

DOCUMENTING FIELD EXPERIENCES IIRR'S WRITESHOP APPROACH


The need to share experiences

Development workers all over the world are faced with unique challenges on a daily basis. To help the poor rid themselves of the menace of poverty requires an adjustment of approaches to suit a particular environment. Some approaches work and others fail. But sometimes one never gets ample information on what has worked in what circumstances to enable the development of more cost-effective programs. Additionally, field studies take place in diverse locations. Findings do not usually get known as widely as possible. Field workers need to be kept aware of new approaches, methodologies and technologies. They need information from their peers. In many cases, publications have been written by experts or academics who may not themselves be active field based practitioners, mainly because the field workers are usually too busy to document their experiences.

In this era of dwindling development assistance resources, donor nations and agencies need documentary evidence of impact of development assistance. This may not be generated from financial reports, but rather from serious reflection on impact. Also, lots of resources are spent on 're-inventing the wheel' through field studies and pilot projects that may not work. Learning from experiences elsewhere may be helpful. Furthermore, new field workers graduating from colleges need materials to 'induct' them into the field. Those working in the field are in constant need of vital information on best practices that can help them become more efficient.

IIRR's niche

The International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR) takes seriously the documenting of experiences/best practices in all realms of rural development. A participatory workshop process (also known as writeshops) pioneered by IIRR and tested for over 15 years in over 30 workshops has led to the production of 57 titles. IIRR produces these publications on a non-copyrighted basis in partnership



with various donor organizations, UN agencies, NGOs and Foundations. Through an intensive participatory workshop many field workers from all areas of the globe have been able to document their experiences. Some are project managers, social workers and medical officers, while others may be farmers, nurses and local leaders. The resulting publications are simple, user friendly and of very high quality. Several IIRR publications have received prestigious awards because of good quality.

The participatory workshop process

To prepare for the workshop, a steering committee lists potential topics and invites resource persons to develop first drafts on each topic. Guidelines for preparing these materials are provided. Participants bring the drafts and various reference materials to the workshop.

During the workshop, each participant presents his or her draft paper, using overhead transparencies of each page. Copies of each draft are also given to all participants, who critique and suggest revisions.

After each presentation, an editor helps the author revise and edit the draft. An artist prepares illustrations to accompany the text. Experienced desktop publishers work on the draft and artwork to produce a second draft. Each participant then presents the revised draft to the group again using transparencies. The audience critiques and makes further suggestions. The draft is thus revised further to generate the third draft. Towards the end of the workshop, the third draft is made available for all participants again for final comments and revisions. A skilled editor then puts all final drafts together into a publication. The workshop usually last two to three weeks, and has a neat mix of professionals on the topic, community workers and other related practitioners.

Advantages of the workshop approach

1. First hand experiences are written about by the field workers themselves. This makes the document authentic, but simple as opposed to some academic publications that field workers may find difficult to use. There is both peer and audience pre-testing through the process.
2. It gives an opportunity for the field workers, who would otherwise have no time and means or even the skills, to write on pertinent issues and present case studies from their field work.
3. It takes a short time to produce such valuable publications.
4. The diversity of skills, experiences and organizational backgrounds make for a broad mix of important ideas.



2009 writeshops conducted by IIRR

- Documenting best practices of ***KIT (Royal Tropical Institute) and UNAIDS Technical Support Facilities (USAID-TSF)*** conducted last May 11-15 at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- Documenting the project experiences of ***German Technical Cooperation (GTZ)*** which was held last March 25 to 30 at Hotel Alejandro, Tacloban City.
- Documenting the field-based experiences and lessons learned of ***Caritas Keuskupan Sibolga (CKS)*** which was held last March 11 to 16, at Nacional Hotel, Gunungsitoli, Nias, Northern Sumatra, Indonesia.
- Documentation of the ***Community Agricultural Technology Program (CATP)*** activities which was supported by Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) conducted last January 25 to 30 at Cebu Grand Hotel, Cebu City

How IIRR can help you produce a publication

IIRR has projects under its Learning Communities Program which are funded from various sources. Through the writeshops process, IIRR's experiences and best practices are documented and made available for other field workers. In addition, development agencies on many occasions partner with IIRR to produce a publication on a particular theme. Such agencies have included UN agencies, international NGOs and bilateral donor organizations. IIRR can also provide technical assistance to any development organization which wishes to document its field experiences and best practices from any part of the world.

IIRR is planning to make the publications available on CD-ROM and some titles will be uploaded on the IIRR website.

If you have an idea of a theme that you think should be documented; or if you have a project (s) which you feel has had some important initiatives that should be documented; a development agency pioneer an approach or a technology in any country and you want a quality publication to be produced on the topic, you can partner with IIRR. For further information please contact:

Publications and Communication program
International Institute of Rural reconstruction
Silang, Cavite, 4118, Philippines
Tel: 63-46 414 3216
e.mail AsiaProgram@iirr.org;
website: www.iirr.org



International Institute of Rural Reconstruction

The International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR) is the outgrowth of a grassroots development movement, which began in 1920s in China. Dr. Y.C. James Yen and his colleagues evolved an integrated, sustainable, people-centered development approach that came to be known as “rural reconstruction.” IIRR has 40 years of experience in offering international training courses. It draws from its 80 years experience working with the rural poor in the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

IIRR’s mission is to share its rural development experience and insights with development organizations and practitioners. More than 11,000 rural development practitioners from over 100 countries representing around 2,500 organizations have attended IIRR’s training courses. In addition, IIRR has produced 57 publications on diverse topics related to rural development.