

Adapting the Target Category Approach in Fisheries Extension Work: Advantages and Disadvantages

Savitree Rangsihaht and Supaporn Thaipakdee

The thirteen participants in the International Training Course on Coastal Fisheries Management and Extension Methodology organized by the Training Department (TD) of SEAFDEC from 2 to 29 September 2008, were taken as the population for a case study which aimed to: analyze the need for target category approach in extension activities, assess the advantages and disadvantages, illustrate the application of such approach in participants' work responsibilities, and present the outcomes from carrying out a program for the small-scale fishers. Results of the case study could be adapted by the countries in the Southeast Asian region with modifications that suit the specific context and situation of the respective countries.

Fisheries extension approach is an organized and coherent combination between strategies and methods. In order that any fisheries extension work becomes effective in a certain area, many approaches have been adapted. However, in choosing a particular approach, the contexts and conditions in the area should be taken into consideration (Seevers et al., 1997). Although there is no single best approach, the target category approach has been regarded as a key feature in fisheries extension work because it has been found to function well with the fishermen, more particularly in successfully responding to their needs (Chokesanguan and Weerawat, 2008). In the target category approach, the needs of specific group of clientele are targeted while the acceptability by such group of an appropriate technology is considered, from the social and economic points of view. The SEAFDEC Training Department (SEAFDEC/TD) organized the International Training Course in Coastal Fisheries Management and Extension Methodology in Samut Prakarn, Thailand on 2-29 September 2008 with the aim of familiarizing the trainees from the Southeast Asian countries on the various fisheries extension approaches relevant to coastal fishery resources management. The 13 training participants from 10 countries were fisheries officials or fisheries extension officials with at least three years experience in fisheries or related work, and had minimum of 10 years active service before retirement, the minimum requirements set for the training course to ensure that the knowledge gained from the training could be carried out in their respective work assignments.

During the training, the researchers (who served as resource persons in fisheries extension approaches) introduced the concepts of the various fisheries extension approaches relevant to fisheries extension activities including the

target category approach. The participants were given the opportunity to analyze, discuss and share their professional experiences on: the advantages and disadvantages of the target category approach, why a target category approach is necessary in working with the small-scale fishers, how to apply the target category approach in the respective participants' work responsibilities, and the possible outcomes from the application of a target category approach.

Using the aforementioned training session as a case study, the 13 participants in the training course representing 10 countries; namely, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam were considered as the respondents of the study. Questionnaires were used to conduct an in-depth interview of the participants, while focus group discussions were also conducted to obtain the participants' responses to the research questions.

Fisheries Extension Approaches

Various fisheries extension approaches were introduced during the training course which include: (1) target category approach; (2) technical change approach; (3) functional group approach; and (4) clients organization approach. Considering that the "fisheries extension approach" in general, refers to an organized and coherent combination of strategies and methods of carrying out extension plans in order to meet the needs of the fishers, the "target category approach" could be appropriately adopted in fisheries extension. In addition, the target category approach focuses on the specific activities of specific groups of fishers, where such groups are formed on the basis of their needs, interests, goals or characteristics. Under this approach, an appropriate technology could be applied which suits the preferences of the said organized groups. The "advantages of target category approach" as the favorable opportunities with respect to the groups' needs oriented towards the clientele, while the "disadvantages of target category" which refer to the unfavorable opportunities towards their needs, were therefore identified during the case study.

The "technical change approach", which is one of the most popular approaches used in fisheries extension work, is aimed at maximizing the adoption of technological innovations from national or regional research centers where researchers attempt to find solutions to the clients' major technological problems. Once a solution is arrived at, this

is developed into a recommended practice that the clients can apply in their work areas.

Usually under the “technical change approach”, innovations are introduced first to a small number of progressive clients and opinion leaders with the hope that the information could be adopted later with other clients. However, the “technical change approach” has major limitations because the technologies or packages of technologies recommended to the fishers could oftentimes be irrelevant or incomplete. More often than not, decisions to promote fisheries practices or technological solutions are usually made without assessing first the clients’ real needs and their socio-economic conditions, as practiced in a top-down approach. Moreover, this approach does not reach out to the appropriate stakeholders as only the highly selected clients could be served.

The “functional group approach” is aimed at working with particular groups of people joined together to achieve a shared goal. Transforming the behavior of the group members could be attained through different elements, such as: mobilization, organization, and training as well as through technical and resource support. In this approach, groups of people are first *mobilized* for action through participatory way and action-oriented research, where it is necessary that the stakeholders should understand their own situation, potentials for change and own possible roles. Then the groups could be *organized* to allow group decision-making, group responsibility, resource pooling and other collaborative arrangements. A *training program* for the staff at the village level and the group members is a must. Developing and utilizing innovations at the local level require *technical and resource support* to attain results, which can be in the form of funds to support the program as a whole or technology that promotes income-generating activities.

The “clients’ organization approach” utilizes independent, self-managed and in most cases permanent organizations such as fishermen’s associations or cooperatives, which are formed mainly for the social or economic development of the members. In this approach, the fishermen organize, direct and manage their own associations and cooperatives. This approach is very common in developed and some developing countries, such as the Netherlands and other Western European countries where the fishermen are organized to a certain degree that they can have access to their Ministries of Agriculture and even to their Parliaments, and in some cases, have influence in the development of agricultural policies. In some countries, fishermen’s organizations even have their own learning centers and extension programs, and their organizations are partners of government agencies in

the formulation and implementation of fisheries extension activities (Maine Sea Grant, 2008).

The Target Category Approach

In the “target category approach”, the selected groups serve as targets of the fisheries extension works. The groups could be the small-scale fishers or the out-of-school young fishers. This approach gives attention to small-scale producers, who can readily adapt technological packages and recommendations that harmonize with their interests, preferences and needs.

Assessment of Fishermen’s Needs, Interests and Preferences

Results from many studies in various countries indicated that by using various elements as shown in **Box 1**, the fishermen’s needs could be addressed while their interests and preferences could be identified and assessed. Once the fishers’ needs are identified, specific plans, programs and activities in response to their needs could then be carried out.

In extension work, the fact that small-scale fishers in general need access to low-cost technologies as they have minimal capital for investment as indicated in the various studies, should be taken into consideration. While commercial fishermen, on the other hand, could be more interested in technologies having higher capital cost, the technologies promoted in fisheries extension activities should result in one or more factors exemplified in **Box 2**.

Basic Information on the Respondents

The 13 participants in the training course who have been considered as respondents in the study were administrators,

Box 1. Elements that could be used in assessing the fishermen’s needs, interests and preferences

1. **Block supervisors’ diary** is a structured page layout for recording problems of the fishermen, which they expressed and corresponding collected and recorded during the day to day work of extension field staff.
2. **Problem census** is a structured meeting with a group of fishermen, and designed to ensure the full participation of the fishermen in order to identify and fully understand the fishermen’s needs.
3. **Participatory rural appraisal** is a continuously developing set of different techniques designed to ensure full participation of the fishermen in identifying the needs and to initiate the planning of the appropriate responses.
4. **Consultation with other organizations** is done through working committees at the village level, district and regional levels where the needs of the fishermen can be obtained.

Source: Ministry of Agriculture, 1999 and Examples of Community Management and Research in the Fisheries Sector, 2008

Box 2. Favorable outcomes from the promotion in fisheries extension plans

1. Decrease in input costs including labor
2. Increase in outputs
3. Increase in the quality and market value of outputs
4. Increase in the production of nutritional food stuff for household consumption
5. Improved fisheries practices to promote environmental sustainability
6. Reduced dependence on externally purchased inputs and greater use of local resources

Source: Ministry of Agriculture, 1999 and SEAFDEC, 2003

scientists and fisheries officials who have worked with small-scale fishermen. Most of the respondents had been occupying their present positions for an average of six (6) years and at their present office for an average of nine (9) years, and that most of them (about 85%) have been directly involved in extension work. Most of the respondents learned about target category approach from their work (69%) while the others acquired more information about the approach from the training course (31%). Considering the multiple responses, about 77% confirmed that they received information on target category approach from the training, 69% learned the approach from their work and 46% from printed and published materials. Moreover, about 39% of the respondents indicated that their roles in extension work were mainly as agents of change and group members with another 23% called themselves as external experts. Furthermore, about 85% confirmed that they have worked with small-scale fishermen, 46% with fisherwomen, about 39% have worked with young fishermen while about 39% have worked with large-scale fishermen.

Findings from the Case Study

Based on the results of the focus group discussions, the respondents confirmed the importance of carrying out programs based on the needs, interests and preferences of fishers in order to gain the fishers' acceptance and participation. Using "the target category approach" therefore could create awareness and enhance commitment to practice and perform their responsibilities. Being time-saving with easy problem-solving method, the target category approach could make the fishers to become more resourceful. Although in certain cases, such approach could also be serving the needs of specific groups as it is oftentimes time consuming to form a committed group.

Necessity

The participants agreed on the need to carry out programs according to the interests, preferences and needs of specific groups of clientele in order to set up acceptable and adoptable programs. Clients' participation could be enhanced once the

advantages from joining the program such as development in skills, knowledge and attitude, could be perceived. On the contrary, if a certain program is conducted not in accordance with the stakeholders' needs, implementation of such program would never give positive results.

Advantages

Grouping people to work on a specific activity based on their interests and needs could create awareness and commitment to practice what they have learned. They would easily understand, take responsibilities to do the activities and be able to plan and carry out programs within a short period of time. With their own cooperation and initiative, problems could be solved easily. Stakeholders became resourceful and self-reliant because their preferences and needs are being met.

Disadvantages

On the other hand, the respondents also confirmed that the target category approach could also lead to the formulation of specific programs that do not serve the needs of the other fishers, mainly because grouping people together could take a lot of time and commitment. The respondents also confirmed that in some cases, the fisheries extension agents could sometimes fall into the trap set by the policy imposed by the government and the programs required by the fishers.

In addition, during the focus group discussions, the participants also shared their professional experiences on how to handle problem-solving situations (Box 3). The respondents also suggested that the application of the target category approach should start from where and what the fishers are, and working with them using the appropriate extension methods (Box 4).

Box 3. Factors to be considered in handling problem-solving situations

Be a good moderator: Fisheries extension agents should convey the message and open the line of communication between senders and receivers. Information gathered from clientele could be sent to agencies concerned while at the same time, extension agents should provide beneficial and relevant information back to the clientele to assure them that their preferences are being addressed.

Be honest and trustworthy: Fishermen would only come near and consult with fisheries extension workers if trust has already been established with them. In order to bridge the gap between government officials and small-scale fishermen, more activities should be boosted that could serve the interest of the fishermen.

Create participatory management atmosphere: Fisheries extension agents should promote a forum where discussions with fishermen are held in a participatory manner. Encouraging fishermen to voice out their views and ideas could create the needed participatory atmosphere.

Box 4. Activities where target category approach could be applied

- **Creating a linkage between extension agents and the community where extension agents are assigned**
- **Identifying the needs, interests and preferences of clientele in areas of responsibility**
- **Grouping the clientele according to their needs and interests**
- **Organization of training courses based on the needs, requirements and interests of clientele**
- **Assistance in seeking credit or loan packages from financing institutions or facilitating the sourcing of financial support to finance specific projects**
- **Monitoring and evaluation of technology adoption, as introduced to each specific target group**
- **Showcasing of successful programs and initiation of documentation for future reference**
- **Conducting demonstration or field days for successful programs**
- **For unsuccessful programs, weaknesses should be identified and improvements should be explored**

As part of the training course, the participants discussed issues related to over-fishing and illegal fishing in their respective countries. In the case of the Philippines for example, the use of destructive fishing methods such as dynamite, cyanide fishing and the use of fine mesh net fishing gear resulted in rapid habitat degradation and decline of the fishery stocks. Therefore, the training recommended that monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) of fisheries system should be addressed as among the priority concerns in fisheries extension.

It was also noted during the discussion that in the Philippines, most information have been gathered from the fishermen such as those on fishing effort, catches, vessel traffic and other related data because of the active promotion of the country's MCS system, and such information have been used for the formulation of national policies and laws. Therefore, the case of the Philippines can be considered as having the most progressive programs for public awareness and promotion of participatory management for its coastal resource areas (Chokesanguan and Weerawat, 2008).

Discussions and Conclusions

Outcomes of any program that fulfills the stakeholders' needs would provide a learning process, strengthen responsibilities and promote self-reliance of the target group (Fig. 1). In the training course, the participants indicated that fishers would learn to be responsible of their own decisions if their requirements are addressed through the programs implemented in their areas because most fishers believe that the results from such programs or activities would serve as inputs and provide lessons for their future activities. Therefore, the ultimate outcomes from an application

of the target category approach depend on the learning responsibilities and self-reliance of the target group.

Even though the thirteen participant-respondents of the case study had various positions and varied work background, they arrived at a consensus that target category approach is necessary in working with fishermen particularly the small-scale fishers. Almost all of them have learned this approach from their work since they had been directly involved in fisheries extension work. However, some of them have learned the target category approach only from the training session.

Based on their work responsibilities, most of the participants in the training course were agents of change, group members and external experts. Their viewpoints on target category approach were basically extracted from their professional experiences and background. The findings from the focus group discussions however, showed that the participants had the common agreement to accept the necessity to carry out an extension program based on the needs, interests and preferences of fishers.

The participants further agreed that the target category approach had more advantages than disadvantages since it is focused on the interests, needs and preferences of the fishermen. From the results of further discussions on how to bridge the gap and misunderstanding between policy makers and local fishermen, the respondents confirmed that this could be done by creating common understanding and alternative solutions to the situation. The most significant advantage of the target category approach is the ability of the approach to respond to the requirements of a specific group of clientele which could lead to creating awareness and commitment. On the other hand, a disadvantage could be the inability to serve the needs of other groups in view of their attitude towards organizing a committed group which could be time consuming. As regards the application of the target category approach, the participants agreed on a series of activities considering the fishermen's present situation, program implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation. The participants also confirmed that the outcomes from the implementation of the target category approach would help the fishermen in strengthening their activities, responsibilities and self-reliance.

Recommendations

Based on the outcomes of the case study, it is suggested that participants in the training course and in similar training courses conducted in the future, should be encouraged to practice the target category approach in their respective work areas. The participants could initiate implementing such approach by writing individual action plans and

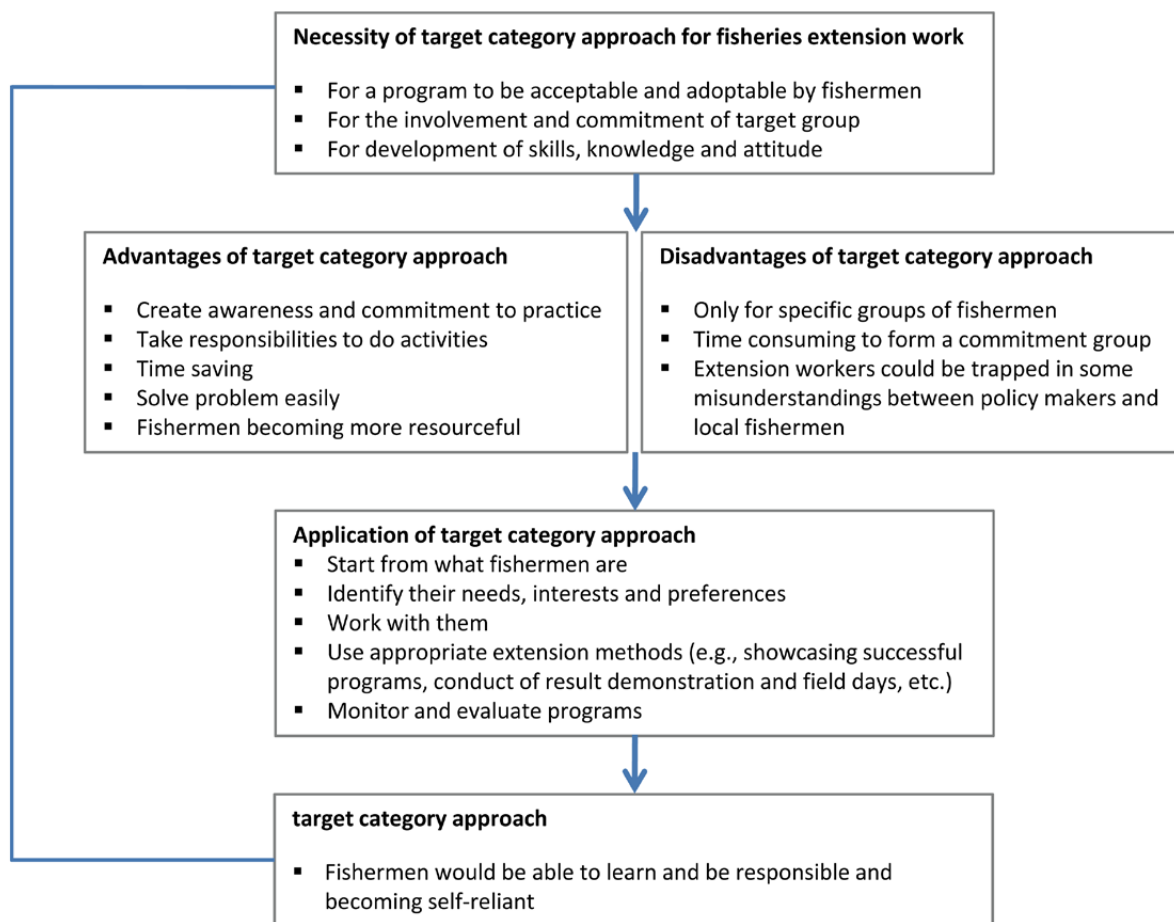


Fig. 1. The necessity, advantages, disadvantages, application and outcomes of target category approach

indicating in the plans the process on how to apply the target category approach. The most important thing to consider is for SEAFDEC/TD to make sure that the target category approach is put into actual practice by the participants. In this regard, SEAFDEC/TD should encourage the participants to formulate their respective programs as well as coordinate and formalize linkages with the participants in order to monitor and evaluate the adoption of the target category approach in the extension activities in their respective countries. It is essential to expand the cooperation across the representative countries to ensure that the knowledge gained from the training course specifically on the extension approaches will prove beneficial and practical.

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About the Authors

Savitree Rangsihaht, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor from the Department of Agricultural Extension and Communication, Faculty of Agriculture, Kasetsart University, Bangkok 10900, Thailand.

Supaporn Thaipakdee, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor from the Department of Agricultural Extension and Communication, Faculty of Agriculture at Kamphaeng Saen, Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen Campus, Nakhon Pathom 73140, Thailand.