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Some Lessons from a Participatory Policy Process in  
Andhra Pradesh, India

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Some Lessons from a Participatory Policy Process in  
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*Abstract*

A large body of empirical literature highlights the need for stakeholder participation within the context of policy change and democratic governance. This makes intuitive sense and may appear to be a straightforward process of managing conflicting interests, building consensus, and lining up support. The reality, however, is often much more complicated and conflictive, even where there is general agreement on the policy objectives. The present paper examines these issues in the context of participatory policy development for the delivery of veterinary services by para-professionals in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. It illustrates the challenges inherent in the politics of participatory policy processes and the potential of 'agenda hijack' by influential partners, resulting in missed learning opportunities. It also offers insights on practical steps to counter these dangers, as potential lessons for practitioners and project managers engaged in participatory policy reform processes.

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## Process, People, Power and Conflict: Some Lessons from a Participatory Policy Process in Andhra Pradesh, India

### 1. Introduction

The importance of livestock as a pathway out of poverty for many of the world's poorest and most vulnerable families has by now gained wide recognition, as has the need for policy reform that promotes much wider delivery of livestock services to the poor. Less attention, however, has been paid to the experience and challenges of bringing about and implementing these policy changes. What should be done to expand the reach of veterinary services, for example, including a reorientation of the roles of the public and private sectors is well documented. Lessons from experience on how to go about achieving results are less abundant but equally critical.

There is, however, a large body of work on policy reform in a more general sense that has grown over the past several decades along with attention on democratic governance. A key theme from that work is that successful policy reform requires paying attention not just to technical content but also to people and process, to who wins and loses from reforms. Among other things, this calls for participation by those affected by the change. This makes intuitive sense and may appear to be a straightforward process of building consensus, managing conflicting interests, and lining up support. The reality, however, is often much more complicated and conflictive, even where there is general agreement on the policy objectives. The present paper examines these issues in the context of participatory policy development in the delivery of veterinary services by para-professionals in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh.

## 2. Livestock, governance and participation—a brief overview

Livestock can play a critical role in reducing poverty, enhancing nutritional security and supporting the livelihoods of a large portion of the most vulnerable rural families in developing countries. Although this is now commonly appreciated (e.g., Delgado et al. 1999), the livestock sector has been neglected for many years in development policy and suffered from lack of attention and resources. Many poor livestock producers still remain outside the reach of necessary support, including animal health services. Increased attention on these sectoral problems coincided with the much broader push in the 1990s to sort out appropriate public-private roles in many areas of service delivery, getting government out of those areas of “private goods” where the private sector would be a better option and strengthening government capacity to supply the critical “public goods” inputs that only it can supply.

David Leonard demonstrated in his work in Kenya that commercial private sector practice may actually deliver a greater quantity of clinical veterinary care more equitably than a highly subsidized public service (Leonard, 1987). Umali, Feder and de Haan (1994) examined the roles of the public and private sectors in the delivery of livestock services which was also the topic of an International Symposium organized by the World Bank in Costa Rica in 1993. This work and a review of the literature by Holdan and Bazeley (1996) showed that in the overwhelming majority of cases (85 percent) clinical veterinary services were provided by the public sector. After nearly a decade, Ahuja (2004) re-examined public private roles in the context of changed market and production environment.

The challenges of livestock service delivery to the poor and the role of government fit well within the broader issues of democratic governance. For many poor households, the critical contact with *governance* (with government officials, rules and regulations, public help or hindrance in carrying out their economic choices) —or the lack thereof— relates to their immediate livelihood

concerns, including things like extension or clinical veterinary care. Although there is a wide range of opinion on the specifics, in general, improved governance deals with three overlapping areas: 1) rationalizing the role of government, 2) empowering individuals, their associations, and the private sector to take on new roles and responsibilities and 3) combining these two to create synergy between market and state, government and civil society. Among other things, *democratic governance* is thought to include: 1) increased citizen participation, particularly by marginalized groups, and for decision-making by local bodies that are accessible to citizens; 2) structures and procedures that permit the incorporation of the views of a range of societal groups in the formulation of policies and 3) the equitable delivery of public services, a redefinition of the role of the state for less direct service provision, creation of a “level playing field” for economic activity, and empowerment of non-state actors (Brinkerhoff and Crosby 2002, p. 8). All of these elements are important in improving livestock services.

From this, participation throughout the policy process is critical. As Brinkerhoff and Crosby emphasize, there is particular importance in “the process by which the content of policies is formulated and the link between participation and democratic governance. Participation and pluralist consultation are not simply features of effective policy processes; they are integral elements of democracy itself” (p. 51). While this perspective is accepted in principle, those most actively involved in the formulation of policy changes tend to be technocrats and administrators concerned with technical content or economic rationale for the reforms, and who do not usually think in terms of winners and losers, opposition and conflict and other factors that weigh heavily in policy formulation and implementation.

The literature on *participation* is rich and varied, including in areas related to agriculture. Although it naturally has come to mean many different things, a useful definition is provided by the *World Bank Participation Sourcebook* (1996) that calls it “the process through which stakeholders influence and share

control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them” (p. 3). Participation in project or programme design and implementation has a long history and continues to evolve. One of the common objectives for participation is indeed to enhance services by being responsive to the needs of the users. Better outcomes are achieved when the views of those who will be affected by the decisions are listened to.

*Participatory policy reform* is something of an extension and an offshoot of this larger agenda. A review of concepts and experience is contained in Marilee Karl’s 2002 work “Participatory Policy Reform from a Sustainable Livelihoods Perspective: Review of concepts and practical experiences” (FAO LSP Paper No. 3). She defines participatory policy making as implying “the empowerment of stakeholders to take part in the whole cycle of the policy process: formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policy.” Among other things, this can include the following:

- Information sharing: stakeholders are informed about their rights, responsibilities and options.
- Consultation: stakeholders are given the opportunity to interact and provide feedback, suggestions and concerns.
- Cooperation and consensus-building: stakeholders negotiate positions and help determine priorities.
- Decision-making: stakeholders have a role making decisions on policy, project design and implementation.
- Empowerment: transfer of control over decision-making and resources to stakeholders.

A common tool for assisting the participatory policy making process is *stakeholder analysis*. If we think of stakeholders as individuals or groups that can affect or are affected by a policy, the list of who might be involved can be very large. The key stakeholders, of course, will be those who are in a position to influence political support for the reform or who will most affected by the changes proposed, either as winners or as losers in the process. The objective of stakeholder analysis and stakeholder participation is to enlist support wherever possible or diminish opposition.

A common means to enlist stakeholder participation is through workshops. There is an extensive literature from the field of Organizational Development that deals with workshops for team and consensus building, which began in the private sector and later was taken up widely by public agencies and non-profit organizations. As in the case of stakeholder analysis, the descriptions of its benefits emphasize the positive expectations but may underplay the tensions and conflicts that the tools are meant to overcome. For example, Brinkerhoff and Crosby in their review of policy implementation experience describe workshops as

“useful to bring together the various stakeholders involved in the policy reform process for a range of purposes. ..They can help to keep policy reforms on track and to manage the change process strategically...Participation of a variety of groups increases the quality of the outputs and the likelihood that those outputs will be “owned” and supported by those involved. Workshops are ideal settings for achieving these outcomes (p. 181).”

A smooth process of consensus building is, naturally enough, often not the case, and it is important to appreciate the difficulties involved. The issue of paraprofessionals in the delivery of animal health services is perhaps typical in this regard. The strong feelings of the veterinary profession globally were revealed in a survey of Chief Veterinary Officers (CVOs) in 1996 (Ashley, Holden and Bazeley OIE report). In this survey, Chief Veterinary Officers expressed only very limited enthusiasm for the involvement of paravets in service delivery. This in spite of the fact that, as the authors point out, “A commonly expressed view encountered in the literature review which preceded this survey suggested that paravets are one of the most promising avenues for increasing the provision of animal health services in the rural areas of many developing countries.” (p. 7)

The suggestion of private sector involvement in delivery of animal health services often receives even colder response from policy makers. Although economic logic suggests several potential spaces for engaging private sector in service delivery, there continues to be heavy public sector dominance in the

delivery of these services in many parts of the world, including India. The rationale for the same appears to derive from the premise that poor small-scale livestock producers will not be able to pay for commercially oriented private services and will thus get excluded from the market. Given the role of these services in supporting the livelihoods of the poor people and contributing towards poverty reduction, and given that poverty reduction is a public good, governments often consider it their responsibility to provide these services. Recent evidence, however, suggests that free or subsidized public provision may not be an effective mechanism to achieve the stated equity objective. Evidence made available by Ahuja *et al* (2000) from different states in India showed very clearly that subsidized services were not benefiting the poor. The study systematically documented that government veterinarians were charging fees that were not significantly lower than those charged by private veterinarians. The study also estimated the willingness to pay for curative veterinary services and found that farmers, including the poor farmers, were willing to pay for assured and good quality services. There are in fact examples of successful private veterinary service delivery in some very poor areas of India (Ahuja, 2004).

Similarly, there are very strong feelings among civil society groups working with livestock producers, which are quite numerous. The rise of NGOs, particularly at the local level, is particularly noteworthy in Andhra Pradesh (discussed below), which has a history of using NGOs as implementing agencies for government programmes. There are, however, many views and often little consensus among these groups on a number of important issues. The difficulty in reaching consensus and enlisting sufficient government and non-government support for policy change to allow paravets to provide veterinary services to previously unreachable households in the state illustrates the challenge of agreeing on and implementing policy change and may provide some insight and lessons for other policy initiatives.



## 1. The Andhra Pradesh Livestock Services Policy Process

The policy process began under the broad initiative titled 'Assessment and Reflections on Livestock Service Delivery Systems in the state of Andhra Pradesh' in mid 2003. In the true spirit of consultation and participation, the agenda was kept open and flexible. The initiative functioned under a multi-stakeholder Steering Committee chaired by the senior Government of Andhra Pradesh officer in charge of the Animal Husbandry Department. The process involved talking to a wide range of stakeholders to ascertain their (often differing) views on effective livestock service delivery systems, discussing with technical experts and peoples' representatives, and conducting field studies to come to an informed view on an appropriate policy intervention.

As visualized in the design, the process began with organization of consultative workshops at the village and district levels to bring together individual farmers, farmer groups, NGOs, students of veterinary colleges and functionaries of the Government and encouraging and facilitating an open dialogue. In all, three district and 18 village-level consultations were organized at various locations in Andhra Pradesh. The consultations were organized by the district administration, facilitated by the State Management Institute for Livestock Development (SMILDA), and guided and supervised by the Chief Executive Officer, Andhra Pradesh Livestock Development Agency (APLDA) and Additional Director (Animal Production), Government of Andhra Pradesh.

Village consultations were structured in two parts: (a) a half-day participatory rapid appraisal in selected villages in the district by groups of professionals to review the present status of livestock production and services delivery and elicit farmers' perception on the types of reforms required and (b) a two-day series of interactive sessions for all participants and group discussions amongst the various stakeholders participating in the consultation to arrive at a consensus on recommendations. Village consultations usually started in the early morning carried on for five or six hours and contained a cross section of

the livestock farmers comprising both men and women. Some of the consultations were of shorter duration and focused on understanding the needs and problems of tribal households and sheep and goat rearers.

Subsequent to the first two workshops, some non-government organizations alleged that the consultative process was too narrow and an attempt to lend legitimacy to a pre-conceived agenda of privatization. Doubts were also expressed on the sincerity and ability of government officials to lead a complex consultative process with objectivity. The project team responded to this criticism by further widening the consultative process and inviting some NGOs to lead the process. Organization of subsequent farmer workshop was therefore shared by a local NGO and the government.

Task and responsibility sharing between government and a non-government organization with quite divergent ideologies and agenda brought to the fore a complex picture of conflicting interactions between politics, history, culture and ideologies (see Box 1). Several times during the consultative process, emotional temperatures were raised high, especially when there was a perceived threat to someone's interest or if the emerging line of thought was not in line with their perspective. Such conflicts posed the danger of shutting down or vitiating the communication rather than stimulating a healthy discussion of different points of view. Despite such episodes during the consultative process, the project team succeeded in staying on course without compromising of the objectives of openness, transparency and inclusive participation. This may be partially explained by the fact that the key process partners had accumulated sufficient goodwill and 'social capital' due to a long period of engagement in grass roots mobilisation in earlier projects in the state. Through their various partnerships and projects with the Animal Husbandry Department, these partners had already introduced a culture of consultation and exposure to participatory processes. As a result, unlike experience in a number of other states, staff of the Animal Husbandry Department in Andhra Pradesh did not feel threatened by openly discussing

their department's strengths and weaknesses. Given the partner's long term engagement in the state, it was also possible to identify selected individuals within and outside the government who would commit themselves to the core values of participation and change. Additionally, the project team had learnt from earlier experiences the value of nurturing relationships at all levels of decision making so that the momentum of a process can be maintained even when there are inevitable changes at the top level of the public administration.

As stakeholder consultations progressed, the gaps and deficiencies in livestock service delivery were more clearly identified. This additional information enabled the stakeholders to demand a further widening of the scope and coverage of the initiative beyond what had been initially envisaged. The resultant refinements included:

- wider geographical and stakeholder coverage under the consultative process,
- additional studies to identify the gaps and weaknesses of the para-veterinary system as it functioned in the state,
- formulating a legal frame for delivery of minor veterinary services,
- capacity building programs for AP government officers and selected NGO participants (Box 2), and
- development of an efficient and practical prevention and control strategy and action plan for selected animal diseases of economic importance to the poor.

The participatory process in which the state Department of Animal Husbandry and the major stakeholder categories played an active role, improved the acceptability and implementability of the proposed reforms. Maintaining the neutrality of the consultative process by establishing a common agenda that

#### Box 1: My farmers, your farmers

The livestock policy consultation process in Andhra Pradesh included a series of stakeholder workshops. The third workshop in the series, held at Annavaram, was designed to address the perceptions and criticisms that had arisen in the first two district events about the lack of neutrality of the process. A local NGO was invited to shoulder the organizational responsibility by mobilizing farmer participants for this workshop. The Department of Animal Husbandry, on the other hand, was requested to provide the necessary logistical support. To facilitate the logistics, the State Management Institute for Livestock Development (SMILDA) was provided the necessary budget with the understanding that all expenditures incurred by the NGO as well as by local government officials would be reimbursed by SMILDA. This was done in consultation with both SMILDA and the NGO.

Within a few days cracks started to appear in this arrangement. The NGO claimed that they would not have necessary autonomy in mobilizing farmers if all financial controls were with the government. Government officials on the other hand expressed their doubts in the ability and intentions of the NGO in mobilizing a representative set of farmers given their limited area of operation and their ideological leaning. To ensure both sides felt comfortable in this partnership, it was decided to enhance the budget for the workshop by providing additional funds to the NGO for farmers' travel and boarding and lodging expenditures and by allowing SMILDA and local government machinery to mobilize more farmers from near and far places in the district.

On the first day of the workshop it became clear that many of the farmers arrived with pre-prepared statements and issues that were to be raised, contrary to the spirit of the event that had been planned. The open agenda with which the workshop had been organized became subject to capture by the organizing partners. This, in turn, limited the space available to farmers to understand the process and issues and voice their own concerns and opinions. As a result, a process initiated to empower farmers and bring them on a common platform with government officials and other institutional stakeholders was impaired by institutional agendas of the organizing partners. Some of the most vocal participants at the workshop, it was later pointed out, were actually local budding political workers, who found this a useful platform to demonstrate their leadership skills and gain political mileage.

would accommodate opposing views and striking a balance among strongly divergent demands of stakeholder groups were major challenges for the project.

The consultative process, however, proved productive, as hoped and an agreed policy reform proposal eventually emerged. The proposal changed the regulations to allow para-professionals to carry out minor veterinary services

that had formerly been the exclusive purview of licensed veterinarians. The process in Andhra Pradesh took nearly two years but succeeded in changing the role / mandate of para-professionals with the objective of rapidly expanding services to poor livestock rearers.

## 2. Some implications and lessons

The experience presented above illustrates approaches and the difficulties involved in facilitating policy change. Reality is necessarily more complex and more conflictive than can be captured in project documents and there is a need to understand and anticipate the process of policy reform and its challenges, in addition to the technical or economic rationale for policy change. The complexities are possibly more apparent in large countries such as India where

### Box 2: Livestock, Livelihoods and Leadership: Building Perspectives, Facilitating Change

In order to develop a better appreciation of the consultative process and the resulting recommendations, it was considered necessary to invest in 'perspective building' training programmes for officers of the animal husbandry department and selected NGO representatives. It was hoped that such a training programme would lead to greater appreciation for the need for reforms and impart analytical skills for analyzing associated problems. The first programme was conducted in December 2004, at the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmedabad.

In addition to providing an overview of trends in livestock production, consumption, trade and prices, programme participants were presented a number of livestock production related management situations and were asked to come up with their own analysis and recommendations. Many of sessions were conducted by IIM Ahmedabad professors with long experience in analyzing managerial situations but without any livestock sector background. For example, the issue of livestock extension was handled by a team of two faculty members—one economist and one business strategy professor. The issue was presented within the framework of participants' own organizations—something they could directly relate to. Similarly, a professor in supply chain management -with expertise in managing supply chains in the manufacturing sector, discussed issues in value chain management for milk, and another faculty member with social psychology background conducted exercises requiring participants to introspect and discover their own gender stereotypes and relate these to their field observations.

The programme was highly appreciated by both government and non-government participants. Many of them went back with new ideas to try out in their own field settings. More important, based on the feedback provided by programme participants to senior officials, the government expressed the desire to send their entire animal husbandry work force for such training and offered to spend about three-quarter of their training budget for this purpose. Eventually, two more such programs were held on the basis of equal cost sharing between PPLPI and SMILDA.

the government is very strong, at several levels, and cannot be pushed (or pushed around), where implementation is widely recognized as the weak point,

and where NGOs are very strong and organized and have extensive experience on the ground. Nevertheless, a number of lessons can be drawn which are generic in nature and may provide useful guidance for facilitating policy change in other development contexts. Broadly, these lessons can be classified into three somewhat overlapping categories (i) getting the facts right and properly disseminating them, (ii) managing the consultative processes with multiple stakeholders and divergent perspectives, and (iii) identifying triggers and creating opportunities for change within the political and bureaucratic processes. We discuss each of these in turn.

*Using Field Research to Strengthen the Analytical Underpinning of Policy Process and to Resolve Conflicts*

Collection and generation of field evidence and dialogue to evolve a common perspective, must be seen an important and significant element of the policy formulation and implementation strategy. But, it must be understood that policy outcomes based purely on dialogue can be fragile and prone to political capture. Complementing a dialogue-based approach with some 'action on the ground' (such as pilot disease control or a system for delivery of minor services) can lend more legitimacy and permanence to proposed policy options and changes.

Analytical work and process interactions are both necessary, although the process is often more complicated and aggressive than commonly perceived by non-participants. In Andhra Pradesh, the approach taken was to bring in the necessary analytical evidence from the field for informing and continuing the dialogue. This was an essential part of the process, but the utility of data and analysis were undermined by the entrenched positions of the stakeholders, which limited constructive dialogue and hindered the give and take of the consultative process. The challenge therefore is to understand the factors that can enhance the 'uptake of research/field evidence' into policy making. It is necessary to pay attention to (i) who demands and conducts research, (ii) how

relevant the evidence is perceived to be by the policy makers and stakeholders, and (iii) a communication strategy appropriate for the target audience.

### *Managing the Stakeholder Consultation Processes*

There is always a gap between policy design and implementation. Implementation success will depend to a large extent on the understanding and commitment to the policy objectives by the key actors who apply the changes. This process is helped by a learning-centred approach to policy change that places emphasis on internalisation and buy-in based on a common understanding of the problem and possible options to resolve them. This inevitably means policy development will take longer but it leads to deeper commitment by stakeholders during the process. Also, given that there is often a long gestation period in changing mindsets, it is critical that the organizations and individuals representing the next generation of leaders are active partners in these processes.

Working with partners to design and facilitate policy change processes and implementation strategies requires an understanding and ability to operate within these relationships and to have a robust understanding of the context in which the work is taking place. Projects that attempt to influence the process therefore need to invest in relationship building as much as in their strategy for knowledge generation and dissemination. This is true both for supporters of the policy change and for those who may be opposed to it. Understanding relationships and making the best of them also requires sensitivity to perceptions and behaviours of individuals who may have much different views and, at least initially, a high level of mistrust. It also needs to recognise that these antagonistic views may have been built over years.

Providing space and opportunities for constant and continued reflection are key to effective learning. Unfortunately, those spaces are often not abundant given cultural values and existing power and accountability relationships. It is therefore critical to constantly examine ways of stimulating communication and

nurturing creative thinking. Otherwise, entrenched views and relationships may block communication and prevent new understanding of the underlying issues, leading to fragmentation and political alignment that hinders agreement on and implementation of policy of change.

### *Creating Opportunities for Change in Political and Bureaucratic Processes*

Facilitating policy change requires identifying opportunities and triggers within the system. This requires considerable familiarity with bureaucratic procedures and people with a political vision. Given the complexity of ground realities it is often quite difficult to be sure that the proposed interventions will end up being pro-poor in their implementation. There are also difficulties as well as opportunities in operating at higher levels of policy. Ensuring 'ownership' by governments and maintaining effective relationships with non-government partners are necessary elements of the process, but, at the same time, fragile government-NGO relationships create their own challenges. Bringing in participation of the communities and other stakeholders is critical, but how the government side views the process is equally important. While NGOs can be quite effective in manoeuvring political power relations and putting the concerns of the poor on political agenda, they may also become entangled in power politics, and in an attempt to build and protect their own constituency can exclude sections of poor people from key decision making processes.

### **Conclusions**

This article highlights some of the difficulties of managing open and flexible participatory policy processes within an inevitably complex social and political context. The paper presents the general themes of policy implementation process challenges, particularly as they relate to participation issues. The Andhra Pradesh case study illustrates the challenges of applying these policy implementation lessons in situations where there are multiple actors with competing and conflicting goals and interests. The case reveals that these



conflicts can lead to missed opportunities to learn from stakeholders. To overcome this it is critical to recognize that no policy consultation process starts from scratch but picks up on considerable previous interaction among stakeholders, some of them possibly quite antagonistic, with strongly held positions that may be entrenched and polarised. It is important that any new policy process understands what has gone on before and be aware of the history and the stakeholders' views and interactions. While it is important for managers of the process to remain neutral, and ensure that they are perceived so, it must also be clearly understood that the other participants, even those in a facilitation role, may be anything but neutral.

Second, the experience demonstrates the importance of using institutional partnerships to bring in various views and tap into the previous groundwork and discussion on the topic. Influencing policy outcomes by building sustainable partnerships requires a set of skills by facilitators and project managers, who need to have respect, trust and confidence about other peoples' view points and be able to adapt. It was quite clear from the Andhra Pradesh experience that when people come together directly to reflect on a policy implementation issue, power factors present a significant barrier to effective communication.

Finally, and especially in the context of projects and processes funded by international donors, there is a often a complicated balance between informing policy based on global experience while being supportive of the national government's own reform agenda in implementing what they have ostensibly agreed to or proclaimed as their policy implementation agenda. This is critical for improving understanding of the 'political and technocratic space for engagement' in the policy processes.

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