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microNOTE #44

Training Mid-level Managers: Lessons Learned From the ITCILO Experience

This microNOTE discusses lessons learned by the ITCILO in sustaining access to its middle management MFI training program. The ITCILO's lessons learned are relevant to other organizations maintaining training programs, particularly those implemented through a decentralized delivery model.

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This note was written by Lisa Lynn at DAI and was adapted from a report written by Cheryl Frankiewicz for the ITCILO entitled "Sustaining Access to Quality Middle Management Training: An Ongoing Experiment by the ITCILO." The report was submitted to USAID under the AMAP FSKG project.

This is the third in a series of three microNOTES to share the lessons learned by the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization (ITCILO) as it seeks to understand and address the challenge of making quality training available to middle managers of microfinance institutions (MFIs). The first document, microNOTE #40, examined the supply and demand for middle management training and identified eight gaps between the type of training that is currently available and that which is required. The second microNOTE in the series, microNOTE #43, explored what the ITCILO has done in an effort to fill some of those gaps. In this third microNOTE, we discuss lessons learned by the ITCILO in sustaining access to its middle management MFI training program, particularly those implemented through a decentralized delivery model.

I. Keep course materials relevant and updated. ITCILO monitors the relevance of their course materials by:

- Providing standardized course evaluation forms during trainings;
- Monitoring repeat demand for courses conducting focus groups or individual interviews with client institutions that do not return for repeat business;
- Hosting periodic web-based Trainer's Forum discussions that allow trainers to discuss industry changes and the relevance of those changes for course delivery; and
- Storing documents on a centralized website that allows the trainers to comment on each document, discuss relevance of particular items, make recommendations and indicate outdated materials

After a sufficient number of suggested revisions accumulate, the ITCILO updates the materials and notifies the trainers that updated materials are available.

2. Maintain a roster of willing and certified trainers. The ITCILO formally certifies its trainers to ensure course quality and reputation. In order to maintain their certification, trainers must remain familiar with the materials by both offering the course periodically and updating course materials.

Because of the high cost of recruiting and certifying new trainers, it is necessary to encourage trainers to regularly deliver the course, or replace inactive trainers. Feedback from local partners has been instrumental in helping the ITCILO assess the need for additional trainers and identify potential trainer candidates.

Trainers are more likely to remain active when they enjoy giving the course, believe that their involvement in the course benefits other areas of their life and work, and don't find the level of effort required for continued involvement to be too onerous. Therefore, in order to retain their certified trainers, the ITCILO built an MFI management curriculum that is fun to deliver, fosters a supportive trainer network, provides checklists and tools to help trainers organize course delivery, and sets reasonable standards for trainers to retain certification.

3. Control the quality of course content and delivery.

Local partners decide which certified trainers to hire for a particular event, thereby creating competition among trainers to provide the best quality. The ITCILO also supports consistent content delivery by providing trainers with a detailed package of materials and coaching trainers how to adapt those materials to meet participants' needs.

4. Offer incentives and benefits that keep local partners interested in offering the training.

To sustain its decentralized training program, the ITCILO offers local partners incentives in exchange for delivering the course regularly and sharing participant lists and evaluation results. Clarifying expectations of both parties through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has helped the ITCILO establish expectations. Potential incentives that the ITCILO may offer partners include:

- Preferential, free access to quality curricula
- Enhanced credibility at the national level through association with a strong international brand.
- Tools that aid course marketing and organization.
- Awareness that the organization will seek out additional partners who may directly compete with existing partners for market share.

5. Design and price the course to be affordable to clients yet profitable to suppliers. Finding this balance can be challenging in developing country environments where good, experienced trainers can be expensive, client institutions may be accustomed to accessing donor-subsidized training opportunities, and client budgets are tight. Because decisions about the appropriateness of a price hinge on the estimated benefit, the ITCILO has found it helpful for local partners to communicate the course's value and demonstrate that the returns from taking the course outweigh the cost.

6. Design and implement a systematic performance tracking system to measure changes at the individual and institutional level. A successful performance tracking system will help motivate trainers, measure the utility of the course, and suggest how the curriculum and/or its delivery could be strengthened.

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