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CASE STUDY

Strengthening facilitation competencies in development: processes, challenges and lessons of a learning alliance to develop facilitators for local community engagement

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Effective facilitation enables farmer-based water user organizations to analyse contextual issues, identify causal links, formulate clear challenges, develop partnerships with stakeholders, and innovate and implement solutions. However, facilitation is often provided by international partners, such as advanced research institutions or non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The reliance on external consultants to facilitate innovation and change processes creates risks for sustainability. This article provides an overview of a capacity development initiative for facilitation of change in the agriculture water sector in Africa. It focuses on the case study of the Improved Management for Agricultural Water in East and Southern Africa (IMAWESA) networkôs learning alliance on facilitating community engagement. The IMAWESA learning alliance sought to build competency on facilitation methods and tools at national and sub-national levels within and across agricultural water management projects. The paper primarily seeks to address questions related to the sustainability of facilitated processes and the effectiveness of capacity development methods to train facilitators and thus strengthen local facilitation.

Keywords: facilitation; learning; capacity development; training; East Africa; Southern Africa

Facilitation of participation: Increased impact from development investments

Development scholars and implementers have shown that skilled facilitation can optimize participatory methods and tools (Groot and Maarleveld 2000; van Veldhuizen, Waters-Bayer and Zeeuw 1997), ensure that participation is representative of key stakeholders and that projects are more equitable. More specifically, proponents suggest that skilled facilitation improves the outcomes of a range of participatory approaches, from dynamic face-to-face workshops to larger

change processes in agricultural systems, such as innovation and multi-stakeholder platforms (Warner 2006; Nederlof and Pyburn 2012), participatory extension (Hagmann, Chuma, Murwira and Connolly 1999; Ramaru, Hagmann, Mamabolo and Netshivhodza 2009), learning alliances (Lundy and Gottret 2005) and household approaches (Bishop-Sambook and Wonani 2008; Farnworth, Sundell, Nzioki, Shivutse and Davis 2013).

Indeed, researchers emphasize the importance of *skilled* facilitation; quality of facilitation is linked to the effectiveness and outcomes of change processes on projects. High quality facilitators are critical to multi-stakeholder platforms. For example, van Paassen et al. (2013) note that facilitators play complex roles and make critical choices during the facilitation process. Makini et al. (2013) state that the ñquality of facilitation is fundamental and should be ensured since this is what will differentiate this approach from top down approachesò (17).

High quality facilitators are still limited in number and are often engaged in facilitation for multi-stakeholder platforms and other participatory methods through advanced research institutes (ARIs) or international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), which manage and lead projects in developing countries. Van Paassen et al. (2013) observe that researchers in these organizations can be seen as impartial and informed, suggesting they bring unique and beneficial characteristics to projects for facilitation. However, the authors provide no evidence of such perceptions. No studies appear to be available that explore the relationship between the origin of the facilitator and the short-term and long-term outcomes of the facilitation process.

Some literature suggests at least the perception that facilitation expertise provided by ARIs or INGOs mirrors other sectors in which international ótechnical expertsô provide advice to óbeneficiariesô and óexitô at the end of a project without an on-going investment and stake in the issue. Makini et al. (2013) argue that facilitation by external actors can raise expectations; they link the quality of facilitation to sustainability based on a shift in the role of facilitation from óoutsidersô to óinsiders.ô Adekunle (2013) support that argument and suggest that óinsidersô are the primary stakeholders and therefore have a permanent stake in ensuring that the process continues generating innovation. One project attempted to deliberately address that concern with the Participatory Market Chain Approach[1], which showed the changing roles of stakeholders across different phases of a multi-stakeholder process (Bernet et al. 2008). In that project, roles requiring facilitation gradually shifted from research and development organizations to local stakeholders and the private sector to ensure sustainability. The perception that reliance on external facilitators could jeopardize the sustainability of innovation and learning initiated by external interventions has yet to be supported by evidence through rigorous impact studies, which are clearly needed.

Local facilitation capacity

Facilitation skills are only one of many capacity gaps in developing countries. Capacity to facilitate change processes is not a priority of most governments or stakeholders, despite their potential to increase the impact of development investments. One possible exception to this statement is training provided for extension service staff to facilitate farmer-field schools using participatory learning approaches, which Duveskog, Friis-Hansen and Taylor (2011) show to be transformative and Davis, Nkonya, Kato, Mekonnen, Odendo, Miro and Nkuba (2010) provide evidence for improved productivity and income. However, the extent of capacity development of high quality facilitators is difficult to conclude, because training content varied both in quality and methods across a wide spectrum from basic technology transfer to facilitation of participatory learning through adult education (Davis et al.2010; Waddington, Snilstveit, White, and Anderson 2010).

Training in facilitation is also not within the core curricula at most national agricultural research systems, extension services or local governments, even considering specific projects that train extension services to use farmer field school approaches, as noted above. Curricula usually focus primarily on technical skills and sector subject knowledge, and less on functional capacities, such as facilitation of engaging communities in learning and innovation processes (Kroma 2003).[2] It is not surprising therefore that facilitation capacity is perceived to be low generally with few skilled facilitators within developing countries. Harvey, Ensor, Garside, Woodend, Naess and Carlile (2013) conclude that there is a need for better understanding of the characteristics of effective capacity, awareness of where those skills are located in institutions, and knowledge on how to expand those skills.

Indeed, targeted facilitation capacity development is often overlooked by proponents of participatory and innovation systems approaches. A few institutions and private training companies offer courses on facilitation skills, but these are often inaccessible and narrowly targeted. The majority of training institutions that offer short courses on facilitation do so as part of organizational development aimed at facilitating of meetings, making presentations, and corporate team building. A few institutions offer facilitation training courses specifically targeting development processes, such as INTRAC in the U.K. or the Institute of Cultural Affairs in South Africa. However, such short-term training courses are often costly and require travel, which makes access difficult for those who would be expected to facilitate at sub-national level with rural stakeholders, farmers and farmer groups, such as local government development staff, project officers and extension service providers.

Short courses alone are also unlikely to be adequate to gain the requisite high quality functional capacity in facilitation. The attributes of high quality facilitation described by various case studies and manuals include abilities for scoping, partnering, networking, mediation, policy advocacy, and ensuring a process is transparent and equitable, among others. These skills are not quickly acquired, particularly in a classroom or workshop setting isolated from the institutional context in which facilitation tools and approaches will be used. Functional capacity development for facilitation therefore requires an integrated approach.

NGOs and research institutions have developed facilitation manuals and toolkits to try to address the gap and meet the need for skilled facilitation. Many make the documents freely available on the internet for download. The manuals to support facilitation of participatory processes for development in specific sectors are numerous, with examples such as *The Operational Field Guide for Developing and Managing Local Agricultural Innovation Platforms* (Makini et al. 2013), *Facilitating Innovation Platforms* (van Rooyen et al. 2013), *Facilitators Manual for Strengthening Rural Institutions through Building the Soft Skills in Rural Grassroots Institutions* (WorldAgroForestry Centre n.d.), as well as various manuals for facilitating farmer field schools, such as *Livestock Farmer Field Schools: Guidelines for Facilitation and Technical Manual* (Groeneweg, Buyu, Romney and Minjauw 2006) and farmer business development, e.g., *Farm Business School Training of Facilitators Programme South Asia: Manual* (FAO 2011). It is also worth noting that access, quality and appropriateness of the manuals vary widely.

The manuals and toolkits are important resources, but like short training courses, manuals and toolkits are not a substitute for a longer process of capacity development that addresses various aspects of competencies and utilizes effective adult learning methods. The systems approach in which process facilitation is situated would suggest that strong capacity in facilitation is more likely to result from an integrated process of appropriate trainings combined with ñlearning by doing.ò

Case studies or other documents rarely propose the best approach or methods to develop capacity, though Makini et al. (2013) suggest that local stakeholders should be mentored to take over the facilitation process from ñoutsiders.ò Therefore, a gap exists in both high quality facilitators in developing areas and in guidelines and methods that outline the best approaches for developing capacity for such facilitation.

Developing facilitation capacity at local level: the IMAWESA learning alliance

This case study describes a two-year capacity development initiative led by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) through the IMAWESA network, which aimed at strengthening facilitation of participatory process with water usersô associations (WUAs) and related community based organizations (CBOs) on projects supported by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The capacity development activities took place within a learning alliance framework[3] to encourage active learning and knowledge sharing across projects and countries with diverse agro-ecological zones.

In irrigation schemes and agricultural water management (AWM) projects the degree of community participation is directly linked to the degree of effective management (IFAD 2001; Senanayake, Mukherji, Suhardiman, and de Luca Senanayake 2012). Participatory irrigation management offers a means to ensure that communities take responsibility for organizing the management and operation and maintenance of irrigation schemes, particularly in cases of limited public funding. The water usersô association (WUA) is the most common institution responsible for managing water resources and infrastructure on irrigation schemes.[4] However, research also shows actual community participation in designing, owning and managing irrigation schemes is inadequate (Snyder, Lefore, de Silva, Venot, and Merrey 2013). At scheme level, WUAs and CBOs often fall below performance levels assumed in project design because of lack of engagement between and within communities around water. Project designs overstate the ability and willingness of local government agencies to assume responsibility for WUA formation and participatory irrigation planning (Ricks and Arif 2012; Cleaver and Toner 2006). As such, a key reason for the limited impact of irrigation investment is the lack of skills of project officers to facilitate effective participation (Snyder et al. 2013).

During the inception workshop of the IMAWESA learning alliance in September 2011, IFAD-supported projects with water components from several countries in East and Southern Africa agreed that their learning priority should be on how to strengthen WUAs and CBOs at community level. They identified the need to support a farmer-driven learning process within WUAs and irrigating communities that would catalyse local innovation through practice and experimentation and generate greater ownership of challenges and solutions. At the same time, the learning process within WUAs could provide the basis for collaboration with external stakeholders to identify solutions to bottlenecks along the value chain. However, participants recognized that the approach would require facilitation. They took the decision to build facilitation

skills within the projects to ensure sustainability and continual learning, and to avoid over-reliance on external and international consultants. The project coordinators believed that facilitators within the project would ensure sustainable, inclusive community engagement for continuous local learning and innovation after funding for the learning alliance ended.

Capacity development approach

IMAWESA engaged an Africa-based consultant to build facilitation skills with an issue-based focus on water management.[5] The project developed a systemic approach to build competencies in facilitation as an alternative to short-term, modular training courses. IMAWESA used this approach in the learning alliance to integrate the development of capacity in facilitation skills with subject-based learning within projects and across countries. This included multi-phased, layered cumulative learning across participatory workshops and in-field practice embedded within the local project structure. Learning workshops focused primarily on facilitation skills that would support project objectives in irrigation and natural resource management. In-field mentoring provided another layer which emphasized use of those facilitation skills to address specific subject related constraints, particularly regarding challenges the communities identified in agricultural water management. The project also supplemented capacity development for facilitation with technical water and agronomy subjects where the participants identified specific needs and knowledge gaps. The process aimed to strengthen the facilitation competencies of project officers, community development officer, subject matter specialists, extension service providers and others working at different levels of the projects and with different subjects to contribute to an overall transformation in managing change in AWM contexts.

In brief, project managers and coordinators from five IFAD-supported projects participated in regional learning workshops and then implemented a learning process in their projects at local level to ensure that a larger pool of facilitators could be developed. Regional learning workshops provided a forum to develop initial action plans based on new concepts and tools with input from peers and mentors in other countries. Experiences from the field were shared with peers and mentors, and then action plans adjusted. IMAWESA also supported a series of local learning workshops and mentoring at field level. The experiences developed from the field implementation were shared during subsequent workshops, synthesised, and lessons used for next action plans and field implementation. This process is described in more detail in the following sections.

Regional learning workshops

IMAWESA held three regional learning workshops under the learning alliance following the capacity development process outlined above to enable cross-project and inter-country learning and sharing of challenges and experiences. IFAD supported project management teams and field level implementation institutions in the project areas participated. Each regional workshop was hosted by an AWM project to provide linkages with field experience. Each regional learning workshop focused on introducing key concepts in facilitating participation and community engagement to participants, enabled sharing of key challenges and experiences of projects in implementation, and provided an opportunity for practicing facilitation tools within the learning alliance group and in the field followed by peer feedback. The participants developed action plans to use the concepts and tools in the field to gain experience between regional learning workshops. A final regional workshop was held at the end of two years to synthesize learning on the facilitation approach and on strengthening WUAs and CBOs, and to share experiences and outcomes from the learning alliance generally.

In-field learning process

The individual projects led the field level learning process which aimed to develop a pool of facilitators within project implementation teams and related institutions. This process included learning workshops for local level staff and stakeholders, as well as in-field mentoring and coaching by those trained in the regional workshops. The learning workshops targeted a different level of project and field officer and therefore adapted the content of the regional workshops to the local context and incentive systems. The project leaders first sought to generate the interest of project teams and stakeholders to use an integrated facilitation approach to work with CBOs and WUAs before introducing concepts and tools to facilitate participatory processes to understand problems, identify opportunities, develop visions, and plan and implement actions. The project leaders also demonstrated the use of tools and facilitation processes in the field in actual WUA and CBO meetings.

Peer learning teams were formed during local workshops. These were composed of three to four project officers working together in the same area or neighbouring irrigation schemes. The peer teams differed across projects and countries. The peer learning teams in Ethiopia formed around zones that represented a cluster of irrigation schemes supported by the zonal focal persons. The Swaziland teams incorporated multiple stakeholders who covered three communities. The Zanzibar team also included multiple stakeholders across eight communities. Technical and subject matter specialists were represented in most of the teams. The peer-learning groups refined their own visions to develop stronger WUAs and CBOs for their local context,

and created project specific action plans in consultation with project managers and coordinators. The project teams then sought to implement action plans and document the experiences for sharing during the three to four month period between learning workshops.

Organisational representation and levels of operations of the learning workshop participants varied widely within and across the projects and countries. Some included government departments, farmer organisations and non-governmental organizations, such as in Swaziland. Ethiopia participants focused primarily on local officials of the relevant sector ministries. One Ethiopian project area also targeted the leadership of WUAs to ensure that the local organizations could facilitate their own change processes after IFAD project closure. The learning process at country level reached around 250 people across 7 projects, a relatively significant number of people for introducing facilitation tools and developing skills.

Developing skilled facilitation within projects

Participants in the learning alliance jointly assessed their experiences in the use of facilitation skills and learning tools in the field, and reflected on what had been effective and what challenges persisted.[6] They found that the objective to create a pool of skilled facilitators within projects had not been fully achieved in two years, but that capacity was gradually increasing.

Managers across projects stated that local level officers initially resisted adoption of a facilitated approach that deviated from the common practice of local government and extension officers instructing farmers on expected practices and actions. Therefore, steps taken in the regional workshops to develop the skills for project managers as trainers and mentors had to be broken into smaller micro-steps at sub-national level. The introduction of the participatory and systems approach to learning in itself was a significant change in approach for most local government staff on the projects, as was the creation of peer-learning teams across disciplines and status levels of staff. The development of functional skills associated with the shift in approaching development as farmer- and local stakeholder-led, as opposed to ǿexpertôdriven, required gradual progress over time. Training and in-field mentoring activities therefore required more iterations than expected and lengthened the time and resources required.

Project managers, coordinators and implementing officers indicated that capacity was being developed in the facilitation approach to strengthen WUAs and CBOs, though they acknowledged that progress in gaining a high level of skills required more time and resources than anticipated. The peer-learning groups within project areas had to reflect on the field experiences and interactions with farmers following each field visit, and then return for additional, unplanned field visits to follow-up and ensure

they facilitated the resolution of the outstanding issues. Projects had expected to use facilitation to resolve issues with each visit, and had not anticipated multiple field visits to address lingering issues. This occurred in one case in Swaziland where initial facilitation tools did not reveal underlying causes of conflict between three WUAs over a common water source; conflict appeared to escalate over time and required police intervention. Facilitators had to reflect with their trainers and mentors on the failed attempts at facilitating a resolution, and then return to the community groups with adapted facilitation tools and more consideration of which stakeholders to include in participatory activities. The revised approach to facilitation for that particular problem eventually resulted in the groups agreeing to act collaboratively and consolidate into one WUA rather than three, but required effort and resources beyond that planned by project leaders.

In addition, project managers noted that facilitation led to progress on one challenge, but that often gave rise to new issues requiring continual facilitation with the WUA or CBO. The project managers had expected that one or two facilitated sessions with WUAs would be adequate to initiate innovation processes by farmer groups to subsequently act independently of the project or community mobilizer. For instance, one WUA in Ethiopia began with the problem of lack of cooperation on maintenance of the irrigation infrastructure. The facilitator guided them through learning process which led to greater collaboration, improving payment of the WUA fee contribution, the operation and maintenance of canals, and general productivity. The facilitator took that to be the achievement, but the WUA then raised the problem of lack of market access for the increased amount of produce. The facilitator had to identify a different set of tools to take the WUA farmers through another round of visioning and planning until farmers identified their own solution to that problem. In another WUA in Ethiopia, a facilitated process enabled the group of farmers to cooperate to engage guards to protect irrigation infrastructure from livestock, but through the process, issues arose over lack of inclusivity and lack of equitable gender participation, requiring further facilitation. In terms of training, the multistage nature of facilitation was important, because facilitating through multiple cycles of identifying challenges, group visioning, action planning and reflection meant that those new to facilitation required continual training and access to tools and methods to facilitate groups through different types of problems. That caused frustration for project managers expecting quick results and also had unplanned resource implications.

Regardless of the challenges, project managers ultimately expressed commitment to expanding facilitated learning and cooperation in their project areas to achieve impact. An external evaluation of the learning alliance concluded that it had led to clear achievements with water usersô associations and that learning alliance participants found capacity development in community facilitation to be one of the most important

services offered by IMAWESA as a network. However, the project managers and coordinators did note a number of constraints in capacity development for facilitation on their projects.

Constraints

One key constraint was the lack of continuity of participants in the learning process at both regional and sub-national level. Projects that committed to the learning alliance sent participants to the two regional learning workshops, but some projects withdrew from the learning alliance and other projects sent different participants to the regional workshops. The projects gave various reasons for this, including: lack of project control or total government control to choose the civil servants to participate in trainings; inability of the same civil servant to participate in more than one training given internal rules on trainings; use of external trainings as órewardsô within the civil service system; turnover of staff in project posts; and constraints on budgets for international travel. However, effective capacity development cannot occur in the absence of a consistent and iterative process of training, planning, practice and reflection.

Similarly, over half of total number of participants attended only one workshop at the sub-national level. Project managers gave various reasons for discontinuity of participants, including the nation-wide deployment process of competent officers, poor regional level support for the learning and implementation process, poor communication and inappropriate selection of participants in the initial workshops, the existing full schedules of officers and budget constraints. Project coordinators in Ethiopia in particular noted the disruption caused by transfer of officers that had begun gaining skills and implementing facilitation tools at community level.

Secondly, project officers noted a number of operational constraints to implementing in-field facilitation, which constrained the development of facilitators within projects at sub-national level. This included inadequate budget for field implementation of facilitation activities, inadequate or no support for implementation from higher level managers within government institutions, difficulty balancing short-term deliverables on projects with long-term participatory and facilitated processes, difficulty coordinating and harmonise technical support with learning processes, lack of experience in advocating for commitment at all levels of government to support the new approaches to engagement of WUAs and CBOs, and lack of financial resources for capacity development of more project officers in facilitation. The projects generally shared all the constraints, but each ranked the constraints differently based on their particular context and project aims.

Thirdly, project managers and coordinators found that developing capacity in facilitation and facilitating learning processes with WUAs are both incremental and time intensive. The approach is a deviation from the usual community mobilization and development methods, and trainers must overcome initial resistance and then build associated functional skills gradually. Likewise, in field facilitation with WUAs and CBOs requires many steps and continually learning and adjustment. Project managers and coordinators however are under pressure from government and donors to deliver outputs quickly. The short time frame to deliver results is in tension with the resource and time requirements to build facilitation skills and ensure high quality facilitated process that lead to more sustainable impact.

Lessons learned: developing facilitators at local level

The lessons here are not necessarily new in capacity development, but are distinct in that they emerged from the IMAWESA case. The initiative is one of the few examples of planned and documented competency development for facilitators at different levels. As such, it may offer valuable lessons for approaches to develop facilitation skills within projects.

Take an integrated, systems approach to capacity development. IMAWESA used a learning alliance method for a number of reasons. Functional skills such as facilitation cannot be gained quickly through short training courses; gaining competency requires cumulative learning over time through practice within the actual context where change is to be facilitated. In addition, developing facilitation skills that targeted a particular subject matter enabled participants of trainings to more readily see the relevance of the approach and apply it to the actual context which was important where local level project staff resisted the change in approach to engaging with water users. Furthermore, engaging in a learning process across projects and countries provided opportunity to practice tools and methods within a relatively consistent, albeit reduced, group where trust developed; peer feedback within the group was an added learning tool. This also enabled periodic reflection on experiences and sharing ways to adapt tools to the local social and project context. Finally, the learning alliance provided a model for linking the various levels of learning, from the regional level at project manager or coordinator level, to sub-national and district level.

Use a modified train the trainers approach. Developing competencies of a core group of participants first provides a set of facilitators to act as trainers and, most importantly, as mentors to develop a larger pool of facilitators in their projects and areas. It ensures that the trainers and mentors for the sub-national level already have a

commitment - a ósteakeô - in ensuring that facilitators will receive similar training, use the same sets of tools and methods, and share in a co-developed vision. They also become advocates for using facilitation in participatory processes more generally at higher levels of their organizations and institutions. Capacity development initiatives can support the local trainings by sharing the presentations and materials used for regional level trainings, and provide feedback on how to adapt those.

Provide learning workshops at different levels. At least two training workshops for each of the different levels are needed. Adequate time should be provided, but should not be too lengthy such that participants find it difficult to manage. The IMAWESA learning alliance found five days was the maximum for training of trainersô workshops with slightly shorter workshops at local level. The workshop approach itself incorporated participants as facilitators and emphasized participatory learning rather than presentations and lectures.

The workshops included the concepts of facilitating participatory, innovation and change processes, sessions for participants to identify their own vision and objectives for using facilitation to stimulate change and innovation in their projects, introduction to and practice of tools with peers in the workshop setting, planning and actual practice implementing targeted tools in the field, peer feedback and reflection, and then formulation of actions plans with input from peers. Subsequent follow up workshops reviewed concepts, provided additional tools in response to experiences and identified gaps or weaknesses in the field, enabled participants to share experiences from the field and reflect, and then adjustment of action plans by peer learning groups.

Identify participants carefully. Select participants using clear and transparent criteria to ensure there is a commitment to facilitation processes and implementing tools in the field at scheme or project level. Including more than one participant from each project worked well in the learning alliance for peer learning, feedback and sharing roles and responsibilities in the field level action plans. It is also important that trainings within projects or areas cover a broad range of people at multiple levels and with different disciplines to create common understanding on the approach and spread skills across teams. Projects also need to consider incentives (including non-monetary) for the initial set of trainers and mentors for the learning process; most add the functions of facilitation and mentoring to their existing workload with little reward.

Make implementation a requirement to remain in the capacity strengthening process, but then support that implementation. Encourage participants to include indicators in their action plans by which outputs can be measured and future participation decided.

Communicate clearly to participants that non-implementation of activities in the field will lead to them not being included in future trainings. Require submission of at least some documentation of action in the field and minimal reflection, prior to deciding on the participants for future trainings. It is important to provide training on documenting and ensure the budget resources are available for the participants to do the documentation in the field, because lack of resources may be given as reason for no evidence of facilitation in the field.

Provide in-field mentoring. The core group of trainees should act as mentors and provide field level mentoring for the trainees on their projects and in their areas, and the overall initiative should provide backstopping to the core trainees. This means providing feedback on action plans, the selection of tools and practice with the tools, and accompanying trainees into the field to observe and provide advice without taking control of the process. After observing the trainees in the field with farmer groups, the mentors should then facilitate a learning process among those trainees by reflecting on the use of facilitation tools, revising action plans and supporting additional practice, as needed. In-field mentoring is also strengthened by linking facilitation training to a particular subject and supporting the identification of tools specific to actual issues.

Develop peer learning groups for strategy development and reflection. The IMAWESA learning alliance found it useful to have learning and peer groups at regional level (cross country and cross project) and project or sub-national level. The peer groups can provide the basis for practicing tools and getting feedback, and also for analysis and reflection on field experience and progress toward reaching objectives. The groups often followed geographical areas or project components to ensure a common point of reference, and always included different disciplines or skill sets. This ensured that action plans represented different perspectives within projects, and incorporated multiple social and technical issues in plans and implementation. It also promoted the spread of facilitation skills across projects to ensure stronger teams in the field. IMAWESAôs experience also suggests that facilitation aptitude and commitment is not aligned with particular disciplines and should not be delegated exclusively to project officers responsible for community mobilization or extension and outreach; engineers, irrigation experts and agronomists were equally effective in facilitation as those from social science training backgrounds.

Build support for the facilitation approach from senior managers. Facilitation of change processes is a relatively new approach to many developing countries, and may be perceived as having unclear outputs. As such, support is often not forthcoming. In the case of IMAWESA, political context also created suspicions from higher levels of management about mobilization of communities. Therefore, supervisors and managers should be included at various points in the learning process on facilitation to

make the activities transparent and show the potential for results and impact. At the beginning of training for the core group of facilitators, workshops should include a short session for decision makers to introduce the concepts, potential benefits and costs of facilitation, as well as an overview of the training process and next steps. The issue that facilitation is an on-going process and involves multiple steps rather than one-off interventions should also be made clear to managers and supervisors from the outset. Also, including the supervisors and managers in an exposure visit to the field to observe facilitation can be very effective. In Ethiopia, one project created videos of field experiences and the impact, which can be used to show line managers in the absence of field visits.

Plan for and implement actions to help ensure a consistent set of trainees. The number of IMAWESA learning alliance participants reduced over the two years of the learning alliance, which limited the development of capacity in an approach that sought to be cumulative. A number of the lessons noted above can contribute to retaining trainees. Building and maintaining this support helps to ensure that the trainees are retained throughout multi-phase training and field level activities. Clear guidelines at the outset that implementation will be a requirement to remain in the capacity strengthening process, and support for that implementation helps to ensure some level of consistency of participants. In addition, building and maintaining support from senior managers can help to sustain resource commitment for learning workshops and in-field activities. Selecting participants with a clear interest in facilitation is also important, as individuals will seek out support and resources for activities in which they are personally engaged. Some constraints may not be easily overcome, such as national selection processes for training civil servants or bans on international travel for some grades of civil servants, but the above actions were associated with the continued engagement of participants in the IMAWESA learning alliance.

Do not expect too much of ICT tools and platforms. IMAWESAôs approach to capacity development never intended to rely on a web-based platform; it used emails with low resolutions attachments to share materials and experiences as requested by participants. The learning alliance participants provided several reasons why web-based learning was not practical for them. Nearly all noted unreliable internet connections outside capital cities and lack of computer access for project officers below provincial or state level. A few stated that sub-national government institutions imposed restrictions on internet use, allowing use of email services, but forbidding use of the internet to visit websites and download materials. IMAWESA also found an unexpected constraint: inequitable access to the internet for males and females, in which females were not allowed as much time as males or any time at all to use internet and computer-based technologies. A survey conducted during the evaluation

of the IMAWESA network also reflected those constraints to internet use. The internet has created opportunities for webinars and web-based trainings, such as MOOCs, but IMAWESA found these were not viable options for building local facilitation competency.

Be flexible with the capacity development process. As with facilitation itself, the capacity development process in each project or area should be determined by each context and the goals and objectives of each project.

Conclusion

Multi-stakeholder, participatory approaches require high quality facilitation to achieve innovation and change effectively. However, reliance on ARIs and INGOs for facilitation could lead to risk of lack of sustainability or lack of local ownership, the very problems that the approach seeks to avoid. Indeed, there appears to be a gradual recognition by a few that the role of facilitation needs to change over time. But there has been little discussion about effective methods to develop the capacities and competencies required for high quality facilitation in a developing context. This case study provided an overview of the attempt by the IMAWESA network to create a pool of facilitators that would target stronger engagement of stakeholders on agricultural water management at community level. The IMAWESA learning alliance sought to develop the facilitation skills of project managers and coordinators, community level development officers, and WUA leaders, among other, directly working with farmer groups on agricultural water management. The learning initiative achieved some successes, despite facing a number of constraints. As such, the case generated lessons for other initiatives to develop facilitators and facilitation skills to ensure that facilitation of long-term change processes can continue even after external facilitators leave and/or a project closes.

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[1] Originally published in: Bernet, T., Devaux, A., Ortiz, O., and G. Thiele (2005) Participatory market chain approach, *LBL BeraterInnen News* 1, 8-13

[2] The categorization of facilitation as functional capacity is based on the three dimensions of capacity identified by FAO http://www.fao.org/capacitydevelopment/capacity-development-home/en/).

[3] A learning alliance is a multi-stakeholder platform using a process for people to learn together, and in doing so, speed up innovation and implementation processes. Researchers, implementing agencies, private sector, policy makers, and individual community members form a partnership to work andlearn together to solve practical development problems through identifying, sharing, adopting and implementing good practices in the field. IMAWESA 2011.

[4] For an overview of approaches to water management institutions see Ruth Meinzen-Dick (2007.

[5] IMAWESA engaged PICO Team to design the capacity development process, which was based on their experience with facilitation in participatory extension and systems approaches in Africa. http://www.picoteam.org/

[6] The achievements that were linked to the facilitation of WUAs and CBOs are outside of the scope of this paper, which primarily focuses on capacity development for local facilitators. More information can be found in a forthcoming report on the IMAWESA learning alliance.