

Congresos de  
**CONVERGENCIA**  
**CONVERGENCE**



**Resúmenes**  
**Abstracts**

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# PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

## CHALLENGES AHEAD

*Compiled and Analyzed by*  
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## THE WORLD CONVERGENCE CONGRESS

The Congress was a happening that taught us very much, a key moment in the world history of participatory methodologies for having facilitated the first meeting of our diverse schools and trends.

*Davydd Greenwood, Cornell University, United States.*

It was a marvellous experience where participants from many regions were able to formulate freely their concerns and points of view, and to open up and affirm their knowledge in an impressive show of contemporary solidarity.

*Hernando Roa, Bogotá, Colombia.*

Since my return I felt that something had happened to me! The impact of the event is going to have major personal repercussions. As a psychotherapist, my work is taking on a new dialogical stance.

*Gerard Rademeyer, University of South Africa, Pretoria.*

I found the Congress a formative experience in several ways. It was extraordinary to have been able to attract so many diverse people who share an overlapping ideology of participation and empowerment of those who are disadvantaged.

*Robert Chambers, IDS, University of Sussex, England.*

We found the Congress stimulating, productive and enriching, a significant milestone.

*Rajesh Tandon, PRIA, New Delhi, India.*

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EDITORES

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At the **8<sup>th</sup> Congress on Participatory Action Research (PAR)** and the **4<sup>th</sup> World Congress on Action-Research, Action-Learning and Process Management** in Cartagena, Colombia from May 31 to June 5, 1997

Marc Lammerink participated as a presenter in three panels from:  
**Group II, Creation, Transmission and Utilization of Knowledge**

1-2 Formal/informal Pedagogical Experimentation: Popular and Adult Education

Convenor: John Gaventa

- Panel or workshop: 'Systematization of experiences of participatory action research and popular education'
- Panel: 'How to train in action research?'
- Panel: 'Participatory action research on Community Management of Rural Water Supply - experiences from Kenya, Cameroon, Nepal, Pakistan, Guatemala, Colombia'.

Furthermore as a convenor together with Timmi Tillmann:

**Group III, System building for socio-economic, industrial and ecologic administration**

- Working group: 'Biodiversity, Natural Resources and Habitat preservation'.

## *Group II, Creation, Transmission and Utilization of Knowledge*

### **1-2 Formal/informal Pedagogical Experimentation: Popular and Adult Education**

**Convenor: John Gaventa**

#### **Panel or workshop on systematization of experiences of participatory action research and popular education**

Since some years more interest is shown to the process of systematization of experiences on action research and popular education. The idea here is to bring together different experiences in that respect. Organiser will present his own case as follows.

#### **Learning together - Experiences with participatory action research and popular education**

**Marc P. Lammerink**

This conference paper is presented in the 'Panel or workshop on systematization of experiences of participatory action research and popular education'. Author started way back in the eighties with a group of popular educators from Nicaragua to develop a methodology for systematization. It became a challenge to systematize his own experiences with popular education and action research. This has been published in Spanish as : '**Aprendiendo Juntos - Vivencias en investigación participativa**', in Nicaragua in 1995.

In this publication he reflects both on the outcome of participatory action research and on the process through which knowledge was gained and served to enhance the grip of local people on their own surroundings. Some twenty years of field work using participatory action research (PAR), whilst developing a training methodology and suitable research methods for practitioners showed that PAR can be a powerful strategy to advance both practice and social science. Most field work aimed at empowering the oppressed and improving their organisations. These oppressed ranged from small rice-farmers, brick-makers, dwellers in marginalised urban-neighbourhoods to environmental grass-roots groups and small fishermen in a Nicaraguan village. For them not only improved knowledge served to enhance the grip on their own surroundings, but also understanding of the process through which this knowledge was gained. In the introductory paragraph some features of PAR are described: PAR aims at finding solutions to concrete problems and conflicts, it enhances learning from experiences of social action. Dialogue between researchers and grass-roots people is important. In the rest of the paper different cases will be described from author's own experiences. The last paragraph gives some concluding reflections on the implications of the cases presented. PAR is not a neutral, value-free activity, but an active questioning process leading to improvements for the researched as well as to new scientific insights.

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## *Group II, Creation, Transmission and Utilization of Knowledge*

### **1-2 Formal/informal Pedagogical Experimentation: Popular and Adult Education**

**Convenor: John Gaventa**

As part of the panel on the topic of '**How to train in action research?**'

**'A process approach to learning: The training of action researchers'**

**Marc P. Lammerink**

#### **ABSTRACT**

This conference paper is presented in the Panel on 'How to train in action research?'. See the paper as an annex.

All too often, training and schooling in research is seen as a process by which "experts" pass on their skills to "non-experts". Useful training and schooling in the field of participatory action research and other participatory approaches should enable people to build upon their own experiences and skills and to participate actively in the learning process. One way of doing this is by adopting a process approach to learning in which the ultimate aim is to empower people for action and to change the environment for the better.

The underlying principles of the process approach to learning are those of popular education. Experiences are seen as an important source of learning. This means starting with the participants and working with the experiences they gained in their home and work and not only with theory brought up by the "experts". It does this through workshops, study circles and fieldwork, rather than through conventional classroom teaching with chalk and board, or overhead sheets.

In this paper some cases will be described of the author's experiences with such a process approach to training based on *popular education* and *action research*.

An example is the development a postgraduate course for Nicaraguan social workers entitled "Social research and popular participation".

In Nicaragua, a need was felt for a type of research in which professionals should be able to turn research into an educative experience for people at the grassroots by searching jointly creative solutions for felt problems.

Thus during the course we guided participants in a gradual process towards the design of an approach to social research and popular participation tuned to Nicaraguan conditions. The social workers experimented with this approach over a six-month period in different field projects. Results were examined in order to come to a final formulation of the participatory research approach. Still lacking skills were trained in order to make implementation by the social workers feasible.

Later experiences in a fishing village on the Pacific Coast of Nicaragua with the developed approach revealed an effective participation of villagers in their own development endeavours. Other examples with how the approach can be applied to other areas are brought from the Training of professionals from developing countries in participatory approaches towards social forestry, i.e. enhancing farmers initiatives in social forestry.

*Group II, Creation, Transmission and Utilization of Knowledge*

**1-2 Formal/informal Pedagogical Experimentation: Popular and Adult Education**

**Convenor: John Gaventa**

**Panel: Participatory action research on Community Management of Rural Water Supply - experiences from Kenya, Cameroon, Nepal, Pakistan, Guatemala, Colombia.**

For three years, NGO's have been working with villagers from three continents in an ambitious attempt to develop a flexible research methodology and strengthen community water management.

During this panel members of each of the research teams from Kenya, Cameroon, Nepal, Pakistan, Guatemala and Colombia will present their joint experiences in this process until now.

The presentations first set the context and will then focus on the training and research methodology and approach used by outlining the various phases of the research. The different teams will describe outputs/ results of these phases and how the outputs of one phase serve as an input for the next. Special attention will be given to the variations among the approaches applied by country teams that have emerged in the course of time, due to different cultural and political contexts. Looking into reasons we will try to identify the implications for action research and community management in different cultural settings.

The presenters will enhance understanding by visualizing many of the activities undertaken.

# A PROCESS APPROACH TO LEARNING: THE TRAINING OF ACTION RESEARCHERS

Marc P. Lammerink  
Cartagena, Colombia<sup>1</sup>  
1997

## INTRODUCTION

All too often, training and schooling in research is seen as a process by which "experts" pass on their skills to "non-experts". Most "experts" have biased and pre-conceived ideas about what people can and cannot do or understand. Useful training and schooling in the field of action research should enable people to build upon their own experiences and skills and to participate actively in the learning process. One way of doing this is by adopting a process approach to learning.

Most aims of a process approach to learning are not different from more conventional educational training. It, too, aims at raising the professional capabilities of participants by improving the level of their technical and intellectual knowledge, skills and attitudes. But the ultimate aim is to empower people for action to change their environment for the better.

The underlying principles of the process approach to learning are those of popular education. Experiences are seen as an important source of learning. This means starting with the participants and working with the experiences they gained in their home and work and not only with theory brought up by the "experts". It does this through workshops, study circles and fieldwork, rather than through conventional classroom teaching with chalk and board, or overhead sheets.

In this paper some cases will be described of the author's experiences with such a process approach to training based on *popular education* and *action research*.

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Later experiences in a fishing village on the Pacific Coast of Nicaragua with the developed

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<sup>1</sup> World Congress 4 on Action Research, Action Learning and Process Management, Cartagena, Colombia, 1997

approach revealed an effective participation of villagers in their own development endeavours.

Other examples with how the approach can be applied to other areas are brought from the Training of professionals from developing countries in participatory approaches towards social forestry.

### *Social Research and Popular Participation in Nicaragua*

In his speech to the First Seminar on Social Work in Nicaragua in 1982, 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 programme: 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 and of the grass roots. 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, research 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 the 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 programme 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 goes along;
- b) the methodology should guide the participants during the training in gradually transforming conventional research design into a participatory 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 should be created of mutual trust and respect as basic conditions for learning.

The actual course follows a flexible participant-centred training methodology based on the principles of popular education, in which 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 inside the training group, which enhances skills to facilitate participatory 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 participatory 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 catalysts 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 workshops 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 actual elaboration of a work programme; the identification of problems to be resolved; the search for alternative solutions; the supply of necessary information; the constant analysis of unforeseen difficulties encountered along the way; the input of elements of comparison with similar experiences; the diffusion or evaluation of results; the drawing up of didactic material. 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 (UCA) 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 we inventoried 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 we made use of group techniques, which could promote the participation of the participants, like brainstorming on cards and theatre. To stimulate favourable learning conditions the emphasis was put on the development of an open atmosphere of mutual respect, trust and commitment within the group.

Then we asked participants to describe and analyse 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 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 we constantly try to "build upon the practical experience of the participants", we 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 we 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 too 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, we 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 we had to be coherent in the training approach, we had to become operative in the field, within a limited time frame. First, a model of participatory action research was defined, directly related to Nicaraguan reality and to participant's work context. Then the model was put into practise 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, we built on the working practice of the participants. In this phase, we 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 fisherman 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. We 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 participatory research

programme started, together with the senior stevedores, to systematize their experience and to integrate this knowledge into an 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, we 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.

## **PARTICIPATORY 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 fishermen village on the pacific coast.

It all started with a request for support from a villager from Masachapa to the School of Social Work. The villagers faced many problems, ranging from bad drinking water, serious health problems, alcoholism, bad housing conditions, high mortality rates, prostitution and illiteracy. Was it possible at least to discuss with the newly formed team for 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 on 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 walk. 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 on 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 recollect funds for 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 and also the villagers presented "sociodramas", etc. 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 led to development activities that were creative, productive and sustainable over a period of time. The popular education methodology evolved. There was plenty to learn from, with, and about fishermen and women and their situations. The popular education approach complemented and combined well with a participatory action research approach developed during the team training in Managua and results of this have since been quite substantial (Lammerink, 1995: 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 training and participatory 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 FMD (Forestry Manpower Development), which operates in the field of social forestry, we have been working on ways in which the developed methodology of action learning and participatory 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 uses and development of community forestry projects in developing countries.

An example is participatory 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 & Prinsen, 1994a: 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 & O'Keefe, 1995: 5).

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 our former experiences we 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 participatory 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 IRC 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 before (see 1.2). In fact the training 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 participatory 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. Practising 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.

#### *Practising: 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 will be given from a specific course held in 1992 in The Netherlands where eleven foresters from eight developing countries participated for six weeks.

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 and 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 were then to be presented 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 practised.

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 cow dung 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 participatory 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 NGO 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."

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**Paper for panel: Participatory action research on Community Management of Rural Water Supply - experiences from Kenya, Cameroon, Nepal, Pakistan, Guatemala, Colombia.**

M.P. Lammerink with many comments from Eveline Bolt and Norah Espejo

With funding from the Netherlands Government the IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre is since late 1994 facilitating the learning process in the project entitled "The Role of Communities in the Management of Improved Rural Water Supplies in Developing Countries".

This participatory action research project involves water programme support agencies in *Cameroon, Colombia, Guatemala, Kenya, Nepal and Pakistan* (1). In each country, an NGO water supply agency is supporting local research on how four villages deal with improved management of their existing water supply. Through this, and together with the communities concerned, the NGO's are strengthening the capacities of the villagers to manage their water and sanitation systems.

A PAR team from each of the six countries together with elected men and women from rural communities, a national reference group in each country, and an international reference group, of which Dr. Orlando Fals Borda from Colombia is one, are consolidating and sharing the lessons learned from the communities' experiences in managing the maintenance, finance and use of their existing water supply systems, provided either by the government or through an NGO.

"The knowledge we gain from this research is much more valuable than gifts. It is something that we keep for life".

This is how villagers in Nkoundja, Cameroon reacted after they visited the neighbouring village of Nyen to find out how people there are solving their problems in managing, operating, and maintaining their water systems. The visit had an immediate effect on Nkoundja's water caretaker who, after seeing how his counterpart in Nyen behaved, realized that he had to change. "We had discussed this over and over again and his behaviour never changed", said Mr. Issiaka Njankouo, one of the community research team members. "Now his attitude has changed radically and he is working really well".

Such 'exchange' visits have proven to be very useful components

The action research project has a primary objective: to develop and document a participatory research and support methodology which both the agencies and communities can continue to use in other situations and which, when faced with problems in the future, they can share with fellow water organizations and colleagues. The project also aims to establish a structured exchange of know-how between every water agency dealing with rural water management in the six countries represented, plus strengthening operational policies on, and support for, community water management. And, at the international level, the group is attempting to increase the expertise of all organizations working towards bringing about effective community water management systems.

In less than two years, the process and empirical results have thrown up real insights, both into what comprehensive, gender-sensitive community management of local water resources and domestic water supply can achieve, and about which agency approaches and tools are effective in helping both rural communities and their local water management organizations to obtain and preserve an effective water supply service.

## **Research teams**

In 1994, the partner organizations - all NGOs - established national participatory action research teams. Each PAR usually comprises two or three men and women with the relevant technical and social science experience. The PAR teams' work began later in the year with the preparation of a situation analysis on local management of rural water supply systems in their countries. The team reviewed relevant documents and interviewed the staff of all the agencies working in the rural water sector, asking them what their policies, and strategies were for the local management of rural water systems after their work was completed. Each team also carried out an in-depth case study of the attempts of one rural community to manage its improved water supply system.

These country studies provided the backbone of a planning and training workshop at which the researchers developed a design for the action research process, for selecting communities, forming local research teams and assessing and analysing local management practices and results.

Aided by three regional skill-development workshops in early 1995, each team then facilitated the selection of four 'partner' communities, based on their demonstrable interest of becoming partners in the proposed action research. The communities were also chosen on the basis of how representative they were of their country's particular water management and socio-economic situation. Building rapport with the population and the existing community organizations was an important aspect of the first visits. Joint village walks and explanatory meetings were very useful in that respect.

Later in 1995, community research teams were established in each participating village, elected from the community water management organizations and the water users. The community research teams received training in analysing the water situation and, in particular, in identifying problems and appropriate solutions.

Early 1996, a second round of regional training workshops involving the national PAR teams took stock of the preliminary research findings. The main topic was: how could the community groups' proposals be included in the next phase - experimentation with the communities? The workshop participants analysed the role of the teams in field-testing, and the skills necessary for the next stage was strengthened.

Most of the community research teams have developed late 1996 their research agendas. Experimentation and field testing of the problem-solving strategies, methods and tools - as well as monitoring and evaluation - will take place in 1997.

## **Community Selection**

Not surprisingly, given that PAR projects do not promise poor communities tangible rewards - no new water supply or latrines - gauging their 'interest' in the research project posed a real challenge. How does one 'sell' community management capacity to a group of villagers? Is it realistic to try and interest them in an abstract idea such as a 'participatory action research process to enhance community management capacity'?

Dealing with these questions called for intensive negotiations between agency staff and community representatives. In Colombia and Guatemala, researchers 'sold' the process with the aid of established participatory techniques, such as mapping and newspaper on the walls which enabled them to initiate discussions on the local water situation and what people considered to be the important management capacity requirements. In Nepal, the research team used a poster of a chicken hatching an egg to explain that, although the hen (the research team) will provide warmth and energy, it is the chick's (the community) responsibility alone to hatch and grow.

In most of the communities, people were very enthusiastic about enhancing their management capacity in this way. Whereas the partner selection criterion of 'a genuinely interested' community proved to be perfectly valid, most country teams added their own criteria. For example, Colombia looked at the level of poverty, while Kenya and Cameroon tried to reflect the cultural diversity of their communities, which has a major bearing on how water supplies are managed locally. In Nepal, the research team was particularly anxious to achieve a good diversity of implementing agencies.

### **The community research teams emerge**

In order to work towards capacity building at community level, each community selected a research team. The creation and role of these teams was much more than a "methodological step" towards ensuring community involvement; they can be viewed, justifiably, as indispensable actors and agents of change, both in implementing action research, and in putting the findings and recommendations into practice.

In La Sirena, a community in the hills of the Colombian city of Cali, research team members were chosen for their relevant experience and aptitude for community work. For the villagers of Ceylan in Colombia's Valle District, famous for its agro-industrial development and coffee plantations, the most important qualifications were having appropriate training and clear leadership potential. As a result, they picked a 16-year old student who, they felt already possessed the right qualities to become an effective community leader.

In the Quiche zone of Guatemala, where educational standards are poor, the community put the bonus on individuals' willingness to participate. A good proportion of older, illiterate people are actively involved in the team, helping to give LRTs the popular image of reliability. Gender segregation was an issue in Pakistan, so separate men's and of women's teams were established.

Overall, there is a broad agreement among the communities in all three continents that, to be an effective research team member, an aptitude for community work, leadership skills, and some knowledge of local history are more important attributes than educational qualifications.

### **Training community research teams**

As soon as they have been elected, the local research team member receive training in diagnosis and research techniques. The ten women and thirteen men making up the Cali team were trained together at a two-day workshop, where they had the opportunity to talk about what they understood by the term's 'participation', 'community organization', 'gender', 'indigenous knowledge' and 'community diagnosis'. The participants felt that the PAR techniques left a lot to be desired and modified them to suit local circumstances.

After the workshop, the local teams prepared a report, incorporating line drawings and

photographs. The reports provided useful methodological guidelines for planning the next stage - the community diagnosis - which the researchers now felt they could carry out systematically. They were proud to be known as 'the water and sanitation researchers'.

### **Diagnosing the problem**

In the Guatemalan village of Belen, early identification of both water problems and short-term solutions was the ideal entry point for involvement in a more general community diagnosis.

In Nepal, the teams began their investigations by organizing exchange visits between villages. The Rangapur team spent two days with their neighbours in Gajedi so they could assess the villagers' needs and make some suggestions about their water problems. After a briefing on the various water supply and sanitation schemes, the Rangapur researchers visited all the village stand posts, where they talked to the users and their families. Then, at an open meeting they discussed their findings with the villagers and made some valuable suggestions for change. Not long after, it was the turn of the Gajedi group to visit Rangapur.

A 'village walk' launched the diagnosis in the neighbouring villages of Nyen and Mbemi, in Cameroon's English speaking, western province. The PAR team, together with the village water-committee members and some district officials, spent three hours walking around both villages. They identified particular features, evaluated the performance of the water supply system, listened to people's complaints about the service and learned more about local palm and raffia tree industry which, while providing the community its main source of income through the production of oil, wine, baskets and bags, swallows up a sizeable amount of its water.

The village walk not only established contact with the villagers, it also acted as a launch pad for the village mapping. 'In the afternoon when we were making up the two maps, the group of participants was considerably bigger. This continued the next day when (the villagers) all drew the Venn diagram to show the key individuals and institutional relationships for water supply decision making', said Mr. Amouye of the Cameroon PAR team.

Community diagnosis is designed and planned by projects teams in collaboration with local research teams. They select a specific set of PRA techniques to facilitate the collection and the sharing of qualitative and quantitative data. Diagnosis deals with the socio-economic, technical, managerial, and hygiene believes and practical aspects of the existing water supply and sanitation facilities. During the diagnosis, women and men express their feelings, interest, and viewpoints using drawings, mappings and matrices.

All of this data takes into account the different roles and expectations of women and men, whether it concerns water supply, water resource management, water use or local management; the depth of the diagnosis depends on the individual community. The countries' experience so far suggests that diagnosis is a continuous process: communities will continue to identify new problems, as well as resources and social changes, irrespective of the stage reached by the research project.

### **Problem solving strategies**

As we write, in early 1997, the communities are developing their own strategies, methods and tools to address managerial problems, and to monitor the effects of any reforms on service

performance. Next, they will put these problem-solving strategies to the test.

The country research teams continue to play a supporting role: helping to strengthen local capacity in areas such as skills development, group building, confidence building for women and men, in forging links with other communities or organizations. They also contribute to the improvement of maintenance, payment systems, and water source protection; a small budget allows to fund some technical improvements to the community water supply system itself.

One of the main management skills to be strengthened is effective monitoring of both the research process, as well as impact. Close, continuous monitoring facilitates adjustments of the strategies, methods and tools based on local findings and requirements.

The monitoring approach is being developed with the partner organizations and the communities to ensure that it provides for the best possible learning opportunity for everyone.

### **Better by PAR**

By the end of 1997, the team will be able to carry out its final evaluation of the process, and its concrete achievements. After being summarized and complemented with by up-to-date news of the latest developments, these findings will be analysed jointly with the respective communities and agencies.

From their very conception in the early 1960's, the first participatory action research activities in rural Latin America and India proved to be effective tools for raising people's awareness and empowerment.

The early experiences of this 1990s project reinforces the argument that PAR methodologies do enhance management capacity in the water and sanitation sector. The communities in Cameroon, Colombia, Guatemala, Kenya, Nepal and Pakistan are becoming far more involved in making important decisions while, at the same time, supporting agencies are learning to facilitate and empower communities.

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(1) Information in this article is based on the project's internal reports send by the participating country project teams: Agha Khan Foundation in Pakistan, ADP-Agua del pueblo in Guatemala, CINARA in Colombia , Netwas in Kenya, NEWAH in Nepal and PAID in Cameroon, as well as on field visits.

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