

# **Knowledge and social change: An inquiry into participatory research in India**

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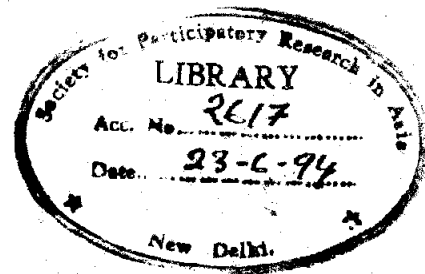
KNOWLEDGE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

An Inquiry into Participatory Research in India

October 1985



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# PREAMBLE

It started with the desire to document, share and critique our own experiences in Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training in India. When the initial idea was discussed with a few friends and colleagues in the network of Participatory Research, they thought it could be worthwhile to pursue it further. Of course, most of these themselves were reasearchers and trainers.

When the idea got shared with a few activists from field-based organizations, they were not sure of its value. In fact, one of them remarked, "A study on study?"

From the skepticism and hope of 1983 to its fruition in 1985, the study itself has been an exciting experience for all of us involved in it. The very task of coordinating a study of this type with seven different organizations from all over the country has been a challenging one. At times it appeared that each participant was doing his or her "own things", pulling the study in several different directions. But those fears and frustrations turned out to be short lived. The final product is a testimony to the confluence and convergence of efforts and contributions of all the participants.

It is important that these diverse contributions are acknowledged. Anita Dighe (Council for Social Development, New Delhi) provided the main support to the study at different stages. Walter Fernandes and Philip Vaegas (Indian Social Institute, New Delhi) were sincere and cheerful contributors of their own experience and reviewers of others. Ginny and Om Shrivastava (Seva Mandir, Udaipur) alternated to contribute to the continuous





process of documentation and reflection. Anthya Madiath (Gram Vikas, Orissa), Sheela Patel (then Nagapada Neighbourhood House, Bombay) and Martha Farrell and Feisal Alkazi (Ankur, New Delhi) joined in the planning, documenting and reflecting process quite actively and energetically. Thank you all!

Special thanks are due to the staff of adult education projects in H.P. and action groups in H.P. and Orissa.

From PRIA, several colleagues actively assisted in the process at several stages: S. Srinivasan (not with us now), Nandini Narula, Anil Choudhary, V. Manilal, Rajesh Pandey, Hem Raj Sharma, Satish Kumar.

The practical shape to the study was given by the collaboration with the International Council for Adult Education. Budd Hall and Yusuf Kassam of ICAE encouraged us to go ahead.

The study was made possible through the financial support of International Development Research Centre, Ottawa. We are thankful to them for the same. Anne Bernard and Sheldon Schaeffer of IDRC provided collegial support and critique throughout the study. Thanks!

We hope that this document will be of interest to other researchers, trainers, evaluators and field workers.

The process of enquiry has been an exciting one for us. We hope it stimulates others to undertake similar ones too.

September 1985

Rajesh Tandon

New Delhi.





# INTRODUCTION

During the past decade, innovations in research methodology have been attempted in different parts of the world. These innovations have arisen out of dissatisfactions from the dominant social science research methodology that became the bulwark of all inquiry in social problems and phenomena during the twentieth century. Critiques of traditional social science methodology have been made on the grounds of neutrality, objectivity and control by professionals. The recent criticism has been most sharply voiced by adult educators from the third world countries where they experienced traditional social science research methodology as alienating and dehumanising, an anti-thesis of all the principles and beliefs of adult and popular education.

Similar critiques have emerged of evaluation and training approaches. Evaluation has been practiced as an externally delivered judgement by the experts without concern for those engaged in designing and implementing various projects and programmes. Too many training programmes are trainer-oriented, designed and conducted by experts who pretend to know all and know what is good for the learners.

The exploration and practice of alternative methodologies in research, evaluation and training, particularly related to the problems of socio-economic injustices, has been going on in different parts of the world. Some of this has been documented and analysed. Yet, newer experiences are emerging as well and the practice is becoming further refined.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in India as well on seeking alternatives





in research, training and evaluation methodologies in development promoting activities in the field. The conceptualization of development strategies has moved away from top-down, pre-planned programmes to bottom-up, people's initiatives. People's participation in their own development has begun to acquire central focus in these strategies. Though as yet scattered, efforts in research, evaluation and training have also begun to base themselves on the participatory processes. Consequently, participatory research, evaluation and training have been and continue to be attempted in diverse settings.

Some interesting illustrations include the typical form of 'shibir'-camp where tribal women (in Shahda, Maharashtra, for example) assemble for a day or two to analyse their problems and to take collective action in common interests. Cadre-building of activists in urban and rural unions of workers and landless labourers utilize a participatory approach to education. Evaluation of field projects like Seva Mandir and Gram Vikas have been utilising principles of participation. Similarly, new models of people's inquiry are emerging: a study of the state of Indian environment had several activist groups and professionals joining hands; a study of the impact of a proposed hydel project was carried out by a team of professionals in collaboration with local people's organisations; and studies on the impact of forest policy on forest-dwellers have been carried out by professionally trained researchers, local activists and forest-dwellers constituting the study teams.

Several theoretical and methodological characteristics of these experiences in Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training are beginning to emerge. However, very little is available in the form of documentation, analysis and synthesis of these





experiences. Moreover, the field level activists, organizers and educators have little materials for their own learning as whatever little is available is in a form that is inaccessible to them. This study proposes to fill this gap by documenting and analysing several such experiences in Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training.

Several persons and organizations engaged in Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training in India have also been feeling a need to critically examine and collectively systematize their own experiences. It was felt that such a systematization will bring out insights for future use and thereby strengthen the practice of Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training in India, and might catalyse similar systematization elsewhere. It was proposed to conduct a study towards this end.

This report is an outcome of this study. It presents an overview framework utilized in the study; it describes in some detail the study methodology. The major chapter of the report presents the cases (which constituted the basis for the study) and their methodological analysis. The concluding chapter compares the three sets of cases on research, evaluation and training, and provides a synthesis of the analysis. The postscript records the reactions of those who participated in the study.

It is hoped that this report will contribute to the ongoing debate on and practice of Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training.





# STUDY FRAMEWORK

In this section, the original objectives of the study, key characteristics of Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training, the detailed study questions and definition of concepts and labels are presented. It then also explains the framework developed for analysis of the cases.

## OBJECTIVES

This study had the following objectives:

1. To document Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training efforts in India;
2. To analyse the nature of participatory process in these efforts;
3. To synthesise this analysis of participatory processes;
4. To disseminate the findings to other professionals and grassroots activists.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

In order to fulfil the above mentioned objectives, the study questions had to assess the characteristics of Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training efforts. The preliminary identification of these key characteristics had been made earlier, but considerable more indepth questioning was felt to be necessary for each of these. The





detailed study questions posed in this study were as follows:

1. How do people exercise control ? How do they control experts ? How is the unilateral control of experts reduced ? How is the myth of experts broken through the exercise of control ?
2. What is the nature of popular knowledge ? How is this knowledge created, articulated and acted upon ?
3. What mechanisms are used to promote praxis ? How do theory and practice interact ?
4. What is the nature and extent of empowerment ? How does this empowerment challenge ideological hegemony ?
5. Where people's organisations exist, how do these processes strengthen them for undertaking collective actions in common interests ? In other circumstances how do these processes contribute to organization-building in common interest ?

#### **KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

In respect of all these sets of study questions, several identifiable characteristics of Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training had emerged from the Indian experiences. These characteristics were enumerated beforehand to provide some preliminary definition





of Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training and thus assist in the selection of cases for a deeper analysis. As outlined at the beginning of the study, these characteristics were as follows:

1. The control over the process of research, evaluation and training is jointly exercised by professionals and ordinary people. The control over knowledge, outcomes and learning is mostly in the hands of others than professionals.
2. Ordinary people-poor farmers, illiterate workers, unemployed youth, women-are capable of producing their own knowledge, awareness and skills. In fact, popular knowledge, in different forms and methods, is available almost parallel to what is termed as 'scientific' knowledge.
3. Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training methodologies attempt a praxis of theory and practice. Daily practice informs theory, and this theory guides practice.
4. Central to this methodology is empowerment of the powerless. Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training empowers people to take initiatives in their common interests. It makes them self-confident, skilled, aware and knowledgeable.
5. The processes of undertaking Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training strengthens (or creates where none exist) organizations of people in a manner such that social change in the interests of the have-nots is set in motion.





## CONCEPTS

In the course of the study, several terms and concepts began to be used. It was felt that a preliminary definition of these concepts will help in ensuring a common understanding among all the study participants and future readers of the report. A brief definition of those terms and concepts is presented here.

**PARTICIPATION:** The meaning of participation in the research, evaluation and training process was broadly taken to imply the active involvement of concerned persons in the various stages of the process. Participation in research implies that those whose problems constitute the focus of research join the process of defining the problem, collecting information, analysing that information and using that analysis. Learners' involvement in defining their learning needs, contributing to the design of a training programme to meet those needs and actively taking part in the conduct of the training programme was seen as the meaning of participation in training. Likewise, the active engagement of those whose work was the focus of evaluation in defining the goals of evaluation and carrying out the evaluation process was seen as participation in evaluation. Participation was seen as an active stance, and not mere mechanical motion.

**CONTROL:** The reference of participation is whether ordinary people can exercise control vis-a-vis the external experts. In many cases, experts external to the situation are involved in carrying out research, evaluation and training. The professional researcher,





evaluator and trainer generally controls the entire process of research, evaluation and training. The question of control implies whether people whose problem is the focus of research, people whose work is to be evaluated, and people who are to be trained, exert any influence on the process or not. This becomes particularly significant when experts are involved. Then the question of control implies influence over the process by ordinary people vs the experts.

**AWARENESS:** Awareness was defined as an understanding of the problems affecting oneself, as well as the underlying causes of the problem. Awareness has both an intellectual and an emotional aspect----understanding cognitively as well as emotionally. This brings the sensitivity to the problem and their causes. In research, evaluation and training, awareness is both a starting point and an end result. Does the participatory process enhance this awareness, and how, was the focus in this study.

**EMPOWERMENT:** Empowerment was defined as the opposite of the sense of powerlessness. Ordinary persons may feel individually powerless, a sense of "I cannot." Empowerment has a collective connotation and expresses the sense that "we can". It is a state of feeling as well as being. It contains elements of collective self-confidence and respect for one's abilities. It is **not** used in a formal or legalistic sense where some one is "empowered" or authorised by some superior to do something. In reference to awareness, empowerment has a collective and deeper meaning: not just understanding but also potency. In the context of this study, the contribution of the participatory nature of research, evaluation and training was the focus.





**MOBILISATION:** Coming together of people around a specific issue was seen as mobilisation. A common problem, task, challenge or enemy can mobilise people to come together, think and plan and then act. In the context of research, evaluation and training, mobilisation can be enhanced through the participatory nature of these or not, was the concern in the study.

**ORGANIZATION-BUILDING:** An organization of the people is built around common interests and with definite goals. The organization has a stable and long-term character. In reference to mobilization, an organization transcends a single issue problem and exists beyond the resolution of the first issue which brought people together. In some cases, a rudimentary or amorphous organization can be strengthened to become more active, coherent and impactful. In this study, the contribution of the participatory nature of research, evaluation and training on the building and strengthening of organizations was the focus.

The above concepts were expected to get refined in the course of the study and linkages between them clarified. The last chapter provides some of these clarifications and linkages. It was also felt that the precise form that empowerment, mobilisation etc take will vary from situation to situation.

#### **FRAMEWORK FOR METHODOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

The cases of Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training that constituted the basis for this study were analysed in terms of the key characteristics on the basis of a frame work





developed. That framework is briefly presented here for the sake of clarity.

This framework essentially classifies various sets of actors involved in a participatory process. Three categories of actors have been identified in figure 1.

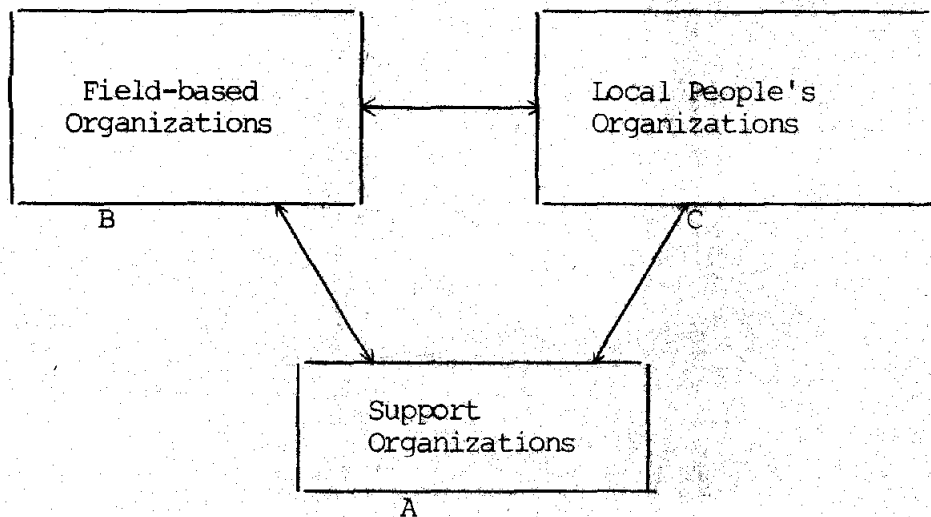


FIGURE 1

The first set of actors are labelled here as **support organizations**. These are basically research, training and documentation organizations, typically operating over a large part (or whole) of the country. PRIA is an example. These organizations provide support (or are expected to provide support) to other two categories of organizations.

The second category of actors are called **field-based organizations**. These are essentially local voluntary organisations or social action groups. Most of these organizations work





with the local poor in a set of villages or slums in a limited geographical area. Their work essentially is facilitating education and organization of the poor, and they use a range of developmental inputs or activities towards this end.

The third set of actors are **local people's organizations**. These groups or organizations are largely comprised of and managed by the local poor (e.g. tribals, landless labourers, women etc.). Workers' association or a union is another example of this. The scope, size and strength of these groups and organizations vary a great deal. They are formed to serve the interests of their members and typically rely on negotiation and agitational methods towards these ends.

In this study, professionals and experts in research, evaluation and training typically come from **support organizations**, though many field-based organizations have also acquired expertise in these areas. References to ordinary people, vs. the experts, in this study imply primarily members of **local people's organizations** and sometimes field workers of **field-based organizations**. In the various cases described later, the different combinations of these three sets of actors will appear engaged in a given Participatory Research, Evaluation or Training case. The case will also indicate the roles played by different sets of actors and the interactions between them.





# STUDY METHODOLOGY

To carry out a study on the methodology of Participatory Research, Training and Evaluation posed several methodological challenges. It was decided, in principle, that the study methodology must be consistent with the principles of Participatory Research. Thus, it became a challenge to design and conduct a participatory research on Participatory Research.

Several carefully thought out key steps were undertaken in the study:

## 1. Identification of Cases

The process of identifying illustrations of Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training took about two and a half months. Several methods were used to evolve a list of possible cases to choose from. These were:

- a) The existing network of PRIA was used to seek this information (for example, through its newsletter);
- b) Personal **contacts** of PRIA and its partner organizations were used to prepare a list;
- c) A formal letter was written to about 50 groups and organizations enclosing a copy of the proposal and inviting their participation in the study.





As a result of this, a list of such examples was prepared which fell within the category of Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training. From this list of about 25 examples, further narrowing was done on the basis of the interest shown by these organizations for their involvement in the study.

On the basis of preliminary interest shown, representatives of eight organizations were invited to the planning meeting. Three of these had research experience, three training and two evaluation experience.

One of the greatest hurdles at this stage was the difficulty in securing the interest of organizations to get involved in the study. This was largely due to the fact we decided to make the study an example of Participatory Research itself and thereby expected very active involvement of participating organizations. Some organizations were not interested to invest a lot of their time and energy in this study at that stage of their own work.

## 2. Planning Meeting

The planning meeting was held at Gram Vikas, Orissa (one of the participating groups) during March 1984 attended by 15 representatives of those eight organizations. The task of securing collaboration of such a wide group of organizations appeared rather difficult and was exemplified by the fact that representatives of Seva Mandir just could not attend this meeting due to their internal engagement.

This problem of developing common schedule has been an ongoing challenge to the study. This is significantly affected by the fact that each organization has its own priority and pace





of work and their internal demands may at times override the requirements of the study.

The planning meeting primarily discussed the needs, objectives and the framework of the study. One of the general questions posed to each organization present was whether their involvement in the study would be of any use to them.

Having evolved this common understanding, three small groups worked to evolve detailed methodology of investigation. The groups on research sat together, and similarly the evaluation and training groups.

These detailed plans for data collection were then commonly reviewed and agreed upon. Two general issues rising out of this planning meeting need mention here. Firstly, participants felt that this kind of investigation called for more qualitative and indepth approaches than use of structured questionnaire. Therefore, some leading questions were prepared as basis for indepth interviewing, but these were not to be rigidly specified.

The second important issue was that members of the participating organizations expressed a desire to help each other in this investigation. Thus besides the PRIA staff, the two research teams agreed to help each other, similarly the two evaluation and training teams.

At the end of the planning meeting, one of the organizations, DEEDS Mangalore, decided not to get actively involved in the study because at that point in time it did not consider the study as a priority. However, it desired to be kept informed of further developments in the study.

The first step agreed upon was to write up a chronological history of each illustration.





This was to be followed up by indepth interviews and discussions with all the people involved in that example. Both individual and collective discussions were considered important.

In each of these events one of the PRIA team members was to assist each of the participating organizations. The overall coordination was left to PRIA but each participating organization devised its own schedule and plans of action.

The issue of confidentiality was also raised in the planning meeting. It was felt that before anything was circulated outside, the participating organisations should 'clear' the draft.

### 3. Field Work

Spread over the next ten months or so, data-collection for this study became a complex exercise. Not only that various schedules had to be met but also various participating organizations had to be kept together on the task. PRIA staff acted as both researchers (and therefore a team-mate) and also facilitators for this process of collective study. The positive experience of the planning meeting generated high sense of ownership of and excitement about the study.

Field work in Orissa was done by PRIA staff in May 1984, its first draft shown to some local action groups and ISI in July 1984 and their comments relooked at in the field in September-October 1984. For H.P. forest study, initial discussions with local partner organizations were held in May/June 1984, an advance PRIA team visited in October 1984 and ISI team alongwith local partners did field work in October-November 1984.





For evaluation and training cases, similar complex schedules were prepared and maintained. The difficulties in field work of such a complex study (both geographically and organizationally) became clear when landslides would occur in H.P. and floods in Orissa. The events during November-December 1984 completely threw off-guard the meticulously planned schedule.

The idea of a review meeting in between the field work period was very fruitful. Held at ISI, New Delhi during mid November 1984 and attended by thirteen representatives of five organizations (Gram Vikas could not attend), the meeting served two major functions. Based on the data collected and drafts prepared so far, a preliminary analysis of the examples of Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training was made collectively. Secondly, gaps in the existing data were identified and plans made for collecting the same in the future.

#### **4. Draft Report and Review.**

A draft report was prepared based on the data collection, draft case studies and preliminary analysis made earlier. Its purpose was to synthesise the experiences and analysis. The draft was first reviewed by the participating organizations and then discussed in a larger meeting held in July 1985. It was planned that final report in English and popular versions in Hindi and Marathi will be brought out then for wider dissemination.

The final review meeting critiqued the draft at length and made suggestions for follow-up action by different participating organizations. It was attended by a total of fifteen persons representing all the seven cases and another representative from a training organization. This report incorporates the various deliberations of this meeting.





# THE CASES

## THE CASES

Seven cases constituted the basis for the study. In this section, those cases are briefly described from the point of view of methodology. Of the three Participatory Research cases, two were forest studies in Orissa and Himachal Pradesh, and one was a baseline survey of the needs of the poor rural women in Udaipur. The two Participatory Training examples comprised of the leadership training of rural women in Udaipur and activists of urban slums in Bombay. Gram Vikas, an integrated rural development agency in Orissa and Ankur, a non-formal education project in urban slums of Delhi constituted the two cases of Participatory Evaluation.

This chapter is organized in three sections. The first section deals with examples of Participatory Research, the second with Participatory Evaluation cases, and the third with those of Participatory Training. In each section, a brief description of the cases and their backgrounds is presented first, and then methodological analysis is presented in three categories: participation and control, awareness and empowerment, mobilisation and organization-building.

### A) Participatory Research

1. **Forest Studies:** The two forest studies in Orissa and H.P. emanated from the same historical background. This background provides the context in which these studies are to be viewed.





*Origins:* Towards the end of 1981, some individuals and local action groups began to get concerned about certain provisions of the new draft Forest Bill (1980) that the central government was planning to introduce in the parliament. A copy of the draft bill was obtained and circulated among several concerned professionals and action groups to elicit their reactions. Their unanimous reactions suggested the need for organizing a workshop to discuss this bill.

Jointly organized by 14 institutions, the national workshop on a New Forest Policy was held at Indian Social Institute, New Dehi during April 12-14, 1982. It was attended by about eighty activists and professionals.

After discussions on various issues, several follow-up steps were agreed upon during this workshop. One of these steps was to conduct indepth studies in different forest areas of the country.

The need for the forest studies arose from the realization that the proposed forest policy of the government intended to protect forests from the forest-dwellers. The assumption behind this policy was that tribals and other forest-dwellers were the main cause for deforestation. This assumption was supported by the data provided by the government's forest department in each state.

The forest department records in Orissa blamed tribals for deforestation by shifting cultivation, collection of fire-wood and grazing; firewood and grazing were assigned as the main reasons for deforestation by H.P. forest department records.





Therefore, any critique of or challenge to the proposed forest policy would need to be substantiated with an alternate data base, developed from the point-of-view of tribals and forest-dwellers. The forest studies were intended to fill this gap.

Besides, the national workshop had also planned steps for enhanced mobilisation of the forest-dwellers for their own organization and struggle, as it was realised that they alone through their collective efforts can ensure the development and implementation of an appropriate forest policy in the long run. It was then hoped that the forest studies could assist in this process of mobilisation of the forest-dwellers.

Thus, forest studies were initiated to serve these twin objectives of developing an alternative, authentic data-base on the state of the forests and causes of deforestation, and of developing awareness and mobilisation of the forest-dwellers and activists in respect of their own interests related to forests.

In August 1982, the follow-up committee of the national workshop began preparations for the forest studies. It was decided that different organizations should be asked to take responsibility for these studies in different parts of the country. While the overall focus of the studies was seen as the extent and causes of deforestation, it was felt that different study coordinators can expand the scope of the study in their area depending on the local situation and the expectations of the local groups. It was also agreed that principles of participatory research will be utilized in these studies in active





collaboration with the local groups and activists of the area. Indian Social Institute (ISI), New Delhi took the responsibility to coordinate the study in Orissa and Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), New Delhi in Himachal Pradesh (H.P.).

**Orissa Forest Study:** ISI, a support organization, coordinated this study with nine field-based action groups from seven districts of Orissa. The study was carried out over a period of about 18 months beginning in August 1982. The following were the key steps in the study:

1. ISI staff made field visits to several action groups in Orissa for an exploratory discussion of the study (August 1982).
2. A planning workshop was held in Kashipur (Koraput Dt.) (January 1983) to plan the study. Areas of focus and interested action groups were identified. Twenty participants from 12 local organizations attended. The study focus included extent and causes of deforestation, the linkage of tribal economy with forests, the nature of minor forest produce and its impact on tribals, cultural relevance of forests for tribals, etc.
3. Another workshop was held (March 1983) in Mahimagadi (Dhenkanal Dt.) attended by 16 participants from 9 local groups. A data collection tool (questionnaire) was finalised and choices made about the selection of villages and villagers.
4. Between April and June 1983, the activists of local action groups collected data from





the field. ISI staff collected data from the government officials and secondary sources. An orientation camp for activists was held in early May 1983.

5. A workshop was held end of June 1983 at Kesinga (Kalahandi Dt.) to review the experience of data-collection so far and to plan further steps. The issue of overload of questionnaire (too big and cumbersome) was raised by the members of the field-based groups and it was decided to reduce the scope.

6. Further data collection in the field and preliminary analysis of data took place between July and November 1983.

7. A workshop at Khariar Road (Kalahandi Dt.) in early December 1983 was used to discuss the preliminary findings and to evolve future action.

8. This was followed by a final workshop in March 1984 at Gopalpur (Ganjam Dt.) which finalised the report and planned concrete future actions.

**H.P. Forest Study:** The H.P. forest study was carried out by PRIA in collaboration with three groups in three districts of H.P. It took about 18 months to complete the study beginning October 1982. The main steps in the study were as follows:

1. PRIA staff established contact with one of the action groups that attended the national workshop (October 1982). Two other groups were contacted through this group.





2. A workshop was held in mid December, 1982 in Jagjitnagar with 8 activists from two local groups. The broad focus of the study and areas of investigation, sharing of responsibility and tools of data collection were evolved. The focus of the study was the extent and causes of deforestation, local forest-dwellers role in it, the nature of the forest contract system, etc.
3. Newer groups were identified over the next three months. In the meanwhile, the first two groups dropped out of the study. The search for local partners started afresh in April 1983. It was recognized that "ideal" field-based groups may not be available in H.P. and hence local partners must be identified from a wide range of possibilities.
4. PRIA staff collected data from government officials and secondary sources during May - June 1983.
5. One action group and two adult education programmes of the University became new local partners in the study in July 1983.
6. Three training camps and field data-collection was conducted during August - November 1983. Training camps became both data-collection events and awareness-raising occasions for local investigators.
7. Data-analysis was made and a draft report was prepared over the next two months.
8. A popular report in Hindi was prepared and published for wider local dissemination in





May 1984. An English report was subsequently also prepared and published.

**2. Developmental Needs of Poor Rural Women:** A study of the development needs of poor rural women was launched in Girwa and Badgaon Blocks of Udaipur District in Rajasthan by Seva Mandir, a field-based voluntary organization, during 1983. As an ongoing part of its work with rural women, Seva Mandir initiated a process of ascertaining the needs of and problems faced by poor rural women and organizing them.

At the same time, Special Schemes Organization of Government of Rajasthan and UNICEF wanted Seva Mandir to conduct a baseline survey of women's needs so that special programmes could be designed to meet these needs.

Seva Mandir utilized Participatory Research Methodology in meeting these twin objectives of organizing women at hamlet levels and influencing policy through the baseline survey.

In collecting baseline data, it was assumed that women themselves were the best source of information and analysis. So, the field staff of Women's Development Unit of Seva Mandir assisted the poor rural women to share and analyse their experiences, which were documented and systematised as baseline survey by the field staff.

In forming hamlet level groups of women, the field staff initiated a process whereby women come together to share their experiences and analyse their situation. These women gradually became a stable group as the process of reflection and analysis led to concrete actions in respect of solving some local problems. Thus some of the steps in organizing





women and in collecting baseline data were identical in this experience.

As the process of documenting the needs and problems of women was going on, government officials demanded the use of a questionnaire for survey. After considerable discussion, Seva Mandir gave in to their whims, designed a simple questionnaire of a page and a half and used it to conduct group survey of 15 women's groups. In the end, they realized that the survey did not add any new insights to the existing data.

At the end of the year, there were 45 groups of poor rural women (with membership ranging from 10-20) as well as comprehensive analysis of developmental needs and problems of poor rural women.

The women's groups have become stronger since then, and the document submitted by Seva Mandir to the government has already influenced the planning of some new programmes.

In this case, no support organization was involved; Seva Mandir as a field-based organization initiated the research process with local women.

**Methodological Analysis:** As mentioned earlier, support organizations (ISI and PRIA) were involved in Orissa and H.P. In Orissa, nine field-based organizations got involved; in H.P. one field-based organization and two college based adult education projects. People's organization did not exist in H.P., but cluster or village level groups of tribals existed in four districts of Orissa. In the case of the rural women, only the field-based organization (Seva Mandir) started the process. The following analysis keeps the above categorisation of actors in view.





**Participation and Control:** The forest studies started with the initiative of support organizations. These organizations initially perceived the need for such studies and then began the process of exploration with the local field based organizations. This exploration in Orissa yielded positive response from nine action groups, two of which had themselves articulated the need for a systematic study. In H.P., the local field based organizations were almost non-existent. Hence, the process of exploration took considerably more time and resulted in a compromise of selecting one action group and two adult education projects.

In both cases, initial planning of the study - its focus, areas of investigation, methods of data-collection and time scheduling - was done through a participatory process where representatives of action groups were involved with the support organization. The various workshops were seen as methods to achieve this participation.

Despite formal participation, the degree of active involvement varied considerably. In Orissa, four action groups played a more active role in planning of study, others just agreed to go along. The groups that influenced the study most had already been building local people's organizations, and were aware of and concerned about the issue of deforestation. They had also mobilised the local forest dwellers on the issue of deforestation even prior to the starting of the study. Thus their own knowledge, experience and concern made it easier for them to influence the course of the study.

The involvement of local forest-dwellers in the study was non-existent in the beginning. Their needs, views and opinions were gradually brought into the study as field based





organizations began the process of initial data-collection. The specific interaction with forest dwellers in the context of the study began to influence field based organizations and action groups, which in turn influenced the study. This was certainly evident in Orissa. The local people's concerns began to get articulated as problem-focus by the field-based groups.

In H.P., on the other hand, the three field based partners of PRIA did not significantly influence the study initially. The action group suggested an additional focus in the study as per its own needs - who are the forest contractors and contract labourers. This was included in the study. For the rest of the study, their participation was high, but their control over the study remained minimal. This was largely due to the fact that the three partner organizations did not have any major concern about or understanding of the issues of deforestation prior to the beginning of the study. They had themselves not raised this issue with the local people.

They got involved in the study as they were influenced by the support organization to see the importance of the issue. The training camps further sustained this initial interest through sharing of information and analysis.

However, the involvement of local forest-dwellers did take place in both the studies in the form of the activists and field workers of these field based organizations. In all the three partner groups in H.P. and in a majority of the Orissa action groups, many persons involved in the planning and conducting of the study were local forest-dwellers. Thus their own involvement did bring in, to some extent, the opinions and views and concerns of the local forest-dwellers into the study.





An interesting aspect of control over the study was that the field based organizations began to exercise much greater control as the study progressed. New ideas and directions were suggested after the initial round of data-collection. They also controlled the use of study findings. In Orissa, the draft of the report and its initial analysis were openly discussed by action groups. They then planned follow-up action in this aspect of their own. In H.P., the local partners demanded a popular report first, which was prepared before the formal report. And their own-follow-up action increased with the dissemination of popular report. The action group in H.P. subsequently initiated a big project on social forestry.

In contrast to Forest Studies, the study of the needs of the poor women involved primarily a field based organization and local women. The study was initiated by the field based organization, primarily with a view to build local women's organizations. The field-based organization catalysed the process of women coming together, sharing their problems and openly discussing the causes of those problems. The research process, to begin with, was focused upon the needs of women for women. Hence, the involvement of poor rural women in the initial analysis of their own needs was rather high. They were also able to specify the precise focus of what was to be ascertained and also provide the underlying causes for the same. The outcomes of their own analysis were largely controlled by the women themselves.

An additional objective of baseline survey for government was subsequently added. The field based organization then performed the function of written documentation based on collation and synthesis of experience of different groups of women. They thus evolved an additional purpose of the study - to influence government policy. It was for this additional purpose that this collation and documentation became necessary. Thus poor





rural women largely controlled the processes and outcomes of the study as they defined it in the beginning. The same process was used by the field based organization to serve another outcome of the study. This second part was largely controlled by the field based organization. The two significant ways in which government policy got influenced arose out of this experience itself: involving women in defining their problems, and group (not individual) basis for developing women's programmes. The two key principles used in the process were the main influence on the government policy.

**Awareness and Empowerment:** The most salient aspect of the Forest Studies was their contribution in building awareness around the issue of deforestation. In H.P., the main outcome of the study was enhanced awareness among the activists and field workers of the partner groups. They gathered insights about the issues; they understood the importance of these issues; and they decided to act on these issues. This enhanced awareness clearly gave them a push to work on the problems of forests. The action group follow-up included a social forestry programme; in case of adult education projects, little follow-up took place largely due to the fact that the field staff was transient and shortlived.

The local forest dwellers developed a better awareness of issues only towards the final stages of the study. The popular report made a great impact on them. And enhanced awareness was visible only after the report was circulated and discussed. The action group and adult education projects discussed the findings written in the report with local people; many literates among the forest-dwellers took copies home and narrated the findings. This also enhanced their sense of ownership of the study, perhaps for the first time in the entire process.





The sense of empowerment was only accomplished among some activists of the action group. They began to act on the basis of their newly acquired insight and confidence about the forest issue. However, another element of this empowerment among the activists arose out of their involvement in the study itself—they felt that they can now systematically conduct their own studies, for which they earlier felt they had no expertise.

The local forest dwellers in H.P. could not develop any empowerment largely due to a lack of sustained interaction with them by the field based organizations. Since the participation and control of local forest-dwellers during the early phase of the study was marginal, continued and close interaction with them was needed to generate and sustain empowerment. The two adult education projects hardly did any further local work, and the staff of the action group was just beginning a serious local effort.

On the other hand, examples of awareness-raising and empowerment abound in Orissa. In all the cases, activists of the action groups have become much more aware of and sensitive to the issues of deforestation. All the nine groups began to also act on these issues by the end of the study, though initially only four were doing so. Their own sense of empowerment, both for action on forest issues and also in conducting their own future investigations, enhanced considerably as the study progressed.

Several activists of these groups have subsequently initiated, on their own, indepth investigations of problems of land and land alienation. They are doing it with great self-confidence, which they confess they acquired through their involvement in the forest study.





In Orissa, local tribals also acquired greater awareness of these issues, the most striking of these is their enhanced sensitivity to the impact on forests of their practice of "Podu" (shifting cultivation). Considering that tribals in most places in Orissa are economically dependent and culturally bound to this practice, it is quite interesting to know that they are debating among themselves to abandon this practice in some places.

The enhanced empowerment of tribals is also visible in Orissa. Though it is uneven in its degree in the nine locations, it is clearly visible in all. The tribals have approached officials with their own community forestry schemes; they have demanded land for afforestation in some places; they have protested when outsiders came in to cut trees in some places; they have demanded the variety of saplings they need, not what forest department gives, for planting in some places. This enhanced collective decision-making and action-taking has clearly emerged among many of them. In one case, the tribals have themselves carried out a survey on the type of saplings needed by them.

The awareness-raising and empowerment in the case of rural women has been clearly demonstrated in the process. The process of defining and analysing their own problems has contributed largely to enhancing their awareness of the causes of their problems. The empowerment is visible from the fact that a collective consciousness evolved to do something about their own situation. Women acted to help fellow women on their personal problems as well as on general community problems like deepening of the wells. A common activity undertaken by many women was to strain drinking water, for better health of the family. The issues varied, but women's actions showed enhanced understanding of and collective desire to act on the issues as the analysis progressed.





*Mobilisation and Organization-Buildings:* The contribution of Forest Studies on mobilisation of local forest-dwellers and building their organizations varied considerably. In H.P., hardly any initial mobilisation was visible. Local village level organizations of forest-dwellers had existed historically. But the study did not seem to enhance or strengthen these in any way.

This was largely due to the transient nature of the field staff of adult education project, and the action group in H.P. was just beginning to get sensitized to this issue and the need for mobilisation and organization-buiding of the local people. They were earlier not focusing on the need for mobilisation around the forest issue.

On the other hand, the Orissa experience is quite different. In most of the cases (7 out of nine), local tribals did get mobilised to take collective action. Protection of bamboo forest, undertaking social forestry programme and forming local organizations are indicators of the mobilisation. In some cases (three out of nine), initial beginnings were made to form local organizations around these issues. Tribals of several villages came together to plan what they could do collectively.

Two out of the four cases where local peoples' organizations did exist beforehand, had earlier worked on the forest issue. For them the study acted as a reaffirmation of their own analysis and position, thereby strengthening their own organizations. In the other two cases, local peoples' organizations had not worked on the forest issue before. But they got interested and concerned about the issue as the study progressed. And their organizations are now actively pursuing these issues. This has also contributed to the strengthening of





these peoples' organizations by adding important new issues as central concerns of the tribals.

The mobilisation and organization-building of poor rural women is most obvious from the experience narrated earlier. Not only were 45 women's groups formed in the process, but many of these groups had initiated concrete action during the process itself on issues of concern to them. For example, one group acted to put pressure on local government officials to provide them with safe drinking water; another group has started collecting information on new income generating efforts.

## **B. PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION**

1. **Ankur:** Ankur is a non-formal education organization working among the urban poor of Delhi. At the time of evaluation, it was known as Abner Project. The project was started in 1977. Student teachers (from high schools) were trained and helped to run non-formal education centres for non-school going children in the slums. Simultaneously, adult education centres, primarily for women, were run by adult volunteer teachers.

At the time of evaluation 15 centres for slum children run by student teachers and 35 centres (10 for adults) run by adult volunteer teachers were functioning. Approximately 30 learners came to each centre. There were 9 full time staff and 28 volunteer teachers at the time of the evaluation. The project had its first evaluation in May 1979.

1. The need for a second evaluation was felt by the project staff in early 1982. The





project director had a preliminary meeting with the two facilitators (PRIA was one of them).

2. A day long planning meeting was held in March 1982 with the entire full time staff where objectives of evaluation, focus, contents, sources of data and methods of data-collecting were planned. The main focus was on assessing goal accomplishment, role of the staff, effectiveness of the educational methods used, etc.

3. A two-day workshop was held with all volunteer teachers and full time staff (April 1982) to plan the evaluation and to seek their assessments. In this workshop, all volunteer teachers developed characteristics of an effective adult education centre and then assessed their centres in respect of those characteristics.

4. Data collection for the project involving student teachers was carried out in April - May 1982 by staff, students, teachers, community people and facilitators. Various short questionnaires were used, as well as guides for interviews.

5. Facilitators and staff carried out the analysis together (June - July 1982). Questionnaires and interview analysis was made and written down.

6. Preliminary findings were presented to the various parties in a feedback meeting (July 1982). Most importantly, principals of the schools were invited.

7. The data-collection with volunteer teachers took place in May-August, 1982. Most of





the data-collection entailed visits to the centres and discussions with the community.

8. Analysis of data got delayed due to a crisis faced by the organization. It was finally completed by the end of 1982 and feedback in January 1983 to a meeting of full time staff of Ankur.

9. A draft report was prepared by the facilitators in 1983.

**Gram Vikas:** Gram Vikas is a field-based voluntary organization located in Narsingpur village, near Berhampur, Ganjam District of Orissa. Started in 1976-77 by a small group of young persons, the organization became a registered society in 1979. Working initially with the tribals of 4-5 villages in the Kerandimal, Gram Vikas gradually expanded its work to 97 tribal villages. From initial effort at health improvement, it moved on to the questions of indebtedness, bondage and land alienation. Fighting these questions emerged an organization of the tribals called Kerandimal Gana Sangathana (KGS) -- local people's organization. As old issues got resolved, new ones emerged. Adult education, institutional loans for productive purposes, savings and consumption loans, agricultural inputs, dairy, biogas etc...etc....Gram Vikas has travelled quite some distance. The organization has expanded, both in terms of area of operation and personnel; a farm at Narasinghpur has been developed for demonstration-cum-promotion purposes; there has been some visible change in the life of Kerandimal tribals.

However, recently, the core members of Gram Vikas had been feeling as if they have reached a plateau. The growth of the organization had been associated with internal and external





strains. The informal, family-type working style of the core group since inception was being experienced as less than effective. It was in this context that the core group decided to initiate a process of evaluation and critical self-reflection so as to facilitate the forward movement of Gram Vikas.

The President of Gram Vikas invited two external facilitators for this evaluation (PRIA was one). The initiative to invite the facilitators was taken by the President on the basis of his prior knowledge of the facilitators. It was felt that a two-person team will be more effective than a single individual. The following steps were taken:

1. The evaluation process was spread over four sittings of a week each over a period of 15 months. The first session took place in January 1983. The core staff, comprising of 9 persons, were primarily involved in the evaluation. The field staff (10 persons) were only briefly involved at this stage. Form and objectives of evaluation were planned. The assessment was carried out among the staff. Some future plans were evolved for direction of work and organizational structure. The core staff were feeling extremely demoralised at that stage and decided to start with themselves, a decision that was respected by the facilitators.

2. The second session took place end of March 1983. This essentially built on the previous one and concretised some plans of action decided upon in the previous sessions. It was still limited to the core staff. Though the group had started feeling less demoralised, it needed some time to practice its new decisions in the field.





3 The staff of Gram Vikas carried out evaluation camps with the local KCS members during May-June 1983. These camps essentially followed the design of their own sessions.

The core staff alongwith field staff decided to use village camps to evaluate their work with the tribals. These camps were organized as village fairs, and discussions and analysis formed a part of over-all celebrations. The Gram Vikas staff went to listen, and many programmes and activities of Gram Vikas were analysed. For example, tribals analysed the loans programme and found it not so useful. Gram Vikas agreed to discontinue it. Special camps for youth and women were also held.

4. A review session was held in September 1983. The experiences of evaluation camps with local people were used in assessing the directions and plans made by the organization. There was a greater involvement of field staff at this stage. The core staff had started feeling more self-confident and positive about their work and the organization. It was then easier for them to involve the field staff.

5. In March 1984 a final session was held with all the staff. The session was essentially an annual review and planning for the future. This was a natural outcome of the process of increasing involvement of all field staff started during the previous stage.

While the facilitators prepared the report of the first session, subsequent sessions were documented by the organisations' staff.

**Methodological Analysis:** In carrying out the analysis of the methodology of evaluation





of these two experiences, the categories used earlier can be utilized. Both the examples fit into Figure - 1, except that there was no local peoples' organization in the case of Ankur. The external support organization facilitators were brought in by the organizational heads in both cases.

**Participation and Control:** In some ways, the experience of Gram Vikas and Ankur varied considerably in respect of participation during the evaluation process. The initial participation of core staff at Gram Vikas was high and remained so during the entire process. In Ankur, senior staff participated more actively initially. The participation of supervisory staff gradually increased over a period of time. The participation of volunteer teachers remained fairly low throughout the process. In Gram Vikas, the participation of field staff remained low through the first two sessions and then increased gradually.

In both cases, participation of local people remained low initially. Initially, Gram Vikas core staff wanted to start from their own group as they themselves were fairly demoralised. The depth of evaluation increased as they felt more confident and skilled. The local tribals and KGS participated in the evaluation camps organised by Gram Vikas field staff after the first two sessions. The process of community participating in Ankur's evaluation just barely began towards the end of the evaluation. It was planned in advance to involve the community, but the push for doing so did not come from within for some time. However, in both cases, the staff of the organization have carried on the participatory process of reflection with the local people as an ongoing part of their regular work. This has been perhaps an important contribution of the process of participatory evaluation in both





cases. In both cases, the staff felt equipped and confident to conduct ongoing participatory evaluation as a result of their earlier involvement.

The nature and extent of control exercised over the process of evaluation varied over a period of time. In both cases, control over the process was exercised initially by the external facilitators. But even in the beginning, control over the objectives, focus and content of the evaluation was exercised by the staff of the two organizations. It was their decision who got involved at that stage of the process. The control, however, gradually increased over a period of time in both cases, and subsequent steps were largely controlled by the staff of the two organizations. For example, Gram Vikas staff on its own decided to hold village camps and subsequently invite field staff into the evaluation process; Ankur staff carried out the evaluation of adult education centres largely on its own and even acted on some of their findings before the report was prepared by the facilitators, (The schools took over the total responsibility for Ankur staff attached to them).

The need of Gram Vikas to rely on perceptions and feelings in the evaluation process was respected by the facilitators. The need of Ankur for quantifiable data and statistics in the evaluation was also respected. Hence, the process of evaluation yielded qualitative and quantitative approaches and outcomes in Gram Vikas and Ankur respectively. This is another illustration of the manner in which control was exercised in the two cases. Though the need for evaluation was initially felt within the two organisations and the facilitators were brought in to assist this process, the process of exercising control over the evaluation process was gradual.





**Awareness and Empowerment:** The evaluation of Gram Vikas came at a time when staff morale and energy was low, future directions were unclear and interpersonal relationships were tense. The very process of evaluation not only dealt with these issues directly but also indirectly. The core staff of Gram Vikas developed a realistic awareness and understanding of the impact of their past work; and their own data-based analysis gave them ideas for future direction. The process of this awareness-building also focused upon the person of each staff and their interpersonal relationships.

The analytical reflection gave them a sense of a collective self-confidence, that they can do it together. The empowerment of the staff was visible in their high energy, enhanced solidarity and high morale after the first session itself. The whole exercise of critically examining their organizational structure was an example of this empowerment - they took it apart and created a new one, by their own hands. The personal growth and the improved interpersonal relationships further added to this sense of empowerment.

In Ankur, evaluation was initiated at a time when the organisation had established clear direction and organization structure. It was looking for an opportunity to assess its work in terms of these directions. The process of evaluation got hampered in late summer of 1982 due to an externally imposed crisis in the organization. And reorganization became the response of Ankur.

It is, therefore, somewhat difficult to ascertain the actual contribution of the evaluation process in Ankur. But awareness raising of its staff was clearly visible. In the project with student-teachers, it was seen that the Principals and some other teachers





also became realistically aware of the activities of the Ankur staff. The conflicts and divisions within the Ankur staff, particularly those between the school and community projects, became clear to the staff. Awareness of the needs of the community, in particular women learners, was enhanced among some volunteer teachers, in particular those whose interaction with the community was low before.

The most visible signs of empowerment in Ankur came in the staff working with the schools. They gradually but firmly acquired recognition in their respective schools. Some general sense of empowerment was visible in the manner in which the entire Ankur staff faced up to the crisis and carried out the reorganization. The collective nature of that process is an important indicator to that. For some volunteer teachers, the process of evaluation acted as a source of empowerment when realistic appraisal of their work was made.

A major aspect of awareness-raising and empowerment common to both cases was the evaluation itself. In both cases, initial reaction of staff towards evaluation was negative. The word itself evoked image of harsh judgement delivered from the desk-top by disinterested external experts. As the process of evaluation unfolded, both sets of staff gradually became aware that it was a collective process and they had an important role to play in it. It took some staff members some time to realise the real meaning of participation during the evaluation. And both sets of staff acquired the competence, skills and confidence to carry on the process of evaluation on their own. The skills and confidence to conduct evaluation on their own is much more in Gram Vikas staff than Ankur staff and it is largely due to the greater depth and width of staff involvement in Gram Vikas during the evaluation process. This has been demonstrated in the manner in which they





carried out continuous evaluation with local people as well as the ease with which they can collectively reflect on their own work. And this has acted as another source of empowerment among them-- evaluation exposed, demystified.

**Mobilisation and Organization-Building:** The contribution of participatory evaluation process on the restructuring and strengthening of the organization of Gram Vikas was most visible. The organization emerged stronger out of it, as persons individually and collectively grew in the process. A realistic assessment of their strengths and weaknesses helped mobilise them to act decisively on several fronts. They reorganized and refocussed the nature of their involvement with the tribals and KGS. They conceived of and created a structure for their own organisation that could tackle some of the problems faced by them. In both these ways, they also contributed to strengthen the organization of the tribals who had inadvertently become more dependent on Gram Vikas. The process of evaluation had contributed towards instilling a feeling of solidarity and trust among the staff which has since contributed towards the development of comradeship and openness. The free intermixing of field and core staff by the fourth session of the evaluation clearly shows this. Not only internal divisions have broken down, but a healthier relationship with local people has developed. Gram Vikas and KGS have emerged stronger organizations through this process of evaluation.

As mentioned earlier, the reorganization of Ankur took place during the process of evaluation, but cannot be attributed to it. The immediate reason for reorganization was the externally imposed crisis. However, several initial steps taken during the process of evaluation seem to have created conditions conducive for this smooth reorganization.





Firstly, Ankur today is a more open organization than it was when evaluation began. In fact, middle level staff and volunteer teachers were then hesitant to speak up openly in the presence of senior staff. The process of setting objectives, deciding contents and methods and determining a time frame for evaluation together gradually created the possibility of openness. The feedback given by the facilitators on sensitive organizational matters also helped in this direction. Second, the planning workshop in March 1982 brought together for the first time in a major way the two sets of staff from schools and community projects. There had earlier existed a certain distance between them. This coming together and working together on evaluation created a better understanding between and feeling of oneness among the two sets of staff.

In one sense, then, the process of evaluation in both examples had a greater positive impact on the organization and staff perse, than on the community at large. The intensity of this was more in Gram Vikas than in Ankur. This could partly be due to the fact that Gram Vikas initiated evaluation at a time when everything was open for re-examination, and hence a broad range of issues - from interpersonal tension to future organizational directions-were tackled in its evaluation process. This could also partly be due to the fact that a people's organization -- KGS -- had existed in the area of Gram Vikas at the time of evaluation, and not in the case of Ankur.

### C. PARTICIPATORY TRAINING

**Nagpada:** The Nagpada Neighbourhood House, a community centre in Byculla, Bombay, has





several programmes for the people from the neighbourhood. It provides recreational, educational, medical and welfare facilities to the people, especially women and children, and has been working in the community for the last 56 years. In the past the organization has always taken the responsibility to identify the needs of the people, and to ensure that the services are provided to fulfil these needs.

Sponsorship was started in this manner, to provide economic backup to very poor families, rather than institutionalise the children, especially from homes of single parents or families with crisis.

One of the first most desired directions change sought was that people participate in the activities of the institution, and determine the direction that it **takes**. It was especially difficult to bring about this change since the organization itself is quite old, and has its own traditions, which were strong, and a large staff which also adhered strongly to this tradition.

It was equally hard at the community level. The traditional community leadership was exploitative, alienated from people, and alignment with these groups was only a symbolic gesture of community participation. The people **themselves** were nowhere in the picture.

Six local areas were identified for sponsorship. The mothers of children sponsored formed into six womens' groups. The weekly meetings of these womens' groups became the area for training women leaders. The discussion and analysis of problems raised by women, the planning and implementation of concrete actions outside the meeting and the ongoing activities in those slums became the learning processes for these women.





It was decided that all women in the group would be trained to acquire certain knowledge and skills to lead a more satisfactory life. It was believed that training a few women representatives from each group would make those women "Leaders" and **may** create a hierarchy among women themselves. Therefore, the focus of training was to develop problem-solving and analytical skills among all women. And it was decided to use every available problem that women faced as the basis for analysis and problem-solving. Thus the process became the main basis for learning, and not the specific content of a problem. The staff team at Nagpada Neighbourhood House (NNH) felt that the weekly meetings of women's groups **should** be minimally structured. A list of issues and problems that women slum-dwellers face was prepared, and the staff would be prepared to handle all these; but which particular one was dealt with in a specific meeting was determined by the immediate reactions and suggestions of the women on that day. It was felt that current preoccupation of women would be a better context to extend their analytical and problem-solving capabilities.

The women were encouraged to share problems, perceptions and information in each meeting. The staff posed questions, encouraged, sought clarifications and promoted analysis.

It was believed that once individuals have been freed from their inhibitions that their own past experiences are useless, and begin to share and learn from each other, they are in a position to gather, from **amongst** themselves, vast amounts of information which in itself indicates learning and problem-solving. Since the groups comprised mainly of women, it was a vital goal of the training to assist women develop their new coping mechanisms and skills, within a strong women's perspective.





In an attempt to achieve this, it was decided that as much as half of each session would be devoted to women discussing their own lives and past experiences. And that the group would then pick out some interesting aspect of this experience, and relate it to their day-to-day lives.

One day, a woman began by narrating how her husband who has a good job in the Municipal Corporation, rarely goes to work, is drunk all the time, and that once he is drunk, he is following her wherever she goes, accusing her of having a lover. Her denials just lead to receiving a beating from him. She began crying as she continued. There was silence in the group and everyone felt paralysed. The staff facilitated the discussion further.

A young woman spoke out, "the truth is that most of the husbands are friends and often drink together. Often what happens to her happens to all of them, may be not so frequently, but nevertheless it happens. The difference is that she talks about it and others don't, and the other women look at this as a sign of weakness."

A sharing of the experiences of other women followed and the discussions on this theme continued for several sessions. The following points emerged from an analysis of this episode:

- a) how women are controlled by their families,
- b) how women do not communicate their problems with each other and face isolation, and
- c) how women are not able to support each other at moments of crisis.





This process then led to an ongoing sharing and narration of women's own problems and experiences. And collective analysis of those became the basis for learning for the women.

2. **SEVA MANDIR:** Seva Mandir, a voluntary organisation in Udaipur district of Rajasthan, has been working among the rural poor in non-formal adult education and rural development for more than fifteen years. In the past five years, special effort has been made to organize illiterate women's groups in different villages. One of the major activities of Seva Mandir staff with these women's group is training.

Training is focused upon building general leadership skills as well as on specific issues. Most of the leadership training programmes are residential in nature, spread over 2-3 years. Women participants are identified by the groups themselves and a suitable time and place decided by them. Each training programme is seen as an event in the overall process of building and strengthening women's groups.

Each programme is uniquely designed but all of them follow certain common processes. The participants first share their groups' work and the problems faced in their areas. These are then analysed in smaller groups. Case studies of other experiences and role plays are used to further deepen this analysis. Certain important skills that women need to **acquire** (like communication, problem-solving, planning etc.) are identified before the programme. Simulations, exercises and discussions are used to learn these skills during the programme.

Before the end of the programme, participants develop action plans for solving certain





concrete problems that they face in their villages. These problems range from alcoholism to health care, drinking water to fuelwood. This process of developing plans for work after the training programme ensures a continuity and linkage between learning and action.

The following excerpt gives the flavour of how an issue is handled in a training programme:

*Some of the women's groups had expressed the need to form a women's Federation. The women participants were broken up into small groups to discuss the necessity of such a Federation, on what issues could such a Federation work and what pattern could there be for such a Federation. After discussion in the small groups, they reported back in the larger group. All the groups were clear as to why they want a Federation and what issues could be taken up. They realised that in number lies their power and certain problems can only be tackled if several groups are together; then they can share knowledge and experiences and thus be able to work better. Being together they can demand for those facilities which are not available to several villages (e.g. a health clinic, a school, etc.). However, participants were not very clear as to what pattern of functioning this Federation could adopt. The seeds for a Federation had been sown; now they were to think as to how it should be patterned and how it should function. This issue was to be discussed in their village groups and further information from other similar Federations elsewhere in the country was to be sought to evolve an acceptable and viable structure of their Federation.*

**Methodological Analysis:** Using previously established categories, the methodology of participatory training can be analysed. Keeping figure 1 in view, both the above examples show field based organisations using training to create and strengthen local organizations of the poor urban and rural women.





*Participation and Control:* The participation of trainees in both the examples was consistently high. The rural women participants were selected by their own groups, started with their own problems and generated their own solutions. In Nagpada, training essentially took the form of working on concrete problems. The choice of time, issues, problems and pace were largely determined by the trainees in both the cases. High participation was also visible in the repeated and frequent use of training by the trainees. It was something that they found useful on their own. And in both cases, training became an ongoing process, not a one-shot event.

The form in which participation took place, however, had two different characters. The Nagpada training was largely of short duration confined to the weekly meetings of the groups. The training in Seva Mandir was of a longer duration and specially structured. The exigencies of the different situations seem to have influenced this choice. Urban slum women found it convenient to attend afternoon weekly meetings; for poor rural women, getting away from the daily pressures of the village life was important to be able to reflect collectively (though elaborate efforts were needed to make this getting away possible). The availability of NNH centre as a place for slum women to come was another difference; rural women did not have a place in their village (whether owned by Seva Mandir or otherwise) to go to regularly. Besides, the Seva Mandir residential programmes came at an advanced stage, after 2-3 years of work in forming and strengthening women's groups; NNH experience was at the early stages of the formation of women's groups.

The extent of control exercised by trainees varied over a period of time. Women in Nagpada gradually came together as a group. Once this was established, their control over the pace,





content and process of their learning increased. Rural women in Seva Mandir case exercised control even prior to the training, in terms of selection of participants, duration, timing and broad focus of the programme. However, the actual process of training was, in the early rounds of training, largely controlled by the trainers. However, as repeated training programmes got conducted, trainees began to exercise control even on the process itself.

Another important aspect of participation is using training as a search process, such that new learning needs unfold during the training itself. This is enhanced by ensuring a methodology of training that emphasises trainees' participation in setting agenda, managing the learning process and taking responsibility for their own learning. The rural women wanted to discuss the issue of federation; the slum women wanted to learn how to obtain bank credit. The training efforts responded to these needs. In this process, the training provided new issues for learning--how to structure the Federation, and how to utilize money and credit, respectively.

An important aspect of both these training cases is that training occurs in the context of acting. Women trainees had decided that they wanted to form a larger Federation or obtain bank credit. These action outcomes were controlled by them. So long as training occurred in the context of these action outcomes, the trainees' control over training remained high.

**Awareness and Empowerment:** In the early discussions on forming women's groups, the slum women of Bombay become aware that slum-lords have monopolised access to knowledge and skills related to community services (admission to school, hospital, bank credit,





drinking water, ration card, etc). Their monopoly over this knowledge (what needs to be done, where, how, whom to approach, etc.) gave them the power over ordinary slum-dwellers. This awareness prompted the women to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills through Nagpada training. The weekly training events gradually gave them the analytical and problem-solving skills as well as concrete information about the various programmes and services available in the area. This enhanced their sense of collective self-confidence and equipped them to act on some of their problems.

The empowerment of slum women began to emerge through the process of open sharing of problems faced and collective analysis of those problems. As women in one group began to talk about their personal experiences related to alcoholic husbands and beating, the collective awareness of the problem as well as the sense of empowerment to do something about it enhanced. Later the slum women began to act as each others' support system in moments of crisis.

The awareness of the shared need for and willingness to form a Federation of women's groups in rural areas of Udaipur occurred through training. And this collective awareness prompted some of the women organizers to test the idea out later in the field. A local murder case became the testing ground. The women clearly felt so empowered that they wrote a joint petition to the police to act promptly in the case. They demanded that proper enquiry of the murder be made and real culprits brought to books. They pursued this matter till they were satisfied with the results.

Several examples of such empowerment abound. The essential process seems to be: the





awareness of a common problem, understanding of its causes, acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills in regard to that, and a sense of collective self-confidence to act together to solve that problem. Open articulation of one's thoughts and feeling, taking public positions on issues of common concern and a realistic appreciation of action options are all indicators of this empowerment. That illiterate poor rural and urban slum women have been able to acquire this sense of empowerment through training has been borne out clearly by these two cases.

*Mobilisation and Organization - Building:* The very nature of participatory training methodology is such that mobilisation becomes almost inevitable. Since the particular training is only an input into an already desired action outcome, it mobilises trainees to act. This was largely the situation in both the cases.

However, training also created conditions for future mobilisation. When slum women began to discuss the problem of bank credit, they suddenly became aware of the need for obtaining ration cards. Mobilisation of slum women to obtain ration cards was possible not because they had apriori decided to act on it, but because of what happened during the training itself. The process of training generates a collective commitment to act on a concrete issue, and thereby creates conditions for future mobilisation.

In the case of rural women, mobilization around an issue was catalysed during the training itself. The very process of action-planning created a convergence of energy and concern on that issue, and made subsequent action more likely and somewhat easier.





In both the cases, small local groups of women had existed prior to the training. But training process did contribute to the strengthening of these organizations. Over a period of time, groups of slum women began to get recognition from both local slum-lords and various government service-providers. The rural women's groups began to get some recognition from the local 'panchayats'.

The building of leadership skills, analytical and problem-solving capabilities further strengthened the existing women's groups. While individual women learnt new things, the context of that learning and its use being collective, their groups gained in strength.

In one clear case, training also contributed to the creation of a larger organization. Those rural women's groups which wrote a petition to the police on a murder case, decided to pursue the matter further. Women from ten villages came together and demonstrated against the police, demanding prompt punishment to the guilty. Their collective pressure not only gave them success in the end, but also created a basis for a federation of women's organizations in the area. The process of training seems to have made a contribution towards the initiation of a larger organization.





# CONCLUSION

The preceding methodological analysis of three sets of cases of Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training brings out some principles and patterns. In this chapter, comparative analysis of the three sets of cases will be presented first, followed by some specific aspects related to the nature of the intervening agents. In the end, a conceptual synthesis of the meaning of Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training is elaborated.

**A comparison:** Though each set of cases, and each specific cases, has unique aspects, a comparison of them brings out some interesting principles and patterns. Some of these are highlighted below:

i) The process of participation of the ordinary people in research, evaluation and training efforts appears to be a cyclical and iterative one. Participation builds on participation, and success at each stage creates the conditions for the next stage. The control exercised by ordinary people is linked to participation, but not necessarily identical to it. The key step in participation, as well as control, appears to be the first one. The participation of ordinary people in formulating the research questions in a participatory research effort, in setting objectives of evaluation in a participatory evaluation effort, and in building agenda for learning during a participatory training effort determines whether that particular effort serves their interests or not. Hence, influencing the very first step in a research, evaluation or training effort helps in ensuring the participatory character of these efforts.





ii) Another important element in ensuring the participatory character of these efforts appears to be the ownership of knowledge, reflection and learning by the ordinary people. This ownership is enhanced through the influencing of the first step, as mentioned above. Influencing the outcomes of a research, evaluation or training effort also contributes to enhanced ownership. In the event of initiative for research, evaluation or training coming from outside (as in the Forest Studies), it is important that greater time is spent in problem formulation and outcome identification so that ownership is enhanced. In some cases, the outcomes may not be immediate and real effect be visible after some time (as in case of tribals in Orissa after the Forest Study). In some cases, unplanned outcomes also occur (for example, coming together of action groups in Orissa on issues other than Forest Study got catalysed through the study). These considerations can be helpful in ensuring local ownership of the outcomes of the effort.

iii) Awareness of the people gets enhanced in the course of their involvement in the process of research, evaluation and training. Both participation and control contribute towards enhanced awareness, and vice-versa. Initial variations in awareness tend to influence the participatory character of these efforts. In a single effort, different sets of actors can acquire different levels of awareness. The field workers of action groups and local forest-dwellers differed on their levels of awareness through their involvement in the forest studies.

iv) Both awareness and action appear critical for building empowerment in any effort of Participatory Research, Training and Evaluation. Awareness or action alone is not enough. When people become aware, acquire knowledge and test it in a concrete situation through



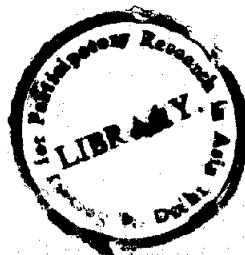


action, empowerment takes place. It is the continuous linking of knowledge with action that sustains and strengthens the empowerment. The struggle of the people around a specific issue further contributes to empowerment. The urban slum women in Bombay as well as the tribals of Orissa felt empowered to do something when they were able to take actions on the basis of new knowledge and learning.

v) The process of empowerment is speeded up where local people are already aware of the issues that form the basis of Participatory Research, Training and Evaluation. Existing concern for and interest in a set of issues, and even action on them, facilitates the development of empowerment. Where such concern or awareness does not exist, the process of empowerment is slower and gradual. The tribals of Orissa felt empowered while the forest-dwellers of H.P. did not, partly due to this initial variation in levels of awareness.

vi) Mobilisation of people is facilitated by their participation in and control over the process. Where awareness is high and empowerment exists, mobilisation is **crystallised** through the process of Participatory Research, Training and Evaluation. The nature of existing organisation can also contribute to, and be influenced by, the mobilisation of the people. The rural women in Udaipur got mobilised around that murder case partly because high levels of awareness and empowerment existed among them.

vii) Organization-building process is enhanced by a Participatory Research, Training and Evaluation effort because of its emphasis on a collective process. Participatory Research is not an individual exercise. It deliberately and concretely brings people together for a collective analysis. It is this collective nexus that facilitates formation of groups and



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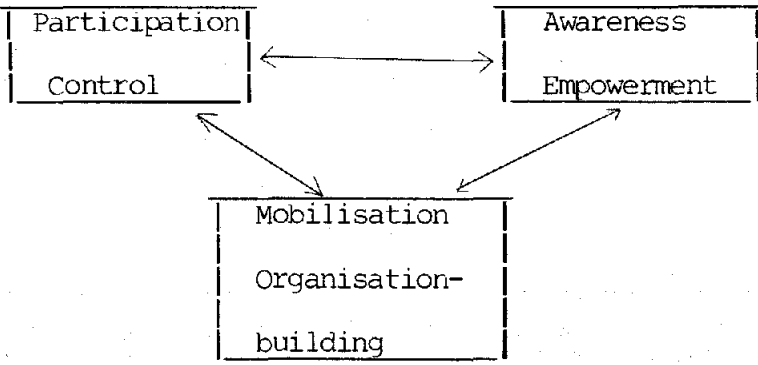


organizations and strengthening of existing organizations. The rural women of Udaipur got organized thus; the Gram Vikas as an organization became strengthened thus, and also contributed to the strengthening of KGS.

viii) The process of Participatory Research, Training and Evaluation promotes meta-learning. People investigate a given reality, and also learn how to investigate in future. People get trained around a set of issues and skills, and also learn how to conduct future trainings themselves. And, people reflect upon and evaluate a given experience, activity or programme, and also learn how to design and carry out their own continuous reflection. This is the single most important contribution of Participatory Research, Training and Evaluation. People acquire the tools of research, training and evaluation for their continuous future use. And thereby their dependence on external expertise is gradually reduced. People become equipped to do it themselves. The field workers of action groups in Orissa and H.P. felt equipped to initiate their own research after forest studies; most staff of Gram Vikas and some at Ankur have been conducting their own evaluations subsequently; and women's (both rural and urban) contribution in designing and conducting various training efforts has increased. There are variations across cases, but there is a definite movement in this direction in all of them.

In a way then, participation and control, awareness and empowerment and, mobilisation and organization-building seem to interact with each other in a given situation and build on each other. The following diagram illustrates this dynamics:





This dynamic process can be sustained over an extended period of time through continuous effort. The comparison of Orissa and H.P. forest studies, and evaluation of Gram Vikas and Ankur suggest a pattern that either sustains or stagnates this dynamic process. It appeared that the Orissa forest study and Gram Vikas evaluation were somewhat successful in sustaining this process; the H.P. forest study and Ankur evaluation could not sustain it beyond the initial phase.

The causes for these variations could be partly explained by the nature of the intervening agents, as presented in the next section.

**The Nature of Intervening Agents:** The cases analysed in the previous chapter show that there are different sets of actors in a given Participatory Research, Training and Evaluation example. There are examples where a local people's organization carries out its own investigation, reflection or learning entirely with its own resources. Such examples are few in India (and none in this study). The most frequent examples are those where a field-based organization works with local people (or their organizations) on a concrete investigation. In this set, three examples were in this category (Participatory Research in





Udaipur and the two training cases). A third type of example is that where a support organization works with a field-based organization, and local people and their organization. The four other cases in the set here are in this category (people's organizations were stronger in the case of Gram Vikas, Orissa and Udaipur, and weak in case of Ankur and H.P.).

The support organizations and field-based organizations can be called intervening agents in the process of Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training. These intervening agents sometimes take initiative in starting the process (as in Forest Studies), sometimes local people take initiative through the field based organisations. Certain aspects relating to the nature of the intervening agents are worth highlighting here.

1. It is important to recognize that control over the process of Participatory Research, Training and Evaluation is initially exercised by the intervening agent(s). This is more so when the initiative comes from them. However, this control gradually shifts over a period of time in the hands of the local people and groups. Thus it is the direction in which this control shifts over a period of time during and after the process that is important, and not just an *a priori* nature of control. However, this shift in control does not occur automatically. The local people and groups as well as the intervening agents have to consciously work towards this shift.

2. The nature of control, and its extent, is partly determined by the nature of local organization. When a field-based organization alone is involved with local people, the relationship between them determines the extent of participation and control of the local





people. Greater the organization of local people, greater is their control over the process.

When a support organization is also involved, two sets of relationships become critical.

- a) the relationship between local and field-based organizations, and
- b) the relationship between field-based and support organisations.

The quality of each relationship can be independently assessed, but one affects the other in the concrete case of a Participatory Research Process. If the first relationship is such that local people have influence over the field-based organization, then the second relationship can effectively support the enhanced local control. In the examples given here, the participation of and control by field-based organizations in the process of reserach, training and evaluation gradually pushed them to enhance the participation of and control by local people as well. But the degree of the shift towards enhanced control varied in these cases as the field-based organizations differed in their own relationship with local people. Thus the extent of control by local people in Orisa forest study and Gram Vikas was higher than their counterparts. This indicates the constraints on local participation and control in a Participatory Research, Training and Evaluation effort.

3. The nature of control also changes depending on the scope of Participatory Research. In the macro-level investigation, local control is initially non-existent and builds only to some extent. The intervening activists of field-based organizations maintain higher





control than local people in a macro level issue. On local and micro issues, the control of local people is relatively easily sustained in a Participatory Research, Evaluation or Training effort. To enhance local control on macro issues, longer and more sustained effort is needed on the part of the intervening agents.

4. The democratic interaction between the intervening agents and local people is a key element in Participatory Research, Training and Evaluation. This democratic interaction is built over a period of time and provides the basis for enhancing local control. The process of investigation, reflection and learning derives its strength from the quality of this democratic interaction. Conscious effort is needed to build and sustain this democratic interaction.

5. The person of the intervening agent(s) is as important as the organization. The facilitator role played by the intervening agent in Participatory Research, Training and Evaluation derives its credibility through the person of the facilitator. The analysis of the cases highlights various aspects of this facilitator role:

#### *Aspects of the Facilitator Role*

The analysis revealed that effective participatory process requires that following roles be played (by an external or an internal person):

- a. Initiating, activating and stimulating actors and processes





- b. Interpreting of external environment, help create micro-macro linkage
- c. Providing information and examples for other similar experiences
- d. Building skills of evaluation, research and training
- e. Recording, synthesising, summarising the proceedings
- f. Managing and facilitating the process, interactions and relationships
- g. Seeking information, asking questions, learning
- h. Data-gathering and analysing
- i. Sensitive to actors' needs, listening, empathising
- j. Respecting others, valuing their experiences
- k. Identifying with the missions and concerns of the organization, and maintaining a distance to develop distinctive perspective
- l. Creating conditions for open sharing, collective analysis
- m. Managing time and other resources





- n. Understanding differences among the set of actors and appearing to be open to all parties and view points
- o. Using visuals (charts etc.) to record and document the movement of the process.

Thus, development of the person of the facilitator is an important element in sustaining any Participatory Research, Training or Evaluation process. This personal development is not merely an intellectual and cognitive development, but also an emotional and ideological development. The commitment and social skills in the person of the facilitator are important for any effective Participatory Research, Training or Evaluation effort.

**TOWARDS SYNTHESIS:** What then is the meaning of participatory research, evaluation and training in practice? What distinguishes it from the classical approaches? What is its relevance and importance in social transformation? These are important questions that require continuous reflection and analysis. The insights derived from this study provide a basis for preliminary synthesis here.

**The Integral Link:** Though examples of Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training have been presented separately, it became evident in the process of this study that the underlying principles in the three sets are the same. The case studies were initially chosen on the basis of these three categories: research, evaluation and training. But in all three, the elements of research, evaluation and training get inter-mixed. Thus activists investigating deforestation underwent some training; Nagpada women engaged in periodic evaluation of their groups, and, activists of Gram Vikas, were trained in the process of





evaluation. Essentially then, the participatory research methodology unfolds itself in learning (training) and reflection (evaluation). Investigation, learning, reflection -- all three -- go hand in hand in a concrete situation. In some situations, people may start with investigation, and learning and reflection may follow; in some others, it may be the other way round. But in the context of a concrete situation, the line between research evaluation and training may be blurred.

*The Underlying Ideology* : Why is this so? Is this so because Participatory Research, Training and Evaluation share a common, underlying ideology? To a large extent, the underlying ideological and philosophical framework influences the definitions and practice of Participatory Research, Training and Evaluation. The starting point for understanding this underlying framework is a worldview: how does a society function? This is central to any understanding of Participatory Research, Training and Evaluation. A historical analysis of our society indicates that a large number of people are poor, weak, unorganized, ignorant, oppressed, alienated and marginalized. And a few are the haves, the rich, the informed and the organized. The social relations between these two (and many a times more) sets or classes of people determine how the society functions. The actual form and expression of these relations will vary from one society to another. But the economic, political, social and cultural domination and control by the few of the many is a reality in all societies.

This worldview then suggests a theory of social transformation. How does transformation occur? With the above theory of society, the social transformation occurs when the dominated, **controlled** and oppressed people develop collective organizations and act in





their common interests. And the process of social transformation becomes an ongoing struggle between the marginalized and the dispossessed on the one hand, and the powerful and the dominant on the other. But the form, content and shape of this struggle will vary from situation to situation and over a period of time.

It is in this context that the role of knowledge becomes critical. Firstly, the have-nots and the dominated mostly lack information and skills, and the tools to acquire that knowledge. Second, the dominant classes have increasingly used knowledge and information to maintain their domination. In the **last** three decades, and in the future to come, knowledge is a major source of power and control. The media, research expertise and the institutions producing them are used to control the thinking of the oppressed; the influence and control over people's minds, opinions, views and beliefs is being continuously attempted by the dominant classes. Thus the oppressed are made to believe that inequality is inevitable, that they are not experts and hence know nothing, and to feel dependent **on the** dominant classes. This cultural and ideological hegemony over the oppressed is a major obstacle towards their collective organization and action. In fact, this hegemony prevents them from recognizing their common interests and organizing around them.

It is in this context the Participatory Research, Training and Evaluation have a meaning and a contribution to make. The central question, therefore, is whose interests does research, training and evaluation serve? And the answer, Participatory Research, Training and Evaluation must serve, or cause to serve, the interests of the dominated and the oppressed, so that they can attempt to overcome these forces of hegemony.





*But, how?:* The contribution of Participatory Research, Training and Evaluation is in the creation, appropriation, utilization and validation of knowledge that can help the oppressed to act collectively in their common interests.

The knowledge and skills necessary for people's collective action is created with the participation and control of the people. They are involved, either directly or through their representatives, in producing the knowledge. In order to do so, therefore, ordinary people need to learn and sharpen the tools of inquiry -- the methods of data collection and analysis. And, these methods can be the quantitative (survey, questionnaire, etc.) or qualitative (discussion, dialogue). However, newer methods of data collection and analysis need to be invented if participation of ordinary people in creating knowledge is to be promoted. That is why a wide range of methods--camps, tours, workshops, field activities, role-plays, drawings, songs, theatre, video etc. have been invented and found useful in production of knowledge by ordinary people. Choice of appropriate methods is also made on the criterion: which methods will promote ordinary people's participation?

However, there are issues that may require technical expertise (appropriate drinking water system for a village, ecological analysis of trees, legal aspects of a women's federation, etc.) in producing knowledge. And a group of people in a given situation may not have that expertise. This is where the people need assistance of the experts. But the assistance has to be rendered in such a way that ordinary people can appropriate that technical knowledge. Appropriation will entail absorption and integration of this knowledge with the popular knowledge of the people. The expertise has to be guided in order to facilitate this appropriation.





There are also issues on which already some knowledge exists. And much macro level statistics and analysis also exists. Ordinary people may not have access to it: they may not know that it exists, and they may not be able to use it. This knowledge also needs to be appropriated by the people. It is here that intervening agents -- individuals and organizations -- can play this role. The support organizations and field based organizations can perform this role of facilitation of appropriation of knowledge by ordinary people.

It is in this context that the role of popular knowledge becomes crucial. The oppressed and th dominated have some knowledge. This is their popular knowledge. Some elements of that knowledge may be authentic and accurate; some may not be. So, the starting point in producing knowledge is the recognition of the popular knowledge. Participatory Research, Training and Evaluation methodology facilitates the recognition of popular knowledge. And it also creates the possibility for the oppressed and the marginalized to value their own knowledge. The process of recognition and valuing of popular knowledge contributes to the awareness-raising and empowerment. And appropriation of technical and existing knowledge further empowers them. But the integration of popular knowledge and the technical information, the identification of authentic and inauthentic elements in the popular knowledge and the acceptance or otherwise of technical information takes place in the context of concrete action. Thus mobilization and organization-building aspects of Participatory Research, Training and Evaluation provide the mechanism through which consolidation and validation of knowledge, thus created and utilized, takes place. It is also in this sense that the distinction between theory and practice disappears. The continuous, iterative process of knowing and acting, awareness and action, learning and





doing exemplifies the praxis. In fact, the inter-twined nature of theory and practice is demonstrated by the fact that acting also contributes to knowing, that action also creates awareness, and that doing also generates learning.

The intervening agents can assist in this process of recognition and valuation of popular knowledge, in identifying authentic and inauthentic elements in the same and in integration of technical and existing knowledge with the popular knowledge. The competencies of intervening agents in being able to play these roles needs to be examined and strengthened.

Thus Participatory Research, Evaluation and Training methodology can make a small contribution in the process of social transformation through knowledge, reflection and learning. Since this process of knowing, reflecting and learning entails awareness-raising and empowerment, mobilization and organization-building, it has the potential to make this contribution to social transformation.





# POSTSCRIPT

How have the participants involved in this study benefitted? Have the participating organizations gained anything?

Answers to these questions are important from the point of view of methodology--why should we get involved in looking at the process? Characteristically, the response of the participants varied a great deal.

One participant from a field organisation said, "I learnt about the evaluation methodology more through this critique than when we were going through the evaluation. But I am doubtful if my organization has gained anything significant."

Another participant from a different field based organization felt that the study provided a "conceptual grounding" to the experience of training and helped create a "network of like-minded activists" in the process. This process of networking initiated due to the study and sustained by periodic meetings in the course of the study was recognised as an important bye-product of the study.

The representative of a support organisation engaged in participatory research expressed his sentiments in this way: "When it first began, I was not sure where it was going. But now I feel that conceptualisation of the experiences has been a crucial learning. I have even written this up as a monograph."





For all of us in PRIA, the study provided an opportunity to systematically reflect on our practice. For the old guards amongst us, it provided affirmation of some principles and beliefs, and moderation of some of our woolly-eyed notions. For the young turks amongst us, it provided an opportunity to rehearse the history of the experiences and develop insights about the methodology.

Even during the course of the study, we in PRIA made several changes in our new projects and programmes based on the insights derived from the methodological analysis. We are able to initiate and conduct participatory research, evaluation and training efforts more systematically and realistically.

It is not often that a study can contribute so much even before it is published.

