

DRAFT

Participatory Action and Learning (PAL) in Community Forest Management:
A Reflection on the Training Contents, Process, and Outcomes

**Organized by Department for International Rural Development (DIRD) of
The University of Reading (UK);
Forest Resources Studies and Action Team, Nepal (ForestAction); and
Nepal: Livelihoods and Forestry Programme (LFP)**



**Forest Resources Studies and Action Team, Nepal
(ForestAction)**

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INTRODUCTION

A five-day training on Participatory Action and Learning (PAL) in forest management was organized by Department for International Rural Development (DIRD) in collaboration with Forest Resources Studies and Action Team (ForestAction) and Nepal Livelihoods and Forestry Programme (formerly known as Nepal-UK Community Forestry Project, NUKCFP) on April 18-22, 2001 in Baglung. The training was targeted at Department of Forests (DOF) forest guards and local animators involved in participatory management of forests. While the primary purpose of the training was to equip the participants with necessary concepts, tools and techniques of the participatory action and learning in forest management, other subsidiary objectives included: testing and refining the key message as well as manual for the training.

The PAL methodology was developed through a three-year intensive field research conducted by the Forest Users Groups Forest Management Project (FFMP) implemented by DIRD and NUKCFP with financial support from Department for International Development (DFID).

The goal of the Participatory Action and Learning (PAL) methodology is to equip frontline extension agents of community forestry management (in this case forest guards and animators) with some concrete but practical sets of ideas, tools and techniques to assist Forest Users Groups (FUGS) for effective management of community forests in Nepal. The PAL methodology promotes an strategy of working with FUGs in a systematic and participatory manner using innovative tools and techniques. The philosophy behind the process is to involve each member of FUGs from the beginning of the process (involvement in decision making and information collection, planning, implementation and monitoring) in the community forest management.

The newly developed methodology is expected to enhance the capacity of the field forestry practitioners to critically address the floating issues of intra- FUG communication, participation of poor and disadvantaged, distributional equity, and monitoring that have hampered active management of community forests in the hills of Nepal.

To deliver the PAL process to the field workers, the training manual was developed by DIRD researchers incorporating the outcomes of the research and was planned for field-test. Forest Resource Studies and Action Team (ForestAction) received a request from DIRD as regards participating in the process of the training, manual revisions and refining the concept of the training. ForestAction decided to take this as an opportunity to enhance its capacity in delivering trainings in PAL methodology in view of the demand for this type services around the country.

Key activities conducted as part of this collaborative arrangements included: orientation of ForestAction staff on PAL process by DIRD research faculty, Training preparation and management by ForestAction staff, training delivery in Baglung, and reflections and suggestions for refinement of the PAL process manual.

ORIENTATION OF FORESTACTION STAFF ON PAL

Dr Y B Malla from DIRD gave an orientation on the PAL concept and process to the core members of the ForestAction (Krishna P Paudel, Hemant R Ojha and Shambhu Dangal, Basundhara Bhattarai) as well as other part time staff (hired on part time basis) of the ForestAction. This was conducted at ForestAction office on 5-6 April 2001 in Kathmandu. The purpose of the orientation was to enable ForestAction staff to independently plan and conduct the training sessions with limited support. During the orientation, a lively discussion was held on the content, flow and activities of five days training package.

Responsibilities for the conduction of the training were divided among the ForestAction facilitators, and following individual preparations, a one day discussion and sharing meeting was held on April 13, 2001 for further clarification and preparation on the training package.

TRAINING DELIVERY IN BAGLUNG AND OUTCOMES

Participants and facilitators

A total of 19 men and women participants (6 from Baglung, 7 from Myagdi and 6 from Parbat) representing forest guards, forest assistants and local animators took part in the training. They had diversified experience in community forestry at the field level. Six of them were women (animator). The list of the participants is given in annex II.

District Forest Officers of Myagdi, Parbat and Baglung and a Forest Ranger from Parbat also participated in the training as observers.

ForestAction Team members and staff facilitating the training were: Shambhu Prasad Dangal, Krishna Prasad Paudel, Prem Prasad Sapkota, Hari Dhungana, Bishnu L Ghimire, and Ganga Neupane.

They divided roles among themselves that included: conducting sessions, compiling comments on the sessions for improvement, contributing ideas, and making presentations. Two core members of ForestAction had main facilitation roles during the course. Mr Hari R Neupane, who involved in the FFMP research activity, was also involved as a facilitator in the training.

Dr. Yam.B. Malla contributed to the training delivery process during the training as well as preparatory discussions and reflections before and after the training sessions. Katie Maya Norris from The University of Reading took the roles of compiling comments during the training for updating the manual. LFP Baglung staff also shared their ideas in some of the sessions.

Content and flow of the training

At the beginning, the training allowed the participants to explore **the factors/reasons attributable to ineffective/inactive management of community forests in their respective areas**. An **overview of the PAL process** was then linked with these issues as a means of facilitating active management of forests. Once participants realized the importance of PAL methodology, they were exposed/reoriented on **how to enter to a new forest user group** for PAL application. Participants were then exposed to various **tools for forest and social information collection**, followed by data/information analysis and planning. The PAL process allows the full involvement of FUG members in analysis of information and planning tactically handling the FUG Committee, which usually holds tremendous FUG power and is generally found defensive to critical reflections and monitoring processes unless treated with great care. The three levels of analysis and planning (FUGC, Tole and Assembly) allow FUGs explore and resolve the critical issues underlying forest management.

Throughout the cycle, PAL emphasizes intra-FUG communication, which should take place within and between FUGC, Tole and Assembly. The **planning process** for CF management was designed to include detailed **action plan preparation and arrangements for implementation** of the plan. **Monitoring** during implementation of action plan was another integral part throughout the PAL process. At the end of the training, participants prepared **PAL process implementation plan** (for participants themselves) in their respective fields, which was backed by an explicit commitment of their boss (DFOs) as regards morally and institutionally supporting the plan. Everyday, time was allocated for an evaluation by participants of the day's activity and a recap of the previous days were included

Participants' Feedback on sessions and training

In the regular evaluations sessions every day, participants shared that they learnt something that is useful in their work. They suggested for an allocation of more time for discussions. A summary output of the completed evaluation sheet is given in annex III. The meeting held each day evening with the observers and facilitators gave significant feedback for the modification and betterment of the course as well as facilitation scheme.

The overall evaluation of the training course was done at the end of the training using a three-point scale. About 27 major topics were discussed during the training and participants were asked to rank their level of understanding against each of them. An analysis of the feedback showed that 16 participants understood the concept well with an ability to explain the process to others orally or in writing. Three of them expressed they need further clarification. The detail evaluation sheet is given in annex IV.

Outcomes of the training

The training resulted in the following specific outcomes:

Enhancement of skills, knowledge and attitude of the participants. The informal evaluation done during and the leisure time and the training evaluation indicated that the level of the confidence among the participants increased sharply. The expression of negative attitude from some participants in the initial days was completely turned into positive. The field implementation plan also showed their confidence for adoption of PAL process.

Training need analysis of field staffs. While designing the course it was assumed that participants have some basic skills (PRA, facilitation skills, simple forest measurement and management skills) used in community forest management practices. Accordingly training period was designed for five days. Most of the participants expressed difficulties in these aspects.

During the training, participants realized need for some basic skills of facilitating community forestry process before participating in the PAL training. The skills required are:

- Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques relevant to community forestry
- Facilitation and communication skills
- Simple techniques for forest measurements
- Options of forest management and silviculture

Action plan preparation. Participants prepared action plans to test PAL process in their field. A total of nine FUGs were selected for testing the process. All the action plans were copied and distributed to concerned participants and District Forest Offices. Participants made small pair groups for effective implementation of the plan they prepared.

Institutional Commitment. District Forest Officers of all three districts also understood the PAL process, and expressed commitment to support the field implementation. DFOs and participants were found to be discussing the potential applying PAL process during the preparation or revision of community forest operational plan. All this indicates a good chance of applying and learning through the PAL process in future.

Follow up plan. A proposal for the follow up training came from some of the participants and was realized by all including the facilitators and DFOs. A follow up training has been planned to be held in July 2001. This will help participants share their PAL experiences after having worked in the real situation. The follow up training plan also indirectly inculcates a sense of obligation to the participants to start the work as per the plan.

Inputs to the training manual. The training gave significant inputs to the PAL manuals. While the training validated the basic idea and conceptual outline of the training, several amendments have been suggested. This includes additions of new sessions as well as restructuring of existing sessions. The manual translated into Nepali needed further editing of language.

On May 5-6, 2001 staff of ForestAction and the University of Reading detailed the outline of the manual on the basis of the recommendation made during the training period. The amended manual outlines a ten-day package for the PAL process. The amended course includes some crucial background skills during

the first three days (PRA tools related to PAL process, facilitation and communication skills, simple technique for forest measurements and management), and the next 7 days will allow participants learn the PAL process. An outline of the revised contents is given in annex V. A preliminary draft of the revised manual has been handed over to DIRD for further work.

Enhancement of ForestAction capacity in PAL. As a result of participating in the PAL training activity, ForestAction has got an opportunity to combine relevant experiences of its professionals with the PAL concepts and process. ForestAction professionals were involved in designing the PAL sessions, delivery of sessions to participants, reflections and evaluation of the training, and revision of the manual. They will continue to contribute to the manual development process for a couple of months in future until the manual is finalized in both English and well as Nepali. ForestAction has thus become a first institution capable of applying PAL process for facilitating effective management of community forests in Nepal.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

Challenges

There are two major challenges related to the application of PAL process by the trained participants in the field include:

Dilution. The concept of PAL process may dilute in the field if the participants do not follow the process properly for reasons of limited real commitment, motivation, priority or otherwise. In such a case, people may consider it as Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), PRA or Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and the original idea of the PAL could vanish. The non-orientated supervisors of the participants could contribute to the dilution of the PAL process. This challenge, indeed, is common to many types of applied trainings.

Follow-up. Only delivering the training could not help the person unless there is follow up support to the participants. This is a felt challenge for most of the community forestry related trainings run in Nepal. Hands-on support in the field could help the participants but this needs supporting staff. The supporting staffs also need to have skills on PAL process otherwise the expected outcomes could not be achieved. An other challenge is frequent transfer of trained field staffs who participated and involved in the field.

Opportunities for improved delivery of PAL training

This training experience has identified some opportunities for improving the efficacy of training. These include:

Venue. The training venue should have an appropriate field site in the vicinity so that practical exercise can be done without much waste of time. A residential training gives added opportunity for sharing, interaction and learning.

Level of participants. The heterogeneous level of understanding within the participants hinders the training in flow and time management. The participants should have about equal level of understanding. It is recommended to select participants having similar background experiences.

Contents of the training. This should be as per the revised Manual.

Phase wise training and follow up. PAL process has four stages and all were discussed in one go. If the package could be divided into at least two phases consisting of: a) information collection b) and analysis, planning, implementation and monitoring. Participants may better apply, adopt and innovate the PAL if it is conducted in two phases, including an in-between field component.

Orientation and TOT. The commitment of the participants and their supervisors is crucial for smooth implementation of the PAL process in the field. An orientation to DFOs, rangers, and LFP staffs may

sensitize them to create an atmosphere for smooth application of PAL as well as help the PAL methodology to be an adaptive process. There is also a need for sharing of PAL concepts among the forest officials and donors working in community forestry. A new group of trainers may also be created through Training of Trainers.

ANNEX I

Original training topics and schedule

| | |
|--|--|
| Day I Introductions and Training Logistics Basic Issues Introduction to PAL Working with Selected FUGs Communicating the Process Daily review | Day IV Travel to village Forest Management Options Action Research plots Discussion on community forest management Return |
| Day II Recap Information collection Practice of using tools and techniques Daily Review | Day V PAL stages presentation Monitoring FUG selection PAL Planning Summing up and Overview Training Evaluation and Closing |
| Day III Recap Information analysis Information sharing and reflection at FUGC level Information and sharing at Tole Level Information and sharing with Fug assemblies Implementing action plans Daily review | |

ANNEX II

List of Participants of the PAL Training in Baglung (18 – 22 April, 2001)

| SN | Name | Position | Office/Address |
|----|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | Khadananda Kandel | Forest Guard | Forest District Office, Dobilla R. P. |
| 2 | Govinda Rana | Forest Guard | Kharpanang R. P. Baglung |
| 3 | Yajendra Paudel | Forest Guard | Kushmi R. P., Baglung |
| 4 | Tanka Raj Gautam | Forest Guard | Baglung R. P. Baglung |
| 5 | Tikaram Upadhaya | Forest Guard | Gyadi R. P. Parbat |
| 6 | Som Bahadur K.C. | Forest Guard | Tatopani R. P., Myagdi |
| 7 | Yajendra Prasad Shrestha | Forest Guard | Parbat |
| 8 | Git Bahadur G. C. | Forest Guard | |
| 9 | Bhumi Raj Acharya | Forest Assistant | Babiya Chaur R. P., Myagdi |
| 10 | Jaya B. Karki | Forest Assistant | Kushmi R. P., Sera, Baglung |
| 11 | Tika Ram Pathak | Forest Assistant | Shaligram R. P. Uram Pokhara |
| 12 | Rudra B. K. C. | Forest Assistant | Myagdi |
| 13 | Champa Thapa | Volunteer | Shaligram R. P. Uram Parbat |
| 14 | Rukmini Paudel | Volunteer | |
| 15 | Dil Kumari Kunwar | Volunteer | Burtiwang R. P. |
| 16 | Chaki Maya Kisan | Volunteer | Babiya Chaur R. P., Myagdi |
| 17 | Sita K.C. | Volunteer | Shaligram R. P. Uram Parbat |
| 18 | Maya Kumari Sharma | Volunteer | Sadi R. P. Parbat |
| 19 | Rupa Khatri | Volunteer | Myagdi |
| 20 | Ganesh Jha | Observer, DFO | Parbat |
| 21 | Ram Babu Paudel | Observer, DFO | Myagdi |
| 22 | Mahesh Hari Acharya | Observer | |
| 23 | Him Kumar Shrestha | Observer, President | Tanahun |
| 24 | Hari Raj Neupane | Trainer | ForestAction, KTM |
| 25 | Bishnu Ghimire | Trainer | ForestAction, KTM |
| 26 | Prem Sapkota | Trainer | ForestAction, KTM |
| 27 | Ganga Maya Neupane | Trainer | ForestAction, KTM |
| 28 | Hari Dhungana | Trainer | ForestAction, KTM |
| 29 | Krishna P. Paudel | Trainer | ForestAction, KTM |
| 30 | Shambhu P. Dangal | Trainer | ForestAction, KTM |

ANNEX III

PAL training daily evaluation by participants:

| What went well | Oh, more better if: |
|---|--|
| <p>Day I</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction relating to proverb. 2. The strategy of involvement of users in PAL process was good 3. PAL cycle/stage/step 4. Necessity of PAL process for effective forest management. 5. Good to see the equal participation of male and female 6. Story of mouse was more related to the traditional knowledge and valued local people 7. Relevant energizer made more activates <p>Day II</p> <p>Concept of equity and equality.</p> <p>Role-play.</p> <p>Energizer related to session.</p> <p>Organized communication system</p> <p>Listing and method of collection of information needed for forest management (Social and Forest)</p> <p>PAL process detail discussion.</p> <p>The concept of review of own work.</p> <p>Day IV</p> <p>Use of volume table.</p> <p>Role-play with tole members and tole representatives sown by the facilitator.</p> <p>Energizer made freshness.</p> <p>Analysis of information.</p> <p>Different tools and techniques of conducting discussion.</p> <p>Analysis and planning.</p> <p>Wealth ranking exercise.</p> <p>Forestry field exercise.</p> | <p>Day I</p> <p>The problem faced in research on PAL process and its solution was discussed which gives more clarity to the participants.</p> <p>Each participant could get equal opportunity in discussion.</p> <p>More/ repeated energizer.</p> <p>The session goes slow</p> <p>More discussion in the session</p> <p>Day II</p> <p>Flexible time.</p> <p>More clarity on subject.</p> <p>More simplest word.</p> <p>Day IV</p> <p>Session goes slow/more time.</p> <p>More field exercise in field on role of field staffs for effective forest management.</p> <p>More time in the field.</p> |

ANNEX IV

Evaluation of the Training sessions/Discussion topics by participants

| Discussion Topic | Clear understanding & can explain | Clear understanding, can explain & write | To be more clear |
|--|-----------------------------------|--|------------------|
| Introduction | 17 | 2 | 1 |
| Objectives of Training | 15 | 5 | x |
| Identification of issues | 8 | 4 | 7 |
| Introduction of Participatory Action and Learning | 9 | 4 | 5 |
| Beginning of PAL | 10 | 2 | 1 |
| Communication the process | 13 | 4 | 1 |
| Information Collection | 14 | 3 | 2 |
| What Information? | 9 | 3 | 5 |
| Why? | 8 | 3 | 3 |
| Wealth ranking | 9 | 5 | 6 |
| Participatory Mapping | 9 | 3 | 2 |
| Field Visit | 9 | 1 | 1 |
| Identification of forest condition | 15 | 2 | 2 |
| Selection of Management option | 13 | 5 | 2 |
| Distance/Height measurement | 6 | 5 | 5 |
| Sample Plot establishment | 12 | 5 | 3 |
| Demand ranking | 9 | 4 | 4 |
| Measurement of volume of Tree | 8 | 4 | 8 |
| Information Analysis of group | 9 | 4 | 5 |
| Information Analysis of Forest | 7 | 2 | 4 |
| Information exchange in Committee Meeting | 12 | 3 | 2 |
| Information exchange & Plan construction in Tole Meeting | 11 | 2 | 4 |
| Information Discussion & Planning in General Meeting | 11 | 2 | 5 |
| Implication of plan | 7 | 3 | 5 |
| Monitoring and evaluation | 10 | 4 | 3 |
| Why is Participatory Action and Learning | 8 | 4 | 6 |
| Average | 11 | 5 | 3 |

ANNEX V

Revised contents of the PAL training (after the Training in Baglung)

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|---|--|
| <p>Day I</p> <p>Introductory Session (2 hrs)</p> <p>Pre PAL experiences assessment (1 hrs)</p> <p>Facilitation and communication skills</p> <p>Introduction (what and why) –1hr</p> <p>Role play on facilitation - 3hrs</p> <p>Review of the day I (0.5 hrs)</p> | <p>Day VI</p> <p>Recap 0.5 hr</p> <p>What forest information, why and how 1.5 hr</p> <p>Field preparation 1 hr</p> <p>Field exercise 4 hrs</p> |
| <p>Day II</p> <p>Recap day I (0.5 hr)</p> <p>Facilitation & communication skills (2hrs)</p> <p>Listening</p> <p>Questioning</p> <p>Phrasing question</p> <p>Managing group discussion</p> <p>Presentation</p> <p>Feed-back giving</p> <p>Summarizing</p> <p>Introduction to PRA tools related to PAL process- introducing training film (1.5 hr)</p> <p>Exercise on related PRA tools (2.5 hrs)</p> <p>Review of the day (0. 5 hr)</p> | <p>Day VII</p> <p>Recap 0.5 hr</p> <p>Information analysis (social) 1,5 hr</p> <p>Information analysis (forest) 1.5 hr</p> <p>Linking the social and forest resource information 1.0 hr</p> <p>Communicating the information collected by tole reps. and planning for action-2 hrs</p> <p>FUGC</p> <p>Tole</p> <p>FUG assembly (Finalization of plan)</p> <p>Review (0.5 hr)</p> |
| <p>Day III</p> <p>Recap (0.5)</p> <p>Exercise on related PRA tools(2 hrs)</p> <p>Simple forest management tools and techniques (4 hrs)</p> <p>Introduction on various tools</p> <p>Exercise one related tools and techniques</p> <p>Review of the day (0.5 hr)</p> | <p>Day VIII</p> <p>Recap 0.5 hr</p> <p>Development of plan for individual plan (2 hrs)</p> <p>Examples</p> <p>(a) Training on harvesting</p> <p>Plan for giving loans to disadvantaged members</p> <p>Plan for the establishment of demonstration plots in CF</p> <p>Field implementation of planned activities (1.5 hr)</p> <p>Concept and approach</p> <p>Role of team members and facilitators</p> <p>What is monitoring and why 1.5 hr</p> <p>Activity</p> <p>Process</p> <p>Outcomes</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| | <p>Preparation of report (Verbal and or written) for presentation at FUGC and toles (Trainers note with emphasis on process, activities and out comes) 1hr</p> <p>Review 0.5 hr</p> |
| <p>Day IV</p> <p>Recap (0.5 hr)</p> <p>Identification of issues in CF management (1.5 hr)</p> <p>Context for PAL process (1 hr)</p> <p>Introduction of PAL (1hr)</p> <p>What process and how it works (1 hr) (Emphasize on entry and phasing out from the village)</p> <p>What is information and why? (1.5 hr)</p> <p>What we mean by information</p> <p>What information do we and villagers need ((Forest policy, social and forest)</p> <p>Review (0.5 hr)</p> | <p>Day IX</p> <p>Recap (0.5 hr)</p> <p>Monitoring continued with presentation and reflection by role play (FUG and tole)-2 hrs</p> <p>Further action in FUG assembly (Revised action plan) -1 hr</p> <p>Summing up a) PAL process b) Planning for withdrawal</p> <p>Planning for the application of the PAL process in the field -2hrs</p> <p>Selection of FUG</p> <p>Preparation of plan</p> <p>Sharing</p> <p>Review – 0.5 hr</p> |
| <p>Day V</p> <p>Recap (0.5 hr)</p> <p>The process of information collection (by who + why) (FUGC, Tole, To le rep)– 1 hr</p> <p>What information, why and how (social information) –2hrs</p> <p>Practical exercise (3hrs)</p> <p>Review (0.5)</p> | <p>Day X</p> <p>Recap 0.5 hr</p> <p>Post PAL training experience assessment - 1hr</p> <p>Training course evaluation-1hr</p> <p>Closing-0.5hr</p> |