Assessment of the Policy Impact Capacity Advancement (PICA) Process (Africa)

Presented at

PARTNERING TO STRENGTHEN CAPACITY FOR APPLIED POLICY RESEARCH WITH IMPACT: ACCOMPLISHMENTS UNDER PRCI, LESSONS, AND NEXT STEPS

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Motivation

Premise of the PICA Process: strengthening policy influence must involve **strengthening centers' capacity**

Assessment Goal: Understand if and how the leadership and staff at 3 policy centers (EPRC, ISRA BAME, PiLAF) perceive the PICA Process and if it has enhanced their capacity to do applied policy research that influences policy thinking and practice

The PICA Process was PRCI's most comprehensive approach to institutional capacity strengthening

- Significant resources invested: USD$300,000 per center – what did they do and what can we learn?
- Thinking forward: intentional and timely opportunity to learn and inform future PRCI and institutional strengthening opportunities
- Learning from Centers: wanted to capture learnings, especially from Centers' perspectives

Method

Evaluation team (MSU, IFPRI, Purdue) traveled to participating policy centers

- Mix of focus group and individual interviews to assess the PICA Process **implementation**
- Coded interviews, identified key themes and important details
- Combined with document analysis
- Developing 2 reports

Note: Other components of PRCI contributed to the PICA Process' success.

Results

Question 1: Has policy influence improved in the specific areas of the policy system identified through the PICA Process? How/why? What are mitigating factors?

Outcome: Centers perceived policy influence improved due to:

- Increased visibility: driven by emphasis on policy influence throughout the PICA Process

- Stronger relations + trust: new tools and approaches influenced centers' decisions around how and when to engage with stakeholders

- Quality of research: PICA Process helped integrate other PRCI components (mentored research and technical training centers) through organizational action planning

Results

Question 2: Which capacity strengthening activities effectively supported centers to move closer to articulated organizational & technical goals?

Outcome: Activity themes emerged from the evaluation

- Strategic hiring

- Improved communication strategies and practices

- Strengthening network partnerships

- Systems mapping through a policy lens (Kaleidoscope Model)

Results

Question 3: Has leadership in centers improved? If yes, has this led to improvements in organizational performance and culture?

Outcome: Leadership Program participants identified improvements within themselves and their institution

- The power of noticing: leaders noted they spent more time thinking about and then practicing specific leadership behaviors proven to improve leadership skills

- Organizational culture shift:
  - Empowering more junior staff to take on responsibilities
  - Developing a more defined culture of appreciation
  - Intentional discussions around leadership

Results

Question 4: Has the PICA process been an effective organizational capacity development approach for African agricultural policy research centers? How and why?

Outcome: Key factors contributing to organizational development:

- Highly participatory, flexible approach

- Project management training and software

- Accountability check-ins

- Co-creation of indicators + shared monitoring process

Implications

- Embrace change in your particular role to operationalize locally-led capacity strengthening successfully. This involves **all** parties: local partners, implementation partners, and donors.

- Use diverse approaches for strengthening individual, institutional, and systems capacities

- Emphasize flexibility throughout the life of the project (simple in concept, complex in implementation!)

- Recognize certain types of training needs or organizational challenges can be difficult to surface due to workplace context, power dynamics, and cultural values.
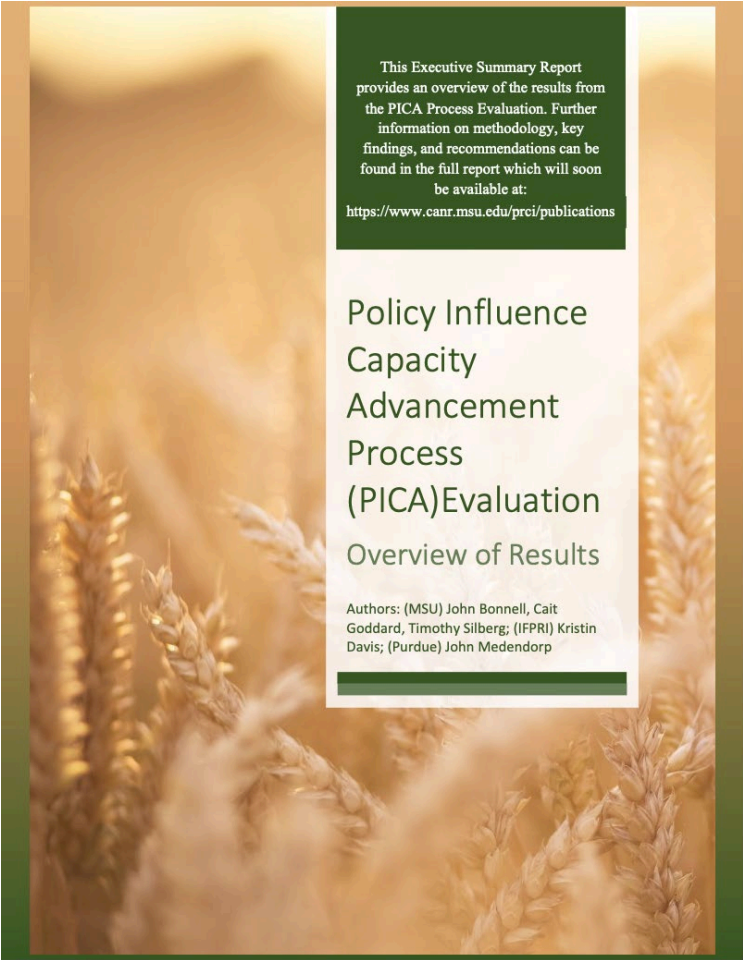
Implications

- Incorporate an organizational life cycle framework (new/birthing, growing, maturing, declining/stagnating) into the institutional strengthening approach.

- Prioritize research AND administrative capacity strengthening for sustainable organizational performance.

- Use baseline (and ongoing) assessments as opportunities to view growth potential rather than highlight success.

Further Information

This Executive Summary Report provides an overview of the results from the PICA Process Evaluation. Further information on methodology, key findings, and recommendations can be found in the full report which will soon be available at: https://www.canr.msu.edu/prci/publications

Policy Influence Capacity Advancement Process (PICA)Evaluation

Overview of Results

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