



EPAM – Building systemic competence for local development

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SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

LearnNet – an approach to skills development not just for rural areas

The 'Technical and Vocational Education and Training Section' within the 'Economic Development & Employment Division' (OE4115) in GTZ is currently preparing a paper on the Learning Network (LearnNet) Approach to the challenges of effective mass skills development in developing countries. The paper is an invitation to those involved in skills development to consider an exciting option that potentially offers a sustainable solution to addressing a key element in pro-poor development.

LearnNet emphasises the importance of local level empowerment as an integral part of skills development, while linking this directly to national policy formulation, implementation and mass delivery. LearnNet is a simple, practical approach with both immediate impact and long-term consequences.

Although the LearnNet Approach is not limited to rural application, it has special relevance there. Most of the early pilot measures and experiences have been in rural areas. The reality is that almost 75% of the world's poorest people depend on agriculture, forestry or fishery for their livelihoods. Production and productivity are notoriously low in these sectors and skills development is seen as vitally important to addressing this challenge.

Skills development in rural areas (SDRA) extends from farm to off-farm activities, both in the formal and informal sectors of the economy, and should be addressing the strengthening of value chains that link to urban and export markets. Despite some innovative attempts, no comprehensive, sustainable solution to providing effective SDRA has yet been found. Against this backdrop the paper outlines why the LearnNet Approach is needed, provides practical examples of what is currently happening in the field and a step-by-step description of the building blocks that make the LearnNet Approach workable. The LearnNet Approach is a relatively new initiative but it is already showing promising results. It needs to be tested in a range of situations so we can share our understanding of how it works in practice. The paper hopes to encourage "development entrepreneurs" to work with us in making this happen.

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LearnNet – THE LEARNING NETWORK APPROACH. Its application in the context of Pro-Poor Development: Towards a solution to the challenges of effective mass skills development",. Contact. Edda.Grunwald@gtz.de.

EPAM - Building systemic competence for local development

Fostering local development means working at different levels in order to improve the integration of activities and instruments into a functioning system of

APPROACH: LEARNNET

Challenges of effective
mass skills
development

Local level
empowerment

Not limited to rural
application

Skills development
from farm to off-farm
activities

CASE: DOMINICAN
REPUBLIC



**Service system for local development
'Demand side'**

services to support communities in their own development. Many programmes mainly concentrate on the macro and meso level - ministries and provincial structures and services.

For building a functioning service system for local development, one of the major challenges is the strengthening of the 'demand side' (local communities, organisations, associations etc.) in their analytical and organisational capacity to manage their own development process. Conventional training in technologies, marketing, administration and participatory planning etc. have had limited impacts at a larger scale. It rarely addresses the capability to organise themselves in an inclusive and effective manner. Self-organisational capacity, however, is the key to develop bargaining power and an economy of scale which enables communities to articulate their demand and negotiate with service providers and other actors.

While in conceptual terms this is obvious, the critical question is 'HOW' to develop these capabilities in the rural communities. Competence development needs to encompass the personal level (attitudes, beliefs, values) as well as the group/team and organisational level in a systemic way, rather than focussing on training of isolated aspects. In EPAM (*Extension as Mutual Learning Process*) working with groups, local organisations and the entire village, involving personal and organisational development issues, is the main difference to other, rather conventional participatory approaches.

Joint learning initiative

EPAM is a joint learning initiative of various service provider organisations in the Dominican Republic, within the watershed management project PROCARYN which is supported by GTZ, DED and KfW. Based on the mentioned insights a systemic approach for competence development at individual and collective level was put into practice. During the first phase, the focus has lied on developing competence of field staff as change agents. Extensionists act at the interface between service provider organisations and the "client" system and thus are the key to success or failure of external interventions. Often they know to instruct farmers but not to explore and develop villagers' potentials jointly with them. In EPAM, extensionists are being trained in a multi-organisational learning group through iterating workshops and coached field-phases. Each extensionist works in one pilot village and facilitates development processes which tackle community's self-determined challenges as, for instance, from agriculture and natural resource management. Facilitation in this context means taking the community groups through learning cycles in order to make them deeply understand the issue at hand, decide on what to do and act.

Competence of field staff

Community groups learning cycles

Exchange visits between groups and communities, innovation competitions, farmer experimentation and working in challenge groups are core elements around which adaptive capacities are being developed step by step. Local organisations, interest groups and the organisation of the community itself are the social settings for collective action. Therefore, local organisational development is the backbone of this approach.

Local organisational development

This new role of the extensionists as facilitators implies profound changes of their attitudes, sense of identity, values and beliefs. During the workshops, they engage themselves in cycles of reflection, decision and action. The whole learning process focuses strongly on personal development as a foundation for becoming a successful 'change agent' - *'if you want to change others, you first need to change yourself'* as an extension agent from South Africa, who went through a similar process, stated. The response to the personal development focus has been very encouraging.

The entire process of field personnel's basic competence development takes



about 18 months with 6 workshops. First community challenges have been addressed successfully, new economic initiatives are on the way and the service providers have started to coordinate their activities at field level.

The pilot-phase of the EPAM initiative concludes at the end of 2004 and will be scaled up then. Scaling up in this context means to use the experiences made at the micro and meso level in order to develop at the higher meso and macro level strategies and policies which support farmers and extension agents as well and institutionalize the principles of the approach. The focus in the first phase of EPAM was on making experiences at field level. Nevertheless first awareness creation and information activities with the Ministry for Agriculture, the Ministry for Environment and Natural Resources, big national NGO, some universities and other donors show the growing interest in the subject.

For comments and questions please contact:

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**APPROACHES:
EUROPE**

**Further training of the
German Agricultural
Education Foundation:**

Be a better entrepreneur

**Individual
entrepreneurial
development**

BUS: Entrepreneurs training entrepreneurs

BUS is a training programme within the initiative for further training of the German Agricultural Education Foundation ("Bildungswerk der deutschen Landwirtschaft e.V. Andreas-Hermes-Akademie, AHA"). The programme was developed originally for farmers and entrepreneurs but is now also used successfully for other target groups. BUS is the German acronym for "better initiate it yourself", "think and act like an entrepreneur" and "create your own future with competence". Or simply, "be a better entrepreneur". The key elements of the training programme are strengthening of entrepreneurial competency and of individual success factors.

Starting point: The economic situation of farmers

Many farmers in Germany feel that they are gradually becoming mere suppliers and passive adaptors of quantities, with no entrepreneurial profile and an unclear future. This situation is very demanding for individual entrepreneurial decision-making as well as for the personal situation.

BUS offers the opportunity to take control by developing your own entrepreneurial success. Contents and methods of BUS are composed systematically. The programme consists of several modules. Each is complete in itself and offers a concrete result. The trainees decide how many BUS modules to train in. BUS-BASIC is part of the further training initiative of German agriculture and supported by the Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour, the European Social Fund, and the agricultural pension fund. BUS BASIC offers over 4 x 2 days a high degree in motivation for the individual entrepreneurial development:

BUS 1: being a successful entrepreneur

BUS 2: develop enterprises dynamically

BUS 3: plan/design the future

BUS 4: deciding and acting