

Short Article

Action Research on Community Empowerment in Underdeveloped Regions, some Experiences from West Java, Indonesia

Background

Action Research is a kind of research, which has been conducted for a long time in Indonesia; however, in general its implementation rarely accommodates farmer's inspirations. Activities of participatory action research require a relatively long time for implementation, depends more on the community's initiatives and needs priority setting. Participatory action research possesses some two-way components, which is of the implementing agent to the community and vice versa. The components cover: (a) information transfer both from the implementing agent and vice versa; (b) awareness action on their existing problems and owned potential (two ways); (c) community motivating process on overcoming their owned problems; (d) innovation transfer and motivating the community to apply the innovation and its improvement; and (e) institutionalization on the innovation application.

There are at least six approaches on action research; these are formative, system improvement, problems solving, model analysis, participatory, and critical corporate self-consciousness. The applied approaches in this action research are problems solving and participatory, because those approaches are considered the most relevant with the community empowerment effort. No less than three parties are involved in this action research; these are local government (including district, sub-district, and village level governments), the involved community and researchers. The government is an influencing part on the programme sustainability and continuity.

The study sites

The action research has been implemented in two districts, Bogor and Sukabumi, West Java province. In each district a sub-district was selected and then a village was selected in each selected sub-district and a hamlet was selected as study site in each village. Study location in Bogor district is Babakan Madang sub-district. The activity is focused to assist the local government in controlling anthrax disease. On the other hand, Sukabumi district was chosen because it is one of the poorest regions in West Java province. In this case, Sukabumi district is represented by Nagrak sub-district and the activity focuses on empowerment of dry land farming community.

Data and analysis

Data collection was conducted by using survey method (baseline survey) and participatory rural appraisal (PRA). Baseline survey was carried out through interviewing community members using structured and semi-structured questionnaires, field notes, and participatory and direct

observation. PRA implementation was in accordance to its norms and principles, which is involving community's aspiration and participation. Secondary data and information were collected from various reports and in-depth focused group discussion at several institutions and with other key informants.

Results and discussion

One of the most important pillars in community development is intensive guidance as there was unlimited opportunity to implement the action research. The involvement of *Dompot Dhuafa* = DD (a society-based alms giving management institution to enhance social level of the low-lived people) through *Kampoeng Ternak* = KT (Livestock Village) in Sukabumi site was very strategic and it was a blessing. Sheep were distributed to some farmers as the source of organic fertilizer. Collaboration with the DD was also a meaningful step in showing to the group that money is not everything, but more on hard work and high motivation. If there is a will, there will be a way and the collaboration with the DD is a proof.

In Bogor site, small ruminant rearing could not be developed more due to anthrax endemic in the area. Government will not develop livestock in the area of anthrax endemic. However, budget is available in the office of District Level Livestock Service for any activity related to veterinary services such as anthrax vaccination every six months. In addition, farmers training on better small ruminant rearing, including veterinary aspects was also carried out.

The handicraft making activity, which was learned from Laa Nona Gallery, has not yet given financial impact. Although the skill has been mastered, the products could not be easily marketed due to relatively high price. Taking part in various exhibitions, both in Bogor and Jakarta, had given them an opportunity to know the 'outside world'. This improvement will make them more ready to catch future opportunities, if any.

Impacts of community development activities are not only in terms of money, but also in other aspects such as awareness of working in a group, wider horizon of thinking, willing to improve their welfare status, be able to speak up in public, be able to collaborate with other parties, etc. Improvement in their income will follow the improvement of human resource and it is the substance of community development. Empowered human resource will be capable to identify owned potential and develop it by considering existing constraints. ■

Written by Edi Basuno, Programme Leader R&D, CAPSA-ESCAP,

Breaking News

Indonesia's Small-Scale Palm Oil Farmers Finding Green Certification Costly

Indonesia's small-scale palm oil farmers are not acquiring the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil's (RSPO) green certification as environmentally friendly producers because it is expensive costing around Rp 1.5 million (\$159) a hectare. The cost could be reduced if regional administrations were able to dispense land certificates for plantations. The farmers also need to get a land certificate from the National Land Agency (BPN) as the requirement to obtain RSPO certification which unfortunately, most farmers have yet to get it. Small-scale farmers own about 3.3 million hectares of palm oil plantations - around 46 per cent of the country's 7.7 million hectares - and 80 per cent of the plantations had yet to be certified. The other factor discouraging farmers from certifying was the fact that there are no premiums offered by the market for certified palm oil. The RSPO has said it would investigate how proceeds from the trade in sustainable palm oil can be used to facilitate certification of small holders.

Ekawati, A., 2009. Indonesia's Small-Scale Palm Oil Farmers Finding Green Certification Costly. The Jakarta Globe, <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/> (17 November 2009).

Agricultural Loan: The Loopholes in the System

Farmer's access to finance is one of the major problems in rural areas. According to the Bangladesh Bank's agricultural loan and special programmes division, the target of distributing agriculture loan through state-owned commercial banks for this fiscal year has been fixed at Tk.7,779.23 crore. Getting finance at the grassroots level is still a big problem. The foremost issue is finding the right farmers and assessing them, which is beyond the scope of the bank's regular work, and is also very time consuming. Contract farming is one solution to these problems. Another solution is crop insurance. In conclusion, even without land collateral, banks can give loans to farmers if they have the will. And contract farming, if utilized properly, can be another way to arrange collateral and disburse loan to marginal, landless farmers and sharecroppers.

Mahfuz, A., 2009. Agricultural Loan: The Loopholes in the System. The Daily Star, <http://www.thedailystar.net/> (22 October 2009).

Events

7th International Biofuels Conference

11 - 12 February 2010

New Delhi, India

http://www.winrockindia.org/International_Biofuels_Conference.htm

International Symposium: Sustainable Land Use and Rural Development in Mountainous Regions of Southeast Asia

21 - 23 July 2010

Hanoi, Viet Nam

<https://www.uni-hohenheim.de/sfb564/uplands2010/index.php>

Climate Change – Adapting is Crucial Too

At a meeting in Copenhagen in March 2009, an international alliance of research universities warned of possible 'dangerous climate change', in which unabated emissions of greenhouse gases could lead to an abrupt or irreversible climate shift. The group's update on scientific findings about climate change, summarized in a report released at a UN meeting in Bonn in June 2009, warns that the effects of climate change will be much worse and quicker than previously believed. Meanwhile, governments, donors, academics and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have begun to document and understand local perceptions of changing weather patterns and coping mechanisms. Their insights could lead to better national and international adaptation strategies. Community adaptation to climate change is one of the key issues that will be addressed at the international climate summit in Copenhagen in December.

Padma, T.V., 2009. Climate Change – Adapting is Crucial Too. Science and Development Network, <http://www.scidev.net/> (4 September 2009).

Address Biodiversity Loss, ASEAN Urged

Philippine-based Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Center for Biodiversity (ACB) urged the ASEAN member-nations to address biodiversity loss in the region, noting that the benefits of intact biodiversity to the ASEAN region is estimated to be worth over US\$200 billion annually. The ACB cited that biodiversity brings enormous benefits to mankind from direct harvesting of plants and animals for food, medicine, fuel, construction materials, and other uses to aesthetic, cultural, recreational, research values. Also, benefits to ecosystems include climate and water regulation. It noted that about 80 per cent of the income of the rural poor is derived from the local biodiversity. In April 2002, 10 ASEAN member-states were among the 191 parties worldwide that committed to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth.

De Vera, E. B., 2009. Address Biodiversity Loss, ASEAN Urged. Manila Bulletin, <http://www.mb.com.ph/> (28 August 2009).

2nd International Conference on Oil Palm Biomass

2 - 3 August 2010

Bangkok, Thailand

<http://www.icopb.com>

Collective Action for Smallholder Market Access

Changes in the global agricultural economy are providing smallholders with new opportunities that also present new constraints. The demand for higher value and processed foods as well as the rise of supermarkets around the world has implications for the entire food marketing system. One way for smallholders to overcome market failures and maintain their market position is through organizing into farmer groups or producers organizations. Acting collectively, smallholders would be better positioned to reduce transaction costs for their market exchanges, obtain necessary market information, secure access to new technologies, and tap into high-value markets, allowing them to compete more effectively with large farmers and agribusinesses. Research in natural resource management has already demonstrated the advantages of collective action - voluntary action by a group to pursue shared objectives - for technology adoption, and for ensuring that resource use is efficient, equitable, and sustainable. These should include improving rural infrastructure, providing extension services, making credit markets accessible to the poor, and making relevant market information available. When considering pro-poor market development, there is a need to be realistic about the potential benefits and beneficiaries of collective action. However, market development is not always going to help the poorest because they may not have the minimum asset threshold (human, physical, and even social) needed to participate in market exchanges. While collective marketing does enable smallholders to raise incomes by participating in more profitable markets, these smallholders may not represent the poorest members of the rural communities. Whether there are possible positive spillover effects for the poorest from these activities remains to be seen. ■

Markelova, H. and Meinzen-Dick, R., 2009. Collective Action for Smallholder Market Access. CAPRI-CGIAR Policy Brief No. 6, IFPRI, <http://www.ifpri.org/> (April 2009).

Revitalizing Asia's Irrigation

Asia contains 70 per cent of the world's irrigated area. Here, 34 per cent of cultivated land is irrigated, as compared to only 10 per cent in North America and 6 per cent in Africa. Irrigation was the key to the success of the Green Revolution and this helped alleviate poverty and boost rural growth. Boosting the performance of irrigated agriculture from now on, however, will be critical because an extra 1.5 billion people will live on the continent by 2015. Experts estimate that demand for food and animal feed crops will double during the next 50 years. Growing this extra food will require better management of existing irrigated lands, since opening up new frontiers is constrained by lack of land and water resources. Irrigated agriculture still offers huge opportunities but only innovative strategies will unlock the potential gains. Future irrigation systems will need to be efficient and flexible to meet the demands of many sectors including farming, fishing, domestic use and energy supply. The managers of irrigation systems will need to find ways to generate more value from ecosystem services and halt environmental degradation. They must also enable farmers to respond to challenges posed by volatile market conditions and climate change. All these require several strategies such as: 1) Modernize yesteryear's schemes for tomorrow's needs because the schemes have become underused, poorly maintained and inefficient; 2) Go with the flow by supporting farmers' initiatives; 3) Look beyond conventional Participatory Irrigation Management (PIM) and Irrigation Management Transfer (IMT) recipes; 4) Expand capacity and knowledge; and 5) Invest outside the irrigation sector. ■

Mukherji, A. and Facon, T., 2009. Revitalizing Asia's Irrigation: To Sustainably Meet Tomorrow's Food Needs. IWMI and FAO, <http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/> (2009).

Biofuels in Asia: An Analysis of Sustainability Options

Biofuels currently supply less than 1 per cent of transport fuel worldwide and approximately 3 per cent in developing Asia. Large-scale biofuels present a broad range of opportunities, but they also entail significant environmental, social, and economic risks. Given the complex challenges presented by biofuels production and use, the US Agency for International Development's Regional Development Mission for Asia (USAID RDMA) sponsored a report to analyse key trends and concerns in Asia. The report highlights sustainability options and outlines ways to promote sustainable biofuels in Asia that reduce net GHG emissions, avoid negative impacts on food security and biodiversity, and promote the social welfare of local communities. Here are several key findings: 1) Energy independence: the study finds that support for decentralized biofuels production on degraded or underutilized lands holds the potential to sustainably provide energy to roughly half a billion people living in poverty in rural areas; 2) Climate change and the Environment. Biofuels plantations must avoid converting forests and peat lands at all costs, planting instead on degraded or underutilized lands, using high-yielding feedstocks that require minimal inputs; 3) Food security: The use of non-food feedstocks grown on underutilized land for biofuels production and the rapid deployment of second- and third-generation biofuels are crucial to ensuring that food security is not threatened by continued biofuels development; 4) Social impacts and Livelihoods: Biofuels initiatives should strengthen the enforcement of labour rights, protection of land rights, participatory processes for indigenous peoples, and implementation of biofuels production certification systems. ■

Clean Energy Asia, 2009. Biofuels in Asia: An Analysis of Sustainability Options. USAID-Asia Policy Brief, <http://www.cleanenergyasia.net/> (March 2009).

Developing Small Enterprises with Savings and Credit Support

Sixty per cent of the more than 500 households in the coastal village of Nazareth, in Kabasalan, Zamboanga Sibugay, Philippines, are lime farmers. Because of the highly perishable nature of limes and their oversupply, earnings from limes used to be low. Five years ago, the Western Mindanao Community Initiatives Project helped establish a lime processing centre in the town. The project also provided capacity-building and production training to the Nazareth Women's Association, organized specifically by the project to manage the business. Less than a year after the centre's establishment, the 35-member-strong association had earned PHP 104,120 (over US\$2,200) from the sale of lime concentrate. With technical assistance and advice from the project, the association has greatly improved productivity and product quality, and adopted a modern packaging style (including bar codes and nutritional information). As a result, the centre's lime concentrate has now been accredited by the government's Bureau of Food and Drugs. To meet growing demand, the project also funded new processing equipment that allows the centre to produce 200 bottles of limes concentrate per batch (requiring 156 kilograms of limes). The centre has also recently added another product line: squeezed lime rind made into jelly, candy and jam. Because of the project, Nazareth has become an economically and socially stronger community. The women's association is still growing. The village's lime growers have a regular market for their produce and are earning far more than before. Given the processing centre's positive impact on the town, the provincial government provided it with additional capital through its 'One Town One Product' programme. ■

Rural Poverty Portal, 2009. Developing Small Enterprises with Savings and Credit Support, <http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/> (2009).

The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2009: Economic Crises – Impacts and Lessons Learned

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome, 2009. ISBN 978-92-5-106288-3.

This report comes at a time of severe economic crisis. The estimates reported that for the first time since 1970, more than one billion people, around one-sixth of all humanity, are hungry and undernourished worldwide. The book consists of three main chapters, i.e. (1) Undernourishment around the world; (2) Case studies of countries affected by the economic crisis; and (3) Towards eliminating hunger.

The current crisis is historically unprecedented, with several factors converging to make it particularly damaging to people at risk of food insecurity. First, it overlaps with a food crisis that in 2006-2008 pushed the prices of basic staples beyond the reach of millions of poor people; second, the crisis is affecting large parts of the world simultaneously, in which the scope of policy instruments to cope with the global crisis become more limited; third, with developing countries today more financially and commercially integrated into the world economy, they are far more exposed to shocks in international markets.

FAO estimates that 1.02 billion people are undernourished worldwide in 2009. The increase in food insecurity is not a result of poor crop harvest but because high domestic prices, lower income, and increasing unemployment have reduced access to food by the poor. Faced with the crisis, households are forced to find ways to cope. Coping mechanisms involve undesirable but often unavoidable compromises, such as replacing more-nutritious food with less-nutritious food, selling productive assets, withdrawing children from school, forgoing health care or education, or simply eating less. The respective coping mechanisms create poverty traps and negatively affect longer-term food security.

The case studies of countries affected by the economic crisis were conducted in five developing countries. Two of the five (Bangladesh and Nicaragua) are rated by the IMF as being at medium risk from the crisis, while the other three (Armenia, Ghana and Zambia) are rated as high risk. The study indicated that a variety of coping mechanisms have been used by the poor to adapt to the crisis, depending on their own specific situation. The relative importance of remittances, foreign direct investment, overseas development assistance varies across the countries. The importance of remittance and trade has been increasing over the past decade. The global food crisis caused key staple food prices to increase in all of these countries.

The last chapter, towards eliminating hunger, consists of three important aspects, i.e. the importance of investing in agriculture and public goods; safety nets for the short term and long term; and the right to food. A healthy agriculture sector can provide an economic and employment buffer in time of crisis, especially in poor countries. To fulfil agriculture's role as an engine of growth and poverty alleviation, agriculture itself needs to grow. It is therefore important that, during and following economic crisis, investment in agriculture receives decisive support from both the private and public sectors. Private investment in agriculture requires accompanying public investment.

Despite the financial constraints faced by governments around the world, agricultural investment and safety nets remain key parts of an effective response to reduce food insecurity both now and in the future. Safety-net interventions should address the immediate impact on the vulnerable while also providing sustainable solutions to the underlying problems. As the shorter-term pillar of the twin-track approach, safety nets must enable recipients to become more credit-worthy and more able to access modern inputs and adopt new technologies, thus allowing them to graduate from the safety-net programme. To achieve these goals, safety nets should be well integrated with broader social assistance programmes.

In 2008, the right to adequate food was recognized as a fundamental component of a sustainable solution to the world food-security crisis caused by high food prices. The right to food is, first of all, a basic human right enshrined in international law. A right-to-food perspective provides a framework for the diagnosis of the food security problem as well as guidance for the design, implementation and monitoring of initiatives taken in response to the food crisis. To lift the poor people out of hunger, the food-insecure need control over resources, access to opportunities, and improved governance at the international, national and local levels.

The state of food insecurity in the world 2009 is FAO's tenth progress report on world hunger since the 1996 World Food Summit (WFS). Various organizations and institutions give substantial contribution to this well organized book, that will give significant contribution on problems solving of food insecurity and hunger faced by the people and government especially in developing countries. ■

Reviewed by I Wayan Rusastra, Senior Researcher, Indonesian