



Adapting Local Agricultural Services to Federalized Nepal: 6

Delivering Agricultural Services in *palikas*

This is the sixth Briefing Note in a series drawing on the experiences of the Nepal Agriculture Services Development Programme or Prayas (January 2016 - November 2020), a bilateral initiative of the Governments of Nepal and Switzerland (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, SDC) with technical support from Helvetas Nepal. The project covered 61 selected *palikas* in provinces 1, 3 - Bagmati and 6 – Karnali (the latter in collaboration with the ASDP, Agriculture Sector Development Project).

Previous Briefing Notes have outlined the challenges of establishing a policy and legal framework for agriculture within *palikas*, and then developing institutional mechanisms, ensuring resources for their implementation, and planning activities. This Briefing Note outlines how Prayas supported *palikas* in delivering agriculture extension services to farmers. As previously explained, federalization had removed the former structure of district-based government agriculture and livestock extension services, with the intention of *palikas* taking over their role. Yet in the early days of federalization, *palikas* not only lacked the mechanisms to do this, but also qualified staff. At the same time, provinces were establishing their own structures for agricultural support: Agriculture Knowledge Centres (AKCs) and Veterinary Hospital and Livestock Service Expert Centres (VHLSECs). These were often located in the buildings of the former district extension services. Although it was foreseen that the AKCs and VHLSECs would operate in a spirit of cooperation with the *palikas*, in practice the perception of many was that

they acted in competition. There was thus a special urgency for *palikas* to prove their local service delivery capacities, promoting an effective system in which multiple actors operate together within their territory – whilst establishing linkages with other *palikas* and their province as appropriate.

What did the project do?

An important part of the Prayas approach was to raise awareness amongst *palika* staff and elects that it is best not to aim to be the sole provider of services (usually in the form of subsidized inputs) – rather, farmers are better served, and the efficiency of service delivery enhanced, if a variety of service providers are involved. The role of the *palika* then becomes mainly facilitation and coordination, albeit with some direct inputs. Prayas supported the *palikas* in developing the systems that they needed for the procurement of agriculture inputs, the standardization of norms for subsidies, the offer of training courses, and similar matters. It also contributed to mapping and identifying potential local service providers, developing regulatory functions, and building networks of advisory service providers. Another area of intervention was support for a staff capacity assessment, followed by the facilitation of appropriate technical and social capacity support. The project also assisted the *palikas* in identifying extension methods and integrating these into the *palika* plans and programs. For example, as part of the farmer-to-farmer extension method, lead farmers were identified and given training through farmer field schools and similar opportunities. Prayas also assisted the *palikas* in identifying and registering Local Agriculture Resource Persons, LARPs, as a means of reaching a larger number of farmers and farmer groups. This involved the development of farmer-led Agriculture Learning Centres, ALCs as local innovation platforms. Another activity was to encourage farmers to become organized into farmer groups so that they could demand appropriate services, and to link them with relevant private sector actors.

In part catalyzed by the Covid-19 crisis and restricted movement in 2020, Prayas has also supported *palikas* to introduce call centers offering agricultural advice to farmers. These are becoming increasingly popular as a direct source of technical information.

Prayas is also engaging with provincial governments, advocating for them to promote – through AKCs - specialized advisory services. Informed by research, these services should complement the local offer within *palikas*.

“Prayas staff worked very closely with us, supporting us to get acquainted with modern and improved technologies such as tunnels, net houses, and improved sheds. As a result, we have been able to establish a goat farm model. Prayas has also helped us identify deserving farmers to receive services. We publish a notice requesting demand from the lead farmers and agro-vets prior to agriculture planning....”

Pashupati Chaudhary, PADC Coordinator, Triyuga *nagarpalika*

Key achievements

- Overall, *palikas* are gradually shifting their mindset from a focus on the distribution of subsidies – which have rarely benefited poorer farmers – to a diversity of service provision that is more inclusive. In addition, many *palikas* are making specific provision for women and disadvantaged groups.
- To promote diversity in service provision, *palikas* are signing service contracts with NGOs, private sector actors, agro-vets, nursery entrepreneurs, LRPs, and farmer-led ALCs. The number of such formal partnerships ranges from five to fifteen per *palika*. *Palikas* have also developed rosters of service providers and have started supporting public - private partnerships. In total, they have contracted 787 private actors for providing agriculture inputs and/or marketing agricultural products.
- *Palikas* are expanding their services to remote areas through the establishment of various platforms, networks of farmer groups, agriculture labor organizations, para-vet associations and similar. They have also prepared and distributed agriculture information booklets. A sample survey conducted in the project area showed that on an average 65% of farming households are now receiving agricultural services from *palikas*.

- 56 *palikas* have started designing specific programs to engage returnee migrants and youths in agro-based enterprises; this is both increasing agricultural productivity and generating gainful local employment.
- Agriculture Learning Centers, ALCs, have emerged as an effective means of agricultural extension at local level. At the time of writing, 12 *palikas* had established a total of 27 ALCs. These on-farm demonstration sites are testing, verifying and disseminating new and proven agriculture technologies and practices amongst farmers and agriculture technicians.
- A farmers' satisfaction survey (Likert scale questions) commissioned in province 1 found that out of 300 farming respondents, 56% are satisfied with the agricultural services facilitated by *palikas*. Around 23% are more positive than negative, meaning that overall, only 21% are dissatisfied.

Challenges

When Prayas began its interventions, the “subsidy mindset” was quite strongly embedded in *palika* elects and staff alike; transforming the role of *palikas* to that of facilitating and coordinating services was not immediately attractive to them. In addition, the capacity of private actors such as LARPs, agro-vets and others needed to be enhanced for them to provide the services expected of them. Nevertheless, the positive impact of the broad-based advisory service networks that have been created has convinced many who were at first skeptical.

Lessons learned

- It is possible to achieve a change in local mindsets - away from a traditional distribution culture to a more broad-based, inclusive approach to service delivery - in a relatively short time. It has taken less than three years.
- Despite the emerging networks of *palika* level service providers, their current capacity is not enough. *Palikas* therefore need to establish a capacity development plan incorporating trainings, accreditation and linkage development.
- Evidence of positive changes in terms of accountability of service providers and level of satisfaction among farmers provides an important incentive for the *palikas*, the network of service providers, and farmer groups to continue developing the inclusive service delivery model.
- Coordination and cooperation between the *palikas* and provincial governments is essential to promote synergies and avoid overlap in agriculture service provision.
- Returnees migrants' and youth represent potential “agents of change” in transforming the agriculture sector. *Palikas* have recognized this through the provision of targeted programs. Nevertheless, most of the agricultural enterprises thus catalyzed are at an early stage and require further support in business development services (scaling up support; business coaching) and tailored financial products (such as insurance schemes and affordable credit).

“Out of a total 5,800 households ([in this palika], youths from 1,700 households are working in foreign countries. There is great potential to use the remittances in agricultural enterprises by motivating the left-behind family members and returnee migrants. With support from Prayas, we have started developing targeted programs for returnee migrants.”

Bimala Rai Tilung, Deputy Mayor of Halesi Tuwachung *nagarpalika*

“On my return home from Malaysia having completed my work permit, I wasn’t sure whether to stay or go to another country. Then I got enrolled in an integrated pest management training, and my interest in agriculture increased. Following the formation of the palika and its focus on agriculture, I didn’t need to look back. I’m glad to be able to earn NRs 40,000 to NRs 45,000 per month by working on my own farm. I sell my vegetables in the weekly market at Chhap and to the wholesalers of Badimohan and Bhalumara market centers. Now the palika is establishing a vegetable collection center in Chhap. This news has intensified my enthusiasm so much that now I’m planning to extend my farm.”

Tara Niraula, a returnee migrant agriculture entrepreneur, Marin *gaunpalika*

“Like other palikas, in the initial years we also faced the challenge of limited human resources in the agriculture sector. The challenge for us was even bigger due to our geographical area and the scattered nature of settlements. When we were looking for solutions, the Prayas team dived in and suggested that we identify and utilize our lead farmers who are experienced in the agriculture and livestock sector and who have received 51 days of village agriculture workers training or 35 days of village animal health workers training. We consulted within our committees and sections and thought that this would be a good idea. We identified 79 such farmers, developed a roster, conducted an assessment and selected 45 as Local Agriculture Resource Persons - LARPs. We deployed them by providing remuneration. In this process, we also faced hurdles such as preparing guidelines for the LARPs, and a designated work model for them to follow. In this, also, the Prayas team guided us and today we have a good mechanism in place.”

Nishanta Sharma, Chairperson, Chisankugadi *nagarpalika*



Photos:

(first page) Agriculture Learning Center managed by Ganesh Kafle at Triyuga *nagarpalika* provided opportunities for hands on skills to Junior Technical Assistant (JTA) students of Triyuga National Education Academy

(last page) left: Raju Pradhan runs an agro-vet business in Khadadevi *gaunpalika* to provide embedded services to over 100 farmers.

(last page) right: Pabina Oli, a young women JTA of the *Palika* Agriculture Section, visits farmers’ fields and provides technical advice to farmers (in this case disease management in cauliflower) based on the farmers’ needs and demand.