



Practitioner's Guide:

Method:

Certifying Community Mobilisation



Example:

Contributing to Community Mobilisation through Learning Centers in Nepal



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Contributing to Community Mobilisation through Learning Centers in Nepal

1. Background

Nepal is internationally considered as a Least-Developed Country with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of just USD 291 in 2006 compounded by high rates of malnutrition and widespread poverty. The decade long conflict between the Maoist Peoples Liberation Army and the then Government of Nepal (GoN) (1996-2006) resulted in a significant worsening of the situation. The remote districts of Rukum and Rolpa in the mid-western development region were generally considered as the “Heart Land” of the Maoists and one the origins of the insurgency. These districts were greatly affected by the violent conflict and its consequences in regards to casualties, damaged infrastructure and adversely affected livelihoods, thus exacerbating the chronic poverty and food insecurity. During the conflict, the Maoists controlled most parts of the districts. They did not permit the entry of GoN officials into the villages in the districts. Thus, the physical and political presence of the GoN was limited to the district headquarters and centres. The conflict also significantly worsened the social and economic situation of deprived and marginalized and vulnerable groups, namely women and widows with small children, orphans, differently-abled persons and Dalits. *(This document uses the political correct term “differently-abled persons” instead of the formerly known term of “disabled persons”.)*

The Dalits were and in some places are still regarded as “untouchable”. About 90 % of them live below the poverty line and have little or no access to land. They generally work in the most menial and degrading jobs with limited possibilities for upward mobility. They are also subject to extensive social, economic and political disadvantage and continued discrimination, compared to other groups in Nepali society.

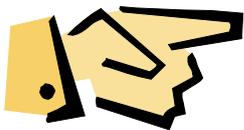
German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) has been implementing a Food Security and Rehabilitation Project (FSRP) from 2004-2008 in 31 selected communities (Village Development Committees, VDCs) in Rolpa and Rukum districts. The project aimed to:

- a. Improve the nutritional status of poor and conflict-affected households;
- b. Stabilize the economic and social living conditions through the provision of short and long-term employment and income opportunities, and
- c. Construct and rehabilitate productive and social infrastructure in the districts.

One component involved establishing learning centers (LCs) in selected VDCs, FSRP aimed to contribute to empowering the marginalised, particularly conflict affected groups both economically and socially through inclusive development activities.



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2. Prioritising disadvantaged and marginalized groups

Overall, 1,300 targeted beneficiaries participated in 42 learning centers, technically and financially supported for three years by FSRP. The Project activities focused on disadvantaged and marginalised groups, with 85% of the participants being women (with 50 % and 48 % of participants from Rolpa and Rukum districts respectively), 31 % were Dalits (18% and 5% share of population in Rolpa and Rukum districts respectively). In the case of women, where society still regards household reproductive activities as their domain, resulting in extremely high workloads, limited access to education because of the low awareness of the importance of women's education. Thus, women were previously widely discouraged from participating in any development and education activities outside their homes. This results in high illiteracy rates and early marriages. The ratio of literate female to literate male (in the 15 to 24 year age group) is only 43 % and 50 % across Rolpa and Rukum districts, and an average of 55 % and 44 % of the women in both districts are at the age of 15 to 19 years, already married. The learning center approach was aimed at tackling these disadvantages through the empowerment and capacity development of disadvantaged and marginalised groups through non-formal education and skills training, as well as mobilising them socially and economically, for self-reliant community development.



3. Learning Center as a Means for Organisation, Literacy and Empowerment

3.1 Conceptual approach

Learning centers (LC) are non-formal institutions and forums for socio-economic transformation and community mobilisation. The LC approach incorporates many elements of "reflection", a theoretical framework, designed by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. It is based on the three principles of organisation, literacy, and empowerment, enclosed in a participatory learning, teaching and action process (see the "Participatory Methods" in references). The three principles are interlinked with each other. Regarding the "Stages of Community Mobilisation" as outlined in the method "Certifying Community Mobilisation" all five stages (empowerment, consensus building, participation, interaction and informing) are integral parts of the mobilisation process through Learning centers.

The LCs created an opportunity for self-reflection and created awareness to collectively identify and analyse social, economic, and cultural issues. It mobilised people to work together as a group rather than as individually, through discussions and self-reflection in class / group based activities and homework. The participants identified common priorities, resources, needs, existing potentials and appropriate action to promote representative and sustainable community development. In general, 20-25 persons gathered once a day, usually in the evenings, to discuss and take action on community issues, selected by themselves. The issues varied and comprised health, hygiene, literacy, local disputes, agriculture and nutritional status, income generation and others.



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During these 'gatherings', the groups both individually and collectively identify local limitations and potentials. They draft simple action plans to contribute to improving the existing situation is an integral part of this process. Through this, the participants develop capacities for community action according to their needs and preferences. While the centre becomes a forum for identifying, analyzing, and prioritising the needs and potentials of the community, the participants commit themselves to collective and individual actions, thus creating ownership and promoting empowerment for social change and economic development.

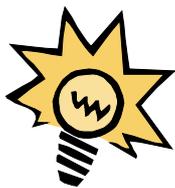
The participatory methods applied were adapted from the approaches and tool boxes developed from participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and participatory learning and action (PLA) methods. These facilitated the learning and action processes of the participants (see also method "Participatory Needs Assessment"). The purpose of participatory methodologies is to ensure that participants understand the current situation, issues and problems so that they can develop an awareness of existing constraints and potentials and become capable to jointly identify, prioritize and addressing important issues. Eventually, participants become able to identify the resources available and needed for undertaking activities to overcome the situation. The most common methods used in the context of learning centers are but exclusively (see also references to other methods):

- ▶ Social and resource mapping,
- ▶ Mobility mapping,
- ▶ Problem tree analysis,
- ▶ Seasonal calendars,
- ▶ Transect walks, and
- ▶ Matrix ranking.

The main purpose of the learning centers within the FSRP was to support disadvantaged and marginalized members in the communities; to gain dignity, self-confidence, and obtain a better social status as well as economic opportunities. Due to the distribution of LCs in the project areas, formerly marginalised and excluded individuals and groups became able to maintain equal positions in their households, communities, and to participate actively in decision-making processes relevant to their lives. Individually empowered, they became agents of change with their peers and families and leaders of community development. Against the background of the protracted conflict situation in Nepal, and in Rukum and Rolpa districts in particular, FSRP encouraged the participants in the learning centers also to acknowledge the root causes of the conflict and its consequences and to develop strategies to collectively mitigate, solve and prevent local disputes in a peaceful manner. Given the widespread food insecurity in the project communities (VDCs), FSRP also promoted economic self-reliance of the communities by providing skills training and initiating modern agricultural practices as well as income generating activities (e.g. fruit farming, nurseries, herbal processing) in the context of the learning centers. Furthermore, vegetable production in kitchen gardens was promoted to contribute to improving the awareness on the nutritional status of the participants and their families as well as the causes and effects of malnutrition (see box 1).



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Box 1: An example of Women's empowerment and economic self-reliance through the Learning centers

Mrs. BK in Bafikot VDC, Rukum district is the eldest child of a very poor and landless Dalit family. She is 18 years old. Her family lived in a shed they built on the bank of the river Sano Bheri. Mrs. BK and her parents used to work as wage labourers to feed the five-member family. When she started to work as a labourer in the FSRP road construction project, the income from the work was sufficient to feed the family (see example of "rural road construction strategy" in references).

In 2005, a Learning center was established in her village with technical and financial support from FSRP. She joined its literacy classes. She was so motivated by the discussion of the various issues in the learning center (besides the literacy classes) that she walked for an hour from her home to reach the centre.

Mrs. BK began to raise livestock, grow fruit trees, and became engaged in other income generation work initiated through the learning center. She acquired two goats and her parents let them graze in the nearby forest. She also started vegetable farming by developing a small plot at the riverbank around her shed as a kitchen garden.

After one year, Mrs. BK had grown sufficient vegetables for both household consumption and selling in the village. From day to day, she became more determined to raise her income by selling more in the market. Mrs. BK says that the learning center has changed her life providing her with the skills to generate their own income. Upon seeing her success, her neighbors began developing their marginal land for growing vegetables.

The FSRP supported learning centers aimed to achieve the following:

- ▶ **Organization:** Provide opportunities in the targeted communities to a) to organise and network in groups, liaise with other informal and formal institutions at community level and beyond (including the private sector, and governmental agencies after the comprehensive peace agreement), b) identify, discuss and plan actions addressing local economic problems and potentials, c) develop relevant development strategies.
- ▶ **Literacy:** Provide opportunities for participants in the target communities to develop basic reading, writing and numerical skills.
- ▶ **Empowerment:** Develop the target communities' capacities to a) bring about a peaceful transformation of local conflicts and disputes, b) reduce discrimination of any form and to promote social equity through democratic processes, c) tap the potential for self-reliant community development. Thus improving the social and economic status individually as well as community wise.

3.2 Objectives

The following were some of the major objectives for the learning centers, mainly assessed through participatory impact monitoring; (see example 'Participatory and Conflict Sensitive Impact Assessment - PCIA'):



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Empowerment and community mobilisation:

- ▶ Learning centers acted as informal self-help organizations in the development of self-reliant democratic forums to identify, mitigate and change local issues. They are places where members gain the opportunity to transform traditional beliefs and attitudes.
- ▶ Learning centers, therefore, developed as focal points and nuclei for local community development.
- ▶ Moreover, learning centers developed as catalysts to transform society towards economic self-reliance through accessing understanding and information on modern and appropriate agricultural practices and income generating activities.

Nutrition and food security:

- ▶ At least 75% of the participants have established kitchen gardens for year round production and planted fruit trees for long-term income.
- ▶ At least 75% of participating households have improved their nutrition status.

Literacy:

- ▶ At least 80% of the participants can read and write simple sentences.
- ▶ The overall literacy rate increases in the community.

Conflict transformation and social equity:

- ▶ At least 50 percent of the project's participants recognize that the learning centers have contributed to social security at VDC / community level through the participant's improved skills and commitments to solve local problems and disputes (social, cultural, and behavioral changes as well as differences).
- ▶ At least 80% of the participants recognise that gender and caste discrimination has reduced in the community through the work of the learning center.

3.3 Basic framework conditions applied by FSRP

- ▶ Learning centers were located in selected remote areas of the project VDCs in Rukum and Rolpa districts where the target communities resided.
- ▶ Non-literate target groups such as women, Dalits, ethnic minorities, widows, differently-abled persons, and orphans were given priority.
- ▶ Participants did not receive any allowances.
- ▶ Participants had to initially allocate at least two hours per day, six days a week for the first two years of project support (one hour for literacy, numeracy exercises, one hour for discussions, analysis and action planning); evolving to two hours, at least two days a week during the consolidation phase (third year of project support).



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- ▶ Target groups selected their own local learning center facilitators who had the capacity to lead the group within their settlements (with women encouraged to act as facilitators by FSRP's social mobilisation team).
- ▶ FSRP provided training, remuneration and financial resources to the facilitators, as well as for stationery, and opportunities for exposures visits to build the capacities of both facilitators and participants.

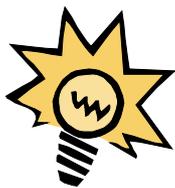
4. Support and Assistance Provided by FSRP to the LCs

FSRP provided technical and financial support to the learning centers participants (indirectly) and its facilitators for a period of three years. Besides financial support, social mobilisation assistance was provided and available from the project's social team for starting and operating the LC. Over the course of the first two years of project support, assistance focused on the identification and implementation of activities through Training of Trainers (ToT) for facilitators, personal coaching, supervision and skills development. During the third year, the project support focused on follow-up services for consolidating the LC to become a democratic and self-reliant community organisation that serves as a platform to initiate and control sustained community oriented mobilisation and development. In detail, FSRP provided seven different support mechanisms to the participants and their facilitators:

- ▶ **Initial Training of Trainers (ToT) for Learning center facilitators (10 days):** All facilitators of the newly established Learning centers come together at a venue outside their villages to participate in a ten days training conducted by FSRP Learning center Coordinator and social mobilizers plus external experts. The training combined theoretical and practical modules and provided skills and knowledge on general issues, as well as concrete topics. Overall the training comprised of four modules:
 - a) **General orientation and theoretical background:** General orientation on FSRP activities, its objectives and approaches. The objectives and approaches for the LCs in the context of social and community mobilisation and development; historical introduction to the concepts of development and the development sector;
 - b) **Introduction to relevant concepts and collective analysis:** participation and empowerment; poverty; formal and non-formal education; adult education; causes and consequences of illiteracy;
 - c) **Community mobilisation and facilitation skills:** Introduction to participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and participatory learning and action (PLA) and their respective participatory methodologies; practical exercises on utilizing tools for collective and self-reflective teaching, learning and action (micro teaching); preparation and follow up of action plans;
 - d) **Management and steering skills:** Starting and running a learning center; participatory monitoring and evaluation of progress and impacts; report writing;



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Box 2: Terms of Reference for Learning center facilitators

The quality of the facilitator determines the success of the learning center. The facilitator should be a respected member of the community who is literate and development oriented. For FSRP, the facilitator was preferably a woman and/or Dalit.

FSRP's Learning center coordinator and social mobilizers trained, oriented, and guided the facilitator. Facilitators should not be employed on a full time basis and will receive 50 kg of coarse rice and 1.000 Nepali Rupees (NRs) cash per month (for 25 days of work ~two hours/day) as an incentive for his/her work (75 NRs were approximately equal to 1 US-Dollar). The main responsibility of a facilitator is to run the learning center regularly and carry out the following specific tasks:

1. Participate in various training events organized by FSRP.
2. Support learning center participants to form a centre management committee (see also consolidation strategy, section 5.2).
3. Assist learning center participants to prepare an action plan and obtain the approval from the learning center coordinator to implement the plan for the centre.
4. Run the learning center regularly, at least two hours per day, six days per week.
5. Assist learning center participants to prepare social and resource maps of their settlement and help them to identify problems that negatively affect their lives. Explore alternatives for solving problems and utilisation of existing potentials for development.
6. Facilitate the centre's meetings by selecting key words that describe issues the learning center participants have prioritized. So that participants discover, realize and discussed key words as social problems and make efforts to transform them, e.g. linkages between social status (age, sex, ethnicity, caste), dignity and discrimination; literacy; social ill practices like superstitions, income promotion, nutrition, health and hygiene.
7. Support revisions of the community maps on a six-monthly basis, showing changes that have occurred in the participants' daily lives.
8. Support learning center participants to address their priority issues in society.
9. Help learning center participants to establish inter-group and institutional level linkages and coordination.
10. Strengthen the learning center with support from the learning center coordinator and social mobilizers, so that it can run its activities without project support in the future.
11. Support the learning center coordinator and social mobilizers to develop tailor-made teaching materials.
12. Help the FSRP team to obtain relevant information about the learning center participants and monitoring the centre.
13. Create a friendly environment for learning and action at community level.
14. Assist learning center participants to obtain materials and equipment essential to run the centre and ensure their proper use.



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Photo 1: Training of Trainers of LC facilitators

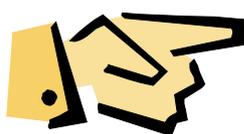


- ▶ **Refresher trainings for the learning center facilitators (6 days):** Every four months the facilitators come together for a six days refresher training conducted by the learning center coordinator and social mobilizers of FSRP. The first half of the training is set aside for further practicing and deepening the facilitators' knowledge and skills on participatory tools and methodologies for literacy and empowerment exercises. Additionally, demand driven management and steering skills are broadened and deepened as the LCs matures. Therefore, training on coordination and extension of liaisons with line agencies and private service providers, the composition of official letters and applications, as well as on monitoring and evaluation skills was provided. The second half of the refresher training is set aside for common analysis of the progress of the LCs, the sharing of experiences and lessons learnt on micro teaching and running classes, as well as expectations regarding the further project support.
- ▶ **Special trainings for the learning center facilitators on specific issue (3 days):** FSRP obliged the LC facilitators to raise and discuss certain issues (during LC classes), linked to FSRP's overall objectives and crucial for further community development. The FSRP Learning center Coordinator and social mobilizers provided a three days orientation course to the LC facilitators on the following six issues:
 - a. Local conflict resolution and its transformation,
 - b. Caste discrimination and equity,
 - c. Gender discrimination and equity,
 - d. Social work and community action,
 - e. Kitchen garden and nutrition, and
 - f. Fruit farming as a means of income generation.
- ▶ **Monthly review meetings:** In order to ensure quality control of the facilitators' work and the LC's performance, all learning center facilitators meet bimonthly and for one day with FSRP social and district management team to provide LC specific data, and to analyze and evaluate progress, outcomes and constraints regarding literacy, empowerment and plans of action. For this, the LC facilitators prepare standardised reporting formats.
- ▶ **Individual coaching:** The learning center facilitators are furthermore supported individually by members of FSRP's social team through frequent field visits and attendance at LC classes in order to provide immediate feedback and assistance to the LC facilitators and the participants to overcome constraints that they face during daily classes.



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- ▶ **Technical and financial support:** Besides food and cash incentives to the LC facilitators, FSRP also provided the LCs with teaching materials and stationary, as well as blackboards, solar lanterns and panels for running classes in the evenings, first aid boxes and stretchers to carry patients, as well as basic equipment for agricultural activities (i.e. kitchen garden and fruit farming). The agricultural technicians of FSRP provided the necessary training to the LC participants in this regard. Moreover, in cases where the LC participants wanted to construct their own LC or community building, FSRP provided technical assistance to the participants and roofing materials. However, as self-reliant forum for community mobilisation and development, the participants of the LC have to initiate and construct the building utilizing their own resources.
- ▶ **Linking LC to line agencies and service providers:** Especially during the consolidation phase, FSRP team provided support in linking LCs to line agencies and private service providers in order to increase their resource base and to networks of back-up support.

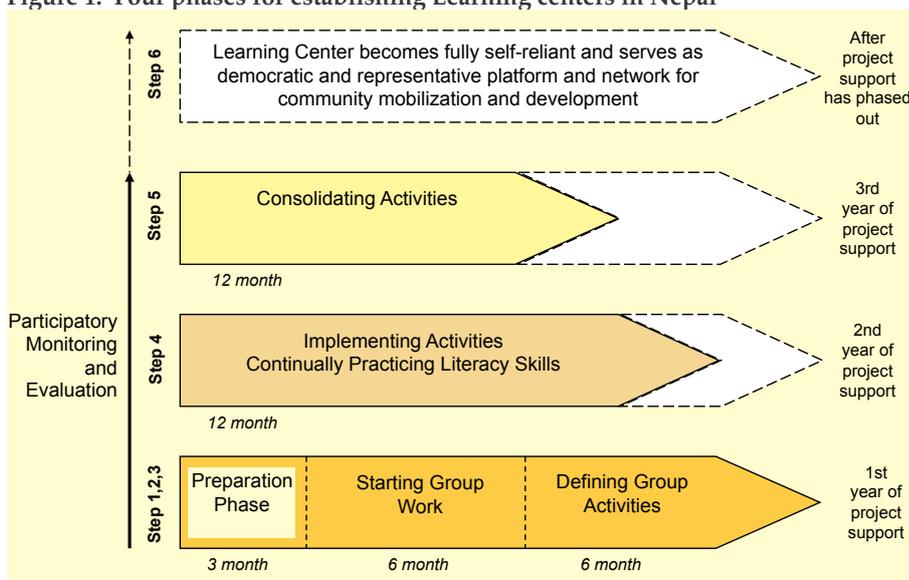


5. Establishing a Learning center

The establishment of LCs was characterized by four phases:

- ▶ The preparation and starting phase,
- ▶ The implementation phase,
- ▶ The consolidation phase, and
- ▶ The phase of self- reliance after project support had phased out (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Four phases for establishing Learning centers in Nepal



Regarding the five “stages of community mobilisation” as outlined in the method “certifying community mobilisation” (page 9) phases one and two generally put emphasis on “empowerment”, “consensus” and “participation” while phases three and four are supposed to promote “interaction” and “informing”.



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5.1 Detailed steps and procedures

Step 1: Forming groups; selecting a group facilitator; preparing and establishing learning centers: The community first identified the target groups based on individual interest and the requirements of the targeted beneficiaries. Participants then formed groups and selected their local facilitators. FSRP provided basic training for the facilitators so that they could run the centres. The groups collectively decided upon the venue and timing, while FSRP provided equipment and social mobilizers to support the process. This step was usually completed within three months.

Step 2: Beginning group work: Group work began with a meeting. The LC facilitator initiated and held regular meetings for a minimum of two hours a day to build consensus. During group work, participants analyzed and discovered common social, cultural, and economic issues and the causes that affected their community. Participants then made plans to mitigate the issues. Group members then drafted social maps, identifying problems, prioritising issues, and developing key words related to the issues. In addition, a process of self-reflection helped them to identify their potentials and constraints.

Participants in the learning centers mostly discussed issues related to long-term food security. They also acquired literacy and numerical skills and started activities to solve social problems and to further strengthen existing potentials. Furthermore, income generation activities were initiated. This step usually took six months.

Step 3: Defining group activities: Participants then discussed and defined group activities, they developed collective and individual action plans on how to improve their existing living conditions. They also started developing skills and looking for resources to carry out their plans. Meanwhile, literacy courses and socio-economic activities continued. This step usually took six months and continued into the next step.

Step 4: Implementing activities: The planning process was intensified during this period with individual and collective micro planning exercises. Participants started to implement activities that they had planned for social, cultural, and economic development (e.g. construction of pit latrines and kitchen gardens). They were also encouraged to continue practising their literacy skills during this 12-month period and frequently discussed development issues. The FSRP's team and the facilitators developed and provided custom-made materials for the group's literacy progress. The activities continued to the next step (from experience, steps 2, 3, and 4 often took place in parallel rather than sequential manner).

*Photo 2:
Resource mapping*





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Photo 3-4: Learning center participants and literacy exercises



Step 5: Consolidating activities: Over a 12-month period, the participants consolidated the social, cultural, and economic activities that they had initiated during the previous steps. Facilitators coached and guided the participants to review and reflect upon their literacy progress, utilisation of materials, and development efforts during the previous steps. On average the groups met at least twice a week (see below).

Step 6: Self-reliance: The empowered participants through the learning process developed the centres further as platforms and focal points for community mobilisation and development. If the participants demanded, they were linked to other FSRP micro-projects. The Learning center also developed as collective centres for agricultural learning and support services, facilitated by their acquired networks of governmental line agencies and private service providers.



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5.2 Consolidation strategy

FSRP consolidated the Learning centers that were functioning for two years for one additional year. The consolidation strategy included the following processes and steps:

- 1. Formation of Executive Committees:** The Learning center coordinator and social mobilizers of FSRP oriented the LC group members on their roles and responsibilities. The group formed a five to seven-member Executive Committee with technical support from FSRP. The committee consists of a chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary, treasurer, and members. Learning center facilitators were encouraged to become the treasurer or secretary of the committees. However, they could not hold the post of a chairperson, as other members were encouraged to apply for this leading position. The Executive Committees received 1.000 NRs per month - the remuneration the facilitators used to receive during the first two years of project support. During the consolidation phase the facilitators were expected to work voluntarily. Instead, the money was used for saving schemes and was usually supplemented by monthly fees of the participants according to the individual LC statutes.
- 2. Equip Learning centers with further equipment and materials:** Learning centers with Executive Committees were provided with additional materials such as a set of permaculture books, ledgers for record keeping on equipment usage and cash, agricultural equipment, and other appropriate and demanded materials.
- 3. Training:** Members of the committee like the treasurer and the chairperson received two to six days training on record keeping and general management skills. At least two active participants in each centre received training to be future facilitators.
- 4. Capacity development:** Two persons from each LC received separate trainings on first aid as well as reproductive health and HIV/ AIDS of several days duration. Additionally, at least two participants received training on agriculture and vegetable production. Similarly, all the committee members participated in training on leadership, communication, group management, mediation, and dispute management.
- 5. Self-reflection and action as a continuous process:** Every centre organized group meetings at least twice a week for reflection and action. The meetings focused on existing discriminatory practices, social issues, and bad practices at the individual, household, and community levels. In these meetings, members also acquired further knowledge on literacy, health and hygiene, nutrition, income opportunities, agricultural activities, social networking, and fund raising.
- 6. Link learning centers with resource centres:** The project further supported the formation of links with governmental line agencies and private service providers such as seed/sapling selling centres, other learning centers, leading farmers in the region, productive micro-projects, market centres for selling their production, and other resources outside the project area.



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7. **Economic empowerment:** Through micro planning, at least 50 percent of the participants begin farm or off-farm income generating activities collectively or individually. To provide access to nutritious food, every learning centre has links to at least one agricultural service centre, and every family has a kitchen garden for household consumption and selling. At least 75 percent of the money raised through continuous fund raising activities is utilized for income generation activities.

6. Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

6.1 Output indicators

For monitoring, the establishment and localization of learning centers over the course of three years, with project support, the following output indicators were developed as “milestones” of LC progress:

The following outputs were expected after the first year:

- ▶ **Literacy and numeracy:** Learning center participants are familiar with the Nepali alphabet and numbers. They can read and write simple sentences and informative leaflets. They can also do very simple calculations for day-to-day use.
- ▶ **Social empowerment:** Learning center participants are aware of their potential power and strength as a group and as individuals. They can express their views without inhibition. They are able to analyze the root causes of local social conflicts and recognise unsocial behavior, such as discrimination, bad habits/practices, and blind faith, as barriers to social development. They are able to start negotiating with local conflicting actors, as well as plan and implement activities to address the social barriers.
- ▶ **Economic empowerment:** Participants have basic knowledge of the needs and potentials of economic activities at community and household level. They collectively and individually plan fund raising events for future investments.

The following outputs were expected after the second year

- ▶ **Literacy and numeracy:** At least 60 percent of the participants practice their reading and writing skills regularly. They are able to read and write simple messages and perform simple calculations. They can read and write the group decisions and can read the tailor-made learning materials.
- ▶ **Social empowerment:** At least 50 percent of the participants recognise the social problems that exist in their community. They plan and implement activities promoting social changes to reduce problems such as superstition, discrimination, local disputes, gambling, alcoholism, child marriage, and polygamy, restricted mobility of women, women's heavy household workloads, labour exploitation, high interest rates, and unequal wage rates for men and women. At least 30 percent of participants use learning centers as a forum for dialogue.



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- ▶ **Experience sharing and social networking:** Every two months a meeting was held at the district level. Here, the executive members of different learning centers shared their experiences, achievements, and challenges concerning issues such as disputes, social justice, health and hygiene, income opportunities, nutrition, literacy, fund raising, future sustainability, and utilisation. The group members established village level networking.

The following outputs were expected after the third year:

- ▶ **Literacy and numeracy:** At least 75 percent of the participants practice and use their reading and writing skills regularly and use the available tailor-made materials.
- ▶ **Social empowerment:** At least 50 percent of learning centers function as permanent forums for dialogue to reduce or transform local conflicts occurring in the community. Almost all groups follow work plans. Most group members are aware of the linkage between food consumption, hygiene, and nutrition. At least 50 percent of group members have practiced social networking (sharing knowledge, skills, and information).
- ▶ **Economic empowerment:** Economic activities are regularised. Members have their own group or individual fund for future investments. At least 50 percent of the participants are involved in income-generating activities for regular income. The group also promotes agricultural activities, such as fruit and vegetable farming, as well as for high value cash crops. These groups function without support from the project. Links to line agencies and private service providers are established and utilized for further technical and financial support of group activities.

6.2 Impact indicators

Beside this set of outcome indicators, FSRP team members assigned in the districts were also responsible for the participatory monitoring and evaluation of the project support. Self-monitoring by the participants provided valuable perceptions and feedback to the project. The staff used tools, including resource maps, social maps, seasonal calendars, cause and effect analysis, physical verification, and self-capacity assessments through classroom discussions (see also example "Participatory and Conflict Sensitive Impact Monitoring in Nepal" in references). The following impacts on a six monthly basis using a standardize format were monitored:

- ▶ Types of self initiated and controlled interventions adopted by different participants in the LCs (disaggregated by gender, caste, sex, age and other characteristics of the special target groups).
- ▶ Progress in identifying and analyzing the root causes of local problems and potentials, and the way the group transforms these causes and taps existing potentials.
- ▶ Observations of major changes since the intervention of FSRP in terms of local conflicts, social dignity, income, health, and hygiene.
- ▶ Quality and quantity of improvements of food security and the income status at group and household level.
- ▶ Other benefits and impacts.



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7. Lessons Learnt

Learning centers as means of sustainable empowerment and income generation

- ▶ Learning centers have developed as a forum where the members identify, analyze, and prioritize local issues according to their needs, resources and existing potentials. Therefore, this forum has been able to sustainably address the needs and interests of previously marginalised and excluded groups during the planning and implementation of local level development initiatives.
- ▶ Members themselves identified issues, prepared plans, and took action themselves. This developed life skills and a self-help attitude among members.
- ▶ Learning centers were effective in addressing social issues and implementing micro-projects. Since social issues and micro-projects were more relevant to poor and disadvantaged groups, these groups benefitted more from these projects.
- ▶ Income generation activities implemented through learning centers are more effective and sustainable. For example, bee keeping activities channelled through learning centers have been more effective (as reported by group monitoring and evaluation) than direct support to individuals.

Selection of facilitators

- ▶ Facilitators were chosen from the same settlement/community as the members. They were someone the members trusted to run the centre regularly. This ensured effective communication between the members and helped to enhance local capacities. When a facilitator was not available within a settlement, a facilitator from a nearby settlement was selected for the initial phase and group members with potential were groomed to be future facilitators. In rare instances, where a facilitator has not been available, group members with potential were provided on-the-job training in nearby centres. They could develop into second generation facilitators, who ensured that a centre ran regularly and smoothly.
- ▶ The selection of two facilitators for one LC proved to be an effective strategy to improve both the regularity of classes and the quality of teaching, learning and action. The facilitators supported each other while running the classes and could also cover for each other when needed, rather than suspend classes and activities.
- ▶ Married women made better facilitators than single women since they were stable and more open to facilitate discussions on issues such as gender and women's reproductive health.
- ▶ Facilitators needed skills training on developing income generating activities with local potential, such as kitchen gardening and other agricultural activities, to help them transfer these skills to members and they were encouraged them to take up economic activities as well and apply and share their personal experiences.



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Orientation towards target groups

- ▶ It was important that the target groups received clear orientation on the purposes and benefits of the learning center before they joined. Otherwise, dropout rates were high after a few days or months.
- ▶ The main limitation of the learning center strategy has been the inadequate membership of women, Dalits, and other disadvantaged community members, relative to the high number of interested persons. This has limited the scope of issues identified by the centres, so only those represented in the centre have benefited.

Composition and location of Learning centers

- ▶ The learning centers catered for both women and men to encourage better participation and sharing of visions. The centre's members have shared the issues they had identified with all sections of society (men, local elites, and community leaders) in order to address these issues within the community.
- ▶ Due to the fact that women were considered as target group many learning centers were composed of women only. Consequently, gender issues were discussed and addressed exclusively from a women's perspectives. This limited the scope of the issues identified by such centres. Nonetheless, in mixed (both men and women) learning centers, male members tended to dominate discussions, sidelining women's issues.
- ▶ As learning centers were established in targeted settlements or villages, it became evident that participation dropped off if they had to walk for more than half an hour to attend the centre's meetings.

Political context

- ▶ Many issues that were discussed in the centres needed further and greater coordination and collaboration with other agencies and government bodies for appropriate action. The LCs were often highly dependent on a supportive political context, which during the conflict period till 2006 (at least), the Maoists in Rukum and Rolpa districts prohibited FSRP's supported LCs from forming partnerships or seeking support from government agencies. Thus, various issues identified in the centres could not be effectively addressed.
- ▶ In addition, the empowering approach of the LCs may have evoked mistrust among the elites (both traditional and political). In the case of Rukum and Rolpa districts, the Maoists prohibited the establishment of Learning centers in many VDCs, due to their empowering approaches and the related process of group formation. Only in cases where the Maoists perceived the mutual benefits of having LCs and that the issues identified by them were considered unimportant and apolitical, they allowed the centres to run regularly and to address these issues.



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References and Sources Used



GTZ / Integrated Food Security Project (IFSP) Nepal, Social Empowerment Policy. Kathmandu, 2002.

Links to related Methods and Examples:

Rural Road Construction Strategy:

<http://www.methodfinder.net/index.php?page=methods&methodID=83>

Construction of "Green Roads" through Community Based Organizations:

<http://www.methodfinder.net/index.php?page=methods&methodID=83&cat=example1>

Agricultural Income Promotion in Food Insecure Remote Rural Areas in Nepal (Food For Work - FFW):

<http://www.methodfinder.net/index.php?page=methods&methodID=53&cat=example2>

Participatory and Conflict Sensitive Impact Monitoring (Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment - PCIA):

<http://www.methodfinder.net/index.php?page=methods&methodID=60&cat=example2>

Participatory Planning:

<http://www.methodfinder.net/index.php?page=methods&methodID=11>

Social Inclusion:

<http://www.methodfinder.net/index.php?page=methods&methodID=84>

Social Inclusion in Development-oriented Emergency Aid in Nepal:

<http://www.methodfinder.net/index.php?page=methods&methodID=84&cat=example1>

Links:

Reflect - Innovative approaches to Adult Learning and Social Change:

<http://www.reflect-action.org/>

Participatory Learning and Action:

http://www.iied.org/NR/agbioliv/pla_notes/index.html

National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC):

<http://www.nrdc.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=951>

Paulo Freire Institute of South Africa:

<http://www.ukzn.ac.za/cae/pfi/index.htm>