EU-India cross cultural innovation network workshop on

*Action research: From women empowerment to community building - A case of dairy movement*

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The workshop was organised by Nistads along with the European partners under EU-India project, ‘EU-India Cross Cultural Innovation Network’. The aim of the workshop was to discuss action research as a tool for innovation and change within a framework of sustainable development. Action research is increasingly being used as a tool for collaborative problem solving amongst the various stakeholders of development programmes and for rebuilding and facilitating supporting environments.

The focus of the workshop was on application of Action Research methodologies of ‘Search Conference’ and ‘Scenario Building’ within the Indian context of dairy development. It utilized the experiences of three methodologies as practiced in Europe for the Indian case. The workshop was conducted by two facilitators; Dr. EGaribaldo from Italy, who used the technique of ‘Search Conference’ and Dr. Lauge B. Rasmussen, from Denmark using ‘Scenario Building’, and three Coordinators - Dr. Kavita Mehra (Delhi), Dr. Jatin Pancholi (Gujarat) and Dr. Rajinder K. Kalra (Punjab).

Dairy sector was used as an exemplar to explore and provide insights into the process of women empowerment and community building.

There were 22 participants in the workshop from Punjab, Gujarat and Delhi representing various stakeholders of the dairy sector- farmers, women cooperative members, Milk Union members, agricultural researchers, policy researchers, NGOs, entrepreneurs in milk processing and representatives from policy making bodies, and the National Dairy Development Board.

During inaugural session, Prof. Rajesh Kochhar, Director, Nistads welcomed the participants and hoped to gain from the experience of the European partners in the four day long intensive workshop. Prof. Dhawal Mehta informed about the so far developments in the ongoing ‘EU-India Cross Cultural Innovation Network’ project. Dr. Francesco Garibaldo and Dr. Lauge Rasmussen introduced very briefly, the methodologies of the workshop and the specific rules to be followed for conducting such workshops.

**The search conference**

It was a day long activity and Dr. Francesco Garibaldo was the facilitator. It was held in three phases:- a) Problem analyzing phase, b) Problem developing phase; and c) Finalizing the issues that emerged for dairy development and women empowerment leading to community building. Participants were asked to have full brainstorming exercise on the problems identification and in the next phase to hold in depth discussion on the problems diagnosed by the house. Facilitators and group coordinators wrote down the contents of the brain storming sessions and discussions on the charts. The coordination group consisting of facilitators and coordinators in the third phase prepared a synthesis report on the basis of the two sessions held. The framework for development of dairy sector to achieve the goals of the participants was summarized in three streams- Dairy as business, Social life related issues and Infrastructure and Policies environment. The report prepared was circulated amongst the participants. Finalization was done with the consensus of the house on the language and the issues mentioned therein.

**Scenario building workshop**

It was conducted by Dr. Lauge Rasmussen and took two and half days. Dr. Rasmussen presented general concepts of the scenario workshop. He explained the rules of the workshop and then the various phases of the Scenario building workshop. Participants were asked to focus on a general question during the workshop ‘How can empowerment of women contribute to community building?’ and to focus on dairy sector. The workshop had plenary sessions and the group activities. Plenary sessions were meant to explain to the participants the next steps. Each group after brainstorming and discussions during the group activity presented its
findings to the plenary sessions. Participants were divided into three groups based on the region to which they belonged - Gujarat, Punjab and Delhi.

The workshop was carried out mainly in the three phases - Scenario making, backcasting and action plan. Each phase was further divided into many sub-phases. After the backcasting stage, there was a Special Plenary session - to bridge the Search conference and Scenario building workshop. The two facilitators jointly conducted the workshop so as to analyse the utilization of the findings of search conference with scenario building workshop. It was found that all the issues except two minor issues analysed during Search conference were taken into consideration during Scenario building exercise. Later on the left out issues were also included in the subsequent course.

In the final phase, two facilitators provided guidelines in nine points to the participants for making action plan for each region by each group. Three local action plans - for Delhi, Gujarat and Punjab were prepared. Each action plan focused on- Dairy as primary occupation of women (and men too), better networking, literacy among the producers of milk, better skills and knowledge to the farmers, improvement in milk production and processing of milk, more and more economic gains and thus all the development leading to empowerment of women. Gujarat and Punjab in their action plans presented some schemes and projections at field level development. Since in Delhi, the dairy as cooperatives is not existing, the theme of Delhi group action plan was Networking. It was to coordinate the developments at regional levels and to provide information on current developments in dairy sector at national and global level through information technology.

The Evaluation session was there to receive comments of the participants on the quality, utility or expectations of action research methodologies discussed/followed by them. All the participants were found to be very involved in the workshop and were very satisfied with the experience.

Formally closing the workshop, Prof. Rajesh Kochhar expressed the hope that this work will not end here but will go on, helping people in agriculture with the focus on some selected areas of farming like organic farming. He expressed the hope that EU will give support to utilize the action research methodology towards those issues.

The workshop resulted in the following as outcomes (presently at draft stage and shortly to be finalized):
1. Full written version of the scenarios, the backcastings and action plans for Delhi, Gujarat and Punjab.
2. A manual tool kit system in Action Research - based on the experiences of the workshop, that can be used by concerned students, researchers, practitioners, NGOs, policy makers and media.
3. A virtual network to be set up for the participants of the workshop to exchange developments and knowledge in the dairy sector.