

**Strengthening individual and organizational capacities for CBNRM:
Towards CBNRM Centers of Excellence:
*a concept paper***

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1. Problematique

“Research that intends to be pro-poor adopts a pragmatic research framework and employs participatory strategies and methods of inquiry in order to generate transformative learning that leads to social change.”

(Gonsalves and Mendoza, 2005)

1.1 Social learning

The problems addressed by community-based or people-centered natural resource management research are complex and in constant flux. They are also imbedded in specific historical, political and socio-economic contexts. In order to analyze them, and to carry out interventions and assess alternatives, NRM research requires dynamic learning processes and methods. The challenge then is to do research that results in both a better understanding of the complexities of social life and a sound(er) base for action. At the heart of such an approach is an effort to engage with social actors and together with those interested to: 1) Set research priorities and identify key problems, issues, and opportunities; 2) Analyse the causes that underlie these problems and issues; 3) Take actions to find both short term and long terms solutions for the identified problems, or take advantage of opportunities, and 4) Learn from these actions and make changes as needed. Today’s major natural resource management questions concern invariably situations in which various social actors operate and interact, and often debate and compete about resources, interests, and points of view.

Participatory NRM research therefore implies the active and meaningful participation of different groups of resource users - small farmers, large farmers, herders, fishermen, etc., as well as entrepreneurs, local authorities, local groups, NGO staff and policy makers at different levels. Many NRM problems require **collective action**: from analyzing problems and defining research and development initiatives to assessing achievements and mistakes. This includes attempting to reconcile conflicting or diverging points of views and interests, joint monitoring and assessment of alternatives tried out. Collective action for NRM is more effective when informed by social learning (Vernooy et al. 2005).

Social learning is defined as the process by which multiple social actors with competing claims or interests move towards, and engage in, negotiations and

concerted action at multiple scales of interaction (Röling 2002). It is about learning together and from each other, above all about collective action and how to strengthen it. Social learning is informed by notions of social actors, human agency, and the social construction of realities (constructivism). It takes place in formal or informal groups, but the form and specific functions of these can be diverse and multiple (units, departments, associations, committees, NGOs, networks of various kinds). The management of groups and networks focuses on facilitating and inspiring social development through learning, innovation and attention to process including dealing with contestations and existing or emerging conflicts.

Many researchers and practitioners in the field of natural resource management are coming from the bio-physical academic domains and do not have the social science skills and knowledge needed in order to work within a participatory research framework. The same can be said about many people involved in decision-making and policy-making in these domains. For those working within a participatory research or development framework, it therefore quickly becomes a necessity to foster a multi and inter-disciplinary ways of working. For many social scientists, this means developing (better) understanding of the natural sciences (i.e., histories, rationales, research questions, methodologies). It also requires working together with partners from the communities, as well as associated social actors or stakeholders, to speak the same language about participatory action research (approaches, tools and practice).

1.2 The need for Integrated Frameworks

Development and development research organizations have been trying to address the issues and challenges outlined above, usually with limited resources and support. Consequently, both researchers and practitioners (such as extensionists) in community-based natural resource management have expressed a need for more and ongoing support. Among others, they are searching for (clearer) frameworks and sets of tools that enable them to improve their work with rural communities and other stakeholders in terms of effectiveness, scientific quality or rigour, and results. They often point out that organizational obstacles and shortcomings hamper improvement of their work, such as the lack of incentives, and poor or zero recognition from peers.

Elements of such frameworks as well as tools and techniques, already exist. But they are scattered around organizations and countries. Many research and development organizations have experimented with different participatory research and training strategies, such as participatory monitoring and evaluation, social and gender analysis, participatory development communication, use of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework etc.

In IDRC, the experience includes, among others:

- The Social Analysis/Gender Analysis capacity building Umbrella project for Asia (partners from India, Nepal, Viet Nam, China, Mongolia, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Canada), the Participatory Development Communication work (with partners from Viet Nam, Cambodia, the Philippines, Uganda)
- Participatory development communication in the Philippines, Viet Nam, Cambodia, Uganda (see various publications and Isang Bagsak Web-site)
- The Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation work in China (see the book “Voices for change”), in Mongolia, Cambodia, Viet Nam, and the Philippines
- The Social Analysis Systems project (global with a number of partners; see the Website)
- Use of the Sustainable livelihoods framework (The Learning Institute in Cambodia, and the LEARN network)
- The development of a PR&D source book (UPWARD, IFAD), and a PR&D training initiative (for South Asia, UPWARD, Li-Bird and NEPAN)
- Specific networks and organizations in Asia, such as IIRR, UPWARD, RECOFTC and others, have also developed approaches and tools to improve participatory research methodology which are contributing as well to the body of knowledge available to improve learning and doing in CBNRM. In 2003, IIRR in collaboration with RECOFTC (and with IDRC support) pioneered a short course on PAR for CBNRM.

Based on experiences around the world, we consider that there is a fertile ground to integrating these various methodological tools into more comprehensive and robust approaches, from which researchers and practitioners can choose, depending on their context of intervention.

1.3 Mainstreaming participatory research at the institutional level

To date, most of these initiatives have focused on *individual* research capacity building; some have also addressed team building. How to translate this kind of capacity building into more effective organizational capacity building remains a major question. Knowledge about good practices for *organizational* research capacity building for community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) is still scarce. There are few CBNRM-oriented organizations interested to take on this work; and those organizations interested in taking on this work face challenges in improving their organizational capacities (Horton et al. 2003).

Partners are also looking for support to build better partnerships and to mainstream participatory action research and CBNRM in their own organizations (and sometimes in other organizations as well), moving beyond their project(s). For this to happen, continuous encouragement to support the pioneering

initiatives and support for continued learning and critical reflection are required. Institutionalization is not something which happens as the result of a single research project or "policy brief," or even from a series of publications, but only through a long term consistent program of support to partners for building capacity and field experience.

There is now an opportunity to bring past and ongoing efforts and results together as one of the key building blocks to institutionalize CBNRM in (national or regional) "centres of excellence:" places where the future generation of CBNRM scholars, researchers, and practitioners will find a home to learn about, practice, improve, and disseminate CBNRM concepts, methods, and achievements. ***Sharing lessons learned with the new generation*** is another major challenge.

1.4 Supporting community learning

Development participatory research has shown that resolving the problems faced by poor communities requires communities to collectively reflect on these problems, identify potential solutions and decide on a set of actions to be carried on to experiment or implement such solutions. It also demonstrated that the poor are much committed to the solutions when they see that change is possible using their own strategies and processes and when aimed at priorities that they set themselves.

In parallel with the efforts aiming to support learning and capacity-building in a participatory action research framework applied to CBNRM research there is also the need to support learning processes in which poor communities experiment such a participatory approach and want to communicate their experience to other communities, other development actors or stakeholders or to authorities and policy-makers.

2. Objectives

This initiative aims to make a start with this bringing together and creating synergy (or convergence) of experiences through an action-oriented "umbrella program" with a number of related projects. The notion of "towards centre of excellence" highlights the institutional efforts ensuring the promotion of CBNRM approaches, concepts, methods and tools.

The general objective of this initiative is to support learning and capacity-building in a participatory action research framework applied to CBNRM research

Specific objectives are:

1. Develop holistic curricula that integrate the various approaches and tools used in the practice of participatory CBNRM research.
2. Offer such curricula to different categories of potential learners: academics and graduate students; practitioners and researchers in the field; community groups; and policy-makers.
3. Develop advocacy approaches and plans to explain and promote CBNRM and participatory action research approaches to policy-makers.
4. Bring together knowledge and expertise about CBNRM and channel “the state of the art” to students, researchers, practitioners, community groups, policy-makers, and international organizations.
5. Facilitate the sharing of experiences between communities in addressing NRM issues
6. Support community networking with other communities and development stakeholders and promoting policy changes
7. Influence global and regional policies in regard of CBNRM.

3. Expected outcomes

- Research partners have strengthened their individual (knowledge, attitude, skills, practice, including research ethics) and organizational capacities for CBNRM research, training, teaching, extension, advocacy, networking, communication and dissemination.
- Research partners have strengthened their capacities for the **management** of these functions leading to improved individual and organizational performance.
- Researchers and practitioners are able to express their views about participatory research and development, link them to their practices, and **communicate** more effectively about their work with others;
- Researchers and practitioners are able to work together with community members and associated stakeholders to **identify** relevant NRM problems and solutions; and are able to decide how best to **facilitate** the planning, experimentation and assessment of CBNRM research and development initiatives;

- Communities **learn** from their experiences and are able to **share** them with other communities and stakeholders.
- Research partners and IDRC staff have gained a better understanding of and practical experience with a variety of locally adapted, effective individual and organizational capacity building strategies allowing to **be more selective** in terms of the choice of future initiatives, and to **provide better support** to these.

4. Research questions

Centres of excellence in CBNRM will develop knowledge to address the following research questions:

1. How to build sustainable and effective relationships between CBNRM researchers and practitioners and the communities in which they work?
2. How best to involve communities in the identification of NRM problems and potential solutions?
3. How best to support learning and sharing learning from community experiences?
4. How to co-produce knowledge versus (instead of just collecting data)?
5. How to build consensus around a concrete NRM initiative?
6. How to plan a participatory research framework, considering cultural characteristics, power and social relations, gender roles and local communication channels?
7. How to build effective partnerships with other stakeholders involved?
8. How to support participatory research and action with a participatory communication strategy?
9. How to integrate local and scientific knowledge?
10. How to influence policy through local community action and research?
11. How to integrate in the research cycle effective participatory evaluation and monitoring?
12. How to plan for the sharing and utilization of results?
13. How to ensure scientific rigour in NRM participatory action research?
14. How to make visible the contributions of PAR approaches to improved development outputs and outcomes?
15. How to help researchers to gain (peer) recognition for contributions to their scientific disciplines?

5. Activities

Strengthening individual and organizational capacities for CBNRM crosscuts current programming efforts and draws attention to the need to look and move beyond project boundaries and timelines.

CBNRM centers of excellence will be developed as an exploratory approach regrouping different efforts and sets of activities such as:

- 5.1 National or regional reviews identifying the state of the art in CBNRM
- 5.2 Participatory curriculum development
- 5.3 Action research about mainstreaming CBNRM in research and development organizations
- 5.4 Community social learning and advocacy
- 5.5 Collaborative learning in CBNRM for researchers and associated stakeholders

The first efforts are currently being developed in Asia.

Based on previous interactions with Asian partners, a first proposal has been developed. This proposal includes one China component and one regional component.

The China component covers three related efforts: a) CBNRM Curriculum development at the College of Humanities and Development (COHD) at the China Agricultural University (CAU) in Beijing, b) Mainstreaming CBNRM and PAR in COHD/CAU, and c) Adoption and adaptation of CBNRM curriculum at the national level through the Farmer-Centred Research/CBNRM network.

The regional component covers three parts as well: 1) A review of the different training and learning opportunities offered in the region regarding CBNRM, and identification of complementarities and gaps; 2) A workshop to identify and develop a regional initiative; and 3) A grants program for development of different components of the regional initiative.

Another proposal has started with the IIRR and looks at influencing policies in the field of CBNRM.

6. Partners

In Asia, partners actually associated to this effort are:

- CIP-UPWARD,
- IIRR (Philippines),
- RECOFTC (Thailand),
- Li-Bird (Nepal),
- NEPAN (Nepal),
- The University of the Philippines at Los Baños,
- China Agricultural University,
- Peking University,
- Jilin Agricultural University,
- The Guizhou Academy of Agricultural Sciences,

- The Center for Chinese Agricultural Policy,
- The FCR/CBNRM network (China).

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