

Recommendations of the Project Launch Workshop

16th - 17th March 2006
Shillong



Livelihoods Improvement Project for the Himalayas Meghalaya

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Background

The Meghalaya Livelihood Improvement Project for the Himalayas is a joint project funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development [IFAD], a specialized agency of the United Nations working against poverty and hunger the world over and the Government of Meghalaya. The Project is implemented through the Meghalaya Rural Development Society [MRDS]. This Project has a mission of building alliances to overcome poverty and economic insecurities of vulnerable groups through sustainable livelihood promotion efforts and principle of self help.

The primary objective of the Project is to improve the livelihood of vulnerable groups in a sustainable manner through the promotion of improved livelihood opportunities and strengthening of local institutions that relate to livelihood development. The Project will work towards:

- promoting a more sensitive approach to the design and implementation of development interventions;
- enhancing the capabilities of local people to select appropriate livelihood opportunities, access required financial resources, manage new technologies and institutions at the village level;
- increasing incomes through more sustainable income generating cultivation systems and the establishment of non-farm enterprises at the micro and small-scale level; and
- establishing effective and appropriate delivery systems for inputs and for the maintenance of assets and resources, with emphasis on microfinance, savings and thrift, and micro-insurance products, along with access to business development sector that will link household based livelihood activities with the larger economy.

Introduction

The project Launch workshop was organized on 16th and 17th of March 2006 with the objective of bringing together various Project stakeholders to deliberate on the Project strategy, components and approach. It is with this mandate that efforts was taken to invite representatives from partner NGOs, traditional heads such a Syiems, Rangbah Shnong (Headmen), representatives from various IFAD Project Offices, research institutions, civil societies, heads of line departments and key project implementers.

The Workshop was formally inaugurated by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Meghalaya Dr. D.D. Lapang in the presence of key Government officials and IFAD representatives. This Workshop besides, throwing open the aims and objectives of the Project also provided a forum for key stakeholders to clarify their doubts and apprehensions and to air their views and recommendations of how to work hand in hand in making this Project a model project for the State of Meghalaya. This document serves to highlight crucial recommendations for key implementers in the implementation of the Project.

Key recommendations of the workshop:

Sl.No	Issues Identified in Workshop discussion	Major Recommendations
1.	Project Management	<p>Prompt expert guidance is required to provide technical advice and support to Projects as they mature</p> <p>Exit strategies even at the entry point is crucial. This calls for empowering the communities from day one onwards or take steps to make them service deliverers</p> <p>Field presence of both FNGOs and MRDS team members is crucial to address the problems of the</p> <p>Sense of ownership on the part of the community is critical for the success and sustainability of the Project</p> <p>The M&E system as far as SVCC is concerned is to be geared by the social sector only and this is seen as a major role for the PMU. The M&E system will need to be geared to see whether, with the intervention of the SVCC there is any change in the target population with regard to improved livelihood</p> <p>Criteria to measure the efficiency of the SVCC would eventually be its financial sustainability</p> <p>Project management need to develop a sense of empathy for the rural poor and embark in the task of promoting and enhancing the capacity of the communities to select appropriate livelihood opportunities</p> <p>Project need to focus on the social and economic shortcomings which would in the long run ensure and sustain the improved livelihood activities</p> <p>Project will need to accord due emphasis on the crucial role of women from the very outset and follow a strategy that allows for the expression of their felt needs and priorities thereby addressing the specific efforts to reduce their drudgery</p>
2.	Social Mobilization and Empowerment	<p>A concerted effort to encourage NGOs to get together as a coalition to facilitate discussion of all issues related to their availability, capacity, etc is required NGOs will need to be professional in their approach and this is a new dimension for many NGOs.</p> <p>Social mobilization, empowerment and capacity building is a critical and crucial elements of the Project. NGOs can provide very good local inputs, understanding and power to mobilize communities. To accomplish this task NGOs would need to undergo a social transformation</p> <p>The pace in which events unfold also calls for NGOs to adapt to changing environment and situations on a rapid pace</p> <p>The process of organizing the poor, to gather and mobilize them together and work as a unit is recommended for successful implementation of the Project</p> <p>A push towards building disciplines within organizations which are often very remote and isolated, teaching them how to keep records, how to talk, how to organize themselves is required</p> <p>A potential of tapping the system prevailing within the traditional clan system needs to be explore</p> <p>Entry point activities with specific reference to social mobilization processes are key questions that need to be addressed. The participation of the communities in deciding such activities is mandatory in order to ensure successful social mobilization</p> <p>A respect to traditional institutions, who over the centuries and decades have taken to come up, and have done well in local governance needs to be stressed in projects</p> <p>Entry point exercises must be very structured and must have the blessings of the traditional institutions</p>

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3.	Government Policies and Programmes	<p>Government needs a very sympathetic, poor-pro approach in order to maximize the impact of the Project</p> <p>An approach that facilitates close interaction with the government planners is required</p> <p>Project needs to have a very thorough study and understanding of the activities of Government programs that is going on in the State</p> <p>Project need to ensure active participation of the State Government as the main facilitator for convergence and formulation of policy that are essential for addressing the sustainable livelihood issues of vulnerable groups and the commitment of voluntary organizations and communities</p> <p>Issue of power relations in the community will have to be given due importance</p> <p>Efforts to achieve a participatory model of the local self Government will need to be addressed</p>
4.	Livelihood Promotion	<p>NGOs are looked up to provide a business dimension to reducing poverty in the Project villages. In order to achieve this aspect, NGOs will need to run as a business sector, inculcate among communities a business culture, enabling communities to think in a commercial manner and work towards that is a new challenge – a new dimension</p> <p>A number of budding MFIs are coming up. If NGOs take this approach of converting themselves into MFIs a clear cut methodology needs to be work out. The relationship with villages will have to be clearly spelt out be it as association, or partnership, joint venture or what. These are areas which need to be looked into in the future</p> <p>Option of co-opting existing institutions like SHGs and cooperative societies will need to be understood and tried out at various levels</p> <p>A kind of a social security net within the village and within the SHG also needs to be promoted</p> <p>There is always a trade off between competition and the cooperation, and this applies at every level, more emphasis should be given to cooperation</p> <p>There is a need to ensure a revenue generation model through the sub-sector BDS, etc. and should be self-sustaining by end of Project Year 8 continuing as a self-supporting entity</p> <p>The SVCC set up should be on lines of business excellence so that it can attract talent and funds</p> <p>Inclusion of members from the banking and corporate sectors is seen as useful so as to ensure the element of experimentation and innovativeness and expert advice can be integrally woven in the process</p>
5.	Implementation support	<p>There is a need to implement the Project in a manner that is conducive for the rural poor</p> <p>In managing new technologies Project will need to ensure that such technologies are sensitive and suited to local conditions</p> <p>Flexibility in implementation is a critical element for the success of the project. Element of competition is required to show who is able to do which job and this adds to the advantage of a competitive process</p> <p>There is a need to provide a context as to why certain decisions are made when designing a project. This will enable more accurate interpretations otherwise things are left too open as everyone has their own ideas of how things should go about</p> <p>Scope of capturing learning and experiences of the existing IFAD Projects and those from other Projects will have to be taken into consideration to strengthen effective implementation of this Project</p>