

Report on the first international course on
**Participatory Action Research (PAR) for Community
Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM)¹**
8th to 19th December 2003, based at IIRR, The Philippines.

Preamble

This report provides a taste of the course with an emphasis on highlighting some of the methodologies that were used. The narrative and pictures in this report provide an insight into how the course was implemented.

Summary

The backbone of the course's pedagogic structure was an experiential learning spiral that provided a systematic learning guide (This can be seen on page 3). As this was a new course almost all the sessions were new sessions to both IIRR and RECOFTC, and trying out new sessions is always a risk. We developed 27 sessions with associated materials for this course with the vast majority of the sessions using experiential learning techniques. We tried to practice what we preached. Only a few of these sessions are highlighted in this report. A wide range of PAR for CBNRM reading materials were also gathered and compiled, and core reading materials were given to participants and sorted into modules in a course reader for reference during the course and after. A CD Rom was given to each participant at the end of the course that included copies of the numerous participant outputs from throughout the course. At the end of the course, the course team reflected on the approach and methods we used incorporating not only our own reflections, but also that of the participants. As well as the evaluation form, other mechanisms for participant feedback used were modular evaluation exercises, 'like' and 'don't like' walls for brainstorming and a 'feeling wall' which enabled participants to map out their feelings as they went through the course 'spiral'. As this was the first time running the course we wanted to benefit from as much participant feedback as convenient for them. What was interesting to observe was that 'liking' and finding a session productive in terms of learning were not necessarily the same thing.

Some revisions are currently being made to some sessions. After more trial and error, we envisage producing a set of PAR for CBNRM course guidelines for wider distribution.

¹ Course development is part of the experiential training and learning component of the IDRC supported and IIRR implemented Community Forestry Phase II project from May 2003 to April 2006. RECOFTC are a collaborator on this project. For more information on these organizations visit: www.idrc.ca; www.iirr.org and www.recoftc.org

Next steps

This course implementation did not stop on December 19th 2003. The course participants have been encouraged to develop papers as they attempt to apply PAR principles to their ongoing CBNRM work. The papers are designed to map out their personal learning journeys in this effort and provide analysis and insight that we hope will add to the discourse around the applicability of PAR for CBNRM. First drafts are to be submitted by April, second drafts are to be submitted in July and reviewed. We hope to share the best papers more widely, at least on websites and ideally, funds permitting, as hard copy. We would welcome assistance in paper editing and assessment as well as in partnering on producing a hard copy publication of the best papers.

Reflections on course organisation

The partnership between IIRR and RECOFTC in course implementation was constructive but of course sore heads were to be expected when bringing together ideas on training philosophy from two training institutes with a long experience in training as well as bringing together two hard-headed facilitators. The interaction though we believe produced some very interesting ideas especially with regards to training methodologies. Participants on the course came from Bhutan, China, Indonesia, Mongolia, Nepal, The Philippines and Sri Lanka. 3 were from NGOs, 4 from government ministries/departments and 4 from universities/research institutions. Professionally they were generally 'mid level'. With regards to low participant numbers (only 11) and the nature of participants we can speculate on the reasons, but generally it is too early to draw conclusions after only one course. Because it was the first time running the course the facilitators were quite happy with the number of participants. They were also a very pro-active group who gave as much as they got from the interactions during the course. The numbers on many training courses have been down in 2003 both at IIRR and RECOFTC in comparison to previous years with speculation that the SARS scare may be partly to blame. We also did have a screening process that meant that some applicants with insufficient experiences in CBNRM were turned away and in one case we thought that too many applicants were applying from one country (Bhutan) so we offered an alternative (see below). Possibly the date was simply too late in the year. We should revisit this issue of course participant numbers and characteristics after we run the international course in 2004. We are already receiving inquiries for this 2004 course which is a hopeful sign. The course will be based at RECOFTC in Bangkok at the new time of the year from the 13-28th Sept. For more information visit the following web page:

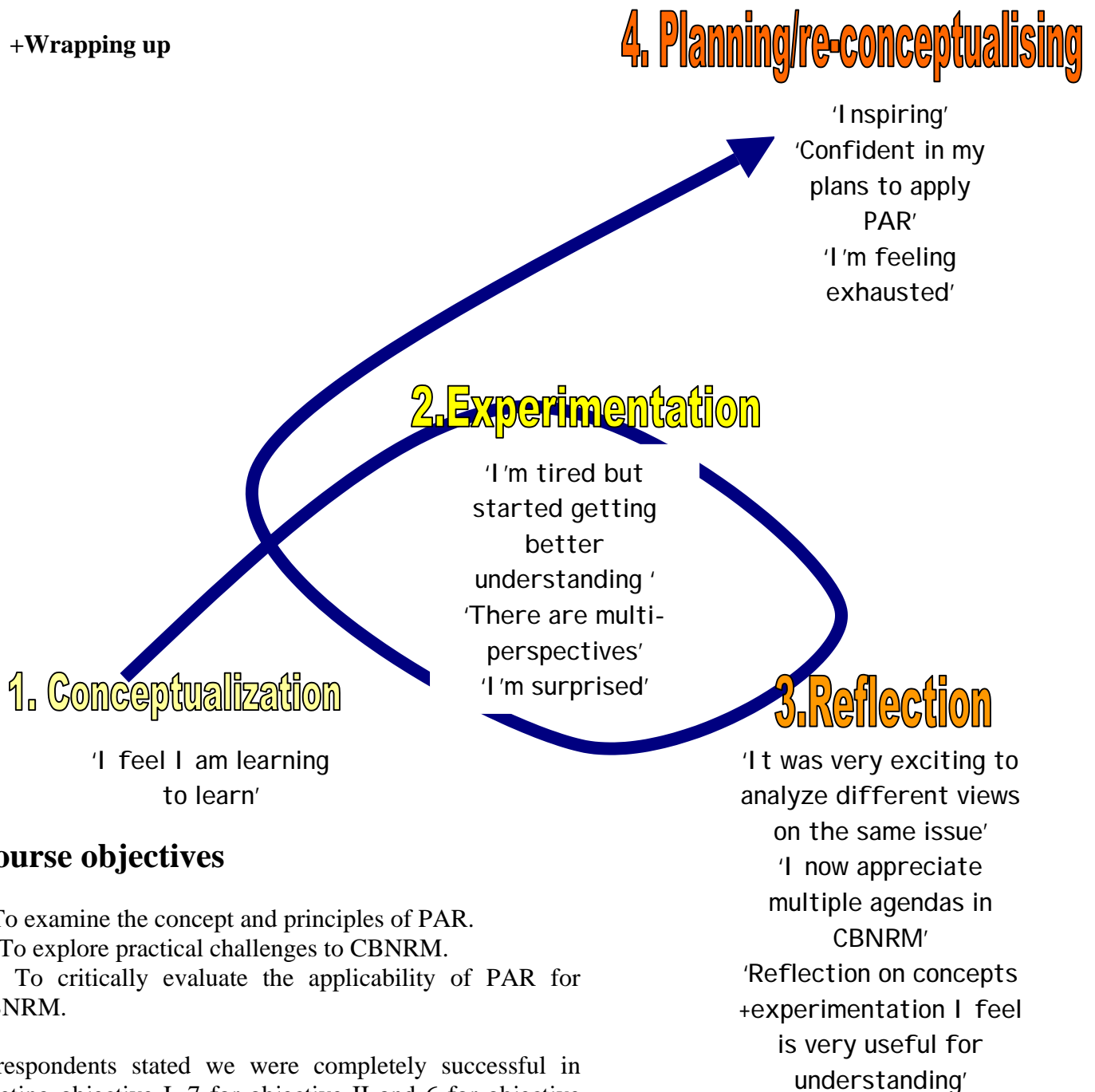
<http://www.recoftc.org/03region/courses/ParCBNRM/parcbrnmSep04intro.html>

We will run the first customized PAR for CBNRM course during April 2004, in Bhutan and will have 25 participants with two of the course alumni taking part as co-facilitators along with the IIRR/RECOFTC facilitators.

The course structure – the 4 modules and the guiding spiral (Comments in comic sans font are from participants’ ‘feeling wall’. The comments were expressed during the modules)

+Setting the scene

+Wrapping up



Course objectives

- I. To examine the concept and principles of PAR.
- II. To explore practical challenges to CBNRM.
- III. To critically evaluate the applicability of PAR for CBNRM.

6 respondents stated we were completely successful in meeting objective I, 7 for objective II and 6 for objective III, the remaining respondents stated we were generally successful.

Insights into the course implementation

Setting the scene

Contents:

- Course overview
- Participant expectations
- Individual visioning exercise on 'good' CBNRM.
- Participant presentations highlighting barriers facing CBNRM in their contexts.
- Team building-experiential learning exercise



Participants drew their individual visions of 'good' CBNRM (see the 'gallery', left) without using any words and then were asked to explain their visions. After a few days these pictures were removed. The exercise was repeated at the end of the course. see later...

1. Conceptualization

Contents:

- PAR resource identification in the 'PAR resource center' at IIRR as well as Internet sources.
- Exploration of the evolution of PAR
- Exploration of the key principles of action research including 'coconut bridge' exercise (see photos and comments)
- Exploration of the key principles of participation
- From 'theory to practice' role play to explore multiple perspectives whilst having a 'dry run' in preparation for the field program



An example of an experiential learning exercise used: 'Coconut bridge'
Task: Plan and make a bridge between two chairs that will hold a coconut off the ground, use only specified materials and do not experiment.

1. A detailed 'blue print' plan was developed (above) for building the 'coconut bridge'. Chances of success were rated at between 80 to 100% by the teams.

2. The blue print plan is followed exactly (right) in the design of the bridge. Confidence is high but then as the coconut is placed...



3... 'Those stupid chairs! Our bridge was perfect' was the comment from one participant as the unexpected happened in experimentation. The chairs slide together and the coconut slumped to the ground. In failed blueprint development projects could 'Those stupid farmers! Our project was perfect' be substituted? The parallels were discussed.



4. Through this experimentation, then reflection and re-planning/ re-conceptualisation a successful strategy was developed (right). A rolled paper was wedged to keep the chairs apart in addition to the bridge. The failure when embraced led to success. The question was raised that do we CBNRM professionals always have the luxury to use an experiential learning approach and embrace failures in our CBNRM work within conventional project set-ups?

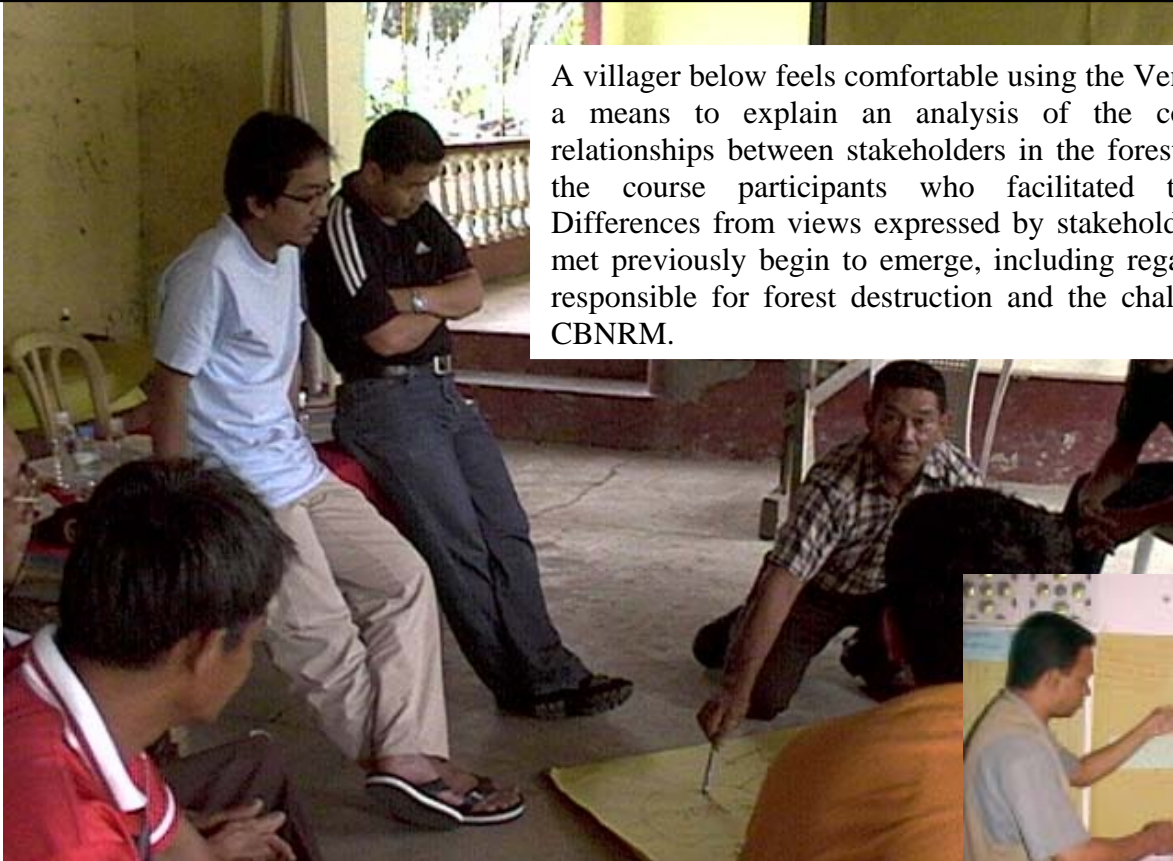


(Left) A role-play exercise based on a scenario they may face in the field was used to move to the context specific experimentation module from the more abstract conceptualization module. In the role-play the participants planned, experimented and reflected and then planned for the field program ahead. It was an opportunity to practice PRA, but also as they played different roles including the roles of farmers, it was an opportunity to step into the shoes of 'farmers' and see a participatory research exercise from their perspective. The training hut that we use for such sessions is at IIRR.

2. Experimentation

Contents:

- Task: Exploration of the challenges facing CBNRM in the Philippines according to community members, NGOs, academics and government officials using participatory approaches.



A villager below feels comfortable using the Venn diagram as a means to explain an analysis of the complexity of relationships between stakeholders in the forest resources to the course participants who facilitated the exercise. Differences from views expressed by stakeholders that were met previously begin to emerge, including regarding who is responsible for forest destruction and the challenges facing CBNRM.



The pictures show the exploration of community perspectives. NGO, academic and government perspectives were also explored. In the community sessions, course participants were divided into 3 research teams and pro-actively conducted PRA with 3 community groups, one group where 'illegal' migrants live in a national park area, the other in a post 'CBFM' project scenario, and the third living on state forest land which had been previously logged by concessionaires. Interestingly (to the left) the park superintendent takes notes as the migrants present their views through the PRA exercises facilitated by the participants. Community members at the end of the sessions had a chance to evaluate the performance of the participants as participatory researchers. Some were remarkably candid. The participant research reports are available on request from IIRR.

3.Reflection

Contents:

- Field program report preparation and presentation for peer and facilitator review.
- Exercise on comparing individual and peer reflections on personal attitude and behaviour during ‘experimentation’ module. A video of participants during the module was used to help with reflection.
- Synthesis of the multi-perspectives on the challenges facing CBNRM in the Philippines.
- Exploration of the strengths and weaknesses of applying PAR principles to address CBNRM barriers.
- Through case study analysis, critical reflection on the applicability of PAR for CBNRM in different contexts around the world.
- Use of fishbowl methodology to critically reflect upon and analyse PAR applicability for CBNRM.



The ‘fishbowl’ debate below was used to provoke a ‘constructive confrontation’ on some of the more contentious PAR for CBNRM related statements that emerged during the course. The body language to the left of 3 participants says a lot about the feelings it can generate. In the fish bowl exercise only those in the center can speak. A ‘justifier’ does just that with a contentious statement and entices others to the center to present their views on the issue, to oppose or agree with their position.

This tool tends to develop its own momentum and its face- to- face nature with no tables seems to add to the dynamic. As each statement is being discussed only the justifier can remain in the center, others have to move to the outside ring again after presenting their view, which provides room for another from the outside ring to take their place in the center and so on.



'Abstracts' were written by participants that describe the envisaged scope of papers, including methodological concerns, that will be developed over the next 6 months aiming to provide experience based analysis in different contexts on the applicability of PAR to CBNRM.

4. Planning/re-conceptualising

Contents:

- Preparation of 'abstract' of a paper that will explore the learning journey undergone by the participants as they apply a 'more' PAR approach to their CBNRM work.
- Presentation of abstracts for review and critique by panel
- Next steps in paper development

Some abstract titles and authors (some sample 'abstracts' are contained in attachments)

- PAR for Capacity Reorientation of Extension Agents working with Renewable Natural Resources (Bhutan), *Thubten Sonam, Head Faculty of Extension and Communication, Natural Resources Training institute Bhutan.*
- Participatory Action Research (PAR) for Documenting Decentralization Impacts on Sustainable Forest Management and Local Livelihoods in Indonesia, *Heru Komarudin, Communication and network facilitator, Centre for International Forestry Research*
- (Applying PAR principles to) Community management of bamboo resources in Sephu, Bhutan. *Doley Tshering, Program Officer, RNRRC Bajo, Wangdue, Bhutan*
- Participatory mapping as a tool for negotiation: Linking People To Policy Change. *By Hasantoha Adnan, Center For International Forestry Research (CIFOR) Bogor, Indonesia*
- Development of a concept for community based inland fisheries management in Sri Lanka using PAR principles. *Chintana Nalaka Siriwardena, Program manager FCDRMP/GTZ project.*

Next steps in the paper development process.

- 1st draft of paper developed before the 1st of April
- Review by IIRR, RECOFTC (and IDRC?) panel
- Submission of final draft before the 1st of July.
- Review by IIRR, RECOFTC (and IDRC?) panel, best papers selected and published at least on websites and preferably as a PAR for CBNRM 'working paper' hardcopy. We hope that the papers will add to the discourse on PAR's applicability as an approach to CBNRM work.

Course wrap up

Content:

- Visioning exercise on 'good' CBNRM
- Course evaluation

On the visioning exercise, where participants drew their vision of good CBNRM at the beginning of the course, then at the end and are asked to compare the before and after, there was some very interesting changes. Noticeably natural resources became less pronounced and people became more evident and often had developed facial features and even smiles. In general also there was a noticeable reduction in the physical size of figures representing professionals compared to the figures representing the villagers.

Unfortunately for this report, we could not make a copy of the pictures. They were removed by the course participants. This method used to map, in a subtle way, changes in participants' visions between the beginning and end of courses has been used on several of IIRR courses with some interesting results. Pictures have been found to be more useful than words for this purpose. When words were used, often development jargons tended to mask what the personal vision really was.

Some final remarks and acknowledgements...This course idea began with a few discussions over a beer between IIRR and RECOFTC staff but was developed and implemented thanks to inputs from a wide array of actors. IDRC, very early on were supportive of the idea. John Graham provided fantastic support throughout. Ronnie Vernooy, Guy Bessette and others at IDRC in their usual hands on way, provided valuable input and useful critique in Email discussions that helped the idea take shape. The idea was then developed further by all of those who responded to the questionnaire that was sent out asking for advice. Those who responded to the questionnaire or provided feedback included Hein Mallee, Moira Moeliono, Sy Ramony, Nguyen Van So, Melissa Marschke, Cor Veer, Oliver Springate Baginski, Ronnie Vernooy, Janice Jiggins and some others who were too shy to submit their names! The information from the questionnaires informed course development significantly and helped in gathering PAR for CBNRM related materials. In addition it simply provided needed encouragement for the idea. During the experimentation module, we relied heavily on some CBNRM experts in the Philippines who gave a lot of time and considerable effort and enlightened participants and facilitators alike. We would like to acknowledge resource persons from the communities of Quezon province; The Forest Management Bureau Headquarters, DENR; The College of Forestry and Natural Resources, University of the Philippines, Los Banos; and Environmental Science for Social Change, Asia Forest Network and the Philippine Federation for Environmental Concern. So finally for all of your support of various kinds a big thank you from the IIRR/RECOFTC course implementation team below (Karen Edwards who was a member of the course team left for Malawi to start a new job during the course planning stage). You all in one way or the other helped take this course initiative from an idea to a reality. We are beginning to see its potential in exploring PAR application for CBNRM. But we recognise we are only at the beginning of a learning journey. We hope all of you will continue to join us in one way or another and help keep this initiative on the right track. Feedback on this report and any suggestions regarding the PAR for CBNRM course initiative are as always very welcome. Email: Peter.O'Hara@iirr.org or Ron at orot@ku.ac.th



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Ning and Annie

Peter and Ron