

## Chapter 12

# Participatory Systems Learning and Planning Process: Experience of the Third Livestock Development Project, Nepal

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Third Livestock Development Project, Nepal

The Third Livestock Development Project (TLDP) is a people-centred project executed by the Ministry of Agriculture's Department of Livestock Services (DLS) with loan assistance from the Asian Development Bank. TLDP is highly participatory and features inter-disciplinary teams operating at the district level. It uses a set of concepts and a methodological framework referred to as the systems learning approach. This approach provides a framework within which many common methodologies and tools can be used. It depends on all stakeholders in the development process being involved at varying levels of intensity, being aware of the complexity or systemic nature of farming systems, and being engaged in a process of learning. TLDP also adopts a process-oriented approach wherein a number of inputs will be decided as the project proceeds and as indicated by learning experiences.

### **Planning process in the TLDP**

The TLDP has been introducing and implementing the participatory systems learning and planning process since 1997. The key to this process has been a belief that communities/beneficiaries should define their own development needs, be at the centre of development planning decisions, and translate development plans into action.

The participatory approach ensures that beneficiaries are involved in development activities from the beginning to the end, and maintain it by creating change. Participatory processes are generally aimed at bringing beneficiaries (men and women), the weaker, the quieter, and the more disadvantaged forward in discussion in a way that is more on their terms. It is different from technically oriented, top-down, authority-driven approaches. It places people and not technology at the centre of the development process. It emphasises that learning needs to occur if lasting change or improvement is to be achieved.

### **Approach being applied in TLDP**

#### *Experience-based learning*

Kolb (1984) studied human behaviour and maintained that there are different learning styles; for example, some people jump to conclusions, and others constantly investigate and theorise but seldom make decisions or take action. He suggests that we should identify our own learning style and be aware of those of others. He also says that because our upbringing and values are different, we have different views and opinions about experience. We all see the world differently. Consequently, when

we do things that affect people, it is the combination of experiences that is important and not just one person's experience. He suggests that if we recognise the stages of learning and consciously work through these stages, we will tend to make better and more complete decisions. He lays out stages in the experiential learning cycle.

## Stakeholder identification and analysis

The word 'stakeholder' is commonly used by many organisations. However, it is used vaguely or in general terms. It would appear that sometimes stakeholders are considered to be beneficiaries. However, in our view, stakeholders are much more than that. The TLDP experience indicates that stakeholders should be well-defined, recognised, and analysed according to the objective of the project.

Stakeholders are those people and their organisations who directly, and indirectly, benefit from, or contribute to the process of development. Stakeholders have been grouped into broad categories.

- **Primary stakeholders.** This is the beneficiary group for whom the project/activity is intended. In the case of TLDP, it is poorer farming families in the western development regions who have livestock. These people are the focus of the project.
- **Owner stakeholders.** Those whose power is such that they could stop the project/activity if they had to or wanted to. The government and the Asian Development Bank could stop this project if they chose to by cancelling the loan or curtailing it. They have an important role that is different to that of others.
- **Secondary stakeholders.** Those who have a substantial role to play in project implementation. In this case, members of the DLS such as staff officers and field-level technicians as well as participating banks and private-sector entrepreneurs. These people tend to initiate and 'manage' the development (learning) process.
- **Supporting stakeholders.** Those persons and organisations whose support is either necessary or desirable for the success of the project, e.g., District Women Development Office, Department of Forestry, banks, District Development Committee, other projects, etc. They may contribute to, or limit, the process of development/learning. There are those that are close to the action, e.g., the Women Development Office or farmers and village development committee leaders, and those that are more distant such as the District Agriculture Development Office.

Stakeholders need to be identified and grouped according to their respective roles and responsibilities, thus making it easier to include people in various activities such as mind mapping or brainstorming. Such activities ought to be undertaken at the beginning of the project and with each component or new activity, and should be repeated as the project grows and matures. Repeat exercises should be undertaken each year as the role of stakeholders, particularly supporting stakeholders, changes.

### Practical application

Identification of participatory planning participants  
Identification of Livestock Action Team members  
Identification of trainers and training participants

Beware. As the process develops, some stakeholders feel empowered and others disempowered. It is as important to manage the process of disempowerment as of empowerment.

Once stakeholders are classified, the next step is to identify or link them with the objective of the activity. If the objective is clear, then the process will deliver the desired output. The output of an activity may become the input of the next activity; so, all activities are linked.

## **Livestock Action Team**

The Livestock Action Team (LAT) is the primary means by which the District Livestock Services Office (DLSO) launches its programme in village areas. An LAT has been formed in each TLDP district through a participatory approach and stakeholder analysis, where all secondary and owner stakeholders are present. The LAT consists of seven to nine members of whom two to three are from the DLSO, as core members, and five to six from supporting and primary stakeholders in the district. The LAT is considered a think-tank for livestock development in the district. It is the main thrust to help farmers in needs assessment, participatory programme planning, and monitoring and evaluation of livestock development activities.

## **TLDP experience**

The DLS recognises the project's concept/approach as being appropriate and effective in livestock development. Achievements are beginning to appear and are considered worthwhile. Some approaches and methodologies are being incorporated into the Department's regular programme.

## **Means and focus**

Farming families (men, women, and children) are the focus; at all times, the project focuses on what needs to be done to improve their situation. They are the primary stakeholders. TLDP/DLS believes that livestock are a means of helping farming families; livestock are not the focus. Livestock are a means to reduce poverty, and improve nutrition and incomes for rural families. Livestock productivity, processing, and marketing technologies are tools; again, they are not the focus or end point.

## **NGO mobilisation and private–public partnership programme**

While public–private partnership programmes are currently in vogue in Nepal, there are few instances where they are demonstrated. DLS/TLDP is one of the first government departments to enter into a contractual relationship with CBOs/NGOs.

The aim is to match the strengths of the DLS (technical services, technical training, programme inputs) with the strengths of NGOs/CBOs (social mobilisation, group formation, institutional strengthening and organisation development) in the same pocket areas in jointly implemented programmes. This will serve to make livestock development more efficient, more cost effective, and more sustainable.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operatives (MOAC), recognising the usefulness of the approach, has institutionalised policy/guidelines for the involvement of NGOs in annual work programmes.

## **Gender policy and strategy**

A gender policy and strategy has been developed for the TLDP that serves as an example, and is capable of being adopted by DLS. It is consistent with ideals ex-

pressed in the Agriculture Prospective Plan and the Ninth Five-Year Plan. It emphasises the predominant role played by women in the management of livestock in Nepal, and their central role in implementation of development programmes. It also recognises that the successful involvement of women depends as much on changing male attitudes as it does on improving female capability. Women are involved in farmer-level organisations (minimum of 35%), and in processing and marketing activities.

The project shares ideas and information through workshops on gender mainstreaming in livestock development with all stakeholders, Livestock Action Team members, farmers, and DLSO staff. The workshop recommends developing roles and responsibilities amongst DLS staff for gender mainstreaming in DLS programme activities, and implementing them at all activity levels.

### **Putting farmers at the centre**

One strength of this learning cycle lies in imaginative ability, and awareness of meaning and values. When asked what was at the centre of TLDP's development, some staff said that the DLS was at the centre or that livestock, or livestock technology, was the focus. Neither is true. People and farm families are at the centre of TLDP's development. The people-centred approach focuses on the poorer sections of the rural community in an attempt to improve their incomes and wellbeing, and bring them more positively into the mainstream of community life. When people are the focus of an activity, many more stakeholders and input factors are recognised, and development becomes more meaningful.

### **Participatory systems learning and planning process in TLDP**

Livestock Action Teams (LAT) are multi-sectoral teams led by the DLS. They include the Women Development Office, participating banks, forestry or soil and water conservation staff, and others. Their objectives are as follow.

- Involve key stakeholders in livestock development so that the plans of various agency stakeholders become more aligned
- Involve stakeholders who will learn more about each other and become more interactive
- Involve stakeholders in a way that they pool their knowledge and begin to 'see' things differently and more as a whole
- Involve stakeholders who may 'see' the farmer as the focus for integrated activities more than as a target for a single stream of technology

Farmer groups are considered the basic unit through which support can be directed, where participants

- use their combined experience and knowledge to make plans and take action;
- combine their resources to achieve goals;
- gain confidence and knowledge in working together, and in taking action to improve their situation;
- are in control of what they decide to do; and
- learn from their experience and progress.

Livestock industries related associations (LIRA) are associations, co-operatives or other organisations that farmer groups form to advance their overall position, market their produce, organise credit/insurance and obtain inputs. Leaders of groups come together to form umbrella committees that, if they choose, may grow into co-operatives or other organisations. LIRA form a pool of leadership capability in an environment where members can begin to think and plan for 'larger' issues, such as marketing or input supplies, or seek new 'options' for group development.

Processed-oriented (non-technical) training is offered to DLS district staff in new areas such as social mobilisation, participatory rural appraisal, participatory planning, and participatory monitoring and evaluation. It is felt that new skills and experiences will lead to new attitudes and activities. Attitudes may become more open to the needs and ideas of farmers and other stakeholders. New ways of doing things are being introduced.

When becoming involved in the project, DLS staff in new districts have to learn about the project, its objectives, and approach, and their role. They are not taught in a workshop environment; they self-learn. The conduct of meetings and workshops is changing. Meetings are less inclined to be stand-deliver-listen exercises, and are becoming more participatory where people's views and opinions are sought.

It is clear that in districts where there is a better understanding of the systems learning approach and its concepts, there is better interaction among staff, more evidence of teamwork, and less of a vacuum between officers and junior technicians. There is less of a them-and-us attitude.

Participatory planning, which begins at the village/service centre level, is making its appearance at and contributing to regional planning. The interface between top-down planning and bottom-up planning is now at the regional level; it used to be lower.

The inclusion of NGOs is new for the government. NGOs' experience and resources can be added to those of the government in a complementary way. Interaction with the private sector is also a new and developing area of activity. The government realises that for the livestock sector to develop, private sector stakeholders need to be brought into effective partnership arrangements.

## **Benefits from TLDP**

People involved with development become conscious of the need to learn their own way forward, and of the different ways of learning. Progress is built on inquiry, and the use of collective knowledge rather than bureaucratic, top-down, target-based planning and direction-setting mindsets.

Stakeholders are more likely to be correctly identified and included. Decisions are better than before and more in line with the needs of all stakeholders. Multi-disciplinary teams at the district level (LATs) and associations of farmers/processors/marketers (LIRAs) are more likely to work for the benefit of participants. Partnership arrangements between government and NGOs or government and the private sector emerge.

Although TLDP stands for the Third Livestock Development Project, it is more focused on improvements for farming families through better management of livestock. Livestock is merely a means to an end. People are the focus. This serves to take the emphasis away from the delivery of fragmented inputs to livestock, and puts emphasis on outputs and outcomes important to livestock owners. This will alter the extension approach to pocket areas, formulation of packages, and the data that are recorded (monitoring) and analysed (evaluation) for future planning.

DLS staff in project areas will have different capabilities in the area of social dimensions with which to undertake their duties. Staff will be less inclined to be technical instructors and more inclined to be development facilitators.

Development plans from the DLS will become known for being relevant to farmers' needs, and effective in delivering meat and milk products, and income and employment arising from the needs of rural and urban communities. The resources of others (NGOs, associations) will be mobilised in partnership arrangements. DLS will become a pioneer in diverting development from being donor-driven to becoming Nepal-driven.

## Reference

Kolb, D.A. (1984) *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. New Jersey (USA): Prentice Hall