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ABC of PRA: attitude and behaviour change

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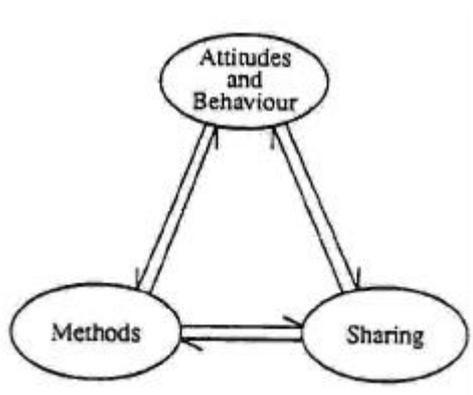
“Worldwide, PRA practitioners and trainers have been finding that personal behaviour and attitudes are fundamental for true participation. Behaviour and attitudes matter more than methods, powerful though PRA methods have proved. At the personal level, practitioners and trainers have found that the major problem in development is not “them” - local people, the poor and marginalised, but “us” - the outsider professionals. Again and again, we have rushed and dominated, imposing our reality, and denying that of the weak and vulnerable. For the poor to be empowered requires us to change, to interact in new ways, to become not controllers, teachers and transferors of technology, but convenors, facilitators and supporters, enabling those who are weak and marginalised to express and analyse their realities, to plan and to act. For this we have to behave differently; it is our attitudes that have to change.

Robert Chambers, 1996

• Introduction

Attitudes and behaviour, methods and sharing have been considered to be the three pillars of PRA (see Figure 1). However, there is growing realisation that attitudes and behaviour are the foundation of true participation. Acknowledging attitudes and behaviour in PRA is both a major challenge and opportunity.

Figure 1. The three pillars of PRA



ACTIONAID India, Bangalore and SPEECH, Madurai resolved to convene a South-South Workshop on PRA: Attitudes and Behaviour in Bangalore and Madurai. For the first ten days of July 1996, 26 experienced PRA practitioners and trainers from 12 countries, mostly from the South, got together to explore and share attitudes and behaviour in PRA. This article summarises the outcome of the deliberations.

• The theme

The theme of the workshop was PRA: Attitudes and Behaviour with a focus on the following questions :

- How do the attitudes and behaviour of officials and professionals change when they become involved in PRA?
- How do they need to change?
- What are the training or other strategies that encourage such change?
- How are behavioural/attitudinal changes handled during basic training and ‘training of trainers’ in PRA?

• The structure

In line with the tradition of a participatory approach, the structure and issues of the workshop were not predetermined or fixed by the organisers. Only time blocks were fixed. Instead, it was instead left to the participants to evolve the content and process of the workshop. A Steering Committee of participants met periodically to finalise the agenda of the workshop.

Seventeen articles were presented which were categorised into three thematic areas *viz.* personal attitudes and behaviour change, methods and training in attitude and behaviour change and institutionalisation of PRA. The presentations were followed by buzz groups discussions. After completion of all the articles on a theme, issues and learnings were listed, discussed in buzz groups and again in the plenary. The main findings of these sessions are outlined below.

• Personal attitudes and behaviour change

Some of the papers presented categorised the types of attitudes one encounters among officials and professionals in relation to PRA. Box 1 outlines an interesting example from Bangladesh. It demonstrates the arrogance of many outsiders and technocrats who believe in technical solutions alone and fail to recognise local peoples' perceptions.

BOX 1

Ranking by villagers of their most pressing problems produced a prioritised list of 44 problems, out of which the rat problem ranked at 42 in some villages. (It is pertinent to mention here that the Directorate of Agriculture Extension has the month of October earmarked as the 'rat killing month' when all the villagers are encouraged to kill rats and bring 'tails' to the office for which they are paid.) Instead of looking into why the rat problem was low in the villagers' priority, the officer immediately said, "Ah! well, you see, the farmers don't know that rats are a problem!"

• Personal experiences

The participants shared their personal experiences on how their own attitudes and behaviour have been changed. The factors which have led to attitude and behaviour change are summarised below:

- Realising that local people can do much better than we can, and have the capacity to analyse their situations and suggest more appropriate solutions.
- Realising that much development is imposed on people.
- Realising that our attitude and behaviour has been offensive to people.
- Recognising that training in concepts and methodologies are best validated by actual experience.
- Understanding that the virtue of listening is one of the basic foundations of changing attitude and behaviour.
- Understanding that internal change in attitude and behaviour requires constant self-critical analysis and introspection.
- Recognising the need to make good attitudes and behaviour an integral part of our lives.
- Understanding the need for space to allow others to reflect and improve/change their attitude and behaviour.
- Learning to regard one's work in participatory learning and action as a way of life, not a livelihood.
- Knowing that attitudinal and behavioural changes begin from within ourselves.
- Realising that knowing oneself, and being open for improvement is the basic prelude to change.
- Accepting the value of meaningful exchanges and interactions.

• Training for attitude and behavioural change

Training was seen as a major tool for facilitating attitude and behaviour change. However, all too often, PRA training focuses on methods, whilst neglecting attitudes and behaviour. There are good reasons why this bias towards methods tends to occur. It is usually easier, and often more fun, to teach people how to use PRA methods. On the other

hand, attitudes and behaviour are difficult to teach, and for trainees to grasp quickly. There tend to be fewer tools available to make the teaching of attitudes and behaviour interesting (Makuku 1996).

The workshop participants focused on how training processes can be adapted to ensure that trainees are made aware of the importance of appropriate attitudes and behaviour. A wealth of principles and ideas emerged. Some basic requirements for PRA training were seen to be that:

- Training should be conducted in an informal and enjoyable learning environment;
- Training should be participatory;
- Lecturing, if at all, should be minimal;
- The participants should not be told anything which they can find out for themselves;
- The usage of games, activities, etc. followed by reflections and analysis can help the participants draw inferences for themselves. A selection of good games and exercises for addressing attitudes and behaviour during training is listed in the workshop report (see also Box 2); and,
- To keep the training sessions interesting - games, energisers, teasers etc. should be interspersed at regular intervals.

BOX 2

SOME TRAINING IDEAS FOR ADDRESSING ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR

Short stories with a clear morale can be used to initiate a discussion on attitude and behaviour;

Role plays of good and bad attitudes for PRA can be a fun, but revealing approach;

Pictures and videos portraying scenes from other PRA sessions can provoke discussions on body language, setting, seating arrangements etc. and can be useful in emphasising key points about people's behaviour and attitudes;

Games such as saboteur, dominator/dominated (see *PLA Notes* 26), master/servant, For or Against? (see *Tips for Trainers*, this issue) etc. are all good ways to allow participants to reflect on their own behaviour and attitudes.

Source: Makuku, 1996

• Quality of PRA

The spread of PRA has been tremendous. This has opened up new opportunities as well as challenges. The major challenge and concern has been the quality of PRA. Many factors have compounded the situation, including: donor driven spread without understanding the basic principles, dearth of quality and experienced facilitators, labelling of other methods as PRA etc.. These issues came up for discussion time and again during the workshop.

The scaling up at a faster pace was another related issue. The rapid spread of PRA and the initial enthusiasm for application was taken as a positive sign. However, quality continues to remain a major concern. Experience indicates that methods are relatively more popular among practitioners and their use for collecting data is labelled 'PRA'. This kind of application misses the fundamental premise of attitude and behaviour and relegates PRA to being an event, rather than a process. A number of experiences were cited where the eagerness to scale up has resulted in failure (see article by Nilanjana Mukherjee, this issue).

Key ways for addressing these concerns when supporting institutions in the scaling-up process include:

- Ensure that an emphasis on attitudes and behaviour is prominent in all trainings;
- Provide post-training follow-up for the institution, to support the internalisation of the approach in relation to the existing ways of working; and,
- Identify, encourage and support positive and reflective individuals within the institution by linking them with like-minded networks. Publicise their efforts to give them some standing and recognition among others.

• Institutionalisation of PRA

Experiences indicate that training, self reflection and field experiences may make a person participatory. However, newly acquired skills often prove ephemeral or do not get the opportunity to be used in an institution. Institutionalisation of PRA, as a way of operating and affecting the culture of organisations, is a major issue.

Normal bureaucratic tendencies to standardise, centralise and impose top-down targets impede or prevent the open-endedness, flexibility, creativity and diversity of effective PRA. Institutionalisation of PRA requires a reversal and a change of culture. This proves to be a Herculean task in organisations with strong top-down authority and hierarchy, evaluative and punitive styles, and repetitive routines and actions.

Some ways which have proved effective for sustaining desired 'attitude and behaviour' change include: working in teams of motivated individuals, institutional support to juniors through mentoring by seniors, observing role models and appreciating field realities. This is in addition to participating in training-workshops. Once again, interim and post-participation support is integral to both individual and institutional efforts for grassroots participation.

The key to understanding participation lies in discovering mechanisms to produce the right

kind of attitude and behaviour. Therein lies the challenge for all those who are associated with PRA activities.

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NOTES

The workshop culminated in a common statement: "*Sharing our experiences: An appeal to Donors and Governments*". The aim was to stress the need to be aware of how rapid scaling-up of PRA, without the necessary support and attention to appropriate attitudes and behaviour, can often do more harm than good. The appeal has been reproduced in this issue of *PLA Notes*.

For details of how to obtain the Attitudes and Behaviour Workshop Report, please contact the PRA Unit at ACTIONAID, D-6 Blessington Apartments, 34 Serpentine Street, Richmond Town, BANGALORE 560 025 INDIA.

REFERENCES

- Chambers, R. 1996. Foreword to *South-South Workshop on PRA: Attitudes and Behaviour*. A workshop report. Bangalore and Madurai 1-10 July 1996.
- Makuku, S. 1996. Methods for training in attitudes and behaviour in PRA training. Paper presented at *South-South Workshop on PRA: Attitudes and Behaviour*. A workshop report. Bangalore and Madurai 1-10 July 1996.