

Visit to Tamale by the social development advisor to confer with coalition members - notably the project leader, research coordinator and social scientist - assess and contribute to progress. 07/06/2003 to 20/06/2003

Mike Morris

Background

The project, 'Improving household food security by widening the access of small-holder farmers to appropriate grain store pest management', was commissioned by the CPHP in its last and final round of calls. As such its identification and formulation was prescribed by a number of pressures associated with the forthcoming 'winding-up' of the CPHP, which together with other factors have inadvertently introduced some new and difficult challenges to the research processes and the delivery of output and development objectives.

In this last phase of its work the CPHP is looking to demonstrate meaningful impact and maximise the value of previous investment, which specifically means building on earlier work. In Ghana the prioritisation of potential projects was established by invited participants ranking the 7 thematic areas associated with the previous 45 CPHP projects undertaken in West Africa, according to 4 prescribed criteria: DFID's poverty reduction criteria; the establishment of viable coalitions of partners; the possibility of achieving meaningful outcomes in the remaining period (<2 years); and, coherence with national policies and priorities. The outcome of this exercise was inevitably skewed by the highly subjective (i.e. as understood by the participants, who did not for example appear familiar with the overarching PRSP initiative), sevenfold weighting of policy (cf. poverty, partners and possibility) and by the predominance of participants coming from organisations with existing preferences with respect to the thematic areas. The thematic areas selected for prioritisation were: improving processing and adding value (rice and bambara); expanded markets for cassava; and, minimising the use of synthetic pesticides. Implicit to the selection process was the predetermined association of given actors - the participants - with each thematic area (i.e. the on-going process would not be subject to competitive tendering). This project falls into the last category, minimising the use of synthetic pesticides, and is being led by MoFA's crop post harvest office/r in Tamale.

Together with the prioritisation of thematic areas, the CPHP sought to introduce local collaborators to a 'coalition approach' to research and technology promotion - 'a new direction for CPHP' - which seeks to emphasise partnerships and the overall project management framework to ensure a poverty focus. The acknowledged implications of this approach include: decentralisation; new role and responsibility for regional coordinators; shift in decision-making from CPHP UK to CPHP regional coordinators; shift to in-country managed projects; shift to a demand driven role for UK partners; new procedures for developing and approving projects; new resources for inception phases, coalition building etc.; evolving, negotiated agenda requiring shift to action research approach. Coalitions are systems for generating innovation (so collaborators - coalition members - were informed), and differ from other relationships (e.g. subsidiary, consultative) by being characterised by: a 'managing partner' (e.g. MoFA in this case) who facilitates negotiation and consensus building amongst partners, and ensures that process is iterative and responsive to change; and 'partners' who accept

collective responsibility for strengthening the capacity of the coalition, and are committed to joint ownership of the process and product. Local collaborators were also briefly introduced to 'livelihoods approaches' by the CPHP in the context of DFID's poverty agenda, and the terminology is prominent in the PM template.

Following a project development workshop, but somewhat contrary to the 'coalition approach', NRI was called upon to draft the concept note. This was premised on the belief that NRI's earlier lead role in CPHP projects and its greater proximity to CPHP made it more able or suited to compiling the proposal in the terms required, which were to ensure that the CPHP's new found principles (e.g. partnerships for innovation, livelihoods and poverty, pluralism, farmer participation and action research) would be encapsulated in the project proposal. Tactically, the process saved face all round - NRI remained with one finger in the CPHP pie; MoFA's shortcomings with respect to understanding of the new approaches and facilitating proposal development were sidestepped; and, the CPHP got a proposal which at least nominally reflected its new thinking - and ensured that a proposal would be commissioned. Strategically however, the delegation would generate further barriers to understanding and ownership of the project by the key in-country partners, and continues to impede if not inhibit local coalition learning.

An iterative e-mail process was used to share both the development of the concept note and project memorandum, but unfortunately there is little evidence to suggest that the coalition partners were able to, or chose to, engage in any depth in this process. Despite some degree of overlap between different agencies' agendas, existing structures, lack of suitable or sufficient organisational capacity, and limited or unperceived incentives, appear to have inhibited any full-blooded acceptance of collective responsibility. This cannot be much of a surprise for those who know the agents and agencies involved (and have not hitherto felt charged with improving local agencies' capacities or capabilities to develop innovation systems), and even the CPHP must realise that the introduction of their belatedly new found approach was made on a 'too little, too late' basis. While this does not augur well for the project, there may yet be a role for NRI in helping the CPHP optimise the salvage process, assuming there are still funds to be mopped up.

The project inception workshop, held in Tamale in February 2003, was attended by Rick Hodges for NRI. Mike Morris was unable to attend due to injury.

Objectives

The social development advisor's TOR include providing: social science backup generally; feedback to the project leader (PL), 'Prince' Andan Fuseine (MoFA) on the institutional aspects of project implementation and approaches to the promotion of storage technologies; specific support to the project social scientist (SS), Joyce Bediako (UDS); and quality control of social science reporting.

Objectives for this visit were:

a) to review project progress and processes generally and follow up on the inception workshop, and specifically:

- b) to follow up on field staff training and review progress on written materials
- c) to review progress on field staff stakeholder meetings
- d) to discuss mud-silo survey work with the social scientist, Joyce Bediako
- e) to discuss progress on alternative - innovative - promotion pathways
- f) to review progress on the development of promotional materials for field staff and farmers.
- g) to collect LGB risk warning data

Achievements

Flights between Accra and Tamale have recently been suspended. I therefore flew to Accra on the Saturday in order to be able to travel to Tamale on the Sunday and have a full working week with colleagues. After finalising these arrangements however, the project leader was required to be in Accra, Monday through Wednesday. This still meant that I could spend quality time with the full time research coordinator (RC), Sam Addo, and with the UDS social scientist, Joyce Bediako. Unfortunately the landrover had developed problems on route and departure for Tamale was delayed until the Tuesday, and sadly, though not unexpectedly, the project leader's mother died on the Thursday morning, which obliged office staff and partners to pay their respects and effectively ruled out quality time with the project leader.

Most of my work was thus undertaken with the research coordinator and/or with the social scientist and her two colleagues on the Wednesday and Friday. The project leader was available on the second Monday (before my departure on the Tuesday), when we were briefly able to review the visit objectives.

a) to review project progress and processes generally and follow up on the inception workshop

Project office and facilities: Sammy Addo, the full-time RC, is currently working out of Prince's office. Prince, who is MoFA's regional post harvest officer and enjoys good support from MoFA's regional director, is employed on a halftime basis as the PL. His office is thus currently the 'project office', albeit there is no visible evidence (e.g. project literature, maps etc) to suggest this beyond the office resources that have accrued over the years of NRI's involvement - now boosted with a new computer. Unfortunately these resources contribute to attracting a constant stream of visitors, which while bearing testimony to the esteem in which Prince is held, prohibits any quality interaction or concentrated group work. Some use was made of MoFA's conference room, but for various reasons this is not a good space for small group work.

Joyce Bediako (SS), who is usually based at UDS, has temporarily set up a computer in a second office to facilitate data input for herself and team members, Paul (?) and Idrissu Adam Haruna (Congo). The possibility of making this second office a dedicated project office and resource centre was discussed with the RC, who

expressed some enthusiasm. The absence of a working air-conditioner may ultimately determine what does or doesn't happen.

Project constituency: Although the PM refers to categories of poor people who will benefit from the project and quantifies the number of farmers groups (those in 20 villages) who will be impacted in the first year, no record of any systematic approach to setting out and differentiating the target areas appears as yet available. Similarly no systematic stakeholder identification and analysis at the project level has been undertaken, albeit partner NGO are down to hold meetings with village level stakeholders (see c) below and Activity 3).

Reporting: No communication strategy was developed at the inception workshop (despite being on the agenda), which means for example that reporting procedures have not been formally agreed by coalition members, and currently reporting appears to be serendipitous. The RC has recently requested coalition members to submit reports on their activities, but none as yet were available. On the plus side financial records (outside my remit) and those associated with specific scientific inputs are I understand being kept, but meeting reports are as yet only reflected in the PL and RC's notes. There is thus no official report on the inception workshop (apart from Rick Hodges' BTOR), albeit discrete items of information generated at the workshop do exist.

It was conceded that this omission would impede the sharing process and lesson learning amongst coalition members, and generally undermine the validity of project findings. It is essential to establish and inculcate the practice of documenting all project activities and processes and subsequently sharing these records.

The PL and RC must be invited and helped to effect this as soon as possible and to initiate the development of a wider communication strategy to address external relationship issues (e.g. dissemination, promotion, scaling up). The possibility of a project website was mooted by the SA, but given that at present it would probably best be effected by NRI personnel it may well serve to further reinforce the dislocation between the project rhetoric and reality. The RC was shown the [Diatomaceous Earths](#) website to which the SA has contributed.

Monitoring & evaluation: The PL and RC had very recently attended a further CPHP meeting in Accra in which the idea of a 'project inception report' was promoted. The inception report, which would replace the current quarterly report, included three sections: a review of the logical framework, an outline monitoring plan and framework, and a description of the institutional context of the project. A project inception report (PIR) was drafted by the PL and RC, but because the CPHP required this for a regional programmes management meeting in RSA on 2 June, other coalition partners were neither consulted nor involved in its development. Moreover feedback from coalition members on the PIR (after the event) did not appear to have been given a high priority, presumably because the M&E had been effected by and was seen as being required by an outsider (i.e. CPHP). The concept of participatory M&E (PM&E), premised on creating an opportunity for coalition partners to initiate, control and take corrective action, is not common currency.

Logframe: The drafting of the PIR was clearly a missed opportunity. Coalition partners (including in my opinion, both the PL and the RC) do not appear to be comfortable with the logic of the logframe, either in terms of the need for fit between the output objectives and their respective strategic activity sets or with respect to any particulars, and a further opportunity to develop understanding and ownership would clearly have been beneficial. A session on the nested objectives of the logframe, strategies and performance monitoring, was held on the Wednesday with the RC, SS and colleagues, and a framework developed (sub-logframe) to help partners better understand the strategic link between activity sets and output objectives, and the themes/principles underpinning the logframe (see: Output 1 sub-logframe objectives & strategies: prompts for thought).

Coalition relationships: No meeting with partners had been planned for my visit. I did however meet Sammy Arku-Kelly (supervisor), Dokurugu Salifu Ziba and Alhassan Amadu of OIC and Naresh Shukla of CARD, when they visited MoFA's office to deliver completed questionnaires for the SS and collect their payments; and Sulemana Stevenson was visited at the expansive CAPSARD premises which doubles with his home. From these limited interactions I was left with the strong impression that the level of engagement of the coalition partners - the three NGOs and the SS - remained in the 'task' fixation mode associated with subsidiary and/or consultative relationships in the CPHP coalition literature, and was not dynamically interactive to the strategic challenges inherent in the output objectives.

Given that the managing partner (as represented by the PL and RC), is essentially unfamiliar and untested in coalition process management (i.e. facilitating negotiation and consensus building amongst partners, and ensuring that process is iterative and responsive to change), this state of affairs is unsurprising. Rising to these challenges however does not appear (from my experience of them) to be beyond the experience and capabilities of Sulemana Stevenson and Naresh Shukla, of CAPSARD and CARD respectively, and I would certainly expect OIC and the UDS SS to be able to appreciate the need for a strategic rather than task based approach. If the project is to stand a chance of adding to the sum of existing knowledge and delivering against its objectives then the PL and RC are going to need significant support to introduce (including overcoming existing poor practices) and manage the required learning process approach.

Project approaches: A number of principles and/or approaches can be identified in the project literature (e.g. partnerships for innovation, voice and responsiveness, livelihoods and poverty, pluralism, farmer participation and action research etc). By and large these are not readily activated in the project processes, nor necessarily understood or subscribed to by members. Efforts are needed to broaden understanding of these principles and their relevance to and role in the project.

b) to follow up on field staff training (Activity 2) and review progress on written materials

Existing training materials (i.e. those already produced for earlier projects) have been circulated amongst field staff. Sam understood that Rick already had (or had been sent?) copies of these materials. The RC and SA discussed the possibility of reviewing and revising these earlier materials with the view of both improving them

generally and establishing some project identity or brand that might better facilitate promotion. Existing materials known to me are strongly if not exclusively technology, crop and/or pest focused. Thought must be given to their relevance to different farmers; and the set of materials might even be re-written to meet the needs of different target audiences?

c) to review progress on field staff stakeholder meetings (Activity 3)

As per a) above the partners have not yet grappled with stakeholder identification and analysis in the wider project context nor systematically developed the concept of target areas or mechanisms for identifying the sampling frame. Partner NGOs have been undertaking some pre-testing of questionnaires for the SS but it is unclear whether the different partners are using the same selection and interview protocol.

d) to discuss mud-silo survey work (Activity 5) with the social scientist, Joyce Bediako

The SA had previously shared two responses (discourse 1, discourse 2) with the SS and others to the proposed mud-silo and LGB questionnaires. These had invited broader consideration of the strategic issues associated with the two activities' respective objectives and had reflected upon farmer decision-making approaches in the literature (e.g. technology, pest, crop and livelihood approaches). Specific suggestions included mainlining farmers in the enquiry process (as stipulated by the PAC) by complementing the proposed socio-economic household surveys, which driven by ease of quantification tend to overly reflect researchers' priorities, with more participatory approaches that would take account of the diversity of rural communities and households (e.g. well-being ranking, technology time-lines, information linkage diagrams, matrix ranking of storage technologies).

To some extent specific ideas (e.g. group discussions on the evolution of storage structure types) have been incorporated or at least were referred to in the questionnaire, and an initiative was underway to attempt a wealth ranking exercise. The social scientist (and her team) was not however at ease with participatory work or familiar with its principles ("farmers provide the answers for the questionnaires so surely they are participatory?"), and seemed generally unconvinced in the value of more participatory ("villages here are largely homogeneous") and qualitative work in complementing her proposed household survey. Part of the dilemma would appear to derive from the 'commissioning' of this task: the SS felt that she was doing what had been asked of her by the coalition as prescribed at the inception workshop, which without any (available) written record is difficult to corroborate. Checking now whether the survey questionnaire would deliver against the output objectives or encompass common denominators associated with other project outputs was felt to be stepping backwards. The scope of the survey work and deriving appropriate sampling protocols appeared to be left to the partner NGO and their individual fieldworkers. This was remarked upon but felt by the SS to lie outside the tasks assigned her. This would not concur with my interpretation of the SS's working agreement, however improving the situation will almost certainly require upgrading the performance of the managing partner together with lending more hands-on support to the SS team, who despite the above appeared interested and willing to learn.

NB: OIC field workers referred to an earlier baseline survey that they had undertaken, a copy of which could be obtained from the M&E officer.

e) to discuss progress on alternative - innovative - promotion pathways (Activity 6)

The RC indicated that some thought had been given to working with and through junior secondary schools, whose students go home daily, and with the vocational schools which include many female students. The SA would suggest that a thorough stakeholder identification process would help in the identification of potential pathways. And following discussions with Janet Adama Mohammed of ET&CC, it seems that organisations involved in HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns, for example, might be contacted. As arguably the most serious cross-cutting issue, HIV/AIDS is being mainlined by the government across all sectors. Exposure to those more dynamic agencies involved in this campaign should provide opportunities both for operational lessons learning and hopefully for promoting improved storage systems and increasing household security.

f) to review progress on the development of promotional materials (Activity 7) for field staff and farmers

The possibility of elaborating the maize storage training game first developed by Julia Compton, and with which Sam was involved, was discussed. However, as per the training material for field staff, no recorded initiatives exist as yet in this area.

g) to collect LGB risk warning data (Activity 4)

The RC supplied trapping and climate data, which was delivered to Rick Hodges. The SS was also developing a second household survey questionnaire which was intended to provide: “a situation analysis of production and storage practices and systems, of individual men and women farmers, groups of farmers, and communal storage users, to identify indicators leading to the identification and selection of the right group of farmers and beneficiaries of the LGB intervention programme”. The proposed questionnaire, which bears much in common with the mud-silo questionnaire, would benefit from critical examination by the coalition partners.

Business Opportunities Identified

Janet Adama Mohammed of the Ecumenical Training and Consultancy Centre, who lives opposite the Baobab guest house, and was at Reading with Mike Morris, is an extremely capable trainer (e.g. in project planning and facilitation, gender, PRA tools, PM&E etc) and would make an excellent local partner in a range of potential activities. She is presently facilitating the peace process between the Dagomba leaders and the Government.

Given the strategic weaknesses in the CPHP commissioning process (see background) and mounting evidence to suggest that the CPHP will struggle to realise its aims - the maximisation of impact from their earlier investment – from projects like this, there is an opportunity for NRI to provide additional inputs to the CPHP. This idea has since been discussed with Tim Donaldson, who suggested Mike Morris meet up with

Andrew Barnet (currently advising the CPHP on innovation systems) and hinted at the possibility of some additional resources being available.

Mike Morris

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