

ASSESSING AND MONITORING HEALTH RISKS FROM POLLUTION IN THE CONTEXT OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

**Goa, India Workshop
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FACILITATOR'S POST-WORKSHOP REPORT

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Introduction

This report will cover observations and reflections related to the workshop process and outcomes. Detailed outlines of what was presented have already been submitted.

Workshop Process

1. Transdisciplinary Team Approach

This was my second experience serving as part of a training team for an Ecohealth Proposal Development workshop. (The first was the SIMA-IDRC Workshop held in Nairobi in 2002.) In my report after the Nairobi workshop, I remarked that I felt there were weaknesses in the way that team worked together (or didn't) in terms of complementarity within a transdisciplinarity framework. One of the resource persons was (for example) unable to "see" or appreciate the importance of the social dimension, and in fact actively discouraged participating research teams from including research questions, disciplinary partnerships and research methodologies that departed from his own paradigmatic framework. In that workshop I felt that the various resource persons each presented their separate and distinct pieces but that the participants were left to take those pieces and make of them an integrated whole.

By contrast, the individual planning time and team communication built in prior to and especially during the Goa workshop led to a much more effective transdisciplinary integration, such that the various disciplinary components fit together into a much more coherent whole than they did in Nairobi.

2. Team Collaboration

As well, the Goa team was very collaborative in its way of working together, collectively building a plan for the workshop, as well as monitoring it and making adjustments as needed.

This collaboration involved pre-workshop communication, an on-site planning day, and daily team reflection meetings at the end of each workshop day. All of this work led, I feel, to a fairly coherent and seamless process, moving participants building block by building block through a process of proposal development from an initial concept note to a comparatively sophisticated ecohealth context and situational analysis (i.e. map) and research plan.

3. The Risk Assessment Component

As was expressed (by Katherine) in our Team debriefing on Saturday following the workshop, I also feel that the problem of how to frame risk assessment within the Ecohealth approach was not really well developed (conceptually) before this workshop. Risk assessment was simply added as a component. Anne R. is obviously a well-qualified expert in risk assessment and environmental management, but she did not have a good understanding of the Ecohealth approach as the workshop began. She did her best to acquire this understanding as the week unfolded but in general she tended to present her material as a stand-alone discipline. This, plus the prominence risk assessment was given within the agenda framework, resulted (I feel) in allowing risk assessment (especially early on) to overshadow (and sometimes eclipse) the overall Ecohealth approach or to make it seem like a 4th “pillar”. I also feel that Ann’s grasp of her own field (while obviously extremely expert) represents a distinctly American perspective. I feel participants would have also benefited from an unbiased presentation of European concepts and methods (such as that represented in the work of participant Dr. Norbert Wagner, who referred, in his questions and comments, to “control bending”, and resources available from GDZ, ILO, and the UK government). He referred the following sources for more information on this perspective.

- GDZ (German Development Agency) <www.gdz.de> Search for “chemical management guide”
- ILO (International Labour Organization) <www.ilo.org> Search for “control bending”
- UK Government <www.hse.gov.uk> Search for “Health and Safety executive/control bending”

I also feel risk assessment needed to be framed within the context of developing cultures in general, and Asia in particular, both in terms of examples given, and (more importantly) in terms of adapting methodologies to be affordable and oriented to the design and testing of interventions within an ecohealth framework. To her credit, Ann worked very hard to bring support to teams in the development of practical methodology, and her work was obviously well appreciated.

Balance of the Agenda

Overall, I feel that the following shifts in the Agenda would have made the program more effective:

1. a comprehensive presentation of the ecohealth approach early in the program, and
2. more on exploration and application of the methodological pillars to specific research problems, namely those brought by the participating teams.

What really Worked

The time given to research teams to work on their proposals, within the framework of a staged series of guided questions supported by a very fluid movement of facilitators from team to team, resulted (I believe) in a steady evolution of participant teams’ capacity to develop their emerging proposals.

Stage II Criteria

Regarding criteria for assessing stage II concept notes, I feel the following criteria should be considered (along with others) by the Ecohealth Team (probably most, if not all, already are, but I wanted to share my views on this):

1. potential for a transformative outcome within the research context;

2. potential for influencing public policy;
3. potential to influence research and development institutional practice, and especially to bring research and development together more effectively;
4. potential for the project to contribute to capacity building in the country and the region;
5. effective (initial) mapping of the research context and articulation of the research problem;
6. depth and effectiveness in framing the concept within the ecosystem approach, i.e.:
 - a. rooted in a specific ecosystem problematic,
 - b. methodological pillars fully incorporated,
 - c. orientation to intervention,
 - d. health-outcomes centered, and
 - e. environmental interventions oriented;
7. re methodological pillars, specific plans should be articulated related to participation, gender and equity, and transdisciplinarity, and all of those effectively linked to all aspects of the research plan (not simply attached for effect).

Next Steps

I feel this project is off to a very good start, and continuation of the collaborative team approach will ensure that we reach wise decisions and compliment one another in producing the best possible support to the research teams that are selected.