

# Use of a Diagnostic Tool for Community Perspective Planning



**T**he IFAD-funded North-Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project (NERCORMP) for the Upland Areas was implemented by the Department of the North Eastern Region (DoNER), Government of India. It covered six districts in three provinces of northeast India. Between 1999 and until 2008, it covered a total of 39,161 households directly and another 234,966 households indirectly. The project worked with 50 partner NGOs, 1,012 natural resource management groups (NaRM-Gs) and 3,168 self-help groups in 869 villages. The overall objective of NERCORMP was to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable groups through improved management of their resource base in a way that contributes to the preservation and restoration of the environment.

# Community perspective planning—the ‘what’ and the ‘why’

After using participatory rapid appraisal (PRA) methods during the initial years of the project, the project staff were challenged by the need to develop a community-based planning methodology that would a) allow communities to participate in the planning process; b) help communities to jointly take stock of the resources available to them locally and appreciate the value of these community resources for improving their livelihoods and c) use a medium-term perspective of 5 to 8 years to plan their development within and outside the scope of the project. It was the first such project being implemented in the area and there was no experience in the region to learn from. Five members of the Project Management Unit went to a village in Senapati District of Manipur in northeast India to test and develop this methodology, along with NGO staff and community members. After working with community members in the mountain village in Senapati for 4 days, the initial building blocks of a diagnostic tool (thereafter referred to as community perspective planning) were put in place.

The community perspective planning methodology is a diagnostic tool that includes a set of participatory exercises for assessing available resources and capacities at the community level leading to a perspective plan. This will enable the implementation of annual work plans and the monitoring and evaluation of implementation performance and results. The activity is undertaken jointly by the members of the community and project staff.

## Steps in the Process

The steps followed in perspective planning and monitoring are as follows:

**Step 1:** A perspective plan is drafted on the basis of information derived from the PRA exercise. This exercise is critical for mobilising groups for livelihood development.

**Step 2:** A community meeting is held with all the households in attendance. The purpose, benefit and the meaning of the exercise are explained here.

**Step 3:** A vision-building exercise is done to identify the long-term goals and aspirations of community members (with respect to their families and the village as a whole).

**Step 4:** Community based organisations identify various positive and negative changes as a result of project interventions.

**Step 5:** Participants are then guided in the identification of short-, medium- and long-term goals on the basis of which a pathway is mapped.

**Step 6:** Corresponding activities are identified for each goal. These are usually a combination of activities that will be supported by the project with others being supported through government programmes.

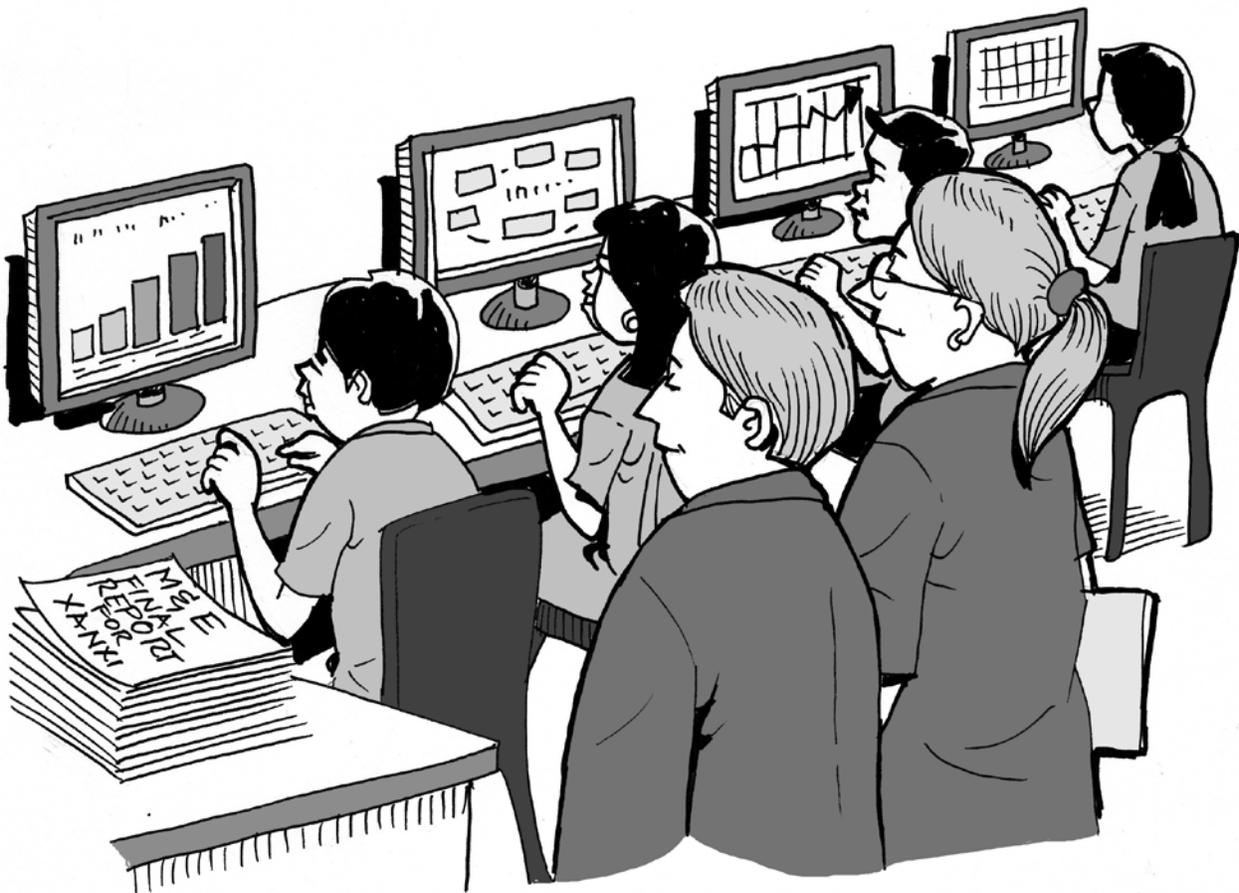
**Step 7:** Activities are then sequenced over a timeline ranging from 5 to 7 years to about 10 years; participants are reminded that beyond 10 years might be unrealistic.

**Step 8:** Groups are assisted in identifying resources within the village as well as resources from the project and other government agencies. Unit costs of project inputs are identified jointly for the preparation of the annual work plan and budget.

## Monitoring and joint review of the perspective plan

When the perspective plan is completed, the project staff assist the communities in setting up a participatory monitoring plan. This entails first preparing an annual work plan based on the perspective plan. The Perspective plan is referred to every year before the village annual work plan is prepared.

The participants then select indicators for monitoring in a meeting during which project logframe indicators are also shared. The sources of data collection and data recording tools (including the time of collection for each indicator) are identified jointly with the community. Furthermore, people who can collect data and also organise joint reflection workshops are identified. These forums enable data analysis to determine collective action.



## Implementing the perspective plan

The above process begins with organising a meeting in the village with all primary stakeholders. In this meeting, the project staff/NGO staff/facilitator explains what the project goal and objectives are. Thereafter, the facilitator explains the rationale of the project and discusses the problem tree to remind people of the cause and solutions to problems on the basis of which the project was designed. Next, the staff organises a discussion on the scope of the project, explaining what activities the project can support to address their needs and what is beyond the scope of the project. Each component is explained in terms of the activities and the results chain. Once this exercise is over, the project staff formally seeks inputs from all community members and obtains their consent in implementing the project. This leads to a social agreement between the project staff and the respective village community.

The involvement of the community institutions play at the early stages of the plan implementation. In this project, the NaRM-G, a village-level institution that comprises one male and one female member from each household is involved. This group of people addresses issues on village-level development planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. These community institutions have been rated very high by supervision mission and reviews. These groups have 'gainfully addressed issues of village development planning and implementation and successfully brought into their fold the participation of women in decisionmaking at the village level, besides bringing about new orientation and sensitisation to the traditional village institutions/authorities towards community development'.

Vision building is an important element. It is often a dream or a long-term perception of a person or a group of people about their life and about their community. In this exercise, a group of people is asked how they would like to see their village after 10 years. After an hour the group members usually come up with a list of things they would like to do, see, and have in the village. On the basis of these, they are also asked to find out what are the things community members will have to do as individuals and as a group to achieve their goals. This exercise is used for planning and for preparing a participatory perspective plan.

Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) exercises were undertaken for purposes of appraisal and assessment of community resources and for determining what opportunities there are to manage these resources. PRAs are used to prepare plans to undertake livelihood activities. (Handbooks and guides describe these methods in detail.) The purposes of using the tools are briefly explained:

*Social mapping* is a PRA tool to help understand the village in terms of its location, dwellings and type of infrastructure such as roads, waterways, source of drinking water, schools, community halls, religious building, population and settlement patterns. This was extensively used in NERCORMP for community mobilisation.

*Wealth ranking* processes are used to categorise households into wealth categories in order to prepare a poverty profile of the village. This is a participatory exercise whereby villagers are assisted to develop criteria for different categories of people. After a thorough discussion, the community decides on the allocation of households for each category, thus creating four groups: rich, middle, poor and poorest. A number of partner NGOs in NERCORMP were already well versed with this methodology. Of these, the BOSCO Reach Out had the most comprehensive methodology. A consensus was made to use wealth ranking in NERCORMP.

*Resource maps* are of several types. Normally, the first resource map drawn in the village is one related to natural resources. For example, it begins by identifying various village resources such as water resources, forests, arable land, marginal land, etc. More detail is then provided by identifying specific resources available within a major resource category (e.g., in the forest, various commercial or useful trees are identified). Land resource capability maps are then drawn; different lands are classified in terms of soil type and its fertility for agricultural production. In addition to these maps, gender resource mapping is also done: here, the total resources in the village are identified and mapped in terms of involvement, control, responsibility and labour of men and women. The resource inflows and outflows from the villages are similarly mapped.

*The mini household surveys* supplement the resource-mapping exercise. They generate household information of a village in terms of population pattern, human resource availability, distribution of resources within the communities and household income and expenditure.

*The watershed maps* are quite similar to that of a resource map where forest and waterways are identified. These maps show the area of a village that falls within a particular watershed. Maps developed by a soil and water conservation department or an agriculture department can be used to compare maps. These maps are used for participatory planning, along with government agencies of soil and water conservation measures. Such maps show bunds, weirs, embankments, waterways, or where contour hedgerows are required for soil and water conservation or erosion control. They are useful tools for mobilising of groups to manage natural resources within the territory of a village. NERCORMP later substituted this with the 3D modeling maps.

*The seasonal activity calendar* is prepared by community members to show what activities are undertaken at different periods throughout the year. It starts by indicating the weather, such as the months when the rain occurs and the months when there is a dry spell. One can also plot the production of food, availability of food, seasonal price of a cash crop in the market, labour demand in the market, grazing time of animals in the pasture, harvesting times, human and animal diseases as well as occurrence of natural calamities such as floods and droughts.

*The Venn diagram* is a diagram that shows institutional relationships within as well as outside the village. The diagram consists of circles of different sizes, each representing an institution or an organisation. The size of the circle represents/illustrates the importance of one organisation in relation to another, whereas the distance represents the accessibility of an organisation in relation to the other.

*Mobility maps* put emphasis on mobility, an important factor in remote villages. The amount of time taken for men and women to travel and person-days usually traveled per week are calculated for a specific activity. This will include, for example, the time required to go to the local market, to the nearest district town, to fetch water or to collect firewood from the forest.

*The transect walk* is a tool used side-by-side with resource mapping. The purpose of a transect walk is to observe and record information from a village. NGO and line agency staff, along with community members, start the transect walk from one end of the village to the other. During the walk, the micro agroecological zones are identified, including soil types, crops, livestock, forest and pasture and traditional new technologies are recorded. At various sections of the terrain, the team discusses problems, solutions and opportunities.

After the PRAs were done, a livelihood promotion strategy is developed. This involves mobilisation of the village community members and community-based organisations. Each member of the activity groups and self-help groups established by the project are assisted in their efforts to identify priority livelihoods with potential to generate income within 6 months to 1 year from farm-based activities. The development of capacities and assets needed to support such activities is discussed.

As the first set of these activities are put into place, the community members can meet their requirements for food production and purchase of food from the sale of surplus from farm-based production. After this, the next set of activities are identified to be put in place/implemented. The community then plans to take up short-gestation (3 to 4 years) livelihood activities. Members who have very little access to land plan activities related to livestock and non-farm enterprises. The older SHGs and activity groups plan higher investment activities such as non-farm enterprises (e.g., management of value addition units such as packaging, processing and milling plants) as well as off-farm enterprises (e.g., convenience stores, petty shops and transportation business, etc.). This strategy is perceived as an essential part of a systematic process of mobilisation prior to activity implementation.

## Results from NERCORMP

**Table 1. Model outputs produced by NERCORMP.**

Major component	Physical achievement
1. Training for capacity building	15,158.00 Nos
2. Agriculture/horticulture	11,138.54 ha
3. Spices	2,173.78 ha
4. Plantation	2,716.37 ha
5. Medicinal and aromatic plants	1,641.34 ha
6. Non-timber forest products	742.91 ha
7. Livestock, fishery, sericulture and vermi composting	860 villages covering 39,161 households
8. Biodiversity and forest conservation	1,835.89 sq km
9. Social sector and infrastructure	

<b>Major component</b>	<b>Physical achievement</b>
a. Low-cost latrines	29,459 units
b. Gravity pipe water supply	368 installations
c. Water tank	613 units
d. Spring-tapped chamber	385 units
e. School building	75 units
f. Road construction	1,236.10 km
g. Bridges/culverts	277
h. Electrification	50 villages covered
i. Terrace development (wet & dry terrace)	1,557.39 ha
<b>10. Non-farm enterprises</b>	<b>6184 numbers</b>

The project completion report of NERCORMP also lists the following changes brought about by the outputs shown in Table 1:

- Low-cost latrines have brought about improvement in sanitation practices.
- Causeways (submersible bridges) have provided better connectivity, especially during the monsoon season.
- Vermi-compost units/pits have contributed to increased productivity.
- Biomass power plants have helped provide rural electrification.
- Planting of perennial crops in jhum fallow land has reduced the areas under jhum cultivation. It had a positive impact on the environment.
- Spring-tapped chambers have increased the discharge of water and improved access to clean water.
- Agroforestry models have conserved moisture, helped control soil erosion and improved productivity in a sustainable manner.
- Herbal gardens have contributed to better health care.
- Protection of water catchment areas has resulted in communities deciding to frame rules and regulations.
- A restored environment has resulted in an increase in non-timber forest products and wildlife.

Even as the project completion report was being written, the government of India was already making plans to scale out the project to a larger number of villages.

# Conclusion

The community perspective plan helps address community development goals that can be achieved through both the project and the identified government schemes and programmes, which otherwise go unnoticed by village communities. This methodology helps men and women identify different activities to achieve the same social and economic development milestones and goals that would benefit their families and their community. Most importantly, it helps to consistently plan activities and targets each year, aligned with the milestones and goals sequenced along a timeline of 5 to 10 years.

# Lessons learned

- The perspective planning process brought women to the forefront of development. Although the goals and milestones of women are the same, the means and activities to achieve these milestones and goals are different for women and men. This enriches the quality of the annual work plans and budgets and village plans.
- Re-visioning and revisiting of perspective plans from time to time with a view to introduce changes as required are important.
- Joint reflection workshops organised quarterly at every level of the project improves project execution.

# References

Project Completion Report – North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project for Upland Areas

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

<b>BOSCO</b>	Don Bosco Industrial Training Institute under St. Anthony's School
<b>CRMS</b>	Community Resource Management Society
<b>DoNER</b>	Department of North Eastern Region
<b>NTFP</b>	non-timber forest products
<b>NGO</b>	nongovernmental organisation
<b>NaRM-G</b>	natural resources management groups
<b>NERCORMP</b>	North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project

## Bio-sketch and contact details

Shaheel Rafique, 46, was born in Assam, India. He earned his graduate degree in agriculture, specialising in Tea Technology and a PhD in agricultural economics from the University of Reading. His interest is in rural economic development and specialises in monitoring and evaluation and project management. He contributed to the setting up of RIMS and annual outcome monitoring and impact evaluation systems with contemporary methods in 10 projects under the IFAD India Country Programme. He worked for IFAD in the India Country Office before becoming a consultant in Asia and Southeast Asia.