

Scaling-up the good bits

Enhancing development impact of process tools developed in eastern India



Most people learn by doing rather than by reading about what others have done in other places. Language, culture, fluctuating inter-country relationships and many other elements that enrich society are also barriers to taking-up and promoting other people's good ideas in new situations. So how do researchers promote their findings so that others can benefit on a national and even an international scale? Researchers faced these issues when they decided to promote a set of tried and tested process tools they had developed to improve aquaculture services to poor, rural communities in eastern India. Well established local and international networks and the Internet proved to be invaluable assets.

In eastern India

Over the past 10 years NRSP has supported aquaculture research in rural eastern India to help severely disadvantaged social groups who rely on limited natural resources in remote areas.

Researchers began in West Bengal where they demonstrated that small-scale fish farming using seasonally stored water was both technically and socio-economically feasible. Using this knowledge farmers started developing their own fish farms and, with further help, they formed Self-Help Groups (SHGs) for mutual support. Some groups went further and formed federations in order to

broaden their support network and to draw in the external services they needed such as finance and technical assistance. Researchers also worked on issues of policy and developed an inclusive method that identified key policy changes that would favour aquaculture services for poor farmers. The policy recommendations were then successfully promoted at a national level and in three states in eastern India (Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal).

A by-product of this research was a set of three tried and tested process tools, all of which were relevant to helping poor people to build their livelihoods:

- **Information Access Survey (IAS)** – helps to identify and recommend methods of communication appropriate to people who manage aquatic resources, with a focus on poor rural communities.
- **Consensus-Building Process (CBP)** – helps to prioritise policy-change proposals, build shared understandings, sensitise senior policy-makers to the policy change proposals coming from remote communities, and facilitates the bringing together of state and national policy-makers, implementers and recipients of services to review policy.
- **Building Social Capital (BSC)** – provides promotional steps to support the development and operation of farmer associations, such as SHGs, and the establishment of a support network of community-based professionals, with poverty alleviation as a shared common purpose.



To overcome the many barriers to uptake STREAM used its well established network of Communication Hubs

This work coincided with growing demand from agencies concerned with aquatic resources across the Asia-Pacific for methods, decision-making tools and process recommendations to improve the capacity of service staff to support poor people's livelihood development. So it was decided to take the three process tools and promote their uptake regionally in ways that they could again be used at a local level to improve the livelihoods of the rural poor.

STREAM – an ideal vehicle

The STREAM Initiative provided the ideal vehicle for this. This is the Support to Regional Aquaculture Resources Management of the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA) – a Bangkok-based regional learning and communications initiative that aims to support the livelihoods of poor people who manage aquatic resources.

STREAM had for some time been active in aquaculture research in eastern India. It was also well aware of the fundamental problems of sharing research products and scaling-up their use. To overcome the many barriers to uptake STREAM used its well established network of Communication Hubs. This is a cross-cultural linguistic network of development professionals working in target institutions in NACA member countries. Such networks are usually beyond the scope of short term projects as they take considerable time to negotiate and establish.

Key persons in aquatic resources agencies from eight member countries – Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Philippines, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Vietnam – were invited to a workshop to identify suitable ways of sharing and promoting the process tools in each national context. From these discussions the need to present the information in two forms emerged – Policy Briefs (PBs) that provide succinct directions for busy policy-shapers and makers; and Better-Practice Guidelines (BPGs) that propose procedures for improving ways of working for extension agents of both government and non-government organisations involved with rural service provision. All would be produced in

local languages. The generic nature of PBs and BPGs meant that they could be applied to many development fields such as forestry and livestock and not just aquaculture. So basic questions were addressed such as: Who are they for? What is their purpose? How will they be used? Once the generic structure was agreed it was then applied to aquaculture and to each of the three process tools in turn.



Early drafts were prepared at the workshop and then shaped over successive months using NACA's network and its capacity for online discussion using the Internet. Communication Hub Managers in the different countries canvassed the views of various stakeholders using their local networks – most of whom did not have access to the Internet. This proved to be a very enthusiastic process. As one NACA communications specialist said *'If people have a common interest they will engage in discussion and will assist each other; the larger the number of registered users, the greater the chance of an informed response'*.

PBs and BPGs were first agreed and finalised in English and then their meaning (not the just the words) was translated into 11 languages – Bahasa Indonesia, Bengali, Hindi, Ilonggo, Khmer, Myanmar, Nepali, Oriya, Sinhala, Urdu and Vietnamese – using members of the Communications Hubs. As the work progressed, they were reviewed by local stakeholders together with options for their promotion, with a final inter-country review at a workshop co-hosted by the Government of Vietnam Ministry of Fisheries.

Putting publications to good use

PBs and BPGs on the process tools have now been produced in 12 languages, tailored to the respective needs of policy-makers and practitioners, and are being promoted in various Asia-Pacific countries. Already, in some instances, they are in use. Although it is still too early to identify impacts resulting from their application, there is a growing demand for the publications from projects, and government and non-government agencies.

Encouraging signs include:

- BPGs on aquaculture have proved popular in India where the ideas originated. Their introduction in India coincided with the evolution of local institutions called One-stop Aqua Shops (OASs). These are single-point-under-one-roof service providers for small-scale aquaculture financed mainly by SHGs and the sale of fingerlings to farmers. Currently nine OASs are using BPGs prepared in Oriya, Hindi and Bangla in the states of Orissa, Jharkhand and West Bengal. STREAM, in association with local organisations, has launched an OAS Information Service to supply them with the communication materials they require.
- In the Philippines, the Asian Development Bank's Fisheries Resources Management Programme used the BPG on Information Access Survey to help shape its extension efforts.
- In Cambodia, the Asian Development Bank and FAO used the Information Access Survey to learn about and inform knowledge sharing around the Tonle Sap floodplain.
- In Nepal, the government Department of Fisheries Development, Extension Officers and NGOs are using the BSC-BPG to encourage the establishment of Self-Help Groups.
- STREAM Indonesia presented the new genres to various farmer and government organisations disseminating fresh water culture technology to communities.
- After learning about building social capital from the BSC-BPG, the first Self-Help Group was established in Ninh Binh Province, Vietnam.

A good example

This is a good example of how useful research products in one country can be promoted to benefit poor farmers in other countries by finding ways to cross the barriers of culture and language. A crucial ingredient was the well established and robust STREAM network of professionals, each with their own local networks of extension workers and farmer groups, all willing and able to contribute to the regional debate. But this could not have happened so quickly and so effectively without the Internet. It brought people together from many countries across a large region and helped to empower them to take ownership of new ideas developed elsewhere.

Working in this way with stakeholders across the region has brought familiarity and rapid acceptance of the communication genres, PBs and BPGs. Importantly, there also is acceptance of the value of the three process tools for helping service providers to better meet poor people's needs.

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