

Novel CBNRM course gets underway in Beijing

by Ronnie Vernooy, May 1, 2005

“During Module 1 about CBNRM concepts I felt a little bit lost, but now, after the field-visit, I have a better understanding of rural life in the country. In the field it was easy to make the connections among the different CBNRM elements. Linking CBNRM concepts to reality has been achieved.” (COHD student taking part in CBNRM course)

“The field-visit has brought me closer to the reality of the poor farmers in China. I was moved by the hospitality and friendship of the farmers and local extension staff. I learned a lot in a short time. This will be very valuable for my future career.” (COHD student taking part in CBNRM course)

“The students understand us quite well. Our question to them is, what you are going to do now? Will you help us to getting access to credit?” (Woman farmer from Guangxi during the mini-workshop held at the end of the CBNRM course field-visit. The workshop brought together CBNRM course students and the Guangxi-based research team including staff from the Center for Chinese Agricultural Policy, the Guangxi Maize Research Institute, the Guangxi Agricultural Technical Services Bureau, and local farmers.)

After many months of preparatory work by a working group made up by facilitators/ teachers and students, the introductory CBNRM course got underway at the College of Humanities and Development (COHD), China Agricultural University, Beijing. A first group of twenty-five Master's and PhD students are taking part in this novel and first for China -and likely for Asia- course developed through a participatory curriculum approach. The students follow one of the three main programs at COHD: rural development management, sociology, and regional economics.

The course uses a participatory and experiential learning approach (learning by doing/discovery) combining short presentations, group-work, field-visits to selected provinces in China, and a number of participatory learning techniques (e.g., role plays, case study analysis). A course reader and binder include selected articles, a bibliography, Web-sources and resources, a facilitator/ teacher profile, short CV's of the facilitators/teachers, course exercises (learner sheets), and the course monitoring and evaluation plan. At the end of the course, participants will have produced a draft CBNRM-oriented action (research) proposal. The introductory course aims to contribute to the capacity building of the coming generation(s) of rural development professionals in China through the introduction and critical review of participatory learning and action concepts, methods, and cases for community based natural resource management (CBNRM). The course also aims to contribute to bridging the current gap between higher education (teaching and research) and rural development realities in China.

A diverse and multi-institutional team of facilitators/ teachers is responsible for the course delivery. Partaking institutions include CAU/COHD, Jilin Agricultural

University, the Guizhou Academy of Agricultural Sciences, the Center for Chinese Agricultural Policy, and IDRC. Team coordination is in the hands of Ms. Qi Gubo, associate professor and director of the Rural Development Management program at COHD. A course working-group including the facilitators/teachers and a number of COHD-students provides organizational and logistical support; and a sub-group of three facilitators/teachers and two students is in charge of the course monitoring and evaluation.

From April 20-25, the first two modules (out of five) were successfully completed. The students liked very much the novel and dynamic teaching methodology used. They appreciated the team-work encouraged by the group of facilitators/teachers, who themselves also practiced a new way of jointly delivering a course. As the quotations above testify, the field-visits helped to ground concepts in reality and practice –one of the pillars of a CBNRM approach. In the field, students were confronted (for some of them for the first time ever) with the hardships of living and working in remote and poor rural areas. This opened eyes, minds and hearts.

Module 1: Defining CBNRM, introduced key concepts, principles and methods of CBNRM, based on an analysis of current NRM challenges around the world and China in particular, and a review of selected CBNRM case studies. *Module 2: Linking CBNRM with Chinese rural realities*, linked the CBNRM approach to actual rural situations in China, through short (but intense) course field-visits and learning assignments to three ongoing CBNRM-oriented projects in Ningxia, Guizhou, and Guangxi.

Modules 3-5, scheduled for May and June, will build on the experiences and insights gained from the field-visits. *Module 3: Formulating CBNRM action questions*, aims to build skills to formulate clear, relevant and feasible CBNRM action questions. *Module 4: Enabling joint action- learning*, will focus on differentiating between effective and in-effective joint action-learning methodologies. *Module 5: Designing a CBNRM action proposal outline*, will bring the elements of Modules 1-4 together in the development of an action proposal. For some of the students, these action proposals will serve as drafts for their Master's or PhD field-research proposals to be developed in the second semester of 2005. Perhaps some of them will then be able to respond to the question posed by the woman farmer from Guangxi...

Other feedback from the students upon return from the field-visits and completion of Module 2:

"During our field- trip, I learnt something interesting about anthropology. It's my favorite."

"I feel so lucky to participate in the CBNRM course and to go to the field."

"We had a very good field-visit, and I think I will remember this visit to Guangxi forever."