

TOGETHER WE ARE STRONGER

Research-for-development projects may seek economic impacts to the lives of subsistence farmers, but the implementation and adoption of research outcomes are fundamentally social phenomena

KEY POINTS

- Focal villages have been established in Pakistan where farmers work with social researchers to maximise impacts from commodity-based agricultural research projects.
- The model further benefitted from establishing Community Service Centres (CSCs) as meeting places for training and other development activities.
- The model has proven so effective it has been adopted by other aid providers.

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How do you improve livelihoods for the rural poor in Pakistan? From our perspective, you first need to understand the circumstances surrounding their marginalisation, especially of women. Second, work with them in their context to design strategies for sustainable value-chain development. Thirdly, explore opportunities for collaboration across the commodity-based projects working in the horticulture and dairy sectors, so that both the poor and non-poor can have 'win-win' outcomes that are empowering and lead to improved livelihoods.

The Social Research Project (SRP) was initiated in the second phase of the Australia–Pakistan Agriculture Sector Linkages Program (ASLP2) to facilitate a collaborative approach to improving the livelihood systems for the rural poor in Pakistan. That includes collaboration with local stakeholders in Pakistan as well as the various ASLP2 value-chain projects.

The SRP team was led by the University of Canberra and was composed of the authors as chief investigators alongside Rob Fitzgerald and

Sandra Heaney-Mustafa (from the University of Canberra), Dr M. Azeem Khan, Sajida Taj, and Nadeem Akmal (National Agricultural Research Centre), Dr Tehmina Mangan (Sindh Agricultural University), and Dr Izhar Ahmad Khan (University of Agriculture Faisalabad).

Together we cooperated with the researchers from the commodity-based teams working in mango, dairy and citrus sectors, and community leaders in rural villages.

THE RIGHT METHOD

For Pakistan we applied a participatory action research method developed by the authors in 2011. It began with an extensive stage of information gathering involving a baseline survey of 750 low-income households, a capacity inventory, focus groups and case study.

Included were initial meetings with all the ASLP2 commodity-based projects to learn of their activities and to build relationships. This was followed by a collaborative planning workshop in Canberra in April 2012 that involved Australian and Pakistani members across all the projects of ASLP2.

The most important idea to emerge was the need to develop sites for integrated research and development that involve all the various commodity-based projects. This resulted in the establishment of focal villages and village clusters that maximise opportunities for collaboration across projects and also enable engagement with the target beneficiary groups.

The SRP team then worked with the four commodity-based projects in 2012–13 to identify six focal villages. Included were two villages in the districts where the dairy, mango and citrus projects were operating.

The villages were instrumental in providing information, including capacity audits, in staging village-level planning workshops to determine R&D priorities, and developing strategies for



PHOTO: RICHARD BRETELL

As part of a youth camp aimed at exposing young people in Pakistan to a variety of agricultural techniques, women visit a bio-remediation plant at NARC, Islamabad.

implementing changes in consultation with the commodity-based teams. Additionally, the villages were assisted to develop ICT capabilities.

THE IMPACTS

To assess the value of the SRP, results from an end-of-project survey of 90 households from the first three focal villages (where activities have been ongoing for sufficient time to assess impacts) were compared with results from the same households in the baseline survey. What we found suggests impacts have been extensive and positive.

The participatory action research model was found to be strongly demand-responsive. It met the needs of male heads of households well (achieving a score of 2.66 on a scale of three) but also of females (2.74). Being demand-responsive is the best way to ensure program innovations are sustainable beyond the end of the program.

The approach also worked to bring together the commodity-based projects at the focal villages, making it possible for research across sectors to integrate their findings. There was also agreement on the development of Community Service Centres (CSCs) as meeting places for



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training and other development activities.

We kept records on the use of the CSCs for the first eight months of 2015 and found that during this time they generated nearly 560 workshop activity hours across 185 unique workshop activity sessions for 3,269 villagers.

These CSC activities were able to address 363 factors related to learning across three categories: attitudes (83), skills (111) and knowledge (167). What that means is that in less than one year, CSCs have proven to be a rich and productive social initiative.

Another key objective of the project was to engage the poor and marginalised so they too can benefit more from ASLP2. Two groups of people of particular concern are women and youth. With regards to inclusion, the CSCs played a particularly important role as a segregated, safe place for women to meet and learn.

A strong result from the endline survey was that women became more confident and empowered as a result of the SRP. Compared with the baseline data, women were significantly more involved in household decision-making, had increased use and ownership of mobile phones, and showed a greater willingness to work

collaboratively with other women in the village.

For example, male access and use of mobile phones was high (about 90%) both at the start and the end of the SRP. However, female access increased greatly over the project duration, rising from about 40% to the same level as males by the end of the project. Access to and use of computers by both males and females was quite low at the start of the project (28% for males and 17% for females) but increased more than two-fold over the duration of the project (to 57% and 45% respectively).

Male heads of households were much more likely than at the start of the project to rate employment opportunities for women as an important household concern. This is an important outcome since the male head of household plays a dominant role in household decision-making and has an important voice in whether—and what type of—training can be undertaken by the women. The endline survey indicated a significant change in their attitude in this regard. In addition, a Youth Camp was organised to expose young people to new technologies and economic initiatives that create opportunities for

rural employment rather than drifting to the cities for work.

One other significant result related to attitudes towards collaboration among different households. Such collaborations are important in many development initiatives, such as joint marketing of outputs, joint purchase of inputs, joint purchase of community assets, or organising a village social event. We found women had a much more positive attitude to collaboration with other households than men. Hence, a strategy of involving women may be a key to success for collaborative development initiatives.

Given the many positive outcomes, work in some focal villages is continuing with the new ACIAR program in Pakistan and we understand the approach we have undertaken in the focal villages is being replicated by another (USAID) project in other villages. ■

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