

Report on the
1. Training of IKAP-Trainers (TOT I)
24th – 29th May 2004 in Chiang Mai
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Working with Indigenous People in the context of development requires an understanding of the specific perception of life in general and especially of the relation between nature and humans, the people one encounters share. In total, these perceptions form a specific “knowledge system”, which in the case of Indigenous People differs remarkably from the scientific knowledge of most development workers. To gain a mutual understanding it is crucial to be aware of these differences. Furthermore, to have an understanding and respect for Indigenous Knowledge, one should approach it from the people’s perspective and recognise it as complex and “modern” as one’s own. (Picture 1478, but cut in a way that only the actual calendar is visible, no background)

The above mentioned idea is the guiding principle of the Training of IKAP-Trainers, a sequence of three workshops in which the participants, 18 IKAP members from different southeast Asian countries (China, Vietnam, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand), learn how to discover Indigenous Knowledge and finally take it into account in development work. (Picture 1022)

The first of the three workshops took place from Monday, the 24th to Friday, the 29th of May 2004 in Chiang Mai/Thailand and had the aim namely to “sharpen the eyes” and increase the sensibility for Indigenous Knowledge in order to improve the facilitation skills of the participants.

As the concept of Indigenous Knowledge however is a very broad and complex issue, the first part of the workshop focused mainly on the update of the participants’ “knowledge about knowledge”. This was followed by several sessions on methods and tools to discover and understand Indigenous Knowledge. Finally the possibility was given to apply these tools and thereby practicing one’s facilitation skills on existing Indigenous Knowledge in local communities in Northern Thailand. (Picture 1014)

The workshop began on Monday morning with a warm welcome by Khun Sadka Saenmi, Director of IMPECT, the NGO hosting the first training in Chiang Mai and base of the IKAP Network. In addition to wishing everyone a successful learning process, he introduced the trainers of this workshop, Dr. Timmi Tillmann and Dr. Maruja Salas, as well as Khun Prasert Trakarnsuphakorn as resource person.

After trainers and trainees got to know each other on the basis of their experiences with Indigenous Knowledge, an outline of the workshop, including objectives and the participants’ expectations was drawn. The objectives focused on gaining new insights on Indigenous Knowledge as a concept, learning how it can be recovered and integrated in development. And finally to become sensitive for the ethical, political, institutional and practical challenges of development work that enhances Indigenous Knowledge. (Picture 1021 and 0999)

To reach the first objective an overview of different concepts of knowledge was given. This included definitions from the social science, like for example concepts of

knowledge as a process of social construction and as a cycle of generation, dissemination and utilization as well as the differences between knowledge systems. The main emphasis however lay on the so called ethno-ecological approach, in which knowledge is seen as the relation between the three spheres of Cosmos, Corpus and Praxis. With this concept it is possible to explain the inextricable link between cultural and biological diversity as due to the relation between on the one hand the idea and the social institutions to “nurture nature” and on the other the resulting praxis of sustainable land use. (Picture 1052)

After dealing the entire first day with mainly theoretical concepts an application of the lessons learned was certainly due. The possibility to gain such practical experience was given in the early morning of the second day, when the group set off to the Doi Saket Market to interview the local vendors on their products. Equipped with a set of basic questions, the trainees were required to reveal the knowledge behind a product of their choice. Besides several interesting insights into the local products, some very pleasant intercultural contacts resulted from the task, too. (Picture 1079)

Despite the early start, the second day continued to be as intellectually demanding as the previous. First, an introduction to the methods and tools to discover and communicate Indigenous Knowledge and the principles of how those should be applied was given. This was followed by several exercises in which the participants not only practiced to apply what they just learned, but also became aware of the requirements of the tools: If one wants to use for example dialogue as method, it is important not only to hear, but to really understand the partner. (Picture 1220)

In the evening, the field work during which the participants would have the chance to practise their newly acquired facilitation skills was planned. For a start, representatives of the four different communities, where the field work could be carried out (the Lahu village Jiang Jan, the Akha village Pha Lai, the Hmong village Pha Phai and the Karen village Mu Tai Klo), gave a presentation of their village. On the basis of this presentation, the participants chose one of the villages as their destination and prepared the visit with the hosts, with whom they departed the next morning. (Picture 1353)

During the two days in the villages, the participants applied a selection of the tools and found out some very interesting results, beautifully visualized by the villagers in form of land use maps, agricultural calendars, matrixes, daily life cycles etc. (Picture 1257)

Back in Chiang Mai, these drawings were interpreted and documented in a way that reflected the intentions and ideas expressed by the producers. In combination with photos taken during the trip, the results were then presented in an informal exhibition, giving the chance to learn from each other. (Picture 1531)

After sharing the experiences in the villages, the field work was assessed and the participants came up with a list of “dos & don'ts” for Indigenous Knowledge Facilitators. Besides the respect for the local customs, the respect for the Intellectual Property Rights of the people was stressed as being one of the most important aspects of the necessary ethical attitude.

Among other requirements as for example to conduct an Indigenous Knowledge event as condition to attend the next two TOT workshops in September in Lijiang and in February 05 in Luang Prabang and the promise to support Indigenous Knowledge in general, the ethics were part of a commitment each participant signed in the end of the

last day. This commitment constitutes the basis of a Community of Practice (that is a group of people sharing a certain domain and practice working together in favour of a mutual aim) which will hopefully arise from this workshop. (Picture 1630)

But as the final evaluation of the training showed, despite the labour and time intensity of the workshop, most people are even more motivated to engage in Indigenous Knowledge matters, the establishment of such a Community of Practice will most likely be successful and the following trainings will certainly be as interesting and rewarding as the first one. (Picture 1647)