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**December 2003**  
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# Learning and teaching participation



# pla notes

## participatory learning and action

*PLA Notes* (Notes on Participatory Learning and Action), formerly known as *RRA Notes*, is published three times a year in April, August, and December. Established in 1988 by the Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods Programme (SARLs) of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), *PLA Notes* enables practitioners of participatory methodologies from around the world to share their field experiences, conceptual reflections, and methodological innovations. The series is informal and seeks to publish frank accounts, address issues of practical and immediate value, encourage innovation, and act as a 'voice from the field'.

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### Participatory development

Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) is an umbrella term for a wide range of similar approaches and methodologies, including Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA),

Participatory Learning Methods (PALM), Participatory Action Research (PAR), Farming Systems Research (FSR), Méthode Active de Recherche et de Planification Participative (MARPP), and many others. The common theme to all these approaches is the full **participation** of people in the processes of **learning** about their needs and opportunities, and in the **action** required to address them.

Participatory approaches offer a creative way of investigating issues of concern to poor people, and planning, implementing, and evaluating development activities. They challenge prevailing biases and preconceptions about people's knowledge.

The methods used range from visualisation, to interviewing and group work. The common theme is the promotion of interactive learning, shared knowledge, and flexible, yet structured analysis. These methods have proven valuable for understanding local perceptions of the functional value of resources, processes of agricultural intervention, and social and institutional relations. Participatory approaches can also bring together different disciplines, such as agriculture, health, and community development, to enable an integrated vision of livelihoods and well-being. They offer opportunities for mobilising local people for joint action.

In recent years, there has been a number of shifts in the scope and focus of participation:

- emphasis on sub-national, national and international decision-making, not just local decision-making;
- move from projects to policy processes and institutionalisation;
- greater recognition of issues of difference and power; and,
- emphasis on assessing the quality and understanding the impact of participation, rather than simply promoting participation.

Recent issues of *PLA Notes* have reflected, and will continue to reflect, these developments and shifts. We particularly recognise the importance of analysing and overcoming power differentials which work to exclude the already poor and marginalised.

# pla notes

Number 48  
December 2003

Photo: IDS, UK



Sharing visualisation diagrams at the International Workshop on Teaching and Learning Participation in Higher Education, 2–4 April 2003, IDS, UK

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# editorial

## Welcome to issue 48 of *PLA Notes*.

### News, reminders, and the next issue

The special theme section in the next issue of *PLA Notes* will be on community-based planning. We now have a full complement of articles for the theme section, but if there are any books or other publications, events/workshops or websites that are relevant to this area, which you would like us to consider for the In Touch section, please email us at [pla.notes@iied.org](mailto:pla.notes@iied.org).

Just a reminder that back issues 1 to 40 of *PLA Notes* are now available on-line on our website [www.planotes.org](http://www.planotes.org). Many of you have already accessed these, as shown by the dramatic increase in visits to our website in recent weeks. We believe that this is a really valuable resource for practitioners – and hope that you agree!

Can I also remind readers that subscriptions are now dealt with by IIED's distributor, Earthprint (see address on inside front cover). Cheques, bank drafts etc. from paying subscribers should now be sent to Earthprint, as should renewal notices from non-paying subscribers. Please contact Darren at Earthprint ([customerservices@earthprint.co.uk](mailto:customerservices@earthprint.co.uk)) if you have any queries related to subscriptions. Contributions to *PLA Notes* and other feedback should continue to come to the *PLA Notes* team at IIED, as before.

And finally, news... in January 2004, I will be going on maternity leave for a second time. We are currently in the process of appointing my maternity cover, who will take over from the next issue. Holly Ashley will continue as *PLA Notes* Editorial Assistant and, as an previous Acting

Editor of *PLA Notes*, will be able to provide invaluable support to the new editor. I expect to be back in the Editor's seat by next September, in time for the December 04 issue.

### Theme section

The theme section for this issue draws on a recent international workshop on learning and teaching participation (LTP) in higher education. Hosted by the Participation Group at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex, UK, the workshop brought together experiences of teaching and learning participation not only in universities but also in other institutions of higher learning, e.g. research institutes and training centres. The workshop and the global dialogue around it aim to examine the role of teaching as a force for understanding and for strengthening processes of civic engagement and democratic participation in development.

The articles in this section describe experiences of teaching and learning participation in a range of higher education settings, from social work education in India, to a law faculty in Peru, to national agricultural research institutes in East Africa, revealing many similarities but also differences in approaches to teaching and learning. They focus on three main areas:

- **participatory modes and programmes of teaching and learning**, including internal aspects of programmes, such as teaching approaches and curriculum content, as well as the role of external relationships with communities and social organisations in effective teaching and learning;
- **university-community linkages**, and the different forms these linkages can take; and

### • the role of learning networks and ways of institutionalising LTP.

Our guest editors for this special theme section are Peter Taylor and Jude Fransman. Peter Taylor is a Fellow in the Participation Group at IDS. He has a background in agriculture and formal and non-formal education, and has been engaged in recent years in training and participatory curriculum development for agriculture, forestry and rural development. His current research interests are in learning and teaching participation in higher education, and integration of natural resources management within basic education programmes. He has research, teaching, training and advisory experience in East and Southern Africa, Central, South and South-East Asia, the UK, and Eastern Europe. He is also programme convenor of the new MA in Participation, Development and Social Change at IDS.

Jude Fransman is a researcher with the Participation Group at IDS. Her background is in development studies with an emphasis on participation and education policy and a regional focus on China, South Africa, and the UK. Her research interests include learning and teaching participation in higher education, development education and education for global citizenship, participatory global learning networks, and inclusion and exclusion in secondary education. She is currently working as a consultant for the Development Centre of OECD.

I would like to thank Peter and Jude for all their hard work in bringing together this issue. Thanks also to all the authors for their patient answering of our many emails, and to our reviewers for reviewing papers in double-quick time. I think all this hard

work on the part of all the different parties involved is reflected in the quality of the final papers.

### General section

In this issue we have two general articles. The first, by **Perry Walker** of the New Economics Foundation in the UK, describes the development of a new tool, Democs, to help people clarify, express, and share their views on public policy issues. The tool takes the form of a game which can be played at home or in more formal fora, e.g. big public meetings. The game has been used so far only in the UK, to explore issues such as whether genetically modified crops should be grown. But it has the potential to be useful for a wide range of issues and context. The article describes how the games are played and developed, and gives pointers as to situations in which it might be a useful tool.

**Judith Chaumba** and **Jouwert van Geene** describe a process of participatory capacity building among a network of NGOs in Zimbabwe. They emphasise that capacity building is a much wider-ranging process than simply training or staff development; it involves assessing the whole organisation and its ability to reach its objectives. In participatory capacity building staff themselves assess their current capacity and where and how it can be strengthened, so that change is based on an internal

understanding of problems, and solutions are 'owned' by the organisation. Following on from individual organisational processes, network members came together to see whether and how they could support and integrate their capacity building strategies.

### Regular features

**Tips for Trainers** this time is on role play, and is taken from a new resource pack, *Communication and Power*, put together by the International Reflect Circle. This short extract discusses when role play is useful and the different forms it can take, and gives examples of where role play has been used in communities. The *Communication and Power* resource pack covers different elements of communication (written word, spoken word, numbers, and images) and is available on-line at [www.reflect-action.org](http://www.reflect-action.org). It contains much valuable information for practitioners of participation.

Our **In Touch** section for this issue contains our usual selection of book notices, workshops and events, and e-participation. This includes some resources related to the special theme section in this issue, 'Learning and teaching participation', as well as a wide range of other resources which we hope you will find useful and informative.

As regular readers will know, we usually include an update on the

**RCPLA Network** (Resource Centres for Participatory Learning and Action Network) in each issue of *PLA Notes*. The network is currently in a phase of evaluation and transition. Following a year of talking to and visiting RCPLA members, Tom Thomas, the network's coordinator, is in the process of revising the network's vision statement. After discussions with steering group members he will circulate the revised vision to current and possible new members and regional networks with a questionnaire asking for views on the RCPLA's vision and its relevance to recipients' work. Following on from this, the network will hold a series of 'writeshops'. These will encourage participants to document their experiences of promoting participatory democracy, as well as providing a space to reflect on the RCPLA's vision and mission, with the aim of building support and commitment to the network. We expect to have a more detailed update on RCPLA activities once these activities have taken place. For further information about the network, visit the newly revamped RCPLA website, [www.rcpla.org](http://www.rcpla.org), or contact Tom Thomas at [tomt@praxisindia.org](mailto:tomt@praxisindia.org).

I hope you enjoy this issue of *PLA Notes* and – as ever – welcome your feedback and comments on any of the contents.

Happy reading!  
**Angela Milligan, Editor**

### Corrections

*PLA Notes* 46: apologies to Carine Pionetti for spelling her name in several different ways, all of them wrong! Hope we've got it right this time, Carine.

*PLA Notes* 47: We gave an incorrect address for Wolfgang Bayer, co-author of article 10, 'Participatory evaluation with pastoralists in Sudan'. His correct address is: Rohnsweg 56, D-37085, Göttingen, Germany. Apologies, Wolfgang.

# LEARNING AND TEACHING PARTICIPATION IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

# Learning and teaching participation in institutions of higher learning: overview

Initiating activities at the International Workshop on Teaching and Learning Participation in Higher Education, 2-4 April 2003, IDS, UK

By PETER TAYLOR AND JUDE FRANSMAN

## How is participation learned?

There is increasing global interest, by many actors engaged in development, in promoting the institutionalisation and spread of participation in society. From grassroots projects to voluntary organisations, and from governments to large funding agencies, 'participation' has been embraced as a way to build greater voice, accountability, and trust into relationships between people and institutions. Successful innovations and practice have resulted in participation being seen as a desirable end as well as a means, with the potential to reduce poverty and social injustice by strengthening citizen rights and voice, influencing policy making, enhancing local governance, and improving the accountability and responsiveness of institutions. Inherent in the idea of participation is that poor and marginalised people should take part in, and indeed drive, the decision-making processes that shape their lives. This involves the use of a range of approaches and methods, and requires changes in behaviour, attitudes, and power relationships by everyone involved.

Efforts are now being made to support organisational and institutional learning and change which will enhance the overall quality and impact of participation. In order to promote and increase participation effectively, and also ethically, there is a growing need for experienced and well-trained people who are active and open to its meaning,



Photo: IDS, UK

methods, and practice. Many institutions of higher learning (which include universities, schools, and colleges offering formal graduate and post-graduate programmes, as well as 'non-formal', governmental or sectoral institutions offering specialised training programmes for experienced professionals) have a role in developing the capacity of institutions and individuals to understand and practice participation. But how can they ensure that they deepen the quality and sustainability of participation in their learning programmes, whilst avoiding the promotion of simply 'more participation' of dubious quality? How may participation be *learned*, and how can institutions of higher learning facilitate this learning?

These fundamental questions have been exercising the minds of many development practitioners and theorists, in



**Box 1: The LTP initiative**

An international dialogue on learning and teaching participation (LTP) in institutions of higher learning was convened by the Participation Group of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex, UK in April 2002. The original purpose of the dialogue was, through the sharing of experiences, to enable HL institutions to develop and deliver more effective education programmes and to contribute to a wider transformation of individuals, institutions, and society. The LTP global dialogue has gathered steadily in momentum. From the experimental contributions of the participants in the initial e-forum, through four subsequent e-fora, and an international workshop (April 2003), the initiative has become a truly globe-spanning network of people involved in teaching and learning participation, both through theory and in practice.

response to the belief that participation is not only an essential part of development, but a basic characteristic of human life. Yet, because of prevailing power structures, hierarchies, and forces at a global and a local level, participation of people in decision-making processes is often prevented, challenged, or opposed, especially in matters of access and use of resources. We believe that institutions of higher learning have a critical role in fostering and supporting participation. In April 2002, an international dialogue on learning and teaching participation (LTP) in institutions of higher learning (HL) was convened to explore the ways in which such institutions have been taking on this role (see Box 1). The rich vein of experiences and stories tapped through the dialogue suggest that the time is right to share some of the lessons learned even more widely, through this special theme section of *PLA Notes*.

**Some key challenges and questions**

The LTP dialogue is largely structured around sharing personal experiences and the lessons learnt from them in order to develop strategies for moving forward. Crucially, this also involves identifying key challenges and issues faced by individuals and groups as they seek to bring their initiatives from the margins to the centre of higher learning institutions. These include questions on issues such as:

- *how to negotiate power relations and hierarchies, especially those involving teachers, learners, and institutional managers?*
- *how to overcome structural constraints to learning and teaching participation, and promote and achieve an interdisciplinary approach to learning within institutions?*
- *how to change attitudes and behaviour, realising that emotions and beliefs play a vital part in the learning process?*
- *how to support and build capacity and competences in the use of participatory teaching and learning methodologies*

**Workshop participants learn from each others' contexts**



Photo: IDS, UK

*such as PRA, action research, and experiential learning?*

- *how to ensure that the participatory concepts, approaches, and methodologies we use are relevant to the particular culture and context in which we operate?*

While in many ways the LTP dialogue has brought to light more questions than answers, the identification of these challenges means that these important issues can be addressed and explored, and potential strategies proposed to overcome them. The papers in this edition seek to do just that.

**The articles in this theme section**

The articles presented in this special theme section of *PLA Notes* are drawn from a selection of papers prepared for the International Workshop on Learning and Teaching Participation in Higher Education in April 2003. We hope they will encourage more individuals and institutions to engage in thinking and practice of LTP, and further participation in the wider dialogue. The papers have been selected for their relevance to three key areas:

- participatory modes and programmes of teaching and learning;
- university-community partnerships; and,
- learning networks and methods for institutionalising and mainstreaming LTP.

**Participatory modes and programmes of teaching and learning**

This first area details participatory modes and programmes of teaching and learning that draw on experiential learning methods combined with critical reflection and conceptual exploration. As the International Workshop revealed, innovative examples of such participatory methods have been implemented in HL institutions across the world and span a wide array of disciplines and courses ranging from agriculture and rural development to social work and law.



'Persuasive' posters highlighting critical issues are presented to the workshop participants



Photo: IDS, UK

**"A recurring theme throughout the dialogue has been that of how to teach students who are already 'experts' in their fields and who already 'do participation' "**

#### University-community partnerships

The second area expands on the notions of experiential learning and social change by homing in on the practice of university-community partnerships. As illustrated by **Randy Stoecker's** experience in the US, the nature of these partnerships encompasses a whole spectrum of participatory and transformative potential, revealing varying purposes, modes of engagement, and scales of initiative. **Carlos Cortez Ruiz** then moves the discussion to the issue of constructing such partnerships within the context of a social movement. Using the example of Chiapas in Mexico, he reviews the collaboration of teachers, students, and graduates from different disciplines with communities, social organisations, and NGOs in different activities through the Interdisciplinary Research Programme on Human Development in Chiapas. He highlights the tension between the conventional academic assertion that knowledge is the key to change, and the belief of activists that real change comes only through action.

#### Learning networks and methods for institutionalising and mainstreaming LTP

The final area focuses on dynamic learning networks and methods for institutionalising and mainstreaming LTP. In the first of two papers, **Steffanie Scott and Truong Thi Kim Chuyen** consider the issue of co-learning processes around participatory planning within a collaborative university linkage programme in Vietnam. They show how methods of capacity building within HL have been established in order to enable institutions to contribute to participatory, localised poverty reduction through community-based projects and participatory curriculum development. **Chris Opondo and colleagues** then turn to an exploration of institutionalising participatory approaches through their experiences in national agricultural research systems and HL institutions in East Africa. Their work with the African Highlands Initiative exposes the challenges associated with attempting to transform organisational norms and instil a 'culture of learning' within such organisations.

A recurring theme throughout the dialogue has been that of how to teach students who are already 'experts' in their fields and who already 'do participation'. In answer to this question, several participants in the LTP dialogue emphasise the importance of working with the 'prior knowledge' of students and facilitating 'unlearning' to encourage personal transformation in student and teacher alike. **Nancy Grudens-Schuck** presents such a case from a course on participatory evaluation using quantitative enquiry, taught at Iowa State University in the US, while **Lydia Braakman's** experience as a facilitator for the Regional Community Forestry Training Centre with partners across Asia reveals 'the painful process of unlearning old habits and learning new ones'. **Jürgen Hagmann and Connie Almekinders** describe the findings from a workshop on curriculum development and transformation in rural development and natural resource management in the faculties of agriculture in eastern and southern African universities. They show that so-called 'soft skills' such as those of self-discovery and personal development are critical components within otherwise technical courses.

**Sherry Joseph** considers the complex relationship between teachers and students in a case study of participatory learning and teaching in a department of social work in India. He shows how participation enables learning on the part of 'teachers' and teaching on the part of 'learners'. The unique case of the development of 'proyección social del derecho' (social outreach of law) within a law faculty in Peru is then discussed by **Henry Armas** who shows how participatory methods can facilitate the linkage between personal development and social change. Finally, **Li Xiaoyun and Li Ou** present an experience from China, exploring the lessons learnt by the College of Rural Development and the challenges currently facing them as they attempt to implement programmes of LTP.

Participants share music, dances, stories and poems at an evening cultural event



Photo: IDS, UK

### Sharing experience and stories – building the bridge between theory and practice

The LTP dialogue has highlighted the importance of participatory learning for individual, social, and institutional transformation. It even has implications for transformation of the discourse on learning, participation, development, and social change. This is because, by nature, learning and teaching participation means dealing with issues of power and equity. It also lends itself to an interdisciplinary approach within which theory and practice may be integrated, and rooted in local realities. It can provide valuable opportunities for collaborative learning through the establishment of active linkages between universities and communities, and the development of wider learning networks. There may be many institutional constraints to such an approach, but learning and teaching participation has the potential to penetrate the conventional heart of institutions of higher learning and be truly transformative.

A basic concept of learning and teaching participation is that individuals participate in generating their own personal theories which are relevant to their own context. These emerge through the experience of practice, and then go on to inform further practice. The relationship between theory and practice seems to work best when a variety of stakeholders are able to participate at different levels of the process, especially through the use of experiential learning methods and activities. Evidence suggests that many individuals and some institutions as a whole attempt to foster such an approach, but often the stories and experiences of how this was done and what happened as a result are not widely known.

### Box 2: Personal experiences of learning and teaching participation

The sharing of methodologies has been a key success factor in the LTP dialogue. A wide range of ideas and practical suggestions on how to learn and teach participation in institutions of higher learning have been related from different contexts and regions of the world. Here are some examples of teaching practice, which seem to encourage participation.

- Begin a teaching programme by asking and giving space to learners to define what they want, and also what they can offer; then adapt the curriculum accordingly to demonstrate that what they can offer is valued.
- Use information as a means of challenging belief systems, as an opportunity to speak for 'different reasons' and as a response to differences in knowledge and experience between individuals.
- Provide structured opportunities for immersion by learners in 'real' situations and contexts; theory makes sense when combined with practice through a process of critical reflection and action.
- Alternate 'formal' and 'informal' exchanges, gradually increasing the group leadership and responsibility.
- Ask learners to define the way they see themselves in a particular context (e.g. their job or position) in relation to the rest of the world.
- Help learners reach understanding of the goals (both individual and collective) of a programme, and provide a structure, with clear steps (but not the method) by which learners can achieve these goals. The teacher thus provides 'an initial envelope around the process and acts as guarantor of the safety of the participants', through a structured transfer of responsibility from teacher to students.
- Provide informal interaction with groups, and individual coaching when needed.
- Provide support to groups, building relations of trust, ground rules, and understandings, which promote candidness, openness, acceptance, and offering of constructive criticism, building confidence that 'they' can do it.
- Avoid and break the habit of returning to the 'master teacher' mode and the use of banking, from which most teachers are only one lecture away.
- Use and facilitate evaluation processes based on an action-research approach, especially through the use of self and group evaluation techniques.
- Carry forward ideas and learning from previous groups and classes to help support and nurture new groups; at the same time, still allow each group its own 'space' to learn through experience and reflection.
- Develop and demonstrate respect and trust creating a climate which affirms the value and self-worth of the learner.

Source: Taylor and Fransman (forthcoming)

### Methodologies for LTP

A discussion on methodologies for LTP has been a key aspect of the dialogue (see Box 2). Two cornerstones of transformative learning are experiential learning and critical reflection. Experiential learning, for example through community-based research, provides a methodology for increasing participation while prompting institutional change. It helps to incorporate

the practitioner into the academic realm by casting the practitioner as 'teacher' and the academic as 'learner'. Critical reflection is a complimentary practice to experiential learning. It contributes to transformation at the personal level through self evaluation, and through learning from experiences. It also helps to further break down traditional roles of students and teachers by involving fellow staff, students, and community practitioners in reflection and action. These methodologies highlight the powerful linkages between participation, learning, and transformation. The more those learners participate, the more they are empowered; the more they are empowered, the more they question previous assumptions. The more they transform at the personal level, the more this is likely to impact on institutional transformation (Taylor and Fransman, forthcoming).

### Moving forward

One important outcome of the LTP dialogue has been the elaboration of a range of potential strategies that can support learning and teaching participation in HL institutions. These include:

- **a series of focused, thematic discussions** on different theoretical anchors for teaching and learning participation, the contribution made by this theory, and reflections on how we learn to theorise through a process of critical enquiry;

- **preparation and sharing of documentation related to LTP** including compiling useful materials for learning and teaching, shared through curricula, resource guides, annotated bibliographies, teaching methods, etc., and a compilation of links and references posted on the LTP website;
- **preparation of a book** on concepts, principles, theories, and practices of LTP;
- **documentation of case studies about institutional learning and change experiences** to demonstrate how learning and change have actually occurred within institutions, and what kind of strategies and approaches were used to bring this change about;
- **regional initiatives:** proposals for regional dialogue, e-forums, networking, and capacity-building;
- **virtual technologies:** innovative use of distance learning, open source models, and blended learning (virtual and face-to-face learning);
- **capacity-building:** exchanges and cross-visits, networking, workshops, and various influencing methods.

Several of these proposals are already being undertaken by 'champions' who have been willing to collaborate in pursuing the desire to bring learning and teaching participation from the margins of institutional life to the centre. Hopefully others will join the initiative and help to maintain the momentum of this rich and dynamic dialogue.

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### REFERENCE

Taylor, P. and Fransman, J. (forthcoming)  
'Learning and Teaching Participation in Higher Education', IDS Working Paper. Brighton: the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). Will be available online at [www.ids.ac.uk](http://www.ids.ac.uk).

# PARTICIPATORY MODES AND PROGRAMMES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

# No beginners: teaching participation at the graduate level

by NANCY GRUDENS-SCHUCK

## Introduction

Where I teach, there are no beginners. Students who enrol for my graduate course in participatory evaluation already 'do' participation. It is part of their working lives. Participation is also a steady presence on our campus. This morning, I witnessed a student leading a group of young people and administrators in a team-building exercise. The technique involved ball-tossing, a giant 'scrunchie' (stretchy fabric band), and lots of talking and laughing. The technique was in the student's repertoire well before taking my class. I made a mental note to copy the technique.

Other students taking the course make their living as trainers or consultants, proficient in rapid rural appraisal (RRA), open space technology<sup>1</sup>, or network analysis<sup>2</sup>. Some of my students have provided leadership for refining and advancing participatory assessment techniques, such as use of the Kenyan bao game to assess new crops (this game resembles the 'mancala' game that involves moving small stones into piles).

Overall, it is good news that students come to the classroom with knowledge of participatory strategies. This is partly

a result of successful distribution of participatory practices worldwide, especially in the field of agricultural development. North American students, in particular, have been introduced to participation through employment in the cooperative extension system or community development initiatives.

But how does one teach such competent students?

## About the course

The course I teach is entitled 'Participatory Evaluation Using Qualitative Inquiry'. The syllabus emphasises theory and practice of participation in the context of programme evaluation. I am the founder and instructor for the three-credit course, which is taught at Iowa State University, a large research university in the US. I offer the course through a department of agricultural education but the topic attracts students from other majors, such as sustainable agriculture, sociology, education, and family studies. The course is offered at the doctoral level on alternate years, like all our doctoral courses. It is one of two at the university that features participation, and it provides the most intensive training. Nearly 30 students have worked their way through the 13-week course, which has been offered twice. The focus on evaluation is purposeful. After deliberating with colleagues at the university, we noted the dearth of courses on evaluation in general. Also, my faculty position is respon-

<sup>1</sup> Open space technology is a technique that allows a group to propose their own ideas for conversation, rather than imposing them at the outset.

<sup>2</sup> Network analysis focuses on people's connections, and helps them to see how practical elements of their lives, such as marketing, are embedded in social relationships.

## **"It is important to discuss who decides what prior knowledge is valid and what needs revamping – student, teacher, stakeholders, peers, or a combination?"**

sible for evaluation studies, so the fit was good. In addition, participatory monitoring and evaluation is an exciting field in rural development, with lots of interesting recent activity.

I created the course in 2001 believing that it was possible to teach participation despite academia's rigidities, isolation, and the way in which it structures experiences hierarchically. Both colleagues and administrators approved development of the course – not for its focus on participation but because it is considered advantageous for new professors to offer new courses. I benefited in my planning from having completed two formal courses in participation during graduate study several years earlier.

Higher education in the US is not, to my mind, the least promising place in which to infuse a participatory ethos. Moreover, Iowa State University began as an agriculturally focused land-grant college and our halls still echo with the 'people's college' ideal associated with its land-grant status. Further, it is important that training in participation occurs where elites are educated. Why would we neglect the professional development of potentially influential citizens? Self-serving reasons for creating the course include the benefit of focusing on one's passion and also on one's publishable activities (participation is the focus for my research).

### **Teaching strategy**

Truly, my students are experts and not beginners. How, then, does one teach experts? Perhaps we should ask instead: how do experts learn? There are many theories, but most emphasise that adults learn in an environment that enables them to take their experiences and current knowledge seriously. Consequently, students' prior knowledge is the foundation for the course. Students' experiences influence what they value, what they find truthful, and the extent to which they may change. A student-centred strategy is not incompatible with scholarly study. My students read plenty of books and are introduced to key scholars. I also sequence activities purposefully, and select techniques that develop particular types of knowledge. However, a focus on students' individual frameworks of knowledge comes first.

These ideas about education work best when students take an active role in their learning. Such notions recommend

that the instructor use participatory approaches to instruction. Participation must inform the whole package. Standardised lectures and universal assessments are minimised, and dialogue encouraged. Using such participatory methods to teach participation lessens the cognitive dissonance that students experience when teaching strategies are at odds with the subject matter.

Working with students' prior knowledge is a constructivist approach, although 'constructivist' says both too much and too little. In brief, a constructivist view emphasises the role of the learner in creating knowledge rather than receiving knowledge. As Paulo Freire noted, we do not insert knowledge into people's brains as we might money into the bank. My application of constructivism focuses on the preparatory phase of **unlearning**. This phase is associated with 'transformational learning' (e.g. a profound change of mind), after Brookfield (1998) and Mezirow (1991). Other types of learning are also important, e.g. skill building and mastering abstract concepts. However, these types of learning are more widely supported at the university. Transformational learning is not, so instructors may need to do more in this regard. Apropos of participation, transformational learning may be necessary for students who desire to succeed with very challenging tasks, such as catalysing participation in complex political and social environments. Highly knowledgeable students may have even more to unlearn because prior experiences anchor both reasonable and unreasonable ideas with great weight.

### **Theory and prior knowledge**

I would like to discuss why it is important for the instructor to address prior knowledge first. Simply put, old learning affects new learning. Particularly if we desire transformation in thinking, great attention must be given to what adults already know and believe. It is not so much an accept-reject situation whereby students fail to learn what instructors tell them unless a yielding surface is prepared through use of prior knowledge. It is more that new learning is shaped to old learning, no matter what. Moreover, the shape that learning takes is strongly controlled by the learner.

Students' prior knowledge is likely to be a mix of the tenable and the untenable. If we fail to draw prior knowledge into the open and deliberate its quality, students will hook new ideas onto frameworks that have not benefited from critical reflection (see Grudens-Schuck, Cramer, Exner, & Shour, 2003). The result is poor quality thinking.

Box 1 lists some beliefs with which students have arrived in my classroom. These ideas capture, in a simple way, prior knowledge about participation. This knowledge is a combi-



**Box 1: List of student beliefs**

**Dorothy:** Participation is something I already do and have seen lots of others do. I don't believe that a great leap in quality is possible or even needed. Classroom study is simply needed for the advanced degree.

**Mackenzie:** I do participation on the job, but the results are disappointing. There must be a way to unlock 'real' participation. The course could reveal this.

**Jim:** Participation is a legitimate approach. I need to know something about it, but it's not really 'me'. The course is useful, however, because it will boost my skills. Then I can claim participation as a speciality, which will distinguish me.

**Sabine:** Participation can be implemented for technical programmes, such as on-farm research. But it's impractical, even dangerous, to use participation to solve social problems such as child labour or gender issues.

**Eli:** Participation could be a radical force if only we could do more! This course will strengthen my resolve and build solidarity.

**Bellis:** Theories that underlie participation can be explained by principles of human behaviour with which I am already familiar. The course will show how to apply these theories to the practical tasks of monitoring and evaluation.

**Mai:** Participation is a lifeline and a vow. It always works for me, but it isn't always accepted. The course will heal wounds from the struggle.

**Jeris:** There is already too much participation led by people who don't know what they're doing. Training should locate talent, build skills, maybe certify. I have some talent, so I'll take the course.

**Elliot:** The course just feels right. I'm in a class with people who have so much experience. I'll learn a lot. I'm the only younger student enrolled, so they shouldn't have any problems with me taking the course.

nation of technical, personal, historical, cultural, and political elements. A student's prior knowledge becomes a focus for critical reflection and potential unlearning. The list suggests what's at stake for the students and, by extension, what may be at stake for the future of participation. The composite statements are paraphrased from things students have said or written. The names are fictitious.

**Challenges of unlearning**

It is important to discuss **who decides** what prior knowledge is valid and what needs revamping – student, teacher, stakeholders, peers, or a combination? I am amenable to the argument that the student should decide in the main – with the benefit of a dialogic process. There are too many things unknown to me, including personal and political issues that I cannot fathom, which stop 'the instructor' from knowing

**"The concept of unlearning was powerful for students. These expert students agreed that a principal challenge of the course was the struggle to integrate new with old"**

best. For example, Jeris' meritocratic stance sounds arrogant to my ears, but he may come from a field filled with inept practitioners. He may, in fact, be right. I am sympathetic with Mai, but her intensity and isolationism may get in her way. Sabine's 'technicist' perspective is a focus of criticism in the participation community, but it may be a necessary first step for her. Elliot's humility is charming, but does he believe that he has nothing to contribute? In the world of participation, such beliefs lack currency.

**Co-managing prior knowledge**

The class environment must permit students and instructor to bring to the surface, understand, and (perhaps) modify prior knowledge. This is a difficult task. It is emotional labour. I try to connect personally with the student to learn their history and interests and to find strengths. If a student voices particular concerns repeatedly, I mark the belief as something that the student is testing. In response, I probe for more of everything: more about context and commitment, more about regrets and remedies that have been tried, and something about punishments that have been levied. Sometimes, I will test a student's willingness to modify a major belief by suggesting that their papers or presentations explore the idea critically. I do these things in the classroom, but also through private discussions and written communications. I proceed carefully, mindful of the wide range of human processing and the fragility that can appear unexpectedly. I try to judge less (difficult), and listen more (also difficult). I do not force (I do not **intend** to force). I encourage students to do the same with each other, according to their own style, which is part of what makes the course participative. To accomplish this, we use various exercises, talk at length, and read what others have said about participation. We also laugh a lot, especially during participative exercises.

**Evaluations**

We conduct joint, ongoing evaluations of course materials, our group relations, and individual and collective contributions, so there is lots of feedback. Anonymous course eval-

uations, de rigueur at our university, have been favourable. Some students tell me that the course changes them profoundly. They change their lives; together we change the state of evaluation practice. A few exit mildly content or neutral.

I have concerns about the course. The first relates to outcomes. Are students better than before? Together with evaluation stakeholders, I hope that my students are more knowledgeable and more effective – or have the wisdom to delegate to those who are. However, like many participatory practitioners (and many instructors), I don't assess outcomes. Second, I regret that the course does not have a community-based component. I suspect that particular students (those who are half-hearted?) would learn more outside the classroom. Also, my course is the only one of its kind for most of the students, which also limits learning. Lastly, I address participation more thoroughly than evaluation because insight into participation seems more precious. I wonder what the consequences of this choice are, particularly for students who enter with little background in evaluation. However, if I restricted the course to individuals who have taken all prerequisite courses, I might bar interested

students. Despite gains, there aren't that many of us.

### Postnote: what students said

I shared an earlier version of this paper with students in my Spring 2003 class. These are their key reactions. First, students spent most of the time talking about the list of composite student statements (earlier). Therefore, I have reproduced the entire list with only minor revisions. With great energy, students told me that they spent a lot of time figuring out, 'Which one is me?'. Students identified with one or two, but were tempted to claim others as well, despite clear differences in tenor. This suggests that the list in its entirety may describe students in general, although to different degrees.

Additionally, the concept of unlearning was powerful for students. These expert students agreed that a principal challenge of the course was the struggle to integrate new with old. There was no doubt, students said, that they exited the course with a substantial stock of knowledge. Some of it was the prior knowledge with which they had entered, some was new knowledge, and some was close to 'muddled' knowledge, which might also be termed emergent.

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# The art of facilitating participation: unlearning old habits and learning new ones

By LYDIA BRAAKMAN

*I always considered myself a facilitator, but only now do I realise that there is much more to it. The model of participatory decision-making will help to guide me when I facilitate future participatory decision-making processes.*

Thai participant, RECOFTC Workshop<sup>1</sup>

## Learning for change

Whether field workers work in health, agriculture, or forestry, nowadays it is expected that they can facilitate all sorts of participatory processes. This means they face the many challenges of making participation happen in often polarised multi-stakeholder environments. How to mobilise groups that don't want to sit around the same table? How to ensure that everybody has a chance not only to share their views but also their hidden agendas? How to make people listen to each other actively? How to make them understand and accept the different perspectives in the group? How to come to an inclusive solution?

This paper reflects on the experiences of RECOFTC (the Regional Community Forestry Training Center – see Box 1) in training people from over all over Asia in facilitating participatory decision-making processes. Often participants

### Box 1: Building facilitation skills efforts by RECOFTC

During the past couple of years the Regional Community Forestry Training Center (RECOFTC), based in Bangkok, Thailand, has worked with partners in Asia to develop participatory processes to support community forestry development, such as conflict resolution, enterprise development, and forest management.

While developing these processes, we started to realise that, regardless of what type of intervention is anticipated, there is the need for a good facilitator to make it happen. Negotiating management agreements, resolving conflicts, or setting up a cooperative all need effective facilitators. Gradually a facilitation component started to emerge and became an integrated component in both longer term capacity-building processes and in the international short-term courses run by RECOFTC.

More information about RECOFTC can be found at [www.recoftc.org](http://www.recoftc.org)

already perceive themselves as skilled facilitators. The paper describes how participants are challenged to revise their views, beliefs, and habits about facilitation and therefore participation. It also provides some brief examples of the type of strategies and methods we developed to make this change happen. The purpose of the paper is to share these learning processes with others who are interested in – and faced with the challenges of – building the skills of such facilitators.

<sup>1</sup> Feedback from a participant working for a Thai NGO at the end of a two-week international course run by the Regional Community Forestry Training Center (RECOFTC), October 2001.

Extension workers often believe they are responsible for giving advice to solve others' problems



Cartoon: Thierry Aubert

### Unlearning being the 'expert'

*The remaining challenge for me remains how to be truly content neutral as a facilitator. I find it hard to hold back myself in order to give the group the chance to express their opinions. Although this was covered in the course theoretically, eventually it remains up to me to develop my own approach to face this challenge.*

Indonesian participant, RECOFTC Workshop<sup>2</sup>

The first obstacle we encountered during our training initiatives was that many participants perceived themselves as technical 'experts'. This is due to their formal education background and, in many cases, years of experience in the field. This is not to say that they do not acknowledge that villagers are knowledgeable but they do perceive that you cannot be a facilitator if you are not an expert in the topic at hand. This also applies to those who work mainly in the office or as facilitators of learning in workshops, etc. Those who come from an extension background are operating in a system which

### Box 2: Being content neutral

The main characteristic of a facilitator is that s/he is content neutral. Content neutrality means not taking a position on the issues at hand; not having a stake in the outcome

Source: Braakman, L. & Edwards, K. (2002)

requires them to transfer technical knowledge rather than mobilising existing knowledge or providing options and channels of communication to alternative sources of knowledge. This means they see themselves as the ones responsible for giving advice to solve others' problems.

The role of a facilitator as presented in the training (Box 2) challenges some very fixed perceptions among participants. Some feel that this dismisses the value of their own expertise and knowledge, and resist openly; others nod their heads but then in simulations often revert to providing strong advice to the group. Facilitators need to learn how, why, and when to intervene technically, and should not be afraid of joint learning processes where they are an integral part of developing new knowledge to meet villagers' needs.

At the other end of the continuum are those participants from NGOs who believe in 'being and living with the people'. These participants also find it hard to be content neutral and tend to take a position on issues at hand, often positioning themselves alongside villagers. These types of participants are not handicapped by the pressure of 'being the expert' but they do feel they are traitors if they do not align themselves with the villagers. They don't realise that, by taking a position, they cannot act as a negotiator, creating linkages and communication channels between the villagers and other stakeholders. This role of trusted and non-biased mediator is often badly needed by villagers and other stakeholders alike.

Therefore, participants with different personal and institutional backgrounds go through different emotional processes in dealing with this concept of content neutrality. Some have only feelings of discomfort, whilst others are resistant, or dismiss the concept outright.

Experiencing resistance from participants, we realised that we had to be better prepared to guide them while they struggled to internalise such personally related challenges. Varied approaches are needed to support participants more effectively through this change process, at a personal level, group level, and at different stages during the process. We developed a series of sessions to introduce the concept of being content neutral



<sup>2</sup> A participant from an Indonesian NGO wrote this in her back to office report after participating in a two-week international course run by RECOFTC, in May 2001.

**Box 3: Being a process advocate**

The main role of a facilitator is in guiding the process. S/he should try to ensure a fair, inclusive, and open process that balances the participation of everybody and establishes a safe space in which all stakeholders can fully participate.

Most groups are very output- and task-oriented. They are not aware of the importance of the process. Facilitators, because they are content neutral, are in a position to guide the process. Facilitation is about movement, moving the group towards a common destination.

Source: Braakman, L. & Edwards, K. (2002)

**“Expertise can be developed in process as well as in content. However, most participants have not thought about this, and training them in anticipating the dynamics and scenarios involved in differently designed processes is a challenge”**

in a very gradual but challenging way. Vivid and heated discussions among participants are part of these sessions. It is very important during this process to provide participants

**Many workshop participants see themselves as ‘experts’**

with concrete ways of seeing how their knowledge is not being dismissed, and the value of presenting themselves as a neutral body in designing and guiding a participatory process.

**Learning to be a process advocate: a new concept for many**

Many evaluations of development activities refer to weak design and facilitation of participatory processes. Conflicts that arise can often be attributed to lack of joint decision-making and participation in identifying solutions and actions. Despite this, few agencies and individuals have considered who will design more effective multi-stakeholder processes and what

knowledge and qualities are needed to do this. In most situations, experience of process is assumed, based on subject matter expertise, and little attention is given to who designs the process and how.

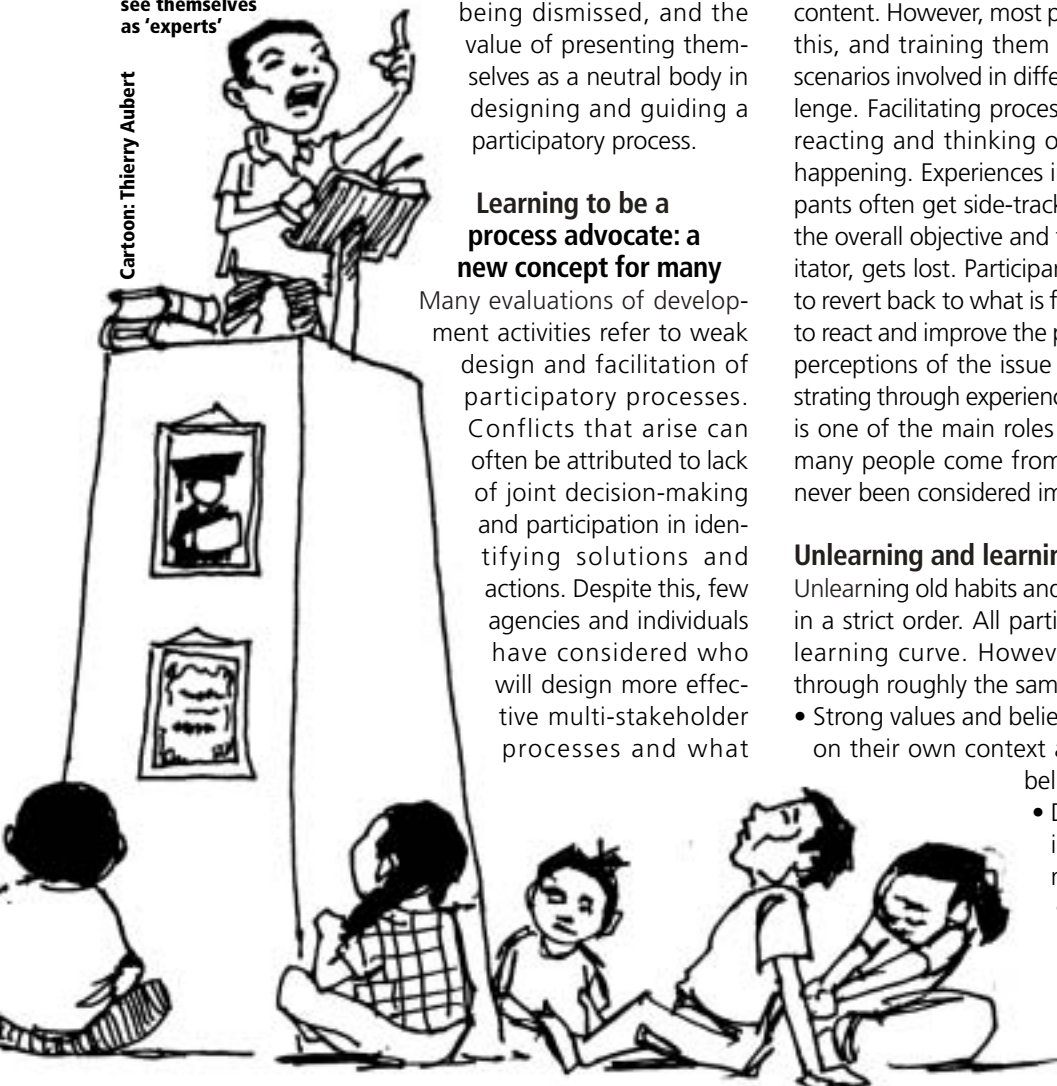
Expertise can be developed in process as well as in content. However, most participants have not thought about this, and training them in anticipating the dynamics and scenarios involved in differently designed processes is a challenge. Facilitating process involves some planning but also reacting and thinking on one’s feet while the process is happening. Experiences in training have shown that participants often get side-tracked as the group diverts itself from the overall objective and then the group, including the facilitator, gets lost. Participants practising facilitation then tend to revert back to what is familiar. Instead of focusing on how to react and improve the process they refer back to their own perceptions of the issue at hand and give advice. Demonstrating through experience that keeping the process on track is one of the main roles of the facilitator is difficult when many people come from backgrounds where process has never been considered important.

**Unlearning and learning: a continuum**

Unlearning old habits and learning new ones does not occur in a strict order. All participants follow their own personal learning curve. However, an average participant goes through roughly the same process:

- Strong values and beliefs about what facilitation is, based on their own context and experiences, usually with the belief that ‘the expert gives advice’.
- Disbelief and resistance against the idea of facilitators being content neutral.
- Starting to realise the need to be content neutral in order to be trusted by all parties involved, and starting to experiment. However, under pressure

Cartoon: Thierry Aubert





Facilitating process  
means thinking  
and reacting on  
one's feet



Cartoon: Thierry Aubert

from a group which expects answers, often falling back into old habits of giving advice and being the expert.

- Starting to understand the need to guide the process, to balance participation, and to keep the group on track.
- Experimenting with being content neutral, but still not always able to resist outside pressure to give advice.
- Being able to resist outside pressure by staying content neutral but not being able to guide either the group process or the meeting process. This often translates into being completely passive and leaving the group to manage entirely on its own.
- Finally, only a few manage to actually experiment with being a process guide during the time span of the training event.

It is probably obvious that none of the above happens by itself. Boxes 4 and 5 outline some strategies and skills that support participants in their new role as facilitator.

At the end of the training, the participants are faced with a series of challenging statements. The debate sparked by these statements often reveals substantial changes in beliefs and attitudes about their roles as facilitators. Nothing is more rewarding for us trainers than when participants themselves realise that they discovered another level to participation, and therefore facilitation.

### Lessons learned and remaining challenges

Developing learning processes and materials in building facilitation skills has been an iterative process. As there was very little to build on, we learned by doing. Some of the most important lessons learned are:

- **Strategic introduction of concepts.**

In previous training we had left what we perceived to be the most difficult concepts until the last stages of the training and built up the training design from simple to complex. In



**Box 4: Skills needed for effective facilitation***Content neutral*

- Active listening
- Asking questions
- Probing
- Paraphrasing

*Process advocate*

- Observing and monitoring group behaviour, group roles, and group processes
- Balancing group dynamics
- Practising feedback to individuals and groups
- Effective agenda planning by formulating achievable desired outcomes and designing effective meeting processes

**Box 5: Strategies for supporting participants**

- Stressing their responsibility for their own learning by motivating them to venture into new territory in the way they think and behave.
- Building in *practice*, preferably in the field; otherwise through well-planned and guided simulations.
- Guiding *reflection* sessions during which participants analyse their own actions and feelings, and those of others.
- Stimulating constructive *peer feedback*.
- *Filming and reviewing* pivotal moments to reconstruct an 'objective' image of what actually happened during a simulation, which draws out very powerful learning points.
- *Challenging* fixed beliefs and behaviours.

many ways this back-fired as some of the most important concepts of facilitation are what participants resist the most and if introduced at the end of the training, it is often too late to deal with this resistance. We feel it is important to introduce the concept of content neutrality early on in the training. This gives time to deal with different individuals' resistance, which often happens at different times in the process depending on their own personal internalisation process.

• **Personal responsibility and development in learning.**

Becoming an effective facilitator often involves a considerable amount of personal reflection and feedback from others. The training programme that has been designed places considerable emphasis on personal development and therefore personal responsibility for learning. This, combined with a focus on experiential learning methods, often involves a big 'shake up' of participants' learning styles, and for some the adjustment is clearly difficult. Skill based training can only be effective by practising and experiencing the use of different skills; many participants find this difficult and are familiar with systems where responsibility for learning is not focused at such a personal level. Enough time needs to be allocated to ensure that trainers can support those participants who struggle with this, often at different stages in the training.

• **Building group dynamics**

Although this is an important aspect of any training, facilitating the learners to work as a group in this training is especially important. Many aspects of the learning depend on peer feedback and exchange, and peers in the group help learners build confidence as much as trainers. Carefully managing introductions, the size of the group, and how the groups are structured in simulations are all important. At the end of a training it is great if the group feels that fellow learners have been as critical to their learning as the trainers, and recognise this themselves. This adds to their own understanding of the importance of group dynamics in facili-

itation and group processes.

Despite certain lessons learned and a feeling of breakthrough and revelation in terms of training development, challenges still remain.

• **The rocks and sponges phenomena**

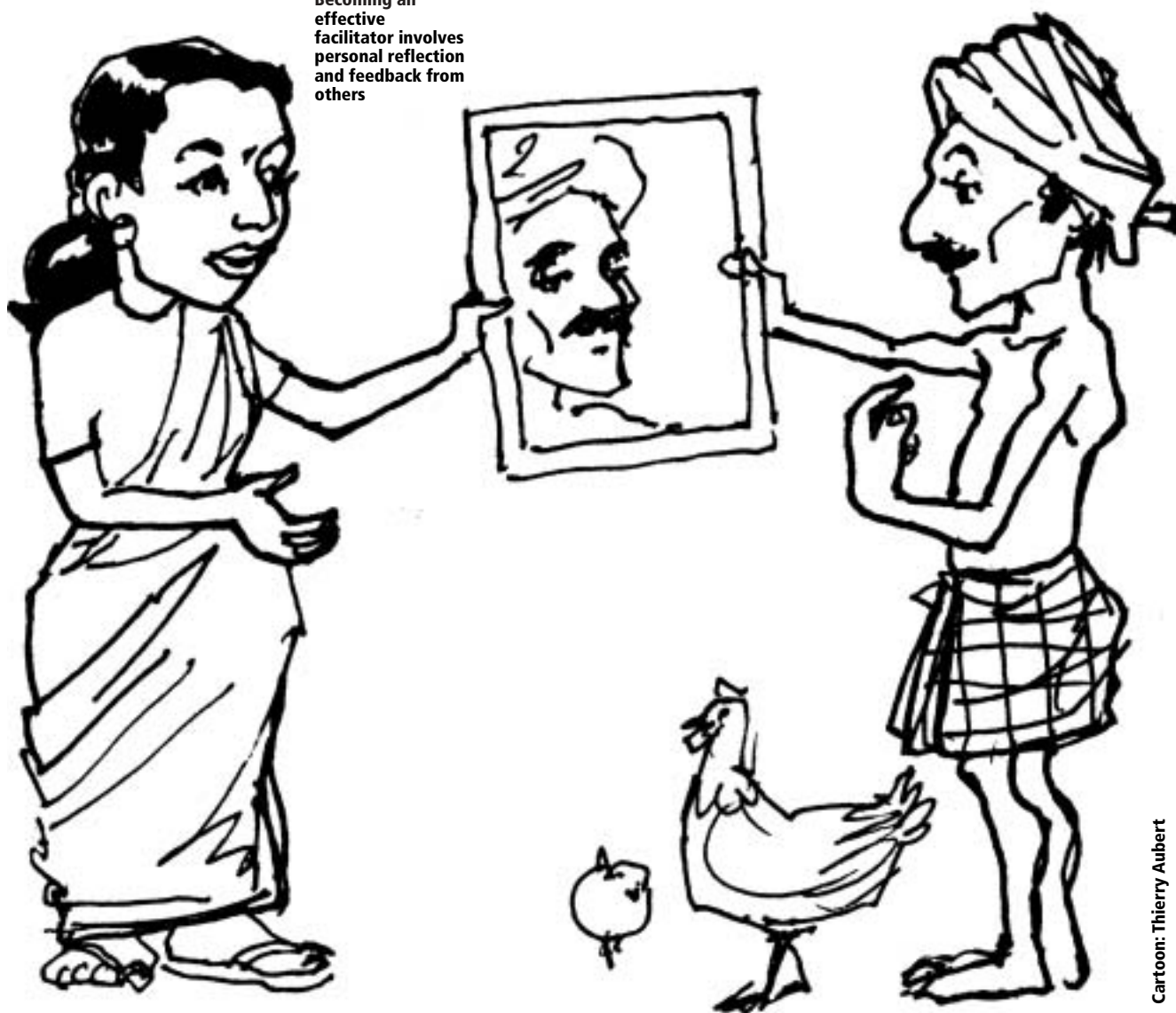
In any training, there will always be participants who are open to new ideas and keen to practice and soak up the training like a sponge. At the other end of the spectrum are the 'rocks': despite efforts to challenge, peer pressure, and one-to-one feedback, these participants flatly refuse to see the value of participation. Although they may not necessarily openly state their beliefs, they are unable to cover them up in training of this kind and they usually emerge when they are in front of a group. Sometimes these individuals can be disruptive in the learning process, but more often than not they are more of a disruption in the minds of us as trainers! A remark from an East Timorese government official at the end of a two-week international course run by RECOFTC in October 2001 illustrates this attitude:

*I will mainly carry out my activities as I used to do. I might start working more closely with NGO people.*

• **Lack of enabling environment**

For many participants, the more in-depth their understanding of facilitation becomes, the more they start to realise that what is being promoted as participation in their organisations is not true participation. The challenge, therefore, is to equip participants with enough self-confidence to practise in environments over which they have some control, e.g. small meetings and workshops which they run themselves, and at the same time help them to anticipate types of resistance they may meet on return. This aspect of training is of particular relevance to participants who believe that what they are learning all sounds very nice but is so far removed from what they are used to that learning any more about it will be

Becoming an effective facilitator involves personal reflection and feedback from others



Cartoon: Thierry Aubert

useless. This challenges points to the fact that training cannot happen in isolation and that a combination of strategies is required.

- **Lack of good role models**

One aspect we have noticed is the importance of participants having good role models they can relate to; otherwise they struggle to improve their own skills and approach, but with very little idea of the type of facilitator they would like to become. We have tried to address this by producing a train-

ing video which provides examples of good facilitation, but it remains to be seen to what extent this can substitute for the real thing.

Some of these challenges can be addressed in the training context. However, most of them relate to the wider environment that any learner of facilitation concepts and skills will eventually have to operate in, and therefore will need strategies other than training to enable the participants to practice their new facilitation skills.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lydia Braakman worked as a staff member for RECOFT in Bangkok from 1996 to 2002. Together with Karen Edwards, another staff member at the time, she trained varied groups of people in facilitation skills in different parts of Asia. Based on these experiences, she and Karen developed a set of materials that can support others in building their own or others' facilitation skills (see the "In touch" section for more information).

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The cartoons by Thierry Aubert are reproduced by kind permission of RECOFTC from Braakman, L. & Edwards, K. (2002).

# Developing 'soft skills' in higher education

**By JÜRGEN HAGMANN and CONNY ALMEKINDERS, with Christopher Bukenya, Francisco Guevara, Aklilu Hailemichael, Prossy Isubikalu, Geoffrey Kamau, Bernard Kamanga, Paul Kibwika, Budsara Limnarankul, Francis Matiri, Tendayi Mutimukuru, Hlamalani Ngwenya, Chris Opondo, Lanying Zhang, and Ulrike Breitschuh**

## Introduction

### The deeper dimension of participation

In many cases, participatory approaches in agricultural research and development (R&D) are understood as tools and methods to better develop and introduce technology options to farmers. This perspective rarely takes into account the dimension of a whole system change towards emancipation and ownership of development processes by local people. In this perspective, participation falls short of one of its main objectives – people's empowerment. Instead, it has been used to make people merely good cooperators with development agencies. In our view, if participation is to make a difference to people's lives, it has to support them in building their confidence and self-esteem in their own capacities; support self-development and mobilise social energy and capacity for self-organised, often collective development/learning processes; and, explore opportunities and proactively seek to exploit those opportunities in a creative way.

In this view, 'doing' participation in R&D means dealing

with relationships; understanding human behaviour; facilitating the reduction of social barriers to working together; and building capacity for people to deal with complex, dynamic, and often conflicting group or community processes. This requires a deep understanding of what 'drives' people, of what their aspirations, their values, and their principles in life are, and how development is linked to the personal and collective potentials of people. In the practice of development, it is about unblocking and creating social energy through facilitation. Founding development in social energy generated through participation can be considered a theory of bottom-up development. Unfortunately, however, capacity for this type of participation is often lacking in institutions that research participation and/or train professionals to 'do' participation.

### The need for competence in 'participation' and process in universities

Agricultural/development practitioners are now expected to work with multiple stakeholders, in arenas of negotiation and learning among individuals and groups. In a recent work-

## **“Studying participatory processes implies unravelling the underlying principles and values of participation and developing a deep cognitive and emotional understanding of participation and process”**

shop, a group of researchers and deans of agricultural universities in eastern and southern Africa concluded that university graduates require far more personal skills, complementing the disciplinary theory and expertise, than is recognised in today's mainstream education (Patel et al., 2001). The ‘ideal’ graduates would have the capacity to integrate across disciplines and skills (hard and soft skills). They would be creative and critical thinkers, team players, take responsibility for their own development, and be able to facilitate learning in groups and communities. They would also have substantial management capacities and excellent communication skills. Most of these ‘soft’ skills are not at all considered in the present curricula, and disciplines and major reorientation programmes are required to enable graduates to practise effective facilitation of participatory processes (Moyo & Hagmann, 2000).

The development of soft skills was articulated as a major challenge for these mostly technically and disciplinary oriented universities. In particular, competent and motivated lecturers were identified as a central requirement to meet future demands. To develop these competencies, education institutions need to go way beyond agricultural sciences to include learning theories, social psychology and behavioural science communication, facilitation (including group dynamics), and organisation and management science. Even more critical than cognitive abilities are elements of personal development. These need to be understood conceptually and mastered practically. Incorporating elements of personal development in the curriculum calls for teachers/lecturers with new ideas and competencies. In our opinion, this does not necessarily mean replacing existing disciplinary courses with soft skills-oriented courses, or introducing separate courses in soft skills, but interweaving them with existing courses.

This paper describes two processes which were designed to integrate personal mastery/soft skills development (see Box 1 below) into different academic settings. The first setting is

### **Box 1: Personal mastery/soft skills development – some components**

- facilitation concepts and practice/methods, group dynamics, facilitation techniques
- interactive training/teaching concepts and methods/techniques
- action research as a research method
- interdisciplinarity – a conceptual and team perspective
- systems thinking – with a view to changing perspectives
- management of change (processes, leadership, roles, and functions)
- organisational development
- process management, planning, and quality assurance
- knowledge management (concepts and practice)
- solution-oriented and appreciative approaches and models (theory and practice)
- facilitating learning processes among multiple stakeholders and groups
- ‘emotional intelligence’ in personal development: self-awareness, empathy, critical self-reflection, social skills
- process consultation and coaching skills
- team skills, team management, team building, feedback culture, learning culture
- negotiation and conflict management (concepts and practice/skills)
- communication skills

a PhD programme at Wageningen University in the Netherlands. The second is a two-year long learning process on personal mastery for research, training, and consultancy, involving university lecturers at Makerere University in Uganda<sup>1</sup>. Both experiences provide very encouraging lessons and insights for ‘learning participation’.

### **Case one: introducing personal mastery in a PhD programme at Wageningen University**

#### **Rationale for a personal mastery learning workshop**

In 2002, Wageningen Agricultural University and Research Centre initiated a PhD training and research programme on participatory approaches and up-scaling (PAU) for students from the South<sup>2</sup>. The students spend an initial training period of up to ten months at Wageningen, then undertake field research in their home country, before returning to Wageningen for a final ‘wrapping up’ and thesis writing period. The initial training aims to develop the capacity of the students in conceptual and analytical thinking, research design, and methodologies around the topic of participation.

Studying participatory processes implies unravelling the underlying principles and values of participation and developing a deep cognitive and emotional understanding of participation and process. This depth, particularly the emotional and behavioural side of it, demands active engage-

<sup>1</sup> Both the event in Wageningen and the learning process at Makerere were designed and facilitated by Dr Jürgen Hagmann and Ulrike Breitschuh, both process consultants/ facilitators/coaches in organisational development and training.

<sup>2</sup> For more information, visit [www.sis.wau.nl/tad/Research/PAU/PAUhome.htm](http://www.sis.wau.nl/tad/Research/PAU/PAUhome.htm)

ment in participatory processes by researchers. Our experience indicates that merely studying 'participation', rather than living through and facilitating such processes, is of limited practical usefulness. Studying participation in our understanding means interaction of the researchers with farmers, colleagues, and other stakeholders in the situation or process they study, engaging in the dynamics, and allowing variables to change.

In order to strengthen the capacity and skills needed for facilitating action research, the PAU programme implemented a tailor-made pilot ten-day workshop on personal mastery to complement the mainstream academic training. The pilot was designed and facilitated by two external process consultants/facilitators in October 2002, and 17 PhD student-researchers participated.

### Structure of the learning workshop

The pilot workshop was structured as a process around the subject of participatory approaches and up-scaling. The way the subject was handled integrated theory and practice, in various dimensions and at various levels. The workshop was built on two pillars: (a) conceptual understanding of participation/up-scaling and (b) personal development. Personal development had a central role, focusing on understanding self (own vision, values, behavioural patterns), understanding others, and using knowledge of these to facilitate interaction. Experiences of personal behaviour and attitudes were shared via group exercises. The group's experiences were then compared with the experiences of the PhD researchers in their working environment in the university, with colleagues and superiors back home, and with processes at the community level. Throughout, links were made with the theory of change, systems thinking, learning, and development. Continuous reflection on the facilitation methods used in the workshop, as well as practical exercises, helped build students' own facilitation skills and methods 'toolbox'.

### Impact of the workshop

The engagement and enthusiasm of the participants during and after the intensive ten-day working programme was far greater than anticipated. This was an indication that the workshop filled an important gap in the professional training of participants. Reflection on the impact of the workshop by participants seven months later gave the following insights:

- The integration of personal mastery and the development of facilitation skills as part of a PhD curriculum had initiated greater student-student learning and student-staff interaction, as well as a 'culture of feedback' which strengthens

**"The classroom is an ideal learning ground, where one can practice alternative ways of dealing with people, and facilitating learning and transferring knowledge in an interactive rather than prescriptive form"**

relationships and improves insights into students' own behaviour.

- It created a common foundation for the rationale of participatory approaches, which has enabled students to question the current understandings of participation and generated the desire to conduct research on participation in a different way – via action research.
- Development of PhD research proposals shifted considerably towards action research. This shift is linked to students' ambitions to carry out research that has a direct value for those farmers and colleagues they are working with.
- Change in the understanding and role of theory: participants felt that theory serves to improve practice but is not an end in itself and therefore should be grounded in practice. For the individual PhD studies, theory is useful to provide a conceptual framework, but ideally theory should be built from practice upwards.
- Traditionally, a considerable part of the academic community favours theory-based research over process-analysis of problem-solving research. It is a challenge for the students in the PAU programme to link the analysis of practice with theory, and conduct their analysis of processes within acceptable academic standards.
- Experience shows that the confidence of the PhD researchers as individuals and as a group makes them better equipped to deal with this challenge of 'learning to theorise' from practice. This increased confidence and group strength is part of the impact of the workshop.

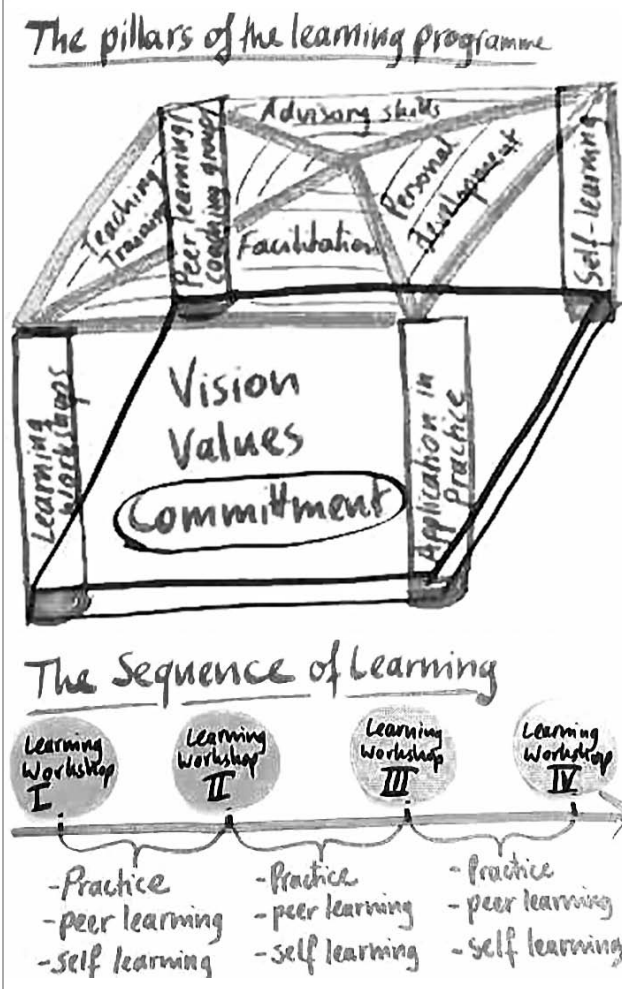
Although the ten-day pilot workshop was successful, it has so far been a one-off event, and students feel that this needs to be followed up to strengthen their gains and build on those principles. The onus is now on the programme to think about follow-up and how to arrive at a mainstreamed formula that offers other students similar experiences.

### Case two: a competence development process in personal mastery for research, training/teaching, and consultancy

Following on from the workshop, which identified gaps in



Figure 1: Elements of the personal mastery learning programme



the development of 'soft' skills amongst university lecturers, a pilot learning programme on personal mastery for Makerere University staff in Uganda was designed, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. In contrast to the workshop in the PAU programme, the learning process was designed as a sequence of workshops with practice periods in between (Hagmann, 2002). Figure 1 illustrates the different elements of the programme. The foundation of the programme is shared values and vision and, particularly, the commitment of the participants to engage in the programme. The pillars are: learning workshops, application in practice, self-learning, and peer coaching/learning teams. The roof consists of competence in facilitation, teaching/training, advisory/consulting skills, personal development, etc.

The learning process design allows the incremental development of soft skills with various learning mechanisms at cognitive, emotional, and behavioural level. One challenge for lecturers was the lack of incentive to be a better teacher when money and reputation is earned through consultancy and research – a widespread problem in many universities. The idea in the process design was to use consultancy as the 'engine' since everybody would like to become a better consultant. Many consultancy skills that are in high demand are related to facilitation skills, e.g. supporting change in organisations; introducing ideas in projects/programmes and organisations through learning processes rather than through external recommendations. Most of these skills are also required when carrying out action research geared towards problem solving. Therefore, the set of skills required is similar in action research, consultancy, and teaching/lecturing in an interactive way. In order to acquire these, one needs to have a good learning platform, where one can make mistakes without losing face and losing the next job. The classroom is an ideal learning ground, where one can practice alternative ways of dealing with people, and facilitating learning and transferring knowledge in an interactive rather than prescriptive form. Using the classroom as a learning ground for these skills is greatly improving the quality of teaching as well as interaction with students – a typical win-win solution.

The process design was discussed and refined with the deans of faculties and staff, and a group of 26 lecturers was chosen by the different faculties. The programme was designed as a pilot, which the different faculties will evaluate in two years' time with regard to potential, and ways to scale up into the overall faculties and beyond. This open approach in setting up the programme has created a favourable institutional openness for a later scaling up.

So far, two learning workshops have been held at Makerere. The impact has been way beyond expectations. To name a few aspects mentioned by the lecturers in the second workshop:<sup>3</sup>

- On a personal level, most participants have introduced elements like the 'culture of giving and receiving feedback' (from superiors, subordinates, and other people with whom they relate closely), appreciation, etc. into their private life where they found surprisingly positive results (e.g. in families, among friends), and were highly energised by those experiences and personal enrichments to further open up.
- At classroom level, almost all lecturers have tried out new

<sup>3</sup> The whole process is being intensively monitored by a PhD student from the PAU programme in Wageningen who studies the personal mastery process and impacts at the level of lecturers, students, and farmers and communities (Kibwika 2003).



ways of teaching and interaction, including evaluation of lessons by students, and allowing students to come up with their own ideas for learning and co-designing lectures. One of the outputs is the development of their own course modules, which they can later use again. The incentive of using the classroom as learning ground for soft skills has really been effective so far, to the benefit of both students and lecturers.

- At consultancy level, many participants tried out the facilitation techniques in workshops, staff meetings, and with collaborators with great success, and this encouraged them to advance themselves further.
- At management level, many staff have tried using elements of personal mastery in the way they interact with their superiors and subordinates, to the extent that the group was asked to present their learning about change to faculty and cross-faculty meetings. The interest from senior management has been very high.
- At university level, other faculties who have heard of or were exposed to the programme have demanded the same processes. The high demand will be satisfied once the first group has the potential to be trainers themselves.

### Some key lessons from these experiences in 'learning participation'

From the above-mentioned pilot activities, a number of key lessons can be distilled.

- The focus on participatory methods and, to a certain degree, attitudes and behaviour in teaching/learning participation is insufficient to generate the required competences

to facilitate participatory processes. Training and education in participatory approaches needs to be strongly interwoven with experiential personality and soft skills development.

- The need for the incorporation of these elements into the curricula of researchers/technicians who are studying and implementing participatory approaches is still not sufficiently recognised. Especially in the academic environment, personal development, and related values, attitudes, and soft skills, are approached with scepticism and insecurity as lecturers in all institutions see themselves as disciplinary experts rather than communicators.
- Our experiences indicate that it is a fallacy to think that competences in process approaches and skills are not essential for researchers involved in participatory research, or for academics who study such processes. The view that you can study participatory processes without being actively involved (i.e. as an observer) still prevails in most universities and often produces rather irrelevant research. Unless researchers engage themselves in the processes they will have a limited understanding of dynamic, complex realities.
- The skills and expertise of lecturers to develop and implement curricula that interweave soft and hard skills is generally lacking and needs to be developed through learning processes in which they engage over a time span of at least a year.
- Curricula for students need to include and integrate cognitive knowledge with soft skills. Participants exposed so far find it highly relevant to develop these core competences. This offers opportunities to develop course modules that can meet these learning objectives.

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## 5

# Teaching: learning participation in social work

By **SHERRY JOSEPH**

Social work is one of the oldest development professions that places importance on people's participation in its practice with individuals, groups, and communities. This is clear from often-cited sayings in social work: 'Give a man a fish, his problem for the day is solved; teach a man to fish, his problem for his life is solved', 'Help people to help themselves'; and 'Working with the people, and not for the people'.

This paper discusses the experience of the Department of Social Work, at Visva-Bharati<sup>1</sup>, India in teaching:learning participation in its revised curriculum. The data on students' perceptions was collected through a focus group discussion with 13 students (nine female and four male), studying at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The teachers' perceptions are based on personal interviews conducted with four teachers, and the author's personal experience.

Teaching and learning participation are not seen as two distinct aspects in social work education and hence a

colon (:) is preferred between the two terms. A teacher is a life-long learner. Apart from learning through practice, a teacher learns through the very process of teaching. Teaching:learning social work takes place both in the classroom and in the field (community/agency), and both complement each other. While, in classroom teaching, more attention is given to theoretical inputs, the focus of fieldwork is to learn through practice. As well as theoretical inputs from the literature, the teacher draws on the students' experiences and her/his own experiences from the field. Students learn from this sharing of experience in the classroom and experiment themselves in the field.

## Revising the curriculum

Before discussing the role of participatory teaching:learning in the curriculum, I will briefly describe the curriculum development process. Individual teachers worked on the curriculum and syllabus of their respective courses(s) and wrote papers which were then shared and discussed in a series of workshops organised in the department. The methods of teaching each course were decided on the basis of the content, the familiarity of the teacher with particular methods, and the personal competence of the teacher. Two external experts provided insights and facilitated the process of curriculum revision. The participation of a few teachers in

<sup>1</sup> Visva-Bharati was founded by Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941). In 1901, Tagore began a system of education at Santiniketan to prepare man for a complete life. But he was also conscious that education alone was not enough. The effects of poverty on the lives of village people called for concerted action through organisation of the people. The Institute of Rural Reconstruction started by Tagore at Sriniketan in 1922, with its systematic approach to community problems, was a pioneering effort in this respect. The two experiments, pedagogic and agricultural, cultural and rural, that he tried to work out at Santiniketan and Sriniketan (collectively known as Visva-Bharati) formed an integrated programme in which culture of the mind and culture of the soil went hand in hand.

the process of curriculum development was poor and they did not contribute to the discussion of other papers. In the entire process of revising the curriculum, the students were not involved. The predominant thinking was, 'We know better what to provide'. However, some teachers mentioned that they used feedback received from the students when revising the curriculum.

### Participatory teaching in the classroom

The teaching:learning methods set out in the curriculum for six different courses are shown in Table 1. The courses selected for discussion are the core subjects in social work. They are entitled Social Work Intervention I, II & III (otherwise known as Methods of Working with Individuals, Groups and Community), and they are taught at the undergraduate and postgraduate level. Specific emphasis on participation is given in the syllabus only in relation to community organisation and community development. In other contexts, participation is discussed in relation to various methods, theories, and perspectives on working with people.

The curriculum shows that 14 distinct teaching:learning methods should be used in these six courses, although this study showed that only nine were used at the undergraduate level and 12 at the postgraduate level (Table 1). Of these, two – lecture and mini-lectures – are defined in the curriculum as 'non-participatory', as the teacher takes an active role and the students play a passive role. The rest, e.g. group discussions, role play, are classified as 'participatory' in the sense that students take a more active role in these methods. Non-participatory methods are used to present theory to students, whilst the participatory methods focus on developing practical knowledge and skills, and appropriate values and attitudes.

'Non-participatory' methods make up about one-third of total teaching:learning activities (30.4%). The remaining two-thirds (69.6%) of the teaching:learning activities are 'participatory'. This indicates that, in social work education, about one-third weightage is given to theory and two-thirds weightage to the development of appropriate values, attitudes, and practical skills.

All the teachers interviewed mentioned the 'undoubted' need for participatory teaching. One teacher regretted that his classes were not that participatory and attributed this to his own lethargy and lack of enthusiasm. Another colleague ironically retorted, 'What participatory teaching? Only chalk and talk'.

The students categorised methods like role play, asking for students' opinions, giving relevant examples, and asking questions, as participatory teaching. However, they did not

**Table 1: Teaching:learning methods used in social work education (figures indicate frequencies)**

No.	Teaching: learning methods	Undergraduate level	Postgraduate level	Total (%)
1	Lecture	14	13	27 (29.3)
2	Small group discussion	7	6	13 (14.1)
3	Small group exercises	8	5	13 (14.1)
4	Analysis of field records	7	3	10 (10.9)
5	Lecture cum discussion	3	5	8 (8.7)
6	Role play	3	3	6 (6.5)
7	Interaction with field practitioners	2	5	7 (7.6)
8	Simulation	-	2	2 (2.2)
9	PRA exercise	1	-	1 (1.1)
10	Mini lecture	-	1	1 (1.1)
11	Mini lecture cum role play and discussion	-	1	1 (1.1)
12	Experience sharing	1	-	1 (1.1)
13	Micro lab <sup>1</sup>	-	1	1 (1.1)
14	Home task	-	1	1 (1.1)
<b>Total methods</b>		<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	

<sup>1</sup> Micro labs create situations and circumstances in which to observe and interpret the behaviour of humans.

categorise other methods mentioned in Table 1 as participatory teaching:learning methods, probably because of the way they are being used. In the students' view, only 25% to 33% of the teachers use participatory teaching methods in their classes.

### Constraining and facilitating factors in participatory teaching – teachers' perceptions

Teachers' perceptions of factors constraining and facilitating participatory teaching were also explored (Table 2). Teachers identified various factors relating to teachers themselves, to the students, and to the teaching environment.

#### Factors relating to teachers and students

Analysis of the constraints faced by teachers suggests that, in some cases, they lack motivation and initiative. If the teacher is skilful enough, the very art of teaching will reduce inhibition, shyness, laziness, and reluctance in the students. However, even if a conducive atmosphere is created, many students do not respond and react positively, and in this situation participatory teaching is very difficult. This leads some teachers to experience 'burnout'. One senior teacher said, 'All these years, I have been sincerely trying to make the students participate more in the classes, but they are not rising to my expectations. Only if I exert myself, can I make

**Table 2: Factors contraining or facilitating participatory teaching: teachers' perceptions**

Factors	Teachers	Students	The teaching environment
Constraining factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lethargy</li> <li>• Lack of enthusiasm</li> <li>• Lack of time</li> <li>• Rigidity</li> <li>• Age/generation gap</li> <li>• Outdated teaching methods</li> <li>• Poor self-preparation</li> <li>• Keeping students at a distance</li> <li>• Lack of personal competence</li> <li>• <i>Dada/didi-chatra</i> relationship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reluctance</li> <li>• Inhibition</li> <li>• Shyness</li> <li>• Non-encouraging</li> <li>• Laziness</li> <li>• Lack of self-preparation</li> <li>• Lack of self-motivation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor infrastructure for teaching</li> <li>• Lack of proper library</li> <li>• Lack of educational aids, e.g. projectors, videos</li> <li>• Traditional seating arrangements (teacher at the front)</li> <li>• Stereotypes concerning 'good' teaching</li> </ul>
Facilitating factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Friendly' student-teacher relationship</li> <li>• Liberal</li> <li>• Firm</li> <li>• Exertion</li> <li>• Practical experience</li> <li>• <i>Dada/didi-chatra</i> relationship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 70% to 80% of students participate</li> <li>• Interested</li> <li>• Self-motivated</li> <li>• Like to participate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition of participatory teaching</li> </ul>

them participate'. Burnout creates lethargy and apathy that in turn makes the teaching process less participatory.

One of the reasons for the lack of active involvement by students is that most students do not invest much in self-learning and rely on the teacher as the sole source of knowledge. This has a direct association with existing pedagogical and evaluation practices where a culture of dependency on the teacher is encouraged.

### The teacher-student relationship

The teacher-student relationship in Visva-Bharati was seen by teachers as being both a constraining and facilitating factor. The relationship is often characterised as *dada/didi-chatra* (literally, elder brother/elder sister-student) and *guru-sishya*<sup>2</sup>. The hermitage model of education initiated by Tagore shaped the teacher-student relationship as *guru-sishya*, and the closeness and the residential nature of the university gave shape to the *dada/didi-chatra* model. For instance, the Vice Chancellor and Registrar of Visva-Bharati are often addressed with a *dada* suffixed to their name, except on very formal occasions.

The teachers examined this relationship from the perspective of aspects that facilitate participatory teaching (informality and congeniality) and aspects which, in their view, constrain it (difficulty in setting limits and purposeful use of authority). Students, on the other hand, expressed a strong

preference for preserving the *dada/didi-chatra* model of relationship (see section on students' perceptions). Irrespective of the differences, there was an agreement that the quality of the teacher-student relationship is important in facilitating teaching:learning participation.

### The teaching environment

The physical environment is one important aspect of the teaching environment. Teachers identified a number of constraints to participatory teaching arising from the physical environment (see Table 2). Among these were lack of facilities for recording or viewing students' practical skills (e.g. video and observation rooms with one-way glass), which could be used to give feedback to students.

Stereotypical images of what makes a 'good teacher' were also noted as being unhelpful in facilitating participatory teaching. According to the stereotype, the 'good teacher' is one who can deliver talk for hours together. So a teacher who 'plays' with the students is not a 'good teacher'.

### Constraining and facilitating factors in participatory teaching: students' perceptions

The perceptions of students of the teaching:learning process were also explored. According to them, the main reasons for low participation are:

- teachers maintain a distance from students;
- teachers are less free with students;
- teachers have problems of expression/articulation;
- the pressures on teachers to complete the syllabus on time; and

<sup>2</sup> God, parents and *guru* are given great importance in the life of an individual according to Indian tradition. The *guru* is equated to God, as he is the giver of knowledge. When the child is ready for learning he is sent to a *guru*, the supreme authority of knowledge, and the child is accepted as a disciple (*sishya*)

- the inability of the teachers to 'come down' to the level of the students.

One remark from the focus group discussion was, 'Our antennae cannot receive the signals sent by the teacher'. They suggested that teachers could make the class environment more conducive to student participation by drawing the attention of the students, bringing in current issues, and using a 'problem-solving' approach. The 'personality' of the teacher was considered a critical factor, along with gestures, facial expressions, and the use of humour. It is interesting to note that the students attributed low participation in teaching to the capacity and ability of the teacher. However, they did not reflect on their role as active learners in the process.

Students also reflected on the teacher-student relationship. The qualities essential in such a relationship, as mentioned by the students, include 'friendly', 'professional', 'understanding the student's interests' and 'accepting the student'. One student saw teachers as 'very imposing', while he would like to see them as 'more challenging'. Another student mentioned that teachers keep a 'higher position' than the students. She accepts this hierarchy, provided the teacher corrects her mistakes and guides her.

The question of the congruency of the professional and personal self of the teacher was also raised in the focus group discussion. While there was disagreement on the need to maintain congruency between the professional and the personal self, they felt that the teacher should practice what s/he professes, at least in the teaching environment.

### Field work

Along with classroom learning, field work is an integral part of the curriculum, and is included in each year of study. The goal of field work is to help students acquire appropriate values, attitudes, and skills in working with people, as well as enabling them to integrate theory with practice. Through this process, the students are helped in developing a holistic understanding of social issues, causative factors, and possible strategies for intervention to improve and/or resolve problems affecting the well-being of people. Students are placed in communities and agencies, and gain experience of working at different levels.

The first step in supervised fieldwork is participatory planning of tasks. The department provides guidelines on the assignments that are expected from a student. Using a log frame, the students prepare a plan of action that gives a detailed account of the objectives, activities, resources, expected outcome, and indicators for evaluation. Each student shares his/her plan in a group conference. This process helps in sharing knowledge, clarifying doubts, and

**"Like individual conferences, group conferences enrich the learning of the students. Group conferences are based on the understanding that sharing the field experiences of individual students will help in collective learning"**

improving plans, and provides scope for cooperation and collaboration among students working in the same community. The final plan of action is also used as a monitoring tool during mid-term sharing and final evaluation. Some of the students discuss their plans with community members.

Supervision is a major component of fieldwork. The teachers visit the agencies and the communities where students are placed, observe them at work, and give appropriate feedback. For instance, after a workshop on the benefits of women forming self-help groups, a student and the workshop resource person were discussing a conflict situation that emerged during the discussion. In the course of their discussion, the resource person stated that, 'Muslims always fight'. As a spontaneous response the student affirmed the resource person's opinion. Her teacher brought her unconscious prejudice against the minority Muslim community to her attention in the individual conference. This was a revelation to the student, who afterwards made very conscious efforts to reduce her bias. Similarly, when students organise group sessions, the supervisor observes and gives feedback on their roles, attitudes, and skills in handling a group situation.

Like individual conferences, group conferences enrich the learning of the students. Group conferences are based on the understanding that sharing the field experiences of individual students will help in collective learning and developing collective wisdom about problem assessment, intervention, and outcome evaluation. Group conferences are organised so that each member gets an opportunity to play the role of presenter, recorder, and chairperson. Through these small group exercises students learn and experience democracy, group process, group dynamics, and participation.

The evaluation of the fieldwork programme is conducted in a participatory way. The student and the teacher separately write evaluation reports and these are then shared and discussed. The mid-term sharing is like a monitoring exercise and the teacher gives feedback and directs the future course of action of the student. This participatory evaluation method has proved very effective where it has been done seriously

and systematically. In order to reduce inconsistency among the teachers in awarding marks, a system of joint evaluation by the internal teacher and an external evaluator has been introduced in the new curriculum.

### Conclusions

The findings from the study show that lectures are still the predominant teaching method used in the undergraduate and postgraduate courses analysed. Although other methods set out in the curricula are also used, these may not be used in a participatory way even though they are categorised by teachers as participatory methods. From the students' perspective, many of the methods used were not participatory, or at least were not used in a participatory way.

The study also showed that a number of factors constrain participatory teaching. Some of these relate to teachers' own skills and competency. In-service training to develop the skills of teachers is important in overcoming this problem as the current recruitment process is primarily based on academic credentials and the ability and skill to teach is not measured. There needs to be advocacy to include participatory teaching methods in the curriculum of the existing orientation and refresher courses for teachers.

The cultural context is also important to the way in which participatory teaching:learning takes place. These cultural differences are often not taken into account in participatory practices, but culture affects the way in which participation is interpreted and made contextually useful. For example, in this case, the nature of teacher/student relationships and pedagogical/evaluation practices in which a culture of dependency on the teacher is encouraged appear to work against the active learning approach needed for participatory teaching:learning. On the other hand, it seems that the hierarchical and unequal power relationship that is inherent in teaching (and was mentioned by many students) can work in teaching:learning participation providing the teacher earns the respect of the students and illustrates the kinds of attitudes and approaches in their teaching which they expect students to use in their social work (ie if they are good 'gurus'). The students repeatedly stressed this point.

The organisational culture is also a constraint on participatory teaching:learning, as participatory methods are not seen as 'real' teaching, and the value of participatory teaching is not recognised. Finally, participatory teaching:learning would be promoted by a more enabling physical learning environment in the classroom.

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## Learning participation: the case of PROSODE, Peru

By **HENRY ARMAS**

*He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches.*  
George Bernard Shaw<sup>1</sup>

This paper tells the story of PROSODE, a special course of the Law Faculty of the Catholic University in Peru. The course has two objectives: to help poor people access justice, and to involve students in a different perspective of law – as a service for people.

Over the course of this paper, I will describe PROSODE's work with a special emphasis on the second of these objectives. The first objective was covered in an earlier paper (Armas, 2002). As an introduction I will detail the programme and its methodology. This will lead to reflection on PROSODE's experience in teaching and learning participation and I will conclude by drawing on some lessons learnt through this experience.

### A different course

PROSODE, which stands for 'Proyección Social del Derecho' (Social Outreach of Law) is at the same time a programme and a course of the Catholic University's Law Faculty. It was initiated in 1992 by students and professors at the Univer-

sity, who identified a need for such a service. That initial participation of different segments of the university helped the project to grow and become representative and, with time, turned what was an informal initiative into a formal course of the Law Faculty.

The course enables students to learn law in a different way, contrasting theory with the country's realities. At the same time, the community benefits from PROSODE's activities, gaining access to justice, rights education, and citizenship building.

PROSODE develops its work through three fields of activity: consulting, legal education, and dissemination. Professors, lecturer assistants, and students form teams around these activities, and the development of comradeship, friendship, and confidence within the team is an important part of the process. Each field of activity is described further below.

### Consulting

In the consulting area, PROSODE gives legal advice to people who cannot afford a lawyer through Free Legal Advice Centres (FLACs) set up in Lima's poorest zones. The programme also takes cases to court. These activities help poor people to gain access to justice and acquire a sense of participation in state justice institutions.

In the FLACs, the students attend litigants. They are

<sup>1</sup> Shaw, George Bernard (1960). 'Man and Superman'. In: *Plays*. New York: The New American Library of World Literature.

**"Students form an emotional link with the litigants they work with. This is a powerful teaching tool because students are learning not only concepts... they are 'experiencing' their career in a participatory way that is much more involving than in traditional courses"**

responsible for researching, following up the case, and preparing court documents. The student is supported by a network of lecturer assistants, course professors, other faculty professors, volunteers, and other students. The spirit of friendship and comradeship developed within the teams creates an atmosphere of mutual confidence and initiative.

Students form an emotional link with the litigants they work with. This is a powerful teaching tool because students are learning not only concepts, but from real-life experience. They are 'experiencing' their career in a participatory way that is much more involving than in traditional courses.

### Legal education

In the legal education area, PROSODE conducts workshops for teenagers at schools in poor zones, where the population is most subject to misinformation and rights violations. All topics of discussion are related to the main objective: rights education, with an emphasis on the teenagers' immediate situation.

PROSODE has also been working with children and teenagers from low-income families in different national schools. The objective is to contribute to citizenship building through rights education.

In order to learn how to identify, research, and present topics that will create interest amongst the school's young audience, PROSODE's students receive special interdisciplinary training (using tools from psychology, education, and sociology) and personalised assessment with lecturer assistants. Students are responsible for running workshops in schools, supervised by lecturer assistants and professors. They also have to prepare informative materials and choose carefully the workshop methodology that they will use. The big challenge is to transform the usually complicated terms of lawyers into simple concepts and examples, giving practical advice.

Through this activity, students learn to work in an interdisciplinary way, and to deal with a non-expert audience.

**Student giving advice at a Free Legal Advice Centre (FLAC)**



### Dissemination

In the dissemination area, PROSODE produces a radio programme *El derecho a tu alcance* (Law is within your reach), which is broadcast once a week. Its purpose is to convey information concerning rights and duties to a substantial number of people and contribute to the development of citizen consciousness.

At the beginning of the term, the topics that are going to be developed in the programme are determined, focusing on current matters that will be interesting for the listeners. Students participate in the selection of the themes, thoroughly researching them and developing scripts and other material for each programme. To prepare them for the radio programme work, students attend special sessions which train them to speak to large numbers of listeners.

'Law is within your reach' uses an informal style, turning the complicated language of law into simple and colloquial terms. Students try to give useful and clear advice, and they also answer questions put by listeners on air.

### How to learn/teach participation.

I would now like to mention some components that characterise PROSODE's experience of teaching participation in society through a law faculty course. What worked for this organisation? What didn't work?

Changing attitudes and behaviour is much more difficult than learning new concepts. To bring about change, you have to approach the student as a human being, and participation not just as a topic but as a life attitude. The following activities and approaches helped PROSODE to create that internal change in students.

### Establishing links between university and community

- University and community are usually seen as being different spheres of activity. Despite the common assertion that the two spaces have an important interrelation, it is not common

**Teamwork is  
essential for  
learning  
participation**



to find real projects that seek to link them. Academic discourses have traditionally developed far from popular spaces.

- When we think about a university working for society, we usually think about ‘saviours’ who give charity and assistance. But we forget that university members are drawn from that same society and suffer from some of the same problems. We forget also that the university needs society.
- Making links with the community gives new sense to the university, and has a powerful effect on students’ learning and internal transformation.

### **Interacting with real people**

This is a powerful methodological tool that helps students appreciate their role in the promotion of rights and development of citizenship, and encourages them to participate actively in society. Interaction with real people gives students the experience necessary for self-reflection and contributes to internal transformation. Students get involved at an emotional level with litigants and school students. That means a different approach to learning participation in society using their own skills and knowledge.

### **Students and teachers working in teams**

The PROSODE’s work system was designed for shared work. Teamwork is essential for learning participation. Shared responsibilities in a practical context help to create a more democratic atmosphere than that of the typical classroom where there are very clear power relationships between teachers and students.

Teamwork encourages students’ participation and initiative in a more equal context. Despite the power element that inevitably exists due to the evaluation system, teamwork helps to redefine roles and concentrate efforts in the community. The new and shared objective is helping a litigant, or a school student, and becomes more important than teachers evaluating students.

**“Changing attitudes and behaviour is much more difficult than learning new concepts. To bring about change, you have to approach the student as a human being, and participation not just as a topic but as a life attitude”**

### **Changing the relationship between students and teachers**

Lecturer assistants are in charge of small workgroups of students, organised and overseen by the professors of the course. Because of their small size, the workgroups not only contribute to establishing academic relationships, but also to developing friendship and comradeship. This encourages students to share their fears and doubts about their community work and helps to create a true commitment to the work done, based not only on abstract concepts but on real human relationships. These relationships are essential if we want to involve students at a different level than that of traditional education.

### **Using quantitative and qualitative criteria for evaluation**

When PROSODE initiated its new course, the group realised that they could not use traditional criteria for evaluation, which include testing understanding and knowledge of concepts and answering questions on hypothetical cases in written examinations. PROSODE included real experience and participation in the community, in which the students themselves could propose tasks. How to evaluate this?

Using a qualification system based only on quantitative or qualitative criteria did not seem adequate, so PROSODE decided to use a mixture of both. Fifty per cent of the evaluation was based on theoretical preparation, consisting of written examinations, readings, groups competitions (simulation of cases), etc. The other 50% was based on community work, consisting of assistance, collaboration, accomplishment, and a final report. PROSODE has tried to judge the effort put into reaching the goals of the course and the internal learning processes of students. This has only been possible with the input of the lecturer assistants, because it requires very close relationships with students and careful monitoring.

### **Looking for ‘personal transformation’ in students**

Experience in communities gives the opportunity for personal transformation throughout the entire course. In fact, every educational or life experience means a personal transformation – each lecture, each reading, each chat with a friend.

**“Teamwork is essential for learning participation. Shared responsibilities in a practical context help to create a more democratic atmosphere than that of the typical classroom where there are very clear power relationships between teachers and students”**

Looking for personal transformation in students does not mean a lack of respect for their individuality. Each student is unique, with a particular background, beliefs, personal objectives, and projects. So, when we talk about transformation, we mean the lessons learned and personal background that the course has given to students to help them reach their personal goals and projects.

### Lessons learnt

We can draw the following lessons from our experience of learning and teaching participation in PROSODE.

- **Learning participation means using different activities and methodologies, and a holistic approach**

Learning participation in a course like PROSODE has involved an interdisciplinary approach, using tools from sociology, anthropology, social sciences, education, communication sciences, psychology, etc. This not only enriches the quality of the service given to the community, but also encourages the participation of other faculties. For instance, students from the Communication Sciences and Arts Faculty have collaborated with PROSODE in the design of the radio programme; Education Faculty students have participated in the preparation of PROSODE's students in the legal education area; and students from the Psychology Faculty have helped in the consulting area.

Offering different activities and methodologies attracts students with diverse interests and preferences. That encourages students to give their own opinions and suggestions about new tasks.

- **If we want to use participation for reducing poverty and social injustice, contact with reality is essential and, at the same time, a useful teaching methodology**

Contact with reality gives students a different view of learning, and the opportunity to experience their career in the context of social outreach. Realising that they can help people with their knowledge and skills gives students self-esteem, because they feel they are valuable in society.

But contact with reality also challenges students, and encourages them to participate more. They cannot remain indifferent to the problems that they see, and this calls them to action.

- **If we want to teach or learn participation, we need the cooperation of different segments of society**

We cannot pretend to do everything on our own. How can we teach or learn participation without calling for others to participate? A course like PROSODE needed the participation of the different university groups: professors, students, lecturer assistants, etc.

But more than that, it was necessary to interact with different segments of society: NGOs, churches, and civil society organisations. For instance, in the early days of PROSODE, there was no budget to open a FLAC. Due to the participation and help of La Recoleta Church, PROSODE opened its first FLAC in a very important zone (Lima Centre) with practically no budget. The church also benefited from this collaboration because they could offer to the community a new service in their building.

- **Learning participation is not only a matter of learning knowledge**

Learning participation is also a matter of learning attitudes. That is why we had to design a programme that could allow students to develop new attitudes. That meant a very close relationship between students and teachers with the intention of redefining traditional power roles within team activities. It also means making an effort to work with students at an emotional level, and using a mixture of criteria for evaluation.

- **We need information from students about their own evaluation of the course**

Input from students is crucial. How can we talk about participation if we don't give students space for criticism, evaluation, reflection, and suggesting changes?

PROSODE's students participate throughout the course through the different activities described. In addition, during term time, there is a special meeting to elicit students' criticisms and suggestions. On this day, working in teams, students prepare their own proposals for continuing the course, based on their own experience.

- **Keep contact with former students**

Being a course in the Law Faculty, in one of the most renowned universities in Peru, makes this point very important. Ex-students are now developing their careers in different arenas, as private attorneys, in NGOs, the Judicial Branch, the Ombudsman's Office, and other different public organisations. In that context, the role of a course teaching participation in society is very important.

Keeping contact with former students helps to create a network that could facilitate work with communities in a more coordinated way.

• **The university is an outstanding space for personal transformation, spreading participation, and democratic attitudes**

The university is a key space for participation in society. Universities give institutional support for taking action, students have the necessary skills to get involved in relevant projects, and we cannot forget that they may have, in the future, a decisive role in the decision-making policy of the country. Courses or programmes related to participation are essential to the new role that the university has to play.

Today, universities face strong competition and the demands of a society centred around a market economy. Universities are struggling for survival in this adverse context, and fighting not to be reduced to a mere part of the production mechanism. Universities were born in the Middle Ages, as associations of students and professors dedicated to education and a humanistic approach, to producing better human beings, and giving them the necessary instruments to develop activities that could be useful for society. Teaching participation in activities that link universities and communities could be a way of recovering that original sense.

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# Learning and teaching participation in higher education in China

By LI XIAOYUN AND LI OU

## Introduction

This paper reflects on the lessons learnt by, and the opportunities and challenges facing, institutions of higher education in China as they attempt to institutionalise participatory paradigms, approaches, and methodologies. The Centre for Integrated Agricultural Development (CIAD) based at China Agricultural University (CAU) has played a leading role in institutionalisation. In the mid-1990s, it pioneered the learning and teaching of participation (LTP) in higher education in China. The initiative was based on its extensive experience and knowledge gained through carrying out research, consulting, and training for over 100 internationally funded agricultural and rural development projects. It began with a graduate programme, and later an undergraduate programme in 1998 when the first College of Rural Development (CORD) was established, on the site of CIAD. This paper will discuss progress so far, lessons learned, and the challenges faced in this field due to rapid changes in urban, and especially rural, development in China.

## Participation in the Chinese context

Participatory approaches and methodologies were introduced in China in the early 1990s through international projects. Instead of uncritically following and applying the

introduced model, CIAD's researchers tried to adapt it to fit the Chinese context and link it to the conceptualisations and understanding of Chinese stakeholders, both officials and farmers.

Participatory approaches or methodologies are not completely new to Chinese people. Mao Zedong applied various methods of interview and discussion in the 1920s and early 1930s in his survey to classify social groups in rural areas. In the 1940s and 1950s 'gaining ideas and information from the masses, and then feeding back the formulated scheme and policies to the masses again' became the guideline for party and government activities.

The experiences and innovations of 'model' farmers (e.g. multiple cropping patterns) were the main source of advanced technologies disseminated in the 1950s before agricultural research and extension systems were fully developed. During the commune period<sup>1</sup>, especially in the 1960s, farmers also played an important role in the experimentation, demonstration and extension system for agricultural technologies. This system proved quite effective in disseminating new technologies.

Socially and politically, farmers have also played impor-

<sup>1</sup> Collective organisations existed from 1958–1984 in China. Within these, farmers had neither ownership nor use rights over arable land, fulfilling assigned manual work and getting grain food from the collective according to their labour contribution recorded.

tant roles in agricultural and rural development. The 'Household Responsibility System (HRS)'<sup>2</sup> was created in 1977/8 by a group of farmers in a small village in Anhui Province when the commune system came to an end, leaving farmers in serious poverty. Deng Xiaoping and the other reformists discovered the farmers' practice and adopted it to cover all the rural areas of China.

However, farmers' participation has become more and more neglected since the 1970s. This exclusion was particularly pronounced after the green revolution when researchers and technicians succeeded in increasing production and became the dominant actors in agricultural research and development. The working guideline of 'from the masses, to the masses', pioneered in the 1940s and 1950s, has been neglected or rejected by most government leaders and officials, especially at local level. Local officials are accountable only to upper authorities and not to ordinary people.

The adaptation and application of participatory approaches and methodologies has helped farmers, ordinary technicians, and project staff to reclaim the traditional working style. It provides farmers with the chance to express their needs and knowledge, analyse their problems, and identify solutions through the use of PRA methods and tools. Its harmony with the Chinese cultural psychology is a key reason why actors around the country readily accept these new ideas and methods.

### Teaching/learning participation in higher education in China

Through our experience of consultancy, research, and practice of rural development, we identified an urgent need to incorporate the theory, approach, and methodologies of participation into the higher education system. We believe this is necessary because:

- The education system in China, especially agricultural higher education, is dominated by paradigms which value scientists' knowledge and ideology over that of practitioners such as farmers. Therefore, it is difficult for educated project officials and line agency professionals to change their attitudes and behaviour enough to enable a development that is sustainable and accountable.
- Training only the existing government officials is not adequate to meet the needs of on-going economic and democratic reform in China. Human resources with new ideas and skills need to be developed.

## "The adaptation and application of participatory approaches and methodologies has helped farmers, ordinary technicians, and project staff to reclaim the traditional working style"

- As China merges into the globalising world, civil society organisations such as farmers' associations are growing rapidly and playing increasingly important roles. The higher education system in China should support these organisations.

Assisted by the Ford Foundation and the international advisory committee for the development of CORD, the undergraduate programme at CORD promotes LTP in several ways.

### Identification of specialised programmes and curriculum development

The undergraduate programme was created bearing in mind the market demand for human resources in rural development and extension, and the experiences and skills of CORD staff in development research and practice. Two specialised undergraduate programmes were identified – rural development management, and agricultural extension and innovation management. Within these programmes, practical sessions in rural areas are arranged for the students, to expose them to the realities of farmers' livelihoods and rural life.

### The development and application of participatory methodologies throughout the LTP process

CORD staff have a long history of introducing and adapting participatory training approaches and methodologies through the projects they have undertaken. It has proved both easy and effective for students to master and apply the methods and there is much evidence of changes in their attitudes and behaviour. The training itself turns into a learning process, and the trainers play the role of facilitators rather than 'teacher'. This has been welcomed by the students who were suffering a lot from traditional one-way teaching.

In order to contextualise theory and concepts, the lecturers employ actual case studies in their teaching. Most of the cases are drawn from their own research and consulting activities. Group discussions are held by the students to further their understanding of the concepts and ideas, using their own knowledge and experience. Exercises are also

<sup>2</sup> Under this system households received use rights over arable land by contracting it from the village collectives who owned the land. In turn, the households had to sell a quota of grain to the state, and pay taxes and levies.

**"While all of the cases reveal the nuances of political process and determination of citizens to influence decisions that affect their lives, they also affirm that advocacy and citizen participation strategies do not come in a one-size-fits-all formula"**

developed to illustrate the application of particular methods, with students from rural backgrounds (more than half of the student population) assuming the role of 'key informants' for the discussions and exercises. Teamwork is encouraged. These activities have proved to be very effective in preparing students for field exercises in rural areas. The students show readiness and confidence in applying PRA tools in the field.

**Exposing the students to real development projects**

CORD staff try to arrange field exercises and especially graduation internships/theses within their own projects, undertaken for organisations such as the World Bank, PLAN International, etc. This gives students the opportunity to interact closely with tutors, and familiarise themselves with the whole process of a development research or practice mission, from framework to methodologies. It is a great opportunity for them to apply holistically and comprehensively what they learned during their university studies.

Although CORD has made a lot of effort to institutionalise participation in higher education, there is still a long way to go. We are now conducting student evaluations in order to identify the challenges we are facing as we seek to improve our programme.

**Student evaluation of the courses**

Recently we conducted a questionnaire survey among the third and fourth (final) grade undergraduates, to evaluate the outcomes and impact of LTP. The questionnaire was divided into six sections:

- the degree of the student's understanding or mastering of participatory development theory, research methodologies, and methodologies of development planning and project management;
- their usefulness to the student's future employment and career;
- the factors influencing the degree of the student's understanding/mastery;
- levels of interaction during teaching and learning, and

- student ranking of different teaching/learning methods;
- the advantages and disadvantages of participatory teaching/learning methods compared to traditional one-way teaching;
- general comments on further improvement.

**Students' understanding/mastery**

Most students had understood or mastered the theory and methodologies of participation, with only 5.1% of the respondents claiming their achievement was 'poor'. A high percentage of students rating their achievement as 'poor' (33.3%) in methodologies of development planning and project management was caused by the inclusion of third grade students who had not taken these courses but were asked to complete the questionnaire nonetheless. Fourth grade students tended to have a higher proportion of students with a good understanding and mastery of participatory development theory and research methodologies than the third grade students, but also a higher proportion of students assessing their understanding as 'poor'. This may in part be due to differences between the teachers and students of different years in their teaching and learning capacity. Female students had better results than males in these two subjects.

**Relevance to future employment**

Eighty per cent or more of the total number of students considered the courses to be necessary for their future employment and career. Forty to fifty per cent considered the courses to be very useful or just useful. However, quite a high proportion of the final grade students (30–40%) considered what they had learnt to be basically useless. This shows that students have little confidence in finding jobs with such subject matter in today's human resource market, which is undergoing rapid and dramatic changes. This provides a big challenge for our undergraduate programme.

**Factors influencing degree of understanding/mastery**

Table 1 shows that students were most likely to attribute negative outcomes to a shortage of practical knowledge and experiences. This was followed by the absence of relevant courses and lack of initiative due to unclearness on job prospects. Only 12.8% attributed it to the lack of a national enabling environment for participatory development. This suggests that practical knowledge and experiences are essential for a better understanding and mastering of participatory theory and methodologies, and that big efforts are needed to fill in these gaps.

**Table 1: Ranking of factors influencing understanding/mastery by students of the rural development management programme (%)**

Rank	1	2	3	4
Absence of subjects relevant to participatory development theory and methodology within curriculum	23.1	20.5	20.5	35.9
Students' lack of practical knowledge and experiences	41	28.2	17.9	12.8
Lack of initiative of learning due to unclearness on the importance of the subjects, and employment prospects	23.1	28.2	15.4	33.3
Lack of enabling environment for the participatory development approach	12.8	25.6	41	20.5

### Ranking of LTP methods

The evaluation revealed that most students appreciated the interactive methods of LTP. It seems, however, to be more difficult to use interactive approaches for the teaching of theory than of methodologies.

Ranking of teaching/learning methods (Table 2) showed that the students most appreciated field exercises, especially for the teaching of methodologies (ranked first at 74.1%), followed closely (with regard to the teaching of theory) by the presentation of relevant cases studies. For LTP methodologies, group exercises (31.5%), presentation of case studies (27.8%), and group discussions (16.7%) were also popular. The low rank of lecturing suggests the need for further adaptation and improvement in this method of teaching. Plenary presentations also appear to need improving if they are to serve as opportunities for mutual learning, communication, reflection, and assessment.

### Advantages/disadvantages of LTP methods

Comparing the outcomes of LTP methods with traditional 'one-way' teaching, 'fostering the team-work spirit and group dynamics' was selected by 44 students (77.2% of total 57 respondents); 'strengthening independent thinking' was chosen by 31 students (54.4%), and 25 students (43.9%) identified an 'increase in oral expression' ability.

Students identified the main comparative advantages of these participatory courses to be the opportunities to gain practical experience, and the proximity of the courses to social realities. Students also proposed that a more solid theoretical foundation be built, more specialised courses useful to development researchers and practitioners offered,

**Table 2: Ranking of six LTP methods by students of the development and extension programme(%)**

Rank		1	2	3	4	5	6
Lecturing	Theory Methods	13 3.7	11.1 9.3	13 9.3	16.7 18.5	16.7 22.2	29.6 37
Presentation of cases	Theory Methods	31.5 11.1	20.4 27.8	16.7 22.2	20.4 22.2	11.1 14.8	0 1.9
Group discussion	Theory Methods	3.7 5.6	20.4 16.7	33.3 24.1	25.9 29.6	13 16.7	3.7 7.4
Group exercise	Theory Methods	5.6 0	25.9 31.5	24.1 33.3	22.2 20.4	18.5 13	3.7 1.9
Plenary presentation	Theory Methods	0 3.7	0 3.7	7.4 5.6	7.4 7.4	35.2 27.8	50 51.9
Field exercise	Theory Methods	46.3 74.1	22.2 13	5.6 5.6	7.4 3.7	5.6 3.7	13 0

better linkages and coherence between courses developed, repetition avoided, more opportunities for field practice provided, and that teachers should set aside more of their time and energies for teaching.

### Challenges and opportunities for CORD/COHD

The evaluation made by the students as well as the new trends of social, economic, and political development in China provide us with a number of challenges. These include better reflecting the interdisciplinary foundation of LTP in our courses, the according requirement for human resources, and the lack of incentives for teachers to devote time to teaching. Through our own research and practice, as well as communication with international scholars in the same field, we have achieved a deeper understanding of the interdisciplinary nature of participatory development. To consolidate the theoretical and methodological foundation of LTP, more subjects are needed in the undergraduate programmes, in addition to economics and sociology, for example, politics, social psychology, anthropology, etc. We do not yet offer these courses and need teachers to teach them. However, creating incentives for teaching staff is a challenge. The staff of CORD have significantly increased their income levels through the consulting activities of CIAD, and demand from clients is increasing due to the blossoming reputation of CIAD. However, these activities take a lot of time and compete with teaching. Although the college contributes a certain amount of money to the limited subsidy paid to staff for teaching, it is still not enough compared with the

economic and academic incentives of consulting and research activities.

Despite all of these challenges, the current reform and development of the economy, society, and political systems in China have really provided a lot of opportunities for our research and teaching, as well as for our graduate and undergraduate students. More holistic and comprehensive development, with better integration between urban and rural areas, has expanded our target areas geographically beyond the rural areas. Other changes, such as the presence of more and more laid-off workers, the growing population of impoverished urban citizens, and democratic development at the urban community level, e.g. civic participation in governance, also demand that we widen the geographic scope of our research and teaching and produce the

required researchers and practitioners.

As government undergoes further restructuring, good governance is becoming an increasingly important issue of development, not only for government agencies but also for civil society. Globalisation will become an increasingly important issue, although the negative impacts of entering WTO on agriculture, rural areas, and farmers have not yet emerged.. The environment for mainstreaming and institutionalising participation and gender and development is also becoming more favourable along with the deepening of economic and political reforms. These new developments demand that CORD adds new subjects and courses to its programmes, for example, governance, international trade, and finance. They will also provide more employment opportunities for CORD graduates.

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# UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

# 8

## Choices in community-higher education collaborations

By **RANDY STOECKER**

### Introduction

In just two short decades, colleges and universities have begun to transform themselves from remote ivory towers to neighbourly community citizens as their faculties and students collaborate more and more with groups outside the academy. But will higher education institutions be the neighbours who borrow without returning and criticise others for not keeping their yards neatly manicured? Will they be the bumbling neighbours who keep coming over to help but, because they are incompetent, make things worse? Or will they be the neighbours who loan tools, provide free help, and offer support in a crisis?

I have been working collaboratively with community organisations ever since a community activist demanded that I return something to the community in exchange for an interview in 1985. During the intervening years, as a facilitator and researcher involved with various institutions attempting to institute various types of civic engagement programmes, I have witnessed everything from a patronising colonisation of poor communities, to amazingly equal partnerships between high-powered universities and the US's poorest communities. The increasing pressures from taxpayers for accountability in public institutions and calls for relevance from higher education critics have sent academics scrambling for a different approach to higher education.

This paper reviews some past and current practices in US universities, asking questions and exploring tensions in the hope of helping find the way to a form of collaboration that truly benefits community and society.

### Forms of community-university collaboration

#### Community service

Historically, the new push for community-university collaborations began with community service programmes. These programmes are disconnected from any classroom learning objectives. A variety of campus-based and foundation initiatives recruit students to provide services in poor communities, e.g. neighbourhood cleanups, house painting, tutorial/literacy programmes, and soup kitchen services (which provide food to those in need). These programmes are the most basic of all the options. In addition to recruiting individual students to volunteer their services, the programmes are mostly geared to helping individual clients, whether a child who needs help learning how to read or an impoverished elderly resident who needs their house painted.

#### Service learning

Service learning tries to link volunteer work with in-class

learning objectives. The hours put into community service are reflected upon in journals, and the causes of poverty or forms of social service are discussed in the classroom. The projects differ little, however, from those in community service programmes: the focus is still on students, and the model of service is still individual-to-individual. Historically, there has been a specific absence of a social change orientation in service learning, and an explicit emphasis on collaborations with agencies rather than community-based organisations (Stoecker, 2003). In the worst cases, communities were seen as 'laboratories' for students to learn course concepts without any obligation to return anything to those communities, prompting one community activist to ask, 'What does that make us, the frogs?' (Beckwith, 1996). Very recently service learning has been changing, as some service learning faculties are now drawing on people like Paulo Freire (1970), and working with social change organisations.

### Community-based research

Community-based research, or CBR, has a somewhat independent history from community service and service learning programmes. Drawing partly from Third World participatory research, and the earlier use of the label by the Loka Institute, a US NGO dedicated to advancing the practice of community-based research, CBR is rooted in non-academic traditions. Today, in institutions of higher education, CBR may be done with or without students. Also, in contrast to traditional service learning, projects are defined through a community-based process, and ideally led by a community-based organisation. In CBR, communities are seen as having strengths and wisdom as well as needs. Community-based forms of information, such as oral and artistic traditions, are respected as legitimate knowledge. Most importantly, the goal of CBR is to support community-based social change efforts. Today, there are an increasing number of CBR centres and networks supporting evaluations of community programmes, participatory needs assessments of school students, collection of community statistics, surveys of residents to guide grants applications and programme design, and many others.

Whether it is community service, service learning, or community-based research, or some combination of these, the next question focuses on what kind of infrastructure can be used to make it happen.

### Community-university collaboration structures

There is an old adage in the community organising profession that says if an organisation doesn't grow it dies (Beck-

**Examples of cards marked with FSS and TIP status.**  
Source: Chinsinga et al. (2002)



with with Lopez, 1997). Whether that is true for community-university collaboration remains to be seen. Many collaboration programmes fade away as their funding ends, but others are trying to grow and expand from single campus centres to broader networks of multiple campuses and community organisations.

### Single campus centres

These currently remain the most popular model. Individual institutions establish a programme of collaboration within their own organisational confines, often as 'enclave offices' separated off in a corner where they won't have much impact on the institution (Staudt and Brenner, 2002). In many cases these programmes partner with a single neighbouring community. The US federal government's Community Outreach Partnership Centre (COPC) programme has promoted this kind of centre. It is also popular with large urban institutions that border poor neighbourhoods, allowing them to help improve the neighbourhood and their own image at the same time. Most of these programmes also practise some form of specialisation. The University Community Collaborative of Philadelphia at Temple University, which until recently was a single campus centre, focuses its efforts on youth and community development. A few single campus centres develop out of a diverse accumulation of projects seeking institutional support, and are part of a growth pattern within the institution. Georgetown University in Washington DC began with a service-learning programme that grew to become the Centre for Social Justice Research, Teaching and Service, an academic unit combining community service, service learning, and CBR programmes, and housing seven staff. The University of Texas El Paso has also developed a large and complex

## **"Many collaboration programmes fade away as their funding ends, but others are trying to grow and expand from single campus centres to broader networks of multiple campuses and community organisations"**

Centre for Civic Engagement and Institute for Community-Based Teaching and Learning.

### **Metropolitan networks**

Metropolitan networks supporting community-university collaboration are not new. The grandparent of them all, since 1989, is the Policy Research Action Group in Chicago, connecting four universities and 24 community organisations. In the past two years, an effort was sponsored by the Corella and Bertram F. Bonner Foundation to build networks of institutions doing community-based research in six US metropolitan regions (along with a network in rural Appalachia). Most of these networks expanded from strong single campus centres. In three cases, these networks are very broadly based. The Trenton network, in New Jersey, has institutional partners ranging from Princeton University to Mercer County community college, and an equally broad range of community organisation partners. In some cases the networks are skill focused. The Philadelphia network focuses on developing institutional and community organisation expertise in youth programming and community development. Most of the projects sponsored by these networks currently involve individuals from single institutions partnering with individual organisations. The hope is that over time the networks will solidify enough to move from independent projects to joint projects involving multiple institution partners and multiple community organisations.

### **Regional network**

One of the most intriguing developments coming out of the Bonner CBR network programme is the spawning of regional networks. A year ago, representatives of the four networks on the East Coast of the US began planning a regional network to promote community-based research around youth, community development, and information infrastructure issues. In addition, institutions across the Appalachian region have formed a network called Just Connections. This is an independent non-profit organisation involving a collaboration of seven colleges and a

growing number of community organisations and groups across five states in Appalachia. In an area of the country where both information and economic resources are widely dispersed, Just Connections allows for an accumulation of information and expertise that maximises the impact of what would otherwise be isolated projects. The projects are still separate and independent, but benefit from the network by being able to tap network expertise in project development, and spread project results throughout the network.

### **Future choices**

The choices that community-university partnerships make on the questions of 'what to do' (community service, service learning, and/or community-based research), and 'how big to make it' (single campus centre, metropolitan network, or regional network) have implications for a set of tensions that exist in those partnerships. Those tensions are between emphasising service versus emphasising social change, institutionalising a partnership programme versus building its independence, and specialising versus diversifying.

### **Service versus social change**

As important as service work is, we keep avoiding the question of whether it is truly helpful. Many of us know the argument that service work is a safety valve – providing just enough help to contain social unrest without addressing the underlying causes. A service perspective often emphasises the commonality across groups in society, and win-win solutions. A social change perspective more often emphasises differences between class, race, and sex/gender groups. It also disputes that win-win solutions are possible, arguing that the 'haves' are unlikely to give up their advantage without a fight.

The service approach is much more comfortable in community service and service learning programmes. There are service learning programmes that actually adopt a conflict perspective, but they are exceedingly rare, with probably the most explicitly social change-oriented service-learning programme being at the University of Colorado at Denver. With most universities divided into a 'student affairs' division and a 'faculty affairs' division, service programmes are typically housed in student affairs away from the control of faculty. And while there has been recent lip service given to how to make projects more community driven, the reality is that very few projects are actually created through grassroots processes, with most being designed to meet the institution's curriculum needs or a social service agency's needs. The level of control needed

to manage programmes such as this also means that they fit best in single campus centres.

The social change approach is most comfortable in community-based research programmes. In contrast to service, which is geared to addressing immediate needs, research is geared to uncovering fundamental causes that can be used in social change efforts. And because the social change model is more community driven, and social change often requires participation beyond a single community, such programmes are much less likely to be geographically fixed by the institution, making metropolitan and regional networks very important foundations. In fact, as we will see next, in a social change context, those networks themselves may become more community-based.

### Institutionalisation versus independence

One of the other tensions in community-university partnerships is the question of 'who benefits?'. The US federal COPC programme specifies that universities, not communities, get the grant funds. That's in contrast to a similar Canadian government programme that funds joint community-university partnerships or even community-controlled partnerships.

Service programmes are the least controversial and 'safest' to house in mainstream institutions. Likewise, single campus centres are more compatible with institutionalisation because the locus of decision-making for multi-campus and multi-organisational networks is so uncertain.

Institutionalised partnerships are by far the most common, but we are very recently seeing in the United States a very interesting alternative model. The two CBR networks in Trenton New Jersey and Appalachia discussed earlier have formed their own independent non-profit organisations. Both of these programmes sponsor some service activities, but they emphasise community-based research. Because such independent efforts need to cover their own overhead, buy-in from multiple institutions and multiple community organisations is important. The Trenton Centre even uses a fee for its service model in some cases to build its operating budget. Both of these independent efforts also structured their boards to allow for a majority of community organisation representatives.

### Specialisation versus diversification

Wrapped up in the tensions of service versus social change and institutionalisation versus independence is the tension between specialisation and diversification. Academics like me were taught to specialise. But some community activists, thankfully, quickly disabused me of the notion that I was a

**"We need to build independent, community-based networks that can support a diverse range of projects. Such a model goes beyond service to address the causes of social inequality that currently make service seem so necessary"**

specialist, and even of the belief that I should be. In Toledo I found myself learning about community development, foundation funding, urban political economy, and all kinds of related stuff for which graduate school had poorly prepared me.

Because academia is still about disciplinary specialisation, community-university partnerships are still pushed to specialise. There are centres dedicated to community service, or to service learning. There are department-based programmes that only take projects fitting their specialty. But community issues don't occur in disciplinary packages, they don't fit abstract single-term curricular designs, and they often require combinations of expertise not found in a single location. So for those whose goal is social change, diversification is almost a necessity. A social change-oriented community-university partnership has to shift as the issues and conditions shift. They need to provide the wide range of information, technical assistance, and other resources needed for full-scale social change efforts. They need to see and address the relationship between small isolated issues and bigger structures. All of those pressures push such partnerships to become full service, community driven, and multi-locational.

### Conclusion

If we start with the belief that social change must be the goal, then our choices are clear. We need to build independent, community-based networks that can support a diverse range of projects. Such a model goes beyond service to address the causes of social inequality that currently make service seem so necessary. Such a model also focuses not only on the material inequality that faces so many communities, but also the knowledge inequality. The truly radical potential of such collaborations is in their ability to create social change by improving participation, more broadly distributing skills and information, and building a foundation for collective social action. Participation means that the people affected by the service, or the research, or the policy, are integrally involved in making decisions about it. Our collaborations should turn agency clients into organ-



isation participants, both in the agencies themselves and in the institutions of higher education that partner with them. Tutoring school kids in reading and writing, using a mainstream literacy model, keeps those children in the role of client. Engaging those same kids in a social change project that requires them to read and write along the way is much more powerful.

Of course, such a model is also risky when it must confront the confines of tradition-bound academia. The risks are summed up perhaps best by a quote from the late Archbishop Dom Helder Camara of Brazil:

*When I feed the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist.*

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#### NOTES

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# Learning participation for a human development approach

By **CARLOS CORTEZ RUIZ**

## Introduction

This paper presents reflections on an experience of university-society engagement in rural areas of Chiapas State in South Mexico. This area is characterised by problems such as poverty, ecological degradation, and social conflicts. In recent years, the Zapatistas social movement has questioned the political and social situation. Around this movement, different social actors have established an agenda that includes: demands for important political changes; cultivation of new relations between government and the indigenous population at the national level; accomplishment of collective human rights (territory, language, culture); 'peace with dignity'; and institutional changes and recognition of new participatory local government. Within this context, different approaches to local participation, political action, and social organisation have been developed, combining traditional with new solutions to complex problems. Some of the most important actions developed are around health, education, sustainable production, and respect for human rights.

## The Interdisciplinary Research Programme on Human Development

The Interdisciplinary Research Programme on Human Development<sup>1</sup> was launched in 1995 by the Universidad

Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM). The programme offers professional and postgraduate qualifications, as well as a diploma for practitioners and local leaders. We also work with undergraduate students.

By a 'human development' approach, we mean work oriented towards guaranteeing human rights to the whole population. Our work is developed around what we call the human development axes, which are:

- health, nutrition, and life quality;
- technology, production, and environment;
- culture, processes of learning, and human rights; and
- social strategies, public policies, and power relations.

This work is carried out in different regions, in interaction with civil society groups such as cooperatives and NGOs, and/or governmental institutions who are already working on initiatives with a human development perspective, and who have some interest in collaborating with our research programme.

An important dimension of our work is the participation of teachers, students, and graduates from different areas (social sciences, biological sciences, industrial and graphic design). Under Mexican law, at the end of their studies, all university students must undertake what is called 'social service'. This entails working for six months to one year using their professional knowledge in activities oriented

<sup>1</sup> Programa de Investigación Interdisciplinario Desarrollo humano en Chiapas

## **"An important dimension of our work is the participation of teachers, students, and graduates from different areas – social sciences, biological sciences, industrial and graphic design"**

towards social benefits. During the last three years, almost 300 students from 16 specialities have conducted their social service through our research programme. Around half work directly in Chiapas and the others work partly there and partly at the university.

The programme collaborates with communities, cooperative organisations, and NGOs to try to link research with practical service and active learning. We understand participation as a route to establishing and maintaining collaboration with social groups, to understanding and helping to identify new solutions to their problems, and to enlarging their horizons. Service takes place via actions developed by our students at community or regional level around different problems (health, production, sustainability).

How can we help our students to learn participation? Most of them decide to work in the programme because they have political sympathies with regional social groups. They want to do something for the population but don't know how. One of our most important challenges is enabling these students to recognise the population as a people with priorities and capabilities, and to base their work on this.

### **Working with local organisations and communities**

Within the programme, we have developed the following strategies:

- Identifying the priorities of different social groups in the short, medium, and long term.
- Defining those priorities around which we can collaborate through a sustainable human development perspective, according to our capacities and resources.
- Developing an intercultural approach, in particular the interaction between different kinds of knowledge – 'popular' and 'scientific'. This means being open to changes in our research priorities, our questions, and our objectives;
- Developing an interdisciplinary approach, involving social sciences, biological sciences, industrial and graphic design, etc.
- Recognising, and, if possible, adapting the work to the existence of different rhythms and time perspectives in

local organisations and the university.

A fundamental question is how to establish strong relations with these local groups? We try to establish a 'positive circle' by drawing on previous relationships with people working with local and regional organisations or with NGOs. Some of them are our own graduates, whose work in the regions gives us a better understanding of the social priorities, and helps us to identify collaboration possibilities. These relationships are very important for new students. The graduates act as intellectual guides, who can provide political understanding of regional situations and even access to infrastructure, something that our institution lacks, and which helps to sustain our continuing work at the local and regional level. This relationship between local organisations, the NGOs, and UAM is the basis for identifying different collaboration possibilities for our students.

### **Creating a space for people from local organisations**

Another question is how to establish medium- and long-term perspectives in relationships with social groups? To achieve this, it is fundamentally important to create a space where people from local organisations can express their priorities and reflect upon what they are doing, what they want to do, and what kind of collaborations would be desirable and appropriate for their technical, economical, social, cultural, and political conditions. The University diploma is one of the initiatives that have been undertaken to establish this space.

The diploma in 'Sustainable Human Development' is aimed at different kinds of popular leader and local practitioners. The majority of these are proposed by their communities, other social organisations, e.g. cooperatives, and NGOs. Between 15 and 30 students are taken at any one time, around a third of whom are women. The diploma has six monthly sessions where students learn analysis skills and conduct analytical exercises on their own problems.

Throughout the diploma, the approach is to help participants define their own 'human development strategies'. In every session we have a theme, for example, values, traditions, and culture; our environment and how we use it; public policies and their effects; our priorities and our rights; or our strategy for sustainable human development. In the interval between the diploma sessions, participants must reproduce this analysis with their own local or regional groups (peasants, woman, students, etc.) through collective work, with the results being presented at the following diploma session.

Not every participant will consider all the human development dimensions in the proposals that they identify

during the diploma, neither will they define actions around all of the axes that we consider. However, the approach enables each problem (around health, sustainable production, the situation of women etc.) or development action (from small projects to medium-term programmes) to be understood from a medium- to long-term perspective, from which alternatives can be identified.

The objectives are to facilitate reflection on a more complex perspective of the future, and to identify possible collaborations. At the end of the diploma, the participants reflect on their own human development strategies, and at least in some cases we have a common agenda on local and regional priorities and have identified some possible collaborative actions with the participation of our students.

This space is not just educative for the formal diploma students. It is also a space where our undergraduate students, who are working in the programme, can learn about the general situation, problems, priorities, and experiences of the diploma students and the constituencies they represent. Students from different subject areas can use this space to try to identify possible collaboration according to their own capacities. We encourage students to define their own activities, in interaction with local practitioners. These can be individual or collective initiatives developed over a period of six months to one year.

We also hold seminars for our students, with graduates and teachers. In these, we reflect upon the general socio-economic, political, and cultural situation in Chiapas, enabling the undergraduates to better understand the context of their work.

### Some examples of learning participation

#### Social health systems

One of the key priorities for people in Chiapas is health. Some of our medicine, nursery, and dentist students work in health at the regional level. However, the objective here is not just to give medical assistance to people who have health problems, but also to develop local health systems. Local participation is highly important in providing an adequate response to regional conditions.

One of the region's characteristics is that people live in small towns (less than 1,000 inhabitants), most of them very isolated and without good communications. For several years an extremely important focus for our work has been building the capacity of local health practitioners, who are able to devote their attention to the local community. Health practitioners all belong to a clinic, where there is a medical doctor, a nurse, and, where possible, a dentist. The health

**"It is fundamentally important to create a space where people from local organisations can express their priorities and reflect upon what they are doing, what they want to do, and what kind of collaborations would be desirable and appropriate"**

practitioners help to translate the patients' explanations to the medical doctors. With this approach, a health team can cover several thousand people. This kind of health work is the origin of our research programme, and it is fundamental to the human development approach. It was the first area in which a diploma was used to help in practitioner development formation.

#### Agro-ecological production

Rural populations have been adversely affected by the globalisation process, specifically by falling prices for their products. There is a vicious cycle of low production and productivity, low prices, and increasing poverty. Priorities for many social organisations focus around environmental problems and the degradation of natural resources, and developing agro-ecological solutions. As part of this effort our students have been collaborating with local practitioners to develop capacities and to achieve better agro-ecological production. Efforts are focused both on domestic production (of maize and beans) and commercial production (principally of coffee). In this latter case the agro-ecological approach is related to the development of alternatives which feed, for example, into the organic or fair trade markets. The complex process involves our students in the intricate realities of globalisation.

#### Designing appropriate technology

Design is the area least acknowledged as capable of providing solutions for poor people's needs. However, we regard it as an important area. In our interaction with different actors, a lot of problems are recognised as having a technological dimension. Several students have been working with local organisations and NGOs to develop small-scale technologies around production problems, handicrafts, and health problems, etc. For example, in coordination with a health NGO, a group of students worked on the design of a cheap and simple aid that enabled children with muscular problems living in isolated areas to achieve better mobility.

## **"We are very proud of our students, of their open minds, and of their capacity to learn. We have a lot to learn from them and from local practitioners"**

### **Some challenges in learning participation**

The participation learning process faces a number of challenges:

- The academic timetable. Students have to report their findings to the university at the end of the academic period; however, students' activities with different social groups are often still pending and therefore their results are incomplete.
- Cultural differences and cultural diversity. The challenge is to create an intercultural dialogue, e.g. between the agro-ecological technical approach and peasants' empirical knowledge.
- The relationship between different disciplinary approaches, e.g. natural sciences and social sciences, including differences in defining problems, solutions, and alternatives.
- The relationship between research, service, and action, and the learning process.
- Problems arising from the complex political situation and from social actions geared to transforming power relations from the local to the national level.

### **Conclusions**

Our university work in Chiapas began 20 years ago with a health programme that developed a novel approach to bridging theory and practice. We learned a lot from this experience in which students chose to conduct their social service by developing their professional practice around community health. They and their work have been fundamental in the next phases of our initiative.

The Zapatistas movement launched in 1994 obliged us to revise what we were doing and how we were doing it. In 1995 a new approach was proposed, and our research

programme on human development was launched in Chiapas, attracting high levels of interest from students and teachers and important support from our university community. However, our commitment to working with the population, many of whom are in opposition to the Government, has meant that we have been under increasing pressure from the Government to withdraw from Chiapas.

In 2000, there were important political changes both at the national and at the Chiapas state level. For the first time in decades, opposition parties won both the presidential and the Chiapas government elections. When the new governments came to power there was hope of a political solution to the indigenous Zapatistas' demands. But, three years on, these expectations have not been fulfilled, negotiations are suspended, and the social situation is very difficult. The Zapatistas decided to maintain resistance, which means that they do not receive any kind of governmental programmes while their demands for changes are not accomplished. Nevertheless, some changes have occurred and in this new phase we have continued with our work.

In this situation, just maintaining our research-service-action work is a very significant achievement. It develops a new learning experience that relates our students to this complex situation and opens them up to the possibility of collaborating with regional social actors in the search for alternatives. That some of these students have decided to stay on there to continue these engagements is both an important result and a key basis for strengthening our work for the future.

We recognise that the needs are great, while the human and material resources are small. Likewise, a lot of work is necessary to achieve the profound social, economical, political, and cultural changes that are needed. Nonetheless, this experience has been very important, and we are very proud of our students, of their open minds, and of their capacity to learn. We have a lot to learn from them and from local practitioners. The main lesson is that, even in this complex situation, human development is a possibility and learning participation is a necessary condition for its achievement.

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# LEARNING NETWORKS AND METHODS FOR INSTITUTIONALISING AND MAINSTREAMING LEARNING AND TEACHING PARTICIPATION

## 10

# Co-learning processes in a participatory poverty reduction programme

By STEFFANIE SCOTT AND TRUONG THI KIM CHUYEN

## Introduction: participation in a Vietnamese context

This paper reflects on Vietnamese-Canadian experiences of promoting participatory development planning in a collaborative university linkage programme. The Canadian-funded Localised Poverty Reduction in Vietnam (LPRV) programme sought to build the capacity of higher education institutions to contribute to participatory poverty reduction through community-based projects and participatory curriculum development. The 'localised' dimension of the programme meant adapting poverty reduction methods to local administrative, cultural, and environmental conditions.

The authors of this paper have been involved (Scott) as a Canadian research associate, facilitating workshops in Vietnam, supervising interns' work in community profiling (as a preface to developing community-level poverty reduction project proposals) and contributing to on-going programme planning and lessons learnt, and (Chuyen) as a Vietnamese member of a university-based Centre for Poverty Reduction established through the LPRV programme, and engaged in workshops, community projects, and curriculum development. The observations we present in this paper are an outcome of our collective reflections over the past five years of the LPRV programme.

'Participation', in Vietnam and in Vietnamese, has multiple meanings and uses. Depending on the situation, *su tham*

Exploring models  
for collaboration



Photo: LPRV

*gia* or *su tham du* can mean to be present, to be involved, to contribute, or to have voice. Participation in development has a multi-layered history in Vietnam. Vietnam is home to age-old practices of village-level collective action including participatory decision making, rotating credit groups, labour sharing, and other forms of mutual assistance. Layered amongst these experiences is the legacy of socialist planning (e.g. the structure of agricultural collectives and mass organisations such as the Women's Union, the Farmers' Association, the Veteran's Association, and the Youth Association). Such organisational structures were in theory as much bottom up

as they were top down.

Through the system of socialist planning implemented in the past half-century in northern (and, after 1975, southern) Vietnam, policies were introduced to minimise the social distance between leaders and 'the people'. 'Participation' largely took the form of class-based mobilisation of peasants and workers. The mass organisations provided an institutional basis for different groups in society to participate and to have their own voice. However, this did not always provide an enabling environment for effective participation in practice. Due to a series of internal and external factors, institutions grew less effective. Agricultural collectives were ambitiously expanded, only to face diminishing returns. It became difficult to motivate people for any kind of collective action, such as the maintenance of public works. People began to tire of endless meetings, empty slogans, and rhetorical speeches with few concrete outcomes to show for them. Overall, there was less interest in promoting participatory processes collectively than in seeking material gain individually. These sentiments were reinforced in the South as the country entered an era of post-war recovery with the reunification of North and South Vietnam.

### The LPRV programme

While Vietnam has achieved an impressive record of poverty reduction in recent years, the number of impoverished people is still very high, and growing inequalities are a cause for concern. The LPRV programme was initiated by a group of people from Vietnamese and Canadian academic institutions, with the following goal:

*To build self-sustaining capacity in the partner institutions to develop and teach low-cost, participatory policy assessment and project planning methods that are effective in generating appropriate solutions to localised poverty, and suited to Vietnamese cultures and administrative conditions.*

The five-year programme (1998–2003) was funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and involves two Canadian universities, the National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities (NCSSH) in Hanoi, and five universities across Vietnam. An overview of the programme's partners, strategies, outputs, and scales of impact is provided in Table 1.

The programme emphasised not just the development of skills among individuals, but capacity building of institutions, particularly universities. A network of university-based Centres for Poverty Reduction (CPRs) was established, one at

**Table 1: Overview of the LPRV programme**

Main partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Canada: University of British Columbia and Université Laval; CIDA; World University Services of Canada</li> <li>• In Vietnam: NCSSH; the Universities of Thai Nguyen, Vinh, Hue, and Dalat, and the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Ho Chi Minh City; national, provincial, and local governments and communities</li> </ul>
Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forming a network of university-based Centres for Poverty Reduction</li> <li>• Testing and adapting participatory methods for poverty reduction in diverse social, cultural, and geographical contexts in 15 pilot projects nation-wide</li> </ul>
Outputs and outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New curriculum and training programmes for university students and state officials</li> <li>• Outcomes of community poverty-reduction projects</li> <li>• Policy recommendations</li> </ul>
Scales of impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National and provincial level: via policy assessment activities and training courses for local officials; using NCSSH contacts with various ministries; liaising with Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction programme committees</li> <li>• Local/community level: via learning-by-doing commune projects</li> </ul>

each of the five Vietnamese universities, and a coordinating CPR at the NCSSH. Each CPR served as a resource centre and a hub of activity for eight or more academics and a number of student assistants.

The programme engaged universities, local citizens and communities, and the state in 'testing' and adapting participatory project planning and policy assessment methods in diverse social, cultural, and geographical contexts in Vietnam. Each CPR practiced the methods in three pilot projects initiated in successive years. These pilot projects (ranging from irrigation pumps to livestock raising to eco-tourism) emphasised participatory processes, and the formation and strengthening of community groups, in some cases building on traditions of mutual aid and rotating credit groups. Reorienting the three main functions of universities – research, teaching, and community engagement – towards participatory action research to address poverty was the basis for LPRV's re-envisioning of the university as an engaged actor for poverty reduction efforts.

The institutionalisation – or, at least, institutional endorsement – of a participatory approach at the level of university heads was a key achievement of LPRV. With this

Community participation in one of the pilot projects



Photo: LPRV

impetus, several CPRs, in conjunction with the Ministry of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs, have been involved in designing and delivering training on participatory planning for poverty reduction for district-level staff. CPRs have taken part in local-level committees of the national Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction programme, written monthly columns on poverty in a provincial newspaper, and profiled their community-based pilot projects on videos produced with Vietnam Television.

An enduring outcome and unique element of LPRV is the broad-based effort to have universities, in Canada and Vietnam, commit to a pan-university engagement in poverty reduction activity. Achieving this should yield a greater impact than would government or NGO-sponsored projects alone, or engaging individual academics in poverty-related consultancy, research or teaching. Although the long-term outcomes of LPRV remain to be seen, positive spin-offs are already evident. The CPRs will become permanent centres at the five Vietnamese universities. Some of the universities have established new programmes (e.g. the School of Social Work and Community Development at the University of Dalat) or

pan-university initiatives to institutionalise participatory action research and problem-based learning approaches (being piloted in the new Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry, and Aquaculture at the University of Vinh). Plans are underway to sustain and expand the existing network of cooperation and communication among partner institutions in Vietnam beyond the culmination of LPRV in 2003.

### Co-learning and facilitating participation in LPRV

The LPRV programme sought to facilitate participation at two levels: between Canadian and Vietnamese university partners, and between Vietnamese universities and local communities. The programme employed a mutual learning approach which acknowledged that learning is a two-way process. Throughout the programme, we attempted to overcome common asymmetrical relationships between partners in the North and South. Programme activities were not entirely pre-determined from the outset. This contributed to greater ownership of the programme by the Vietnamese partners, providing scope for adaptation according to their interests and capacities. The CPRs at each of the Vietnamese

**Output of a community meeting****Photo: LPRV**

universities facilitated communication of lessons internally. Lessons from the projects then fed into course books and training materials for university students, government officials, and others.

### Community-based learning

Pilot projects in 15 communities were a way for universities to enhance their outreach and develop links with poor communities, and to practise and document their experiences of participatory project planning for poverty reduction. Following a series of workshops on foundational concepts in poverty reduction, learning-by-doing community planning, and related themes during the first two years of the programme, the university teams moved into an application of participatory planning approaches (e.g. community profiling) in the 15 pilot projects in the final three years. Through these activities, differences emerged, between and among Canadians and Vietnamese, over how poverty is understood and researched – as a process of positivist, externally-driven measurements, or a process of open-ended community dialogue and planning through a learning-by-doing approach

## **“The LPRV programme engaged universities, local citizens and communities, and the state in ‘testing’ and adapting participatory project planning and policy assessment methods in Vietnam”**

– and how planning for poverty reduction might take place. It is unfortunate that these diverging viewpoints were not sufficiently debated between Canadian and Vietnamese university partners, or with community residents.

Achievements in these micro-projects were mixed. In some ways CPR members fell back on conventional modes of service delivery or charity models, encouraging attitudes of dependency or applying participatory tools rather mechanically. This can be attributed to a number of factors:

- The short-term nature of the projects (one to two years) meant that the long-term relationships and trust needed to facilitate participatory processes were not fully developed.
- CPR members lacked experience with participatory planning tools and approaches.
- Due to their emphasis on ‘learning-by-doing’, most Canadian programme members did not want to over-direct the process of learning participatory approaches as might have happened in a more conventional, structured training programme. Canadians eschewed any references to their roles in LPRV as ‘coaching’ or ‘training’. As this approach was not fully appreciated by Vietnamese partners, it sometimes led to a perception that participation is all talk and no action. Well-structured training programmes could perhaps have more concretely and effectively demonstrated tools and methods for working with poor and marginalised people.

Although a process of participatory learning and planning should be a means to a better end, Vietnamese villagers and CPR members alike repeatedly voiced frustrations with excessive consultations that did not yield sufficient tangible outputs. Only after some immediate benefits are provided to community residents, they said, could issues of participatory processes be addressed. This attitude of favouring **product** over **process** seems to stem from previous experiences of participatory discourses under socialist development, which failed to deliver.

Specific funding had not been set aside for developing these micro-projects. The expectation (on the Canadian side) was that, rather than providing material inputs, there would be poverty reduction ‘initiatives’, e.g. organising groups to



Thai Nguyen CPR  
planning meeting



Photo: LPRV

qualify for agricultural extension training, to cooperate in food processing or marketing, or to develop a project proposal to submit to another funding agency. However, the CPR members soon realised the difficulty of initiating projects in poor communities without offering any 'goods' up front. This problem was raised with the Canadian university partners, and LPRV funding regulations were eventually amended to allow up to US \$10,000 for each community-level micro-project.

Participatory planning might also have been more effectively promoted by tapping into the significant technical expertise of many of the Vietnamese. Participatory methods and tools could have been more carefully integrated into specific fields or sectors such as public health, irrigation, animal husbandry, gender and forestry, community-based coastal resource management, or indigenous knowledge in primary school curricula, rather than developing more generic materials, e.g. manuals on gender and poverty reduction or participatory project planning and management. Despite the recent 'reinvention' of participatory development in community-level projects in Vietnam (led by NGOs or university partners), it will take a lot of convincing for local residents and technically-oriented academics to have faith that a participatory planning process will indeed yield concrete outcomes that are more appropriate and responsive to local aspirations.

### Participatory curriculum development

Following the workshops in the first two years of LPRV, the CPR teams began to produce a series of course books for university students, local officials, and other practitioners. This participatory curriculum development exercise was a way for the Vietnamese university partners to synthesise their learning from the earlier workshops and to integrate their initial experiences from the community-level pilot projects. Drafts of each course book were presented at workshops for comments from other Vietnamese and Canadian programme partners. The material from some of these books has already been used in various training courses for local officials and university students. These attempts at drafting tools and methods appropriate for Vietnam are likely to serve as initial steps in a broader process of national curriculum reform.

Canadians disagreed somewhat on their interpretation of 'learning-by-doing' and therefore the extent of input to offer in the curriculum development process. The learning-by-doing approach provided space for people to experiment and make mistakes. However, the limited input from the Canadians and NCSSH meant that the books suffered from a lack of consistency, coherence, and clear criteria or standards against which to assess the final products. A closer working relationship between Vietnamese and Canadian partners, with Canadians providing summaries and additional materials,



might have improved the process and the final product.

Effective leadership and division of labour are not incompatible with participatory processes. The critiques and frustrations voiced by some (Vietnamese and Canadian) programme members reflected (1) a lack of central leadership and coordination of outputs, which stemmed from weaknesses in programme management, and (2) the passive rather than active facilitation role often modelled by Canadians. Many Vietnamese members seemed to be uncomfortable with the open-endedness of a learning-by-doing approach in which the process is given as much emphasis as the outcome. On the Canadian side, there may have been a tacit assumption that Vietnamese institutions (at the university or community level) were already participatory and inclusive. Or, Canadian programme leaders may have believed that long-term exposure and interaction would be more appropriate than directly intervening and questioning hierarchical relationships. The existence of such relationships became evident during the project, between university lecturers and community residents, and between junior and senior university staff (e.g. in terms of access to computers, information, and travel opportunities).

## Conclusion

This article points to key challenges for North-South modalities of partnership in a postcolonial world, for overcoming the long legacy of northern countries' socio-economic, intellectual, and cultural domination over the South (Cebotarev, 1995). Conventionally, northern partners have their own research agendas and southern partners are confined to roles as implementers of research projects or recipients of training. Our efforts and analysis are a starting point to redress these patterns, but these (often sensitive) 'process' questions need to be examined in more depth. Our discussion of participation is also, necessarily, about relationships between partners and about creating a culture of learning within an organisation.

In sum, the main issues faced by Canadians and Viet-

## "An enduring outcome and unique element of LPRV is the broad-based effort to have universities, in Canada and Vietnam, commit to a pan-university engagement in poverty reduction activity"

namese university partners in 'co-learning participation' through this programme can be summed up as follows:

- Epistemological differences concerning how poverty is understood and researched (see Shaffer, 1996), and how poverty reduction is envisioned;
- Culturally engrained social hierarchies in Vietnam (based on age, status, and education)
- The quality of academic outputs in the capacity building process; and
- Canadians' reluctance to give frank and critical feedback, in an attempt to avoid sensitivities and to be encouraging, recognising that learning is a gradual process.

The LPRV programme was an enormous undertaking, and we, as two individual authors of this paper, cannot claim to represent the viewpoints of all of those involved. The implementation of the LPRV programme was limited by some factors, such as hierarchical relations within universities, but was given extra impetus through other factors, including the priority given by the Vietnam government to poverty reduction. This context of participation had important impacts on the effectiveness and interpretations of participation in the LPRV programme. Mainstreaming participation requires a supportive macro policy environment from the state, plus specific initiatives from universities to gradually make new approaches commonplace and to prove the effectiveness of the outputs of participation. In this way, institutions gradually change. LPRV is one example of an effort in this direction.

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## 11

# Institutionalising participation in Eastern Africa research institutes

By CHRIS OPONDO, ANN STROUD, LAURA GERMAN, and JÜRGEN HAGMANN

## Introduction

The African Highlands Initiative (AHI) was started in 1995 to address complex livelihoods and integrated natural resources management (INRM) issues. Endorsed by the directors of national agricultural research institutions (NARIs) institutions, AHI set out to develop participatory research methodologies (PRMs) and integrated, systems approaches as 'new' ways of implementing research and development (R&D) processes. This work aims to empower smallholder farmers, foster innovative development, and positively influence practices used by R&D organisations. The NARIs of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Madagascar, together with agricultural extension personnel and a number of local NGOs, work collaboratively under the AHI umbrella at benchmark sites that exhibit environmental degradation and high poverty levels.

Given the dearth of experience and conceptual development in participatory methods, AHI has invested in building the competencies of researchers and others through training courses, mentoring, exchange visits, peer review, applying participatory M&E, and using reflection sessions. However, even after four to five years of exposure some researchers still view PRMs with scepticism. On the other hand there are promising results in AHI pilot areas where researchers' work with farmer research groups has resulted in quick uptake of multiple technologies. Thus, there are 'islands' where PRM

has been largely accepted, used, and appreciated.

Although the AHI pilot teams were convinced of the value of PRM, they felt that if their institutions did not support PRM, then it would not survive and spread. Therefore, AHI decided to support the documentation and analysis of key lessons from their past work using PRM, and facilitate the establishment of strategies for the institutionalisation of a participatory INRM approach (AHI, 2002). AHI now has a mandate from ASARECA<sup>1</sup> to assist NARIs in this respect, and work started with two NARIs in 2001.

This article begins by examining some of the barriers to institutionalisation identified during AHI's work. It then describes the learning approach used to introduce PRMs to NARIs. Lessons learnt from this process are drawn out, and the strategies being developed to institutionalise PRM in East African NARIs are then discussed. The article ends by outlining some of the challenges still faced in institutionalising PRM.

## Barriers to institutionalising PRM

Finding ways to get public institutions to embrace innovation – specifically the use of participatory approaches – is a major challenge.

Institutions of higher learning in the North and South, who are responsible for training researchers joining the African NARS, have not adequately trained professionals in

## **“AHI has invested in building the competencies of researchers and others through training courses, mentoring, exchange visits, peer review, applying participatory M&E, and using reflection sessions”**

PRMs. They tend to encourage graduates to believe they have ‘elite’ status, which makes it difficult for them to accept the idea of working in partnership with farmers, where a more equal status needs to underpin the work and greater respect given to local knowledge and practical experience. A ‘learning culture’ has not been fostered in NARIs and other research institutions, largely because they are seen as sources of ‘expertise’ and therefore not in need of a system for continuous learning.

There are also deeply rooted attitudinal biases in favour of the ‘hard sciences’ within NARIs and other research institutions. Biophysical scientists dominate, and few sociologists, anthropologists, and rural development specialists are hired. Nor do needed skills such as facilitation, negotiation, team leadership, and managing partnerships feature in training offered. Little attention is paid to the ‘human’ and cultural factors related to the internalisation and application of PRM, e.g. managing researcher-farmer power relations, handling researchers’ professional identity, nor to fostering a learning culture to encourage incorporation of PRM into the research process.

Agricultural researchers, and their organisations, generally regard themselves as being accountable for generating ‘hard’ technologies and passing these on to farmers via agricultural extension or development agents. In this process, researchers do not take direct responsibility for non-adoption, nor do they make deliberate efforts to ensure that technologies lead to concrete benefits. In most research organisations, professional rewards and advancement are based on crop variety development and scientific papers. There is no reward for using PRM, incorporating important social and institutional dimensions into one’s work, and being more responsive to clients’ priorities and needs.

Scepticism concerning the scientific rigour of PRM and limited expertise that negatively affects PRM quality also impede use. Data and case studies that can convince research managers that PRM is necessary to make a contribution are hard to come by, partly due to the fact that it is difficult to quantify the benefits of PRM in handling social aspects of technology adoption.

### **Box 1: Developing a learning approach to PRMs**

- A series of regional training courses on PRM followed by site training were held in 1998.
- A regional stakeholders’ workshop in 1999 laid the basis for a ‘learning’ culture by establishing a shared vision of research needs to ensure that farmers and farmers’ organisations are successful, an operational plan, associated methods, and an M&E system to monitor change.
- A series of M&E and participatory methodology training and reflection sessions, involving NARI scientists and partners, were held at the benchmark sites. These emphasised group and individual experiential learning (systematic self-reflection, observation, and feedback on the implementation of PRM), interdisciplinary and integrated team work, and multi-institutional partnerships (important components of INRM).
- The site-level outcomes were processed and shared back to and among sites.
- An amalgamated cross-site analysis was made where key learning points were highlighted and disseminated.
- Repeated visits were made to reflect on subsequent stages of implementation of PRM and INRM components.
- Reflection sessions and a SWOT analysis were held after a three-year period. The need for mentoring was recognised and a regional team was established to mentor site teams.

To begin to overcome these barriers, AHI has developed a learning approach to the use of PRM.

### **Evolution of the learning approach**

NARI staff involved in AHI have been trained and mentored in PRM using an iterative process over a three-year period (1999–2002). Initially, implementers of AHI used regional training and one-off workshops on PRM to enhance the capacity of individuals and teams. However, these did not result in the desired level of change in practice. Therefore, AHI started complementing them with team or site workshops with facilitated reflection sessions. Later *in situ* mentoring was added, to increase individual, group, and organisational learning (Box 1).

The AHI learning approach thus involves facilitated reflection by practitioners on ‘what went well’, ‘what did not go well’, ‘why’, and ‘what should be done to improve’. Performance assessment frameworks are now being created to guide this reflection (see next section).

Some key insights resulting from this process, which have helped to shape field practice and future work, include:

- Team learning in the field complements individual learning. Shared field experiences and information led to the discovery of new approaches and broadened the perspectives of researchers. For example, biophysical scientists at KARI (the Kenyan NARI) recognised the need to learn more about the social and cultural dimensions of the farming community.

Learning with farmers at a benchmark site, Ginchi, Ethiopia



Photo: Tilahun Amede

They wanted social science research to be incorporated into their activities.

- Practical field sessions with farmers led to researchers 'learning-by-doing'. Researchers gained better insights into farm system management and how research could enhance impact. In Lushoto, Tanzania, for example, an experiment on farmyard manure with Mjingu Phosphate Rock (MPR) was changed significantly from the original researcher design after farmer input. Since the Lushoto farmers did not have enough manure, the design was modified to use MPR and tughutu, a local shrub used by farmers to enhance their soil fertility. This interaction resulted in more relevant research and increased the researchers' motivation to use these methods.
- Interdisciplinarity reduced tensions and competition between professionals. In conventional practice, specific disciplines operate fairly autonomously given the planning, funding, and reductionist approaches within most institutions. With the new PRM methods, reflection sessions and teamwork increased the frequency of consultations and joint field activities involving scientists and collaborating partners. For example, demonstrations on the use of green manure to improve soil fertility and crop yield required frequent consultations between agronomists, an agricultural economist, a soil scientist, and a livestock nutritionist, who worked for various R&D organisations in the area.
- Shared vision led to expanded roles and responsibilities. At the organisational level, the visioning exercise carried out in 1999 sharpened the perspective of the different disciplines and institutions involved, clarifying more precisely what they needed to do, and how they might relate to each other differently. For example, farmers would change from the role of recipients to partners in development; and researchers (and other service/support organisations) would change from being suppliers to facilitators of farmer- and community-led innovations.

#### Box 2: Guiding principles and values for effective research

- Inclusiveness: consider choice of farmers & give equal opportunity
- Differentiate problems for various social strata
- Understand farmers' situations and value their knowledge
- Build genuine partnerships and facilitate dialogue with farmers and other stakeholders
- Build farmers' capacities to manage their own affairs through participation + self reliance
- Research should be problem driven and demand oriented
- Access to technologies: create flexibility and options
- Joint ownership: role clarification, transparency, build confidence
- Trust in farmers' potentials and their capabilities
- Recognise that farmers are their own experts in their situation
- Experiential learning for both researchers and farmers
- Continuous improvement: systematic monitoring of progress and reflection on approach

*Adapted from EARO, DRD and AHI Regional Workshops held in 2001/02*

- A more supportive organisational environment is needed to enhance adoption of PRM. Although learning and developing PRMs as individuals and teams has been valuable, the teams also identified a need for institutional support to make these methods standard practice. Therefore, in addition to building capacity through mentoring and the creation of 'working models' of PRM in action, AHI has begun to facilitate self-managed institutional change processes. These will encourage organisations to search for ways to provide a more supportive environment for the application of PRM.

#### Developing self-managed institutional change processes

In 2001/2, AHI began working with the Ethiopian Agricultural Research Organisation (EARO) and the Department for Research and Development (DRD) in Tanzania to promote institutional change processes. An important principle is that these should be self-managed but guided by facilitation, so that NARIs understand and own the process and innovation. The process is intended to assist NARI researchers and managers in 'holding up the mirror' so as to identify where change is needed to conduct more effective research, which includes quality use of PRM.

At a series of workshops, participants revisited their shared vision and developed a set of guiding principles (see Box 2) and success factors for effective R&D (Box 3). Participants also identified a performance assessment framework. This has components for each major player (farmers, farmer organisations, researchers, research managers, policy makers, extension agents, and NGOs) and

### Box 3: Success factors for managing effective R&D processes

- linkages and partnerships among stakeholders
- farmer participation and commitment
- community facilitation of R&D process
- local organisational capacity
- commitment and capacity of research teams
- basket of technical options and innovations
- learning through process monitoring and documentation
- farmer learning through sharing and exposure
- supportive research management system
- farmer experimentation
- market orientation
- multi-disciplinary and systems approach
- scaling up strategy
- supportive policies
- designing and operationalising research

Source: the EARO and DRD workshops on Assessing Participatory Research, 2001/02

for each of these actors there are a number of areas (performance areas) that they must focus on if they are to be successful. Associated with these are a set of indicators which show whether or not good practice is being achieved.

The performance assessment frameworks are still under construction as we continue to test them in the field, and identify success factors and elements, gaps, and challenges. Findings are shared with managers in order to develop more effective ways of supporting research from the practitioner's, manager's and organisation's perspectives.

Next steps include:

- setting up a platform for learning across research 'islands' and to gather up best practice;
- setting up a platform or mechanisms for managers to be more in touch with researchers' field activities; and
- setting up committees to review organisational norms, rules, etc. on promotions, planning, and M&E so they better reflect the performance criteria agreed upon (for example, team work is needed but currently not rewarded).

For reasons of space, this is a simplified version of the process. Further details are given in Stroud and Hagmann (forthcoming).

### Key challenges for the future

Norms and values of participatory innovation and learning (participatory research, integrated team work, partnerships, participatory technology development, farmer innovations) may be met with scepticism, fear, and sabotage by

### Key success factors for effective R&D, EARO workshop



Photo: Jürgen Hagmann

researchers and their organisations. Initiators of change must confront these challenges and treat institutional change as a process that needs to be managed at the levels of attitudes, behaviour, and practice.

There is now the potential for researchers to build a learning culture that can assist in 'unblocking' researchers and their institutions from current learning barriers and foster more open, creative, and responsive organisations. Key factors in managing the change process are:

- building a mutual understanding of new concepts
- handling fear, anxiety, and vulnerability
- finding definitive ways that prove that new methods and tools work
- dealing with the 'results gaps'
- handling expectations from within and without
- dealing with the non-believers (Stroud, 2003)

The vision is to improve leadership and facilitation skills, reward champions of change, give recognition for the use of innovative results, and create an unthreatening environment for dialogue about 'poor' results. These are all critical supporting elements that enable learning teams and their organisations to sustain the momentum for change (Stroud, 2003).

It is extremely important to address the issue of quality of science and participation, setting up ways to monitor / measure the quality of participation once it is defined. For instance, assessing who participates – and to what degree – in participatory learning is a dimension that needs systematic treatment. Otherwise, PRM will never be accepted.

It is also necessary to identify indicators of change so that one can recognise progress. For example, a researcher's admission that s/he is ignorant of farmers' indigenous knowledge is an important change in cognitive orientation. Similarly, if a breeder recognises the need to learn about social dimensions of the community, and integrates this step into his/her research protocol, allocating resources for facilitation, this is an important indicator of constructive change. AHI has seen some indications such as these in the pilot teams, but wishes to see them spread more widely within NARIs.



A further challenge is to change reward structures. Currently, rigid mind sets and organisational norms are perpetuated through reward systems that only recognise scientific outputs such as crop varieties and management technologies, and scientific papers. Research results obtained through 'soft sciences' (anthropology and sociology) and PRM, which result in qualitative changes (empow-

erment, farmer, and institutional innovation), are not recognised and rewarded, and limited expertise is available to bring these approaches into the mainstream. Without capacity building and reformed reward structures, PRM is unlikely to be institutionalised. This is currently where AHI sees its agenda – in fostering institutional change to support these new practices.

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# What are Democs?

By **PERRY WALKER**

Democs is an acronym standing for 'Deliberative Meetings of Citizens.' Democs have been developed by UK think tank Nef (the new economics foundation) to make it easier for people to work out, share, and express their views on public policy issues. We wanted something that anyone who wished could use, to give the possibility of reaching large numbers at reasonable cost.

We have produced a game, in kit form, that allows a group of around six people to find out about an issue, discuss it, seek common ground, and give their views. This takes a couple of hours or so. It can be used with a facilitator as part of a formal public meeting (a recent gathering in Edinburgh, UK brought together over 80 people using nearly 20 kits) or informally without a facilitator by a group of friends or family around the kitchen table.

Democs were developed initially in the field of human genetics. Nef has recently produced and distributed 100 kits as part of the UK government's GM Nation debate. This examines whether genetically modified crops should be grown commercially in the UK. Democs made their first foray into local government in June 2003, being used by the Greater London Authority to consult on their ambient noise strategy.

**Participants at a Democs launch event, June 2002**



## What happens

Each game has the same four elements but the content of these varies according to the topic. These elements are:

- policy positions
- fact cards
- issue cards
- scenario cards

**Box 1: Scenario 3: Should Ruritania go GM?**

A large US-based multi-national seed company Biotechfarm wants to get its GM products into the European market, but is stalled by European Union (EU) public opposition to GM in existing member states. Ruritania soon hopes to become a member of the EU. Biotechfarm decides to target it, and makes a presentation to the Ruritanian government promoting the benefits of the company's GM variety of an indigenous Ruritanian crop. The Minister of Agriculture is eager to sign a contract, believing it will benefit the struggling economy. She is advised to hold a public consultation about whether her country should introduce GM crops. She puts a notice asking for comment on a Ministry website for two weeks. Few people know that the website exists, but she concludes there is no public opposition to Ruritania going GM.

What happens in the game varies a little depending on the topic. This example is based on the GM kit mentioned above.

Everyone in the group of six or so starts by introducing themselves and by reading some scenario cards illustrating the personal and social dilemmas that the topic throws up. Box 1 shows an example of a scenario card.

Someone, an outside facilitator or a member of the group, sets the scene, summarises what will happen, and introduces the guidelines for a good conversation (Box 2).

People are offered the chance to suggest amendments to these guidelines, although they almost never do. Everyone is dealt a yellow card to wave if they don't understand what is going on or if someone else is not abiding by the guidelines.

One person acts as dealer. He or she deals out to the players 36 fact cards in six categories. There are two rounds where everyone has the chance to read out a card they think important or to ask a question. Someone might ask, 'What GM crops are we talking about?'. Someone else might say 'I think I've got a card that helps' and read out the fifth card in the 'What sort of GM?' category: 'Most current applications of GM involve increasing a plant's tolerance to herbicides or resistance to insect pests'. Other cards give examples of crop types. Everyone contributes from the cards in their hand; everyone gets to ask basic questions without looking stupid.

The fact cards chosen as most important are laid out on a table, in no particular order. Issue cards are then dealt. For example, 'Can sufficient GM or non-GM choice be offered through clear labelling?'. Everyone chooses two and places them on the table.

People then discuss the main issues and work out what is really important for them. One person might ask, 'Are any of these GM crops going to produce something which would benefit my family? Or are they just for the profits of

**Box 2: Guidelines to a good conversation**

1. **We are all equal** – one person, one voice as well as one person, one vote.
2. **Your view matters** – especially if you are the only one who holds it because no one else will say it, but share air time.
3. **Speak the truth of your heart** – if you find yourself speaking on behalf of others, try asking a question instead.
4. **Listeners are as important as speakers** – work at listening well and allow others to finish before you speak.
5. **Seek to understand** – rather than persuade.
6. **Seek the wisdom of the group** – together we have far more knowledge and wisdom than any of us can have alone. You can always learn from others however far apart you appear to be.
7. **Look for common ground** – this is the way forward.
8. **Notice when you feel surprised or confused** – this is a sign that what you've just heard challenges what you believed or valued before. What are your beliefs and values on this issue? Is there a conflict between them?

some big company?'. The group records the discussion by making clusters from related fact and issue cards. They often link the issue card in the previous paragraph with fact cards such as 'Forthcoming EU law is likely to require any food containing over 0.9% of products of GM origin to be labelled'.

Once they have ordered the clusters, people can fill in a questionnaire that will be included in the Government's official consultation on GM crops.

With subjects other than GM, we usually have three or four policy positions that people vote on at the end of the game and sometimes at the start as well.

The table below shows the voting on over-the-counter (OTC) genetic testing kits. These kits test for the presence or absence of a particular gene chromosome. They diagnose diseases such as Huntington's, genes that may lead to future diseases, and people who don't have a disease but may pass it on to others.

We ran six events on this for the UK Human Genetics Commission (HGC). Forty-seven people attended the six events. The votes for the policy positions, which the HGC developed from a earlier consultation, are shown in Table 1. Note that they do not sum to 47 in all cases, showing that one or two people forgot to vote.

People could also add their own policy positions. For instance, one group said, 'Add to position four issues related to confidentiality and the need for reliable, unbiased information before and after test'. (This is an example of the balance we have tried to strike between providing structure and simplifying things, so that the game can be completed in an hour and a half, and giving participants as much control over the proceedings as possible.)

Participants follow the guidelines for a good conversation and wave a yellow card if anyone contravenes them



**Table 1: Policy positions**

	1. No strict regulation	2. Voluntary regulation with no restriction on types of test	3. Voluntary regulation with restrictions on types of test	4. Strict regulation
	Leave it to the market. Let consumers find out information. Existing consumer protection will ensure quality of products and services.	Voluntary codes of practice covering issues such as consent and information, quality standards etc. No restriction on types of tests available. No legal sanction. Could be issued by government or an advisory body, or by an industry body. This is roughly the current position in the UK.	Voluntary code of practice for some tests covering issues such as consent and information, quality standards etc. Other tests, which could have a high impact on the client (e.g. for Huntington's Disease) could not be sold without a doctor's involvement.	Similar to prescription-only drugs or HIV testing kits. Offence for person other than registered medical practitioner or other authorised person to offer a controlled genetic test.
Not acceptable	40	29	5	11
Acceptable	3	12	21	14
Support	1	1	20	18
Abstain	1	3	1	1

**Table 2: Fact cards for OTC genetic testing kits**

First set of categories	End result
Definitions	Definitions
Principles for genetic information	What genetic testing does
What genetic testing does	Technology
The general context	NHS testing
The legal context	OTC testing
	Regulation

### Developing the cards

So far, we have used an independent expert to develop the cards. On GM we chose Donald Bruce, an ethicist from the Society, Religion, and Technology Project of the Church of Scotland. He was someone whom the civil servants responsible for the debate felt would be respected by both sides. To have a single perspective though is not ideal and was forced on us by lack of time. In future we will probably add an advisory group representing organisations from different sides of the argument.

The first step is often to work out what the six categories of fact cards should be. Table 2 relates to the Human Genetics Commission (HGC) inquiry into over-the-counter genetic testing kits. It compares our set of categories, based on the HGC's own consultative document (we could only think of five categories) with the end result. We found it more helpful to look at exactly what genetic testing does rather than at general principles. We identified that people would want to understand the difference between testing on the National Health Service (NHS) and over-the-counter, and so added sections on each.

Since the game will be played by lay people, it is essential to involve them in at least reviewing the cards. This is what we failed to do when the trade experts within Nef developed a set of cards on Oxfam's trade policy. The Democs team checked the cards but we all know something of the topic so we didn't pay enough attention to acronyms. We had a set of cards called 'Trade and MNCs' which referred to the WTO and LDCs. (These acronyms conceal 'Multi-National Companies', the 'World Trade Organisation' and 'Less Developed Countries'.) One complex card, which in retrospect baffles even me, said that, 'More than 50 developing nations depend on three or fewer primary agricultural commodities for more than half their export earnings'.

With care, every card can be short and clear. For instance, an early card on genetic testing was, 'Currently, individuals who require a genetic test are referred by their GP to an NHS clinical genetics service. This should ensure

**Box 3: Development of cards on stem cell research**

Trial runs of the game with volunteers showed up the need to introduce IVF into the range of topics because the status of the embryo raised questions for people about this chronologically earlier issue. (IVF stands for 'in vitro fertilisation'. Eggs and sperm are combined outside the womb to create an embryo. When it has grown to eight cells, one or two are transferred to the womb.) New technical questions were raised. What normally happens to the placental cord? What consent for research are IVF couples invited to give and at what stage? Is it possible to take one or two cells from an early embryo to make stem cells, without destroying the embryo (as is done for pre-implantation genetic diagnosis), and could such an embryo be implanted and achieve a viable pregnancy? Although implantation of an embryo used in research is currently illegal under UK law, would this notion make a difference for someone who objected to embryo research because it destroyed live embryos?

that testing is performed to high standards, and that full information and counselling is provided'. The word count was halved by editing this down to, 'Currently, individuals are referred by their GP to a specialist, to see that they get information and counselling'.

Trials improve the content as well as the style. Box 3 describes the development of cards on stem cell research:

### The benefits of taking part

To the end of January 2003, nearly 350 people had taken part in around 60 games. We usually asked them to fill in a questionnaire at the end of the game. The questions were designed to test various hypotheses that we had developed about the effect of taking part. Our database shows that:

- Half the participants ended up with an increased understanding of views different from their own, and a quarter became 'more sympathetic' to them.
- A large majority managed to 'identify dilemmas' in their 'thinking and feeling' and just over a quarter resolved them.
- Seventy per cent felt 'slightly clearer than before' on the rights and wrongs of the issue and 12% felt much clearer.

Comments we have had include:

*It reminded me of Monopoly [a board game] when I was a kid, when that was the only time people talked to each other.*

*A terrific way of getting unspoken views into the open and enabling a richer discussion.*

*Everyone contributed on an equal footing. The amount of prior knowledge does not really matter since facts are given during the course of the game.*

**Many participants end up with an increased understanding of views different from their own as a result of playing Democs**



The responses we have had suggest that Democs have the following strengths:

- a game structure that makes them safe and enjoyable
- information is provided, so no prior knowledge is needed
- deliberative, in ways that encourage learning and the search for common ground
- the link to live issues and the opportunity where possible to influence policy on these issues
- quick to play
- appear to whet people's appetite for more
- very adaptable, e.g. can be run with or without a facilitator, informally at home, or as part of a large public meeting

### **Could they be useful for me?**

You might consider using Democs when:

- you want to involve a large number of people

- they need some information in order to tackle the issue in question

As ever, the disadvantages tend to be the flipside of the advantages:

- It takes time and effort to develop the cards. It wouldn't be worthwhile for a single event with a few people.
- This is true even if you wanted to cover a topic for which a set of cards had already been developed. Some of the cards will need adapting because legal frameworks vary from country to country, because new research has been reported, and so on.

Democs works well if a game is facilitated by someone who has played before, so they know what to expect. We haven't yet achieved our ambition that anyone can be given a kit and can use it straightaway. It is too different from anything they are likely to have experienced before and

there are too many different bits of paper. We'll be working to make it simpler and to make it easier to play, for example by providing videos so that people new to it can see what to expect. We also intend to try providing a little training to facilitators, then supporting them to organise and run games.

In a social science research context, clients often want representative samples. The flipside of producing a kit for anyone who wants it is that the people who play are unlikely

to be representative. Again, we are working on this, to see for instance if there is a way of weighting the views of participants according to their under- or over-representation.

In conclusion, we've overcome some but not all of the reservations of the sceptics. We used one view as the title of our report on the evolution of Democs. We called it, 'So you're using a card game to make policy recommendations?'. Underneath we printed a quotation from Albert Einstein: 'If at first an idea is not absurd, there's no hope for it'.

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#### NOTE

Do let us know if you want to have a go. We'll try either to post you a kit or email you one, depending on where you are. They're free, although each kit costs about £30 to make, so donations are always welcome. What is even more important, though, is that you have a go and send us back the feedback forms so that we know how you got on.



# Participatory capacity building in NGOs

By JUDITH CHAUMBA AND JOUWERT VAN GEENE

Capacity building is a buzzword commonly encountered in the work of NGOs. It is often interpreted as being concerned only with training and staff development, but it actually encompasses much more than this, as we discuss in this article. In Zimbabwe, NANGO (the National Association for NGOs) together with an external consultant has developed a method for participatory capacity assessment and planning. Facilitated by NANGO, organisations have begun a process of self-diagnosis, analysis, and strategic capacity planning. This has brought together NGOs from one sector to identify their similarities and to find ways of assisting each other in building sustainable capacity.

## Capacity for what?

Capacity is the power of something (a system, an organisation, a person) to perform or to produce. It may be defined as the ability of individuals and organisations to perform functions effectively, efficiently, and sustainably. To clarify capacity in its context it is necessary to answer the question: capacity for what? Here we narrow down capacity as the ability to solve a problem, to achieve or sustain a mission, or to reach a set of objectives. NGOs need capacity to achieve their planned objectives, to have an impact, and to fulfil their organisational purpose.

It has been widely acknowledged that insufficient capac-

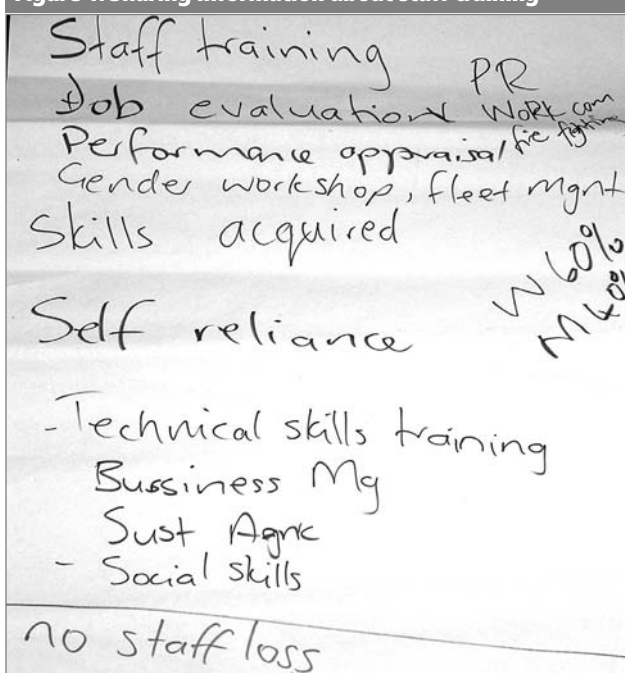
ity of development organisations hinders sustainable development. This problem however cannot be defined simply in terms of gaps in human resources, financial resources, or training. The issue is a function of several aspects including:

- excessive dependency of NGOs on external resources and technical assistance, leading to:
- limited sense of local ownership of the development processes by the NGO and its target groups, also caused by the top-down approaches of projects;
- inadequate consideration of broader environmental or systems factors, such as undeveloped NGO legislation; and/or
- poor integration and coordination of multiple development/programme initiatives between different stakeholders such as government, NGOs, and private sector partners.

## The Participatory Capacity Building (PCB) process

To address issues of 'lacking' capacity many organisations seek external assistance, expertise, or resources. Capacity building often turns out to be externally driven: external experts define an organisation's problems and bring in external solutions. Capacity building strategies are then likely to fail due to lack of ownership and limiting internal understanding of the problems.

Figure 1: Sharing information about staff training



The PCB process, developed by an independent consultant, Jouwert van Geene, in partnership with NANGO, breaks radically break with this tradition. It consists of three steps: participatory capacity assessment, strategic capacity planning, and operational planning. The first two steps use predefined methodologies and involve externally facilitated one-day workshops. The last step is carried out internally by the organisation, without external facilitation, and it may be done as a collaboration with a wider group of NGOs in the same sector.

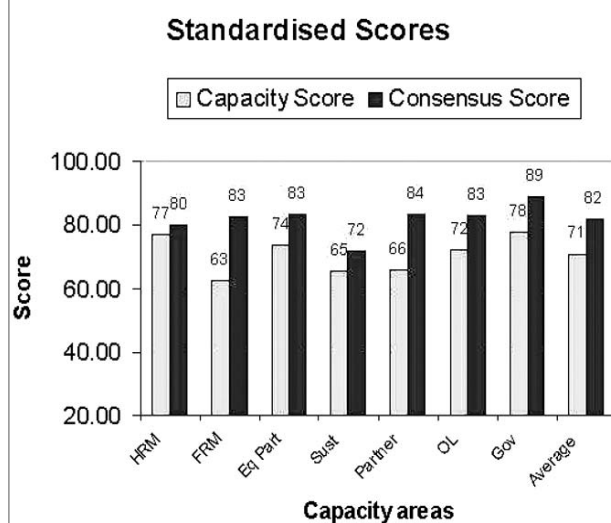
### Participatory capacity assessment

The first step is based upon a tool developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) called POET.<sup>1</sup> In a one-day workshop the assessment team of the organisation is guided through a set of discussions to assess the current capacity of the organisation. Seven capacity areas of the organisation are discussed:

- Human resource management: how the organisation deals with staff.

<sup>1</sup> Participatory Organisational Evaluation Tool (POET) was developed in 1998 by Beryl Levinger of the Education Development Center and Evan Bloom of Pact, with assistance from the UNDP and numerous Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). Based on a methodology called PROSE (Participatory, Results-Oriented Self-Evaluation), POET focuses on the needs of Southern CSOs and their partners. The POET Users' manual can be downloaded from the UNDP website: [www.undp.org/csopp/poet.htm](http://www.undp.org/csopp/poet.htm).

Figure 2: Example of the results of a participatory capacity assessment



Note: the consensus score is the standard deviation of the respondents' answers at a scale of 100

Figure 3: Analysis of the participatory capacity assessment

<b>Human Resource Management</b>	Total scores: capacity 77, consensus 81
<b>Strong capacity items:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff training (88)</li> <li>• Staff diversity (92)</li> <li>• Staffing (85)</li> </ul>	<b>Reasons or Causes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– we look after staff</li> <li>– we honour skills</li> <li>– we are well organised</li> <li>– membership organisation</li> <li>– well defined roles and responsibilities</li> </ul>
<b>Weak capacity items:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff numbers (65)</li> <li>• Promotion opportunities (62)</li> <li>• Staff skills (73)</li> </ul>	<b>Reasons or Causes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– low funded</li> <li>– difficult to get funds</li> <li>– 'flat' organisations</li> <li>– few different job types</li> <li>– new types of projects require new skills</li> </ul>
<b>Low consensus on:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff training (55)</li> <li>• Personnel evaluation (46)</li> <li>• Conflict resolution (44)</li> </ul>	<b>Reasons or Causes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– some people go for training more often</li> <li>– personal grievances or conflicts</li> <li>– not so well defined systems of evaluation</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendations:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do more research on career planning possibilities</li> <li>• Hold staff meeting on conflict resolution policy</li> </ul>	

**Figure 4: An example of envisioned capacity**

Envisioned Capacity	What capacity do we want to see in place in 3-5 years?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>@ All project officers trained in facilitation skills</li> <li># New financial system and procedures in place</li> <li>% Three new computers for our secretariat</li> <li>&amp; Sustainable funds from a variety of donors</li> <li>&amp; Fifty-one board members gone through fund-raising course</li> <li>% New office in more convenient place (transport)</li> <li>@ All target groups trained in facilitation methods</li> <li>!! Ongoing staff reflection in monthly meetings</li> <li>&lt;?&gt;All staff have been chosen as staff person of the month at least once!</li> <li>(*) Membership of five networks established</li> <li>(*) Chosen as NGO of the year by NANGO</li> <li>&lt;?&gt;New job descriptions and job performance procedures</li> <li>&lt;?&gt;All staff have career plans and yearly follow up</li> <li>&lt;?&gt;Competitive salaries that can hold staff</li> <li>% Two new project cars to visit projects more often</li> <li># Administrator has all invoices by end of month</li> <li>!! Rotating 'chair' of meetings to enhance participation</li> <li>(*) Clear understanding of core business presented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&lt;?&gt;Well managed, rewarded and motivated human resources</li> <li>(*) Well formulated, marketed successful corporate image</li> <li>% Enabling organisational environment established and kept in place</li> <li># Well working financial system</li> <li>&amp; Sustainable funds from various donors</li> <li>@ High levels of participation of target groups</li> <li>!! High levels of participation in own organisation</li> </ul>

Note: the symbols alongside the different vision elements on the left were used to cluster the elements. Each cluster was then given a name, as in the chart on the right.

- Financial resource management: getting and dealing with money.
- Equitable participation: involvement of target groups.
- Sustainability of programme benefits: how the organisation's projects have impact.
- Partnering: effective liaisons with other stakeholders.
- Organisational learning: sharing of and learning from information.
- Governance and strategic management: looking at the bigger picture.

Each of these topics is further divided into 12 to 16 sub-items. The assessment uses the 'critical incident' technique to focus group discussions. The assessment team is led through a number of questions about incidents that have happened in their organisation in relation to a certain capacity area. For instance, on staff training, the group will first be asked when their most recent staff training was, and how often staff training has been held over the past 12 months. When participants have shared information on staff training, each participant then 'scores' the level of capacity in staff training, based on the discussion and their own views and opinions. All scoring is done anonymously to create a safe space for each person to make their own assessment. The external facilitator has no input to the conversations, but will probe as much as needed to get clarity on the level of capacity of the organisation. The facilitator uses flip charts to write down the discussion topics and specific examples that are brought forward by the group (see Figure 1).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Figures in this article include documentation from different workshops. Due to the sensitive nature of the documentation the authors did not want to share actual transcripts of workshops. All examples represent documented flip charts or 'visualisations' of brainstorm.

The assessment team should represent all levels of the organisation. Usually it includes general support staff, project staff, management, and board members. Most effective group sizes are between 7 and 15 participants.

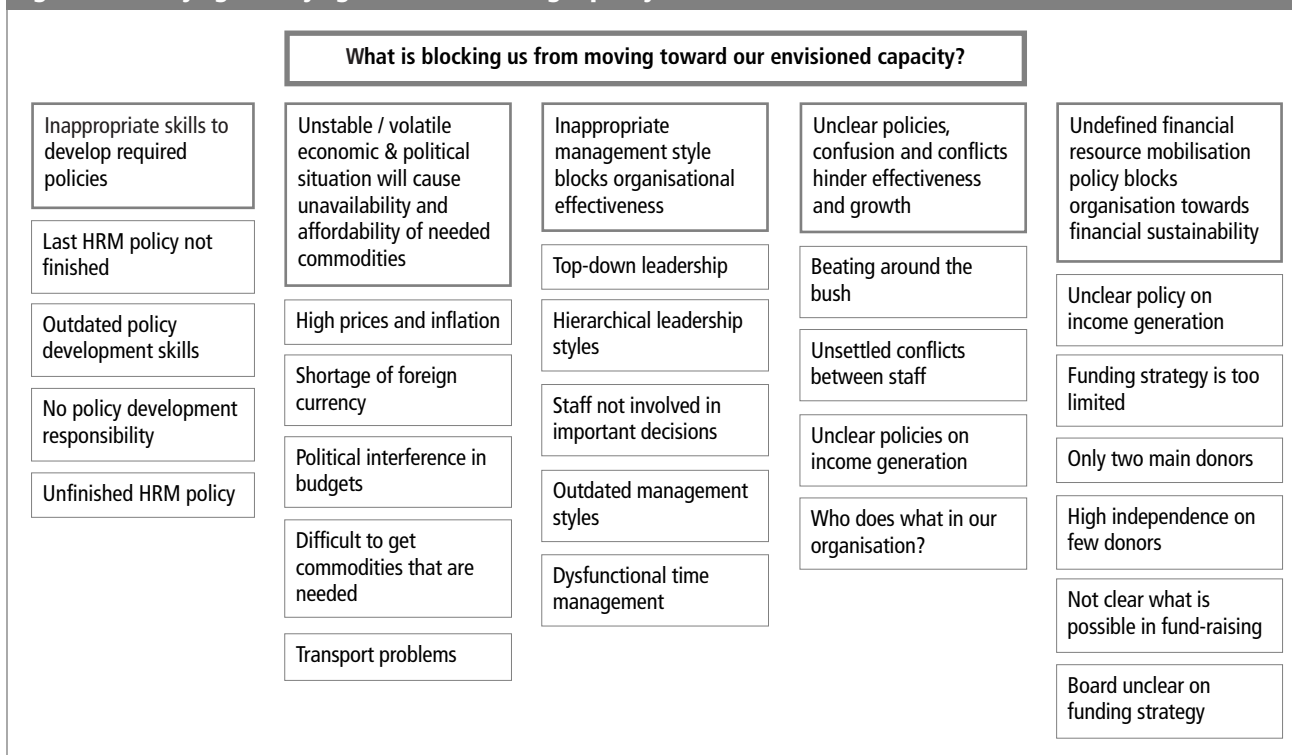
After the workshop the external facilitator will enter all the individual scores of the participants into a simple computer application, using MS Excel. This application will automatically calculate the capacity levels of the organisation in all assessed areas. It will also show the level of consensus among participants for each level. The facilitator then writes a first report for the organisation with the capacity scores that have been assessed (Figure 2).

### Feedback and strategic capacity planning workshop

The second workshop provides a space for participatory reflection and planning, using a Participatory Strategic Planning (PSP) process, developed by the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA)<sup>3</sup>. It starts with a reflection on the results of the participatory capacity assessment. Participants analyse the assessments either individually or in small groups. For each capacity area they look for areas of high and low capacity and brainstorm possible reasons for this. They also analyse areas where there was a low level of consensus among

<sup>3</sup> ICA is a global network of organisations which has created and developed participatory methods since 1966. Following the publication of *Winning Through Participation* by Laura J. Spencer in 1989, ICA packaged these methods as the Technology of Participation® (ToP)®. ToP® is a registered trademark of the Institute of Cultural Affairs. Amongst other methods, ToP® includes: Focused Conversation Method, Consensus Workshop Method, Action Planning Process, Participatory Strategic Planning and Participatory Project Management. There are national ICAs in more than 30 countries, which train and facilitate in these methods. More information can be found at [www.icaworld.org](http://www.icaworld.org).

Figure 5: Identifying underlying barriers to building capacity



participants. They then make a set of concrete recommendations for each capacity area (see Figure 3 for an analysis of human resources management capacity). All capacity areas are presented to the plenary and again discussed and the facilitator presents the scores of the organisation compared to those of peer organisations.

Based on these presentations the group prioritises the areas that need most attention.

The group is then asked to start dreaming about their organisation's future capacity. They brainstorm what their ideal capacity would be in three to five years' time, focusing on priority capacity areas. The facilitator asks the participants to group these elements and name them (Figure 4).

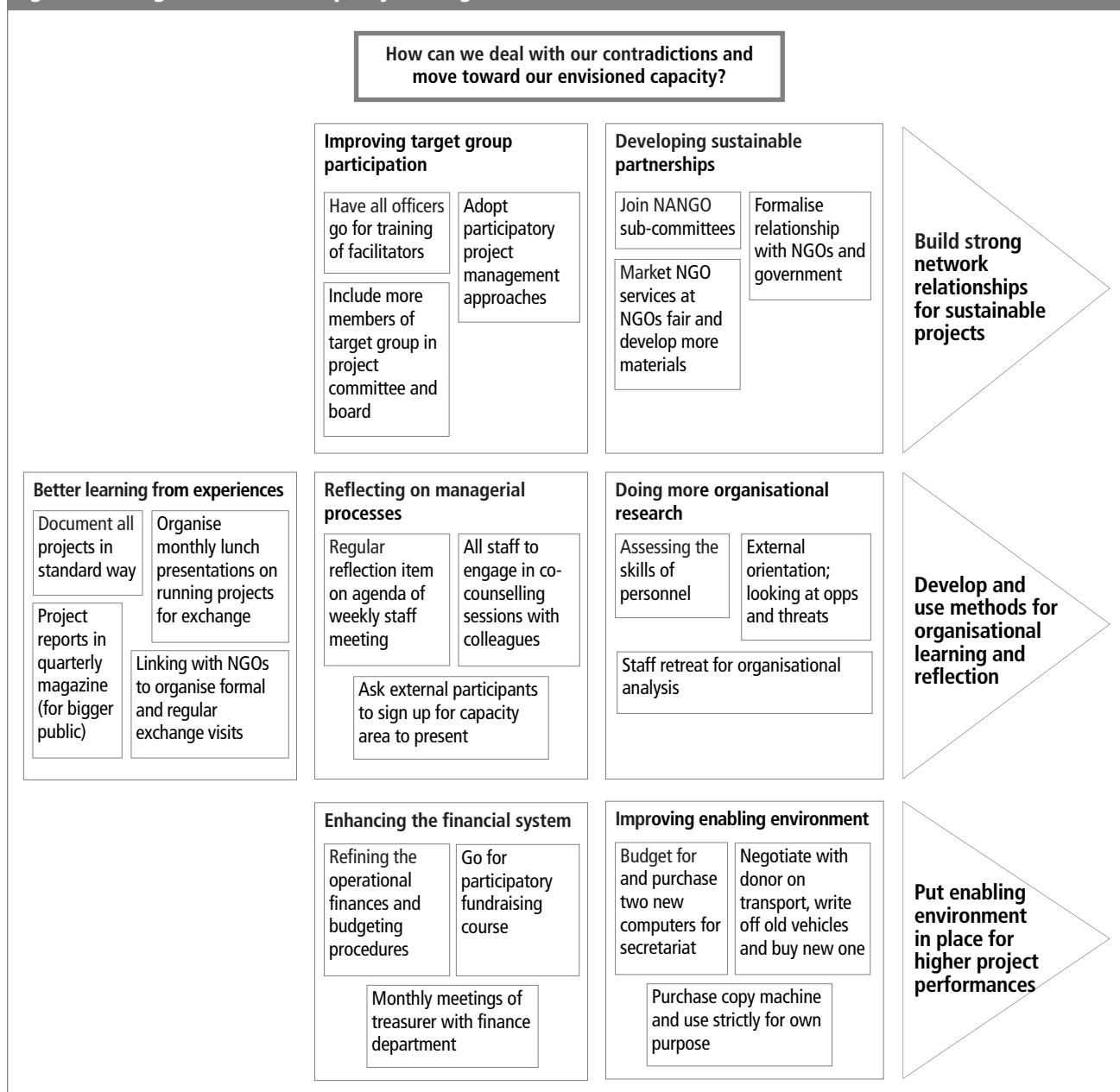
The group then identifies blockages that keep the organisation from reaching this vision, focusing on the elements of the vision and weaknesses in the organisation's capacity. The blockages are clustered according to the same root cause and participants then identify the key underlying barriers to building capacity (Figure 5). This process forces the organisation to look beyond the obvious 'lack of something' towards social patterns of behaviour and attitudes that cause lack of capacity. For example, when exploring lack of staff participation in decision

making, the group may identify an inappropriate management style as a blockage to organisational effectiveness.

The envisioned capacity and underlying barriers guide the group in defining strategic directions for capacity building. The group is asked to brainstorm creative and innovative actions that will remove the blockages and lead to the envisioned capacity. Activities with the same intention or objective form distinct action arenas. These groups are then grouped into strategic directions with the same thrust of action. In the end the participants come up with two to four strategies to build the capacity of the organisation, based on their own assessment, priorities, vision, and analysed blockages (Figure 6). An example of a strategy in a workshop was 'to develop and use methods for organisational learning and reflection' which included three action arenas: 'better learning from experiences'; 'reflecting on managerial processes'; and 'doing more organisational research'. Each of these arenas included some examples that showed the general direction of action, which would later be turned into activity plans.

The feedback and planning workshop is ended with a reflection on the next steps, including:

- how the process relates to other plans of the organisation;

**Figure 6: Strategic directions for capacity building**

- what other types of assessment or research are needed;
- what internal and external assistance could be mobilised; and
- concrete steps to start implementing the capacity building plan.

The workshop is documented by the organisation, together with the external facilitator, if needed.

### Operational planning

The organisation takes the strategic capacity building directions and prepares a more detailed activity plan within the organisation. These plans include specific actions, timelines, responsibilities, and resources. This process does not require external facilitation since all organisations have their own planning mechanisms.

The group of NGOs that has been part of the assessment and planning exercise may come together to synthesise their strategies and develop a comprehensive capacity building plan to combine their efforts. In a typical planning seminar the NGOs will reflect on the process so far, define common capacity building strategies, and discuss their goals, objectives, operating values, roles and responsibilities, and next steps.

### NANGO's experiences with PCB

NANGO is a membership organisation of NGOs in Zimbabwe. Its mission is to create a conducive environment for NGOs to be effective in their work. One strategy to achieve this is building the capacity of NANGO members. In the past this was mainly done by organising and co-ordinating training for NGOs but last year NANGO shifted its focus to capacity building in a broader sense. NANGO invited ten NGOs from the women and gender sector to participate in the capacity building process. NANGO had already established a working relationship with these NGOs through training events and all the NGOs had shown interest in capacity building during meetings. Most organisations are relatively small (five to fifteen staff) and are community based. Most are membership organisations, active in literacy, small business development, community development, and women's empowerment.

The NANGO officer in charge of capacity building, Judith Chaumba, was introduced to PCB by Jouwert van Geene, a local consultant. She conducted the capacity assessments and feedback and planning workshops with ten NGOs from November 2002 to July 2003. After these workshops, a coordination seminar was organised with representatives of all the participating organisations. This meeting created an opportunity for the NGOs to exchange ideas on capacity building and see how best capacity building strategies could be integrated. A comprehensive capacity building proposal will now be developed to combine all efforts.

### Reflections on the PCB methodology

The PCB process combines a relatively formal method of organisational assessment with participatory action research. In its design, the following guiding principles were used:

- Maximum participation: capacity assessment is conducted by a wide variety of people from all levels of the organisation and is based on their realities.
- Minimum external input: processes may be externally facilitated but presentation and analysis of assessment results, prioritisation, and decision making is mostly done by the organisation. Capacity building strategies are mainly

focused on internal solutions that do not need many external resources.

- Comprehensiveness: capacity assessment includes important internal and external aspects of an organisation, and capacity planning is linked to all parts of the organisation. Moreover, the planning process integrates different capacity aspects when looking for underlying blocks and strategic capacity building directions.

The experiences with PCB showed several strong points in the methodology (as reflected by the participating NGOs during the coordination seminar):

- The participatory approach really created a lot of involvement and made NGOs aware of their own capacity to analyse and plan for themselves. The method creates a lot of energy for and ownership of capacity building plans.
- Groups composed of participants from all across the organisation have extensive knowledge to make a thorough analysis of their current capacity.
- PCB provides a good foundation for monitoring the capacity of the organisation, by repeating (parts) of the capacity assessment on a yearly basis.

Some challenges in the use of the tool were also discovered:

- When analysing the current capacity of organisation, it was sometimes difficult for members of the organisation to be completely honest about the root causes of problems. Some causes were very sensitive, such as hierarchical leadership, problems with the board, and corruption. The method does not provide specific tools to tackle this challenge.
- In the capacity assessment, some capacity areas (such as equitable participation and sustainability) are quite difficult for participants to understand, especially when they are not involved in this area. Since a lot of ground must be covered during the assessment, sometimes time is short to explain all the topics. In general, though, there will be sufficient knowledge available in the room to do the full assessment.
- The capacity assessment provides very detailed scores of the level of capacity and consensus in the organisation. The scores are based on the answers of the participants after group discussions and therefore they have a high degree of subjectivity. The assessment results should be seen as giving a general indication of the organisation's capacity. It is the closer analysis in the workshops that gives meaning to these scores.
- The fact that the assessments include staff from all levels of the organisation results in wide variations in levels of understanding. Even though there are discussions of crit-



ical incidents, general support staff are less assertive so they may not make further inquiries about an unfamiliar issue before scoring. Since the calculation of assessment results uses statistical methods, the scores from some inadequately informed respondents might lead to anomalous conclusions. It is therefore important to spend enough time on presentation and reflection on the assessment results by participants in the feedback and planning workshops.

- Though the capacity assessment questionnaire is designed to facilitate a certain depth of analysis it could be too sophisticated workers from community-based organisations, who may be of lower literacy levels. This makes the assessment sessions longer as more simplification and interpretation of terms is necessary.
- In the course of the programme it became more difficult to keep organisations interested. It was clear to them that the assessments and planning sessions were very time-consuming. Also, some organisations were afraid of being

'judged' by outsiders. In the end, however, all the participating NGOs were still motivated to carry on with the programme. To get maximum involvement throughout the process more groundwork may need to be done before the sessions. The process approach must also be adopted in the NGOs' annual plans to ensure their participation.

### Future developments

This exercise of participatory capacity building should be followed by more work. In the final seminar for NGOs an outline plan for collaboration in capacity building was formulated which will lead to a three-year programme of activities including training, exchange of staff, study tours, organisational consultations. After one year, all organisations will be offered the opportunity to monitor their capacity using an adapted tool based on participatory capacity assessment. NANGO also plans to expand PCB services to other NGO sectors in Zimbabwe. The method is now available to all organisations who want to get involved in capacity building.

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#### NOTE

The Participatory Capacity Building process has been developed and packaged by Jouwert van Geene, an independent consultant in capacity building and community participation in Zimbabwe, in collaboration with NANGO, and with support from ICCO-PSa (Interchurch Organisation for Development Co-operation) and PSO (Association for Personnel Service Overseas) co-financing agencies in the Netherlands. A practical toolbox, with all the steps to facilitate capacity assessments, planning workshops, and monitoring and evaluation of capacity building is now available. This includes a CD-ROM with all the materials and software needed to analyse the capacity assessment results. For more information, please visit [www.geocities.com/part\\_cap\\_building](http://www.geocities.com/part_cap_building) or contact: Jouwert van Geene at the address above, or contact NANGO at [info@nango.org.zw](mailto:info@nango.org.zw).

# Tips for trainers

In this issue's *Tips for Trainers* section, we have an extract taken from the new *Communication and Power* resource pack, published by Reflect. Reflect is an innovative approach to adult learning and social change, which fuses the theories of Paulo Freire with the methodology of participatory rural appraisal. Reflect has evolved from three pilot projects in 1995 to the present day, where it is used in over 350 organisations in around 65 countries worldwide.

## Role play: an extract from Reflect's *Communication and Power* resource pack

Role play is an effective tool both to analyse issues and to rehearse speaking up in new situations or on different topics.

### Why?

Everyone has different roles in different spheres of their lives, perhaps as a colleague, employee, mother, daughter, wife, politician, or friend. Someone may be a passive participant in one context, active in another, empowered in one sphere but a victim in another situation. Essential to the Reflect process is exploring the different power relations and patterns of communication between different roles. Role play is an effective way for people to think about different perspectives in a particular situation, and the impact this has on communication – an important step in the process of challenging and changing relationships of power. Role play is an effective tool both to analyse issues and to rehearse speaking up in new situations or on different topics.

### When?

At any time.

Role play  
about  
HIV/AIDS,  
Mozambique



### How?

Enabling people to reflect on their multiple identities in life can help raise awareness of the idea of roles and role playing and make it easier for people to take on or act out the roles of others. Often participants are nervous at first, and the use of simple props or masks can help them take on a character.

Role-plays may come in many forms, for example:

- **Reenactment:** Participants reenact a real incident, highlighting power dynamics and pivotal moments of conflict.
- **Simulation:** Participants act out a situation that could happen or which represents what normally happens in a particular situation.
- **Rehearsal:** Participants act out a situation that they want to happen – to practice their roles. For example, if the group has decided to send a delegation to the local government offices, the scenario of the meeting can be rehearsed in advance to test out roles, help refine arguments, or

prepare for different responses/eventualities.

- **Projection/inversion:** Participants invert or switch normal roles, projecting themselves into the roles of others: men become women; bosses become employees; the landless become landowners etc., in order to understand better that person's reactions and behaviour. This can help people see other points of view and identify points of leverage for changing relationships.

In each case the role play should be the starting point for discussion and can be re-visited at different stages of the discussion to explore alternative responses or outcomes. It can be interesting to encourage participants to come up with different stereotypes or labels for the behaviour of individuals in group discussions. In situations where this approach has been used, labels have included: rambler, talkaholic, wise-guy, coloniser, aggressor, joker, daydreamer, pontificator, silent cowboy. Having such labels can enable participants to reflect on their own roles and challenge each other with humour.

**Pros and cons of  
traditional  
farming and  
cashcrops, East  
Godavari, India**



### Examples from practice

In *Tambopata Condambo*, a national park in **Peru**, role play was used to powerful effect. Two groups with a history of conflict were brought together: the population living in the park and the authorities responsible for maintaining the natural environment of the park. In the role play the two groups were asked to play each other, causing much laughter (and hence a relaxed atmosphere for dialogue) and giving both sides new perspectives on the reasons behind the conflict.

The role play was carefully prepared and structured, based on a series of fictional incidents based on

actual situations, which had caused conflict in the past. Role play was also used within a Peruvian organisation, *Madre de Dios*, in order to promote a better understanding of power dynamics.

Different members of the institution, from field level, project office, and head office exchanged roles to act out specific scenarios – and then reflected on the dynamics of power through lenses of gender, culture, and hierarchy. This has significantly improved understanding and working relations within the institution.

In **Honduras**, a visualisation of social problems in a tree (see the

Images section on the Reflect website), led to a powerful role-play. Women were asked to take on the role of husbands, children became women, and men became children – to explore how these different social problems are played out in the life of a family and how they could be resolved. In a Reflect process with a cooperative in **Lesotho**, local people identified jealousy as a counter-development force. In order to explore this, a role play was mounted with one group of people working together to dig a gully while another group of people were excluded and did everything to sabotage or undermine the efforts. In discussions people then

explored how they felt, what tactics were used, and how this can be addressed in future.

■ The Communication and Power resource pack is aimed at practitioners, and draws on practical ideas and experiences from people using Reflect around the world. Based on the understanding that no communication is neutral, and that the capacity to communicate and be heard is determined by power relations, the pack covers different elements of communication. It contains four colour-coded sections: the written word

(which includes what is literacy?, using newspapers, documenting local knowledge), the spoken word (who speaks?, music, song and dance, recording oral testimonies), numbers (oral mathematics, using drama, understanding budgets) and images (mapping, photographs, analysing television). A final section, 'Reflect in Action', gives examples from practice.

All the material from the Reflect Communication and Power resource pack is copyright free and available to download

free of charge from the Reflect website: [www.reflect-action.org](http://www.reflect-action.org)

Hard copies (priced at £15) are available from: Egigayehu Summers, ActionAid, International Education Unit, ActionAid, Hamlyn House, Macdonald Road, London N19 5PG, UK

Tel: +44 (0) 7561 7646

E-mail: [esummers@actionaid.org.uk](mailto:esummers@actionaid.org.uk)

The pack is currently available in English but will soon be available in Spanish, Portuguese and French. Please state which language you require.

# in touch

IN TOUCH



## Books, reports, videos and CD-ROMs



**Learning to Participate: the role of higher learning institutions as development agents**

● Peter Taylor and Jude Fransman

IDS Policy Briefing Issue 20, November 2003

The Institute of Development Studies Policy Briefs discuss development issues for policy makers. This latest paper discusses how, by developing collaborative and participatory learning approaches, Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) can help build the capacity of individuals to undertake key development roles.

■ Available from the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK.

Tel: +44 (0)1273 606261; Fax: +44 (0)1273 691647 or 621202; Email: [ids@ids.ac.uk](mailto:ids@ids.ac.uk);

Website: [www.ids.ac.uk](http://www.ids.ac.uk).



**The Art of Building Facilitation Capacities: a CD-ROM self-learning resource**

● Lydia Braakman and Karen Edwards  
RECOFTC, 2003

This CD-ROM is an easy to use digital learning resource that allows the user to direct and monitor their own learning on different dimensions of facilitation at their own pace. It can be used in different ways with groups and teams, and is suitable for use by a

Welcome to the In Touch section of *PLA Notes*. Through these pages we hope to create a more participatory resource for the *PLA Notes* audience, to put you, as a reader, in touch with other readers. We want this section to be a key source of up-to-date information on training, publications, and networks. Your help is vital in keeping us all in touch about:

- **Networks.** Do you have links with recognised local, national or international networks for practitioners of participatory learning? If so, what does this network provide – training? newsletters? resource material/library? a forum for sharing experiences? Please tell us about the network and provide contact details for other readers.
- **Training.** Do you know of any forthcoming training events or courses in participatory methodologies? Are you a trainer yourself? Are you aware of any key training materials that you would

like to share with other trainers?

- **Publications.** Do you know of any key publications on participatory methodologies and their use? Have you (or has your organisation) produced any books, reports, or videos that you would like other readers to know about?
- **Electronic information.** Do you know of any electronic conferences or pages on the Internet which exchange or provide information on participatory methodologies?
- **Other information.** Perhaps you have ideas about other types of information that would be useful for this section. If so, please let us know.

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Fax: +44 (0)20 7388 2826;

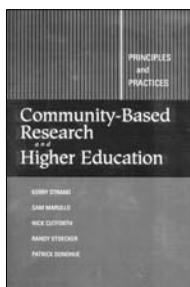
Email: [pla.Notes@iied.org](mailto:pla.Notes@iied.org)

*PLA Notes* is published in April, August, and December. Please submit material two months before the publication date.



wide range of people with different levels of understanding and practice of facilitation. The first CD-ROM allows the user to choose an appropriate 'learning pathway' for their needs, including interactive games, video clips, and exercises. The second CD-ROM is aimed at those who wish to train others to become better facilitators. There is also a hard-copy manual and VHS video available. Systems requirement: Windows 98 and CD-ROM drive.

■ Available from: RECOFTC (The Regional Community Forestry Training Centre for Asia and the Pacific), PO Box 1111, Kasetsart University, Bangkok 10903, Thailand. Tel: +66 2 940 5700; Fax: +66 2 561 4880; Email: [info@recoftc.org](mailto:info@recoftc.org); Website: [www.recoftc.org](http://www.recoftc.org).

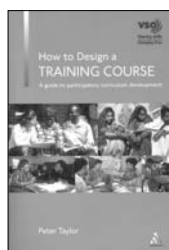


### Community-Based Research and Higher Education

● Kerry J. Strand, Nicholas Cutforth, Randy Stoecker, Sam Marullo, Patrick Donohue  
Jossey-Bass, 2003

This guide is about how to incorporate a new form of scholarship into academic settings. The book presents a model of community-based research (CBR) that engages community members with students and faculty in the course of their academic work. CBR is collaborative and change-oriented and finds its research questions in the needs of communities. This book demonstrates a model that combines classroom learning with social action, aimed at empowering community groups to shape their own futures whilst emphasising the development of knowledge and skills to prepare students for active civic engagement.

■ Available from: Jossey-Bass, Customer Care Centre, 10475 Crosspoint Boulevard, Indianapolis, IN 46256, USA. Tel: +1 877 762 2974; Fax: +1 800 597 3299; Email: [fye@gwm.sc.edu](mailto:fye@gwm.sc.edu); Website: [www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/](http://www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/).



### How to Design a Training Course: a guide to participatory curriculum development

● Peter Taylor  
VSO/Continuum, 2003

Much time and money is devoted to training – but the courses do not always produce the outcomes desired. As a result, many training organisations need to rethink the way they plan, design, deliver, and evaluate their courses.

This book shows teacher trainers, development trainers, and course developers how to design training courses by actively involving potential course participants and stakeholders. Users of this book will be able to provide leadership, training, and coaching in all aspects of the participatory curriculum development process, leading to the design, implementation, and evaluation of more effective training programmes.

■ Available from: VSO Books, 317 Putney Bridge Road, London SW15 2PN, UK. Email: [vsobooks@vso.org.uk](mailto:vsobooks@vso.org.uk); Website: [www.vso.org.uk](http://www.vso.org.uk).

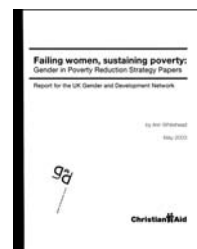


### Basbhum series: Creative lesson plans for teachers, educators, and community workers

ENRE (Ecology and Natural Resource Education), 2002

This series consists of 12 themed booklets, focusing on natural resources and their management, and is intended to help create child-oriented activities in schools and communities. The booklets have been developed in a participatory way with both teachers and children. Topics include creative lesson plans on trees, water, insects and worms etc. The lesson plans include sections such as increasing children's interest, collecting more information, and planning activities, as well as lists of resources. The series also encourages the development of skills and ideas, and positively encourages feedback from users. The series is available in both English and Bengali, and costs Rs30. There are no restrictions on copying for educational and not-for-profit purposes.

■ Available from: ENRE Project/DRCSC, 58A Dharmatola Road, Bosepukur, Kasba, Kolkata 700 042, West Bengal, India. Tel: +91 442 7311 or +91 441 1646; Email: [enre\\_sc@vsnl.net](mailto:enre_sc@vsnl.net).



### Failing Women, Sustaining Poverty: gender in poverty reduction strategy papers

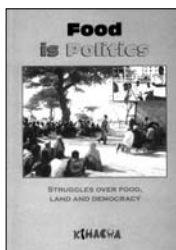
● Ann Whitehead  
Christian Aid, 2003

Gender issues have received little attention in the debate around poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs). However, effective participation by poor women in formulating a poverty reduction strategy is crucial if the strategy is to be effective. This report for the UK Gender and Development Network explores the issue of gender in PRSPs through four case studies: Malawi, Bolivia, The Yemen, and Tanzania.



Drawing on these examples, the report argues that women's participation in developing the strategies has been extremely limited and that the resulting strategies contain almost no gendered poverty analysis, and do not identify solutions by gender. The report aims to raise gender as a critical issue to poverty reduction and to generate a debate amongst stakeholders of PRSPs as to how to address this problem.

■ For more information or to obtain a copy, contact Jennie Richmond, Christian Aid, P.O. Box 100, London SE1 7RT, UK. Tel: +44 (0)20 7253 2204; E-mail: jrichmond@christian-aid.org.



**Food is Politics: struggles over food, land, and democracy**

● KIHACHA (Rural Food Security Policy and Development Group), Institute of Development Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Most of the food in Tanzania is

produced by smallholder farmers and livestock keepers, but many of these farmers work very hard with little to show for their labour. What is worse, more than half lack food security throughout the year. Food producers go hungry while much of the food they produce is eaten in big towns and cities. *Food is Politics* describes a research animation process, begun in 1998, to seek the root causes of hunger and impoverishment in selected areas of Tanzania. The process led to a national campaign for the right to food, land, and democracy, led by KIHACHA.

■ Available from: E & D Limited, P.O. Box 4460, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. E-mail: ed@africaonline.co.tz.



**Action Research**

● Editors: Hilary Bradbury and Peter Reason  
Sage Publications

This new journal is aimed

at the action research community around the world. Each issue will include the following sections: **Editorial; Shaping the Future** (issues the action research community needs to address in the development of theory and practice); **Articles** (accounts of action research projects which help to reshape old practices and/or define new ones); and **Influential Ideas** (devoted to presenting ideas that are significant for action research, but not widely known, or which deserve renewed critical appraisal). The Editorial in the first issue discusses common themes and commitments among action researchers, as well as exploring areas of disagreement and important avenues for future exploration.

■ Published twice a year by: SAGE Publications, 6 Bonhill Street, London EC2A 4PU, UK. Email: subscription@sagepub.co.uk; Website: www.sagepublications.com. Subscription rates: institutional: £119/US\$ 190; individual: £20/US\$32.

## Workshops and events

### NGO Leadership, Development, and Social Change (NGOLDSC) 19th January–6th February 2004 IIRR, Cavite, Philippines

In collaboration with the Global Partnership Programme, this course enables NGO leaders and managers to develop and refine core competencies strategic to managing development organisations in an era of rapid globalisation. The course is designed to increase the learner's ability to describe and critique NGO social change strategies; review

concepts and theories of leadership, and allow them to reflect on their own leadership style and behaviour; and identify characteristics of effective leaders and apply them to existing NGO leaders.

The course can also serve as an entry course to the Postgraduate Diploma in NGO Leadership and Management in BRAC-Bangladesh or via an online course offered by the Global Partnership Programme. Qualified candidates may then pursue the Master of International and Intercultural Management degree at the School of International Training (SIT).

### Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

#### 8th–26th March 2004 IIRR, Cavite, Philippines

The participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) course is designed for development project executives, research study leaders, and extension officers who are managing and/or implementing community-based development activities. It examines PM&E at the community, programme, and organisational levels. Selected cases are presented and discussed. PM&E concepts and theories and methods, tools, and techniques, which have been tested and used in the field, are shared.

● For further information, contact: Education and Training Programme, International Institute of Rural Reconstruction, YC James Yen Centre, Silang 4118, Cavite, Philippines. Tel: +63 46 4142417; Fax: +63 46 4142420; Email: Education&Training@iirr.org; Website: www.iirr.org.

**MA in Participation, Development, and Social Change  
May 2004–July 2005. Fifteen months (full time, including part-time field-based learning)**

**Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK**

The Participation Group at the Institute of Development Studies are offering a new Master's programme in participation, development, and social change. It includes a nine-month period of field-based learning or action research.

Designed to help experienced practitioners deepen their abilities in critical reflection and analysis, the programme combines two periods of intensive coursework and group learning in residence at IDS with a period of practical learning and action research with an organisation engaged in participatory approaches. Students will be encouraged to develop their own capacities for reflection and self-evaluation, and to monitor their learning, in conjunction with a supervisor.

Applicants should have a relevant undergraduate degree or comparable work experience, as well as 3–5 years of work experience in participatory approaches and programmes. This can include relevant work in Southern (developing) and/or Northern (developed) countries.

● For more information contact: Julia Brown, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK. Tel: +44 (0)1273 606261 Ext 3300; Direct:

+44 (0)1273 873300; Fax: +44 (0)1273 621202 or 691647; Email: J.L.Brown@ids.ac.uk; Website: www.ids.ac.uk/ids/teach/index.html.

**Introduction to Participatory Appraisal  
26th–30th January and 19th–23rd April 2004**

**PEANuT Project, Northumbria University, UK**

The Introduction to Participatory Appraisal training courses are coordinated and facilitated by Northumbria University's PEANuT project. The course is run over five full days and focuses on learning by doing. Participants learn about the background and philosophies of participatory appraisal and how to use the tools and techniques. Pre-arranged fieldwork placements enable students (in teams) to practice their skills in an ongoing, real-world project. Places are strictly limited (16 participants) and are allocated on a first come, first served basis.

● For more information, contact: PEANuT (Participatory Evaluation and Appraisal in Newcastle upon Tyne), Lipman Building, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. Tel: +44 (0)191 2273951; Fax: +44 (0)191 2274715; Website: www.may.ie/nirsa/geo-pub/geo-pub.html.

**ICA:UK ToP Facilitation Training courses, UK**

**Group Facilitation Methods  
10th–11th February 2004, London;  
16th–17th February 2004,  
Manchester; 9th–10th March 2004,  
Bristol; 22nd–23rd March 2004,  
London; 30th–31st March 2004,  
Craigavon**

A structured introduction to the basic ToP Focused Conversation and Consensus Workshop methods. This course presents the foundations of

the ToP methodology in a practical and participatory way, demonstrating, discussing, and practising each method. Includes how to conduct purposeful and productive focused conversations; capture the wisdom of the group; stimulate feedback; and reach shared awareness in meetings. Participants become familiar with a five-step process that moves from the collection of data and ideas, through the organisation of the data into meaningful groupings, and to a point of consensus, resolution, and product.

**Group Facilitation Skills  
11th March 2004, Bristol; 24th  
March 2004, London; 8th July 2004,  
Manchester**

This course enables participants to explore the role and skills of the facilitator. Facilitating participatory processes goes beyond being able to design events and knowing which methods to use. There is a whole range of skills that a facilitator needs to bring into play both before, during, and after the event itself in order to ensure that the process and the methods employed are effective. The course enables participants to share actual experiences and challenges; explore ways of addressing these in future; reach a deeper understanding of what it means to facilitate; and experience the ToP Focused Conversation and Consensus Workshop methods. This one-day course is scheduled back-to-back with Group Facilitation Methods to allow from one to three days of training.

**Applied Group Facilitation Methods  
19th–20th April 2004, London**

Group Facilitation Methods is a pre-requisite for this course and prior experience of applying ToP methods is

recommended. The course introduces a powerful, complex application of the basic Focused Conversation and Consensus Workshop methods and the ToP Action Planning Method, and enables participants to more effectively apply ToP methods in their own situations. The ToP Applications Design examines the wider context in which the methods can be used, introduces a framework for the design of participatory events, and explores the role of the facilitator. Participants work in small teams with ToP trainers, to assist in designing facilitation solutions, strengthening facilitation skills, and fostering capacity to design and facilitate events.

● For more information, contact: Martin Gilbraith, ICA:UK ToP Co-ordinator. Tel: +44 (0)161 232 8444 or (local rate, UK only) 0845 450 0305; Email: martin@ica-uk.org.uk; Website: www.ica-uk.org.uk. To subscribe to updates of new courses send a blank email to: ICAUKToPNews-subscribe@yahoogroups.com or subscribe at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ICAUKToPNews/join>.

**The 2004 Afrikan World Encounter  
On Building New Futures  
Mpambo, The Afrikan Multiversity,  
Uganda**

**8th–10th June 2004**

The International Conference on Building New Futures will be held at the Source of the Nile, Jinja, Uganda, East Africa.

This conference will provide a platform for innovative, new frontier thinkers and entrepreneurs, including, but not limited to, scholars, researchers, students, reformers, innovators, inventors and activists in academia, civil society, the private and public sectors. The conference will be a cross-cultural, cross-paradigm, intercontinental, and inter-civilizational platform for dialogue and solidarity. Presenters will define their worlds: past, present, and future. Contributions are invited in diverse formats, from a wide range of visions, practice, and perspectives.

● For more information contact: Multiple Dreams for a Different World, c/o Mpambo, The Afrikan Multiversity, PO Box 7314, Kampala, Uganda. Fax +(256) 41 348468; Email: mpambo@yahoo.com.

**Participation Cymru courses, Wales,  
UK**

**Designing a Participative Event  
30th January 2004**

This course takes participants through a step-by-step guide to planning and

running community partnership events. It includes how to agree aims, decide who to involve, choice of techniques, and ensuring useful outcomes.

**Future Conferencing  
3rd–4th February 2004**

This course gives participants the skills to plan large community or organisational events. It includes design tips and how to use future conferencing in your work.

**Forum Theatre for Community  
Participation  
10th–11 February 2004**

Theatr Fforwm Cymru uses Theatre of the Oppressed techniques to work with individuals and communities to effect change. It focuses on encouraging community participation and involvement, and gives techniques, ideas, and activities that can be used within an organisation or community. Please note that this is not a drama course!

● For more information, contact: Participation Cymru, Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WVCA), Baltic House, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff Bay, CF10 5FH, Wales, UK. Tel: +44 (0)870 607 1666; Email: [help@wvca.org.uk](mailto:help@wvca.org.uk); Website: [www.wvca.org.uk](http://www.wvca.org.uk).



# e-participation

## **KIT Health Approach to HIV/AIDS**

[www.kit.nl/health/html/aids\\_...asp#competent](http://www.kit.nl/health/html/aids_...asp#competent)

This section of the KIT (Royal Tropical Institute, The Netherlands) website focuses on HIV/AIDS prevention and control from a development-oriented approach. It has online library databases, with limited free document delivery to developing countries. It has some useful online documents on participatory methods including the resource pack Facing the Challenges of HIV/AIDS/STDs: a gender-based response.

## **TASONABI: Tanzania Specialists Organisations on Community Natural Resources and Biodiversity Conservation**

[www.tasonabi.or.tz](http://www.tasonabi.or.tz)

TASONABI is a Tanzania-based NGO specialising in natural resource management and community development through integrated interdisciplinary analysis and participatory programmes. In collaboration with partners, TASONABI contributes to the Tanzanian government's national development and poverty eradication policies. Whilst there are currently no documents online, this is an expanding website and provides some useful information about the organisation and its aims and current work.

## **The Journal of Extension (JOE)**

[www.joe.org/joe/2003august/a2.shtml](http://www.joe.org/joe/2003august/a2.shtml)

JOE is the official refereed journal of the US Cooperative Extension System. Essential reading for extension

professionals and other adult educators to improve their effectiveness, it serves as a forum for emerging and contemporary issues affecting extension education, and includes lots of useful material on participation. Back issues are available free online, and the website includes a full text search engine to help you find the documents you want.

## **COMM-ORG: the online conference on community organising and development**

<http://comm-org.utoledo.edu>

COMM-ORG is an online forum for scholars, community organisers, community development workers, and others. COMM-ORG's aim is to connect people who care about community organising to find and provide information that organisers, scholars, and scholar-organisers can use to learn, teach, and do community organising. The website includes some free documents online, resource listings, links, and an email discussion list 'Colist'.

## **Prolinnova: promoting local innovation**

[www.prolinnova.net/](http://www.prolinnova.net/)

Prolinnova is a global programme for learning through action and analysis. It focuses on the promotion of local people's innovation in ecologically oriented agriculture and natural resource management, and in particular the use of Participatory Technology Development (PTD). This site is intended to serve as an e-platform for exchanging information

and experiences, and includes news and events, case studies on the use of PTD, and links to LEISA PTD Working Papers online.

## **GRC Exchange**

[www.grc-exchange.org](http://www.grc-exchange.org)

The GRC Exchange is a new website sharing the latest information about governance in development. Hosted by the Governance Resource Centre (GRC) of the UK Department for International Development (DFID) it provides a focal point for sharing ideas in governance. Includes: information database of policy-oriented summaries on governance with full text online/document delivery service and worldwide training, events, and organisation databases, as well as discussions on key governance themes such as PRSPs.

## **Learning and Teaching Participation - a global dialogue on LTP in higher education**

[www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip/networks/learnparticip/](http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip/networks/learnparticip/)

An international dialogue on teaching participation and participatory teaching and learning. This is a collaborative learning initiative, which examines the role of teaching as a force for understanding and for strengthening processes of civic engagement and democratic participation in development. Open to all those engaged in the design, delivery and evaluation of teaching and learning programmes in institutions of higher education focusing on participation and citizenship.



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‡ Non-OECD: Due to cost restrictions this excludes branches or regional offices of Northern-based organisations in non-OECD countries and non-OECD organisations and individuals based in OECD countries.

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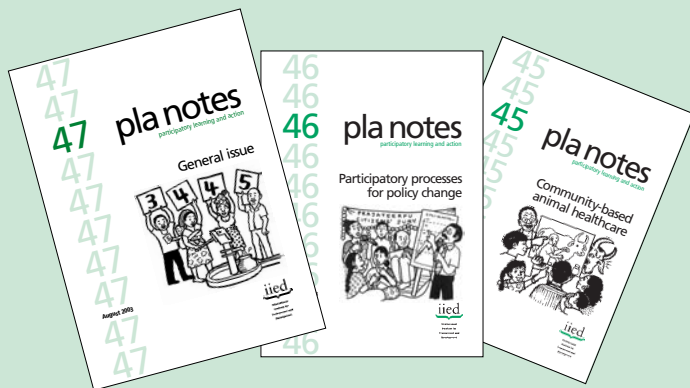
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# pla notes

## participatory learning and action

### Guidelines for contributors

For a full set of guidelines, visit our website [www.planotes.org](http://www.planotes.org) or contact us at the address below.

### Types of material accepted

- *Articles*: max. 2500 words plus illustrations – see below for guidelines.
- *Feedback*: letters to the editor, or longer pieces (max. 1500 words) which respond in more detail to articles.
- *Tips for trainers*: training exercises, tips on running workshops, reflections on behaviour and attitudes in training, etc., max. 1000 words.
- *In Touch*: short pieces on forthcoming workshops and events, publications, and online resources.

We welcome accounts of recent experiences in the field (or in workshops) and current thinking around participation, and particularly encourage contributions from practitioners in the South. Articles should be co-authored by all those engaged in the research, project, or programme.

In an era in which participatory approaches have often been viewed as a panacea to development problems or where acquiring funds for projects has depended on the use of such methodologies, it is vital to pay attention to the quality of the methods and process of participation. Whilst we will continue to publish experiences of innovation in the field, we would like to emphasise the need to analyse the limitations as well as the successes of participation. *PLA Notes* is still a series whose focus is methodological, but it is important to give more importance to issues of power in the process and to the impact of participation, asking ourselves who sets the agenda for participatory practice. It is only with critical analysis that we can further develop our thinking around participatory learning and action.

We particularly favour articles which contain one or more of the following elements:

- an *innovative* angle to the concepts of participatory approaches or their application;
- *critical reflections* on the lessons learned from the author's experiences;
- an attempt to develop *new methods*, or innovative adaptations of existing ones;
- consideration of *the processes* involved in participatory approaches;

- an assessment of the impacts of a participatory process;
- potentials and limitations of *scaling up and institutionalising participatory approaches*; and,
- potentials and limitations of *participatory policy-making processes*.

### Language and style

Please try to keep contributions clear and accessible. Sentences should be short and simple. Avoid jargon, theoretical terminology, and overly academic language. Explain any specialist terms that you do use and spell out acronyms in full.

### References

If references are mentioned, please include details. *PLA Notes* is intended to be informal, rather than academic, so references should be kept to a minimum.

### Photographs and drawings

These should have captions and the name(s) of the author(s)/photographer clearly written on the back. If you are sending electronic files, please make sure that the photos/drawings are scanned at a high enough resolution for print (300 dpi) and include a short caption and credit(s).

### Format

We accept handwritten articles but please write legibly. Typed articles should be double-spaced. Please keep formatting as simple as possible. Avoid embedded codes (e.g. footnotes/endnotes, page justification, page numbering).

### Submitting your contribution

Contributions can be sent on paper, by email, or on disk. We use Word 6 for Windows, but can read most other word processing packages. If you are sending a disk, please include a hard copy of the article as well. Contributions should be sent to: **The Editor, PLA Notes, IIED, 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1 0DD, UK.** Fax: +44 (0)20 7388 2826 Email: [pla.notes@iied.org](mailto:pla.notes@iied.org) Website: [www.planotes.org](http://www.planotes.org)

### Resource Centres for Participatory Learning and Action (RCPLA) Network

Since June 2002, the IIED Resource Centre for Participatory Learning and Action is no longer able to provide a document delivery service. However, practical information and support on participation in development is still

available from the various members of the RCPLA Network.

This initiative is a global network of resource centres for participatory learning and action, which brings together 15 organisations from Africa, Asia, South America, and Europe. The RCPLA Network is committed to information sharing and networking on participatory approaches.

Each member is itself at the centre of a regional or national network. Members share information about activities in their respective countries, such as training programmes, workshops and key events, as well as providing PLA information focused on the particular fields in which they operate.

As part of the devolution process, Tom Thomas, of Praxis, India has been appointed as network coordinator by the RCPLA steering committee. More information, including regular updates on RCPLA activities, can be found in the In Touch section of *PLA Notes*, or by visiting [www.rcpla.org](http://www.rcpla.org), or contacting:

Tom Thomas, Director, PRAXIS, S-385, Greater Kailash II, New Delhi, 110 049, India. Tel: +91 11 641 8885/ 6/ 7, 623 3525; Fax: +91 11 641 8885/ 6/ 7; 623 3525 Extn:21; Email: [tomt@praxisindia.org](mailto:tomt@praxisindia.org)

### Participation at IDS

Participatory approaches and methodologies are also a focus for the Participation Group at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK. This group of researchers and practitioners are involved in sharing knowledge, in strengthening capacity to support quality participatory approaches, and in deepening understanding of participatory methods, principles, and ethics. It focuses on South-South sharing, exchange visits, information exchange, action research projects, writing, and training. Services include a Participation Resource Centre (open weekdays) with an online database detailing materials held. The Group also produces a newsletter and operates an email distribution list.

For further information please contact: Jane Stevens, IDS, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK. Tel: +44 (0) 1273 678690; Fax: +44 (0) 1273 621202; Email: [J.Stevens@ids.ac.uk](mailto:J.Stevens@ids.ac.uk) Website: [www.ids.ac.uk](http://www.ids.ac.uk)



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