



### III. Co-enquiry in practice

Although much has been written about co-enquiry, it is still not a commonly used practice in the context of research on community-based management of biocultural diversity, partly because of a lack of widespread understanding of *how* to implement it. A valid reason for this lack of clear how-to information is that inherent to the concept of co-enquiry are the basic rules that (1) every social situation is different, requiring tailored co-enquiry approaches, and (2) every co-enquiry process will be developed individually by the group of participants involved and cannot be affixed to pre-established procedures. While we fully agree with the foundational philosophy of in-built flexibility, we suggest that one of the main reasons co-enquiry is not yet widely used in research situations where it would be ideal – for example when studying community-based natural resource management – may be because of a lack of guidance and methodological support for willing researchers.

As a contribution to the growing movement towards decolonising research and empowering communities to control their own research agendas and outcomes, we propose this manual, which provides practical guidance, tools and ideas aimed at encouraging researchers, communities and other actors to engage in these progressive approaches and turn self-determination into a central objective in the research process. In red, we pose common questions that facilitators might have when engaging in these processes for the first time. These questions are then answered with suggestions that have emerged from GDF's field-based experience in the Chinantla fieldsite (see the Introduction for some context on GDF's fieldwork in this site).

#### The conditions for co-enquiry

In this section we describe some of the key elements of for ethical engagement with communities (see also the section on Ethics below, as well as Annexes 1 and 2), including the importance of rigorous and continuous 'checking-in' with partner communities to ensure that the co-enquiry process remains empowering and acceptable to all.

#### Free Prior and Informed Consent

A foundational principle for anyone working with indigenous or local communities is the respect for their collective right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), which is recognised in many nations' laws as well as in important international legal instruments.<sup>1</sup> FPIC is both a right whereby communities are able to give or withhold their permission for activities to take place within their community or on their territory. It therefore constitutes their right to choose and to make autonomous decisions regarding issues that

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<sup>1</sup> The principal international instruments that explicitly recognise indigenous communities' rights to FPIC are: the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), ILO Convention 169 (1989), General Recommendation XXIII of the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), Decisions from the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Interamerican Commission for Human Rights, as well as numerous multilateral institutions, banks, funding agencies, etc.



affect them. FPIC is also an inherent element of indigenous and local communities' rights to self-determination (the right to determine their own futures), and as such is a tool for community empowerment and for protection of their territories, resources and lives.

Consent signifies that the community agrees to a given plan, which may have been reworked by the community in order to respect its members' aspirations. Consent is only considered acceptable if all community members have been consulted, according to processes that respect community governance procedures and have been led by the community members themselves. In many cases, the final decision made respects processes of consensus decision-making. Consent is considered valid only if all of the problems raised surrounding the plan have been fully addressed and acceptably dealt with. Moreover, the application of FPIC requires any consent made by the community to be:

- **Free:** this means that it is free of pressure, manipulation, intimidation or coercion; communities are allowed to take the time they need, follow their own procedures, use their own language, and implement their own norms to carry out the process.
- **Prior:** the decision-making process necessarily must take place prior to the launch of the activity, and ample time must be given for the community to make a concerted decision.
- **Informed:** all community members must receive full information of all aspects of the proposed plan (information can *not* be withheld), and outside actors should be ready to disclose and produce any item of information that the community might need to make the decision.

The process of engaging with a community must respect these four elements integrally; the right to FPIC must be fully, mindfully and conscientiously implemented. For example if the community withholds consent, or demands that the plan be amended in order to give their consent, it is imperative that this wish is respected – *regardless of the consequences for the outside actor* (e.g. in the case that donors may retain funding for this actor if the research or intervention does not go to plan).

The practical application of this right is more complex than at first glance. It does not simply require outside actors to ask the community whether they accept an intervention or not: it involves a series of unequivocal steps and a constant mindfulness, on the part of outside actors, of community members' feelings regarding an accepted intervention. Effectively, FPIC is as much a *process* as a right, with far-reaching implications. As a decision-making process, FPIC is iterative: it starts with community consent and then continues throughout the implementation of the project, until the moment of its conclusion.

The overall procedure for the FPIC process will depend on local norms and practices for community decision-making. Below are a few recommendations to help outside actors as they engage in this process with communities:



## 1. Initial meetings

At the start of the FPIC process, it is recommended that researchers carry out information meetings with community authorities or decision-making bodies (the authors recommend this process be carried out with the community assembly). During these meetings all available information on the project is shared, for the community members to reflect on and deliberate on according to their own processes, which may often mean absent the external researchers.

## 2. Information-sharing

The information to be shared – both orally and in written form – must include:

- The project and/or research aims and objectives;
- The proposed project time frame (although in practice the project will be re-scheduled according to community needs once it has started);
- Details of the activities proposed, including where they may take place and whom they may involve;
- The decision-making processes proposed within a co-enquiry framework;
- Presentation of the facilitation team;
- Reasonably predictable consequences or outcomes of the proposed project (including benefits and/or disadvantages for the community);
- Potential predictable risks that may emerge and how they would be addressed.

All of this information must be given in a language and format that is easily understandable for the community. It is important that the full technical proposal be shared with the community (with the caveat that within a co-enquiry scenario these are subject to change depending on community decisions). However, it is also important that community members can easily understand these documents, so they should be, if necessary, translated and/or simplified (without omitting important elements) in order to be fully understandable. Ideally, the process of sharing information would be part of a broader mutual learning process, where intercultural and bilingual tools are used to ensure full understanding by all actors present. It is recommended that those presenting this information to the community be trusted individuals, so that community members are able to freely express their doubts, objections, opinions, questions and proposals.

## 3. Decision-making

Once the information has been fully shared, the community is given time to make their decision, using their own customary mechanisms for decision-making. It is important that all members of the community have a say in the final decision. If the facilitators suspect that elites or community authorities are making decisions against the will of other community members, it is highly recommended to reflect on whether that particular community is appropriate for the implementation of co-enquiry approaches, which require a strong participatory spirit. During this stage, the community is also called upon to request or suggest changes and improvements to the proposed activities, sites, risks, and use of results among others (although it is important to note that they will be able to continue to do so throughout the research project). Community processes for celebrating an agreement are to be respected.



#### 4. Collaboration agreement

Some communities may require a collaboration agreement, which contains in writing all of the important elements of the relationship between the outside actors and the community, including any restrictions the community wishes to place on the scope or activities of the project, and any expectations community members have regarding reciprocity, research processes, authorship, and so on.

#### 5. The ongoing FPIC process

The FPIC process continues throughout the project cycle; this means that every decision, change or innovation made within the project context has to be consented upon by the community following the above procedure. Project facilitators should also regularly and actively 'check in' with community members regarding project progress in order to ensure that any emerging query, problem or shortcoming is dealt with appropriately.

Similarly to other ethical good practices that are mainstreamed into research approaches, FPIC suffers from the potential of becoming institutionalized, of being treated as a box-ticking exercise. It is fundamental that FPIC be applied mindfully, and with the intention of ensuring the communities involved are fully allowed to give or withhold their consent for any aspect of the research process. The principles described above have been given a great deal of thought by indigenous intellectuals, community activists and ethically-oriented policy-makers. When applied thoroughly and with integrity, they provide an excellent foundation for ethical engagement with communities in co-enquiry research processes.

#### Experiences from the field: community-led decisions regarding research

In one of the COMBIOSERVE fieldsites, half way through the project, partner communities decided that they no longer wished to engage with some of the research methods they had originally agreed to. While the community was aware of this when they originally agreed to the research, based on their re-reading of these particular methods and a politically sensitive context, they decided to withdraw their agreement for these methods being implemented.

This caused some dismay in the consortium as the leaders of that particular research theme were obliged to change their approach and revise some of their objectives. However, given the spirit of co-enquiry and community empowerment underlying the project, following in-depth discussions between all parties the consortium agreed to fully respect the decision of the community. Although there remained concerns that the withdrawal of communities from this fieldsite from this specific element of the project would diminish the quality of the research outputs and perhaps jeopardise good relationships with the European Commission, this is an example of ethical good practice, and of researchers' commitment to collaborative research.

#### Engagement throughout the research process

The principles of ethical engagement described in the above section on FPIC, in the Ethics section on p. 28-30 and in the Annexes are to be respected and applied throughout the research cycle. It is not sufficient to reflect on them during research planning or when establishing rapport with the community. To ensure ethics guide the entire process, the authors suggest that these principles and guidelines be referred to continuously



throughout the research process. Another excellent way of ensuring that the research continues to respect these principles is by organising regular 1-day workshops with partner communities in which key questions surrounding ethics are discussed as a group.

The following are examples of questions that can be used to launch participatory reflection (amongst others):

- Do community members still all agree with the research objectives?
- Are community members happy with the progress of the research?
- Are community members happy with the process of engagement with the research facilitators?
- Do community members feel comfortable with the manner and behaviour of the facilitation team?
- Are the facilitation team and the community members happy with communications?
- What would community members change in the research process to improve it?
- Are there any other needs community members would like the facilitators to address?
- Etc.

### **Engagement beyond boundaries**

Engaging ethically with communities also requires researchers and other outside actors interested in working with communities to provide support to communities beyond the scope of the research project itself. In practice, as friendly, committed and regular visitors to the community, facilitators are very likely to be asked, amongst others, to support community initiatives, to search for information the community needs, or to engage politically with community struggles. Given that the co-enquiry approach is founded on social engagement and a political commitment to empowerment, researchers must mindfully respond to these requests – as long as fulfilling them upholds researcher respect for the ethical principles laid out in Annexes 1 and 2.

### **Essentials: time, money and commitment**

It is essential that any researcher or institution wishing to embark on a co-enquiry process take into account two essential components of a successful co-enquiry project: available time and resources.

Co-enquiry requires a heavy contribution of researcher's time in fieldwork and in processes of engagement. In Chinantla fieldsite experience, in which 3 basic research processes were ongoing simultaneously (biodiversity monitoring, community mapping, and social science research) a 4/5 person facilitation team, available to travel monthly to partner communities for 4-10 days at a time over the course of 3 years, is a minimum requirement for providing the support necessary for the implementation of a proper co-enquiry process. These trips may not necessarily be solely for the purpose of the research at hand, however, as facilitators must also be available to support communities on other issues that arise (see the section *Engagement beyond boundaries*). Thus, when planning co-enquiry schedules, it is strongly recommended that the facilitation team allocate more time than required for each activity.



In order to fulfill these time requirements, it is essential that the facilitation team secure sufficient financial resources. These resources must cover the time and travel of the facilitation team, as well as a fund to support the time investment on the part of partner communities. GDF, the leader of the fieldwork supporting the production of this methods manual, makes a yearly lump sum available to partner communities. Through community decision-making mechanisms, the latter decide autonomously whether to pay the community researchers for their time, to save the fund for community emergencies, or to invest it in community development projects.

Beyond the basics of time, money and the necessary infrastructure to carry out research among communities, it is essential that researchers wishing to engage in co-enquiry are fully committed to the process, and intend to remain with the project throughout. Given the intense and reciprocal relationships that invariably develop between facilitators and community researchers, sudden changes can be highly disruptive, particularly if new facilitators are to be trained in co-enquiry approaches or have little experience working with the communities (or types of communities) involved in the research.

Given the necessary requirements of time, energy and commitment, it is highly recommended that first-time co-enquiry projects be implemented in the context of existing relationships between researchers and communities. If participants already know (and like!) each other, communication is likely to be more open, engagement processes more fluid, and trust easier to consolidate. Moreover, facilitators are likely to be more in touch with community concerns and research needs, meaning that funding proposals will be grounded and robust.

### **Experiences from the field: when community processes ‘get in the way’ of funded research schedules**

As previously mentioned, much of the work described in this manual was carried out in collaboration with communities from the Chinantla region of Oaxaca, Mexico. Our fieldwork was set to begin following the signature of the community agreements in March of 2012. However, by August of that year, we still had not been able to fully launch our fieldwork. This is because although our partner communities wished to carry out the project, they were dealing with some important internal political re-organizing at the time, and were unable to dedicate the time and energy necessary to launching the fieldwork. This resulted in a significant delay – in relation to the schedule set out in the project documents – in the production of deliverables.

Given the funding body’s strict rules about conforming to project and output delivery schedules, we were concerned that this would constitute a major setback and may even jeopardise the project. Notwithstanding this potential outcome, we decided to follow ethical best practice: to ensure that the communities involved were the ones to decide when the fieldwork would begin, even if it resulted in the research team having to make up for lost time in the delivery of outputs, and in some cases produce them with some delay. In the event, the EC’s Technical Review of our project, carried out in October 2014, commended GDF for its good practice regarding allowing the communities to define their own timelines and schedules for project implementation. Such a positive outcome is not always the case, however, and it is very important that (particularly large-scale) funding institutions begin to recognize, account for, and respect the unpredictability of



community life and what this means for project schedules and programmes.<sup>2</sup>

### Community conditions

Although we hope that co-enquiry will increasingly be mobilised in research processes with communities, if certain key community conditions are not in place, it may not always be possible. The first key condition is that communities wish to engage in co-enquiry and have expressed this wish to the researchers with whom they wish to work. In order for this to be the case, there has to be a certain degree of agreement within the community itself regarding the collective desire to carry out a co-enquiry research process. While we cannot expect everyone in the community to always fully agree with each other, it is essential that there is an overall consensus that this is important. Researchers can gauge this through dialogue and community meetings prior to beginning activities.

Another key requirement is that there are individuals within the community who wish and are able to take on the role of community researcher, as discussed further along in this chapter. Although it is not necessary that community researchers are formally educated, they have to be willing to examine their knowledge, pose questions, and reflect deeply on a variety of issues that affect their community. They must also be willing to try new technologies and engage in ideas and processes that are unfamiliar to them.

It is essential that the whole community have clarity on the relationships between researchers, community and community research team. It is also important that other external actors working in or with the community understand the co-enquiry process and its objectives, so as to avoid potential misunderstandings. It is also important that the co-enquiry research engage with other ongoing community-outsider processes with a view to having the different processes be mutually beneficial rather than mutually limiting. Co-enquiry can be hindered by conflicts between external actors, which can result in divisions being created within the community – an outcome that would be detrimental to the whole process. To gain this kind of clarity, regular, open and honest dialogue is necessary.

### Challenges of co-enquiry

Co-enquiry processes do not come without inherent challenges. Some of these have been covered already, e.g. the challenge of ensuring enough time and financial resources are dedicated to ensuring a truly collaborative process and the challenge of carrying out co-enquiry in the context of academia. Another challenge that many facilitators are likely to encounter and related to FPIC (discussed above) is when communities decide that they would like to alter a previously agreed-upon aspect of the research, change research timetables, or stop the research altogether. This can sometimes cause serious problems for the external researchers, who are likely to have funding-related commitments to fulfill (see Experiences from the field box, p.25). External researchers are encouraged to

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<sup>2</sup>We further discuss this aspect of institutional funding in a COMBIOSERVE synthesis paper, to be published at the end of the project.



seriously consider all of the contingencies that may arise throughout the co-enquiry research process and include these in their funding proposals.

Beyond the practical challenges of co-enquiry, there are more conceptual challenges that collaborative research groups have to deal with. One of the most obvious ones is power inequalities both between the different groups within the co-enquiry process as well as within those groups (Pohl et al 2010). Without special attention to issues of power – and specifically the intention of ensuring that the different groups within the co-enquiry process are fundamentally equal within it – the process may be hijacked by one of the parties (the research partners, local elites, etc.). It is therefore important that power relations be examined and potential sources of conflict or inequality ironed out prior to the start of the project.

Another challenge the group might find is how to integrate the (sometimes) divergent interests, perspectives and approaches of the researchers, funders, and communities. In the context of co-enquiry, the community's needs are paramount; nevertheless, researcher and funder requirements must be taken into account otherwise the co-enquiry process cannot progress. From the perspective of academia, it may seem that co-enquiry processes lack the rigour and objectivity required for high-quality research. From the perspective of communities, academic research often does not take community needs and rights as the starting point of their approach, resulting in research processes that may not stand up to the ethical approach now demanded by communities. From the perspective of funders, co-enquiry processes may not result in the outputs and objectives expected when the project was funded.

These different expectations are rooted in the different ontologies, epistemologies, and practices underlying each group's worldview and their needs with regard to the research process itself. Integration of these different perspectives for the implementation of a project that is useful and acceptable to all involved is essential. In its strongest reading, integration “stands for consensus achieved regarding a problem, its causes and its sustainable solution” (Pohl et al 2010). In order for integration to take place, it is important that these differences are aired and accepted by the research team at the outset of the project. This can be done through open dialogue, and a collaborative search for solutions for bridging obvious differences between the groups. Integration is an iterative process throughout the project; it will regularly encounter challenges that must be examined and worked through in dialogue by the research group and the community as a whole.

Some research groups may encounter issues of trust and legitimacy. By establishing open dialogue around issues of power, integration of interests, and research objectives and process, researchers help to overcome some of the challenges they may encounter regarding community trust, access and their legitimacy as researchers. Most co-enquiry processes begin when a particular community or set of communities approaches researchers (or other external facilitators) for the implementation of a research process to resolve one or more community needs. In these cases, researcher legitimacy at least is present. Even if there is a pre-existing mutual trust between researchers and communities, continuous effort is required on the part of all participants to ensure that it



is maintained. In the context of work with indigenous or rural communities, their long histories of oppression and marginalisation often results in trust being slower to build up and more fragile when present.

In the cases that researchers initiate a co-enquiry process themselves, gaining access, legitimacy and trust will be more complex. A great deal of researchers' time will be necessary, as will openness to answer questions, engage in dialogue and change their objectives and/or approach if so requested by the communities. Beyond the basic challenges mentioned here – power, integration, trust, access and legitimacy – lie the core challenges which concern research ethics in the context of co-enquiry. These are examined next.

### **Ethical issues**

Much has been written about the specific ethical issues arising within participatory research (see the Resources section on ethics at the end of the manual). Even though co-enquiry is implemented with the very intention of carrying out the most ethical possible form of research, it can suffer from the same setbacks as participatory research (see Comment box immediately below).

**Comment: Possible harmful effects of participatory methods and approaches [adapted from Armstrong and Banks (2011), compiled from other sources]**

- Production of participants as subjects requiring research/development;
- Production of suitably disciplined subjects as participants expected to perform appropriately within participatory processes;
- Retention of researcher's control whilst presenting themselves as facilitators of neutral or benevolent processes;
- Re-authorisation of researchers as experts in participatory approaches;
- Romanticisation or marginalisation of local knowledge produced through participatory processes;
- Reinforcement of pre-existing power hierarchies among participating communities;
- Legitimisation of elite local knowledge simply because it is produced through participatory processes.

Theoretically, taking a co-enquiry approach rather than a simply participatory approach obviates most of these possible negative consequences. Nevertheless, the danger of a 'research-as-usual' process being masked by a co-enquiry veneer exists, and when it occurs it can be even more damaging than sincere conventional research. If co-enquiry is not implemented mindfully, and with the most sincere intention of achieving empowerment and self-determination for the communities involved, it risks become a tool for oppression rather than one for liberation (Cooke and Kothari, 2001).

Unfortunately, it is also possible for ethical problems to arise even with the best of intentions and an utmost attention to ethical practice. This may be the case, for example, if a specific sub-group in the community (e.g. a local elite) takes over the co-enquiry process, in spite of the best efforts of the facilitator, resulting in increased inequality or



oppression of other members of the community, and eventually, conflict. In such cases, the cardinal rule of respect for internal community processes becomes more complex for researchers to follow, and questions of facilitator intervention may arise. While each case must be evaluated individually, is it often most advisable for facilitators to remove themselves from that community and put co-enquiry processes on hold until conflicts have been resolved internally. Further, there are ethical dilemmas that are inherent to co-enquiry (see Comment box immediately below) that are present no matter the integrity, mindfulness or ethical stringency of the research team.

**Comment: Ethical dilemmas in co-enquiry/participatory research [Manzo and Brightbill (2007:33), adapted from Armstrong and Banks (2011)]**

- Participant anonymity cannot be guaranteed in community group work focused on local change;
- Giving participants a voice risks revealing their survival strategies to those who oppress them;
- Projects can engage ordinary people in potentially controversial action;
- Shared control over the research creates ethical conundrums that emerge throughout the process and are not easily predicted at the outset.

The Code of Ethics of the International Society for Ethnobiology (see Annex 2) and 15 Ethical Principles of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) (see Annex 1) provide key guidance for the implementation of high ethical standards in research with communities. Co-enquiry processes seek to surpass these high standards, and in order to do so facilitators are called upon to pay attention to key characteristics for a radically ethical co-enquiry process (see Ideas box immediately below).



### Ideas: Some key characteristics of an ethically sound co-enquiry process, adapted from Manzo and Brightbill (2007).

**Representation:** This goes beyond attempts to give ‘the other a voice’ and instead recognises the participant’s ability to represent themselves throughout the research process and to help direct the process. Practically it is helpful to clarify roles, responsibilities and decision-making on an ongoing and reiterative basis.

**Accountability:** Co-enquiry researchers are accountable *first* to community researchers and the communities in which they work, and *second* to the institution within which they’re embedded. In this way, the habitual interpretation of accountability is broadened.

**Social responsiveness:** Because participatory research is collaborative and change orientated, the researchers have to be responsive to the needs and perspectives of participants. This can result in a fluid and changeable research process. This can pose problems with institutions or funders if they expect predictable, time-bound, and complete results. The choice to engage in co-enquiry is radical, and requires flexibility and lateral thinking on the part of funders and institutions as well as the research team. For co-enquiry to be successful, these conditions should be clear at the outset of the project.

**Agency:** Co-enquiry broadens the ethical principle of respect for persons because every person involved must accept the responsibility of recognising that each of their peers has a right to a voice and a valuable contribution to make. Agency belongs to all research participants, and therefore ethical behaviour is required from facilitators and community researchers alike.

**Reflexivity:** Ethical dilemmas are often seen as something to be predicted and anticipated in advance. However, in co-enquiry research the ethical dilemmas are best understood in a process-orientated way. Co-enquiry research is flexible, socially responsive and emergent so questions and issues that require ethical decisions may only materialise during the collaborative process. Thus, facilitators and community researchers should schedule an ongoing ethical review of their own project throughout the research process.

## Doing co-enquiry

In this section we provide guidance on implementing the process of co-enquiry in a community setting.

### The conventional research cycle

The following is a summary of the conventional research cycle:

1. Determining the knowledge gap or need
2. Developing research questions to address that gap
3. Planning a process for answering those research questions, including development of an appropriate methodology
4. Gathering data using the methodology devised
5. Sorting, sifting and analysing the data gathered
6. Synthesising the analysis
7. Evaluating the analysis in relation to the original knowledge gap and questions
8. Reporting on the process and results, usually an activity that generates further questions, launching a new phase of the research cycle.



## Ideas: Basic skills required for researchers to engage in co-enquiry. (Adapted from the Beacon North East Co-enquiry Toolkit 2012)

### Generic skills

**Adaptability.** Researchers must be flexible and cope well with unexpected changes and events; they must build adaptability into their research philosophies and programmes.

**Ability to think laterally.** Researchers must think about research questions or problems from a variety of perspectives and be willing to think laterally, innovate and search for compromises that enhance collaboration.

**Communication skills.** Researchers must be able to communicate clearly and respectfully with a variety of individuals and groups from diverse cultures and backgrounds. They must be good at bridging communication gaps and at explaining complex ideas using jargon-free and simple language. They must be excellent listeners.

**Ability to manage and meet expectations.** This is particularly relevant for those researchers who are reporting to a University or a funding agency. Researchers must establish and clear aims and objectives – with full explanations of the flexibility needed for co-enquiry processes – so that when research plans evolve and change within partner communities (and they will!) the researcher can continue to respect the principles of ethical community engagement while also responding to institutional requirements.

**Ability to manage group dynamics and processes.** This is essential for researchers who will be required to facilitate community processes of reflection and the research processes led by research teams. For those who have not had extensive experience managing group dynamics, it is recommended that they take a course.

**Mindfulness.** This is one of the core principles of the ISE Code of Ethics (Annex 2) and it bears repeating here. In Buddhist thought, from which the concept borrows, being mindful implies full awareness of reality, for which it is necessary to be in the present moment, and which allows clarity of comprehension and wisdom to arise. In the context of research ethics, being mindful implies remaining continuously aware of the consequences of one's choices, conscious the ethical implications of one's behaviour, and attentive to the bigger picture. Connected to mindfulness is the concept of non-attachment, by which participants should be wary of investing their identity or emotional security in certain outcomes or structures all the while remaining committed to the process (Heron and Reason 2000).

### Specific skills

- Ability to assess commonalities and differences in values and interests.
- Ability to mediate peacefully and diplomatically in conflict situations.
- Ability to maintain friendly, patient, empathetic and approachable persona.
- Ability to rapidly recognise and propose workable solutions when challenges emerge.
- Ability to recognise and deal with emotional responses such as distress, anger.
- Ability to deal mindfully with chaos, while recognising that chaos can also be a productive moment in the process of innovation and reflection, and must be kept in tension with order.
- Ability to encourage the involvement of people who tend to be more passive or quiet, while diplomatically dealing with characters that may be more overbearing or aggressive.
- Ability to negotiate institutional research ethics procedures and to work with the unique ethical challenges that can arise in co-enquiry.
- Ability to learn rapidly in challenging social situations and to implement learning-based changes in approach.





## The co-enquiry research cycle

The co-enquiry research cycle follows a similar path to the conventional research cycle: problem> questions> methods> collection> analysis> synthesis, What is different is the context: in co-enquiry the research cycle is guided by local timetables, political structures, preferences, processes of dialogue, forms of collaboration, methods used and epistemological frameworks. It is also mostly aimed at *solving a problem* and therefore concludes with a practical outcome. In this section, we describe a co-enquiry approach for stage of the research cycle.

## Role of research facilitators

Most co-enquiry processes start when a community, or group of communities, approach outside researchers for support in resolving a problem or satisfying a research need that has been determined by the community. The research process itself is controlled and actively led by the community, usually by an elected team of community researchers. Outside researchers become *research facilitators* in co-enquiry frameworks: their role is to provide training, guidance and financial support for the co-enquiry process.

### Voices from the communities: the need for facilitators' support

Some readers may wonder whether a team of facilitators is always necessary, especially once community research teams have been trained. This was a question asked of the community researchers during the Community Researcher Dialogue of the COMBIOSERVE Conference *Community Conservation in Latin America: innovations in research and practice*, held in Xico, Veracruz, Mexico, 6-9 November 2014. The community researchers present all answered in the affirmative: having facilitators accompany them throughout the process was essential. They mentioned in particular the academic element: receiving support to 'formalise' their knowledge and lay it out for publication or present it using video. It is important, they underlined, that these external researchers be there to truly help the communities (and not to help themselves) and that they build and maintain a strong relationship of trust.

Good research facilitation requires a basic understanding of social science methods, including ethnographic approaches – such as participant observation – as these allow the facilitator to remain highly attuned to ongoing social processes and act appropriately when issues arise. Keeping diaries and notes of what people have said, how they've related to each other (and to the facilitator), and how social situations have been dealt with are important tools for ensuring a constant assessment and improvement of research facilitation. These notes and observations can also be used in reports for the dissemination of analyses of the co-enquiry experience.

While implementing co-enquiry processes, facilitators must strike a fine balance. Although theoretically the communities control the research process, in practice they rely on facilitators for a great deal of support in explaining and choosing methodologies, implementing trainings, and orienting the process. This dependence can make the facilitators' task complex, as they have to be very careful not to take advantage of the power conferred on them, to be mindful of the importance of autonomy, and simultaneously respond to communities' requests for support and advice. It may be particularly difficult for facilitators to be neutral about implementing methodological approaches that they feel are inappropriate or unethical, resulting in co-enquiry processes



that give priority to the facilitators' methodological preferences. Similarly, it may be that facilitators will prefer to train community researchers in methods they feel comfortable with or think are appropriate in the circumstances, avoiding methods they are not familiar with.

Such choices are not necessarily negative: facilitators often have a great deal of experience working with communities, and therefore have a deep understanding of what works and what does not; it is also important for facilitators to work with methods they are at ease with, otherwise the outcome of the co-enquiry process, which relies on the personal ability, sensitivity and capacity to explain of the facilitators, could be compromised. However, it is important that a wide variety of methods are appraised for their co-enquiry potential, regardless of facilitators' preferences, knowledge or personal opinions.

### **Comment: The basics of participant observation**

Participant observation is the central method for ethnographic research, and it is a core component of the process during which researchers and communities get to know each other (see Barnard 2005 for an overview of the method). The principal tenet is that outsiders participate in everyday life while observing social and cultural practices. The process informs a deep, and often embodied, understanding of cultural norms and social processes, which helps tonify relationships and lubricate co-enquiry processes. Participant observation requires researchers to spend some time simply working, talking, eating, drinking, sleeping, celebrating and, generally, sharing in everyday life with the community and its members, all the while taking mental note of how people are behaving, what they say to each other, how they engage with each other and outsiders (including the researchers), what makes them happy, angry, sad, fearful, how they move through their landscape, how and why they make choices, and so on. When key events or insights emerge, the researcher takes note of them and of any attendant learning experiences. Carrying out participant observation throughout the research process requires time and energy, yet can be done easily simply by being present and mindful. If possible, an excellent way of gaining these insights is by adding on 'participant observation days' (during which time the researcher simply 'hangs out' with community members) to the beginning or end of fieldtrips.

We suggest that facilitators take to heart the central philosophies of the ethical standards provided in Annexes 1 and 2. In particular, the ISE's Code of Ethics, which takes as its starting point the importance of *mindfulness*, i.e. "a continual willingness to evaluate one's own understandings, actions, and responsibilities to others". If facilitators are mindful of their own power, influence and responsibility throughout the process of co-enquiry, they are much less likely to impose their will or perspective on the community and much more likely to respond effectively to community needs. More importantly, they are much more likely to act ethically and respect the full rights of the communities they are supporting.

### **Election of community researchers**

The co-enquiry research process requires significant amount of community time investment. In many cases communities choose to elect individuals from among their members to carry out the bulk of project activities. Often the community will elect local



researchers who have a particular talent, interest or desire to do research and help their community.

### **Voices from the communities: the double role of community researchers**

It is not easy being a community researcher, says Avelino Juan, a community researcher from the Chinantec community of Santiago Tlapeusco. A big issue community researchers have to face is the fact that they volunteer their time to support their community. This can cause friction in their household, if they are choosing to carry out research instead of work in the fields for their family. On the other hand, if they try to do both well, they may face burnout. The tension between working in the community research team for the benefit of the community and working for one's own family is not easily managed. In some cases, a small amount of remuneration for members of the community research team helps to alleviate some of the tensions. However, remuneration can lead to increasing tensions between the research team and the community at large. One of the communities in the Chinantla resolved this tension by directing the community researchers' pay (this pay was part of the project budget) to a community fund – to be administered by the community as a whole in their General Assembly – to be used for emergencies or to be used to support the families of the community researchers if they so needed.

It is important that the community as a whole elect the community research team – through customary decision-making procedures – as they will carry a significant amount of responsibility throughout the research process. Facilitators should avoid getting involved in community decision-making during such elections, although they may be required to be present at the meetings. Together, the community researchers, facilitators, and, in some cases, political authorities of the communities, form what can be thought of as the 'co-enquiry research team'.

Community researchers have a vital role in many co-enquiry processes, as they are the main actors involved in the everyday research activities. Facilitators should encourage them to challenge and question given research methods or ideas, to innovate, and to actively adapt methods as they see fit. In some cases, community researchers have all the skills and enthusiasm necessary for the job; in other cases, they require more support and encouragement. Facilitators are therefore also required to update and adapt their facilitation methods to ensure that community researchers (CRs) remain interested in the project. Processes such as culture circles and problematising dialogues, described in detail on p.37-40, are fundamental tools for maintaining open and productive relationships with community research teams, and for them to maintain good working relationships with the rest of the community throughout the process.

### **How can we support the process of community research team election (if we are asked to)?**

The process for electing the community research team should be decided locally, and is usually based on community decision-making practices. However, community members must be informed of what is required from members of the CR team in terms of time, prior experience, curiosity, responsibility, and activities to be carried out. Communities then choose among member candidates that suit these requirements. Simultaneously, if



facilitators know of community members who have manifested an interest in participating in the team, their names can be put forward to the community decision-making body. Once the candidates have confirmed their interest in participating, the community decision-making body organises an election.

It is essential that in their research CRs engage with the plurality of views within the community. This may be complicated if all the CRs belong to the same social grouping in terms of gender, age, status, etc. Ideally, the CR team would therefore be composed of representatives of a diversity of social groups within the community. However, this may not always be possible or even ideal. In some cases, the community will tend to elect young, educated, and, often, male researchers. While facilitators can encourage the election of individuals representing a greater diversity of social groupings by explaining the importance and value of such diversity, they cannot impose this perspective on the community.

On the other hand, as we experienced, in some cases having a greater diversity within the CR group can cause tensions that may hinder the smooth progress of research. In the present example, the CR team was composed of young, educated women and older, not formally educated women; the group's objective was to carry out semi-structured interviews. The group decided to carry out the interviews as dialogues with the whole CR team, and found that the elderly ladies preferred to talk about topics that were not directly relevant to the research, frustrating the desires of the younger women to explore the research topic with interviewees. While such tensions can be worked through with patient dialogue, and eventually even productive as a learning experience for all involved, it is important to reflect on the strengths, opportunities and weaknesses of a highly diverse CR group.

Whatever the composition of the final CR group as elected by community members, it will be essential for the research team to understand and make a point of collecting the views and perspectives of all of the different social groups within the community as they carry out their research.

### **How can we make sure that the skills taught to community researchers are of benefit to the whole community rather than simply these individuals?**

Given that co-enquiry relies on the training of a CR team, it is important to ensure that the skills learned by this team are of benefit to whole community. For this, it is necessary that the research carried out by the CRs aims to benefit the whole community rather than the CR team alone. This is best done by following the guidance in this manual regarding the assessment of research needs and establishment of research questions, both processes that require the input of the whole community through structured dialogues. Community-wide structured dialogue must be maintained throughout the co-enquiry process to ensure that the research carried out progresses for the benefit of the whole community. If these basic principles are respected, the CR team becomes a tool for the community as a whole to engage in a co-enquiry research process.



From another perspective, it is possible for the acquisition of new skills to be democratically shared among members of the community. In one of the communities with whom co-enquiry was carried out for the production of this manual, the entire community benefited from the co-enquiry process because the collective decision was that every member of the community should belong to a specific team.

### **Assessment of research needs and core themes**

The first step in the co-enquiry process proper is the collective assessment of community needs. Based on the problem or issue the community has decided it wishes to work on, facilitators support the community to undertake a process of refining research needs. Specifically, this element of the process seeks to determine the principal community concerns or problems, so as to ensure that the subsequent co-enquiry research process concludes with a practical solution to those problems. This process often requires facilitation, as community members may not have a pre-established consensus regarding their research needs. However, in some cases, the community has already completed a process of dialogue and discussion to establish research needs in which case this stage can be omitted (e.g. in Latin America, the *Plan de Vida* process,<sup>3</sup> which is being carried out in many communities, can help establish research themes and needs).

#### **How can I help the community assess their specific research themes and needs?**

**Firstly, the facilitation team must get acquainted with the context of the community they are working with.** A first step is to read reports, histories, ethnographies and relevant papers. In particular, it is suggested that facilitators spend time talking with elders, authority figures, and other people with experience in the community as well as with other non-community local actors. This will help them understand some of the overarching concerns of the community, allowing them to orient the discussion on research themes. Nevertheless, it is only the community's collective decision-making body that can make final decisions; research themes will have to be fully discussed in this collective space prior to considering them final.

**A second step is to clarify the relationship between facilitation team and community.** Communities have many needs, many of which will not respond to the objectives of the project that is being launched. It is therefore important to clarify the role of the facilitation team prior to beginning the research process. This can take place through a community-wide dialogue that examines the following topics, amongst others:

1. How did the relationship between the community and the facilitation begin? Who called upon who and why? What are the interests of both parties? Although facilitators, community authorities and some community members will know the answers to these questions, it is important to define these answers collectively and to take note of the answers. This ensures that everyone agrees on the foundations of the relationship between community and facilitation team. Ideally, there would be written accords or minutes upon which to base the answers to these questions; if

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<sup>3</sup> There are many references to *Planes de Vida* available on the internet (e.g. <http://www.territorioindigenaygobernanza.com/planesdevida.html>)



there are not, more time may be necessary to fully explain to all community members the origins of the relationship.

2. The roles, responsibilities and limitations of the facilitation team must be fully transparent. It is important that the facilitation team (i) be clear about the nature of the outside institutions to which the team belongs; (ii) share the full project budget – including budget lines that are dedicated to salaries and institutional costs for the facilitation team; and (iii) inform the community of the facilitation team's experience, knowledge and personal commitment.
3. The community must also inform the facilitation team of its own limitations, including of time, energy, resources, etc.
4. It is essential to establish, at the outset, the form in which decisions will be made between the community and the facilitation team, and to clarify who has the final say in how the research is carried out, what information is published, etc. Although it is understood that this is a responsibility held by the community it is essential that all research participants agree to this in a formal community setting and have it in writing.

**Culture circles: creating space for a dialogue of knowledges.** Based on the fact that co-enquiry requires a process of technical training in research methodologies and that facilitators are generally responsible for propelling the co-enquiry process through funding, the relationship between the research facilitator and the community researcher often appears like the relationship between teacher and pupil. It is important that this asymmetric relationship be recognised, critically analysed and worked through, and this is done by creating a recurrent space for dialogue between the three entities involved in co-enquiry: the facilitation team, the community, and the community research team.

Based on the work of Brazilian radical pedagogue Paulo Freire (1975, 2007), the authors use the term 'culture circle' to name this space for dialogue. A culture circle is a space that ensures a continuous attention to participants' readings of reality, to the assumptions that underscore these readings, and to contradictions in the readings. In other words, it is a space that foments a continuous search to expand the group's human capacities to investigate, create, and solve problems. In the space of a culture circle, members of the group sit together in a circle and dialogue freely: both words and silences are permitted, and both must be engaged with critically. Culture circles can also be carried out through walking or hiking dialogues that conclude with a sit-down circle.

Culture circles are the space within which co-enquiry takes place. It is different to a workshop or a class where all activities are organised with the aim of enabling the teacher to teach the student. Culture circles are spaces where everyone is teacher and everyone is student: everyone has wisdom, knowledge, experience and abilities to share. It is the space for mutual learning *par excellence*. The dialogic and mutual learning spirit of the culture circle should be held throughout the co-enquiry process, even when more conventionally styled workshops are required for training purposes.



Although the culture circle is a proposal that arises from the facilitation team, the community may also have its own systems for profound collective reflection, and these should be integrated into the co-enquiry process as much as possible. Sometimes community members already have experiences with Freirean culture circles, in which case the process can be built using their knowledge and perspectives.

**The themes to be discussed collectively must be proposed based on a reading of current community realities.** Using the culture circles method, the following are some steps that can help towards defining the research themes:

1. The first decision to be made is the scale of the research. Maps can be used to help visualise the issues prior to decision-making, although geography will not be the only scale involved in the process: cultural and political scales will also be envisaged. The scale chosen – whether it is community, neighbourhood, region, etc. – will depend on the nature of the community research team, the limitations of the facilitation team, the interests of the community and finances.
2. Once the scale of the research has been chosen, it is important to remind participants of the nature of the relationship between the community and the facilitation team. In particular, the specific, shared theme that brought these two entities together, what experience the facilitation team has to offer, how the knowledge and experience of community research team and facilitation team can fruitfully complement each other, etc.
3. Based on this reminder, a group brainstorm for making a comprehensive list of community problems or issues is held. For this step it is essential that all members of the community participate, including women, the elderly, youth, and children. Based on the results of the brainstorm, connections are made between the problems on the list and the common theme shared by the facilitation team and the community. Separately, the group makes a list of all of the problems that engage the common theme and that operate at the chosen research scale. It is important that the problems are noted down, on a board or in a notebook, so that the group can return to them when necessary.
4. The problems that engage with a common theme at the research scale chosen can be critically appraised through a ‘problematizing dialogue’<sup>4</sup> (see below) so as to (i) locate them in the broader context of the community, (ii) relate them to other spheres and scales, and (iii) reflect on their probable causes and how they are affecting the community economically, politically, culturally, spiritually and environmentally. It is important that participants are well prepared to discuss a specific topic during this process as this will help focus their interventions. The

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<sup>4</sup> The official English translation of the Spanish verb *problematizar* is ‘to problematise’. However, the authors feel that this translation is awkward and jargon-like, so they sought a different translation. The concept of *problematizar* means to critically analyse, challenge, and question; in effect it is based on Freire’s (2007) *problem-posing methodology* for education. Thus the concept of *diálogo problematizador* or ‘problematizing dialogue’ means to engage in a discussion that elicits critical appraisal of an issue, whereby problems are posed – rather than solved – by participants and critically engaged with in dialogue.



facilitation team must also be well prepared so as to avoid improvisation; they must have the cognitive tools necessary to understand what is at the core of the issue/problem through the questions, answers and points made during the dialogue.

5. Based on this problematising dialogue, a final series of problems are chosen for the co-enquiry research to address.
6. In order to make this choice, it may be useful to reflect on what the community feel would be an ideal result once the problem is resolved. The ideal result is also critically appraised using the tools of the problematising dialogue.
7. It is important to emphasise that this is an exercise of imagination to help motivate and generate action, and that community commitment, engagement and work are required to work towards the solution.

### **Problematising dialogue**

The problematising dialogue process – which is also based on Freire (1975, 2007) and an integral element of the culture circle process – calls into question all of the assumptions that research participants (community members, community researchers and facilitators) have regarding the theme/problem under discussion, including knowledge and information available from academic sources or community authorities. The specialist knowledge of the facilitation team must also be put through this process of doubt. The problematising dialogue examines the relationships between the theme/problem and the different spheres of reality – economic, political (what can be done), cultural, spiritual, and environmental – in the community. It reveals the relationships between the theme/problem and the different actors, times and scales that are directly or indirectly involved in it.

Some of the basic questions to launch the problematising dialogue on the theme/problem are: Why are we addressing it? For what? How? For whom? Other questions that help challenge and critically appraise the theme are:

- When did the problem start? How did it start? How is the problem maintained (how does it continue)?
- Where did it start? Does it take place at another scale: household, neighbourhood, town, region, state, county, continent, planet?
- Why does the problem happen? What or who causes it? What are the economic, political, cultural, spiritual or environmental causes?
- What are the economic, political, cultural, spiritual and environmental consequences?
- Who participates in the problem? Who or what suffers its consequences? Who are what maintains it? Who are what benefits from it?
- How are we dealing with the problem? Are there people who have more experience in dealing with these problems?

The outcome of the problematising dialogue is a group of participants and community members who have carried out an in-depth and critical reflection of the themes they wish



to tackle through co-enquiry research. They have a solid and shared understanding of the important parameters and perspectives on the problem, and are able to engage in the process of research with a wide analytical toolbox. The process of the problematising dialogue can be used throughout the research cycle to tackle a diversity of topics that require in-depth reflection (see the Community and Co-enquiry Research Protocol on socio-environmental change in Chapter V for another context in which the problematising dialogue is used).

### **Development of research questions**

For each specific research theme, the co-enquiry team will define a set of guiding research questions. In the field experience that informs this manual, communities as a whole defined the research questions, as all members wished to participate in this foundational process. The community research team then refined them for use in the subsequent research phase – the development of methodologies. If the research theme has emerged from a community-based problematising dialogue process as outlined above, it is suggested that the elaboration of the research questions be carried out in tandem, during the research theme stage of the cycle. However, if the research themes are already in place or pre-established by the community, the elaboration of research questions can be based directly on these.

Co-enquiry research questions, like conventional research questions, must be clear, focused on one topic at a time, non-leading and manageable. Within a co-enquiry framework they must also be translatable to the local language, which means that internal consistency and simplicity are essential. In line with the requirements of action research, they must also be relevant to the resolution of a problem and yield answers that are actionable. Time investment in dialogue processes (as above) and in participatory translation of concepts and research questions are key to the success of this element of the co-enquiry research cycle.

Language is important tool to reach a common understanding, between facilitators and community researchers, of the various elements and terms required to carry out a successful research process. Time should be dedicated – both during the research question development phase and throughout the rest of the project – to developing and refining a common understanding of key terms for particular processes, objects, tools, approaches, environmental elements, concepts, etc. At this stage of the research cycle, generating a common understanding of key terms will help to define clear and mutually intelligible research questions.

### **What props can we use to help us collaboratively develop co-enquiry research questions?**

In the context of COMBIOSERVE co-enquiry research in the Chinantla surrounding natural resources and land use, we adapted a process based on mapping of conflicts and opportunities developed by consortium partners INECOL and UEFS, combined with a problematising dialogue and knowledge exchange. By way of example, the following



describes the practical steps taken to develop research questions surrounding natural resources in the Chinantla:

- a) Creating a basic map of natural resources, their uses, opportunities and conflicts

The research team created an initial general mind map of natural resources, their uses, opportunities and conflicts surrounding them within the community territory. Community researchers drew a map of their territory on white flipchart paper, including basic geographical elements such as community boundaries, main water bodies, mountains and hills, the urban areas, main roads and landscape units. The group then came up with a common definition of key terms: territory, territorial use, landscape, landscape unit, land use change, conflict and opportunity.

- b) Mapping conflicts and opportunities

Using the map as the main source of information, the group discussed and wrote down:

- Natural resources found in each landscape unit
- General uses of those resources
- Conflicts related to those resources
- Opportunities related to those resources

Two map layers were using 2 sheets of tracing paper. Resources and their uses are identified on the first layer; conflicts and opportunities on the second. When identifying conflicts and opportunities, special attention was given to external and internal initiatives and projects that are present in, or relate to, each landscape unit. On each sheet, marks, labels, signs and icons can be drawn to identify the different elements.

- c) Systematising the results of the mapping exercise in a matrix

Upon completion of the map, the table below was drawn up on a separate white flipchart page. For each landscape unit, the information about resources, uses, conflicts and opportunities will be registered.

**Table 1: Basic matrix of natural resources, their uses, conflicts and opportunities in the Chinantla context**

LANDSCAPE UNIT	Resources	Uses	Conflicts/opportunities
Forest	Wood	House and furniture building	Illegal logging Payments for Environmental Services
	Firewood	Cooking and heating	Ensuring an adequate supply of firewood for the community
	Animals	Food	Formal management units Lack of information about populations
Acahual (secondary forest)	Animals	Food Game	Lack of information about populations Hunting restrictions



Coffee plantation	Coffee	Sale Local consumption	Low prices
	Fruits	Food	Alternative to junk food
Agricultural zone	Soils	Milpa cultivation	<sup>5</sup> Lack of information on how to improve productivity

#### (iv) Defining research themes and questions

Using the above table as a source of systematic information, the three steps were followed to help the research team choose locally relevant and interesting themes for a co-enquiry research process:

- 1. Problematising dialogue about the synthesis table.** This stage of the process aims at questioning the process by which the matrix was developed and deepening participants' understanding of its contents. The dialogue may result in some final changes to the content or structure of the table; more importantly it will result in the group having a greater understanding of the importance of the process they are engaged in and of developing precise research questions.
- 2. Identification of a list of research themes that the team wishes to address.** Using images illustrating the themes written up in the table – in this case hunting, food, community control, care for the territory, tradition, etc. – the facilitators launched a second group dialogue aimed at pinpointing key themes for community research. This dialogue must be given ample time and cannot be rushed; in this way participants feel they can speak freely, clarify and engage in fruitful discussion when opinions diverge, and come to an optimum consensus.
- 3. Prioritizing the research themes;** this can be done simply by voting on the different themes.
- 4. Defining research questions.** This section constitutes the fine-tuning of the broad research questions or themes. Following the thematic prioritization exercise carried out, the first three most important themes were selected. For each theme the facilitator guided the identification of a series of very specific research questions. The group began discussing they kind of information required to answer those questions, the feasibility to address them, the need of specialists, etc. Given that the resulting research questions will guide the entire co-enquiry process, it is important that this stage in the process is not rushed and that all members of the team are given the time to reflect and participate in the dialogue. Sufficient time and energy must be devoted to elaborating the dialogue and space must be given for participants to air constructive criticism and improve the process.

<sup>5</sup> The milpa is the traditional multi-cropping system used in Mesoamerica, the basic crops of which are corn, beans and squash (although there are also many others, which vary according to region, ethnicity, etc.). A swidden fallow system is used for milpa cultivation. The term recurs often throughout the deliverable.



## Developing co-enquiry methodologies

Once the research questions have been established, the co-enquiry team can decide what methodological approach to take, and based upon this, the team identifies specific methods for data collection. Ideally, and usually after many years of practice and reflection, co-enquiry encourages community researchers to develop *sui generis* research methods or to identify traditional methods that help to answer their research questions. However, in the long-term field experience upon which this manual is based, conventional research methods are most often used as a basis for the development of community-based approaches and adaptations. Effectively, GDF's attempts at encouraging Chinantec community researchers to develop *sui generis* methods – whether to examine social or natural phenomena – have not yet yielded methodological innovations. Instead community researchers prefer to be taught conventional methods that they then question, challenge, test and adapt to their own realities, abilities and research questions.

The authors hypothesise that this may be because (1) the research questions communities are currently asking engage with external themes and interventions that do not belong to known community processes and therefore cannot be answered using their own approaches to investigation; (2) the conventional method is highly effective and more easily applied than devising *sui generis* approaches; (3) by fully knowing (and then challenging and adapting) conventional research methodologies, community researchers are empowering themselves to take control of the tools so often applied by outside actors; (4) the creation of wholly new methods require significant time, energy and effort that are seldom available to community researchers given their other subsistence activities, cultural patterns, or, sometimes, the unfortunately entrenched notion that outsiders 'know better'; and, of course, (5) lack of ability within the facilitation team to guide a community research team in the process of innovating methodologically.

It is also possible that in communities that have received less outside intervention than those in the Chinantla, there is a greater possibility of fomenting local knowledge-based methodological innovations among community researchers. This idea would require further research and substantiation.

Whether the community research team is willing to work on the development of *sui generis* methodologies, or wishes to learn how to handle conventional research methodologies, local knowledge and ways of knowing are privileged. If the conventional methodological approach provides a useful frame upon which to base the development of specific methods, these can still be integrated with local knowledge and understandings of the world. Please see the specific CRPs for more details on the development of methods that integrate local knowledge with scientific structures.

Building the methodological framework together is an essential and time-consuming stage of the co-enquiry process. Although each social situation is unique (in terms of the level of knowledge of community researchers, type of research questions defined, time available, etc.), it is likely that the process by which methodologies are developed is a combination of: (i) further exploration, led by the facilitator, of the action research cycle



(see above), as the graphics used helps community researchers to visualise how the methods chosen depend on the research objectives and questions, and (ii) facilitated dialogue, during which community researchers are encouraged to raise questions and to reflect on how they answer questions in their daily life.

### **How can we integrate local ways of knowing and conventional methodologies to create a solid co-enquiry methodological framework?**

Outsiders may not easily grasp the content and form of indigenous or local knowledge unless they have the opportunity to spend long periods of time getting to know and experiencing life in the community. Moreover, while many local people understand the importance of their knowledge and of knowledge transmission, increasing encroachments from outside ideas of progress, often accompanied by discourses of disdain for local expertise by outside actors (including government agents, NGO staff, nearby townspeople, etc.) and sometimes even other community members, soften results in local knowledge either being scorned or guarded. Therefore, a fundamental tool to help outsiders understand how local knowledge operates, which forms the basis for a dialogue between Western knowledge and indigenous knowledge, is participant observation and ethnographic research (see Comment box, p.33)

On the other hand, although scientific methods appear relatively standard in the literature, in practice all aspects of scientific research – including how to resolve problems of observation, description, quantification, analysis and communication – are under constant revision. Scientific theories and methods are in a constant state of evolution, including as a result of dramatic paradigm shifts. It is important that community research teams are made fully aware of the changeable nature of scientific methods, techniques, hypotheses, and theories: it is empowering for them to know that scientific approaches do not constitute fixed truths and that we all follow certain scientific guidelines, while also creating new guidelines to help humans to know the universe and to act appropriately when faced with problems. It is suggested that a culture circle on the topic of Science be carried out with the community research team or the community as a whole if they wish.

Dialogue is the primary guide for integrating methodologies; and this dialogue includes the notion of problem-posing critical analysis discussed above. In other words, a first step in the dialogue is to call into question assumptions – both of the community research team and the facilitation team – regarding research themes. This must be done with full respect for the empirical and specialised knowledge of members of both teams; it is understood that all perspectives are necessary to the elaboration of the co-enquiry process. It is also important to elucidate, at the outset of the dialogue process, what it is that members of the community know about the research theme. Sometimes community experts can be invited to provide more in-depth knowledge on the topic; they can be invited to the thematic problematising dialogues, or, should they not be able to assist in these, the results can be discussed with them afterwards.



Everyone, in each research team, knows a great deal, something or nothing depending on the topic under enquiry and their experience. Both the community research team and the facilitation team must be explicit and self-reflexive about their abilities, while avoiding false modesty or exaggeration. A game (for points) of questions and answers on specialised topics that relate to the research theme can help render this truth more explicit (see Freire 1977). The facilitation team asks >10 questions on topics of their expertise, and the community research team asks an equivalent number that concern their specialty. The answers of each team will show that the community research team are experts in some aspects of the overall research problem, while the facilitation team are experts in others.

Another means to support the process of integration between Western forms of knowledge and local knowledge is through *ethnomethodology*. The exercise in ethnoclassification (see the CRPs on plant monitoring and fauna monitoring in Chapter V) is a good example. Using images of plants or wild animals, facilitators ask the community research team to group the images according to common characteristics. Facilitators then demonstrate how Western science categorises the images. This is the first step in understanding how community members know, and how the local language categorises, the world; it also provides a simple and visual comparison of the two epistemologies. Based on the similarities and differences between the two epistemologies, the methods can be designed or adapted in such a way as to render them cognitively available to both teams.

### **Methods training, assessment and adaptation to local conditions**

If the approach chosen by community researchers is based on conventional research methods, this stage of the research cycle requires the research team to begin a process of training. The training process begins with the facilitator reflecting on how to simplify the method without losing consistency, validity and reliability and how to communicate the method clearly; it follows with the research group organising a training workshop. During training workshops, priority is given to questioning the method, reflecting on its applicability in the local social and environmental context, and discussing possible local adaptations. These workshops must also make time for field-based methods testing as it is during these test practices that some of the key adaptations will be integrated into the method. For further information on how to train community researchers, and adapt methods to local conditions, please see the separate CRPs in Chapter V.

The data resulting from field-based practices must be collectively examined to ensure that it is useful and appropriate. If it does not quite achieve expectations, the methods must be reviewed, amended, and implemented again. In other words, this stage of the co-enquiry research cycle requires patience, endurance, innovative thinking, and constant encouragement. It can take months for a community research team to reach the stage at which they are fully satisfied with, and in control of, the methods they are implementing and the results obtained. Once the community research team feels in control of the adapted methods, they can be tasked with carrying out the field research. The facilitator will be available to answer questions and help resolve problems in the field.



### **Comment: Continued engagement**

Given that the methods adaptation requires considerable input by the facilitator, this is an appropriate stage in the research to remind oneself of the importance of continued engagement (see also p.23-4). Community researchers need continued support as they implement the co-enquiry methods: follow-up workshops and informal field visits are essential components of that support. In the field experience informing this manual, monthly field visits of between 4-7 days are a minimum requirement for community researchers to feel adequately supported.

Often the support required is of a technical or methodological nature. However, facilitators should also be prepared to engage in emotional, social or political issues. For example, in the Chinantla, the facilitation team was asked to devise a process for supporting a community research team whose motivation was flagging because other members of the community had begun to question the research process. The support devised was based on a wide variety of sources, including Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), Baruch Spinoza's *The Ethics* (1677), Hui Neng's Platform Sutra which discusses detachment (6th – 18th century), Genrich Altshusser's Theory for Inventive Problem-Solving (TRIZ), Michael Cohen's concept of Ecopsychology, and methods of co-counselling which involve mutual reflection and reaction among participants. Please see the CRP on Innovative approaches in Chapter V, and Chapter VI on co-enquiry monitoring and evaluation for further information.

### **Analysis and results write-up**

The process for analysing data will depend on the methodology used (please see the individual CRPs for methods-specific data organisation and analysis tools). The priority at this stage is that the community research team has full ownership of the analysis, which requires them to fully understand it. Given that some of the data formats that result from the methods used may be unusual for the community researchers (e.g. notebooks of long-hand interview answers), processes for data analysis must be kept as simple as possible. A few rules of thumb for developing simple and effective data analysis processes that are understandable are to focus them on:

- (1) Finding solutions to the problems originally described during research needs stage of the cycle – i.e. a process of analysis that juxtaposes the data with the original research themes/questions is helpful;
- (2) Encouraging autonomy in analysis among the community research team – i.e. a process that makes very clear relationships between the research themes, questions, methods, data, and resulting analysis is key;
- (3) Targeting the analysis process to the audience for which the research is being carried out. In a co-enquiry context, the community decides who the research audience is. It is likely to be the community itself, but it may also include outside actors whom the community wish to communicate with.

For facilitators who are used to carrying out conventional research, it may be difficult to relinquish cherished systems for analysis, particularly those that require computer skills. Nevertheless, the process of simplifying and decoding procedures for data analysis can be an interesting and enlightening personal challenge for researchers.



Given that co-enquiry is a continuous and iterative process, the results of data analysis can feed into a new set of research questions, which require new methods to be developed, and so on. The process of analysis can therefore launch new research ideas and projects among the community and research team.

### **How can the results of a co-enquiry process written up in such a way as to respond to both community and academic needs?**

This is one of the greatest challenges of co-enquiry. It is most important that research objectives, expected results as well as *how these results will be written up and shared* be very clear to all participants at the outset so as to avoid conflicts arising at the write-up stage. It is suggested that the co-enquiry team envisage a number of different formats in order to satisfy the needs of all parties:

- Academics often require papers to justify their funding and continued recognition as academics. Individual community researchers or the community research team as a whole must be invited to be co-authors on these papers, pending an in-depth analysis of the implications of this co-authorship for all parties.
- Communities often need official documents containing the results of their research to present to government agencies and civil society institutions. The facilitation team is required to help communities elaborate those documents.
- Communities also need popular/easy-to-read documents to help with their internal dialogue processes; these documents will need to show the important results of the research and contain the questions that remain unresolved.
- Communities often need to strengthen their formal education systems. Another outcome of co-enquiry can be the preparation of instruments for schools, which may include unresolved and open questions for youth groups to seek to resolve.

### **Community validation**

Once the research results have been written up in a format that is satisfactory to the community researchers, it is important that the entire community validate these results. Ideally, CRs would lead the process of validation with support from the facilitation team. In the CRP for Basic Social Science research methods in Chapter V (p.183-227), we provide a protocol for training community researchers in workshop leadership and organisation, for the precise purpose of validating research results. If this is not possible, the facilitation team should lead the community validation workshop.

This workshop should include a presentation reminding participants of the original research questions, as well as the associated methods and processes for data analysis used by the research team. Following this, the community researchers present the final results and priority is given to a full and participatory discussion of these results.

### **What do we do if the results do not satisfy the community at large?**



Communities and the institutions to which the facilitation team belong should continuously evaluate the process of co-enquiry, both separately and together (see Chapter VI). This constant evaluation must be carried out according to schedules established in the project: it is suggested that every 2 or 3 months, research participants and community members meet officially (in a community assembly for example) to carry out an evaluation dialogue in order to resolve contradictions, doubts, misunderstandings, gaps in the information, etc. All community members should be invited to participate in these evaluations and given the space to air their concerns or questions, and to confirm or challenge the co-enquiry process.

If, at the end of the process of co-enquiry, and despite this constant monitoring and evaluation, it appears that the results do not satisfy the community at large or do not help to answer their fundamental questions, a process of sincere self-reflection is required. Did the community research team and facilitation team go through the due process for eliciting the overarching research theme? Were the research questions appropriately targeted for resolving the theme/problem decided upon by the community? Did the co-enquiry research team promise too much? Where did the misunderstandings arise? How could they have been avoided? The lessons learned from this self-reflection process will be invaluable to all concerned.

### **Using the results for community decision-making**

Often the results of co-enquiry research can be very useful to help the community at large make informed decisions and resolve issues regarding internal organisation, natural resource management, and relationships with outside entities amongst others. Although the facilitation team should remain at the margins of the internal process through which results are rendered useful, it may be called upon to support a reflection process within the community. The techniques of the ‘problematizing dialogue’ discussed below, p. 229-230) are recommended for this purpose. (See Chapter VII for a discussion of co-enquiry dissemination of results).