

13

In search of deeper training, learning, and change

by **ROBERT CHAMBERS**

My horror of evangelism, and of being 'got at' to change, has held me back from facilitation that opens up deeper questions.¹ The reader may not endorse my preference to start with behaviour rather than attitudes, values, or beliefs. It is a personal thing. For whatever reasons, I have preferred to play it safe on the surface with a focus on fun (see, for example, Chambers, 2002). This weakness need not be imitated by others. One great frontier is to evolve and spread approaches that can help oneself and others to change profound attitudes, as well as behaviours. On this subject there is a mass of experience and literature from psychotherapy, including group psychotherapy. In participatory development, one effective ideology has been Training for Transformation, also known as DELTA (Development Education and Leadership Teams in Action) (Hope and Timmel, 1984), with repeated reflective training in Freirian and Christian traditions.² Another approach has been that of the CDRA (Community Development Resource Association) in Cape Town, its inspiring annual reports, and Allan Kaplan's

Development Practitioners and Social Process: artists of the invisible (Kaplan, 2002), most chapters of which conclude with a reflective exercise.³

In India, R. S. Saxena and S. K. Pradhan (2002) have been, as they put it, 'in search of a meaningful participatory training methodology'. They find the top-down attitudes of officials are reinforced by caste, class, and the belief that suffering and poverty in this life are punishments for the ill deeds of the previous incarnation. A complete role reversal is required; but with conventional training they found that attitudes did not change. So they have evolved a participatory workshop process with reflection on attitudes for attaining success, on personal strengths and weaknesses, and on building positive attitudes. Participants construct a personal self-image profile with two columns ('I am' and 'I need to be') for personal attitudes and characteristics, with 'excellent' and 'needs improvement' listed below for behaviours. Fieldwork with communities is stressed, as are win-win situations in which participants, communities, and

¹ A horror of evangelism is itself an attitude. I recognise some of its origin in myself in the boarding school experience of being asked repeatedly by one of the masters whether I had yet 'taken the step' of 'bringing Jesus into my life'. I was damned if I was going to take the step. I am damned still, and still abhor missionary intrusiveness.

² In Shinyanga region in Tanzania, in 1998, there was a one-week workshop for district-level staff from eight districts. Those from one district stood out from the rest for their attitudes and behaviour: sitting down, showing respect, listening, facilitating, not dominating. I asked them what made them different. They said they had had PRA training a few years earlier. I was surprised and impressed. But when I probed, they revealed that before the PRA they had had three DELTA trainings. Almost certainly, I concluded, the DELTA, not the PRA, training would explain most of the difference.

³ The CDRA annual reports are really annual reflections. I warmly recommend them. They can be accessed at www.cdra.org.za.

the overall project all gain. A participant commented on coming to understand what Gandhi meant when he said, 'You must be the change you wish to see in the world'.

Some of the best experiential learning enables a person to feel what it is like to be another. The learning may not be immediate; rather, it may work itself through over time. An example was a ten-day workshop in Bangladesh of ActionAid staff from around the world, held in 2001. It was billed as a Participatory Methodologies Forum. I was one of those who went expecting to share ideas and methods. A planning team that convened days before the workshop evolved different ideas and facilitated a workshop that was about power (for an excellent account, see *Transforming Power*, ActionAid, 2001). The disappointed expectations and deep

frustration some of us felt were themselves a source of learning about how others experience our behaviour. As participants put it:

The planning team denied that it had an agenda. We do that all the time in communities – starting apparently open-ended participatory processes when really we do have an agenda all the time. We have objectives and strategies which may be out of synch with communities. How can we become more open and transparent?

Now we know what it is like to be 'participated at'. Participatory processes can disempower people. They risk wasting the time of people who have less time to waste than us. We got impatient with the planning team, and communities get impatient with us.

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NOTE

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