

Adapting Local Agricultural Services to Federalized Nepal: 3



Institutional Mechanisms for Agriculture at *palika* Level

This is the third Briefing Note in a series drawing on the experiences of the Nepal Agriculture Services Development Program or Prayas (January 2016 - November 2020), a bilateral initiative of the Governments of Nepal and Switzerland (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, SDC) with technical support from Helvetas Nepal. Prayas eventually covered 61 selected *palikas* in provinces 1, Bagmati - 3 and Karnali – 6 (the latter in collaboration with the ASDP, Agriculture Sector Development Project).

As already outlined in Briefing Note 2, in order to be able to operate effectively, *palikas* need their own policies and legal framework in all areas of their responsibility. Hand in hand with this are appropriate institutional mechanisms. The Local Government Operation Act (LGOA), 2017 foresees five thematic areas of *palika* functioning, each with their own committee; agricultural development falls under the Economic Development Committee. When *palikas* were first established, all the thematic committees also had to be set up. This was a special challenge for the agriculture sector, which was generally hampered by an inadequate number of staff, limited understanding of what was required, and difficulties in prioritizing what needed to be done. Prior to federalization, agriculture service provision had been the responsibility of District Agriculture Development Offices (DADO), Agriculture Service Centers (ASC) and DLSOs, and Livestock Service Centers (LSC). It was expected that the technical staff of these offices would be transferred to *palika* level Agriculture and Livestock Development Sections,

but in practice this often failed to occur, partly due to staff reluctance to be based in more remote areas. As a result, *palikas* lacked the human resources needed to establish an appropriate local institutional mechanism for agriculture.

What did the project do?

Prayas staff began by facilitating discussions between elected representatives and administrative officers regarding the type of institutional mechanism that would be most appropriate for overseeing agriculture sector development. They also drew the attention of *palikas* to the LGOA provision that allows for the formation of thematic committees and sub-committees, led by any elected member, for effective decision-making. Through such discussions and reflections, the *palika* elects came to the realization that their Economic Development Committee had a very broad set of responsibilities and that a separate committee dedicated to agriculture sector development was necessary. This committee should be made up of individuals with diverse expertise in agriculture, and should have the role of facilitating sector development, rather than controlling the provision of all agriculture-related services. The result was the creation in each *palika* of a *palika* Agriculture Development Committee, PADC, under the Economic Development Committee. Some *palikas* also chose to establish a separate thematic committee (as they are permitted to do under the LGOA, 2017).

Headed by an elected representative, either a ward chair or member, the PADC comprises a mix of elected and non-elected representatives – the latter being individuals selected for their specific expertise. They might, for example, be innovative farmers, AgroVets (local suppliers of farm inputs), or agriculture cooperative heads. They should also be as representative as possible of the local population. The PADC has an important role to play in sector planning and budget allocation – linking other sectoral committees and the Economic Development Committee, contributing to informed sectoral decision-making, and promoting political accountability. Prayas team worked closely with PADC members and agriculture and livestock development section staff, assisting them in developing their Terms of Reference (ToRs) and a code of conduct. Following a capacity needs assessment, they organized appropriate training sessions and conducted regular coaching of PADC members and staff in planning, budgeting, sectoral and thematic understanding. Section staff also helped in defining their roles as technical advisers to different stakeholders and in facilitating linkages between them.

Key achievements

- PADCs have been established in 60 Prayas-supported *palikas*, their total membership coming to 533. The need for representative diversity in membership emphasized by Prayas is reflected in the figures: 175 (32%) women, 69 (12%) Dalit, 158 (29%) Janajati and 326 (59 %) non-discriminated castes. Furthermore, the voice of women and discriminated castes in discussions is gradually being ensured through supporting such individuals to head the sectoral committees.
- The elected representatives have internalized the processes and procedures required. This is important for institutional continuity, as they are local citizens who remain in the *palika*, whereas administrative and technical staff (who are usually better informed on such matters) come from outside and are frequently transferred.
- Although all the partner *palikas* recognize the importance of agriculture, they tended at first to accord it low priority in planning and budgeting - infrastructure development always being prioritized. This trend has now been halted; the PADC have effectively established agriculture as a priority sector.
- Through Prayas facilitation, the PADCs have established the necessary norms and standards for technical aspects of agriculture, as a result of which there is clarity in implementation, greater capacity – and an improvement in service delivery. Reporting, planning and monitoring is also being conducted to a fair standard thanks to training provided through Prayas.
- In some cases (notably in Udayapur and Okhaldunga), inter-*palika* coordination mechanisms have been established for the institutional sharing of service provision, thus reducing costs.

“We are supporting the farmers/entrepreneurs - flower growers - in marketing. We are connecting them with the Pashupatinath temple wholesaler, as well as sending farmers to register in the floriculture association. Another market is Janakpur. Continuous support entails technical assistance in identifying and treating disease and insect infestation, and market evaluation as per the season and demand. Monitoring is done once fortnightly. Those who are not registered do not get support from the gaunpalika. So far there are 62 registered enterprises in total. Once the farmers/entrepreneurs get registered, the gaunpalika asks them for their work plan. Then the officials undertake a field inspection. They visit every ward in the presence of the local level chair. The technical assistant connects with all the farmers. This is how farmers’ capacity is recognized and documented. This is a systematic module of working and Prayas facilitated us in every step along the way.”

Pradeep Shrestha, Junior Technical Assistant (JTA), Sunkoshi *gaunpalika*

Challenges

Establishing a committee that is truly representative of the local population, well informed on agriculture matters, and politically neutral is clearly not a simple matter. Prayas staff have emphasized the importance of diversity - without intervening on membership selection. Gradually the PADCs are becoming fully functioning bodies, although they are still hampered in various ways, including an inadequate number of technical staff. Another, related difficulty is the continued lack of clear delineation of concurrent responsibilities, especially between *palika* and provincial governments. The Agriculture Knowledge Centers, AKCs, that have been established by provinces, often taking over former DADO staff and infrastructure in former district headquarters, are a particularly obvious example of the potential for overlapping functions.

Lessons learned

- Building a **relationship of trust** with elected representatives and administrative staff in *palikas* is essential in order to work effectively. Prayas staff have learned that they must avoid imposing their own ideas of what should be done, and instead concentrate on ensuring a discussion in which all voices and opinions are heard, and a **collective agreement** eventually reached. Usually, their technical advice was requested, in which case they provided it.
- A sectoral committee such as a PADC should be equipped with the **authority and capabilities** to make political decisions related to the sector; they can then be held accountable.
- **Inter-sectoral coherence** is a key to translating the political vision of *palikas*; opportunities for exchange and discussion should therefore be generated.
- Engagement at both *palika* and provincial level is essential for building a **common understanding, especially regarding concurrent rights**.
- The **shortage of adequate technical staff** at *palika* level may be addressed in several ways. One is the short-term hiring of relevant specialists; another is tailored training for existing staff.

“We have special programs for target groups such as single women, migrant returnees, and Dalits. Agro-vets and LARPs are mobilized as service providers. We have also emphasized land consolidation and community farming for optimum utilization of available land. Now we have understood that unlike previously, when we were overly focused on distribution [of subsidized inputs] in a very scattered way, our focus should be on production-oriented activities and services.”

Pashupati Chaudhary, PADC Coordinator, Triyuga *nagarpalika*.



Photos:

(first page) Orientation on roles and responsibilities of newly formed *Palika* Agriculture Development Committee in Nalgad *nagarpalika*.

(last page) *above*: Meena Sunwar, technician of Khijidemba *gaunpalika* working in *palika*'s newly established lab. The technician would identifies and diagnoses the problem and provides technical advice to the farmers.

(last page) *below*: Livestock development section staff castrating a goat in Belaka *nagarpalika*. Since its establishment in 2017, the section has provided veterinary services to more than 5,000 farming households.