

Mini Series: The participatory approach in regional development (1)

Part 1: PCM Method

These days the term "Project Cycle Management" (PCM) has become very popular in the field of development assistance. For JICA it has also become a fairly common practice in project planning in a wide field of activities, whether participatory (community-based) development planning or rural development, to use the PCM as the research method, based on which a Project Design Matrix (PDM) will be made.

PCM was developed based on a method of planning technical assistance projects, which was further elaborated to be applicable to various other fields of development aid and to ease the evaluation process after completion of the project. Literally, PCM is used to Manage the cycle, i.e. planning, implementation and evaluation of development aid projects with the help of PDM, and it consists of the two components of Participatory Planning (PP) and Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E). PP in turn consists of the analytical stage such as "stakeholder analysis", "problem analysis", "objective analysis" and "project selection", and the planning stage, which involves the formation of a PDM and a work plan. The analytical work is to be carried out step by step before a PDM and a work plan are formed with clear objectives and specific actions to be finally taken.

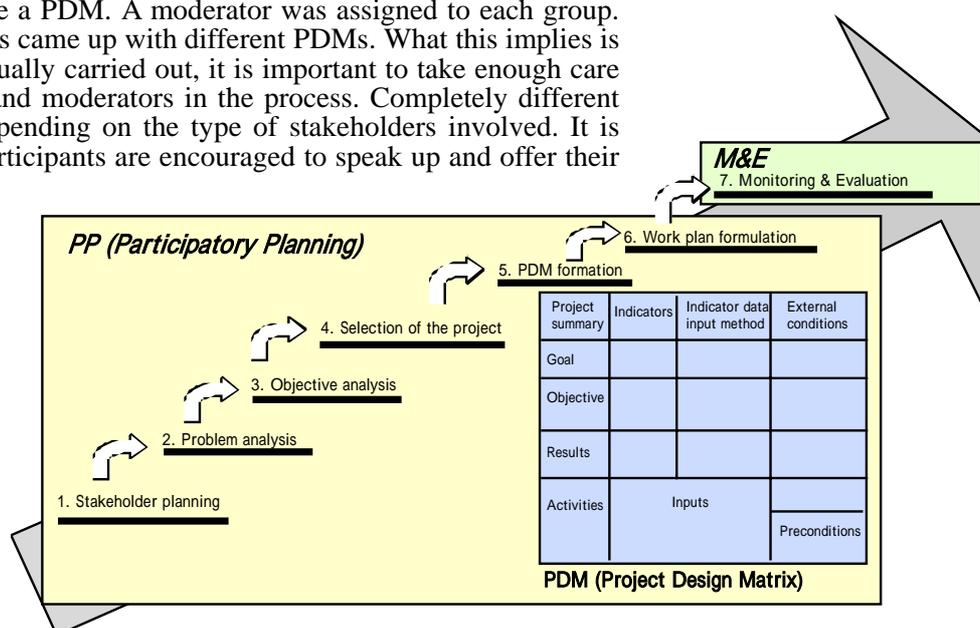
(See the figure below)

The PCM method is characterized by three major features:

- 1) Step-by-step process: The PCM goes through seven stages starting from the "stakeholder analysis" phase and ending with "monitoring & evaluation". A glance at the PDM will reveal the clear outline of the entire project.
- 2) Visual analysis and logical understanding: Participants are asked to write down their opinions about the project on a piece of paper and to put it up on a board. This visualization of various issues allows the analysis of the entire project. Also, at each stage, an analytical exercise will be done to look at "cause and results" and the "means and objectives" of various issues, which enables a logical understanding of the entire project.
- 3) Participatory process: Mutual understanding and problem-solving is given importance by allowing the stakeholders concerned to participate in a workshop-style gathering and discuss various problems. The sense of participation is also accentuated by allowing people to participate in the planning process of the project as its stakeholders.

Recently we joined in a training workshop on PCM planning and designing, organized by the Foundation for Advanced Studies on International Development (FASID). The PCM's obvious advantages are that with these method the project's objectives, methods, process and boundaries etc. can be shown clearly. Furthermore PCM makes it easier to select appropriate projects out of a number of rough plans. Moreover, at this training session we also realized not only its usefulness in problem solving with the step-by-step approach in the PP process, but also its effectiveness in basic project planning and designing. At the exercise session of this workshop the participants were divided into two groups and given the same theme to analyze and for which to develop a PDM. A moderator was assigned to each group.

As a result, the two groups came up with different PDMs. What this implies is that when the PCM is actually carried out, it is important to take enough care in selecting participants and moderators in the process. Completely different PDMs can be formed depending on the type of stakeholders involved. It is also important that the participants are encouraged to speak up and offer their honest opinions at discussion sessions. Incidentally, this FASID PCM training course is complemented, following the above session on "PCM planning and designing", by "monitoring & evaluation" and "moderator training" sessions.



Composition of the PCM method