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Added value of inter-project dialogue: a 'Link Project' on goat keeping in Africa and India.

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Introduction Research and development programmes in the UK's Department of International Development (DFID) are normally executed through a number of individual projects undertaken by contractors from one or more institutions. Within projects, there is increasing emphasis on ensuring participation of all stakeholders, from project initiation to completion, and also on identifying pathways for disseminating project outputs. Such emphases are appropriate to ensure that projects are demand-driven and have outputs that are adopted, with a positive impact. Between-project coordination, to achieve the programme goal, is undertaken by programme managers. However, inter-project dialogue has received relatively little emphasis to date. The objective of the 'Link Project' described in the present summary was to allow dialogue between several on-going projects funded by DFID's Livestock Production Programme with a common theme of improving the livelihoods of resource-poor goat keepers. It was hypothesised that inter-project dialogue would stimulate, within projects, additional activities and dissemination pathways.

Activities Three projects supported by DFID via Natural Resources International Limited, each primarily focussed on one country, India, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, had closely related objectives. The projects, although having different emphases, had the common theme of investigating the use of plants high in tannins to increase productivity of small ruminants (goats). The India-focussed project had the specific objective of easing seasonal feed scarcity for small ruminants in semi-arid crop/livestock systems through a process of participatory research. The Tanzanian project's main aim was to investigate if feeding locally available plant material rich in tannins could reduce parasitic burden in small ruminants and hence improve their productivity. The project focussed on Zimbabwe had as its main aim increasing the productivity in smallholder owned goats through the feeding of *Acacia* and other tree fruits. The Indian and the Zimbabwean projects were both specifically feeding pods. Each of these projects had wider applicability than to the country of their primary location, particularly to other semi-arid regions. This wider applicability needed to be disseminated. In addition, the three projects together had expertise in nutrition, participatory research and animal health, with the degree of expertise varying considerably between the projects. All three projects had a project leader located in the United Kingdom with larger teams located in the target regions. Members of the teams in the target regions were also receiving training in research and development methodology, in two cases this included scientists registered for higher degrees. These three projects, therefore, were an ideal platform to test the hypothesis given above.

An initial meeting took place as a satellite to another workshop on participatory research on goat systems held in Udiapur, India, during September 2000. Representatives of all three projects were present with the majority coming from those located in the target region of India. The meeting was directly associated with the Indian project, but members of the other teams presented their objectives and their current and proposed methodology, in addition to outlining their achievements. The three project teams then visited the field sites associated with the project. An informal workshop was then held where each of the projects was examined, including the problems and challenges they were facing. The main beneficiaries from the meeting were the members of the teams working in the target countries. Improvements in the methodology used in all three projects resulted. Since the meeting members of the three teams have kept in touch with each other. Newsletters have been published by E-mail. The newsletters have prompted other groups to ask for details of the three projects.

The success of the first meeting prompted the extension of the link to include more groups, particularly from other countries in the semi-arid regions, in order to increase dissemination of the achievements of all the projects. A coordination meeting was, therefore, held at the Sokoine University of Agriculture, Morogoro, Tanzania in January 2002. Delegates from 9 projects focused on India, South Africa, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nepal, Zimbabwe and Tanzania attended. In addition local scientists and extension workers participated. The M.Sc. and Ph.D students from Sokoine's Department of Animal Science and Production also took part. Approximately 30 delegates attended. The theme for the meeting was browse plants and small ruminant productivity, i.e., broader than the Udiapur workshop. The meeting included overviews of goat production in Tanzania and intestinal parasites in small ruminants in Tanzania. Experiences of participatory development and research in Tanzania were also described to complement field visits to actual examples of a completed project that had enhanced the livelihoods of under-resourced goat farmers and to a new project that was just being started. Presentations were made describing the achievements of, and more importantly, the future plans of all of the projects represented at the meeting. The meeting also gave the manager of the DFID Livestock Production Programme the opportunity to outline the programme's future and current objectives. In addition, two especially invited scientists from the University of Dar Es Salaam reviewed the potential of using locally grown plant extracts as therapeutic agents both for animals and man. A

report was made on the IAEA meeting in Brazil (November 2001) on the 'Use of nuclear and related techniques to develop simple tannin assays for predicting and improving the safety and efficiency of feeding ruminants on tanniferous tree foliage'. Plenty of time was allowed for discussion, both in the formal sessions and informally. All delegates were strongly encouraged to stay in the same hotel. The delegates concluded that they wished for an e-mail contact list to be established so that they could remain in contact. Other interest groups have been added to the list. The primary output from this second meeting was numerous cases of enhancement of the individual projects. For example, simple but reliable methodologies for examining intestinal parasite burden in small ruminants were described. The designing of meaningful nutritional trials also featured highly. The need to ensure that the studies undertaken were of direct practical relevance to the target region was emphasised. Methods of ensuring this were examined. The proceedings will be published both electronically, on a specially created WWW site, and in hard copy. The WWW site will also have links to other relevant WWW sites and include news from other projects. It is hoped that the web site will also have facilities for a discussion forum. The delegates requested that these link meetings should be continued.

The next link meeting is likely to be held in Kenya in 2003. This meeting will be widened and representatives from local NGOs will be invited and it is hoped to invite the leaders of local smallholder groups to attend part of the meeting.

Conclusions The results of the present 'Link Project', following the two meetings held to date, clearly support the hypothesis, in that additional activities and dissemination pathways have been promoted. The budget for the present 'Link Project', at only 8 % of the total for the three projects initially linked, represents a small outlay in relation to the large added value generated.

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