

Validating the results of monitoring effects with target groups

The social-pastoral team in the parish of Pasorapa, Bolivia

What does the social-pastoral team do?

- The social-pastoral team in the small rural parish of Pasorapa, a mountainous area in the centre of Bolivia, advise small farming families in ten communities on ways to improve their agricultural and livestock farming practices. Once a year, an outcome and impact assessment is done together with the farmers. The data collected is validated together with all the village communities. This is what the project team refer to as 'participatory outcome and impact assessment'.

What is the aim and purpose of this meeting between the project team and the village communities?

- Mercedes Arandia, who chairs a women's group, welcomes the farmers who have come to the meeting convened by the social-pastoral team to validate the monitoring results. (*"...with the engineer, who's working with us, and with the other women, we are working to grow vegetables. We will look at what our weaknesses are at the moment, where we need to improve, what things are improving, what things are going well – and so on for the whole group ..."*)
- Emilio Román, the agricultural engineer who has been working in the parish for many years, explains what the meeting is all about. (*"...We are going to feed back information from you. We have met with the mothers' groups. We have gathered a few small questions, in groups. We are going to share all their replies, their ideas with you. And we will give them our feedback – tell them whether we agree or not..."*) He tells the participants that the team will present all the data recently collected with a small group of farmers indicating what changes the project has brought about. Today, for instance, they will be validating all the data collected on progress made in improving soil protection on cropland, and improving vegetable cultivation, which can now be practised all year round thanks to the construction of water collection basins.

What is the project about?

- Freddy Cabrera, the project team's vet, presents the project with its specific objectives for livestock farming. He explains to the group that they will now take a look at the data together to see whether the project objectives and indicators have been achieved: (*"...Everyone has to realise this, you have to realise it yourselves as well... A second objective is: that the families participating in the project have greatly improved the quality and availability of fodder for their livestock..."*) for instance regarding the improvement of cattle, sheep and goat farming. Are the promoters who are supposed to transfer their knowledge of practical livestock farming to their neighbours sufficiently well qualified, and are they doing a good job? What effect are the vaccination campaigns against parasite infestation having? Are forage crops being cultivated and is silage being produced, and is this helping to ensure sufficient fodder for the herds during the critical months of the year?

How does the project team go about performing the monitoring and assessment of effects?

- Asking all the families about project progress on a regular basis would be too much, says Emilio Cabrera, as he explains why the project team has decided on a random sample. What does this mean? A small number of families from both project areas have been selected to study the progress made in achieving the planned effects at regular intervals. (*“So we have the 5 families we have been visiting: in Arquequeos, in Pasola, in Palmasola, here in Zanjos and in Rudapampa, at Don Pedro Lorenzo’s. And these fields have been monitored – we have been keeping an eye on them.”*) Today’s meeting, he explains, will involve jointly assessing how much the topsoil in the fields has improved as a result of the soil protection measures. He also explains how the area improved in individual fields was measured. And he reports that the yields of the main crops were recorded during the harvesting season, and infestation with fungus and other diseases monitored. They also want to find out how satisfied the population are with the work, and how the various activities are affecting income. To ensure that these data are comparable, the project team also recorded baseline values before the project was launched.

Lively group discussions

- After this introduction and presentation of the monitoring results by the project team, two groups of men and one group of women are formed. Each group is given three questions with which to analyse the results presented:
 - ☞ What do you think about the results presented?
 - ☞ What do you see differently?
 - ☞ What other effects have you observed?
- The issue of surface soil improvement leads to prolonged debates among the farmers. One representative of the village union questions the anticipated effects of the soil protection measures, and calls on the others to justify themselves. The farmers are having a heated debate about the monitoring results. The women concentrate on analysing progress and challenges in vegetable cultivation. They are analysing their subjective perceptions.

Presenting and debating the results in plenary

- Once the group discussions are finished, the participants present their results in plenary. The first ‘men’s group’, represented by Lorenzo Picon, present their results. Questions are asked and critical feedback is provided in the plenary. (*“What are we agreed on? Why? Was there any technical assistance? This means, friends, that we have received support from Emilio, the engineer, and Dr. Fredy. This is what this technical part refers to. There are a few small things we haven’t agreed on, for example last time, with the engineer, when we did the measuring, we noted how the land was being used. With such a slope, a lot gets carried right down. So it means we would be sharing these 15 cms, the 7.50 cms above increases, and the 7.50 cms below is really steep terrain. On lands that are not so steep, there would be little increase above and there would be less wear and tear below. This means that when planting potatoes, there is far more handling of the soil ...”*)

- The results of the women's discussion are presented by farmer Yolanda Espíndola, who is currently president of the municipal council of Pasorapa: *"...it says here...: what other changes have you noticed, either positive or negative, in your family, community, among women or elsewhere? It says here, yes it's been positive for...for my family, for the community. There has been a change in food security. This is what they've said, isn't it? Everyone in the group said there's been a change because the children are learning more, less..."*

The ladies rated the progress made in vegetable cultivation as satisfactory. They see a positive change in the dietary habits of their families. Their children are ill less frequently. Positive economic results are also evident in vegetable cultivation: families now have more money from selling produce.

Conclusions based on the reflection with target groups

- The project team and the farmers from Pasorapa say they appreciate this form of joint reflection. Collecting data and critically assessing the progress made in achieving the planned changes together and on a regular basis, strengthens their self-confidence. Families think more about the changes in their living conditions. This form of reflection motivates people. They say things like: My life has changed! You can change your life! Ultimately this is the most important outcome of the joint process.
- The project team have also changed their view. Rather than focusing on implementing the planned activities, they now monitor changes and consider what strategies they can use to achieve them.