Capitalization of Experiences for Greater Impact in Rural Development
A Project implemented by CTA in collaboration with FAO and IICA supported by funding from IFAD

Project Brief
1. Background

Knowledge is being generated all the time, in many places and at many levels. However, a large proportion of the knowledge generated in the field is rarely captured, is not published or shared, and therefore remains largely unknown. Furthermore, documentation of good practice in development projects is often cursory and focused on getting visibility, rather than on understanding **why** an initiative was successful (or not). As a result, lessons are not adequately shared and therefore not used. Even when impact is measured and quantified, individual experiences – properly analysed - can help in understanding the factors that contributed to success or failure, enabling the story behind the impact to be told.

Experience capitalization is a method through which helps development practitioners learn from their own experience and contribute to the development of practice-based knowledge. It is a process through which an experience is identified, validated and documented, leading to learning and identification of good practices. Such practices can then be adapted, improved, adopted by others and up-scaled, leading to a greater impact. Experience capitalization is referred to as 'capitalisation des expériences' in French and 'sistematización de experiencias' in Spanish.

The 'Capitalization of Experiences for Greater Impact in Rural Development' project is being implemented by the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) in collaboration with the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), funded through a grant from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). All four institutions are collaborating to steer the project and involve other partners in implementation of activities. The project focuses on building capacity in use of the Experience Capitalization approach in projects and organizations. It will also result in a series of lessons learned publications, and a tested learning module adapted in four languages.

A partnership among global and regional partners, facilitated by the FAO, has developed an online learning module on experience capitalization. The module aims at providing the necessary tools and skills to plan and implement an experience capitalization process, and covers all aspects of the process, including how to ensure that lessons are put into practice, and how to create the conditions for adopting experience capitalization as an institutional practice. This project will be contributing to the development, testing and dissemination of the experience capitalization training module itself as a global public good. It will initially field test of the English language version of the module and support the adaptation of the training module in French and Spanish.

The experience capitalization approach complements quantitative and qualitative research and assessment methods by revealing the stories behind the numbers. It generates a narrative that goes beyond a simple "success story" and is a cost-effective and inclusive way to document lessons. Efforts in the analysis and documentation of lessons in this project will build on data available from monitoring systems, evaluations and studies. By focusing on awareness raising and on institutionalization of the approach, this project is well-positioned to contribute to sustainability and long-term impact of rural development initiatives.

2. Direct and indirect target group

Professionals in development projects, government and non-governmental organizations, research institutes, farmer organizations and other interested organizations in the rural development sphere. The main categories of professionals will include: team leaders and managers, project technical staff, monitoring and evaluation (m&e) officers, communication and information staff, knowledge management officers. The project will initially launch a call for expression of interest for collaborators and potential beneficiaries and prioritise development projects where there is a high potential for application of experience capitalization to generate results within the project time-frame. Further support will depend on mobilization of additional resources

3. Goal and expected outcomes

Goal: Improve the quality of results in rural development initiatives. The main **outcome** will be that the experience capitalization approach is used in rural development initiatives to improve analysis, documentation, sharing and use of lessons and good practice.

The project will also **result in**:

1) improved capacity in up to 15 countries globally to analyse, document and share lessons and good practice;

2) availability of more qualitative data to support scaling up;

3) a series of short publications that document the pathways towards impact, based on an analysis of experiences from individual and institutional perspectives; and

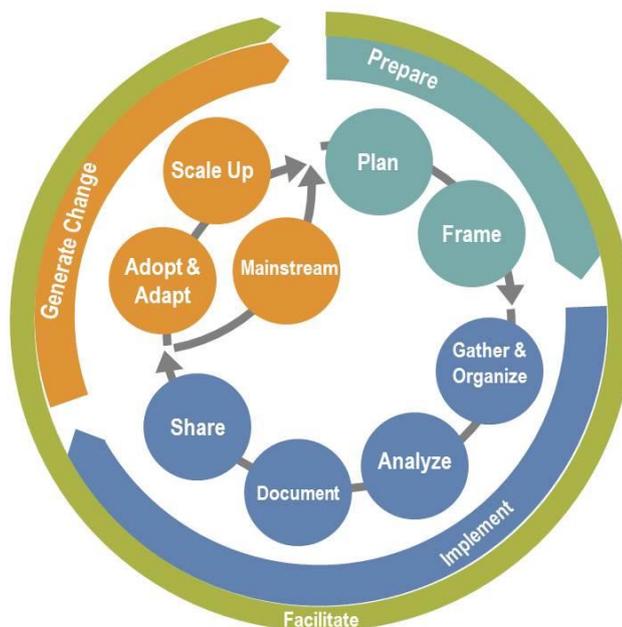4) an experience capitalization learning module tested in English and adapted in French and Spanish.

Figure 1. Illustration of the processes involved in Experience Capitalization

Key activities:
  (a)   Establish a community of practice on Experience Capitalization
  (b)   Identify regions, countries and networks, including projects & partner organizations as direct implementers;
  (c)   Conduct experience capitalization training with a focus on a learning-by-doing approach (including using and testing the FAO learning module - adapting the approach for each context as required); identify experiences (learning by doing); describe, analyse and draw conclusions; document experiences.
  (d)   Develop and apply adaptations of the learning module in French and Spanish
  (e)   Publish and share documented lessons.
  (f)   Create the conditions for feeding lessons back into practice and Institutionalising the approach.
  (g)   Conduct an overall analysis of the global process and ensure lessons learned inform ongoing use of the approach, including through the learning modules.