

**Impacts of an Indo-Swiss Research Partnership Project**  
**A Southern and a Northern Perspective**  
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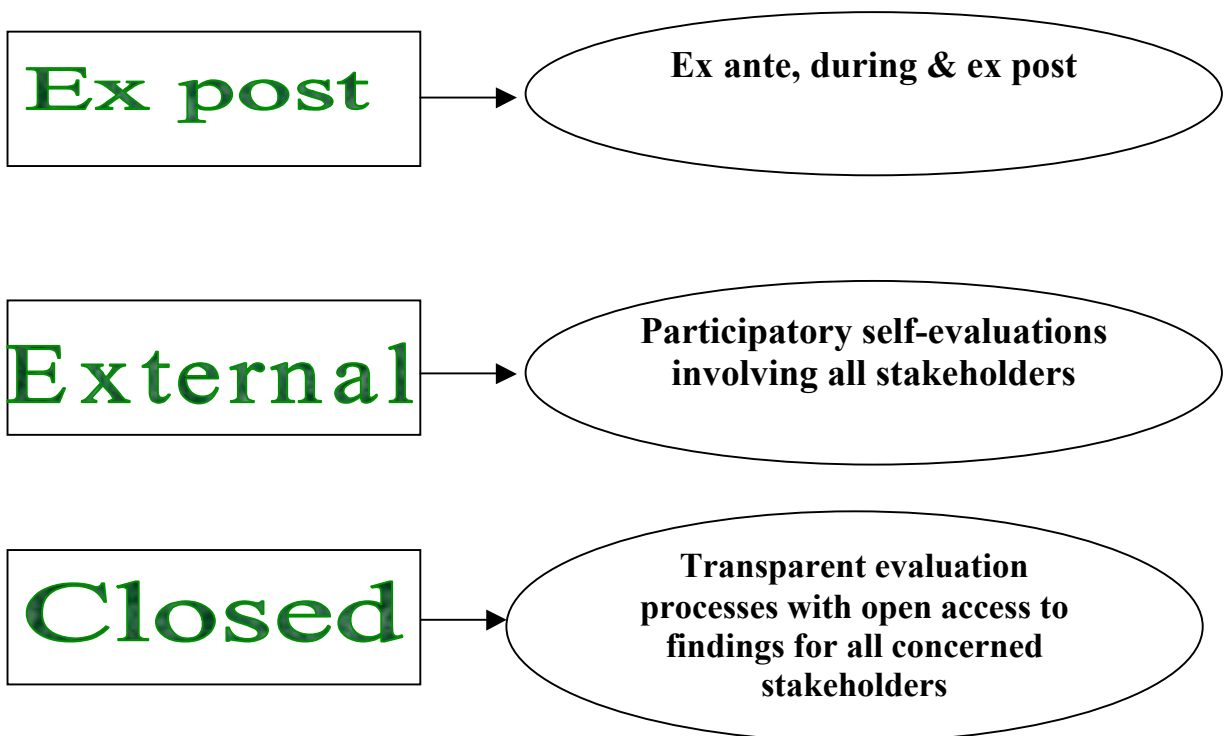
# Impacts of an Indo-Swiss Research Partnership Project A Southern and a Northern Perspective

## 1 <sup>1</sup>The Paper

This paper assesses impact of the RLS research partnership in India, and draws lessons for design of international research collaborations that have a greater chance of creating beneficial impact on different research partners, especially those whom the research seeks to benefit in the end. It also contains reflections and recommendations for methodology of conducting impact assessments of research partnerships, based on lessons learnt from the process of conducting the impact assessment, in earlier studies and the current one

## 2 An Era of New Paradigms

The past two decades have seen a shift in the dominant paradigm of north-south partnerships. This change is also reflected in the chosen evaluation approaches related to such partnership projects, both with respect to research and to development objectives.



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Previously evaluations typically tended to be donor driven, based on a concern about whether the funds had been used for the purposes intended, and in an efficient and effective manner. They were often done at the instance of the Northern donor alone, with a pure donor perspective, and mainly after project termination. This narrow focus has however expanded now, to cover not only ex post analysis but also the monitoring of the project during its lifetime. In fact the current trend is to introduce a range of evaluation and monitoring instruments based on strategies, methods, processes and systems defined or set up right from the beginning of a project and lasting even beyond its termination. The monitoring system can help to answer a variety of important questions in view of increasing efficiency and effectiveness of projects like e.g.:

- Is the project well on the way to achieve the intended objectives and if no why? Do project processes need to be changed?
- What has to be undertaken to make sure that the project will achieve the objectives agreed upon? Do the objectives of the project need to be adjusted or changed?
- Has the context changed since the beginning of the project and if yes how does this affect the activities? Are there new constraints not envisaged earlier?
- Do institutional capacities of project implementers and/or other stakeholders need to be enhanced? Does the partnership process need to be supported by the external agencies in any way?

The ways of conducting evaluations have considerably changed, too - from externally conducted assessments towards more self-evaluations and more participation through the involvement of all relevant stakeholders. Previously assessment and evaluation reports used to be typically confidential while now the trend is to open up and to share the results of these analysis in view of improving subsequent activities and/or to secure the ownership necessary for changing attitudes or behaviours.

This paradigm shift in evaluation is rooted in the concern for more equity, transparency and accountability, as well as sustainability and replicability of good research and development partnerships. It can be considered as the prerequisite for any evaluation and consequently for all impact assessments, too. This is a domain which is still poorly addressed and where more concrete efforts for assessing the long-term effects or the impacts of such collaborative research projects have to be made.

### **3 Conceptual Framework for Impact Assessment**

In keeping with the paradigm shifts, it is crucial to articulate WHY impact assessments of north-south research partnerships are important, FOR WHOM they are performed,

WHAT are the aspects studied, WHO conducts them and HOW. These questions are critical as they help to understand the driving forces behind such assessments.

WHY: Impact assessments are taken up to check whether a certain project or programme did contribute to the overall goal(s) and whether it influenced other domains in addition to those expected and in what way. This analysis goes well beyond checking whether the promised outputs or the intended outcomes were achieved or not. Understanding why some expected impacts did not manifest or why unexpected or unintended impacts happened is most useful to improve future programs or projects.

FOR WHOM: Despite the clear trend towards a participatory approach of most kind of evaluations it remains important to be transparent for whom such analysis are being carried out. Impact assessments are of importance for decision makers to decide upon continuation of support with regard to the overall goal(s) set.

WHO: Most agencies still tend to appoint external consultants to conduct impact assessments. While monitoring and ex post evaluations can easily be done by those directly involved in the projects or programmes impact assessments require more distance and a longer time perspectives. Self-evaluations are not yet the norm but gain in importance. Most of the appointed external consultants work according to terms of reference (TORs) defined by the funding agency alone. They conduct the analysis using the externally given indicators. However, where external teams use consultative processes and work as facilitators for exchange of information and experiences, the processes and results tend to be more grounded in field realities. The more participatory approaches also increase the acceptance for criticism and the readiness to modify habits or perceptions by those directly involved.

HOW: Surveys and questionnaire administration were common used methods for most evaluations. However, they can lead to biased results, as they don't allow for deepening certain responses. Nowadays the methodologies used are increasingly of participatory nature. Experience has shown that the most valuable assessments are those that combine semi-structured open-ended interviews and focus group discussions with detailed case studies. Processes that include sharing of preliminary results enable to validate statements made at an early stage and the common understanding and endorsement of the final report.

WHAT: It is important that expected and intended impacts are formulated when designing a project or programme including the definition of meaningful indicators. When carrying out the impact assessment it is equally important to watch out for unexpected and/or unintended impacts. This requires a broad understanding of the whole context in which a programme or project takes place. The appropriate indicators have to be defined accordingly.

### 3.1. Impact Indicators

Interpreting impact of research partnerships is rendered particularly difficult by the fact that different stakeholders view and understand the term ‘impact’ in different ways. They interpret the research context differently; they set different indicators, and assign different priorities to a given set of indicators.

Every project usually has a specific set of hypotheses or questions. Ultimately this is also true for expected or intended impacts. They describe the road map by which impacts are expected to take place. Once this road map is clear, indicators can be defined; they are usually highly project specific. They can be categorised in different ways. The classification followed in this study is based on the impact matrix with domains (A-D) developed by a group of persons and institutions coordinated by the Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with developing countries KFPE (2000). The matrix has been extended by introducing a fifth domain (E) dealing with aspects of partnerships.

Output of Research Partnership	Utilisation of Outputs/Outcomes	Effects	Benefits/ Drawbacks	Impacts
A) Improved knowledge and changed attitude of researchers				
B) Increased institutional and individual research capacity				
C) Policy relevant research results				
D) Application and user relevant research results				
E) North-South Partnership Processes and impacts				

This basic matrix has been used and further elaborated to assess the impacts of the RLS project in India (Rural Livelihood Strategies). The impact indicators used for the analysis are described within this basic matrix with some adaptations of the matrix itself.

## 4 The RLS Case Study

### 4.1. Background and Objectives of the Research

In the early 1990s, a research effort emerged from a sector strategy formulation by SDC (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation) for sustainable land-use in semi-arid areas in India. The aim was to conceptualise its development assistance in order to contribute significantly and effectively to India's own development efforts for land-use improvement. The research was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (under Module 7: Environment and Development of the Priority Programme, "Environment"). The **goal** of the applied research was to contribute to the design and implementation of innovative development approaches by investigating natural resource management as a process of strategy development, taking into account the farm communities' perceptions of their livelihood systems and their interaction with the local economic and political environment. On this conceptual basis, the project identified and formulated policy changes to achieve a more effective participatory development of semi-arid areas. The project was based on the understanding that land use represents only one dimension of a much wider concern for sustainable livelihoods, thus the frame of reference was one of rural livelihood systems. (Premchander 2001)

A review of the failures and successes of conventional development approaches made it evident that these programmes had not taken sufficient account of livelihood strategies of farm households and communities. Furthermore, they neglected the fact that a farmer's overriding concern was the need to assure a sustainable livelihood. Instead, these conventional programmes for improving land-use largely focussed on the sustainability of single resources like water, forest, land and pastures along un-integrated departmental lines. Against this background, the action oriented Indo-Swiss collaborative research on Rural Livelihood System and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in semi-arid areas of India was conducted between 1994 and 2001.

The research was based on the following assumptions:

- a) Farmers and their communities have developed culture and location specific perceptions of sustainable land-use. Yet "land-use" represents just one, however important, dimension of a much wider concern by farm communities to achieve sustainable livelihoods and to constantly adapt their survival strategies towards this goal.
- b) Strengthening the self-help capacity of farmers towards adopting more sustainable land-use practices, thus, calls for a conceptual focus on sustainability perceptions and strategies by farmers and farm communities, in the context of their prevailing livelihood systems.

With the above considerations as the backdrop, the collaborative research project approached questions of sustainable management of natural resources in the reference frame of rural livelihood systems. This research was conducted in the semi-arid regions

of Gujarat and Karnataka, by three partner institutions in India, and one partner organisation in Switzerland. These organisations were:

- a) Sampark, an NGO working for poverty alleviation and women's empowerment, based in Bangalore,
- b) The Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC), an academic institution based in Bangalore,
- c) The Institute of Rural Management, Anand (IRMA), an academic organisation, based in Gujarat, and
- d) The Post-Graduate Programme on Developing Countries (NADEL) of The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich (ETHZ), in Switzerland.

**The Process of the Research:** During the exploratory phase (1994-1996) of this study, these institutions attempted to design a research study that would facilitate a better understanding of how farmers make decisions on the use of natural resources in the contexts of their livelihood systems. Each research institution and team went on to interpret livelihood systems with a different perspective. The bringing together was done after the first year of research.

Ruedi Hogger, a representative for the Northern Partner, NADEL-ETHZ, introduced a more integrated and holistic approach to understanding RLS, called the Nine-Square Mandala concept. This concept was developed into a framework after many discussions among the researchers about the nature and complexity of livelihood systems.

During the field research component of the project (1996-1999), various researchers conducted research on different aspects of the livelihood systems using the Nine-Square Mandala framework, leading to the adoption of a more holistic view of livelihood systems. General principles followed by all partners: Participatory at least to some extent and gender sensitivity as an essential element of research. The different studies done are included in the accompanied box.

#### Topics Studied

- a) Emerging Rural Leadership and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources
- b) Understanding Livelihood as Complex Wholes
- c) Reality and Reflections: Gender and Leadership for Sustainable Natural Resource Management
- d) Role of Non-Economic Motivation
- e) From 'Marey' to Market: Changing Faces of Rural Livelihood System
- f) The Threshing Floor Disappears: Rural Livelihood System in Transition
- g) Appropriateness of Agriculture Technologies
- h) The "Real Realities" of Life: Exploring Rural Livelihood Systems from a Gender Perspective
- i) Core Issues in Agrarian Economy and Society of Karnataka
- j) Rural-Urban Linkages
- k) Grass-Ploughed Field
- l) Role of Non-Economic Motivations
- m) Participatory Research on Rural Livelihood: Sharing Research Findings for Local Empowerment



## 4.2. Impact Indicators Used in the case study

Output of Research Partnership	Output indicators and Utilisation of Output (Examples of questions)	Effects/ Benefits/ Drawbacks (examples of questions)	Impacts	Process Indicators (to the right end)
A) Improved knowledge and changed attitude of researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has there been an increased use of participatory research techniques?</li> <li>Have there been publications in national and international journals etc.? If yes of what kind, by whom (authors)?</li> <li>Have there been in-house publications?</li> <li>Have conferences been attended and if yes where, by whom, what for?</li> </ul> <p>Has new research been initiated / stimulated on similar topics?</p>	<p>Researchers orientations:</p> <p>Has there been a shift from scientific to a more people/end user centred orientation?</p> <p>Have the concerns of end-users better been incorporated?</p> <p>Recognition of end-users being researchers in their own right</p> <p>Production of knowledge:</p> <p>Is the design of the project based on scientific and indigenous knowledge?</p> <p>Does the knowledge produce both serve end users and researchers?</p>	Increased coverage of research topic in publications (problem with cause effect relationships, attribution factor is important here, the larger trend may be more dominant than the research project, and the research may be a response to the dominant paradigm change than a leader in the change)	
B) Increased institutional and individual research capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of PhDs/ Masters</li> <li>Number of publications in northern/southern journals</li> <li>Invitations to make contribution to other research and development projects</li> <li>Have new training programmes been developed</li> <li>Have new courses been introduced?</li> </ul>	<p>Institutional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved infrastructure</li> <li>Better salaries</li> <li>Supervision of researchers</li> <li>New and improved courses introduced</li> <li>More project researchers involved in teaching</li> <li>Have more research funds be raised?</li> <li>Staff turnover (on project, generally in the institution?)</li> </ul> <p>Individual:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Movement of researchers in the institutional hierarchy (from research assistant to faculty)</li> <li>Movement of researchers to better positions in other research or development institutions</li> <li>Local consulting firms established by former researchers</li> <li>Invitation to international teams, recognition of expertise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishment and maintenance of a critical mass of researchers</li> <li>Access to new projects</li> </ul>	
<b>Output of</b>	<b>Output indicators and Utilisation</b>	<b>Effects/ Benefits/ Drawbacks(examples of</b>	<b>Impacts</b>	<b>Process Indicators (to the</b>

<b>Research Partnership</b>	<b>of Output (Examples of questions)</b>	<b>questions)</b>		<b>right end)</b>
C) Policy relevant research results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are issues relevant to end-users addressed in the research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was there a shift in project goal towards development orientation</li> <li>• Was any positive action taken towards communicating research results to influence policy change</li> <li>• Researchers consulted by policy think tanks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any changes in legislation or policy brought about as a result of research recommendations</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Was there an effort to discuss with end users and include issues relevant for policy change in the research agenda</li> </ol>
D) Application and user relevant research results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any projects introduced within the institution or any other partner, for development action?</li> <li>• Was action at field level facilitated in any way</li> <li>• To what extent have end-users been involved in the research activities? (→ Leadership imaging)</li> <li>• Have there been end-user friendly events, meetings etc.? If yes how many, where, when</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local initiatives for research projects</li> <li>• End-user perspectives about the topics and methods used in research</li> <li>• Did end users ask for more knowledge, technical advice, resources (finance), changes in policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of research results in design and planning of development programmes</li> <li>• Limited impact on actions of government, development institutions, and people</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Was an effort made to share research results with the user group? What was the form of sharing, through brochures, workshops, meetings</li> <li>2. Language used for such sharing,</li> <li>3. Did people's analytical capacity improve; did they make major shifts in their attitudes, understanding?</li> </ol>
E) Partnership Indicators ((to be removed at the end of the matrix))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where is the ownership of products, e.g. copyrights of publications, intellectual property rights, in the north or south</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dependences: fundraising tasks concentrated in the north (both positive and negative aspects of this, not only negative)</li> <li>• Development of stable long term research partnerships</li> <li>• Mutually signed document about the partnership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better intra-institutional team formation processes and systems introduced</li> <li>• Increased/or reduced networking between different national level institutions, and its impact on duplication of research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deciding on research agenda, process and who had major role</li> <li>• Design of research jointly done by both southern and northern partners</li> <li>• Equitable distribution of financial resources (costs as well as profits of the project)</li> <li>• Who did the budgets and how were the budgets finalised</li> </ul>

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shared criteria for selection of partners, and inclusion of new research proposals and partners</li><li>• Conflicts and conflict resolution among partners</li></ul>
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The impact matrix was shared with the RLS partners in India, and then interviews were conducted with three researchers from IRMA, three from Sampark and two from ISEC. The findings presented are a synthesis of these interviews.

## **5 Impacts Perceived from the South Perspective**

### **5.1. Knowledge and Attitudes**

#### **5.1.1 RLS Concept**

The Mandala framework was developed during the RLS research project. This framework needed to be operationalised at the field level. The operationalisation has happened in different ways through different organizations. IRMA worked with an NGO and the government in Andhra Pradesh and developed the LEAP framework, which helps to make an action plan at the household level. They also found that it could be used for planning and monitoring, and for developing baseline information on different livelihoods aspects. The livelihoods analysis developed used quantitative as well as qualitative techniques, and was done at small group level, and also aggregated to give plans for *mandal* level (a group of several villages, that come together in an administrative block called the *mandal*) work.

ISEC used the Mandala for livelihood studies done for two funding agencies, and these was very well received by the clients.

Sampark used the tool during the research in analysing the research methods and the findings. After the project, the framework was used in another study of the livelihoods of *devadasi* (women who are inducted into a form of prostitution with social and religious sanction), and again in the SOLES research project (in partnership with CDE, University of Berne) for a PhD research that is part of the project.

The framework has now found flexible use not only among the RLS partners, but also among the SDC-funded NGOs who were trained on the concept through a workshop in Punganur, Andhra Pradesh, with 25 participants, mostly from partner NGOs. At the end of the workshop, participants designed action plans for applying the tool. These ranged from using it for understanding livelihood systems of the project participants, planning, selecting beneficiary households, identifying project inputs, and evolving monitoring indicators, to analysing impacts of given development interventions. They each reflected the versatility of the Mandala framework, since it is compatible with and can be applied in conjunction with different organisational approaches to sustainable livelihoods.

The impact of the concept would have been higher if the planned book had been published. This is now under process and is likely to be published by May/ June 2003.

Meanwhile, SDC India has ordered some re-prints of the papers published by RLS project, so that they can be circulated to organisations engaged in livelihood improvements.

### **5.1.2 Other Concepts/ Premises**

One of the researchers in IRMA developed the concept of vulnerability of families as a constraint for technology adoption.

Sampark worked on leadership imaging and developed it as a learning tool for people to select leaders and to hold them accountable.

### **5.1.3 International Exchanges**

A list of international exchanges that took place through workshops attended by researchers from different institutions is given in Annexure 1.

The general consensus was that these forums provided space for articulation and sharing of the research, and for thinking about it in a new way. The researchers received useful feedback and encouragement at these workshops. Though such workshops enabled transfer of knowledge between Indian and participants from other countries and exchange between of lessons between farmers and development agencies, they did not really establish a process that could have benefits at end-user level.

### **5.1.4 Training Programmes**

IRMA's research has resulted in several intermediary publications like workshop reports, teaching notes, research notes and case studies. An existing course in our post-graduate program in rural management at IRMA was redesigned to include several topics related to rural resources, production systems and livelihoods. As a part of imparting practical experience, field-visits to research sites and NGOs were organized for the students. Our faculty and students also had opportunities to interact with Swiss partners in several ways including seminars and lecture-sessions.

Researchers from the RLS project are invited as resource persons on topics like Rural Livelihoods, Occupational Diversification, etc, for several training programs and lectures by institutions like Centre for Environmental Education, Ahmedabad, University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad, Sadguru Water and Development Foundation, Dahod, among others.

### **5.1.5 Attitudes**

All researchers of the RLS project felt that they had developed greater confidence in micro and ground level research, and had established clearly for themselves the value of qualitative research.

## 5.2. Individual Capacity Building

All researchers on the project felt that they had significantly increased their own research capacity during the RLS research collaboration.

Two researchers from IRMA felt that they had started doing innovative work as part of the RLS project. They chose unusual topics for research, did not find support from the peers in the project, but persisted. They later found positive feedback during their presentations at national and international conferences. They have, since, continued to do trans-disciplinary research and one of them has also been invited to write papers about the topic and methodology in books.

Two Sampark researchers said they had really understood and learnt to conduct a high standard of qualitative research. They learnt about terms in research, research methods and learnt as well as developed new concepts. They developed greater gender awareness themselves, were more sensitised to field issues and learnt a lot about the topic of research, i.e. gender, leadership and natural resource management. They built up capacities to do independent research, this has been recognized by external agencies too, and they have had opportunities to head/coordinate research projects.

“ I did not open up in the Forum meetings in the early years. The size and composition of the Forum was daunting, I could not talk in the presence of senior faculty members. By the time we had CONTICI workshop in 2000 I was able to express my views, ask questions, and then I went to an international workshop and presented my experiences. There has been a great development of my personality during this project.”  
- A researcher

One researcher from ISEC said that his own capacity was built significantly by the project. He was impressed by the fact that northern partners brought an attitude of learning from the field level, and focussed on people and their perceptions. He received a lot of encouragement and recognition from the northern partners. Earlier, he understood livelihoods only as “occupation and income earning” but then began to understand the other dimensions of people’s livelihoods. He began to apply and gain expertise in PRA applications and in using visual aids for research and communication. This has been recognised, too, and he has been invited to teach/ advise on these subjects, by other departments within ISEC and also from external organisations. He has been able to transfer his own people orientation, developed and refined during the RLS project, through such interactions.

### **5.3. Institutional Capacities**

Each of the three southern research partners developed in a different way in terms of institutional capacities.

#### **5.3.1 ISEC**

There was a small team of 3 to 4 people working on the RLS project within ISEC, during the currency of the project. The predominant culture in the organisation was one of traditional research; the RLS project was a departure from that in many ways.

The RLS project provided the necessary drive to put into practice a research approach that involved the ‘researched’ in a more meaningful way on the one hand, and communicated the findings through ‘dialogues’ with development implementers and policy makers during different phases of the project. The project had a collaborative justification for the different way in which research was done and communicated.

This was supported by the flexible use of funds that the project allowed for, as the use was dictated not by the sponsoring agency but by the needs of the research. This enabled the research team within the project to negotiate flexibility within the institution, which has now become possible for other subsequent projects too.

ISEC had the traditional communication strategies for its research, through publications. This project used photographs extensively, and had feedbacks to villagers that involved projection of transparencies and photo/poster exhibitions. This was new to ISEC. More recently, ISEC has begun to adopt new ways of communicating its research, including through radio and telecasting the findings of their research.

The project has contributed to ISEC’s moving from a position of ‘serious academics’ to involving other civil society institutions and NGOs as a stakeholder in research. Earlier, the reverse flow of knowledge was not acknowledged, whereas now the contribution of people’s participation in research, to the quality of the findings and its usage is well recognised, not only in one institution, but also by several research and development institutions. This process in ISEC was initiated and aided by the RLS project.

ISEC has introduced topics such as Rural Livelihood Systems, Natural Resource Management and Participatory Research Techniques in their pre-PhD programme. The concept of livelihood system, as interpreted through the Nine Square Mandala, has made a deep impact on the students.

#### **5.3.2 IRMA**

IRMA has developed the lessons from the RLS project in different ways. It introduced livelihoods analysis into different courses in the postgraduate diploma programme and

also launched a course on Livelihoods for development agencies. IRMA conducted a workshop in Myrada (an NGO in Bangalore) to teach the nine square mandala framework for livelihoods analysis. It also conducted a similar workshop for Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) on livelihoods concept, and will now assist them on a ten years livelihoods project called SCALE.

IRMA will provide academic support to a project of Gram Vikas Trust (an NGO established with support of corporate sector and DFID) that was earlier based in Dahod in Gujarat and is now in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. IRMA may sign a Memorandum with this organization for ongoing project consultancy support for training, research, and information systems.

IRMA conducted a series of workshops on livelihoods for an NGO, Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP), launched by the Government of Andhra Pradesh with support from DFID. These workshops included topics on the understanding livelihoods, including the nine-square mandala, project feasibility, community organization etc. The workshops and interaction with SERP led to the development of another framework, Livelihoods Enhancement Action Plan (LEAP), which is more action-oriented and represents a move towards operationalisation of conceptual frameworks. IRMA graduates have been placed in six districts of the State for this project, and as these students have studied livelihoods in the courses in IRMA, their orientation to livelihoods support programmes has been appreciated and IRMA graduates have been selected to be project managers at the field level.

IRMA has developed expertise in livelihoods, community organisation, leadership and income generation, and has received recognition for this in the form of training and other project support assignments from the government, for large projects that benefit a large section of the poor.

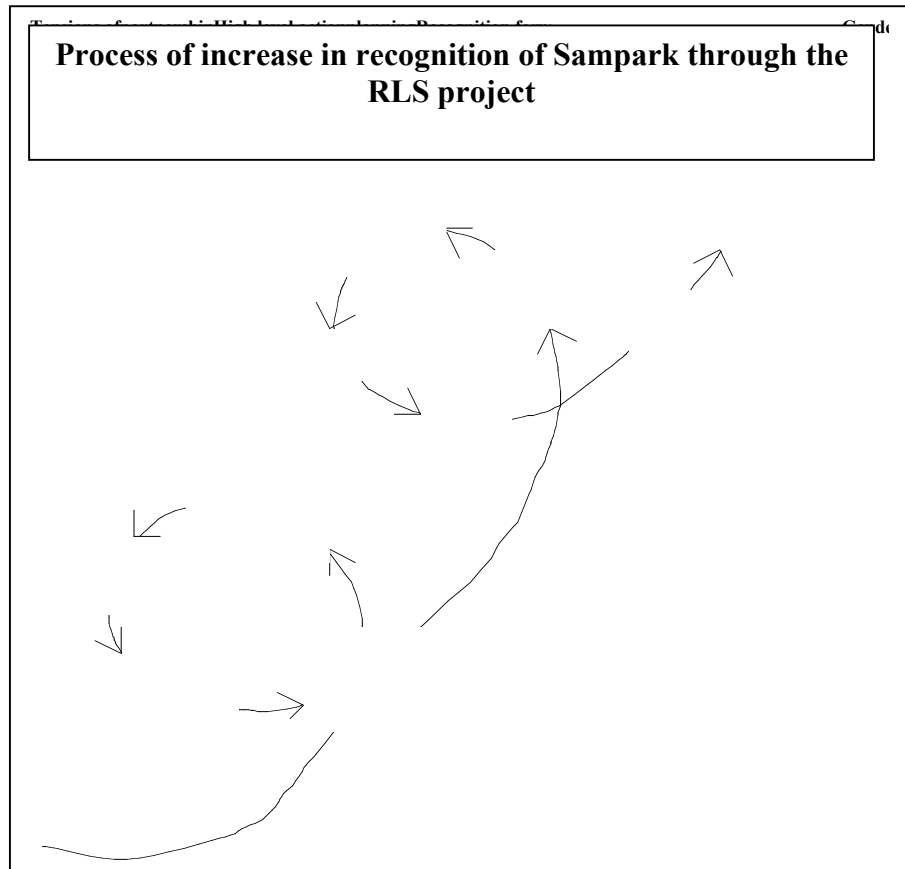
The experiences gained in RLS project have also contributed to courses like *Rural Research Methods, Rural Development and Collectivist Motivation, Values and Ethics* in a substantial way. Inputs from this project are also used in several management development programs and other training programs at IRMA. Some students and practitioners have successfully applied the approaches and methods of RLS project learnt in different courses in working on Village reports, theme papers and other assignments.

### **5.3.3 Sampark**

Early on in the RLS research project, Sampark launched established a series of publications called VIEWS (Voicing Issues for Empowerment of Women), as a vehicle for carrying concepts, methodologies and experiences to the larger development community. The first few issues focused on gender. As the project moved into phase 2, and Sampark took on a hypothesis for independent exploration, the name of VIEWS was changed to (Voicing Issues for Empowerment of Women and Sustainability). Six issues of VIEWS have been published so far, of which five relate to the RLS project, four funded directly by the project and one by DFID. This works like an occasional paper

from Sampark and reaches about 400 individuals and institutions engaged in research, development action and funding.

*Image and recognition:* Over the project period, Sampark made a move from being a Gender Resource Organisation to conducting Action Research, to Development Research and Action. The acceptance and recognition of this combination came seven years after the beginning of the project. From 1993 to 1996, there was tension around the same issue; Sampark was unacceptable as a research partner because it was an NGO, not a research



institution. In 2002, it was valued as a research partner because it had development and research capabilities. This change can be partially attributed to increased capacities in Sampark, for both research and for development action. And a part of this change is brought about due to a significant change in attitudes and demands on north-south research partnerships, which have shifted over the years to being only research-based, to having development agendas and actions as expected impacts.

The evidence of recognition can be found in the following invitations to Sampark:

- Invitation from DFID to share research results and concepts in Delhi, and contribute to a project team from Gujarat for planning
- Invitation to Smita to be a member of the National Support Group for Natural Resource Management, set up by SDC, 1999 to 2001
- Invitation to Sampark to be a joint trainer on rural livelihood systems and nine square mandala concepts in Punganur, Andhra Pradesh, where 15 SDC partners were invited to share the research concepts
- Invitation to Smita to contribute to planning of Livelihood support in NRM sphere at SDC, Hyderabad

- Invitation to Sampark to be part of the Rural Livelihoods Systems group set up by SDC in Hyderabad
- Invitation to Sampark to contribute to national policy, during the process of consultations by the Planning Commission, Sampark’s inputs contributed to DFID and then to Planning Commission
- During the currency of the RLS project, funding support provided for two years by DFID Rural Development Section at Delhi, because they considered the research and its results valuable to DFID’s watershed development projects in Karnataka. (On gender and leadership)
- Invitation to participate and share research experiences in international seminars and workshops. Details are given in Annexure 1.

In responding to these invitations, Sampark has utilized opportunities to make an impact on planning of development projects and at national levels and to specific development projects.

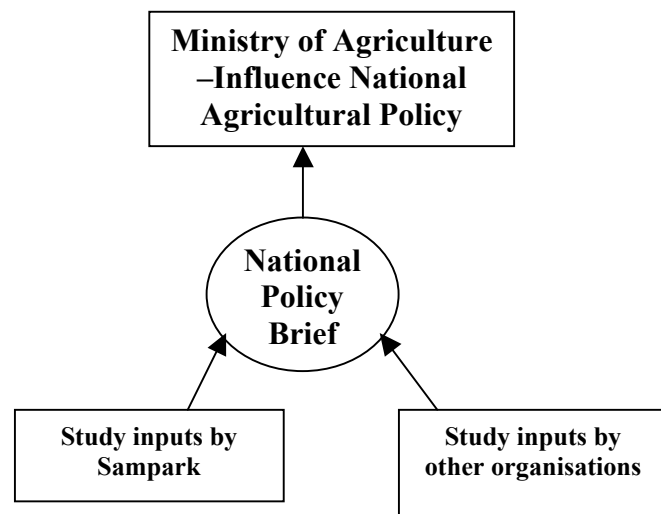
#### 5.4. Policy Level Impact

The major policy level impact that IRMA has had is in the state of Andhra Pradesh, where strategies for improvement of livelihoods are now planned in a holistic manner, and this has a positive influence on planning and implementing major programmes for the poor.

Sampark has made a contribution to the Planning Commission, at the time of formulation of the Tenth Five Year Plan, into the policies and programmes for women-in-agriculture. Sampark was invited to provide the lessons from its research and development practice experience over the past ten years. The findings of the RLS project and subsequent practice in the field as well as research formed the basis for providing the inputs.

#### Process involved in Research to Influence Agricultural Policy

This analysis of experiences formed the foundation for both formulating new schemes and modifying existing schemes by the Ministry of Agriculture, Delhi, which had the objective of supporting women, engaged in the agricultural sector. The experiences compiled include those from Sampark’s own work over the past ten years and also from reports, newsletters, bulletins and publications of other organisations, including NGOs and research institutions engaged in identifying concerns related to women in agriculture.



A common remark about policy level impact was that when the research began the intention was to influence development practitioners and policy of development funding agencies like SDC.

The effort to influence policy makers like the government took place later. The policy level impact may have been limited for several reasons. To begin with, senior level government officials were invited for the dialogues conducted; perhaps a strategy of inviting middle level officers would have yielded better results as the middle cadre is better aligned with field realities and better able to make use of research results. Secondly, the institutions did not make strong public statements during the project, and thus the dissemination of research results remained confined to a small community. A more pro-active stand with regard to wider dissemination might have yielded better impact on policy changes.

As SDC had its objective to formulate strategies in order to contribute to India's own development efforts for land-use improvement, SDC has incorporated the findings into its policy formulation. Sampark and the North partner have provided inputs in the process incorporation of the findings. The process and the factors that contributed to the change within SDC can be traced to a process of sharing the concepts with SDC staff, larger development community, NGO partners of SDC, and participation of SDC officers from Delhi in these forums. These officers then led a move to spread the concept and form a forum for sharing the concept, and making action plans.

Due to the progress of the forum and the partner institution's convictions about the tool, SDC has now (November 2002) designed a policy that makes it mandatory to include the Nine-Square Mandala concept for designing and implementing sustainable rural livelihood projects, in all its existing and new projects. SDC is currently involved in the process of distributing the entire RLS research results where the Mandala concept been used to study livelihood aspects, to all their exiting partners so that they may utilize the findings of the RLS research as reference material for designing and implementing their own livelihood projects.

**The RLS research leading to policy change in SDC owes its success to several factors.** First, SDC began its involvement with a clear-cut aim of designing its development assistance in a way that would contribute most effectively to promoting sustainable natural resource management in India. Thus, the prospect of eventually instituting policy changes was already imbedded into the research aim of the project from the very beginning. Moreover, the involvement of SDC throughout the duration of the project meant that this goal was constantly kept in view during the course of the research. Second, a strong North-South research partnership was struck between specialized organizations in India and Switzerland. This meant that organisations with different areas of expertise could contribute their own perspectives to form a larger, more holistic view of rural livelihoods at the end. Finally, the actual process of extensive information sharing, and the organised manner in which the project was implemented, was the key in making the project a success.

With SDC-India having incorporated the concept into its project formulation, the RLS project has truly met its initial objective of influencing the funding partner that they sought to do, adding quality to the livelihood interventions of Swiss funded field projects in India.

## **5.5. End-user benefits**

In terms of research participants of the RLS project at the field level, the impacts are presented as viewed by the organizations involved. The research project did not seek to benefit the research participants that it worked with, directly, but only indirectly, by influencing design of development projects and policy changes. However, some impacts may have occurred at the level of research participants, some dimensions of which are detailed below.

The discussions with the institutional partners yielded some aspects of impact at end-user level.

In the case of IRMA, too, the collaboration with the NGO was beneficial, and the organization used the findings of the research. They too had collaboration for teaching with the NGO, though this existed even before the RLS research project started.

Another research institution, ISEC, collaborated with a field based NGO during the second phase of the project. This NGO was seen as the end-user, and has benefited from its collaboration with ISEC. As the staff participated in the research, they learnt participatory research techniques, they learnt a lot about the people they work with, received external inputs and also appreciation, and developed much greater confidence in their own work and abilities than before. The interaction between the NGO and ISEC involved bringing the head of the NGO for teaching sessions at ISEC, and in turn a faculty of ISEC served as the Chairman of the Board of the NGO for one year.

The feedback given to villagers by ISEC created some demand for development support, as well as training and capacity building. ISEC and RLS project responded by helping the villagers do a feasibility study at village level, or rehabilitating the village water reservoir. They also supported a technical training to villagers on the subject. However, this did not lead to supporting formation of a local people's forum, due to time and resource constraints, and the fact that researchers went back to their jobs in the institutions.

In both cases, the contact with the NGO continued in some form, however, that with the research participants ceased with the completion of the research project.

The NGO involved felt that they had a significant impact, both during and after the research assignment. The methodology followed was not only participatory, it also allowed for participants to make presentations and in fact *demonstrate* some leadership traits, the topic of the research. They could quote incidents from their lives, and thus get

engaged and relate to the research. Sampark followed a practice of validation and feedback after every participatory exercise. This enabled people to express their views in different ways and immediately acknowledge the learning that occurred in the process of research. They also saw the application of the research methods in their decision-making. (“We have learnt how to select leaders, this is good for us.”)

Sampark followed up the research with an action research project in the district where the research had been carried out, and then established a field based action project in 8 of these villages where the second phase of research was conducted. The action project spans micro-credit, women’s leadership and livelihoods, and has put the learning from the RLS research project into action. The action project has grown over the past three years to cover 40 villages, 111 self-help groups with 1700 women members, who have over Rs. 2 million rupees (\$400,000) of their own money saved, with which they have made productive investments and improved their livelihoods. A part of this field project is now supported through a World Bank project, *Swashakti*, or Women Empowerment and Development Project. During a Training of Trainers project for all field workers of all NGO partners of the *Swashakti* project in the northern districts in Karnataka, Sampark staff shared the leadership imaging exercise; this was accepted very well and has now become a part of the training done at the field level by all these NGOs. Thus the tool that has been tried and developed during the research project now benefits at least 500 self-help groups of women, i.e. 4500 women.

*Conclusion:* In this respect, there is a need to question what does the research community give back to research participants. The claim to give back knowledge is made, but much of the knowledge is not shared with the research participants, even to validate the understanding. Often the budget and time constraints of research projects prevent such interactions, only data collection and analysis is usually built into research project, not validation and knowledge sharing. The normal expectation of researchers is that projects for development action are expected to have greater impact at the ground level, and research projects should not be loaded with such expectations.

However, the field researchers felt that every research project should be designed to provide benefits to the research participants. Just as the involvement of people in research is envisaged, feedback, and planning and implementation of development action must be planned, too. They felt very strongly that research collaborations must intend to give back a benefit to the people at the grassroots. People and institutions with an orientation and ability to initiate and facilitate field action should be part of such partnerships right from the beginning. They must have a mandate to make a difference at the ground level, and a provision must be made for the work to be done as well as the costs of such interaction, and capacity building.

“We asked them about their situation and problems. Then we analysed and told them what they already knew. When they asked us how to solve their problems, we did not stay to help them, we did not have the time or budget or mandate for follow-up work and support. In the end, we did not give anything to people they did not already have. Even in terms of knowledge.” A field researcher

### 5.5.1 End-user orientations

Often researchers assume that relevance of the research to end-users is sufficient to justify the research, and they do not give enough importance to including end-users either in the process of research, especially in scientific research. Nor do they allot time and budgets for dissemination of the results to those for whom these are the most relevant.

“Everyone comes to look at this area. We grow vegetables and crops here. Will you investigate whether consuming these products is good for us or not?”

“Please will you come back and tell us whether we should eat what we grow here, people come and visit, they start research, they never come back to tell us what they found. We consume this food, we do not know if it is harmful to us or not. Should we stop consuming this food? Please at least tell us before you leave here, you are scientists, surely you know.”

Two young men to a group of visitors from an UNHabitat Conference in Nairobi, during a field visit to see urban agriculture in a canal where chemically polluted water flows, Nairobi, May 2002

If this is considered important, relevant indicators for impact assessment of research partnerships need to include feedback to end-users about the research information collected, its analysis, suggested solutions/ alternatives and information on possible linkages for design and implementation (as well as resource raising) for development projects by and for the end-users. ... Thus capacity building of end-users for design and use of research needs to be incorporated as an indicator in impact assessment of research partnerships.

An end-user orientation demands that the research hypotheses be framed in consultation with end-users, thus giving the research agenda a development orientation. The impact hypotheses can then have a ‘demand’ perspective, as it will originate from the end-users themselves. When this begins to happen is when research and development agendas will come together in a meaningful way and result in research partnerships with significant impacts.

### 5.6. Limitations of Impact Studies

The greatest limitation of an impact study is the attribution factor. None of the impacts can be unequivocally linked to just one project as the cause, as there are many other factors that contribute to that impact. The RLS project may have contributed only partially to the impact, and other earlier, concomitant or subsequent work of the organization/ individual researcher may have contributed too.

## **6 Reflections on Research Partnerships**

The nature of the research collaboration can be discussed in three dimensions:

- Intra-institutional collaboration, i.e. team work within institutions
- Inter-institutional collaboration between southern partners
- North-South collaboration

### **6.1. Intra-institutional collaboration**

One of the most critical factors that determine the quality of collaboration is the team dynamics within a research organization. The RLS researchers shared several experiences that influenced the quality of their intra team collaboration.

ISEC and Sampark had teams that worked together on one or two hypotheses, while in IRMA each faculty member chose a different theme, and some worked in pairs. There was a larger team of faculty members associated with the project in IRMA than in the other two organizations.

In all institutions, there was some hierarchy among the institutional teams; with greater powers to the team leader, and the junior team members sometimes felt that they were not 'heard' enough, not enough cognisance of taken of their feedback, and sometimes not enough acknowledgement given to their field work. There may be a factor that particularly affects southern institutions, that of inequities between those who do field work and those who analyse and write, as analytical and English language skills are perceived of more value than data collection and local language skills. They pointed out that in fact the understanding and skills of the field investigators is extremely important to the quality of research as it determines the quality of the data that is to be analysed. Thus they recommended not only that field investigators be trained in concepts and information collection, but also be involved in the analysis and this significantly improves the quality of research.

### **6.2. Inter-institutional collaboration between southern partners**

Many of the research principles laid down assume a benign situation where win-win situations are possible for all partners concerned. However, this is far from reality where in fact several institutions compete for research projects, and several researchers compete to be part of institutional research teams. There are also several issues to which we do not have unambiguous answers in terms of better research design or partnership formations. Some of these issues are discussed below.

### **6.2.1 Competition in Partnerships**

There is an underlying current of competition in all partnerships, and so it exists and needs to be recognized in research partnerships too. Partners compete for funds, and compare team capabilities, institutional processes, and research results all through the project period. This is good as it encourages healthy competition, and motivates partners to emulate the positive processes followed by others. However, there are negative aspects to this competition, too.

The undercurrent of competition can make formation of inter-institutional ((?)) collaborative research teams difficult. It can also block entry of new partners into the project. An indicator in the impact matrix is: “Shared criteria for selection of partners, and inclusion of new research proposals and partners”. The assumption is that all partners will agree to a set of criteria. The reality is that often institutions that are already partners may want to keep others out of the partnership, and share a larger portion of the cake, than involve more partners and have less to share. Therefore, inclusion of new partners is often a difficult process to set in motion, especially after the first phase of partners has been selected. Further, different institutions may not agree with the criteria, or the assessment of potential partners on a set of criteria.

Conflicts in the process of partnerships often do not get documented. It would be good to include indicators about areas in which conflicts arose among partners/research teams, what solutions came up, and who took the initiative to offer/ accept the solution?

In general, process indicators and partnership indicators are difficult to evolve study and are often left out of assessments.

### **6.2.2 Inter-institutional Equity**

The principle of equity states “share profits equitably” (KFPE 1998), there are several aspects that need attention if the principle of equity has to be attended to.

The basis of determining financial compensation is the value assigned to the work of an institution. There seems to be a bias in these attitudes. Research institutions are accepted more easily as “academic,” “scientific” are given more work as well financial allocations. NGOs are viewed as “field based” and “field oriented” and this is somehow perceived as being less scientific and less objective and therefore NGOs are assigned a lower portion of work and finances.

It was commonly perceived that academic institutions better integrate research and teaching. They also have more infrastructure, and tend to have lower costs for the northern partners as they have core support from southern governments. Conversely, NGOs typically have less infrastructure and fewer grants from local governments. These factors result in larger funding allocations to academic institutions, thereby increasing the gap between the two types of institutions, rather than bridging it.

NGOs are therefore subjected to a test of research and education capacity, whereas academic institutions are assumed to already possess these capacities. There is a need to develop equitable indicators of assessment of performance. ((I will have to check whether this is true for the Swiss partners, too))

In recent years, there has been a paradigm shift, and greater value attached to research *plus* action capabilities. “Research partnerships have begun to assign value to, and involve NGOs more and more, for their impact not only on end-users but for the quality of the research to be higher, and for greater influence on policy makers and donors. However, the change in attitude and value assigned to partnerships with NGOs, has to translate into higher financial allocations for NGOs, bringing them at par with allocations to research institutions.

The inter institutional collaboration during the research project was designed to be done through a research Forum of all partners, that met twice a year on an average, but at least once a year. This forum provided an opportunity for sharing of research topics, methodology, progress and difficulties that were envisaged during the research.

One aspect that came out quite strongly among the southern researchers was the lack of mutual support by RLS Partners. One of the IRMA research faculty felt that he passed through a phase when he almost decided to withdraw from the research project. He was interested in a research topic that was unusual and wanted to use a methodology that was not acceptable to the other members of the research forum. He felt he could not convince the others, and his ‘confidence in his own capacity was shaken’. However, as he felt that he was on the right track, he persisted, and in the end the research brought out not only interesting results but also was well accepted.

When reflecting on what brought about the change and acceptance, he felt that the meetings of the Forum were not encouraging, and were not held in a positive frame of mind. ‘However, when people outside the Forum responded favourably to the research, then the Forum members also changed their attitude.’ The positive responses were received during presentations in India and in other countries, and as the RLS Forum members were present when the external appreciation came, they began to look at the same research with a positive perspective.

Another researcher said he went through a similar process. He explored the topic of technology adoption and found several questions that he could not answer when he first began the exploration. At this stage, he was ‘in deep distress’, as there was no support from members of the Forum. He needed to explore the question in depth, without knowing what would emerge as possible answers, and feels that key members of the Forum did not encourage such exploration, but would have liked some conclusions early in the research. It was at this time that he was invited, through the Project, to an international seminar, where he explained his research topic and methodology, and was encouraged to continue the exploration. He feels that it was from this time onwards that the attitude of some of the Forum members, who were also present at that seminar, changed, and then the rest of the members of the Forum followed. He has later

articulated his finding about technology adopted being tied to livelihoods security, and it has been well received and accepted by the research community.

In retrospect, all institutions felt that there had existed an atmosphere of competition rather than collaboration during the research project. There were several phases when the members did not support one another during the periods when the individual researchers found the research difficult for one reason or another. There were also not as many field visits of one institution to another as could have been done. There was perhaps a greater opportunity for intellectual collaboration than was really utilized.

Conversely, there were several instances of inter-institutional exchange, especially those between Sampark and the other institutions, and the northern and southern institutions. These involved visits for specific research on gender aspects, on livelihoods aspects and indeed the emergence of the conceptual framework of nine-square mandala could not have happened without open interactions between partner institutions. Many of these relationships have endured and in fact become stronger after the project, even though the result in terms of further formal inter-institutional/ inter-faculty collaboration between these organizations is yet to be established.

### **6.3. North-South collaboration**

The partners of the RLS project formed a research Forum that met every six months to review the progress and to share the methodology and findings of the research. This forum was seen as a major milestone by the research partners, and was often attended by both, but always at least by at least one of the northern researchers. A northern partner held the position of the manager of the research project, and this did not change throughout

Learnt from northern partners:

- Greater transparency
- Greater accountability
- Collaboration and team work
- Work planning, open, shared, participatory
- Time planning (long term vision)
- Focus on long term goals
- Conflict resolution in a positive way
- Great degree of freedom

the seven-year duration of the research project. Some of the southern faculty members felt that the Forum was not one where joint decision making was done, in fact the northern partners made the decisions, regarding finances as well as inclusion, continuation or exclusion of partners. They provided instances where they would have liked some partners not to continue, but they were continued at the discretion of the northern partners. Another Southern partner had a different view, the members of this organization felt that if the northern partners had not intervened and used their discretion, the quality of research partners chosen by the southern organizations would not have been as high, as the southern partners alone would have taken biased decisions.

One researcher raised some basic issues about north-south research partnerships. He felt that in all north-south partnerships, there is an element of 'agenda setting', as there must have been in this one, being derived from Module 7, SPPE. This overall agenda of the project design must be taken cognisance of in any north-south partnership (as also the agenda for impact assessment). The second issue is about the total amount of funding available, and what share of it comes to the southern partners. Clearly, figures on this are not readily made available, or asked for in most north-south partnerships. Another aspect is about the participatory functioning of such north-south research forums; participation in setting the research topics, methodology, choice of partners, sharing of funds, self assessments and evaluations. Even if some of these processes are participatory, the balance of decision-making power is in the hands of the northern partners as they hold the purse strings, thus he felt that north-south research partnerships are not really carried out on a level playing field.

However, in general the RLS forum was seen to bring in positive processes of sharing. It was an event that the forum members looked forward to, for meeting and sharing their research. The sharing helped to articulate and refine the hypotheses, methodology and findings, during the different phases of the research project. Thus the process allowed for constant refinement of the research work. The project emphasized quality more than quantity and this provided space for the researchers to do in-depth exploration on topics of their choice.

The northern partners played the role of managing the funds and the project reporting to the northern sponsor. This demanded a lot of time and even detracted from a greater involvement the manager could have potentially had in the field research and analysis. There was transparency at all times, with information on the total funds available to the project being shared with all partners. The norms established for payment of fees were made explicit, and the process of inducting new partners was developed and shared by partners. There was great flexibility in the management of the finances by each institution, with the budget decided primarily on the basis of the needs of the project. This helped each of the partner organizations to focus on the work and not be distracted by additional burden of conforming to donor accounting practices. As long as accounting was done according to plan, and reporting was regular and complete, the formats for each institution were flexible, according to the needs of each southern institution; there was no imposition from the northern partner. All major decisions regarding new partners, setting milestones, deciding the plan of action for subsequent phases of research, were taken/informed in the Forum. This led to a common commitment to the project goals and their achievement.

After the project, ISEC tried to replicate such inter-institutional collaboration with a funding agency, NGOs and ISEC. The experience was not successful, it had roles too strictly defined, limits on the work of each partner, strict hierarchical relationships and the role by the funding partner was not played well. This underlines the positive role played by the northern partners in the whole collaborative effort.

The North-South character of the partnership was, therefore, a key element of the success of the inter-institutional collaboration.

### 6.3.1 The Issue of Brain Drain

There is concern among the scientific research community about ‘brain drain’; the perception being that when trained southern researchers go to the north, the southern countries lose research capacity and that some part of the investment made in training these southern researchers is therefore lost. Perhaps this concern is

“When northern researchers come and stay in the south, they call it “technical support”, when we go and work in their universities, they call it “brain drain”.

“The truth is that they do not want us to compete with them, they want us to earn perpetually lower salaries in our universities than earn like them in theirs.”

Participants in a group discussion in KFPE conference in Berne, 2000.

misplaced; as the world has already become too small to worry about where a scientific researcher is placed. It is possible for people to be anywhere in the world, and serve their country. The fact is that salaries are higher in the northern countries, and it would not be practical to expect those who can find themselves jobs in these countries to opt not to do so. It is important to recognize that when research capacities of the southern partners are increased, they contribute more to such research partnerships, regardless of where they are located. This is what we need to check, what are the types of projects such researchers are engaged in, and this is perhaps a better indicator than where the researchers are located. Again, this indicator needs to be assessed for northern researchers, too, as they tend to move on, too, to newer projects and concepts and universities, but we do not perceive this change as important, as we do not see it as a north-south shift. However, in many cases, the shift can be quite significant, from development related to pure scientific research.

### 6.3.2 Mutual Dependence

Another assumption is that north-south research partnerships create dependencies when northern partners do the fundraising tasks. However, there is another perspective to this, that northern partners are more specialized to do fundraising, and it is good use of different skills to use northern partners to write proposals and ascertain project funding. While it would be good to have southern partners involved in doing this job, and thus raise their capacities to access such projects, it cannot automatically be assumed that larger fundraising role for northern partners means greater dependence. We often tend to undervalue, understate or not realise the tremendous dependence that northern partners have on the southern researchers for high quality research processes and results. It is a two-way relationship and recognition of it that leads to truly successful long-term research partnerships.

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