

ອົງການຊາຍພັນ ອົດສະຕຣາລີ

ChildFund Australia

ກໍລະນີສຶກສາ ກ່ຽວກັບ

ປະສິດທິພາບຂອງການພັດທະນາ

Development Effectiveness Case Study

ຊື່ເລື່ອງ: ນຳໃຊ້ວິທີການໃໝ່ PAR ເພື່ອສ້າງຄວາມສາມາດໃຫ້ໄວໜຸ່ມ ເພື່ອແກ້ໄຂບັນຫາ, ຫາທາງອອກຮ່ວມກັນ ໂດຍຊຸມຊົນເປັນເຈົ້າການ

TITLE: Using the Participatory Action Research (PAR) Approach to Build Youth Capacity for Addressing Development Issues

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The use of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach as a tool for community participation is new to ChildFund Laos. In 2018, The Local Empowerment through Community Accountability (LECA) Project employed the PAR approach as part of its Community-Based Monitoring Approach (CBMA), both as a pilot to assess the efficacy of the approach itself for ChildFund Laos projects, and as a learning exercise for the community members who participate in the LECA Project's CBMA.

In this case study, we see how youth from two villages analysed two issues that youth face in their communities: high secondary school dropout rates and issues related to waste management and herbicide use. In doing so, they learnt how to identify the issues and analyse their causes and contributing factors, plan and conduct data collection using various methods, critically analyse their findings, and present these findings to their peers and duty bearers. In doing so they learnt key critical thinking skills, teamwork, and communication skills, as well as growing more confident.

ChildFund Laos worked with a local consultant who both trained ChildFund Laos staff on the PAR approach and led the activity. According to the consultant, "PAR mainly focuses on facilitating an 'empowerment process' for young people and communities to learn, act, and reflect through researching and addressing development issues in their community. The process allows for greater ownership of the development process in their villages through transformational learning. Through PAR, community members gain more analytical and critical thinking skills, and while using those skills, learn to assess and address some key problems that their communities face."

The PAR activity was implemented in two villages, Phoudam and Nongseng, in Nonghet District. The people of Phoudam and Nongseng identify as H'mong (the majority ethnic group in Nonghet). Nongseng Village is about 7 kilometres and Phoudam Village is about 30 kilometres from Nonghet municipality. ChildFund Laos has been working in these two villages since 2014, and has implemented several projects in each, including Nutrition and MCH, Education, and Child and Youth Participation.

Two youth groups (aged 15-22) were formed in each village. In Phoudam, there were 20 youth, including 15 girls. In Nongseng, there were initially 14 youth, however, a month into the PAR activity some of the youth left the group for various reasons, including marriage. As a result, the opportunity to join the group was offered to other young people in the community. In the end there were 10 youth in the group, which ultimately merged into a single group, although it still worked on both of the chosen community issues.

After the consultant trained the project team on the PAR process, the consultant and the project team began the activity in the two villages. The first workshop included activities that focused on creating trust – essential for teamwork – and on analytical skills, which was done by analysing the ingredients, place of manufacture, and expiry dates on packaged foods in order to assess if such food would be healthy or harmful. The team also learned new interview techniques, such as using open and closed questions.

After a number of activities aimed at creating a sense of 'team' and after introducing the skills and methods that the youth would employ during the PAR activity, the project team then worked with the youth to brainstorm issues in their community for which they would like to find solutions. The youth then shared their ideas with the rest of their group, and the groups voted to select a topic/problem to research.

The groups in both villages identified and selected the same topics:

1. School Dropout

2. Community Littering and Herbicide Use

The group in Nongseng said:

“We selected community littering and herbicide use because we observed that people have no knowledge about the effect of rubbish on our communities. Also, in the village, most families are using herbicide around their home gardens and yards, and so kids are always playing in it. We also selected school dropout because we have some friends who have dropped out of school because their parents stopped them, as well as some who dropped out of school because they have a single parent and need to support their family.”

ChildFund staff and key partners worked closely with youth groups to make sure they were supported throughout the activity. The team visited youth groups twice per month to follow up on their work plan and set the agenda for the upcoming month. Each field visit, the team and youth groups also held a meeting with the community in order to update them on the progress of the research and ask for any feedback. These meetings were also held so that the team could keep the community informed as well as to encourage them to support and get involved with the youth group.

The groups achieved many successes, but also faced many challenges. Some parents in the community did not want to provide them with any answers or information because of how young they are. In summarising the feelings of both groups in Phoudam and Nongseng, one youth stated that:

“We asked for information from some parents of youth who dropped out school, but they did not want to answer. They said that we should not be working for ChildFund if we are not getting paid – otherwise we are just making money for ChildFund. Also, when we went to weigh the rubbish, some parents said to us we could only weigh the rubbish if we took it away as well.”

Even though the youth faced some challenges and misunderstandings, they received support from the project team and continued to research their chose issue. As one male youth said:

“We don’t really care that parents complained because I realise that they do not really understand what we are doing, but when they see the results, they will see why we are doing this.”

Behaviour change is a slow process; however, the fact that the youth groups did not give up and continued with the activity is testament to their belief in their work and highlights a growing confidence among the group members. In the future, it will be key to work even closer with village authorities in order to ensure their full and consistent support throughout the PAR process.

During the research period, ChildFund created WhatsApp groups to monitor and support the PAR process. The groups would post everything related to their assignments in the group so that everyone could see and provide feedback. Using the WhatsApp groups for working with youth was also helpful for building their social networks. As one female youth stated:

“I was so proud to meet so many new friends. Without PAR I would not get to meet and make new friends; even among those who live in the same village as me, there were many I didn’t know so well before I joined the PAR activity. I also gained new knowledge from the ChildFund team, especially how to work as a team. It’s not like working alone. Sometimes it’s hard but it’s also easy because we help each other.”

ChildFund Laos focuses on child and youth participation, both programmatically and as a crosscutting issue. Our projects aim to involve children and youth in all stages of project activities, and to ensure they are fully capable of voicing their opinions and participating in decision-making in the family and community. PAR is one activity that supports children and youth to be able to develop knowledge and skills to better make decisions and participate at the family and community levels. Youth groups in both villages agreed:

“In PAR, we been exposed to work that is fun and easy and work that has difficulties like we have never faced before. We worked with youth and parents in our communities. Sometimes, the adults would not listen us because we are still young, and they think we are not important. This is something we want to change, because what we are doing with the PAR is important to everyone.”

Over the course of the PAR activity, the confidence of many youth in the groups increased. At each training they talked more honestly and openly and were not afraid of whether they are right or wrong. A female youth in Nongseng said that she felt more confident, that she could talk and share her opinions and ideas more openly to her groupmates and the ChildFund team, and that her communication skills improved due to the many opportunities she has had to work with her community and ChildFund staff. Other youth said:

“Now, we dare to speak to our village heads and our community.”

“The PAR activity has helped us to understand about analysis processes. For example, analysis of snack expiry dates and ingredients.”

“My studies at school have also improved because now I feel confident. I can ask my teacher questions and answer my teachers’ questions.”

“Before I didn’t dare to ask and answer ChildFund staff’s questions, but now I feel comfortable in speaking out and answering questions.”

“We learned about methods for interviewing people by using greetings and respecting interviewees and how to analyse data.”

“We learned about littering, and I talked to my parents about the issue and what we can do.”

“We now know about the impact of [littering and herbicide use] and we would like to transfer this knowledge to our communities and our friends so they can learn from us.”

“I got to present the key findings [of the PAR] in Nonghet to government representatives – I have never felt so confident before.”

The littering issue keenly resonated with some of the youth. One female from Nongseng noted that:

“Nongseng Village is 7 kilometres from the town of Nonghet, but our community cannot manage its rubbish, even though our village has been awarded [by the District Health Office] as a ‘Model Health Village’. I joined the PAR activity and participated in the group that focused on littering. We found out that the rubbish we use here can stay with us for a very long time, even if we bury it. For example, a plastic bottle lasts 450 years, while paper lasts 2-5 months, soy milk boxes last around 5 years, and fruit skins and foods waste only 5 days to a month. I think many in my community don’t fully understand what this means to our environment.”

After the two groups had finished collecting and analysing their data, the ChildFund team organised for them to present their findings to the Nonghet District government. Over two meetings, government partner offices, village heads, village women's and youth union representatives, and the two youth groups met and discussed the key findings of the two research topics. A key outcome of this meeting saw the two groups requesting support from their government but did not ask ChildFund Laos to fund any part of their proposal. [At a later date, the two groups asked for additional trainings to help them better implement their action plans, such as around setting agendas, managing budgets, and communication skills for working with local government.] One female youth who presented said:

"I think that PAR and our work is really important. I was really excited to see the results of the two research topics, and I wanted to see if [our] government could support us to continue our work. I said 'Please government officers and village heads, do not leave these development issues behind. We need to keep going, but we need your support. For the youth dropout issue, I would like the District Education and Sport Bureau (DESB) office to work closely with school directors and village heads to make sure that we do not collect school fees from the poorest families so that parents who are 'poorest-of-the-poor', can still send their kids to school. For the littering issue, I would like the village heads to create a rubbish policy [so that] if people do not dispose of rubbish in the designated places they will be warned. We should also have small signs that say, "Do not litter here" placed throughout the village so that people see them regularly."

In response, the village head of Phoudam Village said:

"I will keep discussing with my community so we can continue this activity. Even if the government does not give its support, I think I can do it."

In response, the District Education and Sport Bureau representative said:

"I think it is possible to avoid collecting school fees from the poorest families, but we will need help from the village heads to provide lists of the poorest families so that the DESB can discuss the issue."

Meanwhile, the District Health Office representative said:

"I am happy to support the youth in continuing their activities based on these key findings. I understand that communities may not know about the problems with rubbish issue and the effects of herbicide. I would recommend to village heads to consult with their communities to prepare for action plans, and then inform me, so I can support them with this."

The PAR activity has created positive changes for the participating youth and their communities in Phoudam Village and Nongseng Village. They investigated issues affecting their community's development, produced key findings and recommendations, and presented these to their duty bearers – village authorities and local government.

In terms of using the PAR approach to engage children and youth, there are clear benefits around building confidence, capacities around teamwork, critical thinking, and communication, as well as building stronger friendship networks. However, engaging the wider community proved to be a significant challenge and greater focus needs to be placed on ensuring the youth groups are given a supportive environment in which to conduct PAR. Nevertheless, the groups in the two villages were very determined not to give up, which perhaps highlights that when youth confront their communities and find some resistance, it can build on their confidence and resilience as they attempt to overcome the barriers

community members place before them. For many of the participants, this was the first time that they had been responsible for tasks outside of housework. They also took a more prominent role in their communities, regardless of the negative impressions some community members had regarding this involvement, as well as expressing their views and ideas with peers, adults, and duty bearers.

Another key outcome was that the youth groups took more accountability for dealing with local issues themselves. They acknowledged ChildFund Laos as an important actor, but not as the answer to the issues they faced. Instead, along with attempting to address the issues and seek answers themselves, they also tried to hold the local government sectors accountable to supporting them in tackling these issues. This is a critical step in ChildFund Laos' work to support communities in taking ownership of their development progress and holding duty bearers accountable for their responsibilities.

These lessons learned in this case study and the PAR activity can benefit other projects and project officers. For example:

1. The groups noted that part of the rubbish problem is caused by ChildFund bringing in rubbish, like bottles and snacks with plastic wrappers. ChildFund can change its policy to address this issue and communicate to the village authorities that this change is a result of the PAR and the actions of the youth groups.
2. Other projects could draw on methods used during PAR activities to involve youth in identifying and researching key developmental issues.
3. Findings from this project show there is a need for further discussion and review around the topic of how ChildFund is viewed by our target communities, and how to create a targeted strategy for better communication about our work in the communities.

Lastly, a key lesson from this case study on the PAR activity is that when given the opportunity and the training, youth were able to identify issues, research them, propose solutions, and advocate to their government to support them in implementing their solutions. ChildFund Laos was also seen as a supporter in this process, but not as the critical party responsible for solving the issue. The youth and their government emerged as the key partnership needed to address the problem and implement solutions.