



COmmunity-based Management of
EnviromenTal challenges in Latin America



Briefing: Training Process for Co- Researchers: An experience to be replicated in the natural resources management

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1. Introduction

The participative approach in research is an opportunity for joint construction and analysis of knowledge. The appropriation of a scientific process by the communities permits to build a platform upon which the researcher and the community in horizontal relationship cease being object-subject to become co-researchers. This platform is the “Learning arena”.

Hence, the facilitator –who is not the principal researcher- creates, through flexible management, appropriate language, and methodical thoroughness, the path for the participants to become main players throughout the research process from the execution to its comprehension and critical analysis. As a product of all this, results the insertion of local knowledge onto the structure of the knowledge generated, constantly feedback by the community and turning it into a cycle from the theory to practice. For these reason it is necessary to begin a training that allow to local stakeholders participate actively in the research process.

This training must include topics focused in tools that allow to community to know their own territories to make decisions: Knowing the territories thorough the local perceptions about characteristics, problems and political dimensions of natural resources management in the region. This knowledge is feed by the academy with tools from participatory rural approach (PRA). This toolbox allows to understand the vision of stakeholders about the change on the natural resources state, the problems and instruments for the governance of the natural resources management in the territory.

It is important that the facilitator includes in the training, some concepts and methodological tools for the socio-ecological system (SES) analysis. This tool allows, in a holistic way, to characterize the territory in terms not just the ecosystem in itself but also the social aspects and the relationship between both social and ecological dimensions. Equally it is necessary to include tools of qualitative analysis, such as interviews and surveys, social network analysis, structural prospective analysis, gender topics and how to facilitate workshops with a participative approach, where co-researchers apply the tools in workshop with communities. Finally, co-researchers in the context of the training, will learn to triangulate and systematize information to write scientific reports about workshops. In this way, the community could have the opportunity to guide their own decisions taking into account this analysis in the natural resources management.

2. Co-Researchers

The training process with communities implies time and economic resources. This training could ideally be developed with all members of community, but in practical terms it is better to make up a representative group, which can spread the knowledge and to be able to replicate the experience in the community. In order to carry out this work, it is recommendable to get a leader team conformed by managers of the community, especially young leaders who know their territory and community reality.

Also, it is important that people in co-researchers team have skills to function in public, tolerance for mediation of disputes and have a certain level of recognition, responsibility and respect in leadership roles within of the community. These people should also be characterized by their entrepreneurial qualities and community processes dynamization. Since a transverse axis in the process of conservation and natural resource management, is the gender perspective, it is necessary to prioritize the selection of these leaders, taking into account the participation not just of men and women, but also young and old people.

Also, it is necessary to encourage the participation of leaders in the training process. One way for this is to certificate the training course, which allows co-researchers to think about the training process and this certificate lets them to reach the issues of the training, not just for a personal benefit but also for the community. This last benefit is important because it is the final objective of the training: the leadership as a strength spirit to build critical thinking to face the implementation of a new project in the territory. This benefit has two ideas, first co-researchers will be the persons in the community who can propose ideas to collective benefit and make decisions in the communitarian sense. Second, co-researchers can apply this kind of tools to know the collective interest in the context of natural resources management.

A comparative advantage between co-researcher training with another training process without participatory approach, is methodologies can adjust to communities culture. For instance, community could have an oral tradition, but not a written one, in the transmission of knowledge. So if these kinds of process do not adjust themselves to the cultural process of communities, they can fail. Moreover, a dynamic with practical talks and working in groups can be most appropriate by the communities. Meanwhile, the participatory approach in the training process with the communities means that tools have to be adjusted to community, not communities have to adjust to the training.

For this reason, the course has a constant building process, in which the structure of the training is flexible taking into account the particular community's process.

In this regard, it is necessary to combine theoretical and practical sessions with sessions about feedback and monitoring the process of training. This permits the course to be in a constant evaluation by co-researchers and this lets the function of "Learning arena". Finally, this is the advantage of training a local team and to leave human capital in the communities. In this way, the general issue is to build "local capital" or human resource who learns, dominates and applies the training in PRA tools to the SES analysis.



Photo 1. Methodological discussion by co-researchers to adjust and apply the workshop in communities

3. An example: The training process of co-researchers in COMET-LA Colombia

The participatory approach developed in the research Project COMET-LA resulted, in the Colombian case, in an innovation from the Colombian team leader by the Pontificia Javeriana University (in particular: the Rural and Regional Development Department at the Faculty of Environmental and Rural Studies): the strategically training process of co-researchers. The training process selected a group of 25 young leaders from each of case studies: La Delfina, Zaragoza, El Crucero y La Esperanza. Four communities with different socio-ecological systems (SES) in the community councils in the black communities from the river basins in Alto and Medio Rio Dagua (AMDA) and in Bajo Calima, both collective territories located in the rural zone of the municipality of Buenaventura, department of Valle del Cauca.

Training consisted in a 100 hours practical course where the co-researchers team, learn by talks the fundamentals and theory about the tools in participatory rural approach, meanwhile they learn by practice how to facilitate workshops with participatory approach. For this reason, the course design was adjusted since there was a constant feedback during the training process of the co-researchers and the application of lessons in the fieldwork with communities (See graphic 1 below).

Co-researchers, accompanied by PUJ team, appropriated the topics of the course that addressed five tools commonly used in rural studies, and focused here on natural resource management. Some of the tools which allowed the characterization of the social-ecological systems (SES) were: transects, historical graph, the productive profile, Venn diagram, social mapping and problem tree. They are described in the explanatory table of participatory rural appraisal tools (see Figure 2). Co-researchers planned workshops tailored to the culture of oral tradition of African descendants in the Colombian Pacific and discussed together the best way to adapt or apply a gender perspective in workshops to the particular context of each area (community case studies).

Co-researchers practiced the application of tools and their analysis. Every step in the training process gets autonomy to the co-researchers in the development of the local abilities. Therefore, the training presented constant feedback in order to improve the weaknesses and to take advantage of the opportunities.



Photo 2. Co-Researchers carrying out a transect for the SES characterization in a study case zone.

Every workshop was systematized by the co-researchers. This strategy for co-researchers permitted to understand the process of recollection of information. Equally, co-researchers participated in the writing of scientific reports that include the local knowledge. They were authors of ideas and gained

abilities to communicate what they want to say and think about the process. An important approach of the project is the gender perspective. This approach in the fieldwork and the workshops was relevant to know how men and women have different perceptions on natural resource. It was important to know the similar or different pressures on women and men.

On the other hand, one of the complementary activities was the application of a survey and interviews about governance and social network analysis in the dynamics of community's institutions, norms and rules to natural resource management. Co-researchers applied 20 surveys in each of the SES in every one of the study case.

Moreover, co-researchers had the opportunity to get a theoretical and practical training in governance and politics focused on natural resource management. In this workshop, co-researchers discussed about the role of politic democracy in the community and the structural organization in the community council to make decisions about natural resources.

The training finished with a theoretical and practical workshop in relation to the prospective structural analysis (PSA) to identify the main variables that respond to problems in communities, using the MIC-MAC tool.



Photo 3. Training in participatory approach by COMET-LA Colombian Team.

The strategy to teach co-researchers was an innovator idea. It was used to other leaders in the communities to get abilities and appropriate in the practice each of the tools. The critical capacity of co-researchers was developed during the training process since they adapted some specific tools for working with black communities.

Also, the co-researchers walked through an important process of identity creation within the project¹. The general objectives of the project were appropriated for them and the work dynamics was improved with the community councils.

Finally, PUJ and the general coordinator of the project from UCO issued certificates of the course on **Participatory approaches for community management of natural resources**, for the co-researchers. This certificate was given to every co-researcher in the presence of communities and the COMET-LA team.

Photo 4. Co-researchers in the Graduation Ceremony for the course: Participatory approaches for community management of natural resources- COMET-LA.



4. If you want to replicate a co-researcher training in another community . . .

A conclusion from this experience is that the participatory approach used in training processes enhances social capital in communities, encourages interaction of academia with the community and allows to meet the research or development projects with a community focus. It is recommended that the training is focused on a group of community leaders. Also, it is important to design the course with the community and to allow critical influence of the leaders in management decisions and implementing the workshops. A key issue is to involve local stakeholders in the participation of the research process. The work with a local co-researchers team allows not just the recognition of the popular knowledge within research but also the appropriation by the co-researchers of the conclusions and recommendations of the process.

¹ The use of identification cards, t-shirts, and caps was a key issue for the identity creation with the project.

It is important to remind that the process of training in the community-based management of natural resources requires these main steps:

1. To select with the community, the inhabitants who will participate in the training. They will be the future co-researchers, leaders of communitarian process.
2. To design the training in: concepts, topics like methodologies, special training in facilitate and planning workshops to communities.
3. To select the more appropriate participatory tools to be implemented in the workshops. The roles of each individual and the conformation of groups have to be decided in advance.
4. In the implementation of the workshops, co-researchers have to have into account gender perspective and the participatory approach in the process.
6. The feedback process is one of the key issues in the process. Monitoring and the inclusion of local knowledge have to maintain the “learning arena” because it is the best platform to interact horizontally between the facilitator and the co-researchers.

Graphic 1: Themes for the course: “Participatory approaches for community-based management of natural resources” offered to co-researchers from the community councils in the black communities from Alto and Medio Dagua and from the Bajo Calima.

