LOCAL RESOURCE PERSONS:
COMMUNITY TECHNICIANS

3 LEARNING AND SHARING SERIES

LOCAL RESOURCE PERSONS:
COMMUNITY TECHNICIANS

3 LEARNING AND SHARING SERIES

◀ helvetas Nepal ▶

HELVETAS NEPAL
Learning And Sharing Series   No. 3

LOCAL RESOURCE PERSONS:
COMMUNITY TECHNICIANS

Abstract

Community Technicians (CTs) are resource persons within the local NGO partners working with Helvetas' Local Initiatives Support Programme (LISP), in Palpa district. They provide technical support for member groups' income generating/economic development programmes. Helvetas and its partners are testing a new approach to local technical resource development that:

- strengthens the economic programmes of their partner organisations (product development/ enhancement and marketting),
- expands coverage and serves their members effectively, and
- creates and sustains the demand for CTs, and the quality of the services.

Helvetas and its partners are applying strategies that take technicians beyond their customary roles and help them to become local resource persons that meet local demands and needs, and who generate new potential for and opportunities in income-generating and small enterprise.

This paper, *Community Technicians,* examines how effective the approach has been in enhancing the local NGO's product and service, reaching the target community, and catalysing new opportunities for their organisation and own enterprise. As of 2003, all the stakeholders (CTs, parent organisations, members, and LISP) are satisfied with the outcomes. The CTs have developed marketable skills and improved their own enterprises. Parent organisations have more demand for the CTs' work from the communities, which feel more empowered and secure better prices for their produce. The most challenging phase however, will occur when organisations expand programme coverage and membership and begin to compete in larger markets.

A number of key lessons or challenges need to be considered concerning:

- selecting appropriate people to be CTs, who have commitment, ability, vision, and willingness to learn;
- strengthening the organisational development of the parent organisation alongside developing the CTs;
- knowing how to deploy CTs to reach SLOW (Small farmers, Landless, Occupational Caste, and Women); and
- making the CT's role sustainable.

Community Technicians (CTs) are internal resource persons of local NGO partners.

Helvetas has a new approach to local technical resource development that strengthens and expands organisations and creates and sustains demand for services.

CT's have improved, parent organisations are in more demand, and local communities have been empowered.

Challenges:
- **Selecting CTs**
- **Strengthening OD**
- **Reaching SLOW**
- **Making the CT role sustainable**

Community Technician with farmers.

Nepal ▶

Contents

Nepal ▶

Abbreviations

BBLL	Bridge Building at the Local Level
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CT	Community Technician
DCPA	District Coffee Producers Association
FECOFUN	Federation of Community Forest Users of Nepal
IDEA	Institutional Development Extension Alliance
ISK	Indreni Samaj Kendra (an NGO)
LISP	Local Initiatives Support Programme
LNGO	Local Non-Government Organisation
NCPA	Nepal Coffee Producers Association
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NTFP	Non-Timber Forest Products
OD	Organisational Development
PCD	People-Centred Development
PPRP	Participatory Review and Planning
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
REDA	Rural Economic Development Association
SLOW	Small farmers, Landless, Occupational caste, and Women
VDC	Village Development Committee

Credo of Rural Reconstruction

Go to the people

Live among them

Learn from them

Plan with them

Work with them

Start with what they know

Build on what they have

Teach by showing, learn by doing

Not a showcase, but a pattern

Not odds and ends but a system

Not piecemeal but integrated approach

Not to conform but to transform

Not relief but release

Helvetas Nepal and its staff have adopted this credo from James Yen, the founder of the Global Rural Reconstruction Movement, and bring this into their daily work.

Introduction

This short paper, *"Local Resource Persons – Community Technicians",* is one of a series of *Learning and Sharing* papers on various topics of current importance in the Helvetas Programme in Nepal. It attempts to provide a country-level series parallel to the current *Experience and Learning* documents produced by Helvetas at the international level.

The paper presents a glimpse of our working experience in the rural areas of Nepal, as seen by our operational teams and the staff of their civil society partners. It does not claim to provide an exhaustive or definitive picture of the topic under discussion. Instead, it endeavours to document some of our field experiences – a small building block in our learning and sharing. This document will be further elaborated as we accumulate more learning.

This paper reviews the outcomes and lessons of the distinct approach Helvetas and its partners have adopted to establish internal technical resource persons, called Community Technicians (CTs), in Palpa district.

First, it explains the *rationale* and *approach,* which Helvetas' Local Initiatives Support Programme (LISP) has applied to develop CTs within its partners. The step-by-step *process and activities* are outlined and the *outcomes* of these activities for the CT's of each partner organisation.

With the partners' programmes and coverage expanding, CTs play an increasingly important role in delivering quality services to group members, managing programme expansion, and up-scaling commercial activities. By highlighting the main *lessons,* Helvetas identifies *future directions* for supporting CTs in the next critical stages of upgrading their skills, and expanding and defining their role within and beyond the economic programmes of their organisations.

Helvetas works in the rural areas of Nepal.

Community Technicians (CTs) are internal technical resource persons for local organisations.

CTs are playing an increasingly important role in delivering services to group members.

Community Technician with farmers selling coffee beans at market.

Nepal ▶

Background

Rationale for Local Technicians

Local resource persons can build the capacity and self-reliance of the organisations they represent and the communities they serve.

The development of local resource persons builds the capacity and self-reliance of the organisations they represent and the communities they serve, particularly in their effort to address these organisations' and communities' needs and initiatives.

When Helvetas first launched LISP in 1996, its local NGO partners delivered simple income-generating programmes to their members based on the local, basic knowledge available within the organisations and among the farmers.

Line agencies and LISP were unable to provide technical support with the frequency and coverage required.

The small team of LISP was not able to provide technical support with the frequency and coverage required. Technicians working with line agencies were also providing inadequate services to the community because of the large area to be covered, their reluctance to visit the field, and a lack of experience and specialised skills.

> **The objective of Helvetas and its partners is to develop Community Technicians as a means to support their organisation's income-generating programmes and services to members.**

The sense of ownership and responsibility created by CTs will drive local initiatives.

It was a logical, yet demanding, initiative for Helvetas and its partners to create local and internal technical resource persons to serve their organisation and community from within the membership base of their partners. CTs are able to:

- Establish much needed local knowledge and skills at the farmers' level in new and improved agronomic practices and disseminate those to the community;
- Build on familiarity and experience of local farmers' abilities, practices, and problems;
- Work through their already established relationships with local communities;
- Reduce dependency on outside resources and build local capacity to address local needs and problems; and
- Create a sense of ownership and responsibility, based on their knowledge, skill, experience, and vision, which will drive local initiatives.

Community Technicians

In Palpa district, a component of Helvetas' LISP's programme has been the support of partners in developing Local Resource Persons in the social and technical fields. This paper focuses on the formation of CTs within Helvetas' local NGO partners: REDA, NCPA, ISK, and FECOFUN.

As members of NGOs, CTs are internal resource persons supporting income-generating activities of their organisations.

CTs are members of NGOs who are also internal resource persons supporting income-generating activities of their organisations by increasing their own technical competency, establishing much needed local know-how, and disseminating new knowledge and skills among their organisation's member producer groups. Through LISP, Helvetas is testing new ways of developing and supporting the CTs to strengthen their organisation's service to its members and ensuring the sustainability of their operations and work after LISP and their local NGOs withdraw support. This distinct approach involves:

- Targeting Small farmers, Landless, Occupational Caste, and Women (SLOW) in selecting CTs and the community they serve;
- Developing CTs within a local organisation which works with their parent organisation, and being responsible to it;
- Identifying market-led and product-specific technical resource persons in ginger, coffee, Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP), and small livestock;
- Developing technicians as catalysts, within their organisation and in their own entrepreneurial development, enabling them to market themselves by demonstrating their competency.

This new approach aims to establish local access to technical know-how, to knowledge of the range of value-added products, and to functional local markets with linkages and access to broader markets. Communities in Palpa (especially the poor and disadvantaged) will be better able to address their needs and initiatives in a self-reliant and sustainable manner.

The main roles and responsibilities of CTs are as follows:

- Trainer – CTs are trained on improved technical know-how by qualified technicians through formal training-of-trainers programmes. They in turn are expected to act as local resource persons to provide training to the community.

- Demonstrator – CTs are supposed to adopt improved technologies and apply them in their own fields. These serve as demonstration plots to encourage others to adopt the improved technologies. CTs should organise field visit programmes from time to time for group members to come to their own field and to other fields to observe the technologies being used. These demonstrations and visits encourage farmers to use improved technologies.

- Disseminator – CTs act as extension workers to disseminate improved technologies to farmers. They are adopting a variety of extension tools to bring technologies to wider beneficiary groups. These include home visits, group discussions, training, supply of leaflets and booklets, and demonstrations.

- Motivator – sometimes farmers are very reluctant to use new technologies. They do not like to take risks and believe in their own traditional way of doing things. Under such circumstances, CTs play a vital role in motivating farmers to adopt new technologies. They convince farmers of the importance of the new technologies.

- Facilitator – farmers face some difficulties while adopting new technologies. Some issues that farmers need assistance with are sources of seeds and other materials, solving problems encountered in the field and at harvesting, storage, and marketing. CTs facilitate farmers to handle these issues. Sometimes farmers experiment with new technologies on their own, and also want to test new technologies before fully adopting them. Under such circumstances CTs can facilitate the farmers' discovery-cum-learning process.

Role of CTs:
- **Trainer**
- **Demonstrator**
- **Disseminator**
- **Motivator**
- **Facilitator**
- **Input Supplier**
- **Social Mobiliser**
- **Monitoring**
- **Marketing**

Community Technician with landless person-showing him where to plant next to the house.

Nepal ▶

CTs provide inputs, facilitating skills, supervision and monitoring, and marketting support.

- Input Supplier – it is not sufficient to only provide technical assistance to farmers. Farmers must use the required inputs. Farmers, in most cases, are not aware about reliable sources of seeds and planting materials and other inputs, that they may require. Within subsistence farming systems, common in Palpa, farmers hesitate to buy inputs and they cannot afford to go to distant markets to make purchases. This situation hinders the adoption of improved technologies. CTs manage to keep some of the necessary inputs on hand and supply these to farmers at cost with a nominal profit margin. This further improves the relations between CTs and farmers, and allows CTs' work to be more profitable; they get to sell both services and material inputs.

- Social Mobiliser – the CT is not only a technical person. S/he also has to work with the community as a social mobiliser. CTs can mobilise groups of people of different ethnicities, economic classes, age groups, and genders in development activities. They need appropriate facilitating skills, convincing capacity, and a clear concept of the group approach. At first Helvetas focused on developing CTs to provide technical assistance to beneficiary groups; now it is training CTs in social mobilisation as well.

- Monitoring, Supervising, and Reporting Mechanism – CTs are also responsible to supervise and monitor field activities regularly in the groups they work with. They make regular visits to the groups they supervise, monitor the progress of ongoing activities, and provide appropriate suggestions to the groups for further improvement. CTs attend the group meetings at least once a month, review the progress made, and participate in planning for the future. In addition, they report on the progress of their groups, problems encountered and suggestions made to the respective partner organisations, and provide feedback for further planning.

- Marketing – some CTs act as middle persons, who help the farmers to bring their produce together, transport it to the market, and bargain for better prices.

Approach, Activities And Outcomes

Approach

The new approach of Helvetas' LISP programme to agricultural extension work and developing local resource persons is based on the strategies of:

1. **Developing CTs who work for and are responsible to their parent organisation:**
   - CTs can enhance their organisation's ability to attract resources from local government and line agencies.
   - Place CTs within an organisational and institutional structure to ensure continuity in developing skills and providing community service. Follow a logical and planned process that should grow with technological, market, and programme needs.
   - Enable a monitoring mechanism to support the CTs' work and progress in the community.
   - Allow the parent organisation to take responsibility and to invest in CTs for instance by meeting training expenses on a cost-sharing basis between LISP, partners, and CTs themselves.

   Develop CTs so that they demonstrate responsibility towards their parent organisation.

2. **Market-led and product-specific CTs:**
   - Develop local skills and capacity, which addresses the real needs and match the market (and potential) rather than being supply-driven by various development organisations under the slogan of 'local resource person development'.

   Local skills and capacity need to be developed to address the real needs and match the market.

3. **Developing technicians as catalysts for their organisation and their own enterprise:**
   - CTs have a much more integrated and catalytic role in the income-generating activities of their organisation's specific economic programme. With frequent contact, experience, and inside knowledge of farmers' needs and interests, CTs can better serve the community/members in the input and output stages of their specialised product. They can sell their services and the required material supplies to the community through the organisation by acting as a marketing agent at the output

   CTs need to be able to demonstrate new practices at the local level.

Community Technician giving training to farmers.

Nepal ▶

stage — collecting, value adding, and selling products to markets. CTs can thus work as catalysts for their organisation, seeking and creating new opportunities for their organisation and their own business. Once they build their reputation through demonstration, they will be able to sell their services at the local level.

4. Apply the principle of learning by doing:

- CTs consolidate their skills and knowledge with practical application in the field.
- Training programmes must build on existing knowledge and follow the pace of participants.

CT's work in three ways:
- **Paid by their parent organisation with support from LISP;**
- **Voluntary service;**
- **Paid for their services and inputs by groups and organisations that request their services.**

Community Technician giving new pump to farmers near stream

CTs are mobilised by partner organisations in their respective field activities in three ways. In the first case they are paid by LISP through their respective partner organisation for their work with users' groups for a certain number of specified days in the month. The number of days for visits to groups is fixed according to the type of crop. The CTs pre-plan their movements to each group earlier in the year. They are provided with formats to collect information while they visit each group and they have to report the outcomes during their meetings within their parent organisations. In addition, the CTs are also mobilised on a paid basis when the parent organisation needs them to perform special tasks.

In the second case, CTs are encouraged to visit their assigned groups voluntarily according to the need of the groups. As the CTs are usually local people belonging to the communities, it becomes their moral responsibility to look after the groups.

In the third case, CTs are requested by other groups and organisations, to which they have not been assigned, to conduct training or provide technical assistance. In this case they are paid by the concerned groups or organisations, that seek their services. The service rate is agreed between the CT and the concerned group or organisation.

As a temporary measure so that farmers can build their trust and confidence in CTs, Helvetas has paid CTs through their parent organisations. However, for longer-term sustainability, CTs are advised to charge beneficiaries a nominal fee according to their resources and the type of service provided. CTs are also encouraged to supply some basic inputs to the farmers at cost, plus a minimum profit margin.

Activities:

Criteria for selecting CTs are developed with partners.

1. **Selection of Resource Persons/Community Technicians** based on criteria developed with partners. Ideally, CTs should fit the following criteria:
   - Be members of the organisation (preference for SLOW)
   - Be aged between 20-50
   - Have an education, minimum of Class 10 pass
   - Should agree with the terms and conditions set by the parent organisation, such as commitment to serve the community, fulfilment of responsibility, etc.
   - Prioritise time for community service
   - Preferably have some experience in the related field
   - Preference for married women (when appropriate).

2. Cycle-based Training

- Product-specific (i.e., ginger, coffee, NTFP, and small livestock) training should follow the learning-by-doing principle and build on one skill/new idea at a time. LISP follows a cycle-based training process to ensure that CTs consolidate, apply, and share their new knowledge and skills:

  TO READ: CTs learn the theory through reading materials, handouts, and references.

  TO SEE: CTs observe new information, skills, technology, and so forth, through training demonstrations and exposure tours (to research centres, farms, etc.).

  TO DO: CTs apply new skills and knowledge on their own farm and in the broader community through their organisation.

  TO EXPLAIN: CTs disseminate their new knowledge and skills by teaching/ explaining to others. CTs in Helvetas' partner organisation are responsible for providing services to producer/IGA groups within a specified geographic location of the organisation's coverage area.

- During training, CTs within the group of CTs prepare a lesson plan on one topic and deliver it to the larger group.
- CTs are required to organise meetings within their community and provide technical advice with on-site coaching from LISP.
- During refresher training, CTs are given a topic and must deliver this individually to the relevant group.
- During this process, LISP observes and gives feedback to participants.

Cycle-based Training involves four simple phases:
- **Read**
- **See**
- **Do**
- **Explain**

3. CTs' Parallel and Ongoing Activities

- CTs develop model farms in their area/product of expertise.
- LISP facilitates CTs' linkages with related institutions such as research centres, line agencies, entrepreneurs, industries, etc.
- LISP provides support/input to local NGOs to develop an operational mechanism and policy to mobilise CTs' service and investment into their skills development.
- Preparation of technical handbooks that offer accessible and farmer-friendly technical information and guidance including feedback from CTs. LISP encourages CTs to include insights from their own experience and achievements in the handbooks.

Outcomes:

The development of CTs has so far been applied for ginger, coffee, and non-timber forest products (NTFP). A total of 25 CTs for ginger, 21 for coffee, and 16 for NTFPs have been developed in the last three years and mobilised by the Rural Economic Development Association (REDA), the District Coffee Producers Association (DCPA), and the Federation of Community Forest Users of Nepal (FECOFUN). The outcomes from the activities for developing the CTs are:

CTs have been mobilised for the following products:
- **25 CTs for ginger**
- **21 CTs for coffee**
- **16 for NTFPs**

For the individual CT:

- Skills development and technical competency in their area/product of expertise.
- Consolidation and confidence in new and old skills and practices.
- Ability to sell the service within and outside their organisation for additional income.
- Attract community support and recognition for their skill and service.
- Improve their own business — ability to initiate small enterprise development activities.

Individual CTs have developed:
- **Technical competency**
- **Confidence**
- **Ability to sell services**
- **Community support**
- **Ability to improve their own businesses**

Nepal ▶

Partner organisations have gained:

- **Internal skilled resource persons**
- **Institutionalisation of CT development**
- **Group formation expertise**
- **Increases in overall group production**
- **Information about and access to markets**
- **Linkages with local government & line agencies**

Community has gained:

- **Building of local knowledge and capacity;**
- **Access to services,**
- **Producers have bargaining power with middle men**

For the Partner Organisation

- A local and internal skilled resource person for the organisation's programme needs is more cost effective; a local is familiar with the needs of the area and members, and gradually reduces dependency on outside resources.
- The CT development programme is institutionalised within partner organisations — it is recognised as a key component of its organisational development (built into strategy, planning, budget, and investment).
- CTs have stimulated new group formation for income-generating activities.
- CTs have created and maintained the incentive among producing groups to adopt improved agronomic practices and increase overall production by:
  - Supplying the necessary inputs — new information and skills through regular technical training, support, and advice; seeds/saplings, organic fertilisers, veterinary treatment;
  - Providing market information and access; and
  - Collecting output and sale to markets.
- CTs have helped establish linkages between their parent organisation, local government, and respective line agencies. This has facilitated the promotion of their organisations' income-generating programmes, e.g. subsidies for production costs in sampling and transportation and access to new technologies and resources provided by line agencies.

For the Members/ Community

- Building of local knowledge and capacity: problems are identified and solved at the local level and reflect a growing capacity to address initiatives that use local human and material resources.
- SLOW (traditionally excluded from government development programmes) can access services, new information, and skills, thus participating in income-generating activities.
- Improving producers' power to bargain with middlemen. Through collective strength and improved products, farmers are now in a much stronger position to demand and secure fair and stable prices from middlemen.

Lessons, Challenges And Sustainability

In retrospect, some insights and conclusions can be drawn from the approach and activities. that reveal areas of major learning. This section also takes a closer look at the outcomes to determine how the strategic approaches adopted by the LISP programme enhanced the impact and sustainability of the work of CTs and their ability to reach the target SLOW community.

1. Targeting SLOW when selecting CTs.

- LISP had difficulty finding interested partner NGO members from the SLOW community that could meet the criteria of the role of Community Technicians. Poverty or a lack of education, experience, quality farmland, time,and understanding created distinct barriers for the SLOW population to qualify or commit to the CT development programme.

SLOW lack the opportunity to become CTs due to poverty or a lack of education, experience, and quality farmland.

- There are only five CTs from SLOW (all women). These CTs have generally performed well in providing technical support and sharing skills within their groups. They are also considered excellent role models in the community, inspiring other women to become more active in the decision-making for their family's income-generating activities.

- It was difficult to find more women interested and suitable to participate. Married women have responsibilities at home, and educated women (Class 10 pass) are often employed elsewhere. Traditional approaches to gender sensitisation and encouragement for women did not seem to work.

Gender sensitisation still needs to be addressed appropriately.

- More has to be done to attract participation from the SLOW community to adopt the role of CTs and to support their skills development and extension to the community. This can include flexible criteria for SLOW who do not fulfil some of the criteria, but have the right commitment, attitude, expectations, and willingness to learn and share knowledge. Intensive skills training, follow-up/backstopping support especially in teaching/facilitating groups, and greater consideration of practical needs must be addressed. For example, certain materials and inputs may not be affordable by the SLOW population.

The needs of the SLOW community are not being fully addressed.

Group paying Community Technician near good crop.

Nepal ▶

Dropouts remind Helvetas and its partners how important the selection process is.

- Dropouts remind Helvetas and its partners how important the selection process is. The CTs' responsibilities are considerable. Helvetas and partners need to look more carefully for favourable qualities such as attitude, expectations, and genuine commitment, and also a capacity to absorb and disseminate more complex skills and manage greater responsibilities.

2. Targeting SLOW when selecting communities which CTs serve

The targeting of the SLOW community for the formation of income-generating/producer groups has varied among partners, mainly depending on the specialised product:

Goat-raising does not require large amounts of land and a market is guaranteed.

- Participants of the ISK (in remote and poor VDCs of Palpa) in goat-raising programmes are mainly from SLOW/food deficient households. Goat-raising has proven an effective income generation activity as it does not require large amounts of land and it has a definite market. The revolving-fund loan scheme has also been successful so far. The key to success is the local, regular availability of technical and veterinary support. Affordable access to services provided by the CTs/Animal Health Workers has enabled farmers to minimise losses and secure a higher profit margin in the sale of goats.

Training, especially for women needs to be at the village level and on-site/farms.

- Ginger-producing groups organised under GiPP (Ginger Promotion Programme) have increased rapidly since the programme's launch under REDA in 1999. The 2001 production and sale figures indicate that farmers earn a decent income from ginger cultivation. Ginger can be harvested twice a year, and requires minimal technical input. SLOW participation in GiPP, however, has not yet reached its full potential. CTs need to adjust their services to meet the needs of SLOW farmers. Training needs to be given at the village level and on-site/farms at suitable times, especially for women. GiPP is now attempting to focus on SLOW for the formation of new groups and concentrate CT services to needy SLOW farmers.

Women in coffee production have been organised and resourceful in income-generating activities.

- Coffee has traditionally been a crop of wealthier/higher caste families, as reflected in most of the coffee groups in NCPA (Nepal Coffee Producers Association). There is a real opportunity for NCPA to deploy its CTs to target and support SLOW households. Women producer groups have demonstrated their initiative and competency in not only coffee cultivation. They have started other supplementary income-generating activities connected with NCPA. One women's group has launched a catering service for NCPA meetings and training. These women's groups have set an example for women to be organised, resourceful, and decisive in income-generating activities.

NTFPs can be cultivated in community forests and can benefit the SLOW population.

- The semi-commercial scale of NTFP (Non-Timber Forest Products) cultivation in Palpa is still only at a preliminary stage. NTFP, however, have the potential to reach the SLOW population, especially because NTFP can be cultivated in community forests/land. Another positive quality is FECOFUN's policy stipulating that FUG membership be 50% women, 50% men. The challenge, of course, lies in making the women active members rather than mere names on the registration list. CTs can play an additional and vital role in NTFP promotion and semi-commercial scale production, stimulating and supporting the active participation of SLOW. Much needs to be done to disseminate skills and knowledge to the FUGs. FUGs need to be convinced of the value of NTFP's and trained in NTFP cultivation. CTs need to mobilise FUGs to motivate, train, and support SLOW members. FECOFUN, LISP, and CTs must address these issues.

3. Training

Modular and cycle-based training has proven to be effective.

Modular and cycle-based training has proven to be effective for the development of CTs' within each organisation and their specialised "product"/activity. An effective learning process for adults and farmers is the discussion of one idea/skill at a time, practice in the field, and follow-up discussions of their experiences and outcomes.

4. Exposure Tours

As Nepal lacks technical expertise with products such as coffee and NTFP, demonstrations can be difficult to stage and find. For example, CTs involved in NTFPs were disappointed with their visit to government-run NTFP demonstration sites and nurseries, as there was not much to "see". Helvetas will need to continue to explore alternatives and include private channels that offer the exposure and visual experience that CTs require.

Most exposure tours have proven to be effective for building confidence, assessing old and new practices, and inspiring new ideas. For example, CTs involved in coffee were astonished to learn that Nescafe does not produce the highest quality of coffee. CTs learned that Nescafe adds chicory (a root plant additive to enhance flavour) and uses poor quality and/or discarded beans. Exposure tours have also enabled CTs involved in coffee to gain confidence in their organic practices by observing the benefits and advantages of permi-culture, which they had doubted was possible on their own farms.

Exposure tours need to be carefully planned —the timing/season of the visit, the skills and know-how of participants, and what is offered by the organisation being visited-need to be considered. Participants should attend an exposure tour after they have identified their problems and are serious about searching for solutions, options and new ideas. The visit should therefore be especially targeted to help solve the problems farmers have identified. This requires reliable information, responsiveness, and planning ahead by Helvetas and its partners. Opportunities may be lost if Helvetas and its partners cannot effectively plan and budget the time and location of the study tour to match the seasons and the needs and problems of farmers. The field follow-up after the tour is as important as the tour itself.

An optimal contribution from participants to defray the expense of the tour helps to ensure their active participation. Such personal investment motivates CTs to maximise the opportunities/potential an exposure tour can offer.

5. Dissemination of skills

A CTs' performance level, i.e. teaching skills to their assigned groups and to others, depends upon their education, maturity, public exposure, how they are perceived by the public, and their position/association within their organisation. All CTs have been able to serve their groups at least at the farmer-to-farmer level. Greater attention needs to be given to strengthening those CTs who are of a medium-level performance, to ensuring a continuing quality of service to group members, and to genuinely supporting CTs from the SLOW group.

Considerations when planning exposure tours include the season of the visit, the skill and know-how of participants, and what is offered by the visit.

The field follow-up after the tour is as important as the tour itself.

A CT's performance is influenced by her/ his education, maturity, and public exposure.

Community Technician using own field as a demonstration plot.

6. CT accountability to a Parent Organisation

The CT's accountability to a parent organisation has several advantages and challenges:

Advantages:

- Facilitates investment into CTs' development by the parent organisation.
- Allows the monitoring of CTs' work within the organisation to be carried out and institutionalised by the organisation.
- Ensures accountability of CTs to their community/groups through the organisation.
- Places CTs within an institutional framework in which they follow the policy and values of the organisation, thereby establishing norms that can be replicated by future CTs.
- CTs are responding to the organisation's needs and this relationship provides an opportunity for CTs to develop new ideas and initiatives.

Challenges:

- Planning and Management — If CTs are to work as part of a local organisation, effective and realistic planning is essential. The absence of such planning has occasionally been an obstacle for partners and CTs, and it has had a negative impact on the implementation of programme/activities. Parent organisations have sometimes placed demands on CTs or have changed plans at very short notice. Conversely, CTs need to prioritise their responsibilities and be realistic about their availability. They should bring their future plans to meetings and make detailed plans that take into account their interest, availability, and the needs of the organisation.
- Sufficient time is also required for effective planning. Rushing through planning sessions often creates the problem of overloading and overlapping. Not enough time is given to participants to properly voice their needs, availability, and interests.

7. Market-led and product-specific CTs: selling goods in the market with confidence

- The LISP approach is for CTs to respond to the real demands of the market. Ginger, coffee, goat-raising, and NTFP have each demonstrated their potential value and are in the initial stages of commercial growth in Nepal. In addition, local organisations have already taken the initiative of developing the potential of these products in Palpa. The selection of such products which are in demand gives not only the local organisations, but also CTs themselves, a real future, and encourages them to improve their expertise, linkages, and experience in their specific product.
- Perhaps more importantly, it means that beneficiary farmers can easily sell their goods in the market, and earn a good income.
- Product-specific CTs are able to market themselves as "experts" in their field and attract more (outside) work opportunities.
- Being product specific also enables the organisation to specialise and deliver quality services to its members, and attract more resources from local governments and related programmes of line agencies.

8. Developing technicians as catalysts for their organisation and in their own enterprise

- CTs are catalysts; they are exploring and implementing new initiatives for their organisation and for their own individual enterprise.

- For the organisation, CTs have been able to:
    - Attract and extend membership;
    - Carry out contract work for the organisation outside its working area — an earning opportunity for the organisation and CTs.
    - Initiate and manage new activities/plans such as resource centres, market information systems/signage, collection centres, technical handbooks, etc.

Sidebar:

Advantages of links between CTs and parent organisations (POs) are:

- **POs invest in CT's development**
- **POs monitor CT's work**
- **POs ensure accountability of CT**
- **POs place CT within an institutional framework**
- **CT responds to organisation's needs**

Challenges:

- **When a CT works as part of a local organisation effective and realistic planning is essential**
- **Sufficient time is required for effective planning**

CTs respond to the real demands of the market. CTs are product specific and sell themselves as "experts" in their speciality.

CTs are catalysts for their own organisations and for their own personal enterprises.

- <u>In their individual enterprises:</u>
    - CTs have taken the responsibility of providing the necessary inputs, and collecting the outputs and supplying them to the market/processors. While that supports the organisation's programmes and establishes access to resources and functional markets, it also provides CTs with the opportunity to market their specialised skills and earn an income, thus increasing their commitment to their role and responsibility. Some examples include:

      <u>Ginger/REDA:</u> Value adding by exploring new technologies, products, and markets for processing ginger. Two CTs are operating local ginger-processing units.

      <u>Goat-raising/ISK:</u> One CT has opened a medical veterinary shop and sells medical supplies and consultancy services to small livestock farmers.

      <u>Coffee/NCPA:</u> In addition to the supply of coffee saplings/seedlings produced in their nurseries, a number of coffee CTs have been used by NCPA to facilitate training in other districts — an opportunity to earn additional income and acquire experience and confidence.

      <u>NTFP/FECOFUN:</u> The development of local-resource-persons in NTFPs is only in its initial stages; CTs have not had the opportunity to really undertake individual enterprise initiatives. CTs are responsible for collecting NTFPs from their respective FUGs.

9. Sustainability

What do these lessons and challenges tell us about sustainability and self-reliance?
They suggest that sustainability has now become largely dependent on CTs' continuing ability to serve and satisfy their community.

Sustainability is largely dependent on CTs' continuing ability to serve and satisfy their community.

Helvetas' partner organisations have helped significantly by mobilising groups, raising awareness, facilitating linkages and access to resources, providing financial credit and information. CTs must continue to deliver the technical support demanded by the community if they are to sustain the demand for their services, and thus their benefit to the community. Sustainability, therefore, follows a cycle of challenges and opportunities:

1. To ensure there is demand in the market for the product
2. To increase production
3. To provide quality service
4. To upgrade and maintain skills
5. To manage responsibilities and time effectively
6. To satisfy customers/community needs
7. To thereby satisfy the parent organisation
8. To ultimately increase the sale of their service; employment within and outside the parent organisation, and the profit margin from their own production.

LISP's objective: to establish a local resource of skilled, experienced community technicians that can support farmers in their income-generating activities as well as develop the potential of their (organisation's) product and their own marketability in their area of expertise.

Nepal ▶

Future Directions

Improve the planning process; learn from experience.

- Support partners to improve their planning process, e.g. for organisational and institutional development, to learn from their experience and translate that into future action plans. This will improve the management of CTs.

- Upgrading skills and follow-up:
  - CTs need to keep up with technological changes. CTs and partners must continue to identify training needs and opportunities that will keep them abreast with technology, industry, and market changes.
  - Continue training programmes on a cost-sharing basis and look to increase inputs of CT and partner organisations.

CTs need to continuously upgrade their skills.

Farmers should be supported in value-added activities.

- Support farmers in value-added activities, including (action) research and linkages.

- Support CTs to continue quality service to meet the requirements of their members. This can include support to establish resource centres, farmer-friendly technical handbooks/materials, further training in facilitation/teaching, localised/village-based training of groups, demonstration plots/model farms, linkages to secure reliable supply of material inputs to distribute to farmers/producer groups, etc.

Support CTs to support their members.

Enable investment in new ideas, products and initiatives.

- Support the institutionalisation of saving-and-credit activities of producer groups to enable investment into new ideas, products, and initiatives.

Support marketing and information systems to manage the (expected) increase in production.
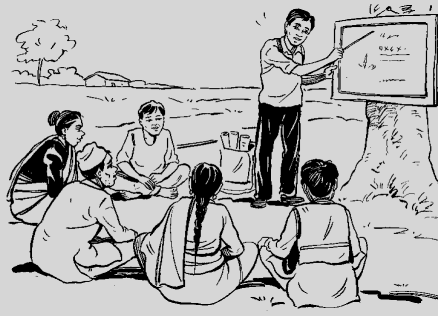
- Support the institutionalisation of monitoring mechanisms used by partners of CTs' work within the organisation so that partners can effectively evaluate their work and use the evaluation while considering future investment in CTs.

- Support marketing and information systems to manage the (expected) increase in production.

Improve SLOW targeting & understanding.

- Improve the targeting of SLOW members and understand their resource and psychological constraints.

A SLOW member, a woman, working as a Community Technician.

◀ **helvetas** Nepal ▶