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## An introduction to Participatory Action Development (PAD)

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### • Introduction

Involving people in the analysis of problems that affect them and in the design of potential solutions is a good way to achieve sustainable development. Although more time consuming than traditional development approaches that rely on 'blueprint' plans and development experts, participatory approaches generally lead to development efforts that are sustainable over the long term because the people themselves have a stake in their success.

An approach to community water management requires a methodology that is sufficiently flexible and compatible to enable rural communities and support organisations to share, analyse and enhance their understanding, and allow them to plan and implement problem-solving activities. This is precisely the focus and rationale behind the Participatory Action Development (PAD) approach for community water management<sup>1</sup>. The simplest description of Participatory Action Development is that it is an approach to development work in which all those involved contribute both to the creative thinking that goes into the problem-solving and planning, as well as to the action that is the subject of the development work.

<sup>1</sup> The approach is largely inspired by material developed by FMD Consultants to support approaches in the forestry sector, entitled 'A stepwise approach for social forestry' (FMD, 1994, *Participatory Learning Techniques: Some Examples*. Haarlem, The Netherlands; E-mail: fmd.nl@wxs.nl).

### • History

Various trends have contributed to the evolution of concepts and practices of Participatory Action Development (Lammerink and Wolffers, 1998). The first is an ongoing debate about the *sociology of knowledge* (Habermas, 1971). In this debate, the view of society, human order and human history are presented from the point of view of the marginalised, the workers, the poor and the deprived, as opposed to the dominant form of knowledge produced and articulated throughout history from the point of view of the rulers.

The second trend came from the work of Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich. Illich's critique of schooling in modern societies and Freire's contribution to an *alternative pedagogy* merged with a number of contributions in the late 1960's and early 1970's. This showed the interlinkage of the process of 'knowing' and the process of 'education' and reaffirmed the fundamental linkage between knowing, learning and reflecting (Freire, 1982).

The third historical trend comes from the *practice of adult education* in the countries of the South. Adult educators developed a methodology of learning, which helped to establish the control of the learner over his or her own learning process (Tandon, 1988).

Another trend in the history was the contribution of *Action Research*. It argued for 'acting' as a basis of learning and knowing. This formulation of Action Research, going back to the work of Kurt Lewin, was influenced by the formulation of Participatory Action Research in Latin America (Fals Borda,

1985). From Lewin comes the following statement: ‘If you want to know how things really are, just try to change them’ (Lewin, 1958).

Another trend came from the work of phenomenologists (Solomon, 1987). These contributions legitimise experience as a basis of knowing, along with action and cognition. This expanded the basis of knowing beyond mere intellectual cognition and helped to develop the practice of *Experiential Learning* (Kolb, 1984).

Finally, the debate on ‘development’ began to place the question of participation as a critical variable in mid and late 1970s: people’s participation, women’s participation, community participation etc.. The emerging failures of top-down, expert-designed development projects and programmes supported the promotion of *participation as a central concept* in development. This has put the use of knowledge and skills of those who are critical participants and central actors in the development process in the centre (Chambers, 1983).

The PAD approach to community water management has been further developed and tested in 22 communities in six countries during a participatory action research programme from 1994 to 1998, known as the PAR-Manage programme.

### • The research process

The main stages of the research process of the PAR-Manage programme were as follows.

1. *Preparations* (1994); in which the partner organisations formed project teams, gathered information on existing community-managed rural water supply systems in their countries and visited selected communities for an orientation on key issues.
2. *Selection of communities*; four communities in each of the six countries were selected on the basis of their interest in taking part in the project, how representative they were in terms of their water management, the geo-hydrology of the area, and the mix of water supply technologies and socio-economic conditions. Those communities selected represented a broad range of environmental, socio-economic and cultural conditions, as well as managerial capacity.
3. *Participatory field investigations* (1995–96); to identify problems and diagnosis. This stage consisted of in-depth examination of local conditions and the actual demand for managerial improvement through participatory research. During this stage, the so-called *community research teams (CRTs)* were formed in some of the communities, and they continued to play a crucial role in subsequent stages, building on the lessons learned during the diagnoses, and participating in the research process.
4. *Joint development and field testing of problem-solving strategies, methods and tools* (1996–97); based on the outcomes of the community diagnoses to identify problems, potential solutions and the available resources, the PAR research teams, in close collaboration with community members, developed strategies to address managerial problems and to monitor their effects on service performance. Each community then drew up an agenda for experimentation and implementation plans, and chose monitoring indicators to assess progress. Many of these experiments have led to improvements in the performance of the water supply schemes. The results of the experiments and the use of monitoring instruments were analysed in collaboration with the respective communities. The PAR research teams documented the outcomes of the analysis, which were reviewed by the respective national reference groups.
5. *Evaluation, follow-up and sustaining the process* (1998); this stage involves the currently ongoing final phase of the project, in which reporting and dissemination of findings through international and national groups will take place. The PAR teams did not wait until the end of the experiments before evaluating them. In group meetings, community members discussed various aspects of the experiments and began to draw conclusions about the usefulness (or

not) of the various problem-solving strategies.

In the cases presented in the following articles, the approach has been developed to find solutions to problems and conflicts in the management of rural water supplies by rural communities. In the process, it also enhances their problem-solving capacities. In this article we outline the principles behind the PAD approach whilst the subsequent article explores the methodological process in more depth.

### • **Appraisal, training and action**

By stressing the relationship between appraisal, training and action, the PAD approach is useful for:

- finding solutions to social problems;
- identifying the needs for change; and,
- working out improved knowledge, technology and patterns of action in order to meet those needs.

This approach can bring benefits to everyone involved: the community can enhance its capacity to solve its own problems, and support organisations working in communities can strengthen their own capacities and effectiveness, and thus cope with the increased demand for community management. There is much to learn throughout the process, and this is linked directly to the identification, development and testing of specific problem-solving strategies and tools together with men and women in the communities concerned (Lammerink, 1995).

In the PAD approach, (some) community members actively participate with 'support workers' throughout the process, from the initial design of the support process, through data gathering and analysis, to the final presentation of results and discussion of their action implications (Whyte, 1991). The community is actively engaged in the quest for information and ideas to guide their future actions. These practitioners are involved as both subjects and local development workers. An important feature of PAD is the dialogue between development professionals and people in the villages.

PAD offers an effective and powerful strategy for the type of interdisciplinary work that is

needed to improve the community management of rural water supplies. It also allows for a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of community management. It permits rapid adjustment to different local conditions in different countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In particular, by applying rapid feedback mechanisms, it stays closely in touch with reality.

### • **Common features of PAD projects**

All projects based on PAD share common features, which according to Barton et al., (1997) include three foci; local, action and process.

#### **Local focus**

- *An orientation towards the felt needs of local people and institutions* - PAD deals with issues directly experienced and explicitly acknowledged as problems by local people and institutions.
- *A strong link with locally generated initiatives*- PAD aims to generate information and support decision-making processes relevant to local aims and applicable to local initiatives.
- *The involvement of non-local professionals as partners in a learning process* - Non-local professionals contribute to PAD as facilitators or by providing technical/management information, and via discussions and negotiations with local actors. Typically, they serve more as facilitators than as experts.

#### **Action focus**

- *A minimal time gap between data collection, analysis and feedback* - The timelines of analysis and rapidity of feedback are important, both to increase the cost-effectiveness of the support activities, and to promote the practical utility of the results.
- *A direct feeding of analysis results into planning and action* - PAD incorporates methods for translating the knowledge gained directly into practical decisions and/or feasible courses of action.

## Process focus

- *An equal concern for process and results* - PAD aims at making all participants aware of the implications of the issue (problem, situation, possible solutions, outcome of experiments) being analysed and supporting them in undertaking relevant action.
- *A built-in communication strategy* - Final written reports are useful for institutional or training purposes of professionals; but meetings, posters, development theatre, workshops are more important means of providing feedback to local institutions and the community at large.

The PAD methodology places strong emphasis on participatory and gender-sensitive appraisal and needs assessment methods. It uses both qualitative and quantitative data collection on system performance and service, such as distribution problems, breakdown rates, costings, and local organisation (see Figure 1).

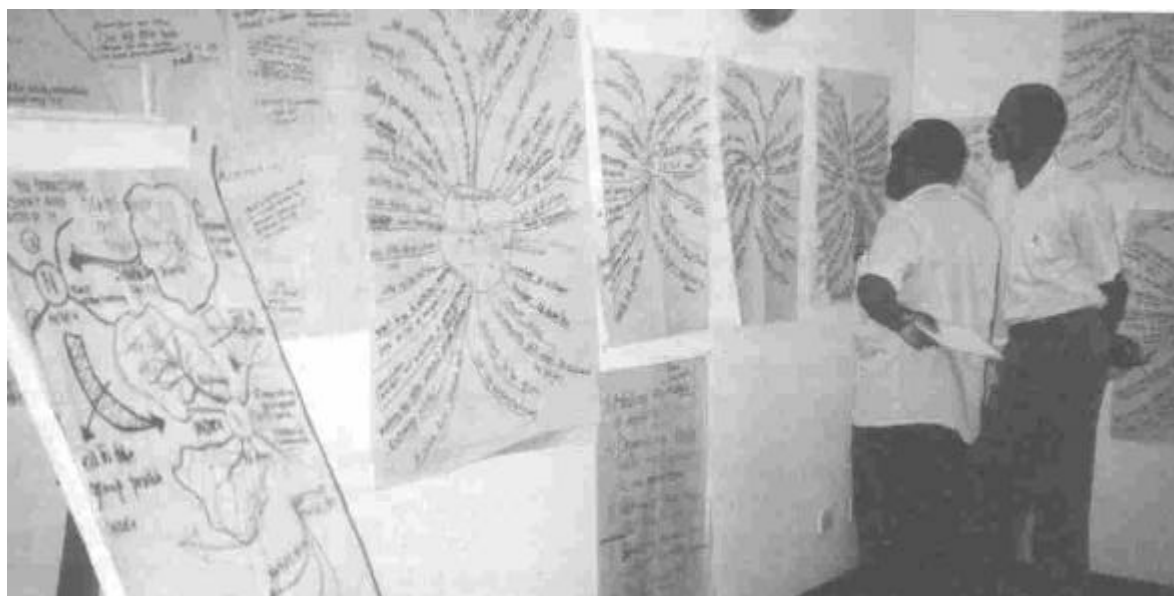
## • A three-stage approach

In general, the PAD approach is implemented through three stages (see the next article for more detail):

- diagnosing phase;
- experimenting phase; and,
- sustaining phase.

For the diagnosis, a combination of methods and tools are available. Some of these emanate from the tradition of participatory research and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), such as semi-structured interviews, observations, participatory mapping, transects, seasonal and other diagrams of flows, causality, trends and local organisational relationships, ranking, brainstorming and portraits or case studies of experiments. For feedback, various visual and communication tools can be used, such as village meetings, theatre, puppet shows, celebrations, games, posters, and other visual means.

**Figure 1. The PAR team in Kenya assist in a mind mapping exercise in Nyakerator, one of the PAR communities. (Photo: M. Lammerink)**



Implementation follows a logical sequence, starting with the joint preparation by fieldworkers and project staff of a common framework for a support project and the selection of communities. This is followed-up in the selected communities by a participatory situation analysis, a needs assessment and problem identification, and recording past experiences and identifying possible solutions. All of these activities together form the diagnosing phase.

An interactive process is then established with the communities to explore the problems facing the community and to discuss, jointly design and adapt possible solutions. These solutions, which may include technical readjustments to the water system, or methods and tools for improved management, can then be field-tested and evaluated by the communities themselves. These joint activities form the experimenting phase. The third and final part of the approach, the sustaining phase, focuses on disseminating methods and tools for improved management, sharing the findings, and planning and co-ordinating further work in order to sustain both the process and the outcome.

## • Conclusion

Facilitating processes in rural communities to strengthen the capacities of people to manage their water supply systems is fascinating. It can only be done in close contact with them, with patience, wisdom and a good sense for community life. Such 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.

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