

Multi-Stakeholder Sector Development and Complex Change Facilitation

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Executive Summary

Addressing poverty means observing systems and structures in society that result in exclusion and disempowerment. Some of these inequalities are historical and pervasive to a society, while some are knowingly or unknowingly developed by various actors in society. Addressing these issues in a sustainable way – rather than simply a technical lens – requires bringing different actors and stakeholders together to determine long term action to change the system beyond technical “fixes”. Taken at its broadest level, this case study on the Environmentally Friendly Roads Construction (EFRC) initiative in Bhutan illustrates how technical approaches can be “up-scaled” to create opportunities to transform broader institutional arrangements. It also illustrates how systems can support lasting environmental protection and stewardship, and how communities can become much more actively engaged in maintaining and sustaining their vital road access infrastructures.

The case highlights the change process the EFRC project initiated and facilitated. The first project phase created more technical changes in the project setting, while simultaneously overcoming resistance and building trust and credibility for broader change. With increased action learning and technical innovation the project over time created increasingly more entry points, as well as support for change, within the Department of Roads and the construction sector as a whole. At the same time, institutional constraints for change identified were taken up by the project: like increase in budget for road construction, sector wide policies on environmental safeguards, quality assurances, and a Codes of Conduct for road construction.

The gradual move from a narrower project focus, towards developing organisational and inter-organisational network capacities and institutional strengthening, shows the importance of understanding change as complex and emergent. The SNV and DoR team had to work in an increasingly complex environment demanding adaptability, flexibility, and an increasing need for relationship building and multi-stakeholder process facilitation.

Within the change process the importance of cultural interactions also became increasingly clear. Understanding within different familial, organisational and ethnographic cultures, and the tension and opportunities these bring, became an important aspect of the change facilitation process. Especially the linking of EFRC to the local Buddhist belief system of respect for all sentient beings, and the development concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH), proved to be a powerful way to stimulate change.

Another lesson learned is that “learning-on-the-go” is an insufficient method for effective change facilitation. There is a need for systematically analysing and understanding complex change in order to navigate the intricacies to bring and keep people on board. The integral theory of Ken Wilber, which was applied to the case as part of the study, provides some interesting insights and seems to have a clear potential for use by complex change facilitators.