Centre for the Development of Human Initiatives (CDHI)

Community Engagement

Perspectives, Processes and Practices

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Preface

Planned development projects work with different actors and partners, with the most important being the community. The goals, objectives and implementation structure of a planned intervention, generally, are all designed by experts and professionals. Some of these professionals have adequate awareness and sensitivity towards the community and its needs, no doubt. Too often, though, an appreciation of the community's capacities, knowledge and potential to evolve is understated and at times misplaced. The current development discourse undeniably emphasizes commitment to democratic values and inclusion. Within this sector, community is considered the focus, and therefore respect to its insights, priorities and wisdom is seen as a non-negotiable condition for the success of any development initiative. It is assumed that the community has a rich repository of knowledge and can contribute significantly to the design and implementation of a given project.

Unfortunately, there is often a perception of persistent inadequacy among "commoners", or more specifically those who have no formal exposure to the professional world. This is an incorrect notion that defies all claims of human development via the recognition of human capability and equality of opportunity. It has been created and propagated by a social structure, socialization process and culture entrenched in hierarchy when it comes to knowledge and capability. This needs to be proactively dealt with, particularly when we consciously endeavor to achieve inclusive development through various planned initiatives. There are several ways to incorporate inclusion into all steps of the development process. An important concept is participatory pedagogy, which includes methodologies that catalyze for the progression towards equality and inclusion. Those living a life of marginalization (in this case, the community) have strong potential to contribute to the success of the project with their rich knowledge. Appreciating and acknowledging this valuable asset, however, is proving tricky. Our entrenched perception, that "certain social groups are born with inadequacies", leads us maintain the status quo and sometimes even perpetuate this isolation. This does not fit with the ethos of inclusion. We must learn to collaborate with the community, and we must prepare ourselves to engage them in every enterprise in which we are involved. Most importantly, we must ensure and encourage their optimum participation in any envisioning and strategizing steps we take. Development initiators need, consciously, to come out against alienating the community, for they must be at the center stage!

The DSI4MTF project works to understand dry season agriculture, analyze the dynamics and factors that influence it and evolve strategic options for making dry season agriculture viable for the benefit of the marginalized communities. As the title suggests, the project is focused around marginalized communities: small, marginal and tenant farmers, and has developed a strong community interface that can benefit both the project and the community equally.

Community engagement is about building new collaborative relationships in all spheres of the project. Although the core of the process is acknowledging the community's wisdom and inviting them to be a partner in the initiative, building this relationship is tricky. It calls for honesty, empathy and the application of appropriate tools. There is a need to build and consolidate this collaboration through careful and empathetic strategies and engagement. The project has encouraged building these relationships in all aspects of project planning, implementation, monitoring and innovation.

During the implementation of the project over the last two years, staff have learned how to better build collaborative relationships with the community. The strategy of incorporating the insights gained in the early stages of the project seems to be working well. This process merits sharing and further reflected. We, therefore, attempted documentation of the strategies and processes that have influenced the project so far. The objective of

the document is to share the outcome of the engagement in the context of various social, institutional and psychological issues. The presentation of the issues may offer an opportunity for reflection about how collaborative relationships and can be built and how inclusion can be realized.

This is not only a documentation of events and processes, but also presents the skills and capacities used to enable space for such collaboration. The project partners, with some hands on experience in facilitation, have used their academic and professional backgrounds and experiences. We hope this encourages others to appreciate, join, practice, and develop the necessary skills and capacities to achieve equality and inclusion in knowledge transaction and benefit sharing in a given project.

The document should not be taken as a guideline or manual for community engagement, although it has all the possible elements in it. Development practitioners are aware of the perspectives, strategies and tools for engagement. Participatory methods are quite popular, either as a course on academic and professional education, or as capacity building inputs for practitioners. The document offers opportunities for reflection strictly in the context of this project. This learning can be used as a reference for different contexts. At the end of the document, a framework has been suggested for orienting those willing to build upon the lessons of this detailed within. This will help translate the lessons from this project into myriad other contexts.

Use of participatory engagement strategies and tools cannot be effective without appreciating the theoretical perspective. The first part of the document, therefore, deals with the perspectives and concepts. The latter part deals with processes and practices. The document will include the lessons learned from all the three project locations in Nepal and India. In its present form, however, it only has insights from India (Cooch Behar). During the planned conference for cross location interactive exposure we may include insights and cases from other locations.

The need for this documentation was felt during the first review of the project in discussion with the project partners, and was followed up on by the CDHI team. The first yearly review took place at CDHI, Jalpaiguri, North Bengal (India) in September, 2015. Subsequently, a general framework emerged through an evolving consultation process. Erik Schmidt (University of Southern Queensland, or USQ), Fraser Sugden (IWMI), Stephanie Leder (IWMI), Dhananjay Ray (Joy), Subrata Majumdar, Mitali Gosh and Benu Kanta Dey (all CDHI) actively participated in the process. Colleagues from the UBKV University in West Bengal offered useful inputs in preparing the frame work. The document is based on the engagement process facilitated, primarily, by Subrata, Joy, Mitali, Benu and Rajeshwar Mishra. Prasun Deb Kanungoe (IWMI's Field Coordinator in Cooch Behar) and Kaushik Pradan (UBKV) participated in several joint facilitation sessions. Stephanie twice visited Cooch Behar and the document has benefitted greatly from her facilitation on gender. Erik, Fraser and Stephanie have been a constant source of support and without their persistent follow-up we would not have achieved the milestone which we set for ourselves. Andrew Reckers (IWMI) volunteered with editing, formatting and designing.

The objective of the document is not to script and showcase a success story. This is to share a process based experience of an important strategy. Reflection and feedback would be helpful to continue and consolidate the strategy used.

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1. Myths and realities about engagement- what is engagement and what is it not?

To introduce the subject let us begin with the following scenarios depicting perspectives on community engagement. We pick up these scenarios from various contexts:

Scenario one

This is an international project being implemented by a government department responsible for water resources management. As part of the project, a Farmers Management Committee (FMC) has to adapt to institutional norms and procedures. A technical agency is assigned the task of facilitating the process. After a series of meetings with the government and the farmers, a draft is prepared. The General Body Meeting of the FMC has to approve and adopt the norms and procedures. There is a meeting planned for the approval and adoption. Key farmers have been invited and have occupied central space for the meeting. All participants wait enthusiastically for the secretary of the government to arrive and witness the grand event. Local officials are anxiously waiting for the secretary who is, incidentally, delayed. Finally, he arrives and the meeting begins.

The local official welcomes the secretary and thanks the farmers for their attendance. The FMC secretary is introduced to the audience and expresses his happiness that he is considered for this position by such an important project. The secretary reads some important points from his prepared document and asks for the reaction of the farmers. He is met by utter silence, with no one appearing interested in providing a response. The government secretary takes command and asks "why are you silent? This is such a good opportunity for you to participate in a government program." Not wanting to waste the opportunity, the farmer's secretary responds rather apologetically, blurting out:

Sir! as the fellow farmers are ignorant and illiterate, they do not understand the situation. But how can they not accept the proposal? After all, experts and officials from international agencies and the government have worked hard on it, and most importantly such big officials have cared for us. Because of all this it must be valuable and useful!

He then encourages the farmers to respond and not let the opportunity pass. The farmers, in haste, applaud and clap, signaling their approval. The few women sitting in an obscure corner also clap, leaving their veils down. The document is approved and adopted. The local official thanks the secretary, and goes with him to lunch in the nearby high school where special arrangements have been made. In the informal discussion among the officials, the local official was recognized for his hard work in convincing the farmers, which he greatly appreciated. The FMC secretary was proud, for he sat next to the government secretary, while watching his costly cell phone and the sleek laptop which has been procured from the project fund.

Scenario two

This is a participatory crop planning exercise being facilitated by a research institution and the Department of Agriculture of an Indian state government. The students from the research institution and the functionaries from the line departments are involved in the participatory planning process. The students have studied all the books and literature on participatory methods and tools and have learned them by heart- PRA/RRA/FGD being their newfound mantra. Beforehand, they had made a couple of visits to the village and interacted with the farmers to debate the applicability of the participatory tool, upon which they had difficulty agreeing. Finally, they were able to develop a plan. This was the final day for them to get the consent of the farmers on the plan.

The meeting venue had only two farmers, to begin with, and the facilitators were getting worked up, whispering to each other, "they always report late", and, "they are so disorganized", and, "this is why the farmers in this country are poor." The farmers keep trickling in and finally the farmers' leader appears, to the great satisfaction of other farmers and the scientists. He is embarrassed that he is late, but implores the farmers to call others, telling them, "don't forget to bring some women – those who can understand and are not afraid to speak up." Eventually, the farmers come in good numbers with varied explanations: "I was in the field", "the irrigation pump burst", "my wife was not well", and so on and so forth.

Their explanations however, are not listened to by the scientists. The scientist in charge begins by reminding them of his team's earlier visits and their views. The farmers nod in understanding and appreciation. Then he presents the cropping calendar and asks for their opinion. The official from the line department is not in full agreement. "Last year we tested this in a nearby village and it badly failed," he explains. The scientist looks stern and reminds him that this was in another village with different climatic condition. Two farmers support the official, and add that this also failed in their village. The scientist in charge asks a number of questions regarding irrigation scheduling, humidity, soil health, pest application, manure application, etc.

The farmers look bewildered, as they are not acquainted with such terminology, since nobody ever discussed these with them during the project. They begin to feel very confused. The scientist emphasizes that the latest research finds this crop to be viable for this region, and he adds that, "we need to try this. It is our decision. Even examples of failure are not valid, as our monitoring data on soil moisture and other environmental components show that everything is normal. Those Farmers must not have been careful enough". This is met by complete silence, which is broken by a fellow scientist with a different specialization. She announces, "this year, let us monitor this properly and collect data regularly, as we may get new insights".

This broke the silence but the farmers are, seemingly, not quite convinced. The scientist in charge looks to the local line official and adds, "you know better, this crop needs to be demonstrated as we have already sent the annual plan to our headquarters. We cannot change it now. Let us keep in touch with the farmers and together demonstrate success." The extension person from the research institution offers his final counsel: "Don't worry, I will deploy my students to engage with the farmers and also get the monitoring data collected regularly. I will ask them to use PRA/RRA techniques to engage, mobilize and convince the farmers. They can complete their dissertation based on this demonstration plot data." Farmers feel lost from the conversation, but since it was already late, some decision had to be taken.

Some of the farmers suggested, “Let us try one more year, but remember your promises of continued support and guidance.” The cropping planning for the village is approved and seemingly accepted, according to the team, in a participatory way. “This is a matter to applaud and celebrate!” exclaims the scientist in charge.

Scenario three

This is a multicultural project on biodiversity in Asia. The community and other stakeholders’ perspectives were necessary to understand the pre-existing biodiversity base. This allowed for sustainable conservation planning and the strengthening of community based institutions. Looking at the nature of the project, it required a multi-disciplinary team and multi-level stakeholders. This was an onerous task of assessment, planning and institution building, all the while keeping the community at the center.

The project team reflected on the issues from their respective backgrounds and agreed on possible approaches that could transcend disciplinary boundaries. They hoped to develop insights from the ground that considered the community as the main repository of knowledge and understanding. In trying to determine the community perspective, a social scientist and an extension specialist spent considerable time with the community observing their day-to-day interactions with the environment and capturing their narratives and oral traditions. The community’s views were respected and there was an encouraging environment wherein they enjoyed being the knowledge givers, rather than simply passive receivers. The multidisciplinary team tried to understand and interpret each other’s findings, form integrated views and present them before the community and local stakeholders. When it came to planning the priorities and options, the community’s perspectives and approaches were mutually discussed and agreed upon.

At the end of the day, the planning exercise considered the set of available information, insights and perspectives that evolved collectively. Interestingly enough, since the focus of the planning and implementation was the community, they developed a strong ownership for the process and intervention that followed. Some resources and logistics for implementation were organized locally, largely from different government agencies in the area. There was no visible conflict over which discipline would play a dominant role in the decision making. The intervention continues, as do the benefits. On completion of the project, the researchers left the location, but the collective learning and benefits continue and sustain.

Scenario four

This is a village level farmer meeting to decide on a plan for winter crops. Various subjects are discussed, including dependence on the technical agency to help them plan a proper cropping calendar. One of the farmers suggested that the season was coming closer and planning was urgent, waiting further might jeopardize their cropping as has happened in previous years. Timeliness and regularity of support had been the critical issue earlier. But what about the technical support? There were moments of silence, while attendees were pondering and reflecting. One of the key farmers from the village, has been doing quite well both in terms of harvesting early and entering the market before others for a number of crops. He did not get any external technical support, he simple tried several innovations with

positive results. Many were wondering to themselves why his results, support and guidance were not being considered. There were whispers and nods in the meeting and everybody in the meeting agreed to go by his experience, knowledge and advice. The facilitators, while appreciating the deliberation, raised one question: "what is it that you cannot do without the expert's advice?" After thinking through this a bit, the collective voice responded that there is nothing that they cannot at least try. Many wondered aloud, "What will happen?" They knew that risk existed, but also that what they may learn could be very helpful in the future. In case of crises they would look to other farmers or experts. The facilitators were convinced with the community's conviction in their own capabilities and resolved to take on the risk. They preferred to go with this decision, "why not?" was the natural response. To respect the external technical agency, they decided to consult them on critical components. They insisted, though, that their own plan go ahead, as otherwise the delay might be counterproductive. The facilitators also agreed to their decision and offered to coordinate with the technical agencies, including a government department.

The farmers decided on trying early cabbage and chilies on 18 katha (approximately 00.12 ha) of land with a collective farming approach, as was practiced earlier with summer paddy. Two decisions were important: one was regarding fencing of the plots to safeguard from errant bulls, and the other was the use of organic inputs. After much deliberation, it was decided to go for bamboo and lemon plant hedges as a fence. The rationale was the potential of the lemon plant as an income generator after three years. For the organic farming, they argued that since they have no experience with organic farming, they are not sure how it will work out. If it fails, they would suffer losses which they would not be able to withstand and recover from. Finally, they decided to try organic farming over a small part of the plot as a test. "If it works," they said, "let us continue next year." The project agreed to offer partial support for fencing with the lemon plants, as this could be an example for others to have the benefits of the mixed cropping and hedging.

The above scenarios reveal different ***strands and trajectories*** of working with the community, interchangeably called involvement, participation and engagement. As is clear from the above, there are distinct ways which are followed while working with the community, which eventually amount to involving and encouraging them to participate in the process to develop a sense of ownership and ensure their continued engagement. The processes used determine the outcome. The details of engagement, therefore, are important to understand and follow. Let us analyze each of the these scenarios. The first scenario depicts a rushed strategy, based on hierarchical authorities of the state government or whatever powerful group it may be informing the community about an external intervention to fulfill the nominal obligation of involving the community. In reality, this "involvement" only includes informing them about the proposed intervention, getting their approval about the strategies and processes and pushing an approval from them.

The second scenario shows an attempt at creating ownership of a decision or process which has, willy-nilly, been pre-determined by an authority system. The authority system may be based on a knowledge hierarchy or an official authority system. The knowledge hierarchy considers official knowledge as sacrosanct and foolproof, but has to conform to the demand of existing democratic values of inclusion and participation. This simply means that they follow certain participatory rituals that are often nominal and fixed.

The third scenario demonstrates gradual and willing involvement of the community in working to evolve insights, plans, strategies and processes. The facilitators of the process are willing to learn from the community's perspectives and values, respect their knowledge repository and take into account their views and decisions for modification of contents, strategies and processes. Synergy and collectivization is seen to the fullest extent. The process does not witness moments of domination, brow-beating or intimidation. Rather, a whole inclusive process is seen, with the possibility of sustainable outcomes.

The fourth scenario demonstrates strong community control and ownership of their affairs, as they are in the driver's seat. The facilitators are seen encouraging and respecting community decisions as observers and morale supporters. The scenario also demonstrates an acknowledgement and trust of the existing leadership and capability structures within the community.

The four scenarios show different degrees of interfacing with individuals, institutions and communities, which can be described as involvement, participation and engagement. In contemporary development parlance, they are conveniently used interchangeably. The relationship is neither linear nor sequential. Involvement is an act of taking part in an activity, event or situation (www.macmillandictionary.com). The act of taking part may be intentional, reflexive or voluntary. Participation is defined as partaking in an event, process and/or situation. Participation can be direct or remote (Aslin and Brown, 2004). Other types of participation can be passive, interactive, self -mobilizing or via consultation (Kumar 2002). Itcan be intense and entrenched or superficial and nominal. Engagement is an appointment or agreement, especially for business or social purposes (www.dictionary.com). The Cambridge dictionary defines engagement as an arrangement to attend to or do something in a particular way. Engagement causes someone to become interested and involved in an activity or it attracts someone's interest (Aslin and Brown, 2004).

> "Engagement goes further than participation and involvement. It involves capturing people's attention and focusing their efforts on the matter at hand – the subject means something personally to someone who is engaged and is sufficiently important to demand their attention. Engagement implies commitment to a process which has decisions and resulting actions. It is possible, therefore, that people are consulted, they participate and can even be involved, but not be engaged" **(**Aslin and Brown, 2004).

Engagement, defined as "to cause somebody to be interested and involved", adheres to the following underlying element: "tactful/tacit persuasion" by an "agency with the 'primary interest or responsibility' to achieve a mission or implement a program." (Aslin and Brown, 2004). – This may be partially true. What is important is that engagement is an honest and empathetic sharing of goals and missions of an enterprise with the stakeholders (to begin with) and offers them an opportunity to reflect, analyze and respond to their possible compatibility with the enterprise being presented. It is a gradual process. In order to conform to the need for maintaining democratic values and inclusion in any contemporary development enterprise, those who are to be effected (whether they are benefitting or otherwise from the planned project) must have the opportunity to engage with the process of planning and implementation. The underlying principle is that they know their context within the project better.

Furthermore, they can take comfort in knowing that the project staff recognizes that their knowledge repertory has evolved over time and therefore has passed several tests of time, which can offer better insights on the proposed development enterprise. Ideally, the engagement process should begin during the inception of the initiative and continue over time. *Engagement, therefore, is quite inclusive in nature based on an objective and honest understanding of the knowledge and other endowments of those with whom engagement is planned and progressed. Once the process begins, there is an evolving identification with and commitment to the goals and missions of the planned initiative, as well as a willingness to share norms and values, as enshrined, and a sense of ownership of the process and outcome. Engagement should not be taken as one-time step to quickly understand the context, social and physical, and then build a plan and strategy. It is not a tool to collect facts and data and forget.*

2. What is community engagement? The idea of community and engagement

The contemporary development discourse refers to community engagement rather abundantly and frequently. The discourse underlines and emphasizes community engagement in all such development initiatives, which involves interfacing with community and other stakeholders. The community and stakeholders are considered important both in terms of contributing to the success of initiative implementation and sharing and distributing the outcome of the initiative, whether that is knowledge or a physical endowment. At this point in time, there is a need to understand and elaborate on the two terms that have emerged: (1) Community and (2) stakeholders.

Community is a collective, a group of people living together in a given physical space. Community is said to share certain demographic features, have common values and belief systems and tend to conform to a defined normative structure. Shared norms and value systems are particularly important to keep in mind. However, community may not be homogeneous and may not always share norms and value systems. A community may outwardly appear homogeneous, but there may be less visible elements of heterogeneity like caste, class and other indicators of social hierarchy. Additionally, one may also come across communities which may not share common spatial or demographic features and characteristics. For example, the community of scientists. We often talk of the scientific community, or the teaching community, farming community, the community of magicians or musicians- all of which may not live in a common physical space. ***We would, in this context, prefer to limit ourselves to collective groups of people occupying common physical and demographic space, which may or may not be sharing common social norms, beliefs and value systems and pursuing similar livelihoods and vocations. There may, however, be deviations hidden underneath.***

Another commonly used term is stakeholder(s). A stakeholder(s) is an individual or group of people who have interest in the subject being pursued. The stakeholder(s) may have interest, being the immediate beneficiary or sufferer, or may have tertiary interest. The circle of stakeholders may grow wider or may change affiliation and identity. For example, a farmer in an agriculture development program is a primary stakeholder, but a dealer supplying sacks, during harvest, is a secondary stakeholder. A scientific community may be both a primary or secondary stakeholder. The type of stakeholder may change according to the context, time and space. It is defined and determined in the context of a given initiative: its goal and mission. Using the two terms interchangeably may not always be avoided which does not, necessarily, dilute or undermine their meaning.

2.1 Community Engagement

We may overlap or interchangeably use the two terminologies, "stakeholders" and "community'", in our subsequent discussion. However, we are conscious of the finer differences in their composition and orientation. Having discussed engagement, in a generic sense, let us move on to community and stakeholder engagement. We consider community engagement to be a collaborative endeavor immerse oneself or one's project with an initiative and action. The engagement may range from being spontaneous to being facilitated by a person or group of people who have propounded an initiative as the primary stakeholder and have the intention and commitment to implement the endeavor. Community engagement, for the initiators, is a well thought out scheme and process to build collaboration with those who can play meaningful role (i.e. the community in which the initiative is to be implemented) in fructifying the initiative as planned. Their (the initiators') understanding is that:

- The community, located around the initiative, has the natural right to be engaged in its implementation as a partner and not just as a beneficiary and dependents. They deserve active involvement and engagement,
- The community has wealth of relevant knowledge related to the initiative which the initiators inevitably lack,
- Their understanding of the context is realistic and therefore the initiative can build upon and progress with their support,
- The above may create a strong sense of ownership among the community which can stand by the initiative with their important endowment and resources,
- They can better follow-up the outcome of the initiative and thus make them sustainable and self-driven after the initiative is completed. The outcome would then be internalized and assimilated in the local context. This is, perhaps, the most important aspiration of the initiator(s).

Engagement, based on the above considerations, is empathetic and collaborative in intent and has the potential of becoming a creative partnership between co-initiators and co-creators of the outcome of the initiative.

2.2 Effective Community Engagement- Some indicators

What is effective community engagement? This may be a natural question to the facilitator(s) of community engagement. Answering this question is difficult and may even sound ambitious. Let us attempt, based on our understanding, what good engagement is. Before trying to identify and underline characteristics and indicators, let us focus on the goal of the engagement, as given above. We underline the followings characteristics as effective engagement:

Aspects of engagement	Indicators
The initiator shares the initial plan and goals with other stakeholders, and more extensively with the primary stakeholders: the community	Sharing events
Wide range of members from the community participate	A number and diverse representatives standing and acting together
Different stakeholders, including the initiators, rearticulate, evolve and understand common goals	Goals are clear to everybody
Mission and strategies evolve and are understood together and collectively	Functional and feasible strategies and mission
Evolving inclusive institutions	Inclusive institutions
Reflective and deliberative processes	Meetings and interactions: participation, continuity and order
Collective actions with coordination and synergy	Minimum conflict and dissension. Conflicts resolved through deliberation and discussion
Collective and participatory monitoring	Shared parameters and indicators of monitoring
Shared and collective ownership of goals and action	Focus on achieving goals
Respect for each other's contribution	Respect and appreciation in all project-related interactions
Inter-supportive facilitation	Everybody supports each other
Optimum goal achievement	Sustainable outcome: community continues project and innovates ways to reduce dependence on external support

The framework above can be summarized in terms of evolving collectivism, synergy and an enabling space catalyzed by the process of engagement. This is a necessary condition for an appropriate and sustainable action, toward a goal, leading to a sustainable outcome.

3. The context of the project: "Improving Water use for Dry Season Agriculture by Marginal and Tenant farmers in the Eastern Gangetic Plains (DSI4MTF)"

The Australian Center for International Agriculture Research (ACIAR) sponsored project seeks to improve dry season farming by marginal and tenant farmers. In the context of the Eastern Gangetic Plains, the small, marginal and tenant farmers suffer perennial problems of water deficit during the dry season, leading to a corresponding lack of agricultural production over large tracts of land. This causes the small, marginal and tenant farmers to suffer a lot. The project envisages to explore if dry season farming can be improved using new sustainable technolgies and by collectivizing the farming community's efforts and inputs. The action research project is different from a physical intervention, in the sense that most of the interventions are knowledge based and communities play a significant role. Technical institutions have to offer technological inputs, where as social instituitions have to facilitatate institutional development, collectivization and equity issues.

3.1 The challenges and opportunities facing the project

Geo-physical and demographic characteristics: The project is operational at three locations, two in India (Madhubani) in the states of Bihar and Cooch Behar in West Bengal, and another in Nepal (Saptari), which represents the Himalayan Terai region (foothills of the Himalayas). In Bihar, the implementation is by an NGO (Sakhi) with technical support from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) Patna regional office. In Cooch Behar, implementation is by another NGO: Center for the Development of Human Initiatives (CDHI), with technical support from Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalay (UBKV), a part of North Bengal Agriculture University.

The region is characterized by land fragmentation and a predominance of small, marginal and tenant farmers with erratic availability of water. The average rainfall and recharge is high, though marked by considerable spells of drought (including the dry season) which adversely affects availability of rain and subsequent cropping behavior and productivity. Needless to say, the small, marginal and tenant farmers suffer the worst from this unpredictability.

Eastern Gangatic Plain has a history of exploitative landowners-tenant relationships and systematic land fragmentation (Boyce and Hartmann, 1981). The strained relationship has taken its toll, and is still present today. There is a lingering sense of mistrust and exploitation that still persists. Under such a situation, collectivization and collective enterprise is faced with difficult challenges. The prevailing demand and initiatives for democratization of the social and political system, processes and institutions has the state's sanction and support. The democratic policies are in favor of inclusion at different levels. For example, in Bihar and West Bengal, the grass roots democracy (Panchyati Raj) has the government's approval and support. Similarly, the Government of India has provided for democratization at grassroots institutions. As a result, farmer managed irrigation system and joint management of natural resources are in vogue. In Nepal cooperative systems, down to the village level, such practices are encouraged and institutionalized. These policies help encourage collectivization.

3.2 The special features of the project: There are two interesting components of the project. While the technical interventions provide an opportunity for the region and farming communities, the community participation and collectivization in innovation and management may stimulate and catalyze conditions for innovation, equity and sharing. Technology can bring optimum benefits only if farming communities take the means and sources of production under their control and make collective efforts in the management. The impact of the technology has to be seen on the ground, i.e. in farmers' fields. Bringing together marginal and tenant farmers with small plots would require an appreciation for the need for collectivization. The distrustful social environment is a challenge which the project envisages addressing. Community engagement is considered as an effective tool to catalyze collectivization and the required social synergy.

Technological innovation and its sustainable impact, with distributive justice, cannot, optimally, be achieved in a fragmented society marked by social and economic discrimination and hierarchy, i.e. a culture of distrust, re-appropriation and co-option. Such impacts, to ensure uniform and even distribution, will necessarily have to articulate strategies for a social smoothing out process and catalyze enabling environments for the same to happen elsewhere. An empathetic engagement process seems to offer a somewhat appropriate answer.

3.3 Issues and challenges

The issues facing the project:

1. Proposing and promoting appropriate technological options to respond to the issues of dry season agriculture,
2. Bringing small, marginal and tenant farmers together with special reference to women farmers,
3. Evolve conditions for creating strong and functional socio-technical and institutional interfaces,
4. Catalyze enabling conditions for initiatives and shared opportunities,
5. Gradually evolve condition for inclusion and equity in contributing and sharing issues
6. Institutional development
7. Creating a meaningful partnership between farming communities and technological institutions and experts,
8. Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

Addressing these issues will require meaningful dialogue, communication and collaboration at various levels. This is what engagement is all about. In a practical sense, this would require that:

1. Farmers are involved and work as partners in the project and have a full understanding of the project,
2. The farmers undergo a collective and reflective exercise to see benefits of coming together,
3. Inclusive local institutions evolve and are strengthened to direct and channel collective efforts into sustainable outcomes,
4. The technological experts appreciate the traditional wisdom and capacity of the farmers and prepare themselves to foster partnerships in knowledge transactions. Participatory technology development may be one possible answer,
5. Farmers join together to monitor programs both for the technological and bio-physical developments, as well as any social and institutional findings
6. Collaborative analysis, where the community and the researchers reflect on the processes, impacts and outcomes,
7. Create forward-thinking strategies and programs for up-scaling and policy integration. At this point, the stage is set for the dissemination of the knowledge, building of theory and eventual publication.

4. Community engagement under DSI4MTF

We began with engagement in a generic sense. Now we move ahead, specifically in the context of the project. Considering the need and demand for dialogue and engagement, the section that follows will deal with this component:

4.1 Why community engagement

The project proposes exploring technological options to address the issues of dryland agriculture. The intention is to ensure the participation of the small, marginal and tenant farmers which, inevitably, would ensure an equal distribution of benefits. Participation and benefits, however, may be mediated and constrained by knowledge hierarchy (the dichotomy between science and common sense), social fragmentation, dysfunctional beliefs and value systems, the community's sense of embedded dependency and indifference, a lack of initiative or a missing sense of cooperation and collective action. The project understands and believes that dealing with such elements would be prerequisite to fructify and optimize the impact in terms of achieving the aspiration of inclusion, synergy of action and distributive justice. Many of the dysfunctional conditions listed above have been caused and perpetuated by dysfunctional structural dynamics which need to be reversed. *There is a need to transcend hierarchy, and replace it with opportunities for dialogue, reflection and collaboration. This is not easily achieved, however. An effective engagement and smoothing out process can help address the issues which, therefore, would need to be evolved and adopted.*

On the other hand, the project also believes that achieving its goals and objectives would require a multidisciplinary approach that emphasized collaborative wisdom. Community has a rich repository of wisdom and knowledge acquired and internalized through various traditions of learning and experiencing (Chambers, 1997). Communities have evolved and practiced various solutions in the past. The modern scientific base and approach of knowledge is important but not sacrosanct and cannot, on its own, address the impending issues and offer sustainable solutions. There is no need for modern science to undermine and subdue a community's traditional wisdom and social capital, rather it should work in alongside that knowledge to optimize the sustainable impact.

Distributing the impact would require proactively dealing with structural barriers. Our technological tools alone cannot be effective in this. Creating conditions for dialogue, collective reflection, questioning, challenging and empathy would be necessary. The benefits of development, in the present social-political context, can be optimized only through collaboration and cooperation. In turn, this can be achieved only through proactive community engagement.

Our interventions, in the form of technological innovations and collectivization, would require up-scaling, testing in a larger physical and social context and advocacy for policy integration. Ultimately, the impact of the experiments has to be felt and established at community fields. Being both a partner and collaborator, the community would be able to vouch and advocate for the impacts and help convey message to other actors for their consideration and integration into policy. Creating such conditions is possible through *collaborative engagement.*

Our (DSI4MTF) approach for engagement would follow the steps outlined above and would emphasize reflection, questioning, empathy and collaboration for the collective good and larger social goals.

4.2 Processes and steps

Community engagement is an evolving process which needs to follow definite strategies and steps. It has to be consistent with the pronounced ethos, collaborative and participatory, as discussed above. We discuss below the necessary steps and processes:

4.3 Entering the community: The first step is to enter the community to understand the context: both bio-physical and social. The hydrology, agronomy and other bio-physical conditions need to be adequately understood. As scientists, one may be a technical expert, but the community has been living and interacting with the physical conditions and is therefore aware of their behavior and orientation. Questions like how and where the river has flowed over time and how groundwater behaves need to be understood. There could be tools and technology to measure them, but the actual dynamics and shifts are experienced by the local people and no one else. Engagement could help understand otherwise inexplicable variations and shifts in the data by incorporating the community perspectives and knowledge.

Similarly, understanding social structure, behavior and dynamics would be essential to accurately assess the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. Social behavior is guided by cultural norms, values and beliefs. Understanding the prevailing level of social network, cooperation and collectivization is necessary which will help predict the extent to which distributive justice is possible.

A realistic understanding of the above would depend on how one approaches the community. If one approaches the community like a donor and provider, the response of the community would center on making the most out of the intervention. In such a situation the response would not be genuine. But if one visits and approaches the community by respecting their knowledge endowment, seeking partnerships and collaboration, the response often begins with inquisitiveness: many queries and doubts. Addressing them would likely create the conditions for trust and confidence to flourish.

Researchers might be tempted to elicit maximum response by conducting short visits. In order to expedite the response time, there may be a tendency to offer largesse and doles directly or indirectly, or present themselves as somebody carrying authority of the government or a well-known company. A tactical combination may still be more interesting, as one may couch one's request in tempting offers or authority. "This work may benefit you in future or the company may consider creating opportunities for the area. Since you are the person who is cooperating and is involved, we shall defiantly look for you if we come again". Entering the community with such ploys in mind is unethical and also has limited impact, as the community might withhold its support selectively, as their covert thinking may be something along the lines of: "Let us wait until he/she makes good on his/her promise." In the short term, the community may provide some information or show some positive response, but for the long run this is eventually counterproductive.

For a long term collaborative relationship, one may be required to hold patience and prepare to be honest about the objective. The initial response may appear to show indifference, but if the purpose of the visit is properly shared and explained, it may gradually create an environment of trust. This involves prolonged time and engagement characterized by an honest sharing of facts, explanations, logic and reflection. This slower type of engagement, though, would lead to a gradual strengthening of the building blocks of relationships and collaboration.

Amidst indifference, arrogance and strong reference, Dhaulaguri turns positive

Dhaulaguri, in Cooch Behar, India, overtly had everything that a village can expect in terms of visibility. It had a hatchery center, a few Self-Help Groups (SHGs), a crop demonstration center and a nominal farmers' club which was more of a pocket club for its flamboyant secretary. As a demonstration center of the UBKV, visitors from the University and elsewhere were common sight. This made the village seem privileged, and the secretary enjoyed the clout and visibility.

When we visited the village for the first time, the farmers' club secretary organized good role models, both men and women, from the village. They all appeared to be trained to respond with a similar chorus, "What are we going to get out of this?" We sat under the tree of the school with some farmers and the secretary. We tried to introduce the project together with Erik and other team members. "This is a research project, and we will carry out our research together with the research scientists from India and abroad. We are aware of your experience and insights which may be quite useful for the forthcoming project. We are here to work together with you and hope to benefit from your insights and experiences". We made our points, but definitely we could not cut through the ice that seemed to separate our two groups. We analyzed the situation and realized that the first challenge is to break our own identity as a provider that was acting as a barrier. After a couple of more interactions, the site was finally selected, but we were firm and insistent in our presentation.

Post site selection, our plan included an institutional analysis of the club headed by the secretary that he often presented as a success story. We had a couple of sessions with him and analyzed the institutional effectiveness against the evolving indicators. We conducted a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis, which gave the community an opportunity to identify and reflect upon their own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The club turned out to be working against its own parameters. We caught the members off-guard, but did not blame any of them. Working through the opportunities that they had identified, we offered to support them using a collective turnaround strategy. The club is not revamped fully, but this critical element established an opportunity for partnership and collaboration to work during the project period. The positive environment continues, and efforts at turning around the club are the highest priority. The project's team of facilitators have been able to weave around a strategy for collaboration and partnership.

A neighboring project site, Uttarchawakuakheti (UC), experienced a delayed start, is still on and working out the goals of the project and possible partnerships. Careful and systematic engagement will follow, and one can hear words of wisdom such as, "who else can work for us to address our agricultural problems? We will have to collectivize." Following reflective interaction, one may also hear, "If we are in a football match we need to shoot the ball, the referee is not going to do this for us!" Engagement seems to be working on attitudes and values. There seems to be great opportunity in

galvanizing these two important facets of a community. The tribal community of Uttarchakuakheti has suffered marginalization and been kept at the margin in the web of dependency. Engaging them is crucial, and once done, it may help them realize their latent potential as a resurgent community, as has occurred in the past. The tribal community is simple and straight forward. If convinced, they can be quite resolute and firm in their action.

4.4 Sharing the big story and larger agenda in unambiguous terms: The next step is building on the initial trust in an environment of collaboration. Having developed a mutually acceptable level of collaboration, we wished to share the project in detail: its goals, objectives, funding and the potential that it had for the village as whole. Several comprehensive sessions were organized to share, discuss and explain the proposal, attended by both male and female farmers.

The project had some opportunities to install equipment and demonstrate cropping techniques, but we never missed a chance to remind the farmers that they have to share their resources and efforts. This proved, at times, tricky, so far as the locations were concerned. There was the concealed temptation to let equipment gadgets be installed at places that would be especially convenient to a specific group of farmers. By bringing in objective considerations, such as the scientific and objective parameters decided by the technical experts and scientists, the contentious issues of locations were resolved.

The risk that helped consolidate the approach and conviction

The decision on the location, again in Dhaulaguri, Cooch Behar, ran the risk of becoming controversial. For that reason, the decisions were made together in full public view and attended by scientists and researchers. This neutralized conflict areas, and the community members approved the location and let the experiments commence and continue.

In a recent session at UC we have been able to clearly communicate with the community the goals and objectives of the project. Agreement unanimously has been reached that the community has to come forward, collectivize themselves and take action. They have to be active players. Be it in the case of maintenance of the implements, upkeep of the farms or institutionalizing their actions, they have to take a central role. They identified leadership, divided responsibilities and created a plan of action with milestones and a timeline. Their farmers club is still not registered, which they would like to formalize as soon as possible.

The momentum seems to have begun, which will need to be observed systematically, lest they lose inertia. Engagement has helped assess how to move further after these initial stages.

4.5 Encouraging questions and respecting doubts –sharing everything the community wishes to know: One should not expect a smooth walk over all the issues once agreements are reached. The community is divided into groups according to various criteria: caste, land holding size, interests, religious beliefs and others. The decisions on the interventions are taken in a business environment, but informal discussions on the sidelines continue. One may agree during the public meeting, but during the evening, they may overhear two people discussing their doubts, and potentially a third adding on. This gives rise to a series of other questions, although they may not be

asked often publically. The facilitators need to be conscious of this reality and encourage questions throughout the project:

Repetition in questioning leads to further clarifications-they help, not hinder

We have experienced series of questions put differently before different people, as well as in the third person. “People are asking questions, such as who will buy the pumps, who will pay for the labor and how long will it take?”. The person asking the question may add that they personally don’t have an issue with these parts of the project, but are simply passing along the questions of others. The ambiguous ”people” or “somebody” that are referenced, however, are unlikely to be found for confirmation.

There are other set of questions as well. For example, a farmer, during an interactive session, complained of the weeds growing in his demonstration plot. “Nobody helped me in dealing with them,” he said. One of the facilitators politely asked, “who do you think should help you in cleaning the weeds?” The facilitator kept silent for a moment, and then turned the question to the collective field of participants, asking, “What do you think?” There were multiple voices dismissing the farmer’s initial question.

The consensus seemed to be, “this is our individual problem, and we should individually learn to handle this”. Such an open forum for discussion of even trivial questions is important and must be encouraged. It has the potential of resolving thorny issues and creating clarity.

Such questions are common and the facilitators need to be patient and consistent in responding. The facilitators should restrain in passing the buck and in shifting the responsibilities. This may happen in the case of multi-stakeholder involvement. “I don’t know what ‘they’ are planning” may be the sarcastic response from one group of stakeholders. It is difficult to locate the “they” in the above conversation. This creates doubts and apprehensions which need to be allayed or altogether avoided. Such questions are natural in a low trust and uncertain social environment, and should be taken as an opportunity to create and strengthen trust through objective information and facts.

In both Dhaulaguri and UC, under Cooch Behar, questions regarding procurement of pumps and installation of shallows were often asked. The arrangement was a little tricky, as the budget was with CDHI, whereas technical advice and price components were decided jointly among CDHI, UBKV and IWMI in Kathmandu. On several occasions, hard questions were asked by the farmers about whether there was the possibility of installation, or if it was all just talk and false promises. UBKV and CDHI maintained a consistent position throughout it all which worked well in the end.

Questions are natural and must be encouraged, allowed and discussed frankly. Questions may be manifestations of a learned sense of mistrust and uncertainty. More questions help clear doubts and consolidate trust.

4.6 Setting mutually agreeable protocols for communicating and engaging: The above stage sets a platform for trust and mutual appreciation, and also validates of the intervention being collaboratively pursued. The stage seems to now be set for laying out and consolidating social infrastructure to implement the activities. One important aspect to consider is evolving communication and engagement protocol. How should communication and engagement follow for information sharing and stakeholder engagement? The community eventually will own the processes and protocols, which will require communicating and engaging with other stakeholders. Their communication and engagement protocols need to conform to the agreed upon approach of empathy and collaboration. For example, the SHG leaders or key farmer leaders need to communicate and engage with other farmers and SHG members. All of these processes should follow uniform protocol.

There is a tendency (in our context) to model a behavior pattern which offers control and authority. In this situation, the spirit of empathy and collaboration does not get entrenched and internalized as a value and practice. It slowly and eventually consolidates. Therefore, there is a need to set up formal communication and engagement protocols to follow and practice. What and how should different stakeholders be addressed? What should the pedagogy for facilitation be, etc.? The formalization of the protocol would help consolidation and internalization. Such protocols should be an outcome of reflective deliberation.

4.7 Encouraging community to assume the driver's seat in the proposed initiative: "You have all the skills and wherewithal necessary to achieve the goal": The community, with ample clarity and a focused agenda, needs to be encouraged to gradually assume further responsibilities and occupy the driver's seat. Management of bio-physical, social and institutional components may appear to be technical and difficult. But there are examples where local communities have learned to deliver and to take responsibilities to manage such seemingly difficult spheres and subjects. Managing the farmers' club requires capacity and skills to mobilize communities, maintain institutional governance protocol, and manage finances so that capacity can be developed using careful engagement process and empathetic hand holding. Monitoring of irrigation systems and groundwater behavior requires simple skills and hand holding. Both can be achieved.

Andhra Pradesh Farmers' Management System (APFAMGS) is an example of how farmers have been able to monitor groundwater behavior and appropriate crop planning using Farmers Water Schools (FWS) at the field level. Groundwater Committees (GMCs) have been powerful institutional arrangements that offer comprehensive water and agriculture management support.

The success stories from distant locations may not be convincing and the community may not realistically relate with them. Additionally, other success stories may have simply gone unnoticed. These stories need to be brought before the community.

Dhaulaguri is stronger on institutional development and innovations from the farmers than is Uttarchakuakheti (UC), which may offer inspiration to the latter. The Satmile farmers' club is a successful example which can offer inspiration and support to both Dhaulaguri and UC. Such stories are essential to capture and bring before communities at new experimental sites. Besides learning the practical details, they also help develop capacity and morale.

Both Dhaulaguri and UC have started learning through exposure and references and have initiated institutional strengthening processes to manage water, crops and monitor tube wells. These initiatives are moving ahead and the foundation for strong institutions in the form of a farmers' club is being laid. These farmer-led institutions and initiatives may, gradually, make the program farmer (i.e. community) driven.

4.8 Identify leaders and encourage and nurture local leadership: For the programs and institutions to be community driven, they would need local leadership. Every village has people with leadership qualities. In the existing milieu, there is a tendency for some fake leaders to manage to grab opportunities. They re-appropriate opportunities for their selfish interests. A participatory and transparent community engagement process helps identify genuine leadership with commitment, capacity and high moral value. Once identified, such leaders can be nurtured and prepared to play various functional roles.

Dhaulaguri had only one visible face with multiple agendas and responsibilities. His all-encompassing profile was encouraging others to show up and demonstrate their potential. In a series of community level interactions and reflective events, at least eight people with leadership qualities were identified who had specialized skills and capacities. All of them may not be necessarily great leaders, but have had visible impacts on the community. This was true for females as well as males.

In UC, the recent interventions have witnessed some farmers showing leadership qualities. Earlier, we depended on one leader who was interfacing with multiple institutions and individuals. Agriculture was not his focus. The interventions attracted involvement of others, and now there is clear acknowledgement in the community of the leadership and genuine intentions and capacity of the emerging new leaders. In the latest engagement session, we witnessed their growing popularity and trust in the community.

With the identification of such leaders and their gradual nurturing, they are emerging as leaders with diverse qualities, ready to take over various responsibilities. An interesting aspect of their emerging leadership is collective approval and acceptance. There is no visible conflict among existing and emerging leadership. The need is to present their contribution and clout in the community forum for everybody to see and judge. The engagement process, in this context, is crucial.

4.9 Prioritizing together: the issues, agenda and strategies: Collective leadership with distributed responsibilities is important, but leadership must be able to fix priorities and corresponding strategies to achieve them. The project initiators and leaders should allow and encourage to synchronize community priorities with project priorities and facilitate this mediation non-obtrusively.

A few of programs became necessary in Dhaulaguri. The sinking of tube wells, preparation of land for demonstration and working out local management protocols for the collective farming are some examples. The facilitators and community leaders reviewed the priorities and decided upon their actions according to these mutual priorities. In UC, the community decided on the priorities of institutional strengthening (farmers' club registration), crop planning and identifying community members without caste certificates. Clear responsibilities and timelines are also collectively decided.

4.10 Participatory and collaborative action planning: Prioritization offers the opportunity to understand whether the capacity exists for systematic action planning. The planning needs a clear understanding of ***what, why, when and who*** questions. This cannot be decided unilaterally or pushed down. As the responsibility for implementation is with the community, with selective inputs from the facilitator(s), participatory and collaborative planning is the next logical and doable step. Participatory and collaborative planning involves settling ***what, when, why and who*** questions together. This fixes priorities, accountability and ownership. Since a culture of collaboration and participation has already been created, this step becomes easy. In Dhaulaguri and UC, we have significant examples of participatory crop planning as well as the planning for an irrigation system installation.

Dhaulaguri had difficulty in planting Boro paddy because there was no water available during the dry season. The members of the collective, scientists from the University and CDHI, the social facilitation team supported by the IWMI local facilitator, had a series of interactions to discuss and decide upon the viability of Boro paddy. The project intervention included shallow pumps and technical guidance on agronomy from the University. The members from the collective decided on the contribution and cost sharing mechanism.

The year witnessed a moderate harvest to the encouragement of the farmers. They were encouraged to work out and attempt a cost-benefit analysis, which they promptly performed. The advantages of this exercise include: (1) reflection on economic viability and (2) exploring options in the days to come.

Encouraged by their successes, Dhaulaguri would like to catch up on an early variety of cabbage and chilies. Not wanting wait for external technical support, they were encouraged to take up planning under the overall guidance of a lead farmer and other successful farmers. They worked this out, and have even initiated sowing of seedlings to begin with. The economics and projection of viability has also been worked out. The knowledge gained in Dhaulaguri is brought to UC by the facilitators, and the UC farmers have begun to plan the next cropping.

4.11 Evolving Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME): Who should monitor the planned activities? The answer usually may tilt toward, “of course the project!” Is monitoring by the project only option, though? Does this sync well with the ethos of participation and collaboration? Monitoring by the project is often favored because of a couple of considerations:

- Because the project has made material and intellectual (knowledge) investments, it is its own responsibility to ensure that the project is moving toward the desired goal,
- Only technical persons have the detailed technical knowledge about the project and, therefore, they alone can monitor the project and
- Because the project has accountability with the donor, they need to be careful in ensuring that the project is progressing along the logical framework and time line

The above considerations are acceptable, no doubt, but because there has been effort for further knowledge and perspective sharing between the project and the community, it is logical to also share monitoring responsibilities. This may have the following potentials:

- There is an opportunity for embedded learning in the process of joint monitoring and evaluation,
- The joint monitoring offers responsibility and ownership, therefore it enhances opportunities for self-correction in case gaps are observed,
- Joint (participatory) monitoring offers opportunities for constant awareness of the potentials for up-scaling and integrating with the existing activities,
- Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) helps capacity building to better manage the project.

In West Bengal, monitoring is taking place at two levels: (1) biophysical and (2) group dynamics collective. At the biophysical level, hydrology, cropping behavior and technological interventions are being monitored by the technology group consisting of members from UBKV, USQ and IWMI. The farmers' world view and insights are important and they must be treated as important insight for the team. The monitoring of the group dynamics, institutional functioning and collective farming is being monitored by CDHI and some aspects by the UBKV. However, the farmers are also engaged in the monitoring of the crops and process of collectivization and group dynamics.

In Dhaulaguri, the farmers have started monitoring their crops' water requirement, inputs used and soil behavior, as well as the economics of cropping and management of the pumps. At the institutional and group levels, the members and officials of different institutions like the farmers' club and SHGs are monitoring their activities: governance, leadership, decision-making and economic behavior. The opportunities for biophysical monitoring, by the farmers, seem very high, as some of the lead farmers have shown technical acumen to deal with the instruments adequately. Asked if they could handle and use gadgets and equipment they say, "Why not? This is so simple!" They informed us that they were able to use the tachometer, and the international technological expert testified the accuracy of their measurements and applauded them for their technical acumen. The farmers offered that they could use the pizometer and monitor water levels on their own. This all sounds quite encouraging. A little in-depth training and orientation can help them develop further technical skills!

4.12 Evolve vision for up-scaling and policy integration: Interfacing strongly with the project, the community and other stakeholders must generate insights for the future: how the learning can transcend from experimental fields to other villages and beyond. This process needs to be consciously encouraged for multiplying the learning and up-scaling. Up-scaling need not necessarily be a quantum leap in the area, as it is a systematic and gradual process. The learning, from the beginning, needs to be shared with different agencies including the government. If there is systematic stakeholder collaboration, the process of up-scaling holds greater hope.

4.13 Practical Questions: *Do these steps and processes need to be taken in a particular sequence and do we need to use specific tools relevant for the specific step? Perhaps not! The sequences can change, and as we are dealing with human beings, we need to be conscious and careful about the evolving contexts, diversities and situations. Similarly, tools are to be context specific. The facilitators, however, need to be aware of the tools that can possibly be used in a particular situation. Tools also need to be used in appropriate combination*.

5. Issues and strategies

Community engagement, as discussed and dealt with above, may not follow the predicted path. There are issues which may hinder or block the process. Strategies need to be evolved for dealing with such issues to make engagement effective and predictable. Let us first consider discussing the potential issues which the engagement process might encounter. Some of these may include the following:

5.1 Disciplinary biases and missing conviction:

Most the development and research **i**nterventions consist of multidisciplinary teams of professionals anchoring, facilitating and managing the project. Each discipline has its own perspective and approach to knowledge. Somebody from a physical science and technology background may have the perspective of knowledge generation in the context of established principles, or theories based on scientific methods and tools. Biases exist for who can be involved in the knowledge transaction process qualifications are required. Many consider certain academic achievements and credentials as essential for contributing to knowledge transactions. "Common persons" without these certifications do not qualify as authentic agents for "genuine" knowledge in this context.

On the other hand, there is a growing movement to acknowledge the potential for common people who can make important contributions to knowledge generation (Freire 1968, Chambers 1997). Their knowledge eventually becomes liberating and transformational. Freire elaborated that the oppressors do not favor promoting community as a whole but rather selected leaders (1968). For him, oppressors can be state authorities, an individual authority, or an authority system. Promoting the community may appear to work counter to its motives of retaining and wielding its authority to command obedience and compliance.

In the context of the above, the first barrier to community engagement is an ideological glitch and dilemma over whether to believe in the knowledge and capacity of the community. Traditionally, physical scientists and technology experts have the tendency to discount community's capability, and therefore fail to adequately represent them as partners in the research endeavor. According to them, any knowledge which is not measurable, in quantitative terms, cannot be authentic. Capturing passion, empathy, participation and inclusion becomes extremely difficult. Needless to say these manifestations offer an opportunity to understand human behavior and response to interventions. Any attempt at taking community's views and capturing such human attributes becomes extremely difficult and therefore is covertly or overtly discarded, or at best explained differently. Stories like, "There is not enough time," or, "This cannot be measured and therefore is futile," are common excuses. It is in these situations that the use of participatory tools becomes nominal.

Whether community engagement is part of the project or not depends on clarity in defining engagement and the commitment to respect its knowledge and capacity. If there is adequate clarity and commitment, community engagement will prove a powerful process. "People who do not act dialogically but insist on imposing their decision, do not organize the people-they manipulate them. They do not liberate nor are they liberated; they oppress." (Freire 1968). If this is the first and primary barrier, then an informed choice has to be made before the project intervention is articulated and planned.

5.2 Upon entering the community, the project may face barriers related to doubts and dependency: Even with expressed commitment to community engagement, entry barriers exist to confront the facilitators constantly. First of all, the community may have doubts about an outsider showing up, even if it is through a known route or channel. Building partnerships takes time, with lots of questions and doubts, both expressed or hidden. Another barrier is dependency. Over the period, states (and also some non-state agencies) have been coming out with largesse and doles as development inputs. Subsidies and free doling has assumed proportions. This macro-social and political environment is not conducive to collaboration and partnership. But the community is not to blame for these, rather it is the state policy which is responsible. Interestingly enough, the community is aware of the dysfunctionality of such avoidable largesse and dependency inducing policies and strategies. There are examples of functional collaboration even under such a vicious environment, where the intention of the intervention and of the agency is clear and properly explained.

> We have already cited the Dhaulaguri example and the initial barriers and proactive manner in which they were handled. UC still runs the risk of becoming dependent. “Let the University come and help us, how can we possibly work on our own?” is a common refrain.

5.3 Dealing with dominance: Earlier it is explained that community is not homogeneous, as hierarchy and class exist. Dominant powers within the community have the tendency to misinform and disillusion people in order to retain their domination. As self-appointed leaders and protectors of community interests, they tend to hedge communications. This is a tricky situation, as one cannot easily neutralize their impact on community decisions. They can spoil project momentum. Their influence needs to be proactively channeled to create a positive and enabling environment.

> During one of our first visits to Dhaulaguri we came across the self-appointed secretary of the water users’ association in the adjoining village. He was also a dominant member of the Panchayat Samitee and has been controlling the area with his authority and network. Seeing us as a high profile visit, he came out with attractive offers such as offering the public pond for experimentation, facilitating linkages and networking with the government officials and the like. When invited to join a community meeting, he agreed and then didn’t attend the meeting.
>
> Later we were informed of his role as an agent of re-appropriating opportunities out of government schemes and programs that would be hesitant to support any community initiative. He would, at best, patronize certain people and through him or her extend his metaphorical tentacles. We did not, however, completely avoid him and maintained exchanges of pleasantries and invited him for multiple discussions. He subsequently opted out on his own, as his interest did not seem to be served.

5.4 Inclusion sounds like a desirable condition, but it is not often welcome: Inclusion and participation are nice desirable words, but in practice they are fraught with complex issues. Exclusion is culturally determined, and a detaching oneself from one’s cultural definition is not easy. The pervasive social hierarchy around caste and religion, economic status, education, entrepreneurship, gender and age are important considerations to maintain the status quo of exclusivity.

As has been indicated earlier, community engagement is about building bridges, about promoting coalitions and synergy. How should we deal with hierarchical and structural inconsistencies? Do we need good Samaritans to descend and resolve the situation? There are processes and strategies which can help facilitate this and bring parity to the social relationship, albeit gradually.

People in the community look at the potential of the interventions and often wish to optimize individual gains. At the same time, much of the perceived individual gains are based on unrealistic understandings. If the social transaction is kept transparent, and explanations evolve and analyses are made collectively, this sends a message of fairness. If the landless women and tenant farmers join together to analyze the potentials of collective farming, and if the arrangement for equal sharing and contribution is worked out and put to practice, there is a chance that doubts about hierarchical consideration may fade. This may gradually lead to creating new relationships. It may not change drastically overnight, but with good positive examples, the trend may emerge.

The collective farming in Dhaulaguri this year has been interesting. The profit sharing in one of the groups has created extraordinary social buoyancy among the landless farmers, especially women. Although the profit is quite miniscule, there is reason to cheer. Both landowners and the landless are optimistic. The landholders appreciate the contributions from the landless, which points to the potential for inclusion through collective farming. The present indications look positive. The constant engagement for collective farming, characterized by objective norms and procedures, has caused this positive tilt in favor of inclusion.

5.5 Conflict for leadership and perceived opportunities: We are working in a constrained opportunity environment where everybody wishes to enjoy a bigger part of the pie. The existing leadership is the natural choice for the intervention. In fact, there is eagerness to reach the community using the existing leadership-people with visible dispositions. The leadership also sees opportunity in the interventions and carefully pursues his or her interests. They often rationalize their gradual claims by citing their earlier contributions, something along the lines of, “I have done so much for the community!” His or her growing intentions of claims, however, does not often go unnoticed, and other people also start hobnobbing and trying to get closer. This period is sensitive and needs to be dealt with carefully. Leadership has to be analyzed, not only in terms of their effectiveness to deliver, but their zeal and commitment to bring stakeholders together and promote and nurture the participation of others.

5.6 Proxy representation of women and other marginalized communities: Proxy representation and co-opting has become the status quo of the Indian socio-political order. Through affirmative provisions, the state has tried to ensure representation and inclusion of the marginalized communities in governance and institutions of profit. While state’s intentions are well placed, there is a growing tendency to usurp such privileges and play proxy games. For example, there are provisions for reservation in the grass roots governance to allow women to have influence on governance and increase gender parity. The patriarchy would like to continue its hold, though, and only use women as front and extension of its interests and authority. Several Panchayats have women representatives, but they are in fact represented by their husbands or other members of the patriarchy. Similar examples of co-opting marginalized people occur in poor communities when dominants somehow maneuver their authority to not consider the community’s opinions. In an intervention, this creates a special problem. When men are present in initial meetings as representatives of their spouses, eyebrows are raised from several sides and the

interaction begins with sarcastic reactions. Since this is serious structural problem that nonetheless enjoys social sanctioning, one cannot and should not, up-front, wildly question the legitimacy of the group. Instead, an environment needs to be created where women and other co-opted individuals are in a position to come forward and show interest in participating. This is possible through strategies to let the women and marginalized community members come forward and join. They should be able to improve upon potential long-term societal gain. Such participation could ensure fair representation without really hurting their interests and opportunities. This happens through applauding even the meekest responses while also allowing credit to the spouses and members of patriarchy.

In a capacity building session, the husband brings his wife, and he prefers to also hang around. This does not go unnoticed by the facilitator, who speaks highly of his support. The husband gingerly shifts the responsibility and blame to his wife for not taking interest, which the wife approves through veiled nods. The facilitator then uses this point to continue encouraging the husband to participate in place of his wife. This situation may not always occur like this, but this happens often enough that we need to know how to address it.

The above moments of opportunity would take time to be systematically exploited. There is a need to organize various forms of awareness building events and sensitivity training using simple methods and tools of role play and scenario analysis, in which women and members from marginalized communities are encouraged to participate and demonstrate their potentials. This does not create impact immediately, but rather has a gradual impact.

Dhaulaguri and UC offer opportunity

Dhaulaguri and UC, in Cooch Behar, officially recorded a sizeable and laudable number of SHGs. During initial meetings for the project, they presented a constrained world view, limited to holding meetings and some of them attending meetings outside the village. They also reported to have undergone a series of trainings. When asking the men or Panchayat members about their participation, they would invariably respond, “We have made such and such number of SHGs, but we are not getting proper facilities and other opportunities from the government.” This is peculiar, as everybody is enjoying having been given patronage and is waiting for the government largesse to come. The training organized at various levels included lectures and moral preaching.

We first assessed the situation using a reflective environment where the women could come forward and express themselves: about their initiation, factors that influenced their identity and potentials they have, etc. Such reflective sessions helped evolve training designs: both the content and pedagogy. Using participatory pedagogy as the preferred method, one series of

sessions has been organized. Participants showed very diverse potentials. They gradually extended their interest to include non-financial subjects, such as agriculture, fishery and management of the farmers' club. The role plays conducted as part of the pedagogy created much needed sensitivity in a non-threatening environment. Their presence and participation in interactions with the outside experts and individuals has been appreciated by the males, who take pride in their evolving identities. The facilitators have been gradually customizing pedagogies and tools according to changing needs and contexts. Both the villages have witnessed gradual openings and expanding roles of the women in agriculture. One may witness women playing key agronomic roles, as well as supporting the male members in water management and technology development. Occasional presence and facilitation by Dipika and Stephanie (IWMI, Nepal), Alison from CSSRO, woman research scientists from UBKV and regular facilitation and hand holding from Mitali seems to have worked positively in carving out a new identity that is accepted and appreciated by all, including the male members. We consider use of participatory pedagogy as the game changing input. Their participation in collective farming and insights on technology on the one hand and issues of equity on the other shows potential for further developments unfolding in the future. A solid foundation has been constructed to build upon.

5.7 Let us do some RRA-PRA: Dealing with the rush: There is a rush for participation and use of participatory methods in order to benefit from the participation. Community engagement has also emerged as a desirable state in implementing development projects. However, there is a time constraint felt by the facilitator(s), especially the senior project staff. One may come across a specific time allocation, in terms of percentages, for this component, which is often not well thought out and too conservative. Meaningful engagement takes time, especially in societies with a culture of deliberative narratives. For example, in India, everybody has an episode in his or her cognitive trajectory, and a specific trigger will start a process of revealing and sharing evidences, narratives, anecdotes and so forth. But to a professional, constrained with time, this may be too much. Hurried reactions may emerge, as facilitators find themselves countering an anecdote with, "This sounds important and is interesting, but we need to come to the point soon." He or she may conceal the time constraint, but at the core, it is both a lack of time and a lack of appreciation that are present. Somebody not familiar with this culturally nuanced situation may feel exhausted and run down. Engagement sessions, even if they are well-structured for time and content, when carried out in an environment of indifference and apathy may prove counterproductive. An informed decision needs to be taken in this context.

5.8 The tragedy of commons: "Everybody's duty is no body's duty" epitomizes the community level initiatives for common good. Since the interventions, oftentimes the goals of common good suffer from unintended indifference. "There are others to take care of the responsibilities, why should I involve myself deeply?" is the refrain one may often come across under such situations. This is the tragedy of commons, which is common in societies in this part of the world. Creating common interest and responsibility is a challenge. There are fictitious narratives to rationalize the indifference, such as, "I did so much in the past and what did I get? This time I am going to just wait." It is interesting to note that 'having done so much in the past' oftentimes is not true. This is a manifestation of internalized indifference, which harms initiatives for common good. The community engagement often faces this challenge in its bid to facilitate synergy and coalitions. If one tries looking deeper, one may realize this indifference has been caused by several factors, largely neglect and alienation created by authorities in the social structure. Instead of fighting the neglect, one prefers to recount others indifference to justify and rationalize one's own indifference and inaction.

Breaking this indifference and replacing this with active participation is the task of engagement strategy. How should one approach this tricky domain? In our view, organizing systematic community level events that encourage reflection and dialogue offers the opportunity for freedom of expression and sharing. Such events need not be designed around technical or institutional subjects, simply let them be informal. Specially designed games work better. Role plays helps ease one's pent up feelings.

From indifference to functional participation

A number (at least eight that I remember) of members from the community played it safe by remaining aloof from the initial interactions, politely indicating, "I am there, let others do it first and I will be around if needed." It was gathered that they were serious farmers with innovative practices in their respective fields. They disliked those who were portraying themselves as the champions by hobnobbing with the officials and experts. They were also peeved that they were purposely avoided. Keeping these serious farmers would have been a communal loss, but breaking their indifference was also a daunting task.

During social assessment we identified a team of eight participants who always discussed innovations and useful practices, shared ideas and supported each other. We brought them before the community and introduced and acknowledged them for their innovations and how useful it could be if they offered and shared their insights with the project for the common good. There was no problem with appreciating them. The public appreciation enhanced their sense of worth and attracted them toward sharing their innovation. They were so much welcomed and invited.

Today they are key members of the collectives that have subsequently evolved. One of them has been recognized and acknowledged as the Principal Agricultural Scientist for the village. Building on his strength and capabilities, he has been invited to anchor and facilitate a farmer led action plan for the next winter crop. He successfully accomplished that task and is now a pillar of strength.

Again the barriers are context specific, and so are the strategies. What will work and what will not would depend upon the sense of fairness and objectivity in facilitators and appreciation for people's reactions and voices, however difficult they may appear. There needs to be a certain tenacity to listen and appreciate diverse views which are caused by dynamic circumstances. As Freire posited, *"One cannot expect positive results from any political, social or educational action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such programs constitute cultural invasion, intentions notwithstanding." (Freire 1968).*

6. Case studies and anecdotal evidences

Contexts, strategies, processes and tools of community engagement have been discussed in the above section with some relevant examples. In the following section an attempt is made to present specific cases. These cases have been picked from the three project sites: **India** has two sites and **Nepal** has one site. These cases should offer specific learning experiences. ***(Presently cases from Cooch Behar, India have been identified mentioned. Others will be included in due course).***

6.1 Entry barriers

When an intervention is proposed, there is not always a spontaneous welcome. The project may face initial barriers because of suspicion and mistrust caused by a number of factors, including past negative experiences, lack of awareness about the intervention and so forth. Entry barriers may not be relevant for the sites where partners are working for a long time and the present intervention is either a continuation of earlier works, or an additional one with the same partners. However, if the present project is considered as a point of reference, the intervention might have faced a barrier. The local stakeholders might not be forthcoming on several counts or may have hesitant responses. All of these potential circumstances impact the project. Entry barriers need to be proactively dealt with and safeguards may be planned out as part of the proposal. In the following section, let us cite certain cases from different locations:

Uttar Chwakukheti (UC), in Cooch Behar, consists of a majority of tribal communities. They have a sizable per capita land ownership, with a single farmer owning some 40 acres of land. The site is also the extension and demonstration site of the Agriculture University, UBKV, Cooch Behar. They work in the tea gardens, quarry sand from the local river and practice rain fed agriculture. When the project was introduced, there was no special excitement, considering the fact that this is one of the University Programs. They sat for couple of introductory meetings facilitated by the project. The project explained that it was a research project and no physical interventions should be expected. The farmers were expected to participate in the research with some irrigation facilities provided by the project.

The finalization of the sites was a bit tricky, as there was no visible participation. Also, when crop planning was to be conducted, they did not show any interest, and the research team felt discouraged. It worked as an implicit barrier, and there was a feeling of indifference by them. The research team once felt like giving up and looked for alternative.

The situation was discussed among the research team and it was decided that the entry barrier was caused by a lack of clarity followed related to potential physical interventions on the site. The experience of the farmers at the demonstration site has been other way round, where the projects often began with some tangible interventions and a popular event.

A series of interactions followed wherein the nature of the intervention, responsibilities and milestones were discussed and worked out together. Two vegetable plots were identified and developed in which the farmers participated. Most important, some farmers visited and attended a SHG meeting at the headquarters of CDHI. This impressed them very much. The next important event was planning for a solar pump in the village, which was perceived as opening a new era of technological innovation. The farmers started enjoying their participation and celebrating their new relationship to the project.

Last summer when the research team, led by Erik and scientist from UBKV, visited the village, the

jubilation was writ large on their faces participation levels were very high. The community heralded the beginning of a new partnership.

The latest engagement session was a milestone to be remembered. There were discussions around technology, agriculture and collective efforts. Some of the farmers, again, showed indifference and complained of a lack of interest on behalf of UBKV. “They do not come on time when we need them urgently, they do not help us with training and hand holding!” some farmers said. The facilitation team asked, “How can we fix this? What do you think is the real issue? Should we abandon the project?” These questions, perhaps, challenged them, and after a pause, a response from the floor started emerging. One of the farmers observed, “Who should come to help us if we ourselves are not united and prepared? Do we expect the referee to hit the ball for us while we sit comfortably on the boundary?”

This further challenged the community, and a positive environment around collective action emerged. To continue with this, the facilitators invited everyone to think positively and work out milestones and timelines. To their great surprise, volunteers came forward. Time lines and action plans were prepared and accountability was fixed and assumed. The farmers exclaimed with excitement, “The meeting was very useful and productive, and we challenged ourselves and also volunteered responsibilities. May be we are on a trajectory for success now!”

The case reveals that the entry barrier, although implicit, was caused because of a lack of clarity, and also because of missing physical interventions, which had been used in previous projects. At the same time, the facilitators used hard strategies to challenge them and did not elect to go with soft cajoling. The variation is perhaps needed depending on the situation, which seemed to work in this case.

6.2 The effective leadership: Sustainability of an intervention would depend upon community leadership. Leadership would ensure that the program and intervention achieves its goals by mobilizing others, encouraging and promoting them for their efforts to contribute to the goal. For such leaders to be effective, they must have clarity about the intervention, acceptance of the community and capacity to nurture further leadership. Synergy and backward-forward linkages and networks also need to be created. This may sound very ambitious. However, going by potentials of the human being (Bandura 2006), these ambitions are achievable, though maybe in varied measure. Finding and developing such qualities would depend upon the social environment where the intervention is planned and implemented.

The project locations are normal social entities and, in general, will come together for a common goal. To do so, they evolve and organize their own social environment and infrastructure, which supports their life and its continuity. While doing so, some people take lead initiatives ahead of others. They are the leaders, persons who lead and sustain communities. Leadership depends upon circumstances and the environment.

In this section we present cases of how engagement for participation in the intervention has been able to contribute to and catalyze the environment for leadership to evolve, nurture and become involve. The direction and depth of its influence is contingent upon several factors -some of them are inherent in the intervention, while others are contributed by the environment:

Dhaulaguri witnesses the emergence and consolidation of multiple leadership roles

Dhaulaguri is one of the project sites of Cooch Behar in West Bengal. Divided into various hamlets, it primarily has migrants from Bangladesh, several of whom belong to the same lineage, village or have at least some mutual acquaintance. This may sound like an environment for homogeneity and a rich social network and capital, as migrants 'struggle and entrepreneurship' has often been the hallmark of a successful community.

The struggle to survive and excel has also offered the opportunity for people to lead the community for common causes. There have been several such individuals in the village in the past. When the project was initiated, some men and women demonstrated their leadership potentials by mobilizing fellow villagers, helping organize events and showing willingness to be part of the project. We identified two such persons: Mrinal Karjee, a dynamic man, and Jharna Das, an active woman galvanizing other women and men. But when we analyzed the leadership spectrum of the two, we realized that they were heavily depended upon by the villagers for guidance and for anything else requiring interfacing with the outside world. This is not uncommon in the Indian context where leadership is centralized in a few who are careful and hesitant to promote others. We were gradually realizing that there are others in the village that were waiting for an active leadership role.

Series of events such as institutional analysis of the farmers' club and SHGs led us to confirm and consolidate our understanding that there are several sparks waiting to flare. The analysis offered an opportunity to understand that one of the important weaknesses of these two institutions was goal and role clarity among members and functionaries, and there was no conscious effort to remedy that. Interestingly, the existing leadership had no intention to assign various responsibilities which could be carried out by others, it was perhaps due to misplaced judgments of the others' capacities. But as outsiders, we could not challenge their style directly. Instead, we helped them reflect on the potentials of the institutions they, Mrinal and Jharna, were leading. There were no concrete prescriptions to be suggested. We organized a series of reflective interactions both formally and informally.

Organizations of collective farming, the construction of shallow tube wells and protocol management all offered opportunities for reflection and role distribution. "One person cannot successfully lead all tasks," was the collective view and wisdom that evolved and formalized. Responsibilities and role distribution was favored, which led to multiplication of leadership in Dhaulaguri. The village now has Mrinal, Nirmal,Rajni and Jharna as leaders. This was possible because of empathetic engagement at various levels of the community duly facilitated by the project facilitators.

For Chakuwakheti, it was a case of indifference turning into participation

Utarchkwakheti (UC) is a traditional tribal village. Although the villagers own land, there is multiple livelihoods focus. They quarry sand from the local river and have fuel wood from the forest. The village has been the demonstration ground for the University, which did not offer opportunities for their continued and active involvement. When the village was identified and selected as experimental site, there was not much excitement, as only one or two people showed interest. Tapan was the established community leader, but there were others with adequate potential. Tapan could mobilize the community for some meetings but recently not as much, as enthusiasm had waned.

As the project activities continued, they underwent a series of interactive sessions of planning for collective farming and physical interventions, like shallow-wells and pumps and also a solar system. This really evoked interest in others who were part of the collectives. The first year of collective farming and experiences from them led to some reflection, but still the onus was on the University as they were the only one's familiar with them. When there was no substantial benefit, disappointment followed. But there were some reasons for excitement in crop diversity. Some farmers had new vegetables in their backyard, while others had pumps helping them irrigate. Tapan, however, was not able to infuse excitement. During this period, we (the facilitators) identified some more people showing leadership qualities and traits and invited them to a meeting. We worked with the University and CDHI to lead exposure trips.

The post summer agriculture brought together all members from different groups for discussion and reflection facilitated by the facilitators. Issues were discussed, responsibilities identified and situations analyzed for the future. This environment of reflection witnessed several persons offering inputs for the project and articulating contributions. Their views were appreciated and more responsibilities assigned. Today there are four or five leaders with concrete responsibilities, with the agreement of the community. While Tapan is the traditionally established leader with strong outside linkages, Subhas is the young leader with an analytical and questioning mind. Surendra is the realist, who can take over in times of trouble. While Ranjeet is the ideologue with rich wisdom, Ram Prasad is the Panchayat leader via his wife. His views on the functioning of the state are radical and remarkable! He told us, "I work with a private mind, as the government mind is not available and helpful at the time when one needs them." He would like to consult his fellow farmers for their experiences and would adopt that knowledge rather than wait for the government agencies to come, which hardly ever happens. To draw a parallel, he would add, "I send my son to a private school, as the government school does not develop competency he needs". These leaders have the potential to be game changers! They can help evolve priorities, agendas and strategies and infuse active involvement of the community. A community cannot expect a better leadership endowment. There is a need to consistently observe their functioning, learn from them and allow opportunity and space for them to be more reflective and proactive. A set of strategies and tools are required to nurture and help them build further.

6.3 Engagement for inclusion- pedagogy matters: Inclusion and its opposite, exclusion, perhaps, is one of the most hotly debated topics in contemporary development discourse. The power structure of the society, capacity and asymmetric opportunities within the social environment and culture, belief and value system are said to contribute or mediate in cases of inclusion. Our intention is not to engage in lengthy theoretical debate here. We propose, instead, to highlight how different people who historically have been segregated and differentiated around economic status, gender and education can be synergized, transcending social boundaries. This may be a feeble story, as of now, but it has loud and strong message. Let us try reading the story:

We now have adequate awareness about the two research sites: Dhaulaguri and Uttarchakowakheti in Cooch Behar. The two villages have several examples of exclusions. In the present case, let us focus on exclusion around gender. Overtly, one may not notice exclusion around gender: women enjoy a sense of behavioral equity, they may be seen working together, participating in grassroots governance, enjoying benefits of the state sponsored schemes and programs so on and so forth.

The social renaissance, in this part of the country, has been pretty positive. It has a liberating influence. The Indian constitution is quite vocal and emphasizes equity in all spheres of life. What is not glaring is subdued participation in technological innovation, access and control over institutions, and more importantly financial decision-making on strategic issues: controlling and managing the financial and natural resources domain. Capacity and culture are, primarily, attributed to their exclusion: technology, institutions and finance are matters requiring special expertise and capacity according to the prevailing social belief.

The project analyzed the role of women in the above subjects and realized that their exclusion from the above seemingly specialized domain, is not logical and goes against the tenets of the capability approach of human development (Bandura 2006). Given the opportunity and support, women can prove their potential. The project team also realized that while trying to build capacities, pedagogy plays crucial role. Freire (1968), a close contemporary of Bandura, insisted that a participatory pedagogy could help create opportunity for reflection, which is a necessary condition for human development. This is what we tried and adopted.

Gender and capacity development framework, as evolved and practiced under the collaborative initiatives of IWMI and CDHI, emphasized demystifying gender stereotypes using strategies and tools evolved in specific contexts. Participatory tools as developed by Stephanie (2015-2016) and Mitali (2014-2016) were jointly applied in the field. The application of the tools, such as role play and social ranking of gendered relationship, proved effective in clearly understanding the gender stereotypes. This basic condition, having been achieved, cleared the way for applications of the strategy and participatory pedagogy in different areas like institutions (SHGs, farmers club and farmers collective farming group) and technology sectors (fishery, vegetable production) of the market.

The balance sheet suggests that inclusion of women has started being accepted and favored as desirable condition for development more so in the specific context of the project. The pace may be different in the two villages, as the cultural contexts are different, but the direction is similar: acceptance of their capability and participation. The pedagogy proved seminal in demystifying stereotypes. So far there is acceptance and opening of the gate –the journey has to move toward integration.

Gendered views on wages: a milestone to be celebrated

In a decision with far reaching implications, the Dahoulaguri farmers' club deliberated around the differential rate of wages for men and women. The men would get Rs. 250/00 per day while women Rs. 180/00. This was debated and serious arguments were put forward even by the club members. They questioned their capability and skill. But ultimately a decision at wage rationalization was arrived at. The agreement was that for the project related activities, equal wages for equal work would be allowed to both men and women. This may be a small decision but is a quantum leap in the direction of gender equity and inclusion.

6.4 Participatory planning and implementation: Participatory planning and implementation is a special component of any planned intervention. Participation creates a sense of ownership and commitment. Dhaulaguri and Uttarchowakuakheti have credible examples. For diversity, this is in the context of planning of technological and biophysical components. This relates specifically to development of shallow-tube well and pumps at the two locations. This is also an example of collaborative functioning among the scientists from institutions of higher learning: UBKV Rupak, Kaushik, Debojit, USQ Michel Scobie, IWMI Romulus Okwany and Prasun, and grassroots practitioners, for example from CDHI, Subrata and Joy, and most importantly the farmers, male and female, from the two villages. Let us read the story. At the three locations at the experimental site, the task was to install irrigation systems. Locations were already in mind, but when the actual transect was made by the above team, minute technical assessments and analyses were undertaken by the team as there were changes in the location and configurations. The changes were suggested, discussed and agreed upon and integrated based on objective analysis. Next, protocol for operation and management evolved together and was agreed upon. The joy of transacting knowledge, together, could be seen and manifested in various ways. This was a celebration of collective accomplishment without fear and pride of dominating knowledge and disciplinary bias.

As has been indicated elsewhere in the report, Dhaulaguri has already developed an action plan for the forthcoming winter crop. Uttarchakawakheti is closely on its heels. These plans are based on the priority, wisdom and experiences of the farmers.

The news from the field suggests that the systems are functioning optimally with teething troubles being sorted out, operation and management are going on well, under the management of the farmers. There are self-evolving efforts to rectify management flaws. This season and the seasons beyond will suggest how sustainable participatory practices have been, but for now it points to a story worth telling.

6.5 Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME): Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) is considered to be an important strategy and tool for self-correction and institutionalization of the impact of any intervention. In the context of our project, monitoring has to be considered at two levels: project management team (PMT) and the community. PMT carries out monitoring regularly at designated intervals. The local team regularly monitors the program on the ground with the help of field staff and physically validates the monitoring output through field visits. The field staff, besides own observation, depend also on the community for their observations and biophysical behavior. The more there is congruence in the observation of both the field staff and experts to that of the community, the better the predictability of the observations is. Community, therefore, is an important actor in monitoring. Consulting community for validation is not PME, but is a reliable source.

PME begins with arriving at an optimum agreement between the implementing experts (the initiators or primary stakeholders) and the community against the indicators and process of monitoring: what has to be monitored and how. The preparation is important. The current level of monitoring is in place where the senior management and field staff are participating in consultation with the community. Preparation and foundation for PME has just begun showing positive indications:

PME in Dhaulaguri

Dhaulaguri started collective farming since the last Rabi. Several plots are used for the cultivation. Members of the group have worked on different indicators of progress and the impact of inputs. There is a plan to monitor plot use of inputs such as irrigation, fertilizer, pesticide etc. They maintain a register to record plot data and analyze the variations, if any.The crop cutting has just been completed. Detailed cost-benefit analysis viz-a-viz inputs analysis has been done by the farmers with the help of project staff. The analysis has been shared among all the partners in collective cultivation. The objective is to create adequate sensitivity and awareness about the cropping behavior and inputs application. The farmers may move and graduate to internalizing such practices, and so the lack of this information would keep them in dark and unaware about their own agricultural operations. The growing level of confidence can be seen from the fact that the farmers offered to undertake monitoring of their groundwater table using pizometer. They informed us that they have been able to handle a tachometer for measuring rotation of the pumps, so why cannot they monitor groundwater? This, perhaps, is the indirect influence of the monitoring, which exposed them to the outcome of their efforts.

Cost-benefit analysis of collective farming

The farmers undertook a cost-benefit analysis of the collective farming on their own using a transparent forum. While the two groups suffered losses, one group had marginal profit. The factors contributing to the profit and loss were identified and discussed. The farmers underlined **three** important factors for each of the three groups for their respective costs and benefits.

Farmers' perspectives on cost benefit of collective farming

Factors	Group one (profit)	Group two (loss)	Group Three (loss)
1.	Systematic work with spirit of cooperation	Insufficient use of irrigation water.	Water holding capacity of land is low.
2.	Maintain the timeliness of different process.	Lack of time for agriculture	Late seedling and plantation.
3.	Timely use of fertilizers and medicine.	Soil of land is not perfect for summer paddy.	Pest attack due to natural disaster.
4	Use of irrigation water.	-	-

The above matrix is important signifying farmer's own attribution. The factors are considered intrinsic to them and therefore can be dealt with by the groups in their subsequent efforts.

6.6 Communicating for integration and up-scaling: Whatever process goes in the project creates a learning opportunity. The learning can help others or may be useful for larger testing, normally called up-scaling. The foundation for up-scaling has to be laid now. There is also a need to continuously communicate the learning across other projects. As a first step, the project learning has to be shared and communicated with kindred initiatives. This is being achieved through inter-project visits in West Bengal. There is a systematic plan for expanding the communication:

Communicating for embedded learning and exchange

1. In the last coordination meeting in Cooch Behar, Apoorva Choudhary suggested to organize field to field and farmer to farmer exchange visits between the two projects: DSI4STF and SRSFI. The areas are located close to each other and have common anchorage and support,

2. Some of the farmers have made cross project visits: Dhaulaguri farmers to Uttar Chakuwakheti and the reverse. Besides creating familiarity there, the opportunity exists for developing solidarity and learning from each other,

3. Coming next winter, a larger meeting is planned, where stakeholders including farmers would gather at one of the locations and have prolonged sharing and discussion among themselves. The idea is to share their insights and experience and let the learning travel wide.

4. The two sites will pave the way for validation and authentication of ideas, insights, processes and practices. The same would be taken to other locations and the policy makers who can consider integrating the successful initiatives into policy.

7. Implementing engagement protocols and values

Community Engagement, to be effective, must meet appropriate conditions. The most important of them is preparing an empathetic engagement team. An engagement team does not consist of persons with specific qualifications and expertise. In a project with a multidisciplinary framework, everybody engages with the community and other stakeholders at some point of time. Engagement value has to be ingrained at all levels. A physical science expert and social dynamics expert need to show similar considerations, otherwise the aggregate outcome may get undermined and diluted. It is necessary to consider an engagement **value system. An intervention with such a value system should, inevitably, have the elements of:**

1. Empathy
2. Participation
3. Equity
4. Respect for others' knowledge endowment
5. Encouragement and support
6. Endeavor toward synergy and coalition

The engagement process, based on the above value system, would lead to positive and constructive outcomes, as discussed above. Such a value system will need to be cultivated and nurtured. In concrete terms, cultivation and nurturance should form an integral part of the planned initiative. As a prerequisite, orientation and training must be provided for the team and their commitment ensured. A chapter on these needs to be made an integral part of the frame work and plan.

CDHI and its conviction in community power

Most of the core members of CDHI have been working in the region for the last two decades. Beginning with the farmer led strategies under the North Bengal Terai Development Project (NBTDP) there has been an emphasis on community ownership. The community led Buxa Shiksha Jyoti Abhiyan (a community led education campaign) helped establish and strengthen community based schooling systems. The Buxa Vikash Abhiyan (Buxa Development Campaign) led to development of local leadership to take up and carry forward local institutions. It has established credible examples. There is continuity and consistency in its approach and community, as the teacher, has become an article of faith for CDHI.

The entire team's perspective revolves around empathy and respect for community collaboration based on its wisdom and capacity. We joined the DSI4MTF project based on our confidence that the project, inevitably, would have the benefit of the community's wisdom, capacity and resources. We are aware of the barriers and we are equally assured of the potential of community engagement strategies that we evolve and adopt.

In conforming with the democratic ethos of participation and inclusion, in development projects, there is an emerging trend to use participatory tools and strategies. Rural Rapid Appraisal (RRA), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Focused Group Discussion (FGD) etc. in combination with other quantitative tools are some of the important tools and strategies. While their application is welcome, they need to follow well thought outs protocols and frameworks. Consistency in time and space is what can make the impact meaningful and different. Perfunctory and sporadic use may be counterproductive, which may be reflection on the efficacy of such participatory tools. Practicing such tools needs consistency, respect and commitment to certain values. With this preparation, the impact can be far-reaching.

8. Caution for conclusion and continuity

In the above sections while reading the engagement process and corresponding impact, one may be misled at the success of the project. There is a need to read the process and impact with caution. The success should be seen in the context of the community engagement processes. Engagement is taking place in a dynamic socio-cultural and political environment which is creating impacts at different time and space. The impacts would need time to consolidate and get internalized. This would require multiple exercises and processes at different times and spaces in different contexts. Generalization can be made only after this level of iteration. The next two years of the project are important, and the processes need to be continued with caution and impacts observed for their depth and direction. Necessary modifications may be required. The successes as seen above are just indicative and offer important references to work with. One singular conclusion that can safely be made is: *the project has significant potential for the small, marginal and tenant farmers to grow and prosper following a collective institutional framework. The technologies would deliver best only under such collectivization.*

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Annexure -1

A framework for training and capacity building for facilitation

Earlier in the document we discussed the perspectives, processes and practices for community engagement. We hope this has provided more clarity on these topics. However, by simply reading this document and referring to similar ones, community engagement cannot be facilitated meaningfully. Community engagement, as has been suggested, has strong ideological interfaces and calls for commitment and respect to such an empathetic process. We feel that realizing such a goal (building empathetic relationship) would require a strong and committed team of individuals who appreciate the dynamics of human development, viz-a-viz participation, dignity, freedom and empathy while also realizing that social structure and dynamics an be barriers to the above desired state. Preparing such a team would require organizing capacity building strategies and tools in an enabling and reflective environment which may create sensitivity more than had skills. We propose capacity building framework which we touch upon and cover:

Contents

1. The context of human empathy, viz-a-viz specific development goals
2. Freedom, participation and agency, related to the given initiatives
3. Collaborative and reflective learning approaches
4. Participatory pedagogies and tools
5. Project cycle management

The process and pedagogy

The pedagogy would have two components: (1) Conceptual and ideological, (2) Practical and (3) prolonged hand holding and mentoring.

Duration

I have calculated a training for a week: six days for phases (1) and (2). For a prolonged hand holding and mentoring at least one year, but can be coterminous with a project. For example, for our project, the rest of the two-year duration can be devoted to this.

Participants

We can have participants from the management and implementation levels. We can develop a core team which can be selected partner-wise. A conference for all the partners can be organized to share project specific learning.

Resources

Modest, can be mutually discussed and decided.

Training in the context of *(DSI4MTF)-Six days duration*

Day	**Subjects**	**Remarks**
1	Concept and ideology behind the community engagement-discussion and examples	Intense and reflective
2	Qualitative Methods/ Participatory Methods and tools	Reflective and experiential
3	Field work to apply the tools	Participatory and stay with the community
4	Field work	Do
5	Collation and integration	Working together not individual assignment
6	Take home plan for prolonged hand holding and mentoring	Whole day –without last day hurry

Annexure 2

An Illustrative crop planning by the farmers of Dhaulaguri-winter crop

Planning as on: 13th Sep 2016											
Site:	2										
Plot no.											
Name of crop:	Cabbage						Contribution				
Area:	18 Katha										
							Farmers	project	other	**Labor use**	
Steps involve in cultivation	Date	particulars	particulars	Unit	Price / unit	Amount				Own male	Own Female
Seed outside purchased:	17th sep 2016	10000 nos. seedlings		70g	Rs.18/g	1260	*				
Land rent:				18katha		500	*				
Seed bed preparation											
Land preparation:	19th -21st Sep 2016	3ft by 12 ft / 6 no.	Vermicompost	per bed 7 kG	Rs. 8 / kg	56	*				
			Dustbun bish	100 gm	Rs. 35 / 100g	35	*				
			Phospate	3kg	RS. 8 / kg	24	*				
Seed sowing	22nd Sep 2016									4	
Bed shade			Bamboo	10 piece	RS. 75/ piece	750				4	
			polythene	3 kg	RS. 170/ kg	510				1	
Main land preparation	28th Sep 2016	Lumsum contract	Power tiller		Rs. 1400	1400					

Weeding 1	4th Oct 2016	Jharai									12
		Pas kata								1	
Farm yard manure											
Fertilizer application	5th Oct 2016		Phospate	100 kg	Rs. 8 / kg	800					
			Potash	100 kg	Rs. 15 / kg	1500					
			Urea	30 Kg	Rs. 8 / kg	240					
			Dustbun	1 ltr	Rs. 350	350					
Organic fertilizer	6th Oct 2016		Vermicompost	250 kg	Rs. 8 / kg	2000					
Sowing / transplanting	6th - 8th Oct 2016									12	
Irrigation 1	15th Oct 2016		Hours	1.5 hrs	Rs. 150 / hrs	225				2	
Weeding 2	2oth Oct 2016									2	
			Wheel machine		RS. 50 / day	50					
Plant protection	21st Oct 2016	Jonaki pokar jonno	Dustban spray	20 ml							
Irrigation 2	30th oct 2016		Hours	2 hrs	RS. 150/ hrs	300				2	
Weeding 3	4th Nov 2016									2	
			Wheel machine		RS. 50 / day	50					
Chapan 1	4th Nov 2016		Urea	8 kg / katha	Rs. 8 / kg	64					
Irrigation 3	20th Nov		Hours	3 hrs	RS. 150/ hrs	450				3	
Chapan 2	20th Nov 2016		Potash	30 kg / 18 katha	Rs. 8 / kg	240					
Plant protection	20th Nov 2016		Dustban spray	60 ml							

			Indofil	100 g / 18 katha	Rs. 40 / g	40					
Irrigation 4	5th Dec 2016		Hours	4 hrs	RS. 150/ hrs	600				3	
Harvesting	20th Dec 2016 - 30th Jan 2017		40 days							30	
Product trasportation			Motor van	20 trip	Rs. 150 / trip	3000					
Physical fencing			Net	900mtr		13500		*		30	
			Bamboo	65 pice	Rs. 100/ piece	6500	35 pieces bamboo				
			Lemon haze	400 piece	RS. 10/piece	4000		*			
Total own male mandays			Own male	96	RS. 200/ mandays	19200					
Total own female mandays			Own female	13	RS. 200/ mandays	2600					
Total expense						60244					
Expected Harvest				6000 kg	Rs. 7/ Kg	42000					
Note: A decision has been taken by Alor Dishari farmer club, Dhaloguri as on 13th Sep 2016 that similar wage will be paid for male and female labour i.e. Rs. 200 with in project site											
Bio cultivation of cabbage in 3 katha experimental basis											

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