

“South-South” Learning Exchange for Client Capacity Enhancement

Client feedback surveys in Africa indicate that the Bank’s performance requires strengthening with regard to (a) respect for local cultures, (b) adaptation of knowledge to the local context and (c) incorporation of local knowledge into development efforts. They would like to see greater involvement by beneficiaries and local project experts in project design to ensure that country conditions are better taken into account. Clients would also like the Bank to develop new approaches to capacity enhancement aimed at transferring knowledge to and between a broader range of stakeholders. To respond to these requests, the Africa Region’s Knowledge and Learning Group (AFTKL) undertook the second “South-South” learning exchange between East Africa and South Asia in June 2004 (the first was held in September 2002). The main goal of this cross-regional learning exchange was to help enhance client capacity in selected countries in East Africa to leverage indigenous knowledge (IK), informatics and social capital for development.

Capacity Enhancement model

The capacity enhancement model posited by many development practitioners in Africa suggests that there are three critical pillars to success: (a) empowering clients, (b) adapting knowledge to the local context and, (c) behaving as an enabler. This involves creating space for the client to learn by doing, finding the best local fit and nurturing effective

behavioral competencies. This process is designed to promote local/country ownership and help bridge the knowledge adaptation gap by leveraging local and global knowledge to bring just in time and just enough expertise to help enhance client capacity.

“South-South” IK Learning & Exchange – June 2004

The “Cross-Regional Learning Exchange” took place from June 14-30, 2004 between Ethiopia, Malawi and Tanzania and Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka and involved three project teams - Women’s Development Initiatives (WDIP) Ethiopia, the Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF) and the Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF). Five Bank staff served as knowledge brokers to ensure that the lessons of experience were effectively captured through Debriefings (videotaped open-ended dialogue) to facilitate learning through reflection.

IK Notes reports periodically on Indigenous Knowledge (IK) initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa and occasionally on such initiatives outside the Region. It is published by the Africa Region’s Knowledge and Learning Center as part of an evolving IK partnership between the World Bank, communities, NGOs, development institutions and multilateral organizations. The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the World Bank Group or its partners in this initiative. A webpage on IK is available at // www.worldbank.org/afr/ik/default.htm

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No. 75
December 2004



The theme of this “Learning & Exchange” mission was to learn from the extensive experiences in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to *“leverage social capital for economic development with indigenous knowledge, and informatics”*. The two main objectives were (a) to adapt, integrate and possibly scale-up lessons learned from South Asian experiences into East African development policies and Bank-assisted projects; and (b) to establish indigenous knowledge and learning partnerships to accelerate South-South dialogue and technical cooperation.

A half day launch in New Delhi showcased a number of IK-based success stories from India. This event included a brief presentation by several South Asian organizations that were to be visited during the tour. In addition, the team reflected on one outcome of the earlier exchange where the Bank’s IK Program had helped the Government of Kerala integrate IK into the state’s 10th Five Year Plan (2002-2007). The launch helped (i) the East African delegation and Bank staff in the Delhi office to revisit the results of the first exchange; (ii) to prepare the delegation for the upcoming visits and (iii) Bank staff in the Delhi office to explore further partnership opportunities for South-South cooperation between IK practitioners/institutions in East Africa and South Asia.

Partnership Process Model

The partnership process is built in four phases : (i) Building linkages comprising of a mapping exercise and initiating dialogue; (ii) Learning exposure for East African countries; (iii) Capacity building at country level; and (iv). Continuing linkages for further cooperation. The first phase seeks to build linkages between the East African and South Asian projects. The second phase involved a learning exposure for project personnel and Community-based Organizations (CBO) partners from project communities in East Africa to projects in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The third phase will focus on building capacity for integrating IK into project activities and strengthening country level initiatives in the East African projects. The fourth phase will help the projects to continue the partnership for further cooperation and learning. The activities are designed in these four phases to emphasize the importance of building and continuing the partnership rather than just undertaking study tours.

South Asia Partner Projects

Eight projects/partners were identified, five in India, two in Bangladesh and one in Sri Lanka through a consultative process involving knowledge sources in South Asia, Bank

staff and other practitioners. These projects have used indigenous knowledge and practices in development in the areas that are very relevant to the projects in East Africa. These projects were : (a) Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA), Ahmedabad, India; (b) Honeybee Network, Ahmedabad, India; (c) MYRADA, Bangalore, India (d). Andhra Pradesh District Poverty Initiatives Project, India; (e) Center for Good Governance, Hyderabad, India; (f) Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) in Bangladesh; (g) Grameen, Bangladesh; and (h) Conservation and Sustainable Use of Medicinal Plants Project, Sri Lanka.

Learning Exposure

Selected participants from each of the EA projects visited the projects in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka . While the entire team visited the five projects in India, it subsequently split into three groups with one group visiting Bangladesh, another visiting Sri Lanka while the third remained in India. The South-South learning exposure itself consisted of : (a) field visits to selected project sites/communities to understand how the process is working; (b) interaction with field functionaries to understand how IK catalyzed the communities’ environmental and social assets into economic gains; and (c) a final workshop at the Country Office in India comprising a wrap-up meeting, debriefing and an action plan. The workshop provided an opportunity for participants to reflect upon what they had learnt and how it could be applied in the African context. The Debriefing method (videotaped open-ended interviews) had proved to be a major asset in capturing and facilitating the learning process in the 2002 study tour. Consequently, it was decided to develop another set of debriefings for the 2004 learning exchange. This took place periodically at several junctures (on average, once in three days), with a final wrap-up session in Delhi.

Lessons Learned

The following are key lessons that the East African clients learned from South Asia. The lessons are introduced by some general observations, followed by specific ones related to community development, implementation arrangements and technical aspects in the following areas

General Lessons

Observations made from site visits crystallize into five general findings that the participants consider integral to the successes of the groups visited.

•**Savings culture:** central to almost all groups visited was a savings (and loan)/micro finance activity. In the context of the rural economy of India (money lenders offering extortionate interest rates, a higher degree of market integration of the rural producers, better service infrastructure, costly social obligations) the propensity for capital accumulation appears to be much higher than in Africa providing a motive to initiate S&L activities. Management of savings and credit is seen as an empowering tool that could lead to greater social cohesion and initiatives.

•**Profit orientation:** All income generating activities initiated seemed to be clearly profit driven and were calculated and implemented in a way that would not require continuous external injections for maintenance.

•**Social mobilization and role of women:** Women in Self Help Groups (SHG) – with the intermediation of external agents, such as NGOs – not only pursued economic interests but also strong social development objectives around ideologies common in India (socialism, Gandhian movements) that emphasize the importance of human rights.

•**Putting institutions first:** Fostering the growth of institutions of the poor leads to greater poverty reduction and empowerment. Participation of the poor does not lead directly to their empowerment; it would lead to building institutions and linkages. The experience gained in building these structures and networks and maintaining them is a major instrument of people's empowerment. Empowerment, therefore, is based on and grows out of people's own institutions; it is not bestowed upon them by anyone or by any attempt to decentralize,

•**Mainstreaming IK:** While not necessarily formalized, IK was central to the successes of the various projects. This includes the intrinsic, gradual transformation of the traditionally restrictive caste system where women now find themselves, as a result of their activities, in a position to negotiate their rights and become equal partners in their communities' development efforts. These five aspects appear to converge in a remarkable sense of ownership if activities and achievements by SHG members, which in turn ensures a high level of transparency, governance and accountability that leads to "quality results on the ground."

Specific Lessons

Approaches to Community Engagement

•The starting point for community-based activities are community interests, needs, demands as established through a variety of means, varying from classical PRA methods to as the concept of member-based organizations (all beneficiaries are also members of the NGO providing

assistance e.g. SEWA).

•Identification of targeted (vulnerable) groups is not a one-time exercise; **flexible methodology** is adopted depending upon the circumstances in different communities; periodic re-evaluation of the target groups as social and economic conditions tend to change at the individual household level over time. Communities are actively involved at all levels of planning and implementation.

•Women groups whose members are linked by a network of relationships which enables them to perform certain traditional, support functions are known as **Affinity Groups**. This affinity, which exists prior to any outside intervention, is based upon mutual trust, reciprocity, functional support and homogeneity among members and reflects a common concern that goes beyond income generation. These groups also form the basis of savings and loans groups or for other specific activities such as weaving, land reclamation or dairy farming. Their potential for sustainability as a group lies primarily in the common concern rather than in the income generation activity. Some participants referred to this aspect as a **transformation from social to economic capital**.

•As a result of the above, all activities at the community level tend to be **multi-sector, integrated and holistic**. This even applies to seemingly single-sector approaches such as the conservation of medicinal plants that could not have ensured the participation of communities without considering their often more pressing needs.

•Sustainable approaches to poverty reduction rest to a considerable degree on making the poor part of the **institution building** process (SEWA, MYRADA, BRAC). The poor become members (even Board members) of those institutions that serve them.

Implementation arrangements

•**The role of government** in all instances has been supportive technically, institutionally and through providing a policy environment in which SHG and Micro-finance institutions can thrive. While cooperation on a daily basis may not always be easy, the relationship has in all cases been mentioned as very useful. In the case of traditional medicine, the indigenous practice (Ayurveda) has actually been institutionalized (e.g. through a Ministry for Indigenous Medicine in Sri Lanka), giving it standards, credibility, and reputability.

•**Credit provision and management:** The micro-finance arrangements are viable because the retail costs of operation are essentially carried by the women groups. Individual accounts record keeping, micro-loan approvals, assessment of collateral are all carried out by the groups

themselves with remarkable recovery rates - well above 98% in most instances. However, this is not only established as a cost saving measure, it also empowers the participating women to manage their own monetary resources with ripple effects into other aspects of their social and economic lives. It is not surprising that in such an arrangement, debtors accept approximately 2% higher than market interest rates (which are still less than a third lower than money-lender rates)

•**Linking Self Help Groups** with banks, markets, private sector enterprises and with each other to form federations to develop products further to meet customer demand etc. increases the negotiation power of the association as a whole.

Technical Aspects

•**Local knowledge innovation:** Gains made by those who document or add value to local knowledge, innovations or practices should be shared with the providers of knowledge and others who have contributed to value addition in a fair and equitable manner. This can be achieved by ensuring (a) legal protection of IK; (b) benefit sharing with providers of IK; (c) documentation, dissemination and networking with providers and communities in their native language; and (d) material transfer agreements with potential investors and researchers

•**Potential bio-diesel:** Potential alternatives to fossil fuel can be found by using oiliferous plants such as “Pongamia”. Oil can easily be extracted by any simple oil-pressing techniques. These plants grow on dry or marginal land and their oil energy efficiencies are comparable to those of diesel with no changes to engine settings required. green cover, environmental rewards, increase in local incomes and nation level independence. The oil cake can be turned into a rich fertilizer slurry and methane reducing costs further. As this plant grows easily in tropical climates, this could very easily be adopted in Africa.

•**Informatics for social services delivery:** “e-Seva” has created a new paradigm by providing single-window computerized services to citizens by leveraging information technology using a public-private partnership model. It offers a variety of services, ranging from payment of utility bills to issuing of certificates, permits, licenses, reservation of buses to business-to-consumer (B2C) services. Real time transactions use technology linking the government,

service providers and banks through a secure computer network. It is a win-win situation for all as citizens use a single window for multiple service providers, government departments can reduce paperwork and redeploy personnel while banks receive funds in a shorter cycle allowing them to defray transaction costs. Starting in 2001 with 10 services, the service has grown to over 75 services with new services being added periodically based upon demand from citizens.

•**Medicinal plants conservation:** Plans for the conservation and sustainable utilization of medicinal plants are successful if they are community driven. A collaborative and open approach to the exchange of information about medicinal plants and conservation concerns is key to increased awareness and improved co-ordination of conservation efforts between the government, NGOs and communities. Sustainable utilization and conservation efforts at community level thrive when there are appropriate local institutions whose structure and systems (organizational and financial) are designed locally. “Cultural diversity and biodiversity” go hand in hand and the erosion of local and mainstream cultures related to biodiversity can result in the loss of the biodiversity itself.

Way Forward

Based on the lessons learned from South Asia, each of the three East African project teams are currently developing Action Plans to help integrate lessons learned in relation to community development, micro-finance and IK into their projects and their domestic policy -dialogue. The focus will be on the following key areas: (a) Partnerships and Networking; (b) Cross-Institutional Capacity Building; (c) Policy level dialogue; (d) Grassroots activities or innovation; and (e) Awareness Raising and Dissemination *and practices* for better quality development assistance and outcomes.