



Complete Participation

Micro-Project Cycles for Sustainable Development

Being adult educators, the authors' definition of sustainable development focuses not so much on the output of development but rather on the learning that takes place during the development process. For them, sustained development is the enhanced capability of a community and its surrounding government, NGO, and private sector organisations to manage "change for the better". The authors report on the programme approach and learning with enhancing 'complete participation' of Small Islands Agricultural Support Services (SMISLE) in the Philippines.

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The programme approach of SMISLE builds on three important elements: community-based development and 'micro-projects' (MPs), integrated area development, and institutional strengthening.

Community-based micro-projects

SMISLE's actions focus on community-based development and MPs. MPs are small-scale development activities undertaken by communities and their supporting organisations. Examples of MPs are: solar driers, farm-to-market roads (supported by the Provincial Engineering Office), tree nurseries, mangrove gardening (Department of Environment and Natural Resources), small scale irrigation systems (National Irrigation Administration), etc. Ideally, a MP should represent a rational decision taken

by the community which is technically appropriate, socially and culturally acceptable, economically viable, and environmentally friendly. Communities contribute significantly to the cost of the MP, to monitor and evaluate its success, and to sustain MP output into the future. Revenue from one MP frequently lays the foundation for expenditure on following MPs. The MP cycle is an experiential learning opportunity for communities to increase their skill at development planning, implementation and evaluation.

Integrated Area Development

Actions are also undertaken at the Barangay (village), Municipal or Provincial level. It is often necessary to initiate "umbrella" actions at local government levels to support projects identified by several local communities. For example, attempts by local farmers to increase corn yields have involved, on the one hand, "village-level

seed production" actions and "enhancement of soil analysis, and seed certification services" at the municipal and provincial levels, on the other. After addressing immediate community concerns, SMISLE staff slowly but progressively introduce wider development concerns such as farm-to-market road rehabilitation, irrigation schemes and grainbanks and thereby increase the capability to implement plans on a wider level and on multi-sectoral issues. On top of that, some training activities are carried out for specific groups to improve group cohesion, efficiency and effectiveness in managing group and inter-groups activities.

At the same time as broadening the horizons of small communities, it is necessary to introduce a greater depth in to the analysis of local systems. Participatory System Analysis (PSA) is used to discover the relationships between various biological, physical, economic or social components of a bounded system (eg. a commodity production system). PSA activities are typified by the farmers' field school technique where farmers and experts follow the production system of a commodity for a full season or cycle, examining each of the system elements as they occur in the field (Nacionales & Wilkie, in press). The analysis identifies and assesses a range of technology solutions, and leads to the selection of an appropriate package of actions to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of

the system. Technology transfer supports these analyses by covering basic principles of the disciplines involved, and providing recommendations and updates from experts. It is here that the technical experts, market specialists, and government staff play a vital role in introducing the principles of integrated area development to local communities.

Institutional strengthening

SMISLE encourages public service technical experts and extension agents and NGO staff to participate in the MP cycle at the local community level. Their genuine involvement generally requires significant transformation of staff, and of the structure and operation of public service and NGO systems. Skill and attitude changes are necessary for community organisers, technical experts and extension agents, and in the government and NGO hierarchies that manage them. This institutional strengthening of participatory development capability is not made easy by the fact that different levels of the government system are, at the same time, partner and supervisor of SMISLE, nor by the rivalry which sometimes exists between NGO and government organizations.

Whilst public servants may contribute to the process, the responsibility for facilitating a participatory planning process logically rests with community representatives. By participating in the SMISLE process at the community level, partner organizations, both public services and political organisations, are strengthened in their ability to facilitate and support participatory development. In addition, the process itself should be sustainable in that it can be operated by government and NGO units, without external funding.

Enhanced capability

SMISLE staff define the process output as enhanced community capability to sustain development, and specify that capability in terms of:

- the ability to establish and maintain a community identity
- the ability to gather and evaluate information
- the ability to make consensus plans
- the ability to implement community plans
- the ability to access resources
- the ability to identify and train people for roles within the community
- the ability to maintain the local environment.

The objective of the SMISLE development process is therefore to provide experiential learning opportunities for the community in order to enhance each of these abilities. Based on a recent review workshop the ability to establish and maintain community identity has been recommended to be deleted for reasons of difficulty in finding measurable indicators.

In development, communities are, by definition, not perfect. The facilitators of

change are also not perfect. When these two imperfect groups work together for it is illogical to expect perfect output. The first actions together may be good, and in the right direction, but may be flawed. Sometimes mistakes are made, but as long as mistakes are learned from, the overall process is positive. The key to the process is repetition, starting at an appropriate level and proceeding into more in-depth analysis and complexity with succeeding repetitions.

SMISLE learned that to avoid community frustration with a participatory process it is necessary to:

- avoid any community contact until logistical, administrative and financial support is put in place
- establish on community entry a clear understanding of respective roles and responsibilities of the different parties
- adapt the complexity of analysis and planning to the skill level of participants
- follow community entry as quickly as possible with implementation as outputs should be achieved within 3 to 6 months.

Process Stages

SMISLE facilitates sustainable development through undertaking a series of planning/action cycles which can be broadly broken up into the following stages:

1 - Community entry. Actions leading to establishment of the first MPs are detailed by Nacionales and Wilkie (in press). Community entry involves a two to three day workshop beginning with an introduction to SMISLE, and acceptance (or rejection) by the community to work with SMISLE. During the introduction of SMISLE, community capability enhancement is emphasized, with the community encouraged to form a team which will monitor and assess change in community capability over the programme period. This is fol-

lowed by the collection of base line data using PRA techniques and a simple participatory review of community goals leading to the formulation of a simple Community Development Plan which allows for the identification of the first MPs. Generally the first MP is a relatively simple, quick acting undertaking which can be implemented by the community using mainly local resources. The community is encouraged to establish a monitoring team to record and report on MP progress, and to evaluate success of the MP. Experience shows that it is better not to select high priority topics from the Community Development Plan for first generation MPs. High priority topics often tend to be complicated, with inherently difficult problems which require complex solutions. With learning and trust-building as principal objectives for the first MP, slow and complex projects are not effective. Such activities can be more carefully approached later in the development process.

2 - Income-raising activities.

On completion of the first MP, a review meeting assesses both the physical and learning output derived from the MP, and moves on to re-evaluate the Community Development Plan. Realizing that successful implementation of the Plan will depend on having sufficient income within the community to finance development, focus is switched to income generating production systems. The community is taken through a commodity analysis in which the production system of a given commodity is identified and analyzed in depth. Through problem and risk analysis, the bottlenecks and weak points of the system are identified. At appropriate times, the analysis is supported by technical inputs from experts, training, and measures aimed at supporting stakeholders or interested parties (such as traders). Emergent from the



SMISLE staff facilitate the active participation of farming and fishing households in planning development actions.

commodity analysis is an integrated package of MP actions which seeks to increase production and income from the commodity. This package of MPs is incorporated into any existing Barangay Development Plans and is implemented, followed by a review and evaluation by the community.

3 - Increasing ownership. The review leads into a second in-depth system analysis and onto a third generation of activities, this time led by community members with reduced support from SMISLE. The analysis can be of any system - production, environment, market, enterprise development, as determined by the community. Opportunity must be taken during this period to address a range of development issues such as the role of special interest groups in the community, role of women in development, long-term environment maintenance. Emphasis will also be given to the process and techniques, as well as the content of the analysis. The third phase features increasing ownership of the whole process by the community.

4 - Long-term development planning. Following a review of the physical and learning output of the third stage, the community will be assisted in an in-depth self-analysis where the structure, operation, objectives and plans of the community are examined in detail. Output from the analysis is published as a community profile and a long-term development plan for the community. The plan will include actions for the community alone, and actions which require assistance from local government and other support organisations. The community will be expected to present its development plan to relevant authorities and promote its incorporation into local development plans. The final stage closes when SMISLE and the community meet to evaluate their interaction since the entry stage. Both parties reflect on their performance, the performance of each other, and the appropriateness of the process undertaken together. After this activity, SMISLE and the community formally part company.

Achievements

By June 1996, effectively 18 months into field implementation, SMISLE had conducted community entry activities into some 160 local communities through 30 SMISLE and Local Government area teams. Over 450 MPs and related development activities have been identified, with 141 ongoing and 181 already completed, including:

- infrastructure - such as solar dryers, village level water supply, farm to market road improvement, repairs to small irrigation systems, village garbage collection & disposal;
- agricultural production - such as hog fattening, corn yield enhancement, duck egg production, village level seed production, locust control study, backyard vegetable production;
- alternative livelihood - such as basket weaving, dress making, salt production, technical trade training;



- marketing - such as market information delivery system, market linking, product promotion, buying stations, improved copra drying facility;
- environmental - such as marine sanctuaries, mangrove rehabilitation, support to local control of illegal fishing, agroforestry, erosion control.

In support, some 200 community extension and training activities have been conducted, along with 68 capacity-building training activities for partner staff (government & NGO). Including staff training, some 330 training activities have been carried out involving over 14,500 participants. All major extension and training activities have been packaged, with instructions for facilitators and supporting visual materials.

Whilst it is too early to report on the impact of the full SMISLE process, it is observable that the response from both communities and partner staff has been enthusiastic. Communities have demonstrated their ability to formulate development plans, to select, implement and evaluate MPs. Their evaluation recognizes the worth of the MP exercise in terms of both learning and income generation.

Short-comings and constraints

Based on our assessment, community-based MPs have more likelihood of success than provincial or municipal-level activities, at least when local communities have minimal participation in the formulation of MPs. The review workshop conducted with the communities confirmed that the framework provides a means for measuring community development. However, it has been concluded that the programme falls short in increasing community capabilities to exploit market opportunities and to address environmental issues. Alternative actions are already initiated to address these concerns.

When the communities were asked what facilitated the enhancement of the seven

capabilities they mentioned that the success of the programme depended on the capacity of the field staff to carry out the job efficiently and effectively. Conflicts crop up in the process when not enough consultation takes place. By the introduction of so-called Micro-Project Planning and Organization meetings, in which all involved actors participate, roles and responsibilities are agreed and conflicting interests are thrashed out early on before the MP is even submitted for approval. There are, however, problems in the implementation when the inputs are delayed. In some cases, schedules are not met due to the non-availability of community members to provide labour inputs because of other family- or livelihood-related priorities.

The success of the approach clearly depends on the ability of the users, project staff and management to understand the principles of the process. In SMISLE, it took us several review and refinement workshops with the staff in order for the process to be fully appreciated. Management support is fundamental to keep the process up and running.

Conclusion

Sustainable development requires that project actions should be appropriate to the local situation, and should be sustained by the local communities well into the future. However, this is *not* all there is to sustainable development. If development is change for the better, then sustainable development is change that keeps changing for the better. Capacity for change for the better resides with local communities. Participation must continue through the project cycle, involving all players in decision making, consensus planning, implementation, and evaluation, as in a learning organization. The project cycle must be repeated with changing roles for the project, partner and community members, with the end view of helping players within the existing socio-political system to be more effective in their mandated roles.

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