The *Yalamaya* Protocol for Effective Research Practice

Enhancing Livelihoods and Food Security from Agroforestry and Community Forestry in Nepal

Prepared by the Project Team in the Research Methodology Workshop

February 2014

Kathmandu, Nepal

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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. This protocol is called "Yalamaya Protocol for the conduct of ethical and professional research practice within ACIAR project" or in short *"The Yalamaya Protocol"*. 'The Project' in this Protocol denotes "Enhancing Livelihood and Food Security from Agroforestry and Community Forestry in Nepal" supported by ACIAR.

2. This protocol emphasizes the need to promote the respectful and responsible research relationships among the researchers and between the researchers, the participating communities and other stakeholders.

3. It recognizes a number of practical, ethical and coordination related issues on conducting field research in the Project. The Research Methodology Workshop held on January 17-18, 2015 at Yalamaya Kendra in Kathmandu has developed this protocol for the conduct of professional, ethical, and high quality research practice. Moreover, the protocol is also stimulated by the motivation of the Project Team to develop and implement commonly agreed norms by translating latest thinking on ethical and high quality research practice in the field of social and natural sciences.

4. This protocol is based on the reflections of, and discussions among, the Project researchers over the past nine months of project experience (April 2013-January 2014), and also draws on the wider principles of ethical and professional research practice. It aims to address many of the issues and opportunities identified – such as those related to coordination among various research functions, collaboration and communication, authorship and recognition, fieldwork planning, data collection, analysis and reporting.

5. This protocol provides guidance for Project team to ensure that their work achieves high level of integrity, professionalism, ethics and effective coordination among the teams, while also being less abstractive to the communities with the study is conducted.

6. The scope of Protocol may not be limited to issues / aspects mentioned below and is open for elaboration and further development as the Project team gains more experience and reflection in the project implementation.

7. The Protocol, once agreed by all, will be used as the binding framework, and if there are any issues about implementing this, the Project leadership team will resolve them and improve the Protocol in the biannual Action Research Meeting.

8. Once approved by the Project team, the Protocol becomes an official, guiding principle for research activities for all the members of the Project. Every individual associated with the project is obliged to abide by this throughout the project duration, subject to reasonable and justifiable discrepancies in practice. Failure to abide by these principles may result in disciplinary warnings or penalties as recommended by a relevant investigation panel.

9. Definitions and abbreviations:

    a. Theme Leader = TL
    b. National Leader = NL
    c. Field Coordinator = FC
    d. Community Forest User Groups = CFUG
    e. District Forest Office = DFO
    f. Project team – denotes all members of the project including researchers based in Nepal, Australia and Indonesia.

SECTION TWO: PROTOCOL FOR RESEARCH PRACTICE

1. ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITIES DURING ACTION RESEARCH, FIELD VISITS AND OTHER TYPE OF INTERACTIONS RELATED TO THE PROJECT

1. All field activities at the local level will conducted in a transparent and fair manner, with minimum possible obtrusive effects at the community level. Every Theme Coordinator (TC) should carefully plan and take a decision on the field visit, in consultation with respective members of the research theme, on who should go to the communities for field research in specific field visit plan, how many researchers go at a specific time and how frequently.

2. Every visit and fieldwork should have specific plan, agenda and objectives which should be clearly communicated to the participating communities at the beginning or even before the visit where possible. There should be clear briefing of the purpose of every visit to the community so they know what is being discussed, why the project staff members are doing this and what are they expected to do.

3. There should be proper and timely information to the communities and respective community leaders about the upcoming visits, interactions, discussions or any activities to be conducted at the community level so they can plan their time accordingly.

4. Any message to the community should be clear, concise and in Nepali language so that community members properly understand the intention and activities of the ongoing research activities and processes.

5. To avoid raising unrealistic expectations from the research team, the researchers should not commit any developmental or other support or assurance to the communities.

6. To minimize obtrusive effects on the local community and also to ensure the quality of data, in normal circumstances, the fieldwork team should not exceed 5 persons. If the size is larger than this, smaller sub-teams (of not over 5 persons) should be formed immediately after the reaching the community for conducting interviews with the people or for observation of the forest, farms and households.

7. Research members wishing to visit the field should aim to fit their schedule with the time availability of the community members with whom the research team wants to interact. If a researcher is not sure of the community seasonal calendars, FC should be consulted to find out the details at the time of fieldwork planning.

8. Research teams should consider and avoid the peak seasons of the farming activities so that respondents will not be disturbed by the research activities. A prior agreement can be made with community leaders / farmers if there is a need to observe activities and interact with the farmers during their busy seasons, as visits during this season may be a necessity for particular research objectives, such as setting of field trials or undertaking ethnographic research.

9. A research team planning to visit a particular field site should inform the Field Coordinator (FC) about their planned visits normally at least 7 days prior to the date of field visit, explaining the purpose, duration and locations of the field visits. The FC should advise the researchers any issues to be considered while planning the field research activity within 3 days of receiving the information about the field visit plan.

10. Any participants for action research (e.g. field trials, leasehold farming piloting within CF etc) should be selected in a participatory manner – with consent from concerned farmers and CFUGs where relevant, and also with informed consent of the individual respondents or households.

11. At the time of the fieldwork and interviews, researchers should actively and attentively listen to participants, take notes accurately and avoid making recommendations or advocating particular viewpoints of their own. They must acknowledge respondent's time and contributions at the end of the interactions. Researchers should not make any promises for development action or any other support which they cannot deliver.

12. Researchers should be sensible to recognise the diversity among community members in terms of gender, ethnicity, caste, political ideology and economic class, and make an active effort for the inclusion of the marginalised community groups in every research activities, by properly engaging diverse group members and also by trying to win the confidence of local elites and powerful groups.

2. Communicating with government and other stakeholders

1. National Leader (NL) should ensure that Project researchers are consistent and coherent in explaining the plan, purpose, scope, strategy, and outputs of the project to the various stakeholders and collaborators.

2. Attempts should be made to engage the government and other stakeholders at all levels in all research events/process which help in collaboration and partnerships

3. All research members should engage and communicate with the government partners such as DFO while planning and implementing field research activities. FC should communicate their progress regularly to the key district level government agencies related to the research - District Forest Offices, District Development Committees and District Agricultural and Livestock offices. FC should immediately report to the national leader of any incidences of mis-communication with local level government staff concerning the matters related to the project.

4. The three TLs will play the lead role to maintain necessary communication with the national level government agencies related to their research themes.

5. NL will ensure that the project progress is communicated adequately and clearly with the national level Government agencies, mainly the Department of Forest and the Department of Agriculture.

6. Where possible, the project should also aim for building capacity and address the concerns of the collaborating stakeholders.

7. Government staff and other stakeholder representatives should be invited to contribute to any research outputs if they are willing to do so.

8. Members of collaborating agencies should also be recognized for their contributions of data, insights and evidence. Acknowledgement of their contribution should be made properly in any form of publication. Different ways in which such contributions can be acknowledged in the research publications or reports include:

    a) Writing a specific acknowledgement section at the end of the report.

b) Identify and recognize the contributions of various actors in the context and methodology of the report.
c) Write a footnote in the first page of the report – identifying names and organizations and acknowledging their contributions.

3. Write up, publication, authorship

1. Authorship and recognition of contributions to the research outputs are determined and managed as per the following provisions:
    a. An author is someone who makes substantive intellectual contribution to the publication.
    b. Free authorship or honorary authorship shall not be entertained.
    c. The ideal number of authors in one publication shall be five or less. However, this should not limit the inclusion of individuals who qualify for the authorship mentioned above.
    d. The lead author is one who takes the overall leadership of the publication, prepares the first draft and shall manage to identify and limit the number of authors needed for the publication.
    e. The lead author (first author usually) shall assess the contribution of the co-authors and include their/his/her name as author(s) in the publication
    f. The lead author (usually the first author) is usually the one who leads the idea, and outline the publication and writes the first draft. The lead author is also responsible to manage (consolidate the contributions of co-authors, integrate and submit) the publication.
    g. The lead author shall decide on the order of the co-authors based on their contribution. He/she (lead) will be responsible to resolve any issue (conflicting) among the co-authors regarding the order of the authorship.
    h. If a large group is involved in a publication, the lead author may invite 2-3 co-authors as the core writing team, to be listed immediately after the lead author. All other co-authors will make contributions as asked by the core writing team and the order of authorship will be as per the assessment of the lead author who will make a judgment in consultation with the core writing team.
    i. All the individuals who do not meet the criteria for authorship, but have contributed to the work in some way or the other, shall be listed in the acknowledgement section of the publication. The individuals who deserve to be acknowledged are those who comment on the conceptual framework of the publication; provide technical support like statistics, formatting/designing, drawing charts/figures etc; assist in typing/writing the text; data collection and compilation of literature; financial and material support.
    j. The lead author shall be responsible to include the names of the individual(s)/institution(s) in the acknowledgement section for the above task and make sure to mention the nature of contribution in the publication.
2. Correspondence between the writing team and the publisher will be handled as per the following provisions:

    a. The lead author is usually the corresponding author of the publication.
    b. The lead author can also delegate the responsibility of correspondence to one of the co-authors. In case the correspondence of the publication is delegated to one of the co-authors, the lead author shall make it transparent among all the authors of the publication.
    c. The corresponding author shall be responsible to communicate the comments/feedback or any information pertaining to the publication with rest of the authors.
    d. The corresponding author shall take the consent of the authors before taking any decision on sharing the manuscript under review to anyone outside of the project research group.
3. Ethical standards on authorship and recognition will ensured through the following arrangements:
    a. The lead author shall be responsible for the ethical considerations – such as related to avoiding plagiarism, ensuring acknowledgement, and other aspects.
    b. If the order of the authorship agreed initially needs to be changed, that shall happen in consent with all the authors, including those whose name in the authorship is being altered.
    c. Exclusion of a name from authorship during the last minute of submission will be considered unethical. In case of a need to exclude a name of author not meeting the criteria of authorship, the decision must always be made through prior and informed consent of the persons involved, and with clear explanation of the reasons for the exclusion.
    d. Any co-authors or excluded co-authors unhappy with the decisions of the lead author can appeal to the project leadership explaining the reasons for dissatisfaction, and the NL will mediate between the lead author and those who appealed him. If the unhappy co-authors want to complain against the NL acting as the lead author, they can write to project leader and co-leader in Australia.
4. To ensure that any publication that comes out as an output of ACIAR project meets the expected quality and message, the following actions will need to be taken before the submission.
    a. The manuscript of the publication should be forwarded to the international team members in Australia for peer review ahead of its submission and/or printing. If the Australian researchers are already involved as authors of the manuscript, other researchers from within or outside of the project will be consulted for peer review.
    b. The lead or the corresponding author shall be responsible to forward the manuscript to the concerned individuals/groups for a peer review.

c. The lead or the corresponding author shall be responsible to compile the comments/feedback from the reviewers and discuss ways to address them among the authors.
d. The lead author shall make sure that the comments are genuinely addressed (and in a different file indicating the changes made) and the corresponding author or the lead shall forward it back to the reviewers for verification.
e. The write up team shall make arrangements for English editing, if necessary, after the reviewers comments have been addressed.
f. The NL should be informed of the process of peer review process. The NL shall make sure that these procedures have been followed for publications.

4. Opportunity allocation/scholarship nominations/capacity building opportunities

Following procedures will be adopted in allocating opportunities associated with the ACIAR project including scholarships and participation in trainings/ programmes both within and outside Nepal. This includes, among others, John Allright Fellowship and John Dillon fellowships.

1. All the interested individuals, who may qualify, will be provided with all relevant information about the application process and support wherever needed.
2. The person directly involved in the project shall be given the priority for the nomination of scholarship. The person selected should have a substantial contribution to the ACIAR project and the organizations he/she represents.
3. The nomination process involves various steps, starting with the nomination of potential candidates for the training by the thematic leaders or by the heads of the project partner organizations.
4. If any aspiring researchers are not nominated by both TL or organizational heads, they can write to NL expressing their interests for the opportunity. The NL may nominate if the candidate is found suitable for the opportunity.
5. Nominations by TL/NL or organizational heads does not automatically lead to an award being conferred to the nominees. The Australian research and funding institutions will undertake further assessment and scrutiny of the candidate capacity and suitability, and only then the final selection will be made.
6. In the case of PhD or Masters by Research Degrees programmes, the prospective supervisor (s) of the Australian Universities will conduct interviews and other necessary assessments of the candidates nominated by the TL or organizational heads, and decide on the suitability and relevance of the candidate for the programmes. Candidates nominated by partner organizations and research themes

need not be automatically admitted at the University and accepted for the prgramme, unless the prospective supervisors see the candidates as suitable and recommend for admission. Besides, the candidates also need to meet other University admission requirements such as English Language score and prior academic accomplishments.

7. Once nominated by the respective organization and endorsed by the concerned theme leader, the candidate can request the national leader to write a reference letter to be submitted to the concerned University for admission. NL will have the responsibility to communicate the strengths of the candidates in the reference letter.
8. In case of any grievances related to nomination, national leader can mediate and resolve the issue. The overall process of nomination/selection shall be transparent and communicated via the base camp.

5. Relationship, reporting, communication and coordination within/ between research teams

1. Regular Coordination, Communication and Reporting are essential to ensure the smooth "workability" and efficient functioning of the Project in the spirit of collaborative and active mutual support. This will be accomplished through a number of provisions:
   a. Monthly strategic meeting among the NL and TLs in Kathmandu. Such strategic meetings will guarantee that coordination, communication, reporting, and cooperation are functional between various mechanisms and structures of the ACIAR project in Nepal.
   b. Quarterly meeting of NL, TL, disciplinary and activity leaders including relevant organizational heads.
   c. Fortnightly communications/sharing/meetings within thematic research groups, under the leadership of the respective TL.
   d. Posting of issues, ideas, insights, recommendations in the basecamp on a regular basis.
   e. Monthly skype meetings between NL and international researchers.
   f. Email, phone and skype communications among the researchers as per the need.

6. Conflict Management

Conflict of interests that arises due to various expectations among partner organizations including human resources management, financial management, assignment of roles, any issues in collaborative working culture, and any breakdown in communication will be resolved amicably between the, national leaders and relevant thematic, disciplinary or activity leaders to resolve the issues.

7. DELIVERY OF THE RESEARCH OUTPUTS AND CLARITY OF ROLES

1. Timely output delivery from researchers will be ensured by the thematic leader and if needed thematic leader will follow-up periodically with the researcher to ensure the quality of the deliverable
2. Thematic leader will inspect the quality of the final output and convey for peer review if necessary.
3. International researchers will contribute to and approve the final research outputs as per the following arrangements:
    a. UniAdel team responsible for ensuring the quality of all research related to the biophysical aspects. It will assess and approve all outputs related to the theme of Agroforestry. UniAdel will also do the same for market related outputs of all research themes in collaboration with WAC.
    b. UNSW team will be responsible for ensuring quality in social and institutional analysis in the research. It will approve all outputs related to community forestry themes.
    c. UniAdel will approve the research outputs related to biophysical and markets, and UNSW will do the same for social and institutional aspects related to the theme of Underutilised Land.

8. ETHICAL RESEARCH PRACTICE / PERSONAL BEHAVIOURS/ PROFESSIONAL INTEGRITY

This section includes some standards which researcher must follow in their research:

1. Research member should be honest, fair and respectful to others in the professional and research activities. There should be honest communication among research team regarding the work in progress.
2. Researchers will have an obligation to ensure the confidentiality of the information which could jeopardize the project activities.
3. Researcher will demonstrate sensitivity for local ritual, culture and personal beliefs during field visits and community interaction.
4. Researcher will establish and maintain trust and respect within the research team.

5. National leader will be responsible to handle any conflicts and grievances, if the condition is serious.
6. Research teams must obey and remain sensitive to the gender related norms in the study sites and more generally in the Nepalese society.

9. Fostering synergy across qualitative/quantitative and action research practices

1. Communication and sharing mechanism will be established within and between the research themes to update research progress
2. A common database will be developed as well as appropriate data sharing mechanism will be established to blend the qualitative and quantitative research progress

10. Monitoring and Evaluation

1. Project leadership will develop relevant framework for monitoring and evaluation of the project and then communicate with the research teams for any information needed or action to be taken in this regard.