

AET Institutional Transformation Workshop Blogs

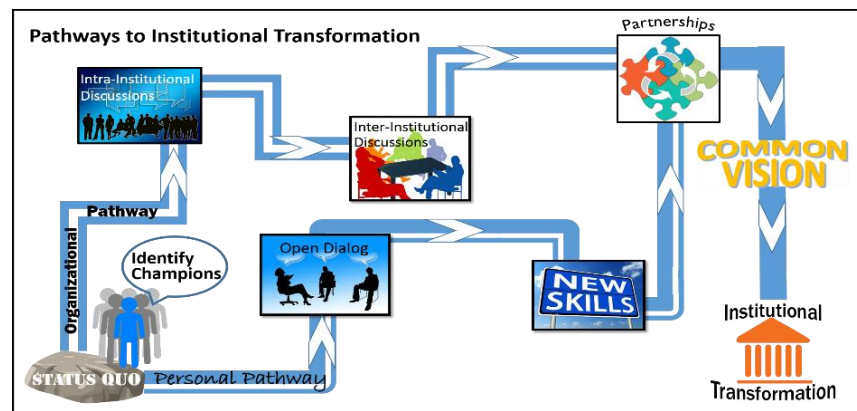
Edited by Keith M. Moore

Institutional Transformation: Leaders and Partners

Amon Mattee, Kandioura Noba, and Peter Koehn

Institutional leaders are political agents whose success is due to mastery of a set of practices that stabilize the organization and their position within it. Bureaucratic processes and procedures guide behavior in predictable ways to negotiate institutional inconsistencies and conflicts. In this way, an organization secures its role in the environment. Good leadership is often indicated by the ability to follow institutional roadmaps that minimize disruption and assure continuity.

Institutional transformation is nevertheless necessary for healthy organizations. As the organizational environment changes, so too must an organization if it is to remain relevant and viable. Institutional transformation does not just happen. Considerable conscious effort is required to overcome organizational inertia. There are two sources from which transformational change may come. Some organizations may be revolutionized from within by dynamic leaders; others are pushed by external forces in their environment. In order to reinforce the process of institutional transformation of agricultural education and training (AET) organizations in developing countries, development projects have been initiated that organize and focus the forces for change.



It has long been realized that one of the most effective ways to promote and guide transformation is through partnerships with similar institutions. In this way, projects can capitalize on internal forces for change and mobilize external leadership. Our experience indicates two merging pathways that a project must follow—the personal and the organizational. On the personal level, our collective experience indicates that effective implementation of institutional transformation projects (whether internally or externally driven) requires institutional champions. These individuals are formal and informal institutional leaders and opinion leaders. There have been three challenges associated with champions: how to identify them; how to build working relationships with and among them; and how to support and reward them.

Champions: Who are they?

Champions are people who are more likely to embrace change; they are flexible and progressive in their thinking. We believe they are people who are already trying to make changes in their institutions through curricular improvement, unselfishly contributing to group initiatives (reports and proposals), seeking financial resources to support the institution, and actively participating in meetings and student projects. Furthermore, effective champions (formal and informal) of institutional transformation need to be respected by their colleagues.

Mobilizing Champions

Mobilization of these champions requires more than simply naming them. Relationships have to be developed, new ideas explored, and new skills developed. It is at this point that organizational relationships come into play. Both internal champions and external thought leaders carry considerable personal and institutional history. Coming to terms with and building mutual understanding of each other's histories means that the personal chemistry among leaders is extremely important. A positive relationship needs to be cultivated at the personal level before formal activities can be effective at the institutional level. This underscores the importance for projects to promote local coordination and to facilitate on-site contacts for both partners. Face-to-face interactions are critical to building trust.

Developing such chemistry requires effort and takes time. In the case of the Innovative Agricultural Research Initiative (iAGRI) project in Tanzania, about one year was needed to build the chemistry that embodies mutual trust, respect, and understanding and eventually resulted in agreement on a common vision of what needs to be achieved. Building these relationships involves exposure to outside ideas through training or bringing in resource people. When a paradigm shift is involved, as in the case of the Education and Research in Agriculture (ERA) project in Senegal, where 'service to the community' threatened traditional university values, developing the shared vision was conflict-ridden requiring additional time to negotiate the process. Open dialog needs to be encouraged to define and operationalize a common vision. Pressing for results too quickly can shut down communications. What do we want to do together? A common vision does not exclude room for individual champions to specialize in particular activities. Champions need to be both leaders and learners.

Institutional Partnerships

Institutional partners generally operate in different ecosystems and have different institutional cultures, so it becomes a challenge to forge commonality especially in the ways things are done. Furthermore, there is always the risk of one institution feeling that the other institution wants to impose itself or its culture on the other, which may create resistance. This requires diplomacy and perseverance on the part of both sides. Leaders must be people who are sensitive and flexible with a deep commitment to what they are aiming to achieve. Our shared experiences indicate that university governance systems are more open to transformative leadership than government ministry systems. In the case of ERA, it took over two years and a change in government to build the chemistry of trust, respect and understanding at the ministerial level. This can be frustrating for those interested in introducing changes, but governments at all levels are key stakeholders whose support is essential to project and program success. The challenges of building trust extend beyond the halls of academe.

The idea is to work with champions in informal spaces so that once they buy into and build for themselves a vision of institutional transformation they are prepared to influence others through the formal system. In iAGRI, we have addressed this by working with all Deans, Directors, and Heads of Department at Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) through an informal forum called the Monthly Leadership Forums where discussion revolves around what needs to change at SUA to improve organizational performance. In ERA, we established an inter-institutional forum called the Group for Reflection on Senegalese Agriculture and Food (GRAAS) where Rectors, Directors, Deans and selected faculty members discuss innovations in institutional management, instruction and research, and agree on action plans for future transformation of their respective AET institutions.

Supporting Champions

Supporting and rewarding champions is fruitful in terms of ensuring their sustained involvement. Champions are not all interested in the same rewards. For some, recognition of the value of their contributions is paramount. Recognition can range from personal expressions of gratitude and accomplishment to scholarly collaboration. Altruism, if not exploited, can be a strong mobilizing force. For many academics, released-time from other responsibilities is a useful reward. Others will require material incentives.

What have been your experiences in leading transformational change in AET institutions?

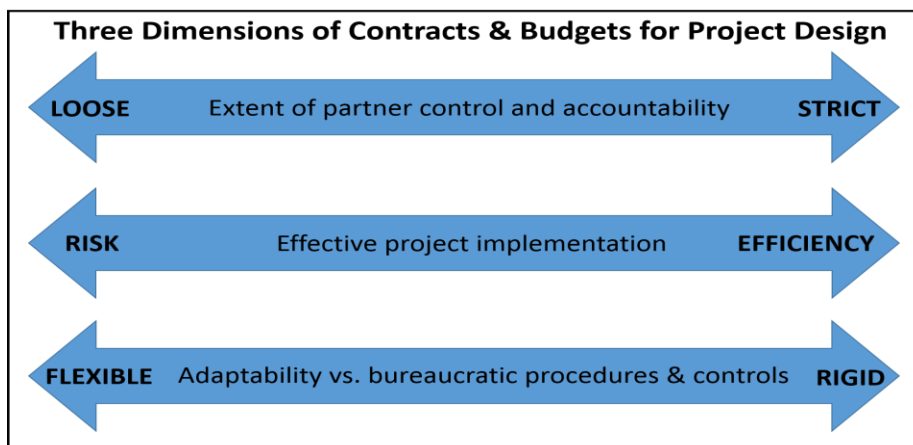
Assessing the Impacts of AET Project Contracts and Budgets

Dave Kraybill, Jim Foreman, and Daniel Yahba

Contractual mechanisms and associated budgets provide the framework for project implementation. This is important for stability and control, but often limits options for effective project implementation. Furthermore, not everyone sees this foundation in the same light. Donors, implementers, and host institutions have differing interests and priorities. Identifying the proper balance for all parties is important for making progress toward achieving project objectives.

In order to better grasp the issues involved, we examine the following set of trade-offs. One can imagine a continuum with three dimensions of variation:

- extent of partner control and accountability;
- risk versus efficiency of project implementation; and
- adaptability versus bureaucratic procedures and controls.



Each dimension variously impacts the contributions of donors, implementers, and host institutions and the overall effectiveness of project management.

Extent of Partner Control and Accountability

Project initiation is a defining moment for the success of any project. At the outset of most projects, host institution involvement is minimal. Donor competitive processes offer limited opportunities for engagement between implementers and host institutions. Donors set project objectives and the scale of activities to achieve them. In some cases, high level officials representing host institutions may be involved, but not those who will be responsible for day-to-day administration; in other cases, individuals may be engaged, but institutional linkages for partnering are ignored. This is significant because contracts set the terms for future engagement around specified objectives within a particular budgetary framework. In addition, this determines the degree of transparency of project partners' actions.

Once the initial contractual terms are established it is often very difficult to make more than marginal changes. Implementers propose and implement a plan for how they will achieve project objectives and document their achievement. They, too, set out contractual parameters for implementation and accountability cementing in place the implementer/host institution relationship. To whom ultimate accountability is owed determines the distribution of control between partners.

Standard project design procedures have had impacts at the host institution level:

1. a lack of commitment of targeted beneficiaries to the specified objectives;
2. poor linkage between objectives and institutional needs; and
3. little recognition of the preconditions for project success.

These procedures have impacts for the implementer as well:

1. limits the range of partnership modalities between implementer and host institution; and
2. constrains the ability to make mid-course corrections as obstacles to project success are encountered.

Risk versus Efficiency of Project Implementation

Within these contractual parameters, the trade-offs for project management involve the degree of risk each partner is willing to expose themselves to and the efficiency with which project objectives can be achieved. Perhaps one of the most common statements that host country researchers have made over the years is that they would prefer funds be directly given to them or that the implementer make the purchases. Indeed, conventional project wisdom dictates not passing funds through the host institution. The management of project funds is at the same time a major implementation challenge and the precondition for sustainable project impacts. Two fundamental questions are posed for implementers:

- Are there adequate controls in place within the host institution (as stipulated in contract language) to transparently manage project funds?
- Can project expenditures be efficiently and effectively managed to ensure the timely achievement of project objectives?

Many implementers have found it most cost effective and efficient to manage the funds themselves. For host institutions, this lack of transparency can become the source of aggravation when project expectations are not met. Alternatively, some implementers have made major cash advances to host institutions to be recovered on a cost-reimbursable basis. Limited devolution of funds management when the scale of activities is restricted has met with mixed results. Shifting the burden for transparency to the host institution would seem appropriate. Effective financial management of project funds by host institutions is a function of inherent administrative and technical capacity to manage funds. However, host institutions face challenges in following contractual procedures often buried in the fine print (in legal English) of implementer/host institution contracts and the alien nature of donor accountability requirements.

Adaptability versus Bureaucratic Procedures and Controls

Adaptive management and project learning have long been the standard for good project implementation. However, contractual mechanisms, budgets, and bureaucratic procedures create challenges for project flexibility. These challenges promote recourse to short-cuts and unsustainable practices to achieve project objectives and demonstrate success before end-of-project.

Innovative Approaches

Confronted with these challenges, our projects have attempted the following innovations with varied success:

- Designed contracts with open-ended, 'to be mutually determined' objectives.
- Promoted organizational experiments for testing institutional innovations.
- Replaced cost reimbursable contracts with fixed obligation grants.
- Implemented administrative and financial management training programs.
- Defined a set of financial performance targets.

What contract and budget innovations have you tried or would like to see attempted to address these issues in project design?

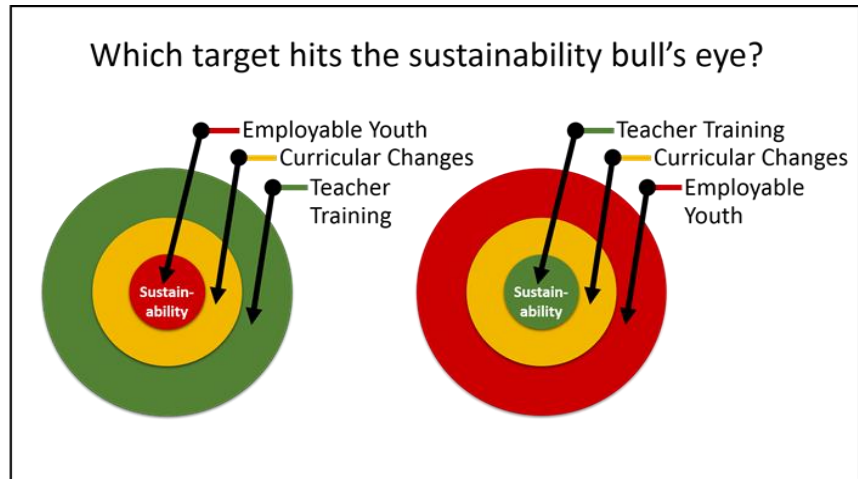
The Challenging Pathway to Immediate Impact

Michael Parr

The Building Agribusiness Capacity in East Timor (BACET) project targeted making an immediate impact on people's lives. The original objectives were to quickly improve the employability of youth for the recovering, newly independent economy and introduce business concepts and market-orientation to curriculum at existing agricultural high schools. Under post-conflict conditions, immediate impact was crucial. This required immediate investment in infrastructure at the schools and, although recognized as important, institutional change was seen as a long-term objective outside the parameters of the project, which was originally only two years in duration. Impacts on the educational system were considered a side effect and a longer-term effort.

Two levels of challenges were identified in the course of implementing the project. The first involved creating the immediate conditions to produce agribusiness employees and entrepreneurs. The second challenge involved transforming the existing teaching staff in order to achieve the first.

The BACET project design involved three basic steps: (1) evaluate teacher capacities and select a few promising individuals; (2) develop a curriculum they could teach; and (3) teach them to teach. Year one focused on building adequate school infrastructure. Year two involved delivering a program based on an Indonesian model curriculum. Year three involved adapting/overhauling the curriculum based on learnings in the first years and training teachers. Years four and five involved—more teacher training—and improving and building the course for continuity.



BACET began by examining the capacity of agricultural vocational technical schools. Funding was minimal, but the schools did have land for agriculture. Basic materials could be supplied as part of the project. The training institutes were staffed with teachers of varying qualities inherited from the Indonesian regime and new recruits. None had ever been trained in the science of how people learn, they lacked teaching fundamentals, and most had only a high school education. It was quickly realized that the teachers lacked the requisite knowledge, attitudes, and practices to teach business skills, modern farming techniques, and soft skills. Traditional teaching practices involved the teacher writing the lecture on the blackboard while the students copied it down. Field experience was primarily about labor not testing ideas and learning.

The project introduced more active teaching methods and classroom instruction was re-organized. Teachers were encouraged to use demonstrations where students themselves could try the new ideas and technologies. Soft skills were emphasized. Practical experiences were gained by using the schools' agricultural lands to create farm businesses run by groups of students.

Achieving Short-Term Objectives Required Institutional Changes

Implementation of these changes required changes in the curriculum, incentive systems, as well as new skills and recognition for teachers.

A third major challenge quickly became apparent: teachers were not prepared to develop or adapt curricula for these new learning activities. A short-term solution was developed: the project introduced a new curricula and the teachers were trained in new pedagogical practices. However, training without some form of certification is not marketable. It was necessary to put processes in place to formalize diplomas at the national level. Degrees are valued in Timor, so the agribusiness program needed national accreditation.

Complicating this matter was the fact that while training institutes existed and were staffed (in part from the time of the Indonesian regime), they were not considered a component of the national education system. Vocational technical schools were administered within their specific ministries (agriculture, public works, etc.). Consequently, they did not take part in the educational reforms the country was implementing. Approval of curriculum changes and accreditation involved politics at the national level.

Another challenge arose in using the schools' agricultural lands for active learning projects. The teachers saw themselves as teachers, a respected profession. However, the land resources of these institutions was the basis for augmenting their meager incomes. Teachers considered use of the school's agricultural production resources as part of their benefit package. It was necessary to negotiate with them to redefine the incentive structure so that those resources could be used for students' learning.

Training to provide the job skills needed for entrepreneurship and employment in the new economy was the priority objective. Creating the conditions to achieve this impact involved considerable change in the institutional practices of the agricultural technical schools. If these changes were to go beyond providing a few project cohorts of agribusiness trained graduates, institutional change would be necessary. Unfortunately, BACET began the project with short-term objectives and associated results indicators; there was no model or resources for sustainable, context-specific institutional transformation. Nevertheless, institutional capacity was growing and challenges were necessarily being addressed from early on as the opportunities arose.

The sustainability questions are:

- How do you set the stage for institutional transformation while achieving short-term objectives of producing entrepreneurs and employable youth through the implementation of an agribusiness education project?
- In designing projects, do you aim for the short-term target (producing employable youth) and in so doing hit some long-term targets (changing incentive systems, accrediting teacher training)? Or do you aim for the long-term targets and in so doing hit some short-term targets?

Skilled, Knowledgeable Teachers are of Paramount Importance

Michael Parr, Michael Schultheis and Jim Simon



Hands-on lab training in Senegal. Photo: ERA Senegal

Training teachers is more important than developing the curriculum, although neither is complete without the other. Good instruction involves both quality science and practical experience. Learning skills/capacity is weak among agricultural education and training (AET) students in developing countries, particularly in post-conflict situations. Agricultural professions are often a fallback educational and training choice for AET students who are not generally academically inclined. Stimulating these minds is challenging, and this requires motivated faculty who can bridge the gap between the new science and business of agriculture and real world applications. Rote learning will not suffice. Hands-on training exercises need to be led by those who understand the technology and the learning outcomes necessary to build the skills to operate those tools for profitable enterprises.

Teacher Training

Mastery of good science can be limited by lack of equipment and training resources, but also by a lack of teachers who have the requisite knowledge and experience using the equipment and other training resources. Teacher training in the sciences may improve the knowledge of instructors, but doesn't necessarily provide the know-how for applying that knowledge profitably. Furthermore, instructors need to be trained in pedagogical knowledge and skills in order to create and adapt curricula to the learning needs of their students.

Hands-on knowledge and skills are expected of graduates, but most existing curricula and pedagogical practices lack mechanisms for transferring those skills and know-how, even when the resources have been made available to faculty (a not insignificant task in itself). Improved teaching methods can address skill and knowledge transfer but only if teachers employ the methods.

Behavior Change

Short- and long-term training can provide the knowledge and skills required of faculty, but don't guarantee that they will be used. Behavioral change on the part of instructors requires that there is adequate motivation for such change. Projects have encountered difficulties engaging local faculty in improved pedagogical practices, often due to the extra effort involved and lack of incentives. Projects can find ways to channel increased benefits to these instructors, but how can such incentives be made sustainable?

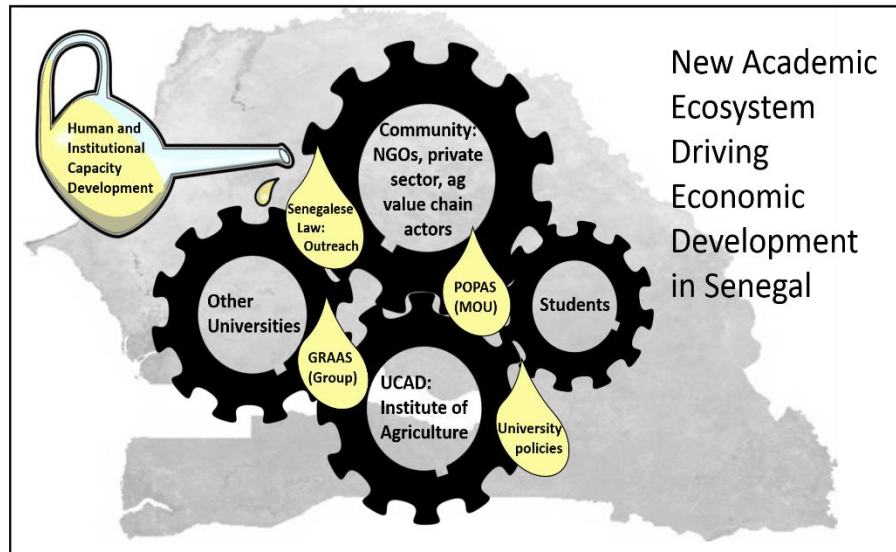
Projects that only focus on training students fail to become transformative because the institutional apparatus training them has not changed. Teachers must be trained and must use that training to instill active learning practices within students.

Community Service Transforms a University into Driver of Economic Development

Kandioura Noba, Larry Vaughan and Irene Annor-Frempong

A recent law in Senegal challenges its universities to contribute to the country's development by establishing an outreach mission. Even prior to this law, the *Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar* (UCAD) was growing beyond its traditional academic missions to build an agricultural science program contributing to sustained economic development. The new law challenges UCAD and the other higher education institutions of Senegal to engage in community development beyond their historic missions of teaching and research. New behaviors will be required. For a faculty to become effective community servants and contribute to economic development, it must build productive relationships with the private sector, professional associations, other universities, university administration, government ministries, etc. This service mindset involves a major re-orientation of traditional university practice. For relationships to be meaningful on each of these levels involves sharing decision-making in the conception and execution of curriculum, research, and outreach activities.

UCAD is far from being the only source of agricultural knowledge and learning in Senegal. Coordination with other universities is important because not every needed expertise for a project resides in the same institution. For universities in developing economies to effectively contribute to economic development in agriculture, they need to develop relationships with the private sector, NGOs, agricultural producers, and other value chain actors. Because a university's first job is educating students and because students become the entrepreneurs and employees operating within a transforming economy, aligning outreach and education economy helps a university remain relevant to national development objectives.



Universities and business have not had a long history of collaboration in Senegal. Professors have difficulty communicating with the private sector. Likewise, business leaders may not see the relevance in reaching out to professors. Making this effort will have an impact on student employment and economic growth in the sector in two ways. Private sector relationships create opportunities for student internships. Knowledge of the private sector by faculty members as well as the direct sharing of perspectives and ideas by the private sector leads to curriculum revision. Furthermore, these relationships provide a pathway for the curriculum to remain lively and relevant to students and employers.

The departments and institutes within UCAD have worked together with USAID support to strengthen outreach with small businesses. Relations with the private sector were first secured through a memorandum of understanding between the university and a professional organization of small-scale, women-owned food processors named POPAS. The university provides training to entrepreneurs and POPAS hosts student internships. To strengthen UCAD's ability to collaborate across departments and disciplines, the university is developing an institute of agriculture. At the national level, UCAD and other universities are members of an inter-ministerial, private/public sector forum focused on identification and discussion of priority issues in agricultural education. Known as GRAAS from its French abbreviation, it offers a unique space for dialogue between representatives from farmer associations, agribusiness, universities, agricultural technical schools, and government.

In our opinion, an institution that is consistently and broadly committed internally in promoting an engagement mission and increasing support to economic development in private sector creates for itself a landscape full of opportunity for recognition and conducive to government and donor support.

This model strengthens the research-outreach-education triangle through linkages with the community, creating an ecosystem for science-led economic development. In the process, new knowledge and practices are created within the university, transforming faculty and students into community servants and the university into a vital driver of economic development in Senegal.

Partnership engagement is a key ingredient for the success and sustainability of a project in a given society, especially for developing countries such as Liberia which needs research professionals to achieve this social, economic, and political transformation. Key points for successful partnership engagement are:

- Project goal setting should be mutually understood by all project beneficiaries and donor partners.
- Trust needs to be cultivated for effective project implementation.
- Cultural understanding is the foundation for a collaborative culture.
- Collaboration and cooperation should be designed to build motivation among parties.
- Empowerment and capacity building will lead to sustainability and ownership.
- Leadership roles and responsibilities should be defined by all.
- Project beneficiaries must participate and make decisions concerning what affects them as a social group.
- When people or beneficiaries are empowered through capacity building they come to understand the important and relationships between themselves and the project.
- Budget awareness and clarity are needed to promote administrative and financial transparency and accountability.
- Research is a key component for creativity and innovation. This process helps us to critically think to discover new ideas, tap into new ideas or knowledge, and find solutions to problems.

Partnership engagement serves as stimulant and inspiration in promoting any development program. It greatly promotes productivity, develops mutual trust and confidence, overcomes project vulnerabilities, and provides meaningful involvement and shared experiences.