

Adapting Local Agricultural Services to Federalized Nepal: 5



Palika Agricultural Planning

This is the fifth 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, institutional mechanisms and allocation of resources for agriculture at *palika* level. This Briefing Note turns to planning. The development and implementation of periodic and annual plans is fundamental to local government operations. In the early days of federalism, *palika* planning suffered from limited experience, knowledge and skills amongst elected representatives and available staff at local level. There was some confusion around the 7-step planning process (introduced by the Ministry of Local Affairs and General Administration, MoFAGA, for *palika* planning) that replaced the previous 14-step process in operation prior to federalisation. The *palikas* lacked the necessary data and information needed to prioritise their activities and budget (see Briefing Note 8), which meant that decisions tended to be influenced by political priorities rather than being based on facts. The initial lack of sectoral and periodic plans also resulted in piecemeal decisions rather than a systematic approach aiming towards a long-term outcome or goal.

What did the project do?

As part of its support to strengthen sectoral management for effective agriculture service delivery, Prayas supported *palikas* in organizing a logical planning process, based on a vision for various priority sectors. In the visioning process, Prayas first supported the *palikas* to source information from different quarters, to manage available databases and analyse the information they contained, and to commission sub-sectoral assessments and growth potential assessments. Based on the information thus obtained, Prayas then facilitated the more detailed planning by the *palikas*, in which they identified sectoral priorities and aligned them to sectoral and annual plans. Prayas also contributed to the development of a strategic sectoral plan. In emphasizing consolidated planning, the project intention was that all external development partner funds and internal revenue as well as the (federally-sourced) equalization and conditional grants would be brought into a single plan, allowing *palikas* to allocate their budget according to the requirements and sectoral priorities set in their periodic plans. To make the agriculture planning process as participatory and inclusive as possible, Prayas also ensured that the *palika* Agriculture Development Committees (PADC) were established and their capacities strengthened (see Briefing Note 4).

Key achievements

- All 61 *palikas* supported by Prayas have prepared their sectoral consolidated annual plans. Nine of these *palikas* have developed their periodic plans, while eight others have also formulated sectoral strategies.
- There is an increased realization among the *palika* elects and staff of the need to invest in agriculture and formulate a sectoral strategy; this has led to many *palikas* increasing their budgetary allocations for agriculture.

Challenges

It has been, and remains, a challenge for *palikas* to secure acceptance of consolidated sectoral planning amongst all development partners. As noted in other Briefing Notes, some development partners are skeptical of government planning processes - fearing a loss of control over their finances and activities and/or being unaware of all the implications of the new federal system. Such development partners prefer to trust long-standing partner NGOs or CSOs (civil society organizations) – which may indeed be doing good work, but which are not necessarily aligned in priorities or party politics with the *palika* and have their own interest in operating independently. Thus, despite the logical argument for sectoral coherence, avoiding the duplication of efforts and promoting accountability to citizens, some development partners remain unconvinced. The *palikas* nevertheless remain committed to the aim of consolidated planning. They also face challenges in avoiding duplication of agriculture sector activities organised through the provincial and federal governments. For example, the Prime Minister's Agriculture Modernisation Programme (PMAMP) has its own staffing and reporting system; there is no mechanism to harmonise its activities with *palika* agriculture sector planning. Given the limited revenue base and weak revenue generation and administrative capacities of *palikas*, most find it difficult to meet the budget projections derived from their periodic and sectoral plans. As a result, there is a high fiscal dependency on the federal government, which also puts into question the autonomy of *palika* planning.

Lessons learned

- Accurate information is essential for effective planning, implementation and monitoring; in this respect, *palikas* need to have their own monitoring system. This is increasingly recognized by *palika* elects and staff, and resources are being allocated accordingly (see Briefing Note 8).
- Periodic plans are essential for setting common goals and priorities, which should be agreed in a *palika* assembly. The establishment of a periodic plan also helps to promote intersectoral alignment and coherence between different priority sectors. Only once a periodic plan has been agreed should annual plans be made,

as annual activities should clearly contribute to the agricultural development goals set out in the periodic plan.

- Good planning fosters good fiscal governance – providing an incentive to *palika* officials to adhere to budgetary allocations and promoting accountability in *palika* operations.
- Planning must be realistic; it is important that *palika* elected representatives and staff recognize budgetary limitations and commit to undertaking what is feasible, according to agreed priorities.

“... we envisaged cardamom as a potential sub sector in promoting agro-enterprises, particularly in the upper belt of Molung, where the climatic condition is favorable for this high value crop. Farmers used to travel to other districts to purchase seedlings but were dismayed to find the seedlings drying out. We foresaw the need to produce quality seedlings locally and make them available to farmers. So, we included this in our plan and set out to promote private nurseries last fiscal year (2018/2019). Currently there is one nursery in ward 8 covering 7 ropanis of land [0.356 hectares] where the seedlings are ready for distribution. We have also trained a handful of farmers interested in nursery management, who will start soon. The technical guidance of Prayas has been fruitful ever since the planning phase of private nursery development ...”

Mani Raj Rai, Chair, Molung *gaunpalika*



“Prayas’ guidance in developing appropriate policies and plans were so fruitful for the palika to develop and implement relevant programs bringing farmers closer to palikas. Considering dairy as a potential sector, we developed focused programs such as artificial insemination, shed improvement etc. In recent years, farmers have been able to produce enough milk to meet demand within the palika and have also sent it to the factory in Biratnagar. Now, we aim to collaborate with private sector actors for value addition in milk products, such as making lassi, commercial packaging and marketing. I believe this can be done with better private-palika partnerships. During this pandemic, we have also been supporting farmers now and then in selling milk and vegetables from door to door in highly populated areas, army barracks etc by supplying transportation facilities from the palika. ...”

Baldav Chaudhari, Mayor, Triyuga nagarpalika



Photos:

(first page) Amrita Thapa in her well-planned vegetable farm. She actively participates in planning processes at the *Palika* and gains advisory services based on her needs.

(third page) Annual agriculture planning meeting facilitated by *Palika* Agriculture Development Committee in Dugeswor *gaunpalika*

(last page) Marin *gaunpalika* has incorporated promotion of improved technologies in its annual agriculture plan to boost agriculture commercialization.