

*Broadening  
perspectives in*

# *Action Research*

EDITED BY TONY CARR



Published 1996  
by the Action Learning,  
Action Research and Process  
Management Association (ALARPM)  
in conjunction with  
Interchange and Prosperity Press.

© Tony Carr  
All rights reserved.

Cataloguing in publication data  
National Library of Australia

Carr, Tony (ed) Broadening Perspectives in  
Action Research

ISBN 0646 297244

Printed by  
COPY PRINT XPRESS - Queensland

Distributed by  
the Action Learning, Action Research  
and Process Management Association,  
Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

Telephone: + 61 7 33995750  
Facsimile: + 61 7 38992519

## CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgements	
Introduction <i>Tony Carr</i>	1
<b>PART ONE     Action Research in Education</b>	
Chapter 1: <i>Franz Kroath</i> From empowerment to innovative research methods: Two workshops with a critical approach to emancipatory action research	7
Chapter 2: <i>Ron Passfield</i> Empowering people and organisations: An action research approach to action learning	22
<b>PART TWO     Action Research in Management</b>	
Chapter 3: <i>Robert Burke</i> Action learning as an effective change process	29
Chapter 4: <i>Cliff Bunning</i> Dilemmas experienced in conducting emancipatory action research	55

Chapter 5:	<i>Joe Zarb</i> The development of an academic staff appraisal system through action learning	64
Chapter 6:	<i>Pam Swepson</i> Emancipating scientists through action research	72
Chapter 7:	<i>Tony Carr</i> Turning experience into learning: Guidelines for graduate action research Masters and PhD candidates	79
<b>PART THREE: Action Research in the Community</b>		
Chapter 8:	<i>Paul Wildman</i> Action learning and community economic development	102
Chapter 9:	<i>Marc Lammerink</i> Learning about people's participation and action research	118
Alphabetical List of Authors		130

## Introduction

**Tony Carr**

Action research as a methodology of social inquiry has come of age. From its beginnings in the 1940s with Kurt Lewin in the United States, it was exported to Japan in the 1950s and 1960s and returned to Europe and America in the 1970s in the form of 'quality circles', 'quality control', and 'total quality management'. Since then this research and development paradigm has been further developed and of growing interest in OECD countries, including Australia.

Action learning or experiential learning processes are complementary to action research. Both are highly effective when groups explore organisational problems, when the problems are complex, unclear from the start, and result in new or revised ways of achieving best practice. Thus, both are cyclical, continuing, exploratory, creative, ongoing and lifelong.

A major characteristic of action research is the integration of theory and practice, research and action. As a methodology, action research is more systematic in its approach than action learning, is more rigorous in its methods, application, and results in a publication.

As a 'soft' systems paradigm, it is complementary to the 'hard' systems approach of traditional research. Both can be effective and are used wisely, but for completely different reasons. In hard systems science, a hypothesis requires the testing of variables by reducing or restricting social science phenomena under controlled (laboratory) conditions - confirming or refuting the hypothesis as right or wrong. This activity is largely linear in production and appropriate for predicting future trends in human behaviour and social practices. Action research on the other hand is cyclical, problem centred, action oriented, non positivist and dialectical - that is, both right and wrong, depending on the participants' perspective. Action research is appropriate for predicting future human behaviour, the improvement and understanding of social practices, processes and conditions and of changing conditions if they impede the desired improvement.

Developments in action research are accelerating globally. Investigations or inquiries comprise awareness building, interest gaining, information sharing, involvement of all parties and commitment to outcome at one of three levels of practice - technical, practical or emancipatory. To undertake technical action research is to aim for efficiency and effectiveness of operational practices and the practitioners' increased skills. Practical action research combines the elements of technical action research, but aims at greater understanding of the system by the practitioners and some element of transformation of their consciousness. Emancipatory action research combines both technical and practical but further removes participants from self-deception and coercion by their influence, shared responsibilities and viewpoints - facilitating transformational change of the organisation. All three comprise group co-option, co-operation, and collaboration, to some degree.



The chapters in this book draw on the experiences of authors who have conducted technical, practical and emancipatory action research. They detail many success stories and problems experienced along the way. Contributions include interesting and varied examples with emphasis on practical insights and experiential gain. The focus on practical and emancipatory action research highlights participants' willingness to explore the complex and difficult, alongside the more common and known of organisational problems. With contributions from international authors in this book, there is an anticipation surrounding emancipatory action research. The experiences in Columbia and Europe are in direct contrast to the Australian examples.

Theories have been kept to a minimum, but have been used as a base point when needed. References, too, provide for rigour or 'evidence'; they trace progress, source authorship and in some, lead the way to further research.

This book is for managers, teachers and other practitioners as action researchers interested in:

- (i) collaborative action research;
- (ii) technical, practical and emancipatory action research approaches; and
- (iii) rationale for and evidence of successful outcomes - both personal and organisational.

The processes of any social science inquiry through action research can be difficult, frustrating, even threatening; alternatively, it can be enjoyable, exciting and immensely rewarding. These outcomes are somewhat dependent on you as action researcher, how you manage and go about it - the people you involve and the resources you use. This book will help you achieve the latter.

The book is structured into three parts. Part 1 provides examples of applied research in education. Part 2 presents five reflective examples of action research in management. Part 3 focuses on broader perspectives in the community. All have theoretical and practical bases. The following is a brief outline of each chapter.

### **Part 1: Action Research in Education**

Franz Kroath (Chapter 1) canvasses the theoretical and practical propositions of emancipatory action research in two workshops comprising secondary education teachers in Austria. The first workshop describes a process of how to empower probationary teachers through action research. The second workshop demonstrates how teachers favour boys or girls in their classrooms. Aspects considered important in both workshops were criteria for assessing quality and ethics through the action research process. The conclusion drawn is that 'emancipatory' is a tautology for action research and no longer considered to be a relevant criteria for action research activities in practice.

Ron Passfield (Chapter 2) describes how an action research process facilitates major action learning programs in a University setting. With a

focus on empowerment as a tool for the emancipation of teams in confronting self-limiting perceptions and gaining leverage through sponsors in the main, it is geared to act on impediments to individual and organizational learning. The chapter discusses the role of the researcher and participants as empowered members of collaborative and critical teams engaged in the resolution of significant organizational problems. The cumulative learning impact of the empowerment of participants and of the program team is explored in terms of organizational learning and development.

### **Part 2: Action Research in Management**

Robert Burke (Chapter 3) discusses the merger of a company through an action learning process. Concentrating on the human elements of the merger through a case study reveals perceptions and reality with regard to structures and individuals' perspectives on 'fitting-in'; how well controlling or mechanistic approaches to mergers work, if at all; how all of those involved were able to create a new climate and culture for success through team building, empowerment and emancipation. Concluding comments relate to bottom-line company matters, specifically profit and loss, and how the profitable outcomes achieved have impacted on the new revitalised company to date.

Cliff Bunning (Chapter 4) describes five dilemmas experienced in undertaking an emancipatory action research project in a large government research and development organization. The dilemmas involved are: stress levels which block learning in organizations; value orientations of the action researchers; the group's needs; the need to test grounded theory; and the criteria determining the success or failure of the field work conducted. Reflections on process are discussed, including the learnings derived and strategies adopted to deal with or manage the dilemmas.

Joe Zarb (Chapter 5) describes the development of a staff appraisal system by action research in a university setting. Canvassed are the personal and professional development of individual members, improvement in the quality of teaching and learning and in the management and administrative context. The results so far are inconclusive due to the need to translate successes into the development of a learning organization; the need for synthesis and synergy within other functional areas of the University; and for congruency of the assessment methods (experiential learning), as practised by the School of Agriculture at present.

Pam Swepson (Chapter 6) develops a mounting argument to make a 'warranted assertion' about the values that drive 'pure' research which places a premium on rationalism and 'applied' research which places a premium on empiricism. Despite the ideology of 'pure' and 'applied' research, the author contends that no researcher practices a totally 'pure' methodology, and that all methodologies are a mix of the two, to some degree. In a study with a group of scientists she asked the critical questions not only what they did, and how they achieved what they did, but more importantly why they

practised science as they did. Whilst incomplete to this point, the action research approach has shown to bring clarity to 'fuzzy' scientific questions and seen as a way of integrating rationalism and empiricism in both the physical and social sciences.

Tony Carr (Chapter 7) explores a framework for action research Masters and PhD candidates at university level. With experience predominantly in management research, the applicability and appropriateness of action research is compared with traditional research. Of importance to candidates is how to conduct practical, technical and emancipatory action research through both core and thesis activity. The chapter concludes with reflections from the author's experience in differentiating between core and thesis activity, developing candidates as researchers and working effectively with groups.

### **Part 3: Action Research in the Community**

Paul Wildman (Chapter 8) describes and reflects on the results of a two year action research project which sought to increase jobs for unemployed people in the community. Based on the principles of action learning, the concept was linked to Adult and Community Education within the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) system in Queensland. The results reveal on the one hand highly interested, interactive groups in the community, eager to better the situations they were in, whilst on the other hand self limiting perceptions and natural resistance to change from within the TAFE system.

Marc Lammerink (Chapter 9) describes emancipatory action research/action learning approaches to grass-root developments in a fishing village in Nicaragua. The study is enlightening to the participants who are somewhat basically uneducated and disadvantaged people in society. The study also recognizes the need for and importance of people to share views, ideas, problems and concerns and for those involved to have a critical voice in determining the direction of social change. The author depicts the spread of emancipatory action research approaches across the social spectrum into areas such as farmers initiatives in social forestry and in the training of professionals in developing countries.



# Learning about people's participation and action research

Marc P. Lammerink

## Abstract

Eleven years of Sandinist government has afforded numerous opportunities for emancipatory action research. This chapter describes the author's experiences in Nicaragua with such an emancipatory approach to grass-root development based on *action learning* and *action research*. It recognizes the importance for people involved to have the critical voice in determining the direction of social change. This demands a commitment of social scientists to share their expertise and listen to the needs of common people.

The author depicts two projects, one dealing with the training of action researchers and another dealing with emancipatory action research in a fishing village. A further example shows how the approach can be applied to other areas like social forestry and the training of professionals from developing countries.

## Introduction

Between 1984 and 1988 the author was working as coordinator of a Dutch University Cooperation Project with the Central American University (CAU) in Managua, Nicaragua. The project was designed to help redefine and restructure the functions of the Faculty of Humanities and to help improve the quality of teaching and research work in the areas of Adult Education, Community Development and Social Research.

## Social Research and Popular Participation: the theoretical framework

In his speech to the First Seminar on Social Work, Ruiz, Minister of Planning, spoke about the objective of community work. He said it ought to be 'to search, jointly with popular organizations, for just and efficient solutions to people's problems' (ANTS, 1983:39). Community development

should be guided by the principles of participatory planning which seeks to achieve participation in all stages of the program: research, planning, coordination, organization, execution, evaluation and follow-up.

The need for a particular type of research arose: research with a broad perspective. Research which would act as a tool in the hands of the people, encouraging participation and a growth of awareness at the grass roots level. In this context, research would become a process of getting to know and interpreting social reality, with the aim of gathering sufficient knowledge to allow for the reproduction, transformation and induction of new processes in society. Thus, the research was seen as a scientific practice, which promotes critical reflection on the nature of social reality and contributes to its transformation.

Such research becomes broader than just a receiver and transmitter of a certain quantity of knowledge about immediate social reality. It would allow the researchers and the subjects of research to establish a relationship of mutual support and collaboration. The people at the grass roots should be active and conscious participants who, basing their actions on their local knowledge, are in a more favourable position to transform their own situation towards more desirable futures.

In short, there was a need for a practical, participatory, collaborative, emancipatory, interpretative and critical type of research. Such research would break with previous ways of drawing up and carrying out research projects. It was within this context that the need was recognized to form and train a team of teachers and professionals in participatory action research.

## A methodology for the training of the research team

An important requirement for the training of action researchers is a methodological approach to professional development which is both sufficiently flexible and compatible with the described research profile. There are two main objectives. One is to carry out a program of training, professional development and work experience which succeeds in raising the level of the scientific, technical and critical skills of the participants in the type of research required. The other is to establish research teams which are capable of planning and carrying out research projects. Some fundamental specific conditions have to be created:

- (a) the methodology should take as its starting point the knowledge, experiences and working context of the participants and adapt itself as it proceeds;
- (b) the methodology should guide the participants during the course in gradually transforming conventional research design into an emancipatory action research approach;
- (c) a range of methods and techniques must be used to optimise the learning process to stimulate participation, creativity and analysis;

- (d) an overall atmosphere of mutual trust should be created and respect for one another, as basic conditions for learning.

The actual course follows a flexible participant-centred training methodology based on the principles of action learning. In action learning, experiences of the participants are seen as an important source of learning. Participants move and grow through different phases. Participants develop on the basis of the contradictions in their own working practice; a new research approach that recognizes and builds upon local knowledge. Participants also learn a lot from systematic reflection on what they do individually and within the training group, which enhances skills to facilitate emancipatory approaches.

The learning process can be depicted by spiral developments. In the first phase, the formative/training process will take the concrete experiences of the participants as its starting point. They will be able to theorize on these experiences and plan a new course of action, integrating new theoretical elements into a common approach towards emancipatory action research and popular participation (the second phase). The third phase would be that of analysis of the new experiences and experimentation with this approach. After this reflection and theorization, it will become possible to plan future courses of action on broader foundations.

### **The methods and techniques used**

Various working methods were adopted in training the research team. Depending on circumstances, the group functioned much like a workshop, study circle or as specific action research projects. The different working methods have the following characteristics:

- (a) The workshop can be regarded as a collective reflection upon a piece of field work. Its aim is to put together one or several 'end products' created by the combined work of the group of participants. The coordinator functions as catalyst for and gives direction to the learning process, whilst the direct transmission of knowledge is reduced. Each participant sees him/herself as both teacher and learner. The workshop method is guided by the principle, that to learn something by seeing and doing is a much more formative experience than to simply learn through the verbal communication of ideas.
- (b) In the context of the study circle, the process of self-learning is directed by a coordinator and is sustained by using didactic materials to clarify and further the debate on a given topic.
- (c) The specific action research projects most closely relate theory, practice, reflection and the creation of materials, knowledge and forms of organization. This working method is conceived of and organized to help 'accompany' the group in carrying out a project. Here the training activities consist of helping in the formulation and elaboration of a work

program; identify problems to be resolved; search for alternative ways of solving problems and finding solutions; supply necessary information; managing unforeseen difficulties encountered along the way; input into different elements and make comparisons with similar experiences; and evaluate the results. Practical work is both the source of the training process and the object of its application.

### **Spiral of learning applied**

The training course was held at the Central American University (CAU) in Managua in 1985 and 1986 on weekly intervals of a full day. In this course 25 professionals participated from 12 different institutions, mainly in the area of Education, Health, Social Welfare and Agriculture. Each had to be 'a professional, directly or indirectly linked to a popular organization'. The spiral of learning can be divided into three phases: diagnosis of practical experiences; theorising on practical experiences; and development of a new form of action.

### **The first phase: diagnosis of practical experiences**

In the first phase I compiled an inventory of how participants conceived social research. It gave some interesting insights, which can be summarised as follows: 'Research as a method of acquiring knowledge to transform reality', 'Research as a means of achieving popular participation', 'Research as an educative process', 'Research as a strategy in national planning'.

Right from the beginning I made use of group techniques, which could promote the participation of the participants, like brainstorming on cards and theatre. To stimulate favourable learning conditions, emphasis was placed on individual and group learning dynamics in an atmosphere of open trust, mutual respect, and commitment within the group.

I then asked participants to describe and analyze their work experiences related to social research. The participants were stimulated and guided in describing their experiences by answering questions of other participants; by performing tasks which reflects their working experience and practice; by using simulations; and by describing their individual working context through collective presentations.

The central part of this step of the learning process was that their individual experiences were being expressed, discussed and 'used' for further brainstorming within the group. The confrontation between ideas and reality made them aware of the many contradictions in their day-to-day activities.

For the third part of this initial diagnosis, in which I constantly try to 'build upon the practical experience of the participants', I embarked upon the task of visualizing the national political, social and economic context in which the participants found themselves by creating a newspaper mural. At this point in



the diagnosis I stressed the importance of taking a global rather than a purely contemporary perspective.

Bearing in mind that the participants had little research experience, they were asked to practice drawing up a blueprint for research and then to discuss in depth, the contradictions which might arise in putting this blueprint into practice. In a final synthesis each research team reflected on the experience. Some comments were as follows:

'The blueprint for the investigation which we drew up is still tied to the traditional concepts of research work. The methodology of participation is not reflected in this blueprint'.

'We lack the necessary theoretical elements to make research a strategy for popular participation. How are we to tailor these models to suit Nicaraguan reality?'

Many of the statements contain an element of questioning which the participants were beginning to express. It showed the need for further study in which the main question had to be answered. How does one relate social research to popular participation?

### **The process of theorizing on practical experience**

The initial findings of the triple diagnosis did, in fact constitute a new level of awareness and a new interpretation relative to the starting position. It is the next stage which allows us 'to theorize on practical experience'. It is the process in which their systematized knowledge was enriched with additional theory and experiences from other sources (articles, lectures, slides). One step involved the integration of theoretical notions into a blueprint for a research project. The result was a redefinition of three fundamental stages in a research process: the identification of the ambit of a research question, the critical analysis of the problem, and the formulation of plans of action, involving the subjects of the research. Then, a comparison of different models of action research was made and discussed. Important in this process was a more in-depth look at the identified key elements, causes and possible approaches. A high level of participation and interest was maintained by using various communication techniques.

### **Coming full cycle - a new form of action**

In the activities carried out up to this point, I had completed the stages of action and self reflection, identified with the first diagnosis and the corresponding theorization which was followed on this. In order to generate theory 'grounded' in action I had to be coherent in the training approach, I had to become operative in the field, within a limited time frame. First, a model of emancipatory action research was defined, directly related to Nicaraguan

reality and to participant's work context. Then the model was put into practice and its coherence tested in three small research projects. Finally, the participants presented and evaluated the different projects, taking into account their participatory content and their practical results.

The second training period started in July 1986. Again, I built on the working practice of the participants. In this phase, I took stock of the progress and the results that had been achieved with the research model developed in the first period. Research projects were defined in the institutions where the different participants were working.

After a short training process the research team started three different projects, three in 'barrios populares' (poor neighbourhoods) in Managua, one in the port area of Corinto on the Pacific Coast and one in a fishing village.

The research projects in the poor neighbourhoods aimed at a joint training/research process together with the neighbourhood organizations to find out which were the most deeply felt problems affecting the community. Then, a plan of action was made together with the representatives of the responsible government agencies. I also trained the neighbourhood committees in such a way that, in future, they would be able to cope better with their problems on their own.

The other project involved a team working with the National Harbour Board. It had to do with the development of a participatory training course for foremen stevedores (people that are loading and unloading ships). For this purpose, a emancipatory action research program started, together with the senior stevedores, to systematize their work experience and to integrate their knowledge and on-the-job training in which these 'veterans' would be the trainers.

A process of group counselling, training and project execution took place in the field. In planning the process, I took into account different stages: getting acquainted with the community, putting together a mixed research team (professionals and members of the community), defining research topics, training the team and designing the methods and techniques to be used in (a) executing the research (b) feeding the results back into the community and (c) formulating action and evaluation.

### **Emancipatory action research applied among fishermen in Masachapa**

One action research project was carried out by researchers from the School of Social Work and students during 1986 in a fishing village on the Pacific Coast of Masachapa.

It all started with a request for support from a villager in Masachapa to the School of Social Work. The villagers faced many problems, ranging from unhealthy drinking water, serious health problems, alcoholism, poor housing and living conditions, high mortality rates, prostitution and illiteracy. It was possible at least to discuss with the newly formed team in the community



organization what could be done. A plan was made for six participatory (learning) meetings in which we would work on training and research to improve the community organization and the participation of residents in the development of their own village.

The first learning meeting was held in the village in an open place near the harbour and all villagers who were willing to participate were invited. The meeting started with the introduction of villagers and 'outsiders' to one another and continued with playing some games within the group and sharing in a common community talk. The purpose was to create an atmosphere of friendliness and equality as well as to indicate the seriousness of the 'outsiders' willingness to learn.

In a second learning meeting the group was asked to identify problems and opportunities for development. The villagers (men and women) were allowed to show the 'outsiders' how well they knew their village and the reasons for various practices. This gave a good idea of the physical environment of the village and established the basis for the somewhat more difficult exercises that followed. After the exercises, all presentations made by villagers were held in an open marketplace, which allowed people who were not participating to see what was going on.

In the next meeting the group of participating villagers was tripled. At that time, further researches delved more deeply into separate topics as the fishery economy, on social stratification and family relations, on the history of the village and on the existence and functioning of social institutions. Villagers could actively participate in either one of the three. At the same time the participatory learning meetings continued now analysing the problem of participation in the community organization, the identification of opportunities and planning of community actions by listing priorities. Roles and responsibilities of the people were also defined. After the third meeting, a group of villagers started their first actions: they cleaned the village and the beach, and started to collect funds for the construction of a small brick road to the harbour. At the same time discussions started to organize a cooperative of fishermen.

After six weeks it was time to evaluate what had happened and what had succeeded. Results of the analysis were presented to the community in a creative way in the form of a village celebration meeting. Fishermen came with fish and lobster, women prepared a big meal, all teams presented their outcomes; some of the villagers presented their outcomes by the experiential 'sociodrama' technique. Results were commented thoroughly, which provided a good basis for further actions.

Prominent features of the style of functioning of researchers in this project were their emphasis on the participation of villagers in their own development, and their active presence in the village not as 'benefactor', but as 'catalyst' and 'partner' in development. What was used was a method that did not stop at the level of diagnosis or appraisal but which went beyond it into shared analysis and understanding of the local situation. This in turn lead to development activities that were creative, productive and sustainable

over a period of time. The action learning methodology evolved. There was plenty to learn from, with, and about fishermen and women and their situations. The action learning approach complemented and combined well with an emancipatory action research approach developed during the team training in Managua and results of this have since been quite substantial (Lammerink, in press:182).

There have been several lessons. This research again showed us that villagers are often capable of collecting far more accurate information than 'outsiders'. They were also able to correct and prioritize the information. The analysis gave rise to a process of self development. The perceptions about their situations were a critical input in the planning of actions. Social workers/researchers also came to understand that there is a general need to understand and appreciate traditional knowledge and systems of livelihood, and the way people feel, see, think, and act in these areas.

With the methodology of joint learning and emancipatory action research we could start a process of joint discovery and shared analysis of the situation. It enhanced both participation and the learning of all parties involved.

### **Different applications of this approach**

Since 1988, as co-initiators of the consultancy group Forestry Manpower Development (FMD), which operates in the field of social forestry, I have been working on ways in which the developed methodology of action learning and emancipatory action research could be applied to a variety of situations in different countries. These have included participatory approaches to rural development, participatory planning of natural resources use and development of community forestry projects in developing countries.

An example is emancipatory action research related to rural development. During the past two decades opinions about the role and responsibility of professionals in the context of rural development have changed dramatically. There has been an increasing demand for an approach that can contribute to the process of sustainable development. This implies a development that is equitable and that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the needs of future generations. It also implies that social forestry services have an important role to play in contributing to a participatory, decentralised and self-sustaining process of rural development.

Within this framework it is a challenge for us to introduce a 'new way of seeing' in rural development in order to be able to value farmers initiatives in land use systems and in the local production. Valuing and enhancing local initiatives of men and women farmers is not only an imperative from a social-political perspective but also responds to a very pragmatic need. It is a two-fold operational strategy based on two important assumptions. First there is the fact that farmers know their own environment through experience and



continuous experiments. They are therefore a major source of locally tested and relevant knowledge.

Secondly, due to the magnitude of the environmental problems we face today, a successful strategy necessitates that people themselves, not only policy makers and government officers, are recognized as the ones responsible for the management of their and their children's natural resources (Lammerink and Prinsen, 1994:29).

This emphasizes the need for a participatory model of development in which local people are not just involved in the identification, formulation, implementation and evaluation of development projects, but where their knowledge and skills are the building blocks for development initiatives (van Gelder and O'Keefe, 1995:3).

To be able to enhance local initiatives in an effective way professionals in social forestry need new approaches and skills. They need to identify correctly these initiatives and support local groups in interchanging their knowledge and experiments. They need to assist in developing sustained approaches. Action research methods are very well suited to clarify local opinions on existing problems and solutions. At the same time these methods provide an excellent means of developing, in close collaboration with farmers, pragmatic plans of action that can be implemented immediately.

Based on my former experiences I developed a new training approach that makes people aware of the importance of this new way of seeing farmers initiatives and more importantly, that focus on the development of the emancipatory approaches that are needed to initiate and implement new production initiatives. This training approach should also give participants confidence to apply a different way of designing and implementing rural development projects.

Since 1988 this approach is being applied in different projects in countries like Kenya, Zimbabwe, Colombia and Pakistan and events like a 9-months Postgraduate Course in Forestry for Rural Development (ITC in Enschede, The Netherlands), and a shorter version at IGAC in Bogota, Colombia. It is also the basis of a 6-weeks course 'Enhancing local initiatives - participatory tools for social forestry' in The Netherlands. Recently, this same approach was adapted for a 6-weeks Planning and Training Workshop at the International Water and Sanitation Centre, also in the Netherlands, for a multi-country research team which initiates a participatory action research project in six countries on community management of water supplies.

The training methodology is based on the same principles of action learning described earlier. In fact the facilitators are guided by the same principles during the learning process with the participants as those they advocate following in the field. Participants are shown that there is no standardized content that goes with each phase of emancipatory action research applied to social forestry. The exact content is structured around the knowledge and experience of the participants. The responsibility of the facilitators (and later the course participants in their own work) is to outline, facilitate and maintain the logical order of the phases and connections

between them. During the course, staff assist participants to describe and thereafter diagnose their own experiences, i.e. a self critique of personal practice and of the social milieu of practice which leads to personal understanding. As a picture emerges of what is actually being done and what participants believe should be done, additional knowledge and skills are introduced in order to close the gap. It is only on the basis of this diagnosis that the introduction of new concepts and tools can be expected to be fruitful. Practicing these new tools and concepts is necessary to obtain the self-confidence needed to translate these newly acquired concepts into an effective personal action plan.

As such, the basic starting point are the knowledge and experiences of participants, their concrete social reality and their working context. Equally important is the investigation of specific social, economic and political conditions in their working context and the contradictions between ideals and reality.

Another part of the training methodology consists of an exchange, analysis and systematic reflection of specific past experiences of the participants. In this way participants become aware of other ways of seeing their reality. This process of increasing awareness provokes attitude changes, enhances self confidence and leads to see the 'landscape' differently. The art of seeing consists of appreciation of the indigenous knowledge of farmers and the recognition of the importance of this knowledge for intervention. Once this is recognized participants are assisted to develop their own participatory approaches to enable them to make this local knowledge the basis of development initiatives.

Within this process, learning goes from concrete to abstract in the analysis and from general to specific in the intervention.

### **Practicing action research: a South-North dialogue**

Learning by seeing and doing has much impact. Thus, an essential part of the methodology developed is to experiment with the new approaches under field conditions. Theory becomes related to practice and improves the capacity for action from the participants. One example was a specific course held in The Netherlands in 1992, where eleven foresters from eight developing countries participated over a six week period.

In order to identify the value and the limitations of a developed action research approach a four day participatory appraisal was implemented in the small Dutch village of Voorst (12000 inhabitants) with villagers who were interested in collaborating in such an exercise.

The participants defined the fieldwork objective as to provide local extension staff and villagers with insight into the different forces that determined the past and present situation that will determine the future of the village. On the basis of this analysis, using participatory techniques, different challenges and proposals for the future of the community were



elaborated with key informants. The results of this whole process was then to present to interested members of the community at a public meeting/seminar.

During the three days of field work the participants split into small groups to work with various community members (individual farmers, farmer's families, key persons from various agricultural organizations and the municipality, the local agricultural school) to create a clear picture of the rural village. Halfway through the process, the information that had been gathered was checked with young farmers at an informal evening meeting. On this occasion participatory mapping was also practiced.

The fourth day the results from the discussions, the sketch maps and transects were written on wall papers and presented at a final meeting to which all the villagers were invited. Those 35 people who attended, most of whom were farmers, had some factual comments on the information concerning the past and present situation. When the information was presented on the future challenges of the community, the farmers started a very lively discussion among themselves.

The three major challenges identified included: the quota for milk (subsidized price for a fixed amount of milk), the gradually decreasing quota for cowdung that can be freely dispersed over the land and the increasing acidity of soils and water. The conclusions - that farmers in order to maintain a reasonable income needed to increase the size of their farms and intensify production but also needed to take environmental protection measures - were contradictory.

A lot of discussion focused around the question as to whether consumers were willing to pay a higher price for agricultural products produced in an environmentally friendly manner. Though the villagers themselves were not in agreement on the answer regarding this question both they and the course participants agreed that this was the major issue for farming in the village.

In evaluating this exercise both participants and villagers agreed that the contribution of foreigners had been challenging and constructive. It had been a facilitating force to initiate a public discussion, for the first time, on an important issue between the different groups in the village. This actually came as a surprise, to both the participants and the villagers. The participants had not expected that they would be able to facilitate this discussion and the villagers had not expected outsiders to the village to be able to activate a discussion on an environmental issue that was increasingly dividing the agricultural community.

After reflecting on this experience, participants were better able to adapt the new approach to their existing working context and to design and implement rural development projects in a different way.

## Concluding comments

At the conclusion of the course, participants reflected on what they had accomplished. In addition to exchanging valuable personal experiences throughout the course, they appreciated the importance of knowing that they were not alone in a search for more emancipatory approaches. Most participants also stressed the fact that they had not only acquired knowledge on participatory approaches but even more importantly had gained increased confidence in their ability to 'learn by doing'. Others, even more daringly, added that the course made them realise that it is not so much a lack of institutional resources that hampers their work. A far more important problem is the poor involvement of local people in development work.

Development work in practical terms has many uncertain factors as it deals with people, their culture, their history, their socio-economic and political situation and their different interests. These uncertain factors are not a problem to be overcome, but an important resource to be respected and enhanced as it is local knowledge which finds its meaning within a cultural framework.

Local knowledge is not only the domain of men and women at local level, but is also an important and often untapped resource among government and non government organization staff. Creating situations and methodologies with the possibility of reflecting upon one's own ideas and opening the mind to new ideas and perspectives has proven to be an important result of people's participation and action research. One group of participants stated this very clearly: 'From initially being seen as ignorant, farmers are now recognized as knowledgeable partners'.

## References

- ANTS (1983) "Mildred Abaunza" *Memoria del primer seminario nacional de trabajo social 'Laura Amanda Cuadra'*. Lima, CELATS
- van Gelder, B. and O'Keefe, P. (1995) *The New Forester*. Intermediate Technology Publications, London.
- Lammerink, M.P. (1995). *Aprendiendo juntos, vivencias en investigacion participativa*, Managua, Nicaragua.
- Lammerink, M.P. and Prinsen, G. (1994) Participatory tools for social forestry. In *Forests, Trees and People Newsletter*. 23, pp29-33.
- Lammerink, M.P. and Wolffers, I. (1994) *Some examples of participatory research*. DGIS, The Hague. (Also published in Spanish, French and Vietnamese).

## Alphabetical List of Authors

### Bunning, Cliff. DBA.

Cliff Bunning is Professor of Human Resource Management, at the International Management Centre (IMC), Pacific Region, Brisbane, Australia. He is a Chartered Member of both the Australian Human Resources Institute, and the Institute of Management Consultants in Australia Inc. and is a Graduate member of the Quality Society of Australasia. He is the author of *Total Quality Management* (1993) and *Action Research - An Emerging Paradigm* (1994).

### Burke, Robert

Robert Burke is the Managing Director of Carwash Ltd, and Founding Managing Director of Futureware Corporation Pty Ltd. Formerly he was Managing Director of Fuchs Australia, the Australian arm of the World's largest independent lubricants producer for 18 years. He has an Action Learning MBA (IMC) and is currently completing an Action Research PhD (IMC). He is the founding member and formerly on the Executive Trust of the Mindware Exchange.

### Carr, Tony

Tony Carr is a Senior Consultant (HR) in the Queensland Department of Families, Youth and Community Care. He has a Bachelor of Business in Public Administration, a Graduate Diploma in Industrial Relations, and Masters degree in Business Management. He is a Chartered member of the Australian Human Resources Institute. His research interests include organisational change and development, concepts of quality used in management and action research in management.

### Kroath, Franz. PhD

Franz Kroath is an Associate Professor and the Head of the Teacher Training Centre at Innsbruck University. He has a PhD in Psychology and a post-doctoral degree in Education. His research areas include: professional development of teachers through action research; in-service training concepts for supervisors and probationers; evaluation of initial and in-service training programmes.

### Lammerink, Marc. PhD

Marc P. Lammerink, PhD, is a social scientist and director of FMD Consultants (Forestry Manpower Development), and consultant to the International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC). Both organisations are located in The Netherlands. He concentrates his activities on the development of participative training methodologies related to the field of natural resource management, on supporting organisations in developing countries with the implementation of sustainable rural development projects and on the implementation of emancipatory action research in the field. He is the author of several books and many articles on action research and action Learning. For IRC he currently coordinates an action research project with six partner organisations on 'The role of communities in the management of improved rural water supplies in developing countries'. It focuses on possibilities for improving community management of water resources in communities located in Kenya, Cameroon, Guatemala, Colombia, Nepal and Pakistan. (Tel. +31-23-5260375, Fax. +31-23-5257467).

### Passfield, Ron

Ron Passfield is a lecturer in Human Resource Management in the Faculty of Commerce and Administration at Griffith University in Brisbane. He recently finalised his action research PhD study based on an action learning program conducted for senior academic and administrative staff at the University of Queensland between 1991-1995. He is president of the Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management Association Inc. (ALARPM) - an international, not-for-profit organisation based in Brisbane. ALARPM was responsible for the First and Second World Congresses on Action Learning and Action Research held in Brisbane in 1990 and 1992, and sponsored the third World Congress at Bath University, UK, in July 1994. Ron also provides consulting services to organisations interested in using action learning and action research.

### Swepson, Pam

Pam Swepson is an organisational psychologist working as a management consultant and trainer in the Queensland Department of Primary Industries. Pam is currently undertaking a PhD research program at Griffith University to study the nature of good research, action research or science.

**Wildman, Paul**

Paul Wildman is a lecturer at Southern Cross University, Lismore, in the Faculty of Education, Work and Training. He was previously Director, Labour Market Directorate in Technical and Further Education, Queensland and responsible for a geographical area comprising 60 youth employment consultants in 20 centres around the State. His research interests include Youth Work, Futuring, Regional Development, Work and Community Development, Public Policy and Organizational Development. He has published over 60 articles and books, including audio and visual aides particularly in the areas of Community Economic Development. He is presently lecturing in Social Science which is offered at Masters level, and is available on the World Wide Web.

**Zarb, Joe**

Joe Zarb is Head of the School of Agriculture and Rural Development in the Faculty of Agriculture and Horticulture at the University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury. His research focuses on the assessment of experiential learning, and the relationships between the assessment of experiential learning and the appraisal of professional development of academic staff. Joe is currently the co-ordinator of an Academic Staff Development Review within his own School. The methodology of the review follows principles of action research and is intended to provide data about the school as a learning organisation.