Capacity Development in the UNU System - Principles and Guidelines (13 December 2002)

In December 2001, the results of an external evaluation of UNU’s capacity development activities were presented to the UNU Council. As one of its key recommendations, the evaluation report called on the UNU System to more clearly define the conceptual basis, strategic goals and operational characteristics of capacity development in the UNU context in order to increase the cohesion of its activities. The present document responds to this recommendation by defining the principles underlying UNU’s capacity development programmes and projects and providing guidelines for their design, implementation and evaluation.

I. Introduction

Aims

Capacity development aims at enhancing human potential and strengthening institutional resilience to address the challenges of human survival, development and welfare. As such, human resource development entails the enhancing of capabilities for self-sustained learning, for the generation of new knowledge or technology, or for their application. These capabilities are especially crucial to the development efforts of poorer countries as well as to the effectiveness of UN programmes.

The normative mandate for UNU comes from its Charter. Capacity development is an explicit component of that mandate with regard both to the research and the training activities of UNU.1 Accordingly, all parts of the UNU system engage in capacity development activities that aim to:

- Support the growth of vigorous academic communities in developing countries firmly linked with international academic networks;
- Support the United Nations system and other international and regional organizations in their efforts to promote human security and development;
- Support policy makers and practitioners on all levels – global, regional, national and local – and in all sectors of society in their efforts to design and implement sustainable and equitable development strategies;
- Improve the capacity of institutions, especially those in developing countries, to contribute to the solution of pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare; and
- Improve the availability of human resources necessary for institutional development.

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1 According to the Charter of UNU,
“The University shall have as a central objective of its research and training centres and programmes the continuing growth of vigorous academic and scientific communities everywhere and particularly in the developing countries, devoted to their vital needs in the fields of learning and research within the framework of the aims assigned to those centres and programmes in the present Charter. It shall endeavour to alleviate the intellectual isolation of persons in such communities in the developing countries which might otherwise become a reason for their moving to developed countries” (Article 1, Paragraph 6); and
“In its postgraduate training the University shall assist scholars, especially young scholars, to participate in research in order to increase their capability to contribute to the extension, application and diffusion of knowledge. The University may also undertake the training of persons who will serve in international or national technical assistance programmes, particularly in regard to an interdisciplinary approach to the problems with which they will be called upon to deal” (Article 1, Paragraph 7).
Characteristics

Reflective of the aims of UNU capacity development, activities go beyond the provision of academic training courses. Rather, the concept underlying all UNU capacity development activities is “Integrated Capacity Development.” This term refers to the contextualization of the university’s capacity development activities along three trajectories:
1. as an integral part of the research and policy studies undertaken by the university;
2. as a reflection of the inter-disciplinary approach stressed in all of the UNU’s academic activities;
3. as an integral part of the policy-making, development and advocacy processes to which the UNU’s activities contribute.

The degree of integration along these trajectories varies with each capacity development activity according to its specific objective(s). One programme or project may aim to provide new insights for effective policy-making mainly through research, but will include activities to familiarize relevant policy-makers with the results of this research. Another programme or project may specifically focus on enhancing capacities through the provision of training to persons involved in development activities, policy-making or advocacy processes. Yet another programme or project may contain elements of both. Either of these programmes or projects may specifically focus on the integration of various academic disciplines, or it may reflect inter-disciplinarity tangentially.

Types of Activities

UNU’s capacity development activities take two forms:
A. Specialized advanced training programmes for postgraduate scholars and young professionals, particularly from developing countries
   UNU helps not only to upgrade participants’ individual capabilities, but also the capacities of their home institutions in developing countries to contribute to the extension, application and diffusion of knowledge and skills to further the development process. The university’s specialized capacity development programmes include short- and long-duration training programmes as well as degree-oriented education programmes covering a wide variety of subject fields, all within the priority programme areas of the University (see http://www.unu.edu/capacitybuilding/index.htm#programmes).
B. Project-based capacity development
   The UNU upgrades the skills and knowledge of individuals, groups or institutions through their involvement in UNU project work. Project-based capacity development includes:
   a. the manifold topical training seminars and workshops that are conducted in direct connection with ongoing research and policy study projects for UN or national/local government officials as well as civil society actors by all parts of the UNU system;
   b. community-based, multi-stakeholder participation in the design, implementation and evaluation of UNU projects.
II. Principles

1. Reflecting the specific characteristic of UNU as the academic institution within the UN System, its capacity development activities are linked to research and policy studies or development projects based on these. The results of UNU’s research and policy study projects inform its capacity development activities, and the capacity development needs of the international community inform its research programme. As a consequence, capacity development is an integral part of the responsibilities of all academic staff of the UNU.

2. UNU’s capacity development activities are characterized by a high academic level and are specialized and problem-oriented in terms of approach and content.

3. The main target group of UNU’s capacity development with regard to individuals comprises postgraduate level academics, policy makers, civil society actors and other professionals contributing to the enhancement of human security and the promotion of human development.

4. UNU aims at a multiplier effect by focusing its capacity development efforts on training the trainers, research leaders and policy decision makers.

5. With regard to academic institutions, UNU involves in its capacity development activities – both as contributors and beneficiaries – those that are, or show the potential of developing into, centres of excellence in their specific thematic focus areas.

6. To effectively support the growth of centres of excellence in developing countries, UNU identifies a limited number of core institutions with which to develop a long-term relationship, both as training institutions and as institutions from which participants in UNU capacity development activities are selected.

7. To enhance the sustainability of the capacity development effect, UNU emphasizes establishing and supporting networks of participants and partners in its capacity development activities, comprising both institutions and individuals, particularly in developing countries.

8. As both developed and developing country actors share responsibility for enhancing human security and promoting human development, UNU’s capacity development activities supporting such efforts extend beyond individuals from or institutions in developing countries. However, financial support, in terms of fellowships, travel grants to international conferences that are not part of a UNU project, literature grants etc., is made available only to individuals and institutions from developing countries or countries in transition.

9. UNU aims to augment the role of developing country institutions in its capacity development networks by increasing the number of activities implemented at or in collaboration with individuals and institutions based in developing countries.

10. Aiming to further improve the quality and scope of UNU capacity development, all entities of the UNU system – the UNU Centre and the UNU Research and Training Centres and Programmes – actively exchange relevant experiences and best practices and cooperate, wherever feasible, in the design and implementation of their respective capacity development activities.
11. With the aim of further widening the scope of its capacity development, UNU actively endeavors to share its expertise in structure, pedagogical approaches, content and syllabi gained in successful projects with other institutions engaged in similar areas of capacity development.

12. Also to widen the scope of its capacity development activities without compromising quality, UNU employs, to the widest degree possible, modern communications technologies. Care is taken to apply e-learning technologies to include persons with limited or low-quality access to modern information and communications networks.

III. Guidelines

The following guidelines are intended to facilitate the design, implementation and monitoring/evaluation process for capacity development activities throughout the UNU system in accordance with above principles. Specific sets of guidelines have been developed for each of the two types of capacity development activities implemented by the UNU system, i.e. specialized advanced training programmes and project-based capacity development.

A. Guidelines for specialized advanced training programmes

Programme development

1. Proposals for training programmes such as short- and long-duration specialized training courses or degree-oriented education programmes including PhD internships, Master’s, PhD and postdoctoral programmes, are developed on the basis of and with close reference to above principles.

2. The feasibility of a proposed training programme is analyzed carefully and documented in the project proposal, in particular with regard to:
   - the contribution of the planned training programme to the strategic goals of the respective UNU entity;
   - the demand for capacity development of the kind defined by above principles in the respective thematic area and with the intended regional focus; and
   - the capacity of the respective UNU entity to administer the programme.

3. Training programmes should be designed in a way to ensure that participants can make full use of the knowledge and skills gained during the training after their return to their home countries/institutions. Each programme should be planned with due consideration to the specific conditions regarding institutional structures, access to information and the physical infrastructure in the target countries of the training programme. In the course of programme implementation, due attention should be paid to the institutional background of training programme participants (see guideline no. 8) to ensure that the training effect is sustainable. In many cases, it may be useful to include a follow-up component, either material (literature, equipment, etc.) or non-material (continuing information exchange) in the programme.

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2 For a definition of “Specialized advanced training programmes” in the UNU context, see “Types of activities” on p. 2.
4. Possible linkages or strategic alliances with external institutions undertaking related initiatives should be established wherever feasible to strengthen the institutional, financial and human resource base of the programme.

5. Cost-sharing arrangements should be actively pursued for every planned training programme. Possible funding partners include institutions that cooperate in the implementation of the programme as mentioned above, international and national public donors, or private foundations. In addition, possibilities should be explored on a case-by-case basis to introduce a reasonable financial contribution by the participants in a training programme (individuals, institutions), which can serve to increase ownership of the activity among its target group.

Implementation

6. In line with principle no. 8, financial support for participation in training programmes is made available exclusively to participants from developing countries or countries in transition. Emphasis should be given to candidates who pursue their careers in a developing country or country in transition.

7. The methods for the recruitment of programme participants most commonly used in the UNU system include:
   a. public announcements (on websites, through electronic mailing lists, in the media, by means of mass mailings, etc.);
   b. identification during academic events organized by the training institution,
   c. site visits to prospective or previously identified sending institutions during which individual interviews are conducted; and
   d. solicitation of applications from previously identified sending/nominating institutions.

   The most suitable recruitment method, or combination of methods, should be chosen for each programme with a view to its objectives.³

8. A rigorous selection of fellows and their home institutions helps to ensure that the training opportunity provided to an individual bears greater fruit at an institutional level, adding to the sustainability of the training effect. In the process of selecting training programme participants, emphasis is therefore placed not only on the academic background and professional experience of a candidate, but also on the institutional environment in which she or he works with a view to fulfilling principle no. 4 – the multiplier effect of UNU’s capacity development activities. Further, to enhance the institutional aspect of the capacity development effort and in line with principle no. 6, it may be useful to train more than one person from a given institution over time.

9. Criteria for the selection of programme participants shall be spelled out for each individual programme. For programmes that are implemented in collaboration with external partners, the criteria should be developed jointly by the person(s) responsible for the programme at UNU and the external partner(s).

³ Methods c) and d) are particularly suited for programmes with a strong institutional capacity development focus, while methods a) and b) serve to identify a large pool of applicants for programmes with less emphasis on strengthening the capacities of specific institutions, or to broaden an existing institutional focus.
10. Due attention will be given to attaining a gender and regional balance among training course participants as well as lecturers and trainers.

11. Participants in short- and long-duration specialized training programmes as well as PhD internship and postdoctoral programmes may be awarded a UNU Certificate of Completion upon successfully fulfilling all programme requirements. Diplomas could be awarded to programme participants under criteria approved by the UNU Rectorate. Master’s and PhD programmes can be implemented only in collaboration with accredited academic institutions, which will award the degrees to successful programme participants on the basis of the joint programme.

12. Basic information on the academic background and career development of each programme participant shall be entered, by the entity responsible for programme implementation, into an internet-based, password-protected database system created at the UNU Centre. This database, accessible for updates by programme coordinators and programme alumni alike, will serve to promote networking among the coordinators of capacity development activities throughout the UNU system and former participants, including the identification of partners for research and capacity development activities or the solicitation of recommendations for programme candidates.

13. Channels for regular communication with programme alumni shall be established for each programme to enhance the networking aspect of the capacity development activity. These can include individual communication, newsletters in hard-copy, electronic alumni mailing lists, etc. However, an electronic mailing list should be established for every programme, the address of which should be communicated to the UNU Centre Capacity Development Programme for use for periodic general updates on UNU activities.

*Monitoring and evaluation*

14. Evaluations regarding the structure, contents and organization of the programme shall be sought from programme participants each time a programme is given.

15. Each programme participant is required to submit a final report on the knowledge and skills gained during the training programme. For programmes of more than one year duration, interim reports are required at regular intervals to be defined in line with the structure of each individual programme.

16. A general review of the need for, and structure of, every programme should be conducted at regular intervals. For new programmes, such a review should take place once the programme has been offered three times; the intervals may be extended to five programme cycles thereafter. The general review should be conducted under the auspices of the responsible UNU entity and should take the form of a self-assessment. A peer review could also be included in the general review.
The self-assessment should, as a minimum requirement, include:
- an assessment of the documents produced under guidelines 14 and 15;
- comments by the external programme partners, if any;
- a review of the career development of programme alumni based on the
  information obtained through regular follow-up contacts as described under
  guidelines 12 and 13;
- assessments of the training effect by the home institutions of former
  programme participants.

The self-assessment, along with above listed documents, could be submitted to a
group of external experts for a peer-review.

Reports of general reviews of training programmes should be submitted to the
governing body of the UNU entity (Advisory Committee/Board or UNU
Council) for review.

B. Guidelines for project-based capacity development

Programme development

1. Capacity development activities are an integral part of project planning. Each
   project proposal should specify the perceived capacity development needs in its
   thematic, institutional and regional focus areas, and the ways in which the
   project will address them. Specific mention should be made of the capacity
   development effects expected from the multi-stakeholder involvement in the
   planning, implementation and evaluation of the project and of workshops,
   training courses, and information dissemination events conducted in the course
   of the project, on the basis of and with reference to the principles of UNU
   capacity development.

2. Project-based capacity development activities should be designed in a way to
   ensure that participants can make full use of the knowledge and skills gained
   from the activity within their own professional environment. Each activity
   should take account of the specific conditions regarding institutional structures,
   access to information and the physical infrastructure in the home
   countries/institutions of the participants to ensure that the capacity development
   effect is sustainable. In some cases, it may be useful to include a follow-up
   component, either material (literature, equipment etc.) or non-material
   (continuing information exchange) in the project.

3. Cost-sharing arrangements should be actively pursued for every integrated
   capacity development activity, in particular with institutions that cooperate in
   the implementation of the project and benefit from the capacity development
   activity. Such arrangements enhance ownership of the activity by its target group
   and are particularly important in cases where the project-based capacity
   development activity has the potential of developing into a longer-term
   specialized advanced training programme.

4 For a definition of “Project-based capacity development” in the UNU context, see “Types of
   activities” on p. 2.
Implementation

4. In line with principle no. 8, financial support for participation in capacity development activities is granted exclusively to participants from developing countries or countries in transition. Priority should be given to participants who pursue their careers in a developing country or country in transition.

5. In the selection of project partners for whom collaboration in the project is intended as a capacity development exercise, or participants in workshops, training seminars or dissemination events, emphasis should be placed not only on the academic background and professional experience of the individual candidate, but also on the institution in which she or he works with a view to fulfilling principle no. 4 – the multiplier effect of UNU’s capacity development activities.

6. Due attention shall be given to attaining a gender and regional balance among beneficiaries of capacity development components of research and policy study projects.

7. Wherever feasible, channels for regular communication with alumni should be established for each project to enhance the networking aspect of the capacity development activity. They can include individual communication, inclusion in electronic mailing lists, etc. Where an electronic mailing list has been established, its address should be communicated to the UNU Centre Capacity Development Programme for use for periodic general updates on UNU activities.

Monitoring and evaluation

8. Evaluations regarding its structure, contents and organization should be sought for each capacity development activity from programme participants.

9. Each regular project report and evaluation, including the project completion report, should include a review of the capacity development components of the project. This review should focus on the degree to which the intended capacity development effect(s) was/were attained and should include recommendations on whether to develop follow-up activities to enhance the capacity development effect or to develop the activity into a longer-term specialized training programme.