



Case Overview

Development of a Sustainable Project Framework to expand Project Outcomes

Studying points

The sustainability of agricultural development projects is often a matter of concern, especially in countries where the governmental extension system is weak or does not exist. Although it is critical to ensure a project's sustainability, governments and development partners rarely pay enough attention to this problem. Students are expected to recognize and identify wider stakeholders, including public and private sector actors involved in “the Project” in this case study and characterize them to strengthen project planning capacity.

Basic information

- Region: Central Asia
- Issue: Rural Development
- Keywords: Project formulation, technologies/knowledge dissemination, project sustainability
- Country: Republic of Inland (fictitious country)
- Year: 2023

Abbreviations

DAD	Department of Agricultural Development
DADD	District Agricultural Development Department
DP	Development Partner
GoRI	Government of Republic of Inland
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture of Government of Republic of Inland
NAU	National Agricultural University
ToT	Training of Trainers

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Summary

Development Partner A (DP A) implemented “the Project” to enhance the export potential of agricultural products and elevate income levels for farmers in the Republic of Inland. The Project successfully increased the export volume of vegetables in the targeted areas and as a result, the Government of Republic of Inland (GoRI) requested a second project phase. As part of the planning of the project framework for the second phase, DP A conducted a preparatory survey to confirm the situation after the Project completion. It found that after the completion of the Project, none of the stakeholders had continued to implement dissemination activities, and the approach which had proven effective during the pilot phase of the Project, did not expand to other areas. DP A was disappointed with this situation. It had made an effort to establish the framework of the Project so as to secure its sustainability and had expected the Project’s good practice would be spread by the stakeholders even after its completion. DP A would now like to confirm the reason(s) for the failure of the Project’s dissemination system and develop a new project framework for the second phase.

Key questions when reading this case:

1. What kind of activities should be implemented to secure the sustainability of the Project after its completion?
2. How do you evaluate each project stakeholder as an implementer of the above activities, against each of the following considerations: (1) “knowledge”, (2) “motivation”, and (3) “budget”? “Knowledge” is not only knowledge of training content but also the experience and know-how to deliver the trainings to beneficiaries. “Motivation” refers to both mental and economic drivers. “Budget” is the financial capability to implement the necessary activities.
3. If DP A commences Project Phase 2, what implementing structure should be developed? Which specific activities do you think should be added to improve the sustainability of Project Phase 2?

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1. Background

The Republic of Inland (a fictitious country) is a lower-middle income country in Central Asia, with a per capita GNI of USD 1500. The agriculture sector occupies about 15% of its GDP and 25% of the population engage in agricultural practices. In addition, since 60% of rural people earn from agriculture, this sector plays an important role in both economic and rural development.

The Government of the Republic of Inland (GoRI) was keen to develop the agricultural sector and has identified priority agricultural products, such as wheat, potato, vegetables, fruits and berries, vegetable oil, sugar beets, milk, meat, and eggs, based on food security and their export potential.

In 2016, in line with the GoRI agriculture policy, Development Partner A (DP A) started a technical cooperation project (the Project) to support small-scale vegetable farmers. The Project focused on exploiting the export potential of the target farmers and increasing their income by introducing new crops and/or shifting harvesting timings by new cultivation technology. Additionally, the Project aimed to develop the market survey capacity of the farmers and fostered mutually cooperative (win-win) relationships among farmers and buyers/middlemen in the five pilot districts.

At the beginning of the project, the Department of Agricultural Development (DAD) under the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and the international consultant team hired by DP A formed a project team and conducted a survey to determine the project implementation. The DAD had extension officers under the District Agricultural Development Department (DADD) within every district, whom the Project Team proposed should be the main implementers at the field level. However, the DAD budget was very limited and it could somehow cover the recurrent budget, mainly salary of officers, of DADD and insufficient budget was left for field activities every year. The Project Team therefore had concerns about the sustainability of the Project and looked for other implementers who had their own activity budget.

Between 2014 and 2015, the National Agricultural University (NAU), which is under the Ministry of Education, had conducted several demonstration experiments relating to vegetable and fruit cultivation technology with budget support from DP B. This activity covered the five pilot districts and NAU staff had

already established a good relationship with farmers in the area. Moreover, NAU had adequate experts in areas such as agronomy and marketing, to implement the Project. After negotiations between the Project Team and NAU, it was agreed that as the project was interesting from an academic viewpoint, NAU would:

- 1) take the role of implementer of the Project; and
- 2) allocate its own research budget even after completion of the Project in order to disseminate the approach that had been shown to be effective in the pilot areas.

The agreement was confirmed by an MoU signed by NAU, the MoA and DP A.

The Project Team and NAU identified profitable crops and cultivation methods for each district and developed a set of extension materials, which could be understandable even to farmers;¹ NAU then provided trainings to farmer groups. Buyers were also heavily involved in trainings to support understanding between farmers and buyers and help them develop cooperative relationships. Stakeholder meetings with farmers who were producing vegetables and buyers who were directly buying vegetables from farmers, were regularly held. Farmers provided information about when, where, and what kinds of vegetables could be produced, and buyers provided information about when, where, and what kinds of vegetables were most in demand (higher market price). Through such information exchanges, farmers and buyers developed a relationship of trust and most of them entered into business transactions. In the latter stages of the Project, the Project Team and NAU selected five core farmers in each district, who had successfully adapted new technology, developed cooperative relations with buyers, and increased income from vegetables. Selected farmers were then provided a Training of Trainers (ToT). Using the extension materials, these core farmers then disseminated what they learnt to surrounding farmers. As large in-person trainings were impossible in during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020; the Project team made the extension materials available on the internet and accessible from PCs and smartphones. In addition, NAU gave additional ToT to extension officers who then visited farmers in their areas and conducted trainings using the extension materials. All activity costs were borne by the Project. The Project was successfully completed in 2021. The endline survey revealed

¹ Literacy rate of the Republic of Inland is 99%

that the agricultural income of the farmers had increased by 80% on average. Through the communication with buyers, most farmers became familiar with market information and noticed that shifting the timing of their harvest earlier to a period when the market price was higher, gave them more profit; for example, early tomatoes, early bell peppers and early cabbages were introduced under the Project. Buyers were also satisfied with the Project because they were able to easily find vegetable farmers who were producing what they wanted and through the development of trusted partnerships, they enjoyed stable transactions with farmers. In addition, early harvesting also increased profits for buyers.

2. After Completion of the Project

In 2023, because of the remarkable achievements of the Project, the MoA requested that DP A implement the Project Phase 2 (a five-year project). DP A agreed to conduct a preparatory survey to develop the framework for the second phase.

However, the preparatory survey confirmed that none of the actors had continued dissemination activities after the completion of the first phase. The situations of stakeholders was shown to be as follows:

MoA and DAD

The COVID19 pandemic negatively impacted the state revenue of the GoRI for several years. As a result, the MoA/DAD could not provide any additional budget to continue the Project activities after the completion of the first phase.

DADD

During the Project, activity costs (such as PCs, smartphone, connection costs and transportation fees) were borne by the Project budget. While the Project Team had concerns about the sustainability of the activity budget for extension officers, maintaining these activities was the only way to continue the Project during the COVID19 pandemic. After the completion of the Project, some motivated extension officers had continued extension activities using their own PCs and smartphones; however, at the time the preparatory survey was

undertaken, no one was carrying out such activities as the use of private money and resources was not sustainable for the extension officers long term.

Since extension officers were involved in the Project in the latter stages, almost all trainings for buyers had been completed by the time they joined the Project. Accordingly, the officers only provided trainings to farmers. This meant that after the Project, extension officers did not have the experience or the connection to the buyers to continue trainings.

NAU

Although NAU agreed to provide their own research budget to continue extension activities, they failed to do so. The rector of NAU changed right after the Project completion and the new Rector decided to allocate more budget to agricultural engineering research to tackle climate change, especially decreasing irrigation water resources. The MoA and DP A requested that NAU fulfill the MoU, but NAU refused by stating that climate change was a very important issue for the GoRI and they had to follow government policy. Besides, the MoU was not legally binding.

In addition, NAU was only paid for its work during the project implementation period but not afterwards. There was little motivation for the NAU to continue this work without payment.

One year after the Project completion, DP B recognized the achievements of the Project and decided to utilize the know-how of NAU in its Technical Cooperation Project, which commenced in 2021 and was planned to be completed in 2026. Several NAU professors were hired as local consultants, to provide ToT and organize field visits to farmer groups who had shown great performance during the Project.

If DP A were to start the Project Phase 2, NAU would have had enough human resources to collaborate with DP A and DP B at the same time. However, they did not wish to cover any of the activity costs.

Core farmers/ beneficiary farmers

Most of the core farmers and beneficiary farmers who received trainings from the NAU, core farmers, or extension officers, were still utilizing the technology

and knowledge they had acquired. Moreover, they continued to communicate with buyers in a cooperative way. As a result, they continued to enjoy good productivity and income.

Even after the Project period, some core farmers had continued dissemination activities for neighboring farmers but the frequency of the activities decreased over time. At the time of the preparatory survey, no core farmers were undertaking dissemination activities.

The financial burden of dissemination activities for core farmers was small and was not the reason dissemination activities ceased. Core farmers admitted that the provision of raw materials, such as fertilizers and seeds, to them during the Project had motivated them; however, once that input stopped, they lost their motivation. The Project had decided to provide raw materials for those who tried new technologies/ crops to mitigate the risk of the new challenges in the first phase.

Due to the favorable weather conditions, the harvests of the target crops within the Project were abundant, and their market price decreased. This market situation also discouraged core farmers from disseminating the new technology of early vegetable production as to do so may have generated new competitors.

Buyers/ middlemen

After the Project period ended, buyers continued to do business with core farmers and beneficiary farmers; however, they found that the productivity and quality of the crops was gradually deteriorating. A series of brush-up trainings was seen as necessary to regain the full potential of the new technology and crops.

In the immediate aftermath of the Project, buyers wanting to increase their business volume, encouraged core farmers to conduct occasional trainings for other farmers. However, as time went on, the number and frequency of the dissemination activities waned.

Although buyers had participated in the series of the trainings, they did not participate in the ToT as they were not put in a position to disseminate new technology to farmers.

DP B

DP B was active in economic development, including the agriculture sector in the Republic of Inland.

In 2014 and 2015, DP B collaborated with NAU to develop appropriate cultivation technology for several horticulture products. They then tried to introduce contract farming together with the developed technology. Although farmers enjoyed improved productivity, contract farming was not very successful as farmers were able to easily sell their products to local markets when the market price was higher than the contract price. Therefore, DP B showed an interest in ways to nurture a cooperative relationship between farmers and buyers, and brought NAU into the marketing component, too.

DP B's project was due to finish in 2026 and they were positive that a new technical cooperation project and new ideas would follow.

2. Discussion on the Next Phase Project

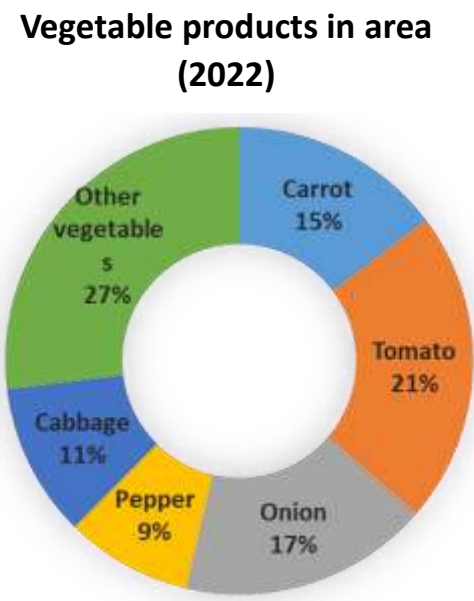
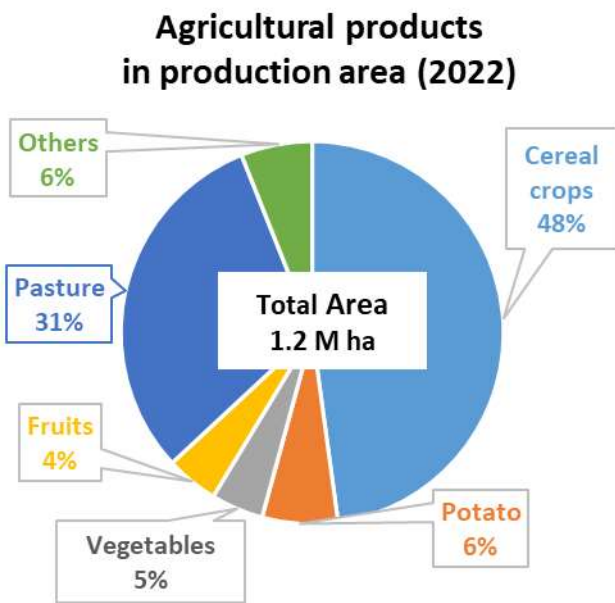
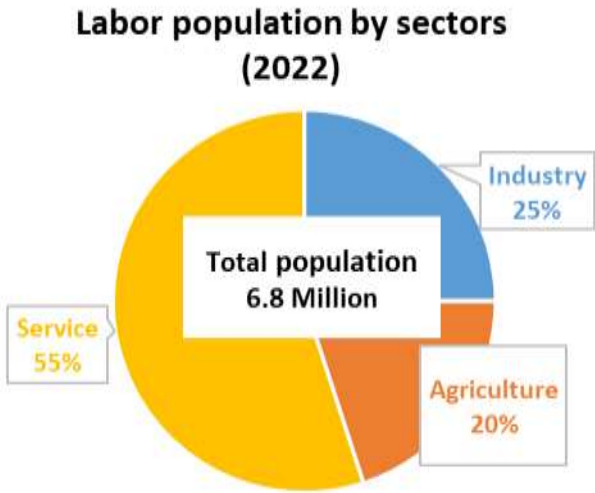
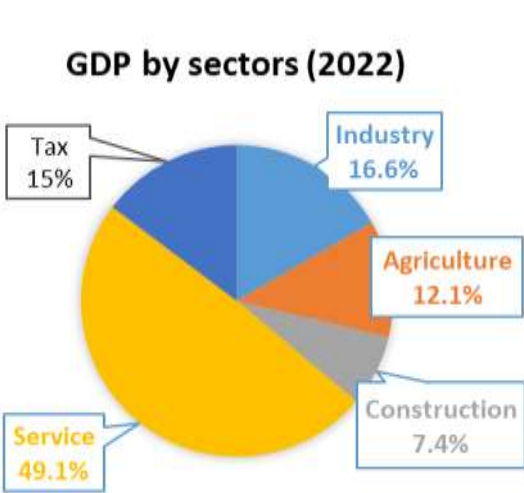
The Project successfully demonstrated the effectiveness of the approach and established many good cases of increased incomes for farmers. DP A developed the project framework in a way that allowed stakeholders to continue to disseminate the demonstrated approach and keep creating “good cases” even after the Project completion; however, this attempt appears to have failed. Based on this “lesson learnt”, DP A would like to develop a new project framework that can secure sustainability, but it is unclear on what kind of implementing structure would be suitable for achieving this purpose.

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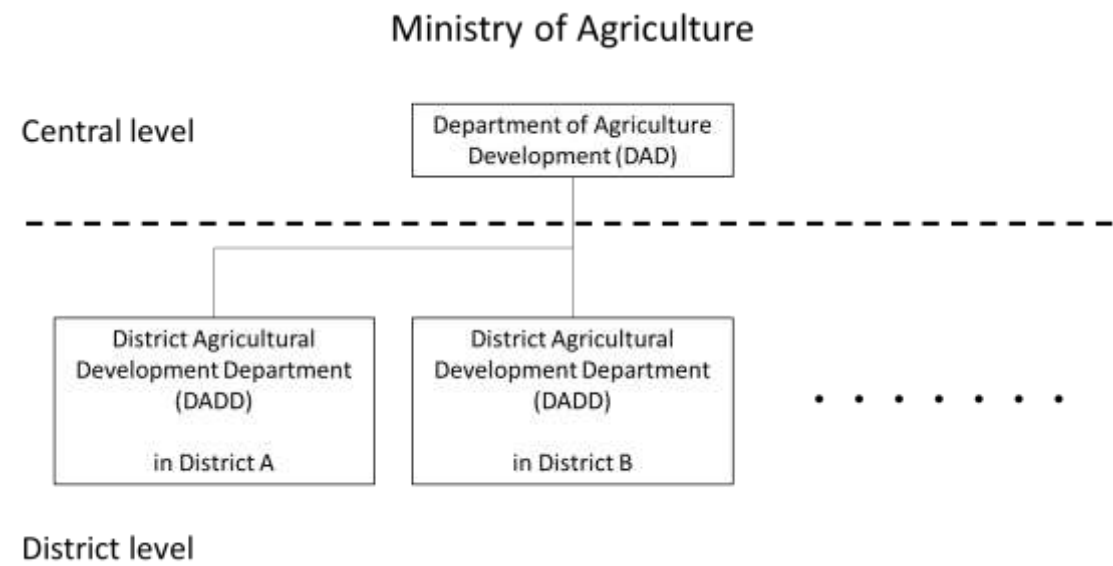
Attachment 1 Data from the Agriculture sector

Attachment 2 Structure of the Ministry of Agriculture

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