Participatory Project Self-review and Planning

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Heifer International is a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization that works to alleviate poverty and hunger and to restore the environment by providing appropriate livestock, training, and related services to small-scale farmers worldwide. Heifer International helps communities use livestock as an integral component of sustainable agriculture, environmental improvement, and holistic development. The basic unit of Heifer’s work is a community-level project. Each project is shaped and guided by the expressed needs and interests of the people who participate in the project. Project participants are encouraged to examine their progress throughout the project cycle. Project self-review and planning (PSRP) is a fundamental aspect of Heifer’s partnership with local community groups. PSRPs are facilitated annually as part of regular project management to assess how the projects are evolving relative to their goals, aspirations, and priorities. All project members participate in the PSRP.

Method

In 2002, Heifer International facilitated over 50 PSRPs in 16 countries. Country staff and project leaders facilitated the review and planning sessions in the local language with sessions ranging between four hours and three days. A minimum of 10 and a maximum of 55 people participated in the individual PSRP sessions.

Major Points or Information to be Shared

PSRPs consist of two sessions: the project self-review and action planning. The self-review includes the following activities: a group storytelling, an appreciative reflection, an objective/goal check-in, a project values and Heifer Cornerstones review, a suggestion “box”, and a closing celebration. The action planning session results in the creation or revision of a project action plan that takes into account the outcomes of the self-review. A description and discussion of the different participatory activities will be shared, including self-review and planning activities specifically designed for children.

Conclusions or Lessons Learned

Many lessons were learned in the field: a) The PSRP process serves as a team-building tool and allows project groups a structured format to reflect on their work, b) booklets, flyers, handouts, and drawings greatly enhanced the process, c) integrating the review and planning sessions into the normal activities of the group is the most sustaining, d) appreciative or developmental stages of ranking work better than dichotomous categories, such as “good” or “bad,” e) co-facilitation with a project leader builds capacity within the group, and f) allow project members to decide what information from the PSRP will be shared with the country program office.

Educational Importance

An annual PSRP that includes all project participants achieves many benefits: fostering accountability; examining areas needing growth; ensuring participation of all members; adapting the plan to new circumstances if needed; providing valuable insight from the project and sharing the information with others; recognizing and celebrating achievements; strengthening the community bond among members; building internal capacity for project review and planning; and nurturing project sustainability and self-reliance.