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A CASE STUDY

SAJHEDARI BIKAAS

Pact's project in Nepal to strengthen citizen-government interaction and help communities direct their own development.

November 2016

Integrated Development

/ˈin(t)əgrādəd/ /dəˈveləpmənt/

adjective *noun*

1. An approach to global development that intentionally links disciplines and sectors through partnerships that design and deliver inclusive programming to amplify impact and achieve sustainability.

PROJECT AT-A-GLANCE

Donors	USAID
Key partners	Nepal Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Equal Access Center for Legal Research and Resource Development 12 local NGOs
Location	Six districts in far-west and mid-west development regions (core areas). Areas covered by a project cost extension for post-earthquake recovery areas are not being considered in this case study.
Time frame	December 2012 – May 2018
Value	$25 million originally for core areas
Project goals	Strengthening the relationship between citizens and local governments and improving transparency, accountability and responsiveness among Nepalese government officials. Conflict mitigation and technical assistance that focuses on developing the capacity of local organizations and government bodies to function more independently and effectively. Following the April and May 2015 earthquakes, the program adjusted to help affected villages make disaster recovery plans, including launching mobile service camps and rebuilding destroyed small-scale infrastructure such as water taps, latrines, roads, irrigation, river training, schools and community building.
Achievements	• 12,883 disputes registered and 81% resolved; 70% of first-party disputants are from marginalized groups • More than 10,000 youth participated in local-level planning processes • 454 women's groups received support • User committees are 50% women, more than the target of 33% • 10% increase of women in coordinator positions within Ward Citizen Forums • Citizen views of service delivery by Village Development Committees have improved by 15%efforts.

Background

This case study, one in a series, focuses on Pact's Sajhedari Bikaas project in Nepal, one of many integrated projects that Pact has implemented around the world. Integrated approaches have been at the core of Pact's programming for 20 years.

Achieving transformational change in poor and marginalized people's lives requires integrated approaches to development. Such approaches intentionally link disciplines and sectors through partnerships that design and deliver inclusive programming to amplify impact and achieve sustainability.

The case study series unpacks operational factors that allowed for the approach to succeed, including challenges that arose due to the integrated nature of the project and how these were overcome. While the case studies do not provide recommendations for specific stakeholders, Pact intends development practitioners to use the case studies as a basis for identifying ways that the community can use integrated approaches more often and more effectively. The discussion of the projects reflects major areas of the project cycle: funding, design, implementation and measurement. Funding is often one and the same as design, given donors' significant role in setting overall design direction for projects. In addition, given the broad range of issues that fall under implementation, consideration is given separately to coordination mechanisms and to human resources implementing the project.

Making the Integrated Approach Work

Design

Cross-sectoral integration is inherent in Sajhedari Bikaas's focus on communities making their own development decisions, without a pre-determined focus on any given technical sector.[1] Project components reflect cross-cutting program areas rather than strict technical sectors. In addition to direct efforts to strengthen local governance mechanisms and processes, the project involves the media, women's economic empowerment (WORTH) groups, youth groups and conflict mediation committees to create long-term demand for good governance.[2] It also works to create an enabling environment for meaningful participation of these groups in local governance.

> "The Village Development Committee is the center point. Our five components are around these Village Development Committees. "
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> **MAHESH NEPAL**, SENIOR FIELD DIRECTOR

Given inputs from a range of partners across several different components, working in clearly delineated geographic areas is important for providing focus. The core mission of the project is to support and complement the work of Village Development Committees (VDC). District-level partner organizations implement that work at the local level. In addition to the VDC and lower-level Ward Citizen Forums (WCF), the governance partner organizations work closely with local media partners and with partners facilitating WORTH groups whose members contribute to WCFs and VDCs.

Coordination Mechanisms

Operationally, integration in the project context means integrating across different project components. Layers of coordination and communication mechanisms ensure flow of information so that the components can coordinate. These include weekly meetings in the central project office involving staff on specific components and activities, the Chief of Party (COP), and other senior management. In the meetings, attendees discuss upcoming targets, share activity updates and news from the field, and discuss any implementation concerns. Coordination meetings also include monthly district-level partner coordination meetings, called by district coordinators at the governance partner organization; informal village-level partner coordination meetings; and

quarterly project-level learning and planning meetings. In addition, Pact's media partner, Equal Access, holds media coordination workshops for other partners. Moreover, project beneficiaries and staff contribute to quarterly village review meetings (*Sahjedari Chautari*) that they consider part of their project coordination structure as well as an exercise in strengthening local systems.

"These components are all for the governance strengthening, so what we are doing with the village development committee and even in the district, we have created a platform to sit together with all our partners."

MAHESH NEPAL,
SENIOR FIELD DIRECTOR

People at every layer have specific responsibilities to coordinate with staff on other components, in planning and implementation and in involving their target beneficiaries in other parts of the project.[3] This starts at the top levels of the project, with the COP, Deputy COP (DCOP) and senior officers directly involved in coordination meetings and in ensuring that components are working together appropriately. In addition, each component or initiative is assigned a "point of contact," again mirrored at different administrative levels, specifically responsible for fostering coordination. These individuals disseminate information, respond to queries, and make linkages. Furthermore, Pact staff actively check for and support effective coordination among partner organizations.[4]

Coordination mechanisms have evolved over time, in particular from the first and second halves of the project.[5] Earlier on, each component operated with an element of "tunnel vision" necessary to get its own personnel and activities up and running. For example, Equal Access and its local media partners have a mandate to involve beneficiaries of other components in their radio listening groups, provide media coverage of activities implemented by other components, and otherwise support other project components. Despite this, as of mid-2014, they were struggling to link effectively with the other project components, operating largely independently. Two years later, the media component takes its lead entirely from the other components. According to a statement from Equal Access, other partners' increased understanding of the benefits of utilizing the media resources available helped to improve coordination.[6] The

> "[At first], the people managing those components had to have a certain amount of tunnel vision. Before you actually set up WORTH groups, it's hard to start thinking about how you're going to integrate governance into the WORTH group program. … Then two years in, the project was really at a point where it could [ask], 'ok now we've set up these different pillars, how do we start making these different pieces of the project talk to each other.'"

MASON INGRAM, SENIOR TECHNICAL OFFICER FOR GOVERNANCE

development of specific guidelines, mechanisms for coordination and designation of media points of contact at partner organizations also aided in this process. Another example is the use of the *Sajhedari Chautari*. Following a review between project phases, VDC secretaries, who are civil servants, officially lead the *Sajhedari Chautari* as VDC periodic review meetings. Such meetings were required by government regulations, though VDC secretariats rarely implemented them in practice.

Human Resources

Sajhedari Bikaas relies on specialized staff, even at a very local level. The Pact team is organized in teams based on technical specialty, complemented by the specialist teams at Equal Access and CeLLrd. In most cases, there are several local partners operating in any given village with teams responsible for implementing activities under one component (in particular, governance, media and WORTH). The importance of specialized skills was demonstrated early in 2016 when Sajhedari Bikaas cut the national partner organization responsible for the youth work component of the project because of performance issues, integrating the youth component into the work of its governance partner organizations. To make this work, governance partners are bringing on specialized youth officers as well as youth mobilizers. In another example, the project's March 2016 quarterly report noted that Equal Access was hiring additional field reporters in order to better cover local forums.

The project also incorporates generalist personnel who bridge these different areas of specialization. Within the central project staff, the project's gender equality and social inclusion manager has helped foster integration. As part of her role in helping the project to be as inclusive as possible, she advises and carries knowledge to and from all of the components and provides technical backstopping to ensure that beneficiaries from WORTH, youth, community mediation and media are being integrated into the governance component. Similarly, the project's emphasis on continuous learning and adaptation has meant the monitoring and evaluation team has a special role in encouraging integration of the components in practice. Furthermore, the COP, DCOP and other senior staff participate actively in and encourage strong integration across the components.

"We encourage our social mobilizers to be positive… they should have really good relationships [with the government social mobilizers] so that activities are done smoothly."

VISHNU TANDON, GOVERNANCE MANAGER

At a local level, the social mobilizers who report to the local governance NGO partners have explicit responsibilities to coordinate with the local VDC, with government social mobilizers, with empowerment workers who organize the WORTH groups and with representatives of the other components. They both receive and share information on issues of concern to higher levels of project administration so that coordination is consistent. Different than the district-level and project headquarters meetings, they carry out this coordination role informally. They rely on social capital and their local knowledge as residents of the villages where they work. To be effective, they form good relationships and hold informal but regular meetings with the necessary stakeholders, including local government and other Sajhedari Bikaas partners. Perhaps because of the presence of specialized staff at a local level, the project does not report the overburdening of community workers that is often a concern in community-driven and integrated development projects.

Measurement

Measures of success on the project incentivize integration. USAID's process-focused midterm evaluation sought first and foremost to investigate the extent of integration on the project.[7] While the results framework and topics covered in routine reports are mostly broken down by component and do not specifically measure for integration, they do include measures for collaboration and productive working relationships, as well as inclusion, sustainability, institutionalization and capacity development. All of these are important aspects of effectively implementing an integrated approach.

Key Operational Findings

Cross-sectoral integration is inherent in Sajhedari Bikaas's focus on communities making their own development decisions.

Given inputs from a range of partners across several different components, work in clearly delineated geographic areas is important for providing focus.

Several coordination and communication mechanisms ensure flow of information so that the components can coordinate.

People at every layer have specific responsibilities for coordination and integration.

Coordination mechanisms evolved over time.

Sajhedari Bikaas relies on specialized staff, even at a very local level, while also incorporating generalist personnel who bridge these different areas of specialization.

The project does not report the overburdening of community workers that is often a concern in community-driven and integrated development projects.

Measures of success on the project incentivize integration.

Results

USAID's midterm evaluation of the project found that integration was strong and attention to sustainability exemplary.[8]

WORTH, a key Sajhedari Bikaas program component, has proven remarkably sustainable previously in Nepal, with groups staying active for decades and evidence of a stronger voice for women in community decision-making.

The focus on government systems and efforts to make use of existing decision-making platforms is likely to lead to more sustainable impacts than direct service delivery.

Recent changes in which governance partners implement the youth component with specialists on staff could represent cost effectiveness.

Citations

1. Integration of services for communities also happens through WORTH, an award-winning platform for delivering services to group members in addition to the economic activities. Additionally, the project supports mobile service camps that help ensure access for marginalized people to government services.

2. Following the massive earthquakes in 2015 that devastated parts of Nepal, USAID granted Pact an addition to its Sajhedari Bikaas funding for targeted work in recovery zones. The project in post-earthquake recovery areas built on but ultimately has a very different design to that in the "core" areas. Moreover, other than at the highest project management levels, implementation is separate. The recovery areas model would be a valuable case study in its own right about integrated approaches in post-disaster areas and how a project in that situation can balance meeting immediate needs with

sustainable systems strengthening activities. This case study focuses on the approach in the "core" areas of project.

3. According to the midterm evaluation for the project, personal relationships among project staff has helped foster integration furthered by the relative isolation of the project office in the relatively remote city of Nepalgunj rather than the capital Kathmandu.

4. In addition, USAID has increasingly asked Sajhedari Bikaas staff to co-ordinate with its other, sector-specific programs in Nepal. This coordination has mostly entailed information sharing and ensuring lack of activity duplication at local and national levels. In addition, there have been several cases in which beneficiaries of another USAID project applied for and got a Sajhedari Bikaas micro-grant on the basis of shared project goals and information.

5. It should be noted that it was US-AID's intention for the project to be flexible according to its Sajhedari Bikaas project webpage (2014).

6. Equal Access for Pact - Sajhedari Bikaas. (2016, September). Integrated approach case story (updated). Internal document.

7. USAID. (2016, March). Mid-term evaluation for Sajhedari Bikaas project.

8. Ibid.