"Participatory Action Research for Community Based Natural Resource Management Workshop" in Vietnam Forestry University

Workshop report

Background

The Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) and Vietnam Forestry University (VFU) launched the Community Carbon Accounting (CCA) Action Learning Project in Vietnam in 2012 with funding from the Ministry of Environment of Japan and the Asia-Pacific Network for Global Change Research (APN). The IGES-VFU CCA Project is developing and testing an approach to engage local communities in forest monitoring and reporting, which is essential not only for the generation of performance-based REDD+ payments, but also for generating information that communities can use to manage their forests wisely. Under the CCA Project, IGES and VFU are supporting selected villages in Cao Phong district, Hoa Binh province by building their capacity to monitor carbon stocks in their planted forests. The villagers established the planted forests as part of an A/R CDM project.

Vietnam's National REDD+ Strategy recognizes the importance of community participation in REDD+. Community-based forest management is one of the core elements of the Strategy. To promote community engagement in REDD+ in Vietnam requires investment in human resources to build up the numbers of people who understand the concept of "community participation" and have the necessary skills to work with communities. The IGES-VFU CCA Project compliments the National

Institute for Global Environmental strategies (IGES)
Forest Conservation Task
nre-info@iges.or.jp

REDD+ Strategy by building the capacities of fieldworkers on community participation and on the technical requirements of forest carbon monitoring.

Workshop overview

The "Participatory Action Research for Community Based Natural Resource Management" workshop was held on 22-26 July, 2013 at Vietnam Forestry University. Two instructors from RECOFTC – The Centre for People and Forests, Dr Nguyen Quang Tan and Mr Ahmad Dhiaulhaq, 16 researchers and students of VFU and 5 local government forestry officers participated in the workshop. This was the second workshop in a series of IGES-VFU-RECOFTC workshops on Community Participation in Forestry in Vietnam. These workshops are intentionally interactive and not the typical classroom lecture style of workshop. The participants were engaged through numerous experiential exercises. The first workshop, held in 2012, focused on the concept and value of participation. This second workshop focused on practical application of the concept of participation in social research and "participatory action research (PAR)."

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Action research is based on an experimental learning process. It consists of a four-stage cycle: planning, action, observation and reflection (Fig. 1). This cycle is applied to develop, test and reflect on solutions to a problem that has been identified. Out of the fourth stage, a new cycle is started from the planning stage by considering the results of the reflection in the previous cycle. This second cycle, and other subsequent cycles, lead towards a better solution. Participatory Action Research (PAR) incorporates participatory processes in the action research. This brings forth multiple perspectives from stakeholders, resulting in more effective and sustainable solutions.

Generally, different stakeholders have different interests and different ways of perceiving problems, which can result in conflict. PAR employs the core values of participatory processes (mutual understanding, full participation, inclusive solutions and shared responsibility) to help overcome conflict and other difficulties that conventional top-down natural resource management planning struggles with. Top-down approaches create disconnects between professional practices and what is needed for meaningful community participation. Where conventional natural resource management has failed, PAR can contribute to the development of locally-appropriate community forestry and natural resource management models. PAR is also needed to find ways in which local people can participate meaningfully in REDD+, as required in the REDD+ safeguards set out by the UNFCCC COP.

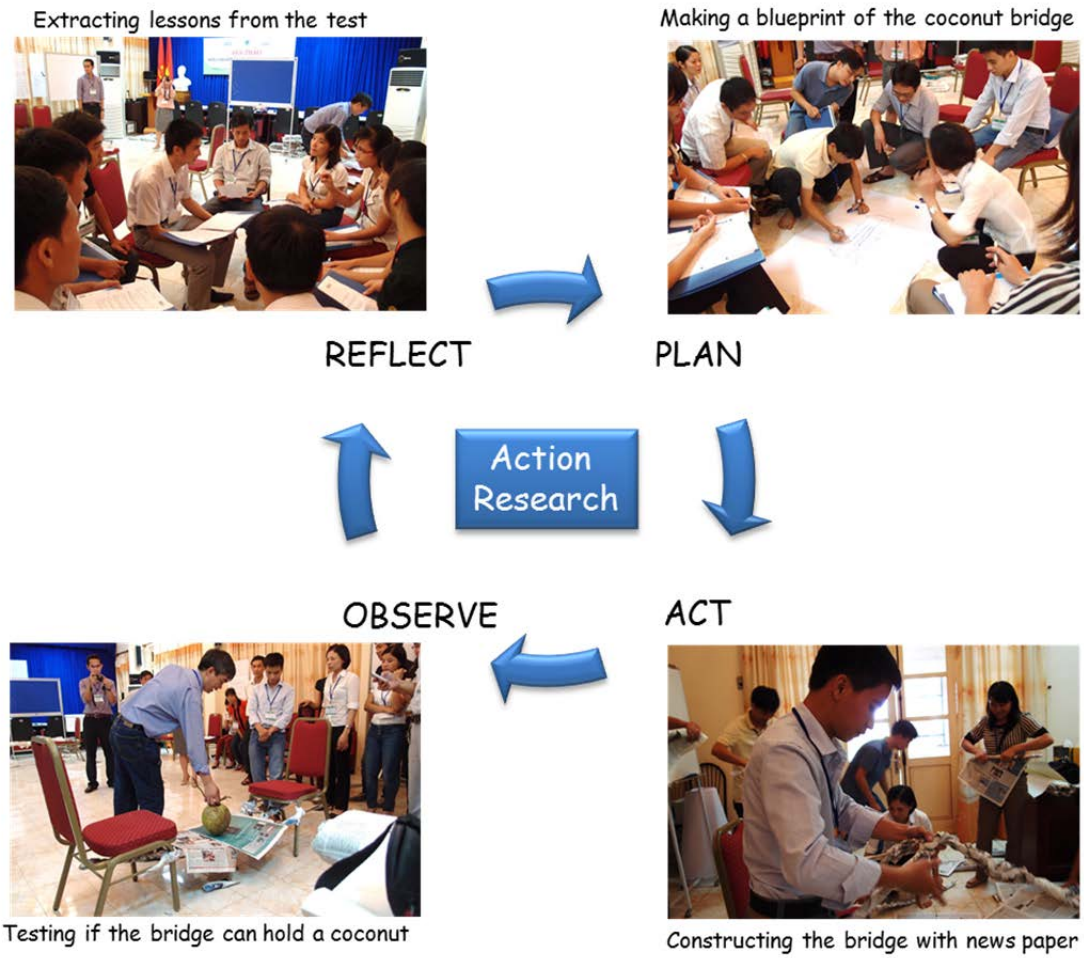

Figure 1: The four-stage cycle of action research
(Pictures show the process of the "Coconut Bridge Task" on the 1st day of the workshop)

Workshop Activity

Day 1: On Day 1 the participants learned the fundamentals of action research through group work. To have practical experience of the continuous four-stage PAR cycles, groups were asked to build a bridge spanning 2 chairs and strong enough to hold a 2kg coconut by only using 200 pieces of newspaper, 1 pair of scissors and 2 rolls of sticky tape. First, they developed a plan without touching the given materials (Stage 1: PLAN). They then built the bridge and tested if the bridge could hold the coconut (Stages 2 and 3: ACT and OBSERVE). They then discussed their observations to extract the key lessons (Stage 4: REFLECT). After the reflection, they entered the 2nd cycle of the PAR by improving the PLAN, and rebuilding and testing the bridge (ACT and OBSERVE).

Day 2: The participants were involved in an exercise to show that everyone has different ways of determining his/her values and they learned the importance of considering multiple perspectives. They were reminded that the participatory approach they learned during the 1st workshop enables multiple perspectives to be brought forth and discussed. The participants practiced some of the PAR tools, including participatory resource mapping, stakeholder analysis and problem trees, and examined advantages and disadvantages of each tool.

Participants experienced and learned through various activities

Day 3: On Day 3, participants prepared for the A/R CDM project field work. They were divided into 4 groups and each group prepared a research plan for the village. They started with identifying a problem to be addressed in the A/R CDM project and key information needs to be collected to resolve the problem. They then selected suitable PAR tools.

Group preparation for the field work

Day 4: Each group carried out their research plan with a community involved in the A/R CDM project and tested the selected PAR tools. One group looked at the shortage of food for cattle caused by the project and another group focused on the benefit that the local people would receive from the project. Some groups struggled with facilitating active participation of the local people, but in the end, all groups collected some very interesting and useful information.

Testing a PAR tool with the villagers in Cao Phong

Day 5: The last day of the workshop was used for field work reflection. The participants delivered presentations on the research results, as well as key lessons drawn from the field work in regard to the research process. By incorporating everything they learned, the participants developed a complete action research plan and estimated the budget required to conduct the research.

Presenting the action research plan

Workshop outcomes and next steps

By the end of the workshop, some of the participants understood how social research and rural development can be merged by applying PAR. This was a better-than-expected outcome of the workshop. The workshop participants were quick in learning the PAR concept as most of them are from academic backgrounds and are familiar with research.

However, putting the PAR into practice was challenging for them. When applying PAR tools with the community, they tended to collect information in a conventional research way, i.e. the communication was essentially one way; the experts posed questions and they noted the answers from the community. This is not unexpected as the researchers are used to and comfortable with conventional survey approaches aimed at data gathering. It takes time and practice to become comfortable and competent with PAR, which requires a fundamental change in the mindset of researchers. No longer do they gather data from communities to then take away and conduct their analysis. Under PAR, the communities join in the research and together with the outside experts are involved in problem identification, solution proposal, solution testing, and reflection.

Follow-up will be conducted with the participants. Further opportunities for the participants to apply PAR and implementation of the action research plans presented by the participants at the end of the workshop need to be considered. IGES and VFU will discuss (i) whether the action research plans proposed by the workshop participants can be incorporated into the CCA Project to support villagers to improve the A/R CDM project, and (ii) how to provide further training to the workshop participants on PAR.

Ru 4 village, Cao Phong district, Hoa Binh province

Annex I. List of Participants

	Name	*Affiliation*
1	Nguyễn Thế Dũng	Vietnam Forestry University
2	Mai Thị Thanh Nhàn	Vietnam Forestry University
3	Vi Việt Đức	Vietnam Forestry University
4	Trần Hải Long	Vietnam Forestry University
5	Đặng Tuấn Anh	Vietnam Forestry University
6	Nguyễn Thị Phương	Vietnam Forestry University
7	Nguyễn Thị Mai Hương	Vietnam Forestry University
8	Trịnh Hải Vân	Vietnam Forestry University
9	Đồng Thị Thanh	Vietnam Forestry University
10	Nguyễn Đình Hải	Vietnam Forestry University
11	Nguyễn Hải Hà	Vietnam Forestry University
12	Phùng Thị Tuyến	Vietnam Forestry University
13	Bùi Xuân Trường	Vietnam Forestry University
14	Đặng Thị Thắm	Vietnam Forestry University
15	Nguyễn Minh Quang	Vietnam Forestry University
16	Nguyễn Thị Chung	Vietnam Forestry University
17	Bùi Thanh Việt	Vietnam Forestry University
18	Nguyễn Xuân Lượng	Cao Phong District, Hoa Binh Province
19	Bùi Văn Toàn	Cao Phong District, Hoa Binh Province
20	Trần Đức Việt	Tam Dao National Park
21	Lê Thành Cương	Tam Dao National Park
	Nguyen Quang Tan	Instructor, RECOFTC
	Ahmad Dhiaulhaq	Instructor, RECOFTC
	Makino Yamanoshita	Organizer, IGES
	Do Thi Ngoc Bich	Organizer, VFU
	Hoang Ngoc Y	Organizer, VFU

Annex II. Workshop Agenda

Time	Topic	Objectives
Day 1: 22 July 2013		
8:00	Welcome note and back ground	- Get warm welcome all participants to the meeting - Understand the background of the meeting and the whole process in action research
8:30	Participants introduction	- Get to know each other - Identify main elements of research through a warm up exercise - Recognize needs for research in decision making process
9.15	Meeting introduction with expectations	- Clarify meeting objectives and outcomes - Identify expectations and formulate certain ground rules - Clarify roles and responsibilities among participants and trainers
9.45	Break	
10.00	What is Social Research?	- Have basic understanding of fundamental elements of conducting social research - Differentiate social research and forestry research - Values of having research in community forestry development
12.00	Lunch	
13.30	What is Action Research?	- Have recognized differences between blue-print plan and systematic learning for action - Are able to identify four main steps of systematic learning - Have basic understanding of action research concepts and its application - Link action research with community forestry
15.00	Break	
15.15	Participatory Action Research (PAR)	- Have critically reflected main reasons why participation is important in CF - Recognize values of having multiple perspectives in research process - Explain basic principles of PAR
16.45	Daily feedback	- Collect feedback from all
Day 2: 23 July 2013		
7.30	Review lessons of the day	- Review key lessons learned from previous days and clarify some point as needed

8.00	Research mapping	- Identify key areas of focus for community forestry action research - Determine basic framework for desired action research - Draft picture for research plan with key questions for data collection
11.30	Lunch Break	
13.00	PAR Tools	- Develop basic understanding of the concept and principles of PAR tools - Examine advantages and disadvantages of individual PAR tools in community forestry action research
16.15	Daily feedback	- Collect feedback from all
Day 3: 24 July 2013		
7.30	Review lessons of the day	- Review key lessons learned from previous days and clarify some point as needed
8.00	Research Planning	- Draft a research plan with key questions for data collection and basic tools
10.00	Break	
10.15	Research Plan Presentation	- Share research plan with other research team members - Collect comment and feedback for further refining research plan
11.30	Lunch Break	
13.00	Research Plan Presentation (cont.)	- Share research plan with other research team members - Collect comment and feedback for further refining research plan
14.00	Field exercise introduction	- Clarify main objectives for field exercise - Develop basic understanding about the site before having field visit
14.45	Break	
15.00	Field preparation	- Clarify roles and responsibilities for research team member - Identify key focus for conducting field research - Select appropriate tool, approach, and materials for field research
16.15	Daily feedback	- Collect feedback from all
Day 4: 25 July 2013		
	Field work	- To test research framework in real situation - To practice the use of PAR tools with real stakeholders - To identify gaps and pitfalls during action research process

		- To practice analysis and presentation of the action research results
Day 5: 26 July 2013		
7.30	Review lessons of the day	- Review key lessons learned from previous days and clarify some point as needed
8.00	Field reflection	- Present key research result - Draw key lessons from field visit in regard to research process and contents - Explore possible solutions to address gaps and pitfall during field action research - Examine possible options to improve analysis process and results presentation
9.30	Break	
9.45	Review research plan	- Incorporate key lessons learned from the field into action research plan
11.30	Lunch	
13.30	Finalize research plan with estimated budget	- Develop estimated budget to carry out the action research program - Have the semi-final research plan for further approval and permission
14.30	Break	
14.45	Determine required supports from IGES and RECOFTC	- Determine key areas for further technical supports from IGES and RECOFTC - Develop action points with timeframe for technical mentoring and coaching support with indicative roles and responsibilities
15.30	Course evaluation	
16:00	Closing	