

Coutts J (2003) Human Capacity building through extension and education, in RipRap – River and Riparian Lands Management Newsletter, Edition 24 2003 Land & Water Australia Canberra

Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building and Innovation in Rural Industries

The Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building and Innovation in Rural Industries has a 'shorthand definition' of **capacity building** as being about... *increasing the abilities and resources of individuals, organisations and communities to manage change* (News No 1 March 2003). Definitions taken from the National NRM Capacity building framework described **human capital** as...*the capability of individuals* and **social capital** as *the level to which social networks, relationships and processes within a community support individuals to exercise their capabilities.*

One of the initial projects commissioned by the Cooperative Venture was a national review of extension and education in the context of capacity building in rural industries and communities. This was complemented by a study on *fostering involvement* in learning opportunities and another exploring the *institutional arrangements* supporting capacity building. Other projects in the capacity building and innovation arena have since been funded through the Cooperative Venture (more information can found at www.rirdc.gov.au/capacitybuilding.)

The *National Extension Review* is now in its second year. It has approached the review at a macro level by looking at the trends in extension and education across Australia and at the project level focusing on a range of extension/education projects across industries, issues and states. This two pronged analysis has allowed projects to be analysed in the context of what is happening around them and helped to match implications with future trends.

The role of extension and education in capacity building

It is recognised that capacity building – that is...*increasing the abilities and resources of individuals, organisations and communities to manage change* – occurs through a number of avenues apart from 'organised' extension and education activities. Mentoring, self-directed learning, experiential learning and other personal and community growth processes are constantly at work within communities.

Extension and education in the context of the review relate to...*planned and proactive interventions to provide new information, experiences, skills and learning support to individuals or groups*. In this way they are seen as complementing the informal capacity building processes that are occurring in a functioning community.

Extension and education initiatives can result from top-down intervention ('our policies or strategies have highlighted that this education/extension project is important – who can deliver it?') or from a community need ('our situation would benefit from training/support in this area – where do we get it?'). Neither is necessarily better – but the match is critical.

Extension and education models operating across Australia

As projects have been evaluated and analysed for this review, a number of distinct approaches or ‘models’ have emerged as operating across industries and communities, with each playing key and complementary roles within a capacity building framework. These are outlined as follows:

The Group Facilitation/Empowerment Model: This model focuses on increasing the capacity of participants in planning and decision-making and in seeking their own education/training needs based on their situation. The project will often provide or fund a facilitator to assist groups to define their own goals and learning needs and to help them realise these.

The Technological Development Model: This model is about working with individuals and groups to develop specific technologies, management practices or decision support systems which will then be available to the rest of the industry or community. It often involves local trials, demonstrations, field days and on-site visits.

The Programmed Learning Model: This model is about delivering specifically designed training programs/workshops to targeted groups of landholders or community members to increase understanding or skills in defined areas. These can be delivered in a variety of modes and learning approaches.

The Information Access Model: This model is about providing a range of blanket information that individuals and groups can access from a distance and at a time that suits them. It can be based on a web-site, information centre or other centralised locations.

The analysis has shown that these different extension/education models work in well together as a suite of complementary capacity building avenues. For example, members of groups in projects operating under the *group facilitation/empowerment model* provide a key source of participants in training offered through the *programmed learning model* as they are motivated to seek identified training. People who participate in *programmed learning model* initiatives often learn about, and are motivated to seek, information available in initiatives under the *information access model*.

Implications

Extension and education interventions cover a range of complementary approaches to support capacity building. The power is in the mix of models. A one-off training workshop (programmed learning model) without access to on-going follow-up supporting information (information access model) could have very limited impact. Without groups operating under the *group facilitation-empowerment model*, participation in training events may be low. Without *technological model* interventions, adapting new knowledge to local environments may be slow in occurring. The challenge is to stand back and take a birds-eye view of the extension and education training needs to support capacity building in industries and communities and not focus on one model or mode of delivery.