

## **Working Paper to be discussed during the Workshop on Process-Supportive Consultancy to Natural Resource Management Projects**

**MARC P. LAMMERINK**

**Haarlem, May 24, 1995**

As a consultant who is entering the 'scene' I would like to highlight the following items:

- First, I will give a description of my itinerary as consultant
- This is followed by a story of fruitful consultancy of which I learned a lot on how to conduct consultancy
- Some more recent experiences with Process Supportive Consultancy (PSC)
- A critical review on the working aid on PSC.
- A story of how to train people in different process-oriented approaches.
- My assumptions and questions with regard to PSC

### **1. My itinerary as consultant**

After finishing my studies in 1974 on sociological economy I was working for two years as a junior consultant in an Organisation Advisory Group. During that time I worked as external consultant in both profit and non-profit organizations. The main activity was an action research in the brick stone industry of The Netherlands. This was my first experience on the path of alternative consultancy approaches.

I will elaborate a bit on this project:

It was formulated in order to improve the quality of working conditions, and the human aspects of work and management policies in the Dutch brick industry. In what can be called a Rapid Industrial Appraisal and using participant observation, semi-structured interviewing, different visual aids (like maps and diagrams) and group sessions, a thorough analysis was made of shop-level conditions in some fifteen different factories. Sub-standard conditions became manifest in some of them as well as the human, technical and economic mistakes managers can make by not taking workers into account, when seeking higher outputs in the brick-making process.

Some relatively progressive managers from various factories were identified who had already experienced in practice that a higher quality of workers' participation was essential for proper functioning of their factory. During various group sessions an action profile for humanising both the working conditions and management was developed in dialogue with them. Their experiences in workers participation were revealed in a mutual-learning inquiry. Their information and ideas, gathered during years of experience in the effective integration of the shop-floor into the total production organization, were utilized to design a profile of an effective management style. Practitioners became participants in the research process and the subsequent training process.

Nevertheless, when the most outspoken owners of the brickworks were informed about these preliminary results, they decided to halt the consultancy process. They could not accept the chance of creating unprecedented situations with which they were not prepared to cope. This unexpected termination of the project made clear the risks and disadvantages of such a participatory approach organized *'from above'*.

I decided to quit the consultancy firm, because I did not feel in the appropriate position to change this situation. Then I worked for several years as a university professor in the area of Andragogy (Social Pädagogik für Erwachsenen), mainly on approaches for adult education and community development. Some approaches related to what can be called Process Supportive Consultancy (PSC) where developed during those years. Also experiences with fieldwork helped to develop an approach '*from below*'.

I will reveal one experience in 1978 which was quite productive in that sense: It dealt with the support jointly with a 'Volkshogeschool' (Adult education college) of a grass-roots organization for environmental protection in Waterland, north of Amsterdam. Strengthening the action organization strategy was preceded by a process of awareness-raising through a series of social inquiries by members of the organization themselves, ranging from historical investigations to large-scale group dialogue on the strategy to be followed. The study showed how such an alternative consultancy approach can successfully bring about awareness and change by actively involving people in generating self-knowledge about their own history and conditions for action. This process demonstrated the need for the leaders of this local organization to share their acquired expertise with the rank and file, and to remain responsive to the feelings and needs of the farmers and common people, whom they are supposed to represent. During this process the role of the researcher was clearly changing to that of a convener, a colleague, a catalyst and sometimes of a consultant, who brought in new ideas or experiences unknown to the grass-roots organisation.

This and other experiences with grass-roots organizations helped us to elaborate a department's research programme, called "Community action and urban social movements". It aimed basically at developing an approach for supporting local initiatives in neighbourhoods of Amsterdam.

During this research the concept of urban social movement was explored and popular education approaches to learning are examined, as well as other methodologies that can strengthen the ability of social movements to promote from below the changes needed for building a more democratic urban environment. Collective experiences of urban social movements and their strengths and weaknesses are central to the analysis. Strategies for support could draw on this analysis, as was experienced also by the environmental action organisation in Waterland.

This research project marked the end of my working period oriented towards the North, the so-called developed world. I felt a need for new insights and experiences in the field of development work. Experiences that could help to overcome certain biases and see the picture again differently. In that sense a consultancy at the Vice-Ministry of Adult Education in 1981 in Nicaragua was very productive.

Since 1979 adult and popular education played an important role in the Nicaraguan educational transformation and I could be part of these experiences with new process-oriented approaches. In a way the country was converted into one big social experiment embodying a new conception of education. Principles like 'people educating the people', flexibility, action-reflection-action, dialogue, consciousness raising, rescuing cultural heritage, and integration of theory and practice characterized this new conception.

This practice of 'educación popular' could be identified in the Nicaraguan National Literacy Crusade and the subsequent programs of adult education.

From 1984 on I got the possibility to use these principles of popular education in subsequent years in a university cooperation project, "Andragogy and Community Development", which I was coordinating for four years. This project was designed to support the redefinition and restructuring of the functions of the School for Social Work at the (catholic) Central American University (UCA) in Nicaragua as a centre for teaching, research and the promotion of social change. The project aims principally to help in improving the quality of teaching and research work in the areas of Adult Education, Community Development and Social Research.

Especially rich for our mutual learning process was the development of a postgraduate course for professional social workers entitled "Social research and popular participation". This training was related to the felt need in Nicaragua for a particular type of research: Research as a process of getting to know and interpret social reality, with the aim of gathering sufficient knowledge to allow for the reproduction, transformation and induction of new processes in society. The professionals trained should be able to turn research into a learning experience for people at the grassroots as they jointly search for creative solutions. Nowadays, the coincidence with Process-Supportive Consultancy is apparent.

Important question was: how to train professionals in such an approach?

The training methodology was based on the principles of 'educación popular' (action learning), which is both sufficiently flexible and compatible with the task of such a researcher. Experiences were seen as an important source of learning. The knowledge and experiences of the participants, as well as their working contexts, were taken as the starting point for a process of exchange, analysis and systematization. Participants were guided during the course in a gradual process towards the design of an approach to social research and popular participation tuned to Nicaraguan conditions.

After this first part of the course, the professionals experimented with this approach over a six-month period in different field projects under various conditions. Results were examined in order to come to a final formulation of the research approach. Still lacking skills were trained in order to make implementation by the social workers feasible.

## **2. A story of a fruitful consultancy: Participatory research applied among fishermen**

A fruitful consultancy took place during 1986, which showed me many strong points from the new approach. It was part of the project with the School of Social Work of the Central American University of Nicaragua.

It all started with a request for support from a villager from Masachapa, a fishermen village on the pacific coast, 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 'contract' 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) showed the 'outsiders' 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 inquiries 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 action learning methodology evolved. There was plenty to learn from, with, and about fishermen and women and their situations (Lammerink, 1995: 182).

This action 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.

Some of the lessons learned are here summarised:

- there are big risks and disadvantages in an alternative consultancy approach organized 'from above' against an approach 'from below'
- the role of the researcher/consultant changes in a process approach to that of a convener, a colleague, a catalyst (advocate of the devil), a partner in development and sometimes of a consultant, who brings in new ideas or experiences
- strategies for support should draw on a self-analysis of strengths and weaknesses of a project/organization
- action learning is characterized by principles as 'people educating the people', flexibility, action-reflection-action, dialogue, consciousness raising, rescuing cultural heritage, and integration of theory and practice
- participatory research should become a learning experience for people at the grassroots as they jointly search for creative solutions
- experiences are important sources of learning
- effective participation of villagers in their own development endeavours is very well possible,
- villagers are often capable of collecting far more accurate information than 'outsiders' and are perfectly able to correct and prioritize the information.
- for professionals there is a general need to understand and appreciate traditional knowledge and systems of livelihood, and the way people feel, see, think, and act
- process consultancy cannot be seen as a neutral, value-free activity, but is an active, questioning process leading to improvements for the those who are supported as well as to new insights in development work.
- participatory action research and popular education are both a philosophy and a means of working with people to promote people's empowerment towards changing their immediate environment on their own behalf.

Systematization of above described experiences in a PhD thesis (Lammerink, 1992 and 1994) laid a firm base for my activities as a consultant. This thesis is the result of field work and of reflection on efforts to use a participatory action research approach in the field, whilst developing a training methodology for practitioners and suitable research methods for different situations.

Nowadays, many different names are used for approaches that have common features. As such for me Process Supportive Consultancy of the NARM project seems to be developed in a comparative spirit to development.

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, process-supportive consultancy of organisations in developing countries for the implementation of sustainable rural development projects and on the implementation of participatory action-research in the field.

### **3. More recent experiences with PSC**

Two more recent initiatives are still worthwhile to explain further. One is related to a process-supportive consultancy in Nicaragua, another is related to current consultancy work in the water sector.

#### **A) The establishment of an action research initiative – the case of ADESO las Segovias**

In the framework of the new Dutch research policy for development cooperation I am involved in the development of a regional research program in Nicaragua.

Let me explain this new research policy. The following aspects are central in the new Dutch research policy: 1) the acknowledgement of importance of scientific knowledge for economic, technological and social development; 2) developing countries should have their own autonomous research capacities; 3) these should develop research based on their own questions and developing and using their own scientific know-how; 4) a counterbalance to monopoly of knowledge of northern scientific community is needed.

In this context funds of Directorate General for Development Cooperation (DGIS) are made available for 'local, multi-annual, and multi-disciplinary research programmes'. Main objective is to stimulate research that has relevance to local development issues. Out of the recognition that society is changing continually, development interventions will have to deal with the dynamics of the local situation. This implies that research programmes will focus on long-term socio-economic processes of change and on their contribution to sustainable development.

In these programmes, which can be funded up to 10-15 years, the research agenda is developed in a process of consultation between local scientists, the local population (representatives of grassroots organizations, NGO's) and local policy makers with a view to facilitating optimal tailoring of research to social needs. This agenda can help to understand and solve important local development problems in a long-term perspective.

Here a continuing dialogue between non-researchers and researchers or potential users concerning the research agenda and the design of the programme is introduced. The general focus should be problem-oriented and thus 'demand-driven' instead of 'supply oriented'. An important part of the research will be based on participatory approaches. Researchers from the region are invited to develop proposal based on this agenda.

DGIS asked me to support as a consultant the start of such a programme in Central America. For that reason a contract was signed for short 'orientation missions' from August 1993 to July 1994. In July 1994 a second contract was signed for formulation missions between July 1994 and December 1995. Since September 1993 eight missions took place in order to identify people and organizations and support them to establish and organize such a research programme.

### **About the consultancy in ten missions**

During the first mission (9/1993) together with the responsible from DGIS after consultation with many parties it was proposed to start the process in one region of Nicaragua, region 1, known as 'Las Segovias'. The municipality was interested to convey a first meeting with grass-root organizations, the policy framework, scientist and NGO's in order to explain the rationale of the new Dutch policy.

This meeting was the start of a process of discussion on the possibilities to implement a research programme which should provide elements for the development of a sustainable development strategy for the region. During this mission we had many personal interviews with organizations and people of interest.

Some of the highlights were:

- Municipality showed to be a good entry-point
- There was positive interest from the Dutch embassy
- Relations were established with people and organizations in the region
- Small fund was established on the embassy to meet initial costs

During a second meeting (10/1994) it became clear, that in 'Las Segovias' the proposal of a multi-disciplinary research programme was little by little positively conceived, after a slight initial suspicion. It was progressively discovered as a possibility to begin building up the process for a new experiment of joint, harmonious and coherent work involving different actors in the region.

Already during the second mission (12/1993) a preparation group of people from different organizations and grassroots groups started to organize themselves in order to push the process forward. Together with them we made a global planning for the coming period. Right from the beginning horizontality and transparency was established. The municipality was a good choice in order to involve a broad gamma of organizations. Soon it became clear that the initiative also served as a process of, what is called in politically highly polarised Nicaragua, 'concertation'. Different political oriented people started to talk with each other again about development issues. During this mission identification was made of a programme for the pursuit of the work to do in the coming time

(participatory planning). The commitment of a large group of people towards the process was increasing. In one of our last meetings the name for the programme was established as 'Investigacion para el Desarrollo Sostenible de las Segovias' (instead of the 'Dutch multidisciplinary, location-specific, long-term programme on development research'). Again there were several personal interviews with people involved.

Some of the highlights were:

- On one of the meetings an interchange between organizations started
- Group become stronger and more stable, about 42 persons from 35 organizations were organized

During a third mission (2/1994) the preparation group prepared a two days diagnosing workshop in which grassroots and NGO representatives, policy makers and some researchers discussed development strategies in the past (the fifties, sixties, seventies, eighties) and their effect on development. Then the actual development strategy was discussed and its possible future effect on the region. After a discussion on a desired future ('dreams') the big differences became apparent. Partly this was due to wrong policy measures. However, partly it was also the result of a lack of knowledge of how to steer the development of the region. This gave rise to a discussion on the possible role of research in order to change the development strategies. Some main areas for research were identified.

Later a group of researchers were asked by the preparation committee to prepare a kind of state-of-the-art papers on these areas for their discussion in a forum. One of the topics is related to natural resources management due to the critical environmental situation in the region.

In the preparation committee a discussion started on the organizational set-up of the programme, because there was no NGO sufficiently independent to host a secretariat of the programme without influencing the broad character of the programme.

Some highlights were:

- Groups and organizations with very different political background came together to discuss their common future ('Concertación')
- Ownership of the programme becomes the region
- Tremendous effort of the voluntary preparation committee

During the fourth mission (4/1994) this forum was prepared, and a consultation started on the possible organization that might administer the research programme in Nicaragua. NGO's present in the region were found too much related to political parties. An organization of broad acceptance, so important for the discussion up to that moment, was not present. Discussions started between the people and organizations involved to organize themselves as an autonomous association.

Some highlights were:

- Position papers were prepared on: natural resources management; popular consultation of past, present, and future; processes of migration: social economic results of poverishing; changes in small scale agriculture; possibilities for



industrialization on small scale; alternatives for development: gender aspects and local cultural heritage related to mentioned topics;

- Programme is getting its own dynamic, institutionalizing as a broad Segovian programme for research.

During the first semester of 1994 I also elaborated a reader for DGIS on examples of participatory research, which was distributed as methodological support in three languages in the different research programmes in nine different countries (Lammerink, Wolffers, 1994).

Fifth mission (6/1994). Until now the so-called executive comity had been working in free time without any remuneration. It was decided to assign a secretary as an implementor of decisions taken. Also the Forum took place and was attended by many groups and organizations of the region. During this forum a first research agenda was decided upon in a participatory consultation of three days. The initiative was now becoming to be an autonomous movement for change in the region. The discussion on the best juridical form to make this initiative sustainable for the long run was discussed. Decided was to explore the association as a form. In July ADESO 'las Segovias' was established with 35 organizations members/ founders (ADESO means 'Association for research for the sustainable development of the Segovias').

After the forum we set together with the preparatory team and evaluated what had happened. Quite some issues were raised on the organization, internal coordination, external relations, methodology used, but also on the influence of the researchers from Managua who prepared the state-of-the-art papers.

Some highlights were:

- Establishment of new organization ADESO las Segovias was getting shape, based on local preference
- Researchers do not really know what the needs of the Segovian people are
- One day workshops were developed for concept development

During a sixth mission (8/1994) together with the executive comity of ADESO a discussion/workshop was held how to formulate on the base of the first research agenda a programme for research in order to develop a programme document for approval and funding by DGIS. The movement is getting known in- and outside the region and is getting involved in all kind of development activities.

During the month September to December this programme document was being developed, discussed and presented to the Dutch government. Approval by the minister in March 1995. Meanwhile the organizational form was taking shape and the movement was becoming stronger. This became clear during the evaluation of the year 1994 in December.

Some of the highlights were:

- The programme document as a conceptualisation of the discussions held in ADESO is discussed and accepted by its members.
- Three subprogrammes are proposed (Research, Information and Capacity

Building).

Seventh mission (2/1995) and eight mission (3/1995) were mainly dealing with institutional development of ADESO. Based on the need in the region for interchange of existing information the process of documentation gathering started in September was accelerated. Also looking back importance of process documentation becomes apparent. The process of the development of ADESO is understood as a process of action research of diagnosing, theorizing, conceptualizing, internalizing, which leads to an improved practice.

The programme is getting its shape which is totally different from what the representative of DGIS and the consultant could have thought it would become. In an iterative process in which my role was clearly that of a process-supportive consultant a regional action research movement is getting consolidated. The dynamic pushed by local groups in the region which is the result of this initiative is relevant and is getting impact, because of its open learning environment. All of us we have learned a lot during the initial iterative process of establishment of the programme, which have strengthened our commitment. It is now sure that the support geared towards the association will continue.

This process of orientation started without any idea of what region, on whom to approach and without any idea of possible themes for research. This meant that the Dutch research policy had to be adapted to suit the specific situation of each region. In that sense also for the donor organization (DGIS) a lot of learning has taken place throughout the process of establishing this and similar programmes. It meant in a way reversals from centralised to decentralised decision making and management. The uniform became diverse, the static became dynamic.

At the same time, and this is sometimes threatening, the controllable became uncontrollable and the future becomes less predictable. Instead of controlling the outcome it became an enabling and empowering process, proliferating local diversity and also giving voice to the people themselves in the decision on what is important to take into account for the future.

## **B) PSC and community management of rural water supply: participatory action development with communities in six countries worldwide**

As a consultant I currently also work with the International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC). There I coordinate an action-research project with six partner organizations on 'The role of communities in the management of improved rural water supplies in developing countries'. Its focuses on possibilities for improving community management of water resources in communities located in Kenya, Cameroon, Guatemala, Colombia, Nepal and Pakistan.

The project is developed with six partner organizations in the above-mentioned countries. In the first year after the formation of multi-country research teams and a first situation analysis (state-of-the-art) in each of the countries, we organized a 6-weeks Planning and Training Workshop in The Netherlands for which we adapted the earlier mentioned training approach. Together with the teams we planned the

participatory action research project in the six countries on community management of water supplies.

Since January 1995 a team of three consultants is giving a kind of process-supportive consultancy to the teams in the three continents, sometimes in regional workshops, mostly in in-country support which will continue the following four years.

The objective is to get the process of strengthening management capacity moving, creating opportunities for communities to debate and reflect on their abilities to manage their own systems. Where this will end is still unknown and difficult to engineer, because these processes are the responsibility of the community. They will have to walk away with it, some time, one way or another. The facilitation task is to initiate the process, using a variety of tools and information. For the facilitators of community management processes, however, it is not enough just to open a box of participatory tools. They first need to understand the community's social and economic relations, leadership, cultural or religious aspects, and the different interests, and need to use methods and tools in flexible ways. They are also likely to need mediation and negotiation skills in order to create opportunities for community management.

We can already understand that facilitating processes in rural communities to strengthen the capacities of community people to manage their water supply systems is fascinating. It can only be done in close contact with the community, with patience, wisdom and a good sense for community life. These processes are not predictable because of the specific characteristics of each community, and one has to deal with setbacks and conflicts. However, the community members give a lot in return – their creativity, trust, humour and often real commitment. The relationships that develop between facilitators and community members are often intense, satisfying and challenging for all.

Although the approach and theory are the same for all project participants, the stories of how the process evolves in practice will be diverse. In every community the process will probably be different, in terms of both pace and content. Although we aim at enhanced capacities in each community to manage their water supply systems, the institutions, rules and structures that underpin this capacities will also be diverse. This diversity can may be proof that the communities are able to design their own management systems, rather than follow a blueprint provided by support agencies. Community management celebrates heterogeneity.

In the coming years we will report extensively on this endeavour and the lessons and experiences that will come out.

#### **4 Critical review on the working aid of Process Supportive Consultancy (PSC)**

I do agree a lot on the different aspects of the working aid of PSC as can be understood from my former experiences.

Nevertheless, there is one comment in relation to the document on PSC which is

triggering me, and which might be interesting to discuss further during the meeting. One is related to the capacity building: 'the qualification of consultants can less be developed during seminars on participatory methods and is more apt to be learned in situations in the field' (page 7).

I agree on this statement in a sense but would like to make some comments to activate the discussion.

According to our experience in capacity building for NRMSH there is still an important role to play for seminar type of learning. Nevertheless, these seminars should be based on the same premises as the alternative approaches that are to be supported in the field. I would like to call it a Process-Supportive Approach to Training. This should not be undervalued.

We have seen that in many situations the former education of, in our case foresters can become a hindrance for more participatory approaches in projects. Some examples in papers for the workshop on PSC in 1993 reveal the same kind of limitations, for example Thomas Schwedersky reveals about the difficulty to incorporate 'sociological thinking' in the team's work.

Chambers in a recent article (Nelson, Wright, 1995, 33) writes about 'normal professionalism': concepts, values, methods and behaviour which is dominant in professions, which seeks and values controlled conditions and universal truth. This is also true for foresters. The education of foresters is mostly geared towards a so-to-call 'industrialized' concept of forestry and less towards social forestry in which farmers and their knowledge/initiatives play an important role. The same can often be said of other disciplines. According to my experience in a certain moment of time a joint training which takes into account the following ideas, can be very productive and speed up the learning process.

#### a) Training of professionals in participatory approaches (some of my assumptions)

Thus an important area for me, working with foresters in developing countries, is the training of professionals in social forestry and approaches like process-supportive consultancy, which can contribute to a participatory, decentralised and self-sustaining process of rural development.

Valuing and enhancing local initiatives of men and women farmers in local production and land use systems is an imperative from a social-political perspective and also a very pragmatic need. This is based on two assumptions. First: 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, 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 natural resources (Lammerink & Prinsen, 1994a: 29).

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.

Based on former experiences we developed in FMD a training approach that makes people aware of the importance of seeing farmers initiatives and, more importantly, that focus on the development of the alternative approaches that are needed to initiate and implement new production initiatives. This training approach also gives professionals confidence to apply a different way of designing and implementing rural development projects.

Since 1988 this training is being applied in different projects in various countries on in seminars varying between two weeks to six weeks.

The training methodology is based on the same principles of popular education (action learning) described before. 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 a participatory approach in social forestry. The exact content is structured around the knowledge and experience of the participants. The responsibility of the facilitators (and later the professionals in their own work) is to outline, facilitate and maintain the logical order of the phases and connections between them.

During the course, facilitators 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. 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. At the same time they obtain the self-confidence needed to translate these newly acquired concepts and approaches to their existing working context and to design and implement rural development projects in a different way. Within this process, learning goes from concrete to abstract in the analysis and from general to specific in the intervention.

At the conclusion of one of such courses, 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 process-oriented 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.

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 action learning and action research. One group of participants stated this very clearly: "From initially being seen as ignorant, farmers are now recognized as knowledgeable partners."

Some additional lessons learned:

- Farmers know their own environment through experience and continuous experiments. They are a major source of locally tested and relevant knowledge.
- Due to the magnitude of the environmental problems 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 natural resources. Their knowledge and skills should be the building blocks for development initiatives
- Training facilitators should be guided by the same principles during the learning process with professionals as those they advocate following in the field
- Commitment of professionals towards support of local initiatives is a prerequisite of participatory approaches

## **Bibliography**

van Gelder, B. & O'Keefe, Ph. 1995. *The New Forester*. London, Intermediate Technology Publications

Lammerink, M.P. 1992. *Participatief actie onderzoek met rijstboeren, steenbakkers en vissers - Ervaringen uit Latijns-Amerika en Nederland*, Den Haag, Gradus Hendriks Stichting

Lammerink, M.P. 1995. *Aprendiendo juntos - Vivencias de Investigación participativa*. Managua, Nicaragua, Vanguardia

Lammerink, M.P. & Prinsen, G. 1994a. Participatory tools for social forestry. In *Forests, Trees and People Newsletter*. no. 23, page 29-33. Sweden, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Lammerink, M.P. & Wolffers, I. 1994b. *Some examples of participatory research*. The Hague, DGIS (also in French and Spanish)

Nelson, N. & Wright, S. 1995. *Power and participatory development - theory and practice*. London, Intermediate Technology Publications