

Doing research with people: Approaches to participatory research, an introduction

Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA)

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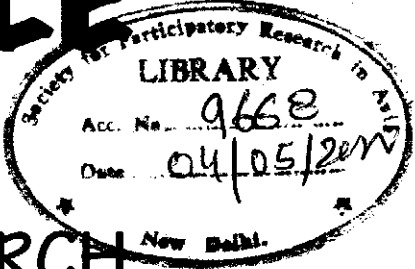
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DOING RESEARCH WITH PEOPLE

APPROACHES TO
PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

AN INTRODUCTION



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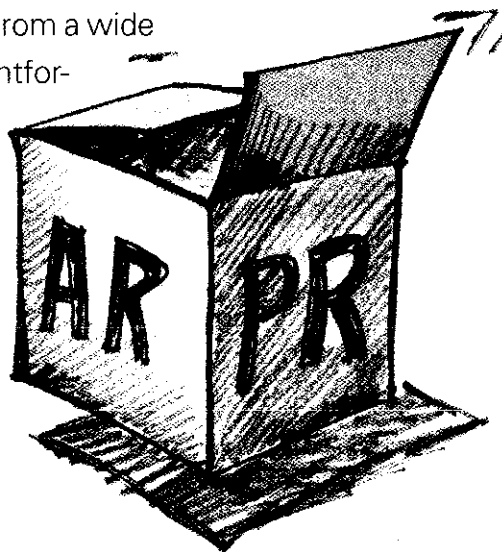


The inspiration for this manual came from a the World Congress on Participatory Action Research held in Cartagena, Columbia, (June 1-5 1997) where people from over 30 countries gathered to discuss participatory approaches to research, education and social development. The experience for most of those present was an eye-opener. It revealed that although the term 'participation' has varied connotations and participatory approaches or methodologies have been developed in response to different contexts and situations, yet the opportunities for convergence- to discuss, to share and learn from each others experiences - are immense.

The contents of this manual trace the roots, principles and practices of four well known participatory research approaches: Participatory Research (PR), Participatory Action Research (PAR), Action Research (AR) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). The manual has been organised in such a way that information about each approach can be read separately or in conjunction to the other approaches - just like reality itself ! Each section includes a description of the approach and a case study designed to be used in training situations. This information has been compiled from a wide range of sources. In order to keep the manual simple and straightforward, the references have been listed at the end.

In recent years, the support for the various participatory approaches has increased tremendously. Alongside, numerous innovations and methodological variations have emerged. In South India, PALM (Participatory Action Learning Methods) has been developed which follows similar principles as PRA. DELTA (Development Education of Leadership Teams in Action) developed in Kenya and Training for Transformation used

ABOUT THIS MANUAL



in Zimbabwe, all shares an ideological base similar to PR and PAR. In the UK, Co-operative Inquiry is emerging as an independent theory and practice. Appreciative Inquiry, Action Learning and Process Management have overlapped with AR in management contexts.

PRIA's mission and programmes have been inspired by the approach referred to here as PR. In the course of PRIA's work, however, the contacts and exchanges with other traditions and schools of thought have been numerous. Through research activities, training programmes and publications such as this manual, we, at PRIA, are constantly attempting to renew and re-vitalise this dialogue. Do write back to us with your ideas, views and experiences of promoting participatory research.

The text of the manual has been written by Maya Pinto, who was working at PRIA's Centre of Participation and Governance.

AN INTRODUCTION

The word "research" usually conjures up images of laboratories and scientific experiments; of expert researchers armed with questionnaires and interview schedules; of endless statistics or other 'quantified' expressions of reality.

For many of us working in human concern professions such as education, social science research or social development, this view of research is often frustrating. It puts a distance between us and the people we work with. It makes inquiry an academic exercise rather than a basis for social action and, quite often, limits our understanding of social reality.

Participatory research provides an alternative approach to research. Simply put, it involves doing research 'with' rather than 'on' or 'for' people. It is based on the principle that ordinary people are capable of critical reflection and analyses, that their knowledge is both essential and valuable in any research, educational or development intervention.

PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH (PR)

PR refers to the approach developed by activist researchers as a critique to conventional social science research methodologies. Some of the well known authors of this approach are John Gaventa (USA), Budd Hall (Canada), Francisco Vio Grossi (Chile), Yussuf Kassam (Tanzania), Patricia Maguire (USA), and



PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES IN BRIEF

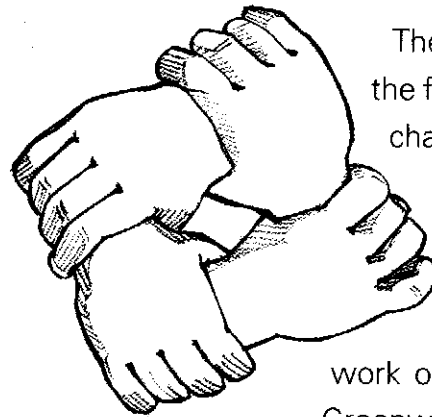
Rajesh Tandon (India). The International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) in Ontario, Canada and Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) in New Delhi, India are amongst the organisations which have been responsible for promoting PR over the years.



PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (PAR)

PAR, like PR, was inspired by the need for 'alternative' approaches in social science research and community-based social action. In fact, in practice today there is no clear distinction between these two approaches. The term 'participatory action research' was first used by Orlando Fals Borda (Columbia), inspired by the 'action research' approach described below and informed mainly by the practices of Latin American researchers and social activists. Some of the UN agencies like UNRISD and ILO provided support to PAR during its initial phase of growth. In this manual, PR and PAR are described together.

ACTION RESEARCH (AR)



The origins of AR maybe traced to the work of Kurt Lewin who was the first to suggest that the best way to learn about social systems is to change them. The approach has subsequently been evolved and applied in educational as well as management contexts. Well known proponents of action research (educational perspective) include: Stephen Kemmis (Australia) and Robin McTaggart (Australia). Action research (management perspective) is associated with the work of Chris Argyris, L. David Brown, William Foote Whyte, Davydd Greenwood and others in USA. Action research, particularly the action re-

search carried out in management settings, is not always 'participatory' in nature. Nevertheless, it has been included here because of its influences on the other approaches described.

PARTICIPATORY RURAL APPRAISAL (PRA)

PRA emerged from a related family of approaches and methods referred to as RRA or Rapid Rural Appraisal. It evolved as an alternative to the conventional methodology used in planning development projects. It is associated in particular, with the work of Robert Chambers. Pioneering organisations include the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) - both in the UK. Several organisations in India and Kenya also played a pioneering role with respect to PRA. At present, there is an extensive network of organisations around the world engaged in promoting PRA. The term 'Participatory Learning Approaches' or PLA is increasingly being used in place of PRA.



CONSCIENTISATION

The concept of 'Conscientisation', introduced by Brazilian educator Paulo Friere is an essential feature of participatory research approaches. 'Conscientisation' simply explained, implies that people, if involved in an ever-deepening analysis of their own realities, develop the understanding and capacity to act to improve that reality.

The concept of conscientisation has implications for the manner in which proponents of these approaches view participation. In a conventional research situation, people do participate, but as passive 'subjects'. The concept of conscientisation suggests that people are active agents in the research process. It also implies that research, if conducted with people's participation can be used as a tool for education, social action and social change.

USEFUL KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge and the process of knowledge generation are important elements of participatory research approaches. The distinction between conventional and participatory research, is that proponents of the latter avoid generating knowledge for knowledge sake. They are concerned with 'useful knowledge'



**COMMON
THEMES**

i.e. knowledge which enables people to solve their problems and improve their lives.

Proponents of participatory approaches also challenge the dominance of 'northern', 'expert' or 'scientific' knowledge and knowledge systems. They emphasise the value of 'indigenous knowledge', 'popular knowledge' or 'people's knowledge' and urge for a closer examination of the latter.

POWER AND EMPOWERMENT

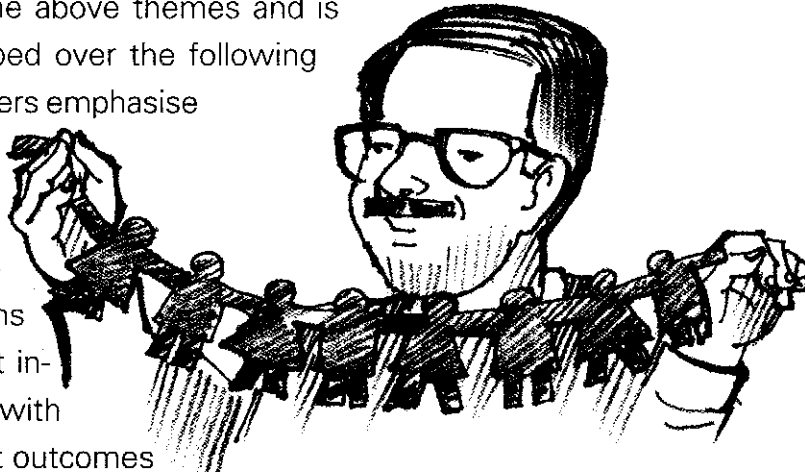
Power is a central theme in the approaches described over the following pages. Participatory researchers are of the view that power - both in the economic and political sense - determines the extent to which people participate in determining their own futures. Their practices promote shifts of power in order that the needs and aspirations of traditionally less-powerful groups are addressed. In the context of community development for example, participatory research approaches are utilised to empower the poor and marginalised members of the community. In management settings, participatory research approaches are utilised to empower workers or lower levels of the organisational hierarchy.

The precise strategies for empowerment vary not only with the approach but also with the context and purposes for which these are employed. Proponents of PR and PAR for example, emphasise political action as part of the participatory research process, through the formation of local bodies or citizen groups. Knowledge is seen as an essential ingredient for empowerment.

CONTROL

The issue of control is related to the above themes and is also central to the approaches described over the following pages. Participatory and action researchers emphasise the question : “who controls ?” at all stages of their research.

A conscious attempt is made to nurture democratic processes and systems of control. For a researcher, this might include identifying issues to be studied with a local group of people or ensuring that outcomes are shared with them. For educators or trainers who draw inspiration from participatory research, the challenge would be to involve trainees in setting the agenda for learning.



OUTSIDERS AS FACILITATORS

Participatory research interventions are often initiated by outsiders. However, intervenors adopt the position of ‘facilitators’, ‘catalysts’ or ‘change agents’ rather than positions of dominance. Their role is to initiate a participatory process and take steps to ensure that the control local people and groups have over that process steadily increases.

The emphasis on outsiders as facilitators requires some amount of de-learning and sensitisation of practitioners of these approaches. To emphasise this, practitioners of PRA speak of ‘role-reversals’ or the need for outsiders to learn from and with local people. The literature on PR and PAR

also emphasises that the attitudes of researchers towards the less privileged groups they work with, is critical in determining the extent to which participation takes place in the research process.

ACTION IS IMPORTANT

Action is accorded a central value in PR, PAR, AR and PRA - both as a means for knowledge generation and as an expected outcome of using of these approaches.

The emphasis on 'acting' as a basis for 'knowing' is most explicit in AR. This approach focuses first, on people acting to solve practical problems.

These actions then lead to the generation of practical knowledge. Proponents of PR and PAR influenced by this idea have emphasised the need to maintain 'praxis' or an iterative link between knowledge and action.

In PRA, because this approach is usually practised in the context of a development project or programme, there always exist resources and support for analyses to be translated into concrete action.



PARTICIPATION AS A PROCESS

Participatory and action researchers invariably distinguish between different 'types' or 'levels' of participation, ranging from participation as a form of 'involvement' of local people in the research project to situations where the participation actually set the research agenda and control the research process.

They further emphasise the dynamic and contextual qualities of participation. Authentic participation in the research process is not achievable through a single, one-off interaction with local groups. It is a process which builds and strengthens over time. A variety of tools and inputs may have to be utilised before authentic participation is achieved.



GROUP AS A VEHICLE FOR CHANGE

Participatory research approaches while instrumental in bringing about change at an individual level, also emphasise the importance of collectives of individuals in understanding and transforming social reality. Practice suggests that the process of collective discovery and decision making enables individuals to accept change more readily.

In PR, this has promoted the use of mobilisation and community or-

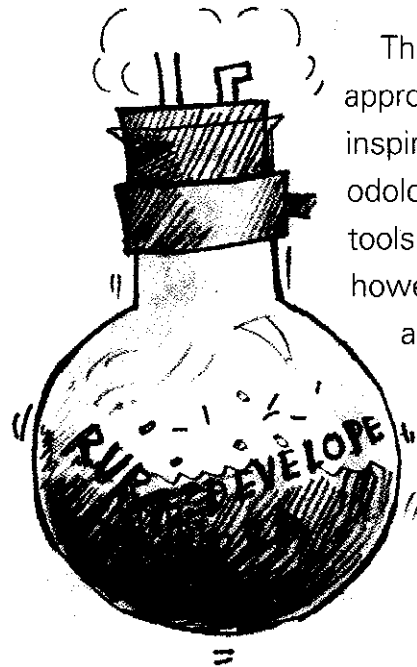
sation strategies - particularly amongst oppressed sections of society. In AR the central theme is group decision making and it's role in social change. PRA also emphasises the use of groups exercises and has provided several illustrations of how different categories of social actors interpret their social realities differently.

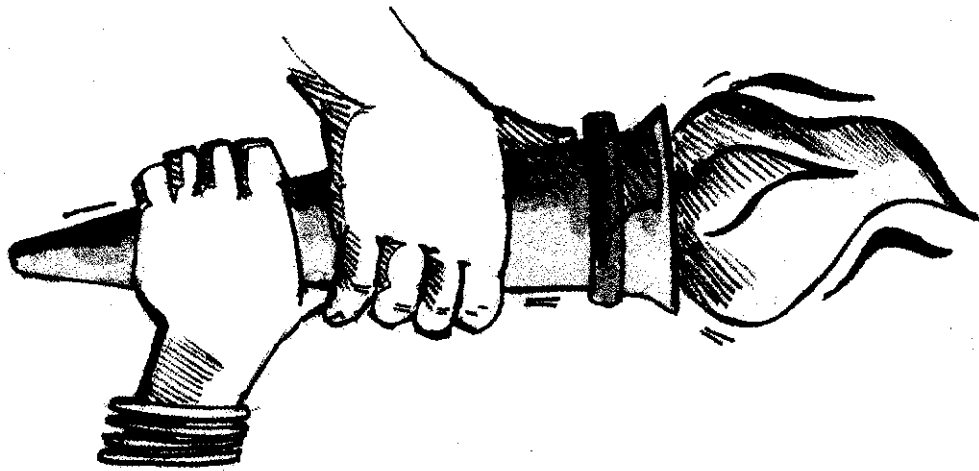
METHODS AND INNOVATIONS

In comparison to conventional research, participatory researchers lay less importance on the use of uniform, 'objective' methods of investigation. Some participatory and action researchers even suggest that methodological rigour and standardisation limits ones ability to understand and work with varied groups and in varied social settings

The space accorded to 'methods' in the broader discourse on these approaches, however, differs. Proponents of PR and PAR generally draw inspiration from the ideological basis of their work rather than the methodological aspects. PRA, on the other hand, did emerge as a series of tools and methods to aid in understanding of rural reality. In recent years, however, practitioners of PRA emphasise the attitudes and behaviour and not just the methods of PRA.

All four approaches encourage methodological flexibility and innovation.





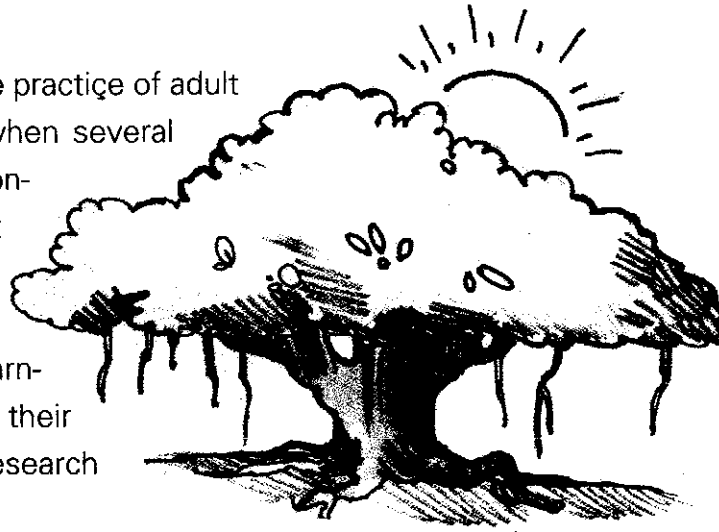
**PARTICIPATORY
RESEARCH
"KNOWLEDGE IS
POWER"**

ROOTS

The term 'participatory research' originated from a group of activist researchers working in Tanzania. They first used the term to describe their research in an experimental pilot survey of skills and resources in 46 villages. Their research was based on the principle of active participation of the villagers themselves in the research plan, which would ultimately motivate them to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses.

Prior to the actual articulation of the term, similar exercises had been undertaken in India and parts of North America, both in the context of research and social action. In Latin America 'participatory action research' (PAR) - based on similar principles was evolved around the same time, influenced by the struggles of Latin American peasants. The work of Brazilian educator and social activist, Paulo Freire was of immense importance in inspiring both PR and PAR. The work of Myles Horton - a popular educator who set up the Highlander Education Centre in North America was also a great influence.

The roots of PR can also be traced to the practice of adult education, particularly during the 1970s when several adult educators had begun to question the contradiction between the philosophy of adult education and the research methodologies they were employing. The philosophy of adult education places central value on learners and focuses on learner's control over their own learning process. The conventional research



methodology borrowed from mainstream social science research suggests, however, that control should remain with the 'external', 'objective' or 'expert' researcher. This contradiction prompted them to search for a more democratic framework for research and education.

The notions of class division, conflict and struggle have also influenced thinking in PR. Several of the pioneers of PR had links with social movements and citizen groups. This encouraged them to direct their research agenda towards issues of social transformation. Ongoing debates challenging the top-down, centralised and bureaucratic approaches of development further informed their practices.

In sum, PR emerged as a critique of the research methodology practised in mainstream social science research, which has subsequently guided researchers and activists to work with oppressed groups and to challenge the structures and processes which account for their oppression.

FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework adopted by participatory researchers, focuses on the political economy of knowledge and knowledge production (in simple terms : issues concerning who creates knowledge, how knowledge is created, who takes decisions for actions etc.). The underlying assumption is that powerful groups derive their power through control over the use and production of knowledge. This monopoly over knowledge is a major hindrance to participation of less powerful groups.

The purpose of PR therefore, is to create or re-discover knowledge

which will enable people - particularly the poor and oppressed - to improve their lives.

In practical terms, three inter-related processes are involved in PR:

- Collective investigation of problems and issues with the active participation of the constituency in the entire process
- Collective analysis, in which the constituency develops a better understanding not only of the problems at hand but also of the underlying structural causes (socio-economic, political, cultural)
- Collective action by the constituency aimed at long-term as well as short-term solutions to these problems

WHAT PRACTICE TELLS US

Over a decade of experience of PR in fields as varied as adult education, literacy, health care, women's empowerment, tribal development etc. has demonstrated the following:

Valuing people's knowledge : In the face of continuing delegitimisation of people's knowledge and alternative systems of knowledge production, PR has served as a means to re-legitimise these. It has demonstrated that ordinary people are knowledgeable about their social realities and are capable of articulating this knowledge.

Refining capacities : A second major contribution of PR has been the re-capturing and refining of ordinary people's capacities in conducting their own research. Experience has demonstrated that active participation of ordinary people in the research process is a form of education. This en-

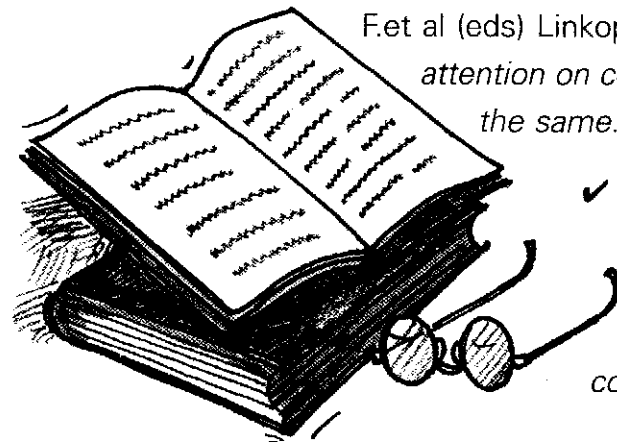
tails enhancing their self confidence about their capacities in order for them to analyse their situation and to develop solutions.

Appropriating knowledge : A third major contribution of PR is the assistance it provides to ordinary people in appropriating the knowledge produced by dominant knowledge system. In contemporary societies PR has assisted the oppressed in acquiring, incorporating and re-interpreting the knowledge produced by the dominant system for their use.

Liberating the mind : Finally, PR has contributed to the forces of liberating the minds of the poor and the oppressed by helping than reflect on their situation, regain their capacities, to analyse and critically examine their reality, and to reject the continued domination and hegemony of oppressors.

EXPLORATORY READING

✓ Fals - Borda ,O. (1980).Science and the Common People. Research for the People - Research by the People . Selected papers for the International Forum on Participatory Research in Ljubljana, Yugoslavia, , Dubell, F.et al (eds) Linkoping University , Sweden, pp13-40 *The paper focuses attention on common people's science and on processes to support the same.*



✓ Hall, B., Gillete, A., and Tandon, R (Eds.) (1982). Creating Knowledge : A Monopoly. Society for Participatory Research in Asia, New Delhi. *This book contains a good selection of essays dealing with some of the concerns which inspired PR.*

✓ Horton, Myles and Freire, Paulo. (1990) .We make the road by walking. Conversations on education and social change. Bell, Brenda, John Gaventa and John Peters.(Eds) Temple University Press, Philadelphia *Book comprises of dialogue between Horton and Friere, providing new insights on meaning of pedagogy, social criticism and collective struggle.*

✓ Fernandes, W & Tandon, R. (Eds.) (1981). Participatory Research and Evaluation - Experiments in Research as a Process of Liberation. *The book provides readings and case material relevant to the Indian context.*

✓ Friere, P. (1972). Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Herder and Herder, New York. *A seminal text which was instrumental in inspiring participatory approaches.*

✓ Grossi, Francisco Vio , Martinic Sergio, Tapia Gonzalo and Pascal Ines (1993). Participatory Research: Theoretical Frame, Methods and Techniques, ICAE ,Ottawa and Division for the Study of Development, UNESCO, Paris. *Document attempts to integrate theoretical elements of PR with practical components of methods and technique.*

✓ Kassam, Y.O. & Mustafa, K. (Eds.). (1982). Participatory Research : An Emerging Alternative Methodology in Social Science Research. Society for Participatory Research in Asia. *It includes some of the first case studies written up about participatory research in Africa.*

✓ Maguire, P. (1987). Doing Participatory Research - A Feminist Perspective. Centre for International Education, Amherst. *Book provides a critical view of PR from the perspective of a researcher working with battered women*

✓ Rahman Md Anisur (Eds) (1984). Grassroots Participation and Self Reliance .Oxford and IBH Publishing Co and PRIA, New Delhi. *It includes essays based on the work under ILO's programme on participatory organisations of rural poor.*

PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH: AN ILLUSTRATION

This illustration is based on the work of Vrikshamitra, a grassroots voluntary agency working in Maharashtra, India.

In many parts of India, forests are being depleted at an alarming pace. This has implications for all sections of our society, particularly those who are dependent on forest resources for their livelihood. Vrikshamitra got acquainted with the problems faced by tribal populations in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra, owing to the destruction of the forest cover in that region. Discussions with informed individuals at concerned research institutions and the reading of relevant literature encouraged Vrikshamitra to embark on a research study to address the impact of depleting forest reserves on tribal life and livelihoods.

During this period, Vrikshamitra had a good rapport with the local people of Dhanora Tehsil (section), Gadchiroli district, so it was decided to focus the study there. Grassroots activists from the area were contacted. They also expressed concern over the depletion of forest cover. Discussions with them revealed a variety of problems associated with forest depletion. The common conclusion was that it was necessary to go deeper into the subject and very important, to raise the awareness of the local people about this matter. One idea that emerged was to launch a 'cycle tour'. The activists learnt of



a meeting of all the village-chiefs in the area and took this opportunity to initiate a debate over the depletion of the forest cover. After listening, the village chiefs gave their consent to the cycle tour and agreed to provide all the required support. A few local government representatives were also involved.

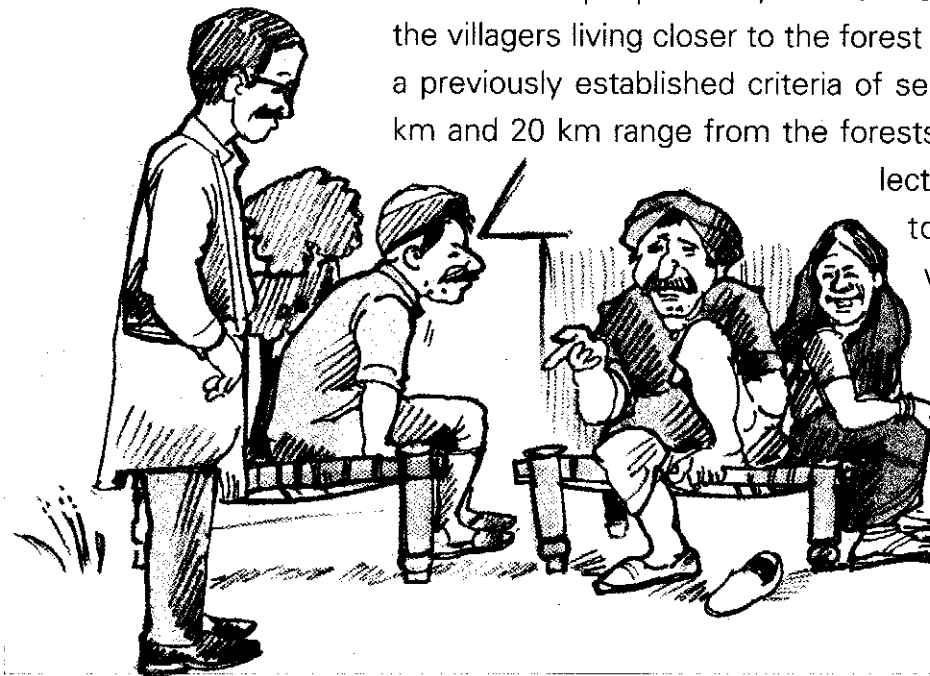
The most important outcome of the cycle tour was the contact and communication that took place between the researchers and the local people. When studies of this nature are normally carried out, jeeps are used. With a jeep the study process becomes a hurried one and the type of interaction and association with the people is of a very different nature.

During the cycle tour it was noticed that some of the villages located at a distance from the forests also earned income through the sale of fuel wood. These people were, in other words, as dependant on the forests as the villagers living closer to the forest cover. Because of this observation, a previously established criteria of selecting sample villages within a 15 km and 20 km range from the forests was revised. The researchers se-

lected some villages which were close to the forests and some villages which were located further away.

The researchers discussed and finalised the selection of the villages with the local activists.

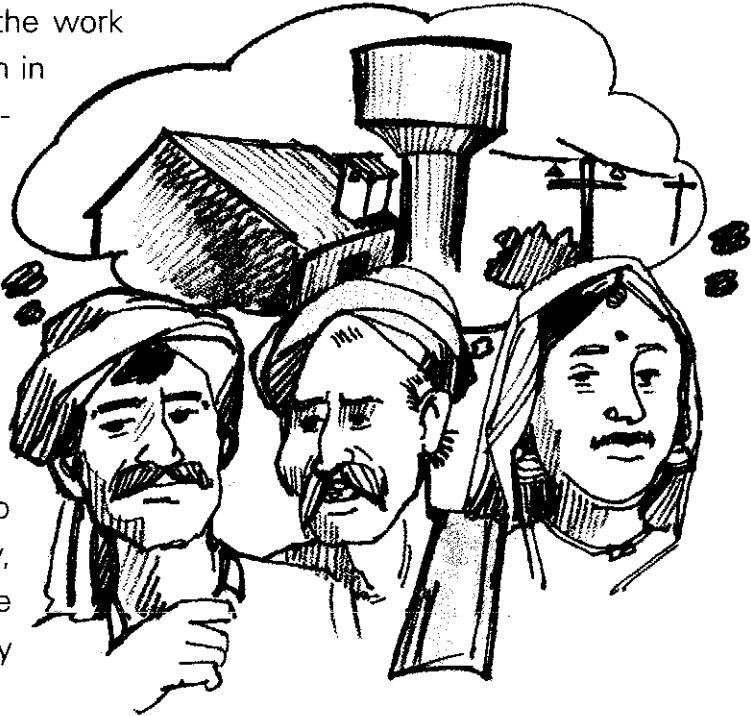
They then started visiting the villages and engaging in casual discussions with the local people.



The meetings usually started with a group song. The researchers explained the purpose of their visit, that: "we are interested in understanding the nature of your problems, the factors causing them and their solutions, that is why we have started the campaign". They explained to the villagers, that their problems could not be solved by any single individual or by a group of a few, but all of them needed to come together and think about the situation collectively. "Everyone's outlook and experience is important".

The researchers also made it clear to the participants that they would not provide the villages with any tangible benefits except for providing the villagers with a chance to participate in the study and to understand their problems themselves. They would insist that all those present in the meetings introduced themselves and the work they did. This simple act of self introduction in front of a group or crowd helps initiate a feeling of self-recognition leading to self-confidence and commitment.

Discussions usually started with identification of the village's major problems. People spoke of the hardships they faced owing to the lack of water tanks, roads, electricity, hospitals, schools and jobs for their educated children. They would then go on to speaking about larger concerns like poverty, forests, and unemployment in general. If the attendance of women was high, and if they



joined the discussions, they related the hardships they faced due to depleting forest resources and alcoholism.

During the discussions, the researchers found it useful to encourage those present to piece together their different individual experiences to get a better understanding of the problems they faced. Once given an opportunity, the villagers were eager to debate and argue based on their own work, experiences and preferences. The discussions used to proceed from one argument to the next, with the researchers asking questions and sub-questions and adding responses and opinions either for or against it. After experiencing the outcome of this methodology, the researchers decided that other research techniques such as questionnaires and surveys were unnecessary. These techniques raise suspicion in the minds of local people as to why only a particular family is being questioned or how the researcher obtained their names.

It was observed that the leisure time available to villagers is limited. Due to this, the researchers conducted most of their discussions during 'polo' (a day declared when all work and business was stopped for some social or religious cause). The villagers did not have much time to get involved in the study at their times.

As the villagers gradually came out with a list of problems, they were asked to point out those of greater importance so that they could be discussed as priority. The order in most cases was: the problems regarding forests, alcoholism, unemployment and poverty. The nature of these problems, their causes and remedies were discussed. One issue that became clearer through the discussions was that "whatever assurance the Gov-

ernment, political leader, or bureaucrats may give, nobody is going to solve our problems. The problems kept increasing day by day as we have trusted and relied on them. Now we must not depend on others to solve our problems and must try on our own". Gradually, the idea that the study should also yield some kind of action plan was mooted.

In keeping with this development, researchers began to emphasise the inter-dependence of people and forests and ask them if they would participate in an action-plan emerging from the study. Following this, it was decided to conduct a three day camp or 'Sahyog Shibir' involving all the activists working with democratic means in the tribal areas of Gadchiroli. It was also decided not to get money for conducting the camp from any external source but to meet the expenses through individual contributions, both in kind and money. The idea behind this was that if resources are taken from an external source then people become dependent. Local contribution leads to a feeling of self-confidence and ownership over the process.

Local government representatives were also invited for the meeting. At the meeting, people were informed how individuals and groups in other states and at the national level were struggling with similar problems. A considerable amount of discussion took place. This led to a chain of such Shayog Shibirs held at intervals of three months and finally a conference on "Forests and Development". Each of the events provided an excellent method for advancing the study as well as promoting a community mobilisation process.

As priority issues became evident, action plans began to take shape.

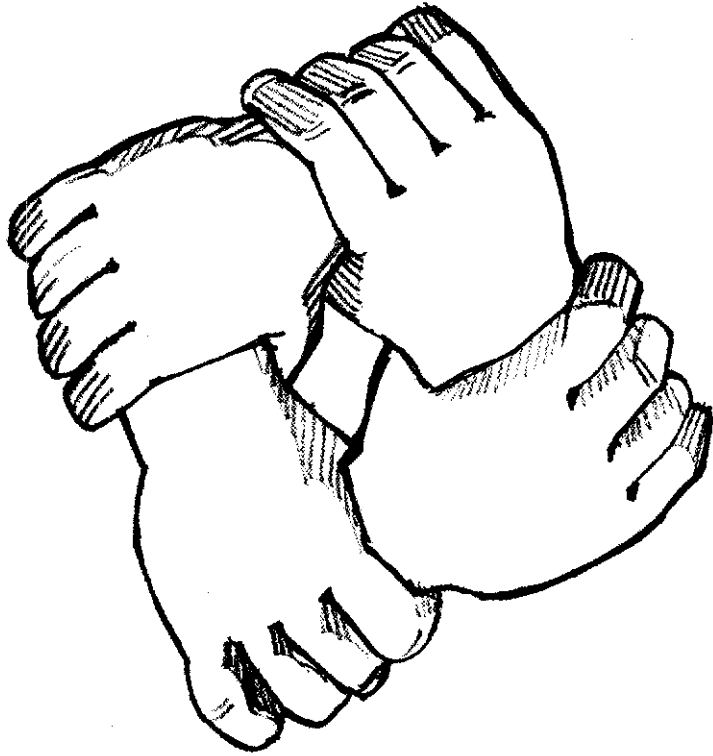
Some issues which emerged from the study and the various group events, could be taken up at the village level while others could only be handled at relatively 'macro' levels. In one area, it was decided to merge the campaign for forest preservation with a campaign against alcohol. In another area, the methodology used in conducting this study was applied to address of other village development problems.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

A stylized logo consisting of the letters 'D' and 'Q' in a bold, hand-drawn font. The 'D' is positioned above the 'Q', and they are both rendered in a dark, textured style.

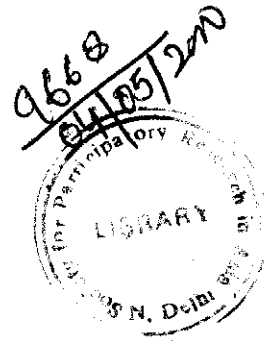
What are some important steps and processes in a participatory research project ?

How was new knowledge generated in this participatory research project?



**ACTION
RESEARCH
"PEOPLE LEARN
BY DOING"**

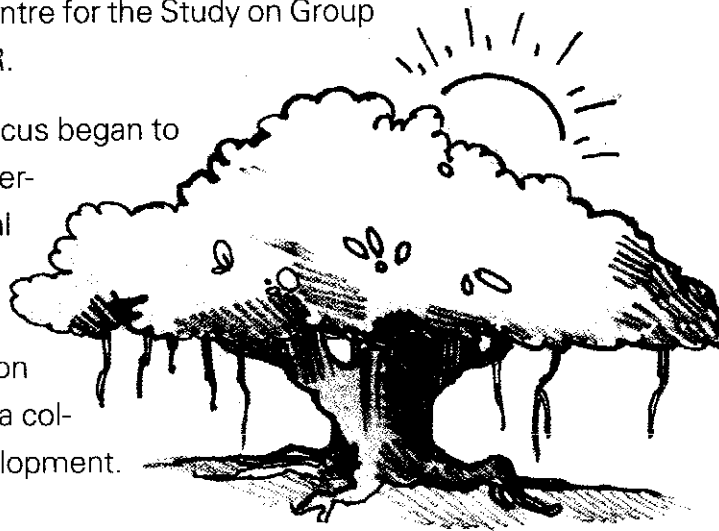
ROOTS



The term 'action research' (AR) was coined by social psychologist Kurt Lewin as far back as 1944. He used the term to describe a form of research which would combine the experimental approach of social science research with a programme for social action to address social problems. When Kurt Lewin first wrote about AR, he described it as consisting of analysis, fact-finding, conceptualisation, planning, execution, more fact finding of the evaluation and then a repetition of this whole 'circle' of activities, amounting to a 'spiral' of such circles. The assumption underlying this approach is that the best way to learn about social systems is to try to change them. Also, that through a collective discovery process, individuals accept change more readily.

In its initial phase of growth, AR was used by social psychologists mainly in solving problems arising out of racial prejudices. Lewin founded two applied research institutions: the Committee on Community Interrelations for the American Jewish Congress and the Centre for the Study on Group Dynamics, reflective of the initial focus of AR.

Towards the latter half of the 1950s, this focus began to shift as action researchers became more interested in using this tool for improving formal organisations. The principles of AR came to be incorporated in studies of business firms and educational organisations. AR focused on business firms has been evolved primarily as a collaborative arrangement for organisational development.



Likewise, educational action research was evolved by educational researchers who were interested in helping teachers improve their practice. Developments during the 1960s and 1970s in the area of 'collaborative curriculum development' and evaluation work in education also influenced educational AR.

Aside from these root motivations, AR has also drawn from the work of applied anthropology, particularly the work of anthropologists such as William Foote Whyte who sought to bring anthropological methods and insights into formal organisational settings.

PRINCIPLES

The two core principles of this research model are: group decision making and a commitment to improvement.

COMMITMENT TO IMPROVEMENT

Research begins with a general idea that some kind of improvement is desirable. Groups of individuals are then engaged in deciding upon what the problem areas are and what improvements can be made. This commitment to improvement also implies that group members take responsibility for actions emerging from this research and reflect upon these leading to further action (hence the spiral).

GROUP DECISION-MAKING

According to Lewin, the question of group decision making lies at the intersection of many basic problems of individual and group life. At an individual level, group decision making influences the motivation of indi-

viduals to act. In a wider setting of social processes, group decision making is fundamental to bringing about social change. The action-research model is used therefore to understand group conduct and direct this towards the solving of social problems.

THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS ARE IMPORTANT TO TRANSLATE THIS MODEL INTO PRACTICE:

LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY AND RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION

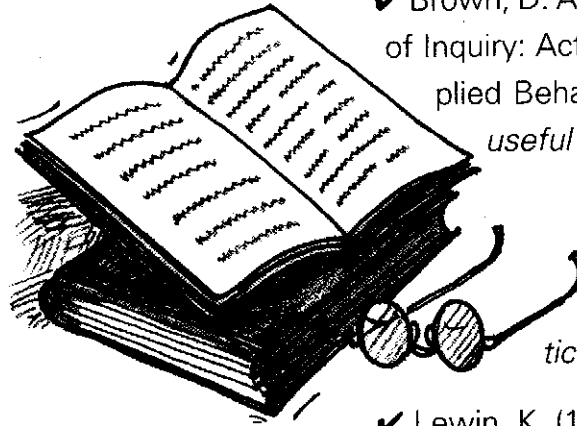
Action research assumes that problem solutions acceptable to many parties are legitimate. This assumption is reasonable when the distribution of resources and authority is generally accepted as legitimate. Consensus solutions are much more difficult to achieve when the legitimacy of current distributions of power and resources is challenged and when the solutions that benefit one party are rejected by others.

ACCEPTANCE BY DIVERSE CONSTITUENCIES

Lack of sanction and resources from the authorities or suspicion and resistance from middle levels or challenges from lower levels, can all scuttle action research projects. Maintaining acceptance by multiple interests may call for researcher skill in managing conflict.

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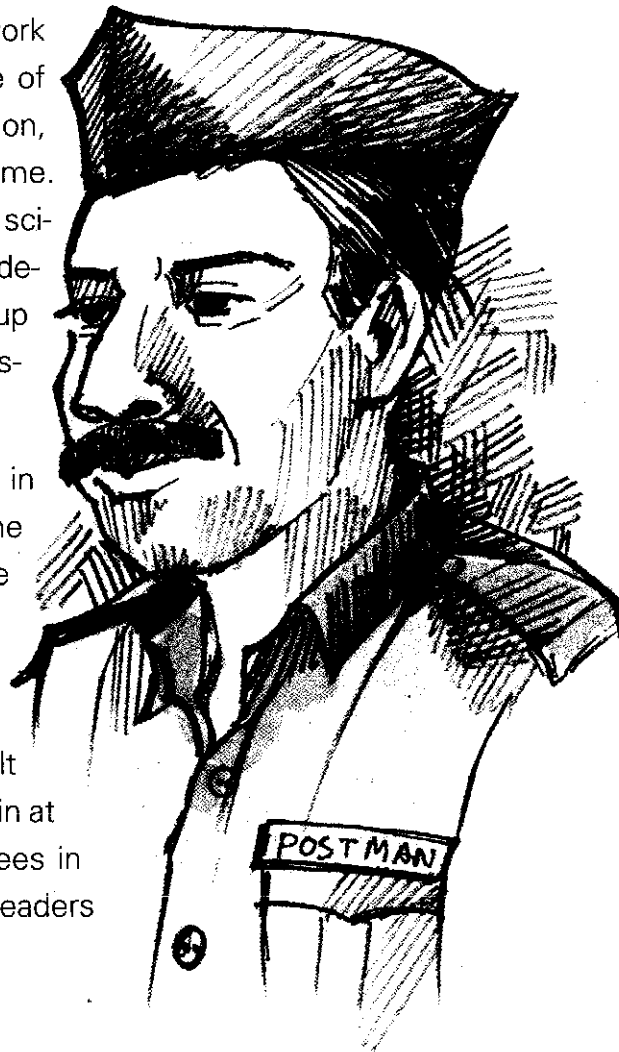


- ✓ Brown, D. And Tandon R. (1983). The Ideology and Political Economy of Inquiry: Action Research and Participatory Research. *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science and Technology*. *The papers provides a useful comparison between AR and PR.*
- ✓ Deakin University (1982). Action Research Reader, Deakin University, Australia. *Provides a useful collection of articles covering the history, principles and practices associated with AR in different parts of the world.*
- ✓ Lewin, K. (1946) Action Research and Minority Problems, *Journal of Social Issues*, 1946, 2, (4) 34-46. *It is one of Lewin's first accounts of AR.*

ACTION RESEARCH: AN ILLUSTRATION

The Director (Postal Training) Shimla, had earlier been the Principal of a postal training centre - a position he held with distinction. As head of the centre, he was not content with the customary role that he was cast in - mainly administrative and, secondarily, classroom activities. He was interested in using a more action oriented approach to training activities and to do this, decided to organise a work motivation seminar drawing upon a diagonal slice of postal employees from two post offices. In addition, he mobilised two young officers for the programme. He also called in an action-research oriented social scientist who, along with him and the two officers designed the three-day programme. The target group responded positively but cautiously to the work system redesign .

The first demonstration project was launched in Shimla. The external resource person along with the director and his colleague worked as a team , were highly motivated and visited all the post offices in the city, studied the work flow and the work environment and interviewed the employees randomly. Three of them had stock-taking sessions, as a result of which it was decided that the project would begin at Chaura Maidan post office which had 43 employees in addition to one part-time employee. Two union leaders were among these employees .





Some of the active employees including the sub-postmaster, who was in charge of the post office, were first involved in a diagnostic study which revealed the following problems as significantly affecting performance in the post office:

- a) The work space in the post office was inadequate with high degree of congestion;
- b) Furniture was antiquated and dysfunctional but over-abundant, contributing to congestion;
- c) There was no physical facility at the counters for the customers to fill in forms and no sitting accommodation for old and infirm visitors; and
- d) Lighting was inadequate and improperly placed.

The team assured the employees that appropriate action to rectify these difficulties would be taken. They initiated action almost immediately on this front. More space was created, functional furniture was brought in and the old stack of records occupying unnecessary space was disposed of. A recreation room was created for the employees. While this process

was going on, a socio-technical analysis of the work system was undertaken, again in collaboration with the employees. Not that all the employees took part, but employees were encouraged to come forward and work with the change agents. This work system study revealed that the primary tasks of the post office fell into the categories of: (a) mail-delivery activities (b) counter-service activities (c) cable and telephone activities and (d) control functions, including treasury activities.

It was found however, that these various activities were organised in an extremely fragmented manner with Class IV employees doing the mail carrying job, sorting postman carrying out the sorting activities; delivery postmen involved in detailed sorting and delivery of mail, delivery clerks maintaining records of accountable items, counter clerks functioning on a one man-one job basis in different counters and the supervisory officers, primarily assistant sub-postmasters, and sub-postmaster, performing the supervisory and control functions.

After this diagnostic study, a series of meetings were held with the employees in search of developing better work systems which could relieve them from undue pressure of work. Gradually, an integrated delivery group was created with members from sorting postmen, delivery postmen and the clerks concerned with maintenance of records of accountable items. This group also included the assistant postmaster. The group decided to have, on a rotational basis, one employee acting as a liaison with the sub-postmaster. The internal allocation of tasks devolved on the group itself. The work layout was redesigned to facilitate group work introduced by the group. While there were initial difficulties in developing group norms, gradually the system got stabilised with the result that sort-

ing and delivery time for the mail was cut down by about three-quarter of an hour per shift. The problem of occasional absenteeism was also dealt with effectively as the group could redistribute the workload in a reasonably equitable way.

Next, attention was paid to the counter system. The counter system was redesigned, with introduction of multiple counters where all counter services (except saving bank activities) were available to customers. This

enabled the customers to transact all their business at one counter instead of running from one to another to complete the total process. The customers were satisfied with the system because of curtailment of delay. Pressures on the counters were equitably distributed reducing the overload on any counter. The counter clerks could also take their lunch break by turns by closing down one counter at a time without creating any problem of delay for the



customers. Even though there was shortage of employees in this post office, a number of employees could still be transferred to the other post offices without perceptible impact on work efficiency or the employee morale, although at the experimental stage it was a risky step to take. The telegraph signallers were also integrated with the group in that whenever they had free time, they could volunteer to lend a helping hand to the delivery group, if and when necessary.

There was, however, a problem. The role of the sub-postmaster became somewhat ambiguous and he was not sure about the degree of supervision he could exercise in the new work system. There were occasional problems, but the team refused to intervene in such situations and advised the two distinct groups - delivery group and the counter-group — to resolve the problems along with the sub-postmaster.

With reasonable success achieved in this post office, the experiment was taken to two other post offices in the town AGPO and Chhota Shimla P.O., where the initial difficulties experienced at Chaura Maidan could be minimised due to the insights gained in the first experimental office. In fact, some of the employees of Chaura Maidan P.O. were encouraged to visit the two new experimental sites and offer help.

These three experiments were carried out on a low key. The higher authorities like the Postmaster General were, no doubt, kept informed but the experimental sites were not exposed to the top brass during the first year of the experiment. Later on, internal publicity was given to these projects and senior officials came and saw the working of the new system. One of the first actions on the part of the management was to seek

assistance from the union at its main copier production facilities to improve the quality of working life, manufacturing costs and increase productivity. There was a joint decision to engage an external consultant who would work with the union and management to study the problem and arrive at possible solutions.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

A stylized logo consisting of the letters 'D' and 'Q' in a bold, hand-drawn font. The 'D' is positioned above the 'Q', and they are both rendered in a thick, black, slightly irregular style.

What is the role of the researcher in an action-research process ?

How is knowledge generation linked to action in AR ?



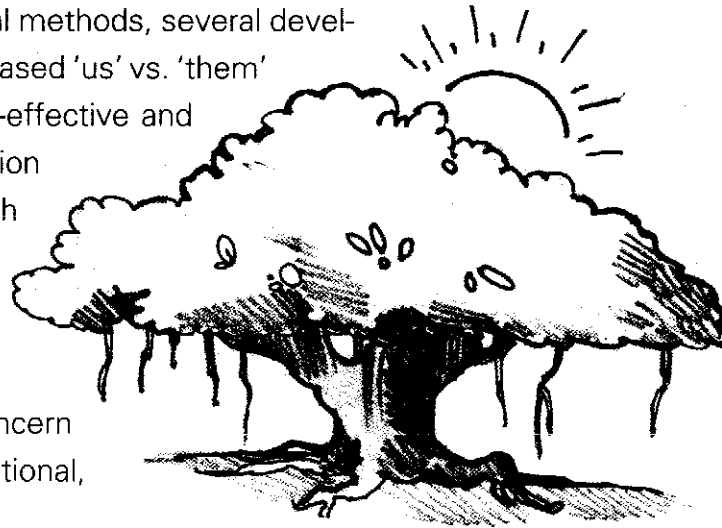
**PARTICIPATORY
RURAL APPRAISAL
"THE BEST KNOWLEDGE
IS PEOPLE'S OWN
KNOWLEDGE"**

ROOTS

The origins of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), may be traced to a series of methods and approaches which emerged during the 1970s and early 1980s, in response to growing disillusionment with research and extension practices in agriculture development. Farmer Systems Research was one such approach. This field of inquiry placed central value on developing agricultural technology in accordance with the real needs of farmers. Farmer 'Participatory' Research went a step further to emphasise the actual involvement of farmers in designing agricultural technology. Both fields challenged and exposed the limitations of expert, 'scientific' knowledge in addressing the real needs of farmers.

During the 1980s, a similar development occurred in the mainstream of rural development. The limitations of conventional questionnaires and survey methods in designing rural development programme, prompted the development of Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) methods. Apart from the time and costs involved in using conventional methods, several development practitioners felt that these led to a biased 'us' vs. 'them' view of development. RRA provided a cost-effective and less cumbersome method to collect information about rural realities. It gained popularity with several academic and development agencies in the North and was used to conduct base-line survey, pre-project appraisals etc.

The spread of RRA and an emerging concern that it was developing into another conventional,



'extractive' mode of data-collection inspired PRA. PRA has been evolved and spread mainly by non-governmental agencies and development practitioners - both in the North and the South. The popularity of this approach lies in the vast range of methods and tools (mapping, modelling, transect walks etc.) associated with it. Some of these have been drawn from other disciplines such as social anthropology, ethnology etc. Others have been developed by practitioners of PRA in collaboration with local people.

In its current phase of evolution, PRA is often referred to as PLA or Participatory Learning Approaches - to account for the wide range of innovations and applications since its early years.

KEY PRINCIPLES

A reversal of learning : Learning from local people rather than from experts.

Learning rapidly and progressively : Learning with conscious exploration, flexible use of methods, not following a blueprint approach but being adaptable in a learning process.

Offsetting biases : By listening not lecturing, being unimposing instead of important and seeking out the poorer people and women and learning their concerns and priorities.

Optimising trade-offs : Relating the cost of learning to the useful truth of information, even though this might involve trade-offs between quantity, relevance, accuracy and timeliness.

Triangulating : Using a range of methods, types of information, inves-

tigators and/or disciplines to cross-check.

Self-critical awareness and responsibility : Facilitators should continuously examine their behaviour, and try to do better.

WHAT PRACTICE TELLS US

VILLAGERS' KNOWLEDGE AND CAPABILITIES

PRA has revealed that villagers have a greater capacity to map, model, quantify, estimate, rank etc. In fact, several PRA practitioners feel the richness of detail and discrimination expressed by villagers in maps and models, far surpasses that demonstrated by experts and outsiders.

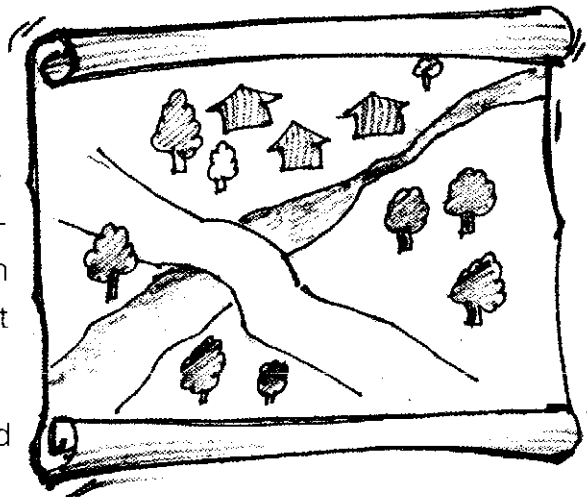
RELAXED RAPPORT

Practice also tells us that relaxed rapport between outsiders and rural people can and should be established early in the process. Rapport is the key to facilitating participation.

DIAGRAMMING AND VISUAL SHARING

A third lesson is the popularity and power of participatory diagramming and visual sharing. If information is transferred through questionnaires or interviews, the learning is one-off. The information becomes personal and private. Through participatory village maps and models on the other hand, the information is visible, semi-permanent and public.

Paper can be used for diagrams, but the ground and



other local materials have the advantage of being 'theirs'; media which villagers, whether literate or non-literate, can command and alter with confidence.

SEQUENCES

Most PRA practitioners combine a variety of methods and improvise and sequence them while working with poor and marginalised groups. Such sequences are found to increase the commitment of participants, making further action more likely, more spontaneous, and more sustainable.

TRAINING AND RE-ORIENTATION FOR OUTSIDERS

Practice also tells that for some outsiders, initial training and re-orientation need not take long before they can go off and practice. Face-to-face field experience are found to be the key in re-orientation. Several PRA trainers have also found it useful to 'smuggle-in' participatory methods. Mixing them with hard, scientific methods which certain institutions and individuals are more comfortable with, aids in acceptance.

SHARING AND SPREAD

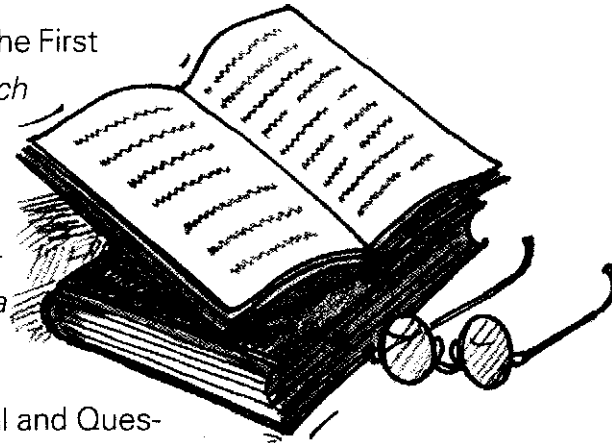
Finally, practice has clearly demonstrated the importance of sharing in the culture and spread of PRA. Sharing of ideas and experiences between outsiders and villagers; sharing of self-critical appraisal of the process among outsiders is part of learning PRA.

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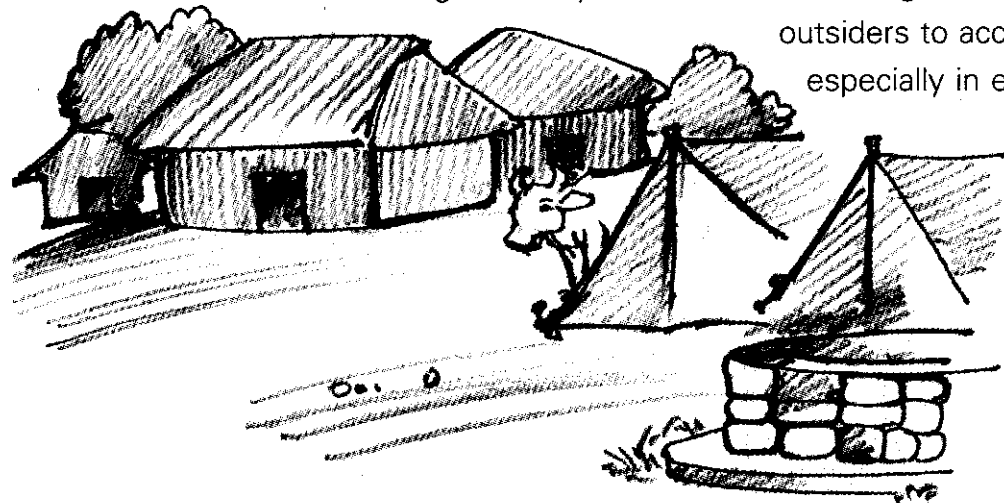
A TYPICAL PRA EXERCISE

Owing to the wide range of methods and tools involved in PRA, it is difficult to generalise about the process followed. The process described here is referred as the Participatory Learning Method (PALM), and is being followed by MYRADA* - a NGO in South India.

For MYRADA, a typical exercise has about 25-30 'outsiders' participating. These participants are drawn from various organisations - NGOs, research and training institutions, the government, etc. The village selected as a location for the exercise, is usually one where there is already an established ongoing presence by an outside agency. This stipulation is made out of respect for the villagers whose curiosities and expectations are raised by such exercises. To leave the village without a concrete response to expressed needs would not be appropriate.

The PRA participants stay in the village. This helps in several ways. Apart from simplifying logistics, it gives the outsiders a feel of what the village is really like. There is also a greater opportunity for villagers and outsiders to access each other and interact - especially in evenings after the day's work

is done. A strong rapport is developed and the degree of sharing extends over many more aspects of the



** Mascarehnas, J. (1992) Participatory rural appraisal and participatory learning methods: (see bibliography).*

village which are more intimate to the villagers than only their work. Village camping has a definite impact on participation.

Typically, a PALM programme takes about five days and includes the following:

DAY 1 - INTRODUCTORY

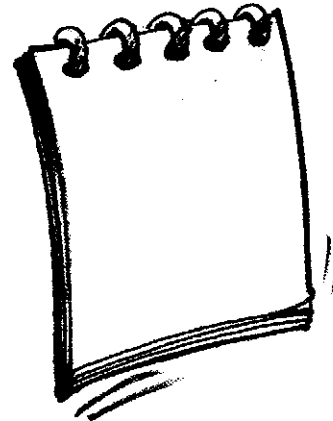
The first day includes exercises which can be called "emphathisers and equalisers". These are held in the village. They include introductions of villagers and "outsiders" to one another, sharing in village tasks, group games etc. The purpose is to create an atmosphere of friendliness and equality as well as indicate the seriousness of the 'outsiders' to learn.

DAY 2 - EXPLORATORY (SIMPLE)

Interaction increases during the second day through exercises focused on the study of resources, livelihoods, trends and preferences. This day provides a good idea of the physical environment of the village and helps to establish the basis for more difficult exercises that follow. All presentations after the exercises are held in the village and made by the villagers. Identification of problems and opportunities for development form an important part of the exercise.

DAY 3 - EXPLORATORY (COMPLEX)

During the third day more difficult exercises such as seasonality mapping and wealth ranking are undertaken. These are difficult as they touch upon sensitive issues of caste and class stratification, access to resources etc. They require care in selection of participants.



DAY 4 - CONVERGENCE

The fourth day is then set aside for convergence exercises which are aimed at identifying people's development priorities, identifying opportunities, identifying roles and responsibilities etc.

DAY 5 - CONCLUSION

These culminate in the preparation of an operational plan to address the need and aspirations of villagers.

Some of the standard group processes and techniques used through the programme are transact walks, participatory mapping and ranking exercises. Participants and facilitators work in groups and sub-groups. All presentation of information is done in a large combined forum - an opportunity for village people to correct one another and arrive at a consensus. The innovations and learning continue well after the programme is completed.

DISCUSSION QUESTION



How is knowledge generated in PRA ?

What is the role of the outsider in PRA ?

SOME WELL KNOWN METHODS OF PRA

do-it-yourself : asking to be taught to perform village tasks - transplanting, weeding, ploughing, field-levelling, drawing water, collecting wood....

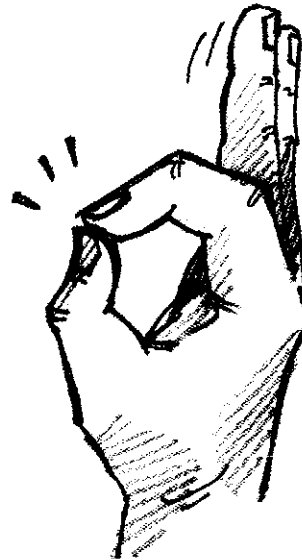
they do it : villagers and village residents as investigators and researchers - women, poor people, school teachers, volunteers, students, farmers, village specialists. They do transects, observe, interview other villagers, analyse data, and present the results

participatory mapping and modelling : in which people use ground, floor or paper to make social, demographic, health, natural resource (soil, trees and forests, water resources etc.) or farm maps, or construct three-dimensional models of their land

transect walks : systematically walking with informants through an area, observing, asking, listening, discussing, identifying different time zones, local technologies, introduced technologies, seeking problems, solutions and opportunities, and mapping and diagramming resources and findings

time lines : chronologies of events, listing major remembered events in a village with approximate dates

trend analysis : people's accounts of the past, of how things close to them have changed, ecological histories, changes in land use and cropping patterns, changes in customs and practices, changes and trends in population, migration, fuels used, education , health, credit....and the causes of changes and trends



ethno biographies : local histories of a crop, an animal, a tree, a pest, a weed

seasonal diagramming : by major season or by month to show days and distribution of rain, amount of rain or soil moisture, crops, agricultural labour, non-agricultural labour, diet, food consumption, types of sickness, prices, animal fodder, fuel, migration, income, expenditure etc.

livelihood analysis : stability, crises and coping, relative income, expenditure, credit and debt, multiple activities....

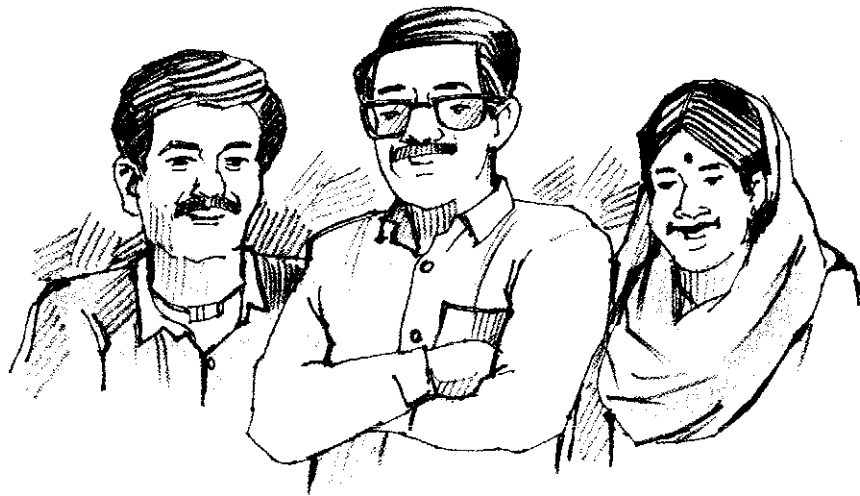
participatory diagramming : of flows, causality quantities, trends, rankings, scoring - in which people make their own diagrams

wealth ranking : identifying clusters of households according to their wealth, including the poorest

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Over the last three decades, the dilemmas, disappointments and setbacks encountered by participatory researchers have been numerous. Despite these, the researchers' contribution to understanding participatory and social change processes has been immense.

Today, recognition of participatory and alternative knowledge systems is spreading at an amazing pace. The principles underlying participatory research traditions are being incorporated in large-scale development initiatives. Courses on participatory research are being taught in several universities around the world. In PRIA, we are excited by these developments. But we also feel the need to stop, pause for a moment, and critically reflect upon the directions participatory research is headed in.



SOME CHALLENGES

DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

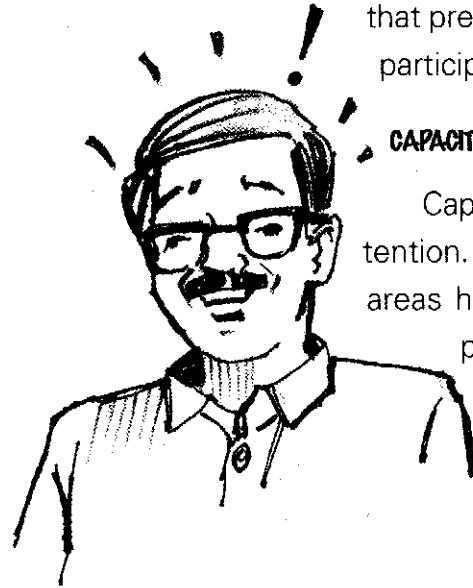
The approaches described in this manual were evolved and promoted by like-minded researchers, activists and organisations, working from a social change perspective. Over the years however, the participatory research networks have expanded to include diverse disciplines, ideologies and sectors. It is indeed a challenge to dialogue and network across these.

STRENGTHENING PRACTICE

As appreciation spreads, so does the scope and scale of the participatory project. On the one hand this calls for new ideas and innovations to take participatory research to scale; or to use the lessons from one project in another context. It also calls for repeated critical analyses to ensure that pressures to 'up-scale' or 'replicate' do not dilute the authenticity of participatory processes.

CAPACITY BUILDING OF PRACTITIONERS

Capacity building of practitioners is another area which requires attention. What a decade ago, was merely an experimentation in micro areas has now acquired an increasingly central place in development projects of a large scale nature. Participatory research approaches are also being employed in contexts like policy advocacy and networking at an national and international level. Are practitioners of these approaches aware of these micro-macro linkages ? Are they able respond to new and diverse challenges ?



EMPOWERMENT-IN-ACTION

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we need to ask ourselves how we can continue to spread the participatory research perspective while maintaining its roots in the lives of ordinary people. Empowerment requires a commitment to people's knowledge, their struggles and their learning. Do our current tools, methods, and frameworks meet up to this criteria? How can we further promote empowerment through participatory research?

An important objective of this manual is to invite reactions, feedback and ideas in order to strengthen our understanding as well as practice of participatory research in future. In the spirit of the World Conference held in Cartagena, we also support the need for "convergence" or bringing together different participatory approaches, traditions and schools of thought. The struggle to promote people's knowledge, learning and social transformation has always been a challenging one. We need to join hands in meeting this challenge.

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