

HOLISTIC MANAGEMENT AND VALUE CHAINS WITH A LIVELIHOODS PERSPECTIVE: INCLUDING AND TRANSCENDING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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Introduction

After three decades of experience, integrated farming systems approaches remain at the core of innovative methodologies for development practitioners, researchers and communities. There has been an increasing demand for holistic solutions to address complex problems that simultaneously address social, economic and environmental aspects of development, yet the practical tools were not evident (Neely and Dixon, 2006, Scharmer, 2005). The objectives of this paper are to illustrate the potential for a fused holistic and value chain framework for effective decision making at the farm and value chain level.

Results

The Approach

The Holistic Management (HM) decision-making framework (Savory and Butterfield, 1999) provides the opportunity to understand the whole that is being managed and articulate a holistic goal towards which decisions can be tested - ensuring that sustainability in the short and long term. Further, with global changes (national and international trade and markets, biofuel demands, realities of climate change) that require integration into local, national, and international markets, it has become evident that the whole value chain (VC) must be taken into account. In this paper, we present an enriched framework that fuses HM and VC approaches from a livelihoods perspective to ensure that decisions taken by communities and farmers can lead to substantial and sustained impact.

Holistic Management (HM) provides a framework for decision-making that emphasizes what is most important in life, what has to be created or produced to achieve this, and what future resource base (behaviours, ecosystem process, services, etc) must be in place to sustain this long into the future. It is against this higher level holistic goal and desired outcome that decisions are “tested” in an integrated fashion to ensure social, environmental and economic viability. Complexity has limited our capacity to handle these different aspects simultaneously. From a holistic perspective, the world operates in “wholes” and subsequently we must recognize and manage the assets in any given whole under management. The whole comprises decision makers, the current resource base (human, social, physical and natural capital or assets including those institutions that influence decision making) and available money (financial capital). Holistic Management offers a practical framework for identifying and testing the sustainability of potential strategies (including livelihood strategies) and motivation for implementation, monitoring and controlling towards the desired outcome.

The set of actors and institutions which bridge rural service providers, farmers/pastoralists and processing and marketing services can be referred to as a value chain (VC) Framework, or as a U-impact pathway (Dixon et al., 2007). Functional VCs could be viewed as dynamic wholes (Carrell et al., 2004) where the various decision makers share a common vision and values and evolve through competitive cooperation. The chain is a complex non-linear system where efficiency and sustainability could be enhanced through Holistic Management decision making both by individual actors within a value chain or by the full group.

Illustration

The HM-VC fusion is illustrated for conservation agriculture (CA) in the irrigated rice-wheat system of the Indo-Gangetic Plain. In a world where farmers and consumers depend on a few centimeters

of soil and water, which are being rapidly degraded, conservation agriculture (CA) is viewed as a viable approach towards sustainable agriculture and rural development. Small farming communities are creating a quiet revolution in the rice wheat farming systems of the IndoGangetic Plains of South Asia with the rapid adoption of resource conserving technologies which are an important step towards CA. Yet experience with CA across continents confirms that farmer and business cooperation is essential to reap the full benefits of CA its management requires a holistic multi-institutional approach.

An Indian farming community manages a whole that consists of decision makers (farmer leaders, farmers, workers, family members); a resource base (farmer networks, researchers, extensionists, service and input providers, buyers, land, water, equipment, skills and knowledge) and money (income from sales and savings). Through facilitated community discussion, their holistic goal could be: "We the farm women and men of this village wish to have a strong relationships among family and community, be financially secure, enjoy healthy and safe working lives, and be continually learning and improving the state of our natural resource base. To have this, we must create opportunities for farming in a sustainable way, generate income from meaningful work, and create opportunities to learn from one another and others and build transparent communication and information strategies. To sustain this, we must be honest, trustworthy and innovative producers with. Our land must be covered with residues, have diversity of plant/animal species and have an effective water cycle. Service and input providers and markets must be available and supportive".

As a whole within a larger whole (the value chain), the farmers might test the decision to adopt conservation agriculture principles (minimum tillage, residue retention, rotation) to meet their holistic goal - enhance livelihoods, profitability and the environment.. By using this framework, they may find that to achieve their holistic goal, they must interact differently with or even change those with whom they do business, i.e., VC participants. This effort to achieve sustainable livelihoods could be enhanced further if each of the entities and actors with whom they engage in the larger whole (services, input providers, processors, markets, consumers) had a holistic goal by which their decisions were also tested. They could each - through enlightened self-interest - in turn make decisions that produced better results (socially, financially, and environmentally) for themselves while influencing positively others across the chain. As we advance our capacity to truly implement multi-stakeholder processes, it is envisaged that conversations hosted among the actors across the value chain using a holistic decision making process can lead to enhanced awareness, relationships and mutually agreed to sustainable solutions.

Conclusions

Such a fused HM-VC Framework has great potential to organize and assure more effective decision making, improved management of resources and viable pathways to livelihoods improvement and poverty reduction in a wide range of complex rural development settings.

References

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