

### 4.3. Training and capacity building on Rural Sustainability Indicators for Central America

#### Objective

Indicator tools can transform data into information, and information into actions, and thus help people and institutions make better decisions. As a result of the Rural Sustainability Indicators for Central America Project (a CIAT-World Bank- UNEP collaboration), a series of products were produced with the aim of helping and improving decision-making processes, and the monitoring of the development process. However, the tools by themselves will not make better decisions. Neither is it enough to provide only tools to the relevant institutions. Instead, real capabilities need to be created on how to produce and use the information and the tools for decision making. The way to create these capabilities is to train the personnel of the institutions on how to use and develop indicators and information tools.

#### Methods

Decision making, just like development, is a dynamic process and is carried out at different levels of society, taking into account different social, economic, environmental, institutional, and political aspects. At each stage of the decision-making cycle, different users/audiences take part, and use and require different types of information and tools. In practice, the training sessions and materials address two types of audience: (1) decision makers that *use* the information (i.e., Ministers, advisers); and (2) technical staff that *develop* the information (i.e., technicians, consultants). These two groups have different needs and responsibilities, implying two different types of training activities and material. Given the importance of improving the use of available information for decision making, it is sensible to concentrate on the “use of information”.

Since the two audiences have different needs and approaches to using information, the training sessions will be different. However, for both groups it appears more cost-effective to develop distance-learning training given the needs and capabilities in the countries and the profile of the users. The training activities will be:

- (1) For *decision makers*, the distance learning will be 1 day of 2-hour sessions based on the importance of indicators and information in decision making. The purpose is to sell this concept to decision makers so that the demand for indicators comes from them. One conceivable output of the session could be the formulation of a development problem that the decision makers would like technicians to “solve” for them. This could then be taken to the training of technical staff as a problem-solving part of the course (“hands-on training”). This idea would only work, however, assuming the two groups are trained in succession.
- (2) For the *technical staff*, the distance learning will be over 4 days of 2-hour sessions, each day based on the importance of using indicators and information for decision making. In this way, they can be trained properly on all the features of the

CD-ROM and the other products (produce information and improve tools). The purpose of these sessions will be to teach the participants how to produce the information that the decision makers need to make informed decisions.

The modules will be transmitted from Washington DC to all collaborator centers in Central America, using video-conferencing technology, with the participation of people from the Ministries of Agriculture, Environment and Planning, and Statistics offices, as well as people from international institutions and cooperation agencies from Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, and Panama.

## **Results**

As a result of the training sessions, the measurable expected impact will be the improvement of the use of the indicator toolkit and information. An expected impact of the distance learning phase will be to increase the number of institutions using the indicator toolkit, and the capacities to produce and use data and indicators in order to provide information to decision makers. Measuring this impact is rather more difficult and would involve follow-up calls to all the participants of the distance learning, probably through the continued use of the questionnaires distributed in the dissemination phase of the project. At the same time, regarding the results of these distance-learning sessions, the goal of the World Bank is to analyze the usefulness of applying and disseminating the approach and modules to other regions (South America, Asia, and Africa).

At the same time, another impact should be an increase in the number of institutions using the lessons learned document in the indicator toolkit in order to plan their own indicator initiatives. Measuring this impact is also difficult, and would have to involve follow-up calls to all the participants of the distance learning, the continued use of the questionnaires, and keeping an eye on publications and bulletins from the region.

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