

Approaches to Livelihood Planning

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Choosing the appropriate methodology for livelihoods enhancement, while keeping the targets and the desired impact in mind requires considerable thought and is often determined by the beliefs and assumptions of the intervening organization.

There are several ways to promote livelihoods. Accordingly, there are many different methodologies that are based on factors such as the existing capabilities of the targeted people, the resources and linkages available in their environment, the capabilities of the change agent and the priorities set by the promoting organizations. Each of these factors is founded on some assumptions and decisions made by the implementing organization such as PRADAN.

We also have to keep in mind that, in a given situation, in which targets and the desired impact are clearly defined, the output and impact would vary with the methodology used to implement changes. Therefore, formulating a methodology is important if we are to arrive at consistent results. In order to do so, we need to define factors that include:

- ♦ Our target people in different locations
- ♦ The desired impact we want to create
- ♦ The resources and linkages in the environment
- ♦ The professional capabilities of the intervening teams
- ♦ The organization's commitment to human resource development (whether we will accept variance in the capabilities of the teams).

In PRADAN, we have agreed that Self-Help Groups (SHGs) of women will be the starting point of our interventions. We have also decided to promote livelihoods by following an area saturation approach. We have already moved a long way in standardizing the SHGs in our project areas. We have tried to gear up our internal HRD, to address the capability gaps of our professionals, with respect to SHG promotion across the organization.

One of our colleagues is working on an SHG roadmap and the Internal Learning System (ILS), developed by Helzi Noponen. When the ILS becomes a compulsory tool for capability building of SHGs, it will create demands for another round of capability building across the organization. These tools are being tested in various teams and will have direct bearing on the processes to be followed for livelihoods promotion. There is, thus, a strong need to integrate these tools with our livelihoods planning methodology.

The SHG roadmap and the ILS will, in a way, determine the methodology we follow in livelihoods planning. For instance, the underlying assumptions in ILS will significantly influence how we go about livelihood planning exercises. The assumptions based on the 'they know' principle will be qualitatively different from the assumptions derived from the 'they do not know' principle.

In the first case, our role will be to supply what our targeted people demand. In the second, we have to follow processes that will help people realize how their lives are affected because of inadequate knowledge and skills and then help them equip themselves with new knowledge and skills. Those of us facilitating livelihood-planning exercises with the 'they know' assumption will come up with a list of ideas as articulated by the people. So far, our credit planning exercises with the SHGs are of this nature. Others, with the 'they do not know' assumption, may look at each and every element of the environment and subsequently come up with ideas that may or may not confirm what the people shared.

Let us consider the ILS in which there is a module on livelihoods. In this, families are expected to take stock of their resources such as land, labour and livestock. The role of a professional is to introduce the tool so that the SHG members can take stock of their resources based on their own perceptions about the potential of each resource. What happens when these perceptions differ significantly from that of an expert on those resources? How are we to plan our interventions?

ASSUMPTIONS DETERMINE ACTION

We must also keep in mind that our assumptions and beliefs play a big role in how

we intervene. Let us refer to the experience of promoting SHGs as micro-finance institutions to strengthen people's livelihoods. The first-generation proponents of the idea identified credit as the missing link that affects livelihoods. This assumption was strong enough to influence national policies. This idea was tried in areas where the missing inputs were more than just credit. The changes brought about by savings and credit groups were, unfortunately, not significant.

Many of us considered that credit generation and repayment in time were the most important characteristics of a good SHG. We developed our evaluation parameters accordingly. Later, when wider experience revealed that credit alone does not enhance livelihoods in many situations, our belief changed and led to subsequent changes in our approach.

Our experience with lift irrigation (LI), one of PRADAN's most successful livelihood interventions, is also a case in point. We initially promoted the LI infrastructure on the assumption that irrigation was the only missing input that affected improved agriculture. Some families did benefit but others did not because of factors such as market orientation and access to credit. These examples clearly illustrate that we were guided more by our core competencies and by what we could deliver, rather than by an objective analysis of the situation.

We cannot say that one assumption will work and the other will not. Each is effective within a given context and each has its limitations. It is, therefore, important for each team to delve into the assumptions and beliefs underlying its work to promote livelihoods and then to share these with other teams in different locations. We will then be in a better position to decide about the methodologies

that we require to adopt, to promote livelihoods effectively.

In the meanwhile, it would be instructive to consider the methodological options that we could choose from. In order to do so, we need to define the nature of our interventions to promote changes and produce developmental outcomes. To define our interventions, we need to take a stand, articulate our beliefs and describe the inputs to these in order to produce some definite outputs.

Let us first look at the various basic beliefs and approaches to promote livelihoods. It may make sense to first look at these independently and understand their potential and limitations.

'START WHERE THEY ARE' APPROACH

The first approach that we could consider may be called the 'start where they are' approach. This is variously termed the 'minimalist' or 'trickle up' approach. This approach and its associated beliefs presume that livelihood promotion is an incremental process. Being external facilitators, we as change agents, have to learn to be with the identified families and communities and understand how they look at their problems and how they treat those problems.

For example, our interaction with a farmer, who carries water from distant tanks to her vegetable plot, may reveal that she has been thinking of digging a well in her own plot for the past five years but has not been able to do so because she could not mobilize the required credit. The nature of this demand will be qualitatively different from a demand generated in a meeting.

In this approach, we need to know the capabilities of the people intimately, the

reasons they fail despite possessing some knowledge and skills, and the issues they are ignorant about. The process demands that a professional be with the people for a fairly long period, to arrive at a fuller understanding of their way of living.

Livelihoods generation behaviour is displayed in everyday work situations. We need to stay with the villagers to observe these behaviours; one Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) or one credit-planning meeting will be inadequate to understand where they are or where they could be. The developmental outputs will come in terms of comparatively 'smaller jumps' at this level. If it makes a significant impact, it will then enthuse the entire community to meet the higher order challenges, for which 'bigger jumps' may be designed.

Extension of support, in this case, will mean helping them to do better what they are doing. To change agents, this will also mean 'walking one step behind the community'. Following the principles of counselling, we will not take the risk of moving faster than the client. It demands working with patience till the people discover their own potential and move forward faster.

The associated belief in this approach is that it is not our problem that we have to solve. We have to recognize that it is their lives and their problems, and we can only make our presence available to them. They will confide in us only if they want to. Professionals need not move in with a baggage of developmental programmes. The process involves getting into the people's frame of reference, helping them articulate their plans and translating these plans into action.

How do we enter into their frame of reference? When can we be sure that we can

get into their frame of reference? How can we be sure that the plan they have shared is actually their plan and not a reflection of external influences? For example, a particular demand could be influenced by some government poverty alleviation programme or by some promises made by the political leaders before the elections or, simply, it could be a repetition of ideas or demands of another person (a neighbour or a friend).

The safest way is to observe their daily decisions, how they allocate family resources, for a year or so. There is continuous stocktaking and review by a family on its livelihood practices. It identifies its resources and gaps regularly, and makes contingency plans. Such close observation will help to understand the family's experience in the previous year and its plans for the next year. This understanding will help us realize our role in livelihoods generation and we can then intervene meaningfully. For instance, if we are to intervene in agriculture, we need to explore the cultivation practices and yield, take a look at the cattle sheds, know the size and health of the cattle, their capacity to plough lands per day and so on. This is what I mean by getting into their frame of reference. The focus is on making detailed observations, presenting the data to them and checking with them for any inconsistencies.

As groundwork for large-scale livelihoods promotion, each professional should systematically pass through this phase before she thinks of taking up large-scale programmes. This may help reduce failure rates. Often, PRA experts make village plans that can never be implemented; young professionals make credit plans without knowing how long the gestation period of a goat is and without looking at the capacity of

families to rear goats. These are unfeasible plans, without proper references.

In this approach, it is difficult to quantify outputs. The process will yield 'increase in confidence of the people' as the primary output and 'increase in family income' as the secondary output, in terms of sequence and not value.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY APPROACH

The second approach arises out of the belief that we have the social responsibility to pull people out of poverty. Development professionals need to take stock of the available resources (both human and material) in any selected area and identify the potential of those resources, using the best available knowledge and technology of the communities to realize this.

In this approach, the development professional is more central as an actor than the people living in a particular area. The poverty of the area is more central than the people. People are to be evaluated first as factors of production while we assess all their growth and developmental needs as challenges to be addressed through planned interventions.

The irrigation schemes PRADAN promoted in the Chhotanagpur plateau or flow irrigation schemes in Keonjhar are examples of this approach. In these cases, our hypothesis was that there were poor farmers with cultivable land and the only missing input was access to irrigation water. Thus, providing irrigation would strengthen their livelihoods. The hypothesis held good to a fair degree.

We did not look at how people viewed their agriculture, how they used the existing irrigation sources, who used these and what was the level of efficiency of the resource use.

If we had included the skill, credit and motivation gaps to make our intervention more effective, such analyses would have helped formulate a more comprehensive hypothesis.

There are certain advantages of the social responsibility approach over the 'start where they are' approach. This approach can be scientifically converted into projects with definite quantitative outputs and corresponding designed inputs. Most government-sponsored, poverty alleviation programmes are of this nature. However, in most cases, the quality of analysis looked at before formulating the hypothesis is inadequate to account for the wide variations in our country. Often, oversimplification of issues in order to come up with mass-scale, standardized schemes reduces efficacy.

The social responsibility approach would yield faster results than the 'start where they are' approach. Theoretically, it demands that all the missing inputs be mapped out before planning interventions. It demands a high order ability of resource potential analysis because time is limited. This approach inherently believes that if all the factors of production of livelihoods are scientifically identified, there is no reason why livelihood promotion will not be ensured with a certain degree of predictability.

The social responsibility approach requires the change agent to be capable of doing justice to all available resources and their linkages in developing the project. The approach draws its strength from the standardization of the intervention package for a faster spread. In doing so, it accepts that it cannot reach everyone. Without standardization, it cannot move fast and it will, therefore, lose its strength and identity. There will be a segment

of the poor community, as factors of production (not as consumers), who may fail to prove themselves as potential resources within the projected time, and will, to that extent, adversely affect project outcomes.

SECTORAL APPROACH

A third approach could be called the sectoral, or sub-sectoral, approach. This involves developing a prototype and aggressively selling the idea. In this approach, prototype development is the critical task. Once a prototype is developed, it starts attracting people and adds to the growth of the sector, benefiting a large number of people who fit in the sector along various points of the sectoral chain.

Let us take the example of PRADAN's tasar project in Godda. We started with host tree plantation for the first couple of years. It seemed more of a wastelands development programme than a tasar project then. The same project took a very different shape when we started working more seriously with the traditional tasar rearer. With the identification of the grainage as the most critical missing factor, we could standardize the package for successful grainages. The package then became a successful prototype.

The sectoral approach is different from the social responsibility approach in the sense that the latter has the breadth to accommodate more than one sector and could thus address the needs of a geographical area better. For instance, the social responsibility approach could intervene in agriculture and livestock rearing simultaneously.

In the sectoral approach, the professional's role is critical in identifying a sector and generating an idea that would be pro-poor in nature. The more pro-poor elements there are

in the chain, the more the possibility of the poor benefiting from the intervention. Any innovation in the sector that fits with the better-off people would mean that the better-off would replace the poorer in the process chain.

We may refer to *The Forgotten Sector*, written by Thomas Fisher, Vijay Mahajan and Ashok Singhal to understand this approach better. It makes sense to follow scientific processes to choose a sub-sector before we engage ourselves in actual intervention. The opportunity costs in this approach could be high because various livelihood interventions and the different ways of implementing these have to be tried out before a prototype takes shape.

ECO-DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

A fourth approach called the eco-development, or natural resource management approach, comprises just developing the basic natural resources such as land, water and vegetation. A change agent could overlook short-term ownership of resources. This approach is based on the belief that if all the available resources are developed and managed in a sustainable way, it benefits everybody, including the poorest. Watershed development generally follows this kind of an approach. The eco-development approach is based on the belief that if all the available resources are developed and managed in a sustainable way, it benefits everybody, including the poorest.

This is a comparatively simpler approach. Here, the focus remains primarily on increasing the carrying capacity of the natural resource base on a sustainable basis. Issues such as soil loss (physical erosion, biochemical factors, etc.), water conservation, plantation, promotion of sustainable

agriculture and animal husbandry, anchored around people's ownership of those resources, are taken up. Because these are basic resources for producing the primary commodities for society's consumption, any loss of these resources affects everybody's lives in the long run.

A large majority of the people of our country directly manage their livelihoods with these resources. They are also the generators of primary surpluses. But issues such as who gets a greater share of the benefits of such natural resources may make this approach complex. Poorer people have lesser access to land; therefore, they do not benefit, in terms of assets created for further income generation whereas the landed families get such benefits by using the labour of the poor. Options to reach poorer families with meaningful activities, following the basic principle of watershed development, are limited.

The biggest advantage of this approach is that various tested tools and techniques are available that could be further simplified and transferred to the common people, thus significantly reducing the demand on professionals. The benefits of resource conservation and development are measured with references (such as water and vegetation) that are very basic to our life; therefore, it is easier to ensure the production of those outputs when the resources required for investment are not limited. Complexities arise when the approach is used to address the needs of the resource poor and the less skilled people. The benefits are then largely limited to wage labour. Each of these approaches indirectly determines our role in development.

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