

Searching for Participatory Approaches in China: Findings of the Yunnan PRA Network



The implementation of the Yunnan Upland Management Project, a Ford Foundation funded project initiated in 1990, created a demand for participatory approaches in Yunnan Province of China. The project, with a staff of more than 50 researchers and officials from 13 institutes, aimed at preparing approaches for sustainable development in Yunnan's upland areas. The project selected four sites that reflect different geographical conditions. From 1990 to 1993, project staff were trained in and practised the skills for interviewing, rapid rural appraisal (RRA), monitoring and evaluation. Projects in each of the four sites went through processes of surveys of household demands, design of project activities, including agricultural and livestock interventions, and other income generating activities.

Participatory approaches were introduced in Yunnan Province, the People's Republic of China, in 1993. Since then, a group of practitioners in Yunnan has started to search for ways of implementing participatory approaches within the Chinese context. This paper summarises the major findings of the practitioners' experiences in research, action and extension projects, and presents the current state of practitioners' thinking on participation.

The project staff and local officials decided on what project activities to undertake and when to conduct them. Villagers could only present their needs. In 1993, it was found that the project staff felt very happy about the project's outputs, such as increases in grain yields, household incomes and services to the poor. These outputs met some of the villagers' needs as well as the project's preset objectives. However, project staff were concerned that the villagers often ended up as passive "receptients", either waiting to join in the designed activities or expecting to be "motivated".

"Thank you very much for your help, but what do you want us to do next?"

At the same time, the project staff discovered the richness of the villagers' knowledge about their farming systems, knowledge which was not fully recognised in the project activities. Villagers often utilised these practical skills and knowledge to solve difficulties during project implementation. Yet, the project staff began to realise that their earlier approaches only helped to strengthen the villagers' dependence on outsiders and this could not lead to sustainable development in the long run.

PRA Potentials in China

In a poverty alleviation planning exercise undertaken in Qianmai Township [funded by the Network to learn PRA potentials in Chinese context], local officials were trained in participatory methods, and undertook in-depth planning exercises in sample villages. They also held extensive consultations on specific topics to enlarge the scale of the planning. These measures can fill the gap between the limitation of villagers' knowledge at the small scale and the requirements of planning on a larger scale, leading to better quality planning. The trial also revealed several issues, including the need to take into account the perspectives of different stakeholders and their roles during the planning process, and issues concerning integration of participatory with existing and conventional plans.



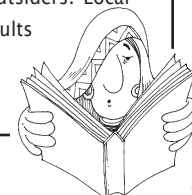
Around this time, a book entitled *Rural Appraisal: Rapid, Relaxed and Participatory* by Robert Chambers came to our attention. The theory and methods presented in the book appeared to be very relevant to our problems. Dr. Chambers was invited to conduct a training workshop on participatory rural appraisal (PRA) at Kunming in December, 1993. This signified the formal introduction of participatory approaches in Yunnan, and the PRA Network was established after the workshop to learn and promote participatory approaches for rural development in China.

The Yunnan PRA Network funded ten pilot projects to help some members to apply PRA as tools in their researches. Other members started to apply PRA to their own projects.

In 1995, PRA practitioners in Yunnan gradually realised that the potential of participatory approaches depends as much in action projects as in surveys and assessments. It was recognised that communities should be recognised as key stakeholders in decision-making processes, in operational management and in the sharing of benefits.

Villagers' Contribution

Another monitoring and evaluation exercise of government projects at the township level using villagers' evaluation criteria found that participatory monitoring and evaluation could reveal practical constraints to project achievements, many of which would not have been thought of by outsiders. Local officials are willing to accept such results and appreciated the capabilities and knowledge of villagers.



Applying PRA to Action Projects

Social forestry

Although considered as simple and quick methods for forestry [departments] operations, the conventional approach to reforestation projects excludes villagers from decision-making about where to plant what kind of trees and how to manage them. This often leads to low survival rates of trees. The Yunnan Forestry Department has experimented with social forestry approaches in three villages. Beneficiaries are now involved in the whole project cycle, and most important of all get a share of the benefits. One current concern is to develop suitable methods and criteria to evaluate the impact of the new approaches.



Improvement of shifting cultivation practices

Villagers see shifting cultivation as an important part of their livelihood and farming systems and biodiversity specialists regard it as a central practice for maintaining biodiversity in tropical uplands. However, officials believe that shifting cultivation destroys forests and must be replaced by sedentary practices. The challenge has been to seek improvements or alternatives to these practices. Participatory approaches have been applied to this issue in an action-research project that involved villagers, local officials and researchers in a joint search for solutions. The resulting action-research recommended ways to decrease the negative impact of shifting cultivation which were acceptable to stakeholders, thereby leading to action.

Community-based conservation and development

The Caohai Nature Reserve in Guizhou Province is densely populated. Poor villagers around Lake Caohai have to produce grain by converting wetlands to farmland. They are often regarded as destroyers of the environment because their activity threatens the habitat of endangered birds. Facilitated by outsider PRA practitioners including the reserve staff, the local villagers have developed their own systems and rules for the management of 'community trust funds', thus developing a mechanism to

create opportunities for non-farming income generation. This strategy has helped to make villagers the beneficiaries as well as the protectors of the environment, rather than its destroyers. The reserve management office has had to adapt its management style from that of controller to that of facilitator, even to the point of agreeing to being monitored by the villagers. This change in institutional approach has been essential to sustaining the villagers' action. Similar findings have been shown by the experiences at Zixishan Nature Reserve, Yunnan Province.

Main Learning

It is not enough for practitioners to have knowledge, skills and experience of participatory approaches. They must also be equipped with the necessary capabilities, coordination and facilitation skills, etc.



Applying PRA to Other Projects

Through our Network activities of training, learning by doing and experience-exchange, PRA practitioners in Yunnan now provide services to projects initiated and funded by the donor community. They advocate and provide support to projects initiated by the government. In the first kind of project, PRA practitioners introduce participatory approaches by providing training and technical assistance at different stages of the project cycle. Such projects have included those of a wide range of donors and international

non-government organisations (NGOs). Several provincial government agencies (Forestry Department, Education Commission, Scientific and Technology Commission, Health Department, Yunnan Office for Poverty Alleviation and Environment Department) have started to test participatory approaches to their projects. Our main learning is that it is not enough for practitioners to have knowledge, skills and experience of participatory approaches. They must also be equipped with training capabilities, coordination and facilitation skills, advocacy tactics, organisational management, project development and consultancy skills. A lot of PRA practitioners in Yunnan now recognise the change of their roles, i.e., to be trainers, facilitators, project managers or advocates. However, few practitioners have reflected on the effectiveness and efficiency of these measures for extending participatory approaches.

Learning from Participatory Approaches

Theory and philosophy

Perspectives on participatory approaches differ slightly among PRA practitioners in Yunnan. Some regard participatory approaches as a method for conducting surveys or assessments. But an increasing number see participatory approaches as a philosophy and an important part of development theory.

The theory of participatory approaches is based on assumptions which imply that, given the opportunity, one would participate in discussions or actions that affect one's interests. Being concerned with one's own interests, one also participates in collective initiatives with the hope of achieving gains during the process. This theory further implies that as the subject (not object) of development, project beneficiaries (not others) should make decisions about their own destinies. Many PRA practitioners in Yunnan point out that for effective and sustainable participation, it is necessary for government officials and scientists, not just communities, to cooperate in planning, decision making and implementation.

Enabling environment

The adoption and application of participatory development in China requires changes in policies, institutional arrangements and working procedures. Although essential, changes in personal behaviour and attitude are not enough because a person's role is largely determined by institutional policies. Participatory development requires an enabling environment, which differs from country to country due to differences in culture and political systems. In debating the required changes, PRA practitioners in Yunnan often focus on the changes needed in the respective roles of government, communities and development workers.

Key Learnings about PRA from Action Projects in Yunnan

Social Forestry Projects

Participatory approaches require:

- changes in attitude and behaviour of foresters;
- skills in participatory approaches and community organisation;
- openness and flexibility in project design and management;
- mechanisms for community-based management; and
- more time and human effort investment in the initial stages

Community-based Conservation and Development Project

Participatory action requires:

- respect for villagers' desires and trust in their capabilities;
- transparency in the process of development;
- an enabling environment for villagers to operate; and
- staff capabilities, institutional capacities and appropriate management styles.

Improvements to "Shifting Cultivation" Practices

Key factors for success include:

- building communication channels between the different stakeholders;
- assuring transparency of project components and funding arrangements;
- drawing on indigenous knowledge and practices;
- strengthening of conflict resolution mechanisms;

Source: Zhou 1998, Wang, et al. 1997, Lu, X, et al. 1998, Xu 1998



Summary of Changes Needed to Support the Practice of Participatory Development

Changes required in the government	Changes required in the community	Changes required among development workers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Decentralise decision-making processes and focus on macro measures. ■ Make policies, procedures and management styles more open and flexible. ■ Create space for bottom-up approaches. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop their own organisation and institutional mechanism for conflict resolution. ■ Enhance their abilities and skills to tackle problems and opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Change their attitudes and behaviour. ■ Enhance their capabilities in advocacy, training, coordination, facilitation and management as well as participatory practice.

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Introducing Participatory Processes among Ethnic Minorities: Challenges in Vietnam



This paper focuses on the challenges in introducing participatory processes amongst ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. The Poverty Alleviation Project funded by Bilance, Netherlands focuses amongst others on:

- infrastructure;
- income-generation; and
- capacity-building through participatory processes.

Vietnam is an agricultural country with about 78% of the population living in rural areas. Based on its natural and socio-economic conditions, Vietnam is divided into eight agro-economic regions of which the Central Highland is one of the poorest. In this region people from different ethnic minorities live in harsh natural conditions with little or no infrastructure, low literacy, high school drop-out rates and “backward” customs. The region also has a very high poverty rate of 40% compared to the national average of about 27%.

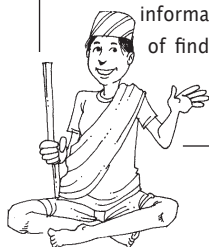
Shifting cultivation is widely practised by the ethnic minorities and this has led to environmental degradation, loss of soil fertility and even floods in the lower regions. To help improve their living conditions, the government, in 1997, initiated priority projects on agricultural development and poverty alleviation in three provinces of the Central Highland.

Use of PRA in Poverty Alleviation Project

Keeping in mind the target group's capacity to understand and participate in the process, PRA tools, such as mapping, matrix ranking, group discussions, etc., were used to:

- collect basic data of villages;
- analyse the data collected;
- identify common problems;
- evaluate agricultural productivity;
- evaluate forestry activities and cropping patterns;
- wealth ranking; and
- assist village development planning.

Throughout the entire exercise farmers are the main actors. The project staff only facilitates the appraisal method, analysis of information, summing up of findings, recording the results and writing the report.



Putting People First

People's participation is crucial to the sustainability of any project; developmental activities cannot succeed without their active participation. To achieve this:

- inform them about the objectives, the activities and the benefits of their participation;
- tell them about their responsibilities for the sustainability of the project;
- inform residents about the work to be undertaken in their community; and
- involve representatives from different ethnic groups in all meetings and other processes of monitoring and evaluation.

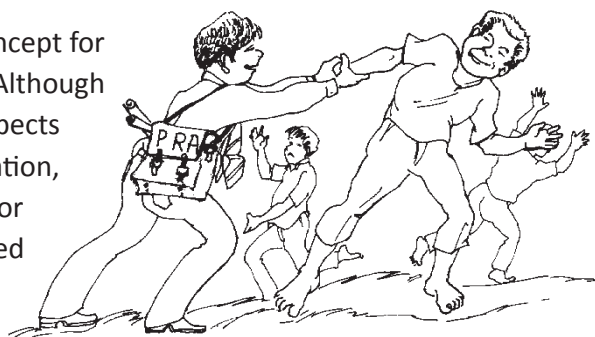
This will not only empower them but also help them in decision-making.



Challenges in Using PRA

Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) is a relatively new concept for the ethnic minorities of the Central Highland province. Although efforts were made to involve local beneficiaries in all aspects of the project cycle, the mobilisation of farmer participation, particularly those from the ethnic minorities, was a major challenge. The following are some of the challenges faced during the process:

- The ethnic minorities are made up of various small groups with diverse dialects and cultures and little or no knowledge of Vietnamese (the national language). Such communication gaps have limited effective use of participatory tools and methodologies.
- The minorities live in isolated scattered areas and long distances make it difficult for them to gather for meetings or PRA exercises.
- The people find it difficult to understand that participation is their right or responsibility. In many instances, people do not participate in PRAs as they think it as a waste of time and resources.



- The illiteracy rate is high at 70% and the average level of literacy is only up to Class 3. The men are usually more educated than the women. This hampers the participation of women.
- Getting willing local facilitators is another major problem not only because of the low literacy rate but also due to the people's perception of PRA exercises as not immediately useful.



- Understanding the tradition and culture of numerous ethnic communities is another major concern as it determines people's participation.
- Matrilineal is prevalent in some areas but this has had no effect on the participation of women even in issues related to them.
- More men attend meetings, as they are held in higher esteem than the women.
- Convincing the locals about the benefits of participating in PRAs has been more difficult because of their casual attitude to the process.
- The people are normally very shy and usually do not open up during meetings.
- The project facilitators summarise the data or information collected for the communities to learn and understand the purpose of the exercise.

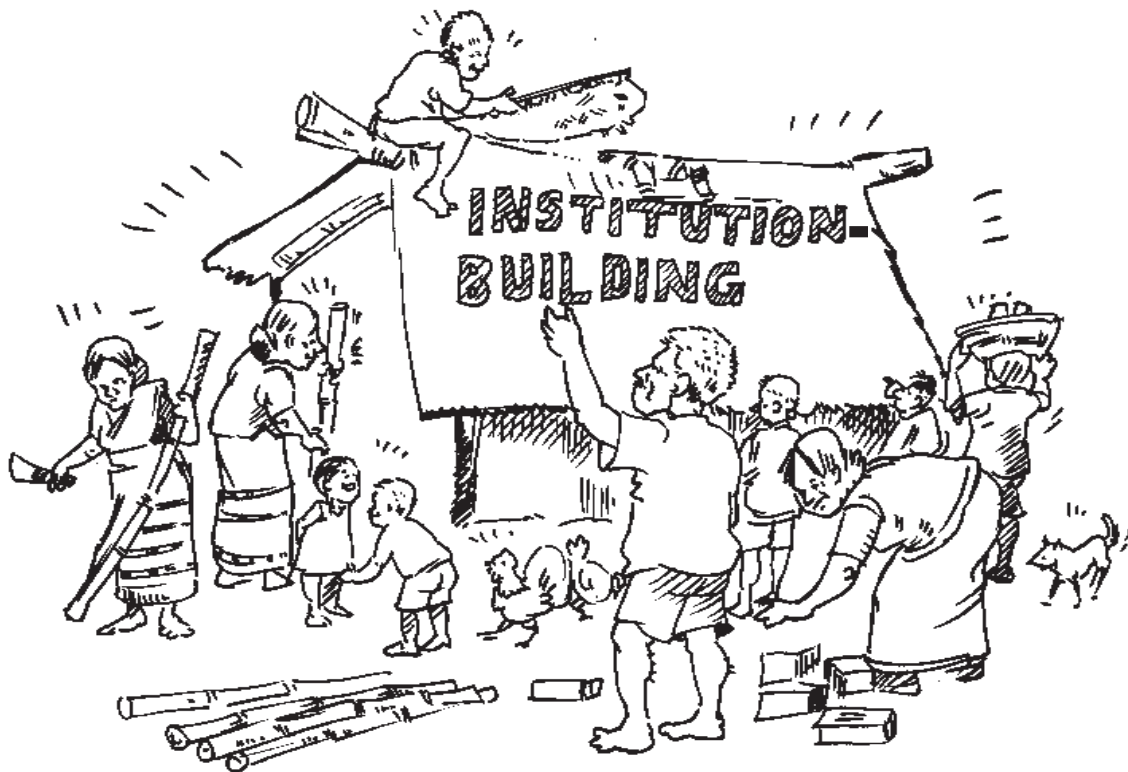
Lessons Learned

- Encourage communities to take part in planning meetings and project management activities.
- Ensure that both men and women attend meetings and that the *Kinh* (major Vietnamese groups) of different social and economic groups are well represented. The participation of different people can prevent unforeseen negative impacts on project activities.
- The project facilitators must always keep in mind the different challenges and problems during all stages of the project cycle.
- Improve the capacity of project facilitators through further trainings.
- The project staff must be patient with the people.
- Make people comfortable and encourage participation.
- Proving alternatives might be necessary but it is not easy. It must not conflict with the customs and traditions of the communities concerned.
- Arrange or plan PRA meetings, keeping in mind the people's free time, e.g., avoid harvesting or planting seasons.
- Ensure that the meeting place is convenient and comfortable to encourage people to attend.

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Participatory Process in Institution- Building: Experiences from Northeast India



Northeast India is home to more than 250 different indigenous ethnic communities with very diverse cultural and socio-economic bases. The region presents a complex socio-cultural framework with a unique set of challenges. Agriculture is the primary occupation and most of the communities have a strong dependency on forests and their resources. Increases in population and the continued diversion of forestlands for the traditional system of shifting cultivation have resulted in serious environmental consequences in these areas of high biodiversity.

Many development initiatives have been launched in the region but most of them have not succeeded because the projects were technically inappropriate, socio-culturally insensitive or because of the incapability of implementing agencies (both local and state government). The most important factor in this region remains the strong traditional systems.

The North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project for Upland Areas was initiated by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to address the issue of livelihood from a natural resource management perspective. The project extends over six villages in the three states of Meghalaya, Manipur and Assam. It aims to search for more sustainable economic bases in a participatory approach, keeping in mind the local contexts and institutions.

The Traditional Institutions

Most traditional institutions are not very broadly based; the village councils are composed of elders and clan representatives who generally come from the “elite” of the village community. Women are usually excluded. The traditional institutions differ within the three states but most of them have functional similarities. Their major functions are land management, enforcement of traditional and customary law, settlement of disputes, management of forests, collection of revenue, etc.

The traditional institutions are generally not very democratic in nature as all sections of the community do not get represented in decision-making processes. The village chief with his council of elders decides on almost all issues regarding the development of the village. This has an inherent disadvantage, especially on issues related to equity and poverty. Of late, a number of government development programmes are being implemented through these traditional institutions but experiences have shown that many of the latter lack transparency and accountability especially when it comes to management of funds.

Natural Resource Management Groups (NaRM-G)

Sustaining long-term interventions, especially in development activities, requires strong institutional arrangements. Institution-building becomes necessary not only to respond to the preferences of the people but also to efficiently utilise the natural resources and traditional knowledge of the areas. The institutions must provide services consistent with people’s aspirations, tastes and preferences.

Site-specific choices can only be made through the full participation of the local communities. Bringing decision-making to the point of action can also significantly reduce the cost of information, in which case locally built people’s institutions become the keystone.

It is in this context that the North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project for Upland Areas facilitated the formation of the NaRM-G to supplement the existing traditional institutions and to help the communities to develop a more development-oriented institutional framework.



Salient Features of the Natural Resource Management Group (NaRM-G)

- The NaRM-G is a complementary institution to existing institutions in the villages.
- The NaRM-G comprises both women and men from each household of the village; 30% of the executive body members must be women.
 - One of the three signatories for the NaRM-fund operation is a woman.
 - No funds can be withdrawn or utilised without a written resolution passed by all members of the NaRM-G.
- All members must attend meetings which are held at regular intervals.
- Built-in mechanisms, such as community action plan charts, monitor the activities of all members and strict sanctions, are imposed against defaulters.
- The NaRM-G is democratic and participatory in decision-making assuring transparency and accountability to all members.

The Institution-Building Process

A team consisting of project staff, local NGOs and government line departments visits the villages a number of times to discuss various issues relating to their day-to-day life. The team explains the project and its objectives. Several discussions are held with the village headmen, chiefs and other local leaders; after the initial visits, the community and the team jointly hold a three-day camp at the village. The village community usually provides a place to stay, cook food, etc. During these camps, various tools of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) on development and livelihood contexts are applied. These exercises help the community to analyse into their situations leading to lots of debate amongst themselves. PRA tools like Venn diagrams and institutional linkage maps are used to discuss existing institutional arrangements within the community.

Rapport-building between the team and the community

- Clearly state the objectives and purpose of visits
- Conduct discussions on issues and problems.
- Meet with individual households through house visits.
 - Be sensitive in understanding the community.
 - Make overnight stays compulsory.
 - Visit the village in adverse conditions (during rains, in the evening) when they are at home.
 - Never visit the village with politicians and public leaders.
 - Do not stay in the house of the village headman or other socially important people.



Facilitating Conflict Resolution

The Dimasa Kachari village of Gurubari is located at the north Cachar hills of Assam. The Gava Burha (traditional village institute) not only enforces the customary laws and administration but is also the custodian of the village lands and forests. Women are not admitted into the council.

The project team visited the village to explore the possibility of establishing a NaRM-G, which will include women as members. The menfolk objected to this saying that women will not only find it difficult to attend meetings but also that this will add to their burden. The team and the villagers failed to reach an agreement, so the team decided to meet the women separately. During the discussion, the women expressed their desire to be part of the NaRM-G, but wanted to set up a separate woman's group that would act as a pressure group. A women's self-help group (SHG) was therefore formed; within one month, they initiated a meeting with all the village community where they demanded their participation in the NaRM-G.

Today, the NaRM-G of the village has both men and women as members and they take decisions jointly. Facilitating the dialogue between the two groups and not imposing objectives upon the community was an important learning because doing things otherwise might not have yielded the desired results.





Participatory exercises through PRA

- Focus on institution-building.
- Hold discussions with the community on the purpose of the exercises.
 - Involve all members in the discussion.
 - Never generate information which cannot be used by both the community and the team (the principle of optimal ignorance).

Facilitating to build new institutions (NaRM-G)

- Relate to the PRA exercises.
- Understand relationships between the institution and the community.
- Emphasise why women should be part of the institution. Make sure that the women are heard and actively participate.

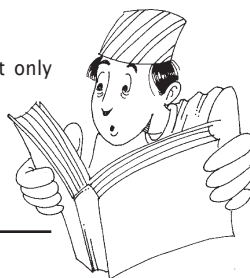


- Ensure participation of all members of the community.
- Discuss the project and how it can be achieved with the existing institutional setup.
- Never suggest to build a new institution.
- Never have discussions without the presence of village elders and the village headmen.

People's Institutions: The Strength Within

Chandigiri is a village in the Garo hills of Meghalaya. The community consists of the ethnic Garo group where the head of the village is the Nokama or custodian of the village land and resources. In this community, women own the land and it is the husband who is called the Nokama. The village already had a resource management committee consisting of both men and women to look after their natural resource. The committee also imposed strong sanctions against those who break the rules.

When the project initiated the formation of a NaRM-G, the village committee was willing not only to accept and adopt the project principles but also strengthen their institution and function as the NaRM-G. Today, this committee has all the women in the village in their general body. This shows that it is not always necessary to build new institutions, but that it is possible to build upon existing institutions.



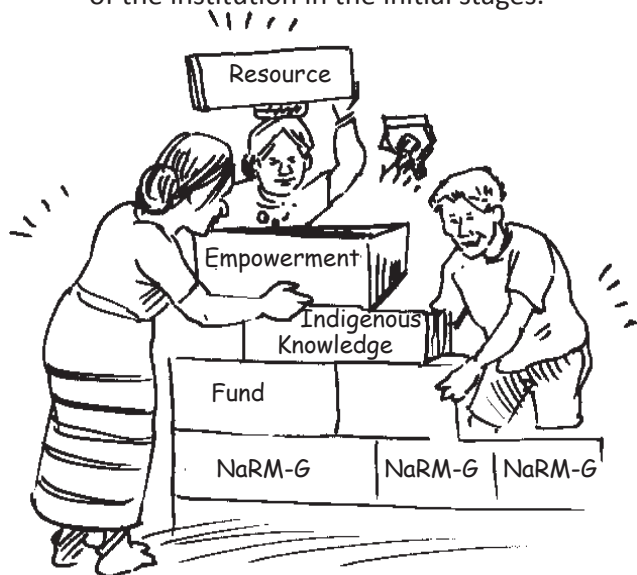
Social agreement

- Discuss the objectives and role of the institutions.
- Facilitate the formulation of rules and regulations with the community.
- Discuss the mode and method of operation.
- Discuss the functions of the newly-formed institution.
- Discuss the relationship between the newly-formed institution and the traditional institution.
- Make sure that all agreements are based on consensus and not only on the views of the majority.



Consolidating and strengthening the new institution (NaRM-G)

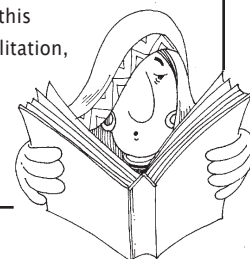
- Conduct adequate training at the village level on institutional management.
- Develop a self-monitoring system to strengthen the institution.
 - Try and avoid conflicts of interest among the members during the formation stage.
 - Facilitators to regularly attend the meetings of the institution in the initial stages.



People's Institutions: They Know Best

Halang Village in Ukhrul district of the state of Manipur has 365 households. On deliberations with the village authority and elders, they voiced their apprehension of such a large NaRM-G where every household is represented. It would not only be difficult to sit together and plan but also make it difficult for the poor and the resource-poor people of the village to be heard.

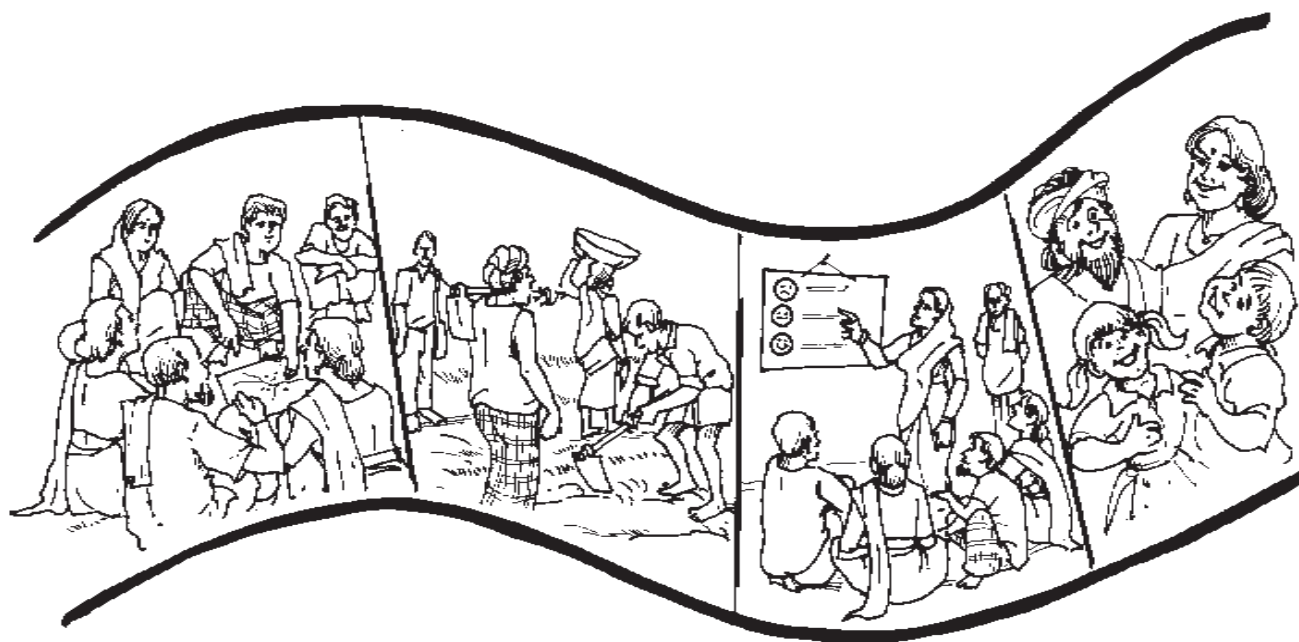
After a prolonged discussion, the villagers proposed that each Tang (sector) could have a NaRM-G. This will not only be easy to manage but also be more effective. Moreover, each Tang can represent the resource-poor from their respective Tang. They also suggested that the apex body could be the village authority to take decisions on activities like roads, drinking water, etc. The apex body decided that it will not operate any bank accounts but help to consolidate the common infrastructures and activities. An important learning from this experience is that, given the right facilitation, existing institutions are capable of undertaking their own decisions.



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Stakeholder Involvement in Participatory Practices: An Overview of Bangladesh NGOs



CARE-Bangladesh has carried out a long range strategic planning (LRSP) exercise for setting programme and organisational directions. One of its strategic directions is to promote stakeholder participation in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating development programmes. Documentation and sharing best-practices on stakeholders' participation form an integral part of the LRSP.

A task force (team) was set-up to learn about varied experiences relating to stakeholders' participation in development programmes.

Methodology Followed

The team identified participants, project staff, Government of Bangladesh counterparts, partner non-government organisations (NGOs), donors, research/academic institutions and CARE International as the primary stakeholders. Information and data were collected from both primary and secondary sources.

Selection of Projects for the Study

The team randomly selected three projects each out of three sectors namely: agriculture and natural resources; rural infrastructure; health and population. One partner NGO was selected purposively from the small economic activity development sector. In all, 10 projects implemented by CARE-Bangladesh were selected for gathering information and data.

The purpose was to select both international and national NGOs working in Bangladesh. Criteria used were: regional coverage and size of the organisation. The organisations that were practicing participatory approaches and had partnership with CARE were given preference. External organisations selected were: Scheme for Underprivileged People to Organise Themselves (SUPOTH), Action-Aid, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), CARITAS, SAMATA, BANSTESHAKA and Barisal Development Society (BDS).

Data collection

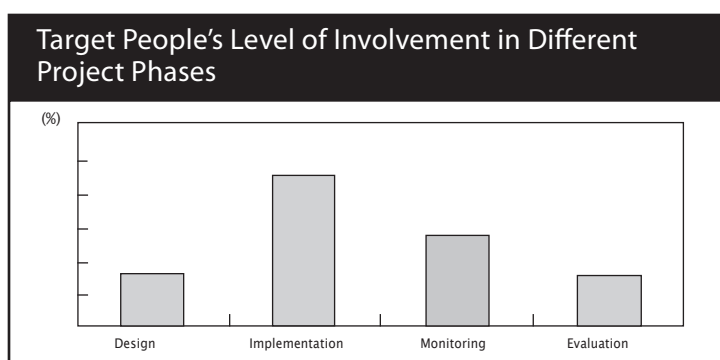
Data was collected through:

- focus group discussions (FGDs) at different levels;
- interview of key persons; and
- review of documents.

Major Findings

Participation of target beneficiaries

An attempt was made to determine the extent to which participatory approaches were practiced by different NGOs to involve participants/beneficiaries in different phases of the project. The participation was measured against the elements under each phase of the project. The following diagram shows that different organisations and the projects under study are using participatory approaches in different degrees. The survey indicated that the beneficiaries (target people) participated the most during implementation (93%) and least in designing and evaluating the project (32% and 31% respectively).



Elements of Project Phases

- A. Design Phase
- Need assessment
 - Problem analysis and prioritisation
 - Goal, log-frame and strategy formulation

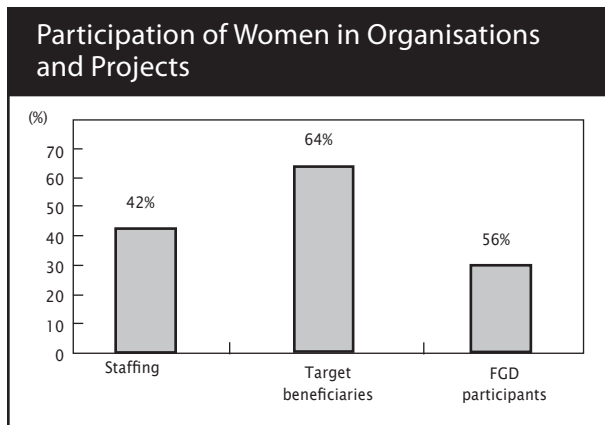
- B. Implementation Phase
- Activity planning and targetting
 - Activity implementation
 - Negotiated indicators [participatory monitoring and evaluation (PME)/ participatory learning and action (PLA) process, etc.]
 - Problem identification and solving (on-going phase)
 - Negotiated changes in strategy (on-going phase)

- C. Monitoring Phase
- Baseline activities and expectation setting
 - Progress monitoring
 - Analysis of results
 - Result sharing

- D. Evaluation Phase
- Evaluation of technical, social and economic changes/impact due to the project
 - Result sharing
 - Sustainability and replication
 - Future programme direction articulation



Similarly, variations in the participation of beneficiaries in inter-organisation and inter-project levels were analysed. In most cases, the target beneficiaries were involved in some of the stages of project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. However, their participation was not found to be effective in all phases of the projects.



Women’s participation

The study also investigated the level of women’s participation in project activities, their number among project staff, target beneficiaries and focus group discussion (FGD) participants. The data show that the participation of women had been quite appreciable in all the phases.

Overall participation

The field staff and the participants felt that they were suitably involved in the process of designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating of the projects and that this contributed significantly towards improving their analytical and decision-making skills. They were more confident and had developed a sense of ownership in their organisations.

Participatory practices in different phases

The study revealed various similarities and dissimilarities in participatory practices used by different organisations at different phases. An attempt was made to document different best/exemplary practices of ensuring participation in the project cycle including design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The experiences drawn at different phases are presented below:

A. Design Phase

Potential Participatory Practices

- Conducting needs assessments deploying holistic approaches (e.g., HLSA, ZOPP, REFLECT method) or applying participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools (e.g., transect walk, community mapping, large group discussion, focus group, wealth ranking, key informants, seasonalities, household interview, etc.)
- Needs assessments by applying PLA process.
- Problem identification meeting at the village level.
- Beneficiaries’ opinion surveys (on-going phase).
- Taking views from the staff in meetings.
- Design workshops involving different level of stakeholders.

Experience

Involvement of the community/target groups at the design phase was minimum. The senior programme officials did most of the designing. Although many organisations/projects were following a bottom-up approach in designing projects involving people and different levels of stakeholders, they did not ensure meaningful involvement of the people at all stages of the design, e.g., needs assessment, problem analysis, formulation of goals and strategies.

For smaller NGOs, costs and lack of in-house expertise were the main limiting factors to conduct an in-depth needs assessment and design involving different levels of stakeholders.

B. Implementation Phase

Potential Participatory Practices

- Activity planning through PME/PLA, group discussion.
- Regular monthly meetings with groups.
- Regular monthly, bi-monthly/quarterly meetings with field-level staff.
- Monthly and semestral local chapter/ federation meetings.
- Weekly group meetings (mainly savings and credit groups).
- Monthly courtyard sessions.
- Doorstep meetings with target groups.
- Need-based seasonal meetings with target groups.
- Annual review and planning meetings with project field staff.
- Group elections to change the leadership (annual/every two-years).
- Annual general meetings of local committees (chapter, federation, union).
- Local bodies elections (chapter, federation, union).

Experience

Involvement of different stakeholders, particularly project target groups and field workers, was observed to be high at different stages of implementation. Target groups and ground-level extensionists were very much involved in activity planning and implementation. There was a wide variation in approaches to ensuring the involvement of stakeholders (particularly target groups) in progress monitoring, problem identification and changes in strategies. In most of the projects, only the senior management/Government of Bangladesh counterparts and donors had designed the broader implementation framework. According to their needs, the participants and grassroot-level field workers prepared field level implementation plans, keeping in mind the broader implementation framework. They also applied participatory approaches to their work.

C. Monitoring Phase

Potential Participatory Practices

- PME/PLA sessions.
- Monitoring by local committee.
- Open discussions with villagers.
- Progress review at the group level.
- Receiving feedback from the groups.
- Progress review and analysis with the staff in monthly meetings.
- Result-sharing at the group level (monthly, seasonal, annual).
- Sharing output/progress at the annual general meeting by the local chapter, federation, union).
- Sharing the monitoring report at different levels.

Experience

Some organisations provide assurance of involvement of stakeholders particularly direct project participants in monitoring the progress or results. Involvement of the people, however, was not ensured at all stages, like result monitoring, analysis and decision-making. Organisations provided for increased participation in PME/PLA/group sessions.

D. Evaluation Phase

Potential Participatory Practices

- Seasonal evaluation applying PLA/PME.
- Self-evaluation engaging different stakeholders.
- Sharing evaluation findings with the participants and staff.
- Sharing evaluation findings in the chapter, federation and union meetings.
- Sharing evaluation reports.

Experience

Both summative and formative evaluations were done externally or by the senior staff of the project/ organisation using log-frame indicators and pre-designed methods and tools. Few organisations/projects were applying participatory approaches like PME, PLA, self-evaluation, sharing of evaluation findings and involving project participants, community and field-level staff in the process.

It was observed that there were some exemplary practices of sharing evaluation findings at different levels, particularly at the project beneficiary level, during annual general meetings. Future directions are also articulated through this process.

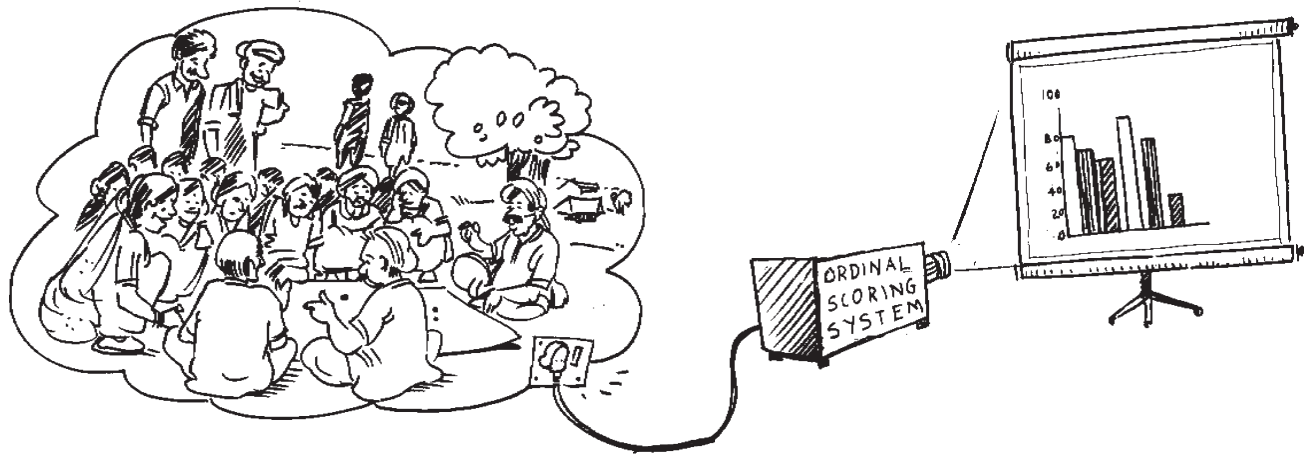
All the development organisations brought under the purview of the study are making serious efforts to involve different stakeholders by applying different participatory practices. But full-scale/meaningful involvement of both male and female target groups/beneficiaries and other stakeholders in different phases of the project cycle was hardly observed. In spite of these conditions, national, international, regional and local NGOs are trying to adapt different participatory practices to ensure involvement of different stakeholders.



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RESOURCE BOOK PRODUCED IN A PARTICIPATORY WRITESHOP ORGANISED BY THE International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC), Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP), South East Asian Rural Social Leadership Institute (SEARSOLIN), MYRADA and International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR).

Enhancing the “Assessment” in Participatory Assessments



Ordinal scoring systems convert qualitative information from participatory assessments into numbers, and assist the analysis of such information. But there are several pitfalls in this process – villagers may find it difficult to self-score, the scale categories may not capture field reality, or the ordinal scoring system may not capture interesting and relevant project processes – which affect the validity and reliability of results. This is unfortunate given the rich possibilities of ordinal scoring systems to complement participatory assessments. This paper presents and draws on two recent participatory assessment exercises to highlight concerns and illustrate good practices. It also describes how such assessments can be extended, for instance, for use in project geographical information system (GIS), to exploit the possibilities offered by a sound ordinal scoring system to complement participatory assessment methodologies.

The PLA and the MPA

The term methodology for participatory assessments (MPA) was coined by a multidisciplinary team working on the global participatory learning for action (PLA) Initiative study for the Water and Sanitation Program. The PLA study assessed 88 communities in 15 countries using the MPA.

Key features of the MPA

- A specially developed analytical framework which identifies the main factors affecting sustained and effective use of project facilities, and hence, the key indicators and sub-indicators to be assessed. These were developed after intensive discussions with community men and women, project field staff, NGOs and resource persons in different countries. Special attention was paid to prevent the process from becoming extractive, and to include indicators sensitive to gender and poverty.

- **A number of commonly used participatory tools** such as wealth assessments, transect walks, card scoring, matrix voting and stakeholder meets. Tools were carefully chosen to suit the context as the same information can be generated using different tools.



- **A codebook** which specified ordinal rating scales (from 0 to 100) to capture field realities accurately and to assist field workers experienced in participatory assessments to translate qualitative field experience into ordinal scores.
- **Community folders** to note the raw (tool-specific) information from the community assessments, and special qualitative issues which explained the scores given.
- **Basic ordinal statistical analysis** including frequency analysis, cross-tabulations and correlation analysis, done using a spreadsheet software and without specially developed software.

Strengths of the MPA

While the individual elements of the MPA have been used before in participatory assessments, it is the way these have been combined into a single methodology that is its real strength. In particular, four aspects of this methodology stand out:

1. **A holistic approach to assessing sustainability.** This links sustainability with gender, poverty, participation and demand-responsive approaches, using participatory assessments. It also links community, institutional and policy levels, visualising sustainability as a goal that must be pursued simultaneously at these three levels.
2. **Emphasis on capturing processes.** The response categories of the ordinal scoring system seek to capture not mere quantitative aspects or subjective value judgements, but the nature of the underlying process. This enables easy identification of good and bad performance across project communities, and also permits meaningful comparison of community experience across regions and even countries, in terms of graphs and tables, and basic statistical analysis.
3. **Retention of supporting qualitative information.** Normally, participatory assessments using ordinal scores do not report why a particular response was given. The use of community folders ensures that users at the project and programme levels can always go back to individual community folders to understand these reasons.
4. **Multiple-use of information.** A single round of assessments generates information that can be used, in appropriate formats, by the community (e.g., maps, achievement ladders, etc.), and also by project management and policy-makers (graphs, tables, spreadsheets, etc).

Applying the MPA Principles: the DOON Watershed Study

A socio-economic and environmental impact study of the 7-year-old Doon Valley Integrated Watershed Management Project (Dehradun, India) was conducted in 1999-2000, adapting certain features of the MPA to the new context, namely, participatory assessments, ordinal scoring systems and multiple-use information.

The adaptation of the MPA to the watershed context, and its focus on socio-economic and environmental impact rather than on sustainability, necessitated a complete re-definition of the indicators and the ordinal scoring system.

Significant aspects of the DOON study

Ordinal community scores for soil erosion control

Assessing the impact of soil and water conservation measures on erosion damage to fields usually requires the collection of extensive and continuous field-data, and detailed technical analysis. Instead, villager perceptions were used to document the rough dimensions of change. On a village resource map, they first marked the areas affected by erosion where the project had worked. For each site, they scored the effectiveness of soil erosion measures: score of 0 meant that the problem continued unchanged, while a score of 100 meant that the problem had stopped completely. Villagers identified immediately with the scoring system (since it paralleled the money scale: 1 rupee = 100 paise), and in fact, suggested a local variation, the 16 anna scale (16 annas = 1 rupee or 100%, while 8 annas = 50 paise or 50%, etc.). Since the scoring system was easily understood, the discussion of what (ordinal) value to give for each site produced a consensus quickly. The resulting scores also enabled project management to easily identify problem areas and villages where project activities had produced the desired result (in the eyes of the villagers).

Village Scores on Erosion Control							
Village	Division	Scores on erosion control					
		Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5	Average
Tachchila	Dehradun	50	75	100	40		66
Majhara	Dehradun	100	100	100	100		100
Rainiwala	Dehradun	100	100				
Hasanpur	Dehradun	25	100	100	100		81
Bhopalpani	Song	0	0	0	0		0
Bharwakatal	Song	50	25	75			50
Kalimati	Song	75	75				
Marora	Song	50	75	50	100		69
Dudhai	Kalsi	75	100	50			75
Nahad	Kalsi	50	25	75			50
Singli	Kalsi	80	100	100	40		80
Sorna	Kalsi	100	100	100			
Koti May Chak	Rishikesh	75	100	75	50	100	80

Frequency of Village Scores on Soil Erosion Control								
Score	0	25	40	50	75	80	100	Total
Frequency	0	3	2	7	8	1	17	38
Percentage	0 %	8 %	5 %	19 %	22 %	3 %	46 %	100 %

* Excludes sites in Rishikesh villages which were affected by the recent earthquake and flash floods.

Capturing impact of social processes

Relatively simple indicators were used to assess changes in the number of women who attended village meetings, before and after the project; the change in numbers who felt confident enough to speak out at such meetings; and changes in the number of households where men consumed alcohol (a major problem in hill villages).

Use without baseline information

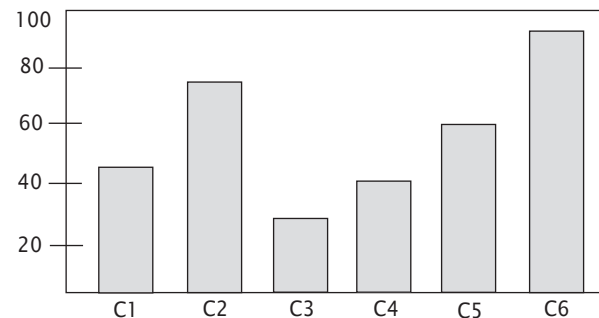
As reliable baseline information was not readily available, community perceptions were used to assess project impact. When asked, "If pre-project crop income is given a score of 100, what score would they give to post-project agricultural crop income?" Villagers were able to give a consensus figure (in terms of their own 16-anna scale).

Although crude, such methods may well have an "acceptable level of imprecision"; i.e., even with baseline data, and full evaluation techniques, the margins of error may turn out to be roughly the same. They are certainly cost- and time effective (getting the last 10% of accuracy may account for 80% of the cost of conventional methods).

Scoring Women's Participation in Community Management Committees

Options	Score
■ Women are not members of the management committee	0
■ Women are members but do not attend	25
■ Women members attend, but do not speak up	50
■ Women members attend and speak – but do not influence decisions	75
■ Women members attend, speak out, and are able to influence decisions	100

Women's Participation in Community Management



Note: C1 = Community 1; C2= community 2, etc.

Good Practice in Using Ordinal Scoring Systems

Although the MPA uses commonly used elements, experiences with problems on the field prompted the following guides for good practice in using ordinal scoring systems.

Design

■ Use a 0 - 100 scale with “gaps”

In comparison with 1 - 3 or 1 - 5 scales, this has two advantages.

First, it avoids the problem often experienced in the field with a 1 - 3 or 1 - 5 scale: villagers feel their situation is neither 2 nor 3, but somewhere in between (3.5? 3.75?). If options are scored with “gaps” (e.g., option 1 = score 0; option 2 = score 25; option 3 = score 50, etc.), it is easier to score an in-between situation as say 30 or 40.



Second, actual percentages can also be shown to avoid the problem of “squeezing” percentages into an ordinal scale (e.g., 0 - 33% = 1; 33 - 66% = 2, etc.). Depicting percentages in full gives more information to the person (e.g., project manager or project monitoring and evaluation unit) who expressed the need in the first place.

■ Use descriptive ordinal categories as far as possible

It is difficult to compare scores from ordinal scales devised to pick up people’s value judgements (e.g., good = 100; average = 50; bad = 25; etc.). But “descriptive ordinal categories” – which arrange descriptive categories in a certain order (*see, for instance, the scoring for women’s participation in community management given in page 182*) – can capture processes much more meaningfully than, for instance, “percentage of women on management committees”.

On the field

■ Do not prompt respondents

Even team staff members (either drawn from local NGOs or part of the project’s staff) with experience in conducting PRA exercises should not prompt scores, or attempt to score for the community, for these defeat the purpose of self-scoring. This can also initiate biases (where the community feels it must give scores that project management will “like”). Conflicting opinions, in fact, initiate clarificatory debate.

Reporting assessment results

■ Describe respondents

When reporting results, detail the nature of community respondents (e.g., how many were present, out of how many) so that users of the final results can distinguish between scores given by a small sub-section of the project community and those given by a majority (or all members).

Potential Uses

Although the MPA has been used so far in different contexts (e.g., watershed projects) and purposes (e.g., assessing sustainability or socio-economic or environmental impact), the potential of the MPA is much larger. Potential uses are described below.

Decision support

■ Project design

The global PLA study identified key variables underlying sustainability in water and sanitation projects, which, if used to design such projects, can improve their sustainability. Work is underway in India to identify key variables for other types of projects (e.g., poverty alleviation projects, and rural livelihoods projects).

■ Policy performance review

The stakeholder meetings can be useful tools to bring policy decision-makers, project management and community representatives to review project performance on the basis of both ordinal scores and qualitative detail. Such a relatively simple and quick representation of qualitative information could enrich and improve policy and institutional review.

Acknowledgement

This paper draws on joint work by a team (of which the present author was a member) from the Water and Sanitation Program, which includes the "Methodology for Participatory Assessments with Communities, Institutions and Policy Makers" (Dayal, Wijk, Mukherjee, 1999) and the final global synthesis report (under preparation). It also draws on the report (by the present author) of the "Socio-Economic and Environmental Impact Study" of the European Community funded Doon Valley Integrated Management Project, submitted to WS Atkins International, UK, April 2000.



■ Community decision-making

MPA can be used as part of a project management's participatory learning approach, training the village community to use ordinal scoring for self-management and village-level decision-making, with appropriately modified visual representation of ordinal scores.

Community-level M&E of project performance

■ Use in GIS-linked M&E

Since an ordinal scoring system generates numbers, scores on even "soft" social and institutional issues (such as capacity-building, women's empowerment, transparency and accountability of community organisations, etc.) can be added to a project's GIS, which normally tracks only financial and technical information.

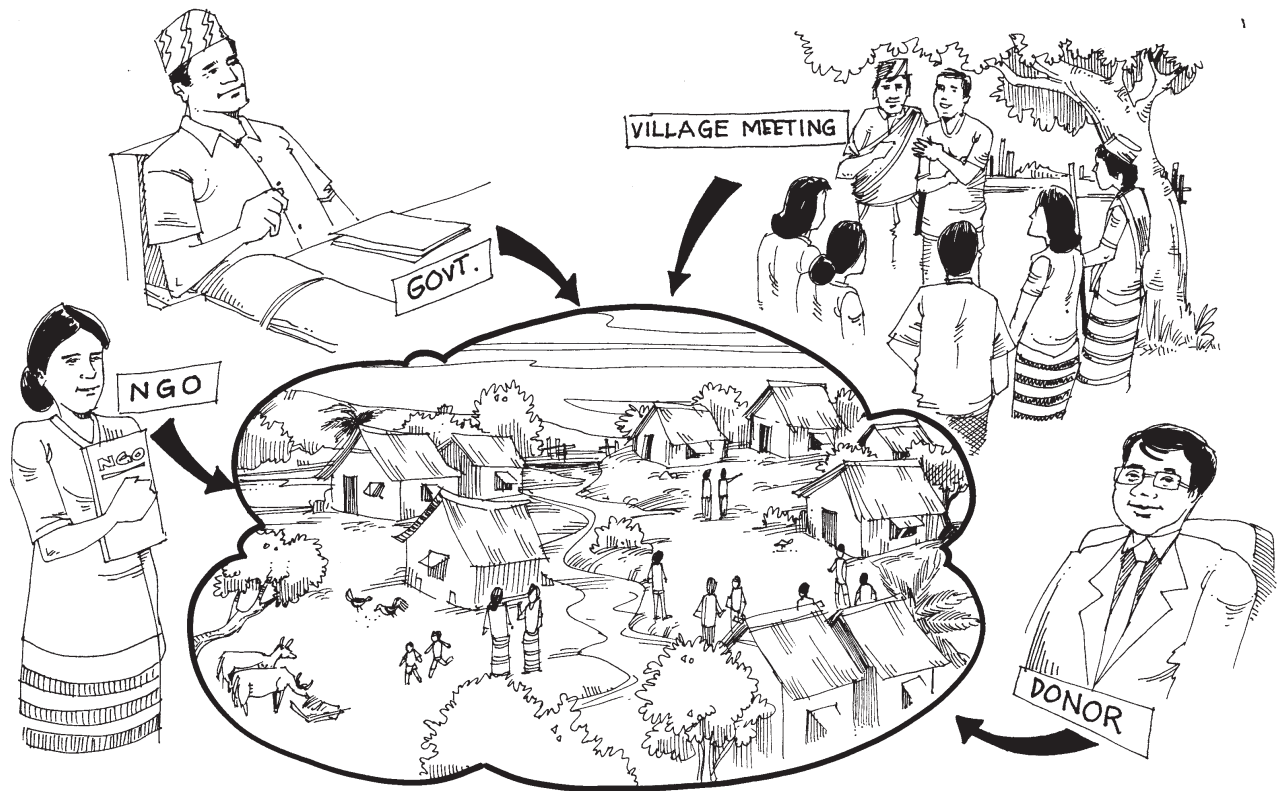
■ Continuous monitoring

With comparable annual assessments, a well-designed ordinal scoring system can help communities and project management to track progress over time. It can also improve end-of-project evaluations by providing a trend over time, rather than a comparison of mere baseline and final figures.

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Participatory Planning in Nepal



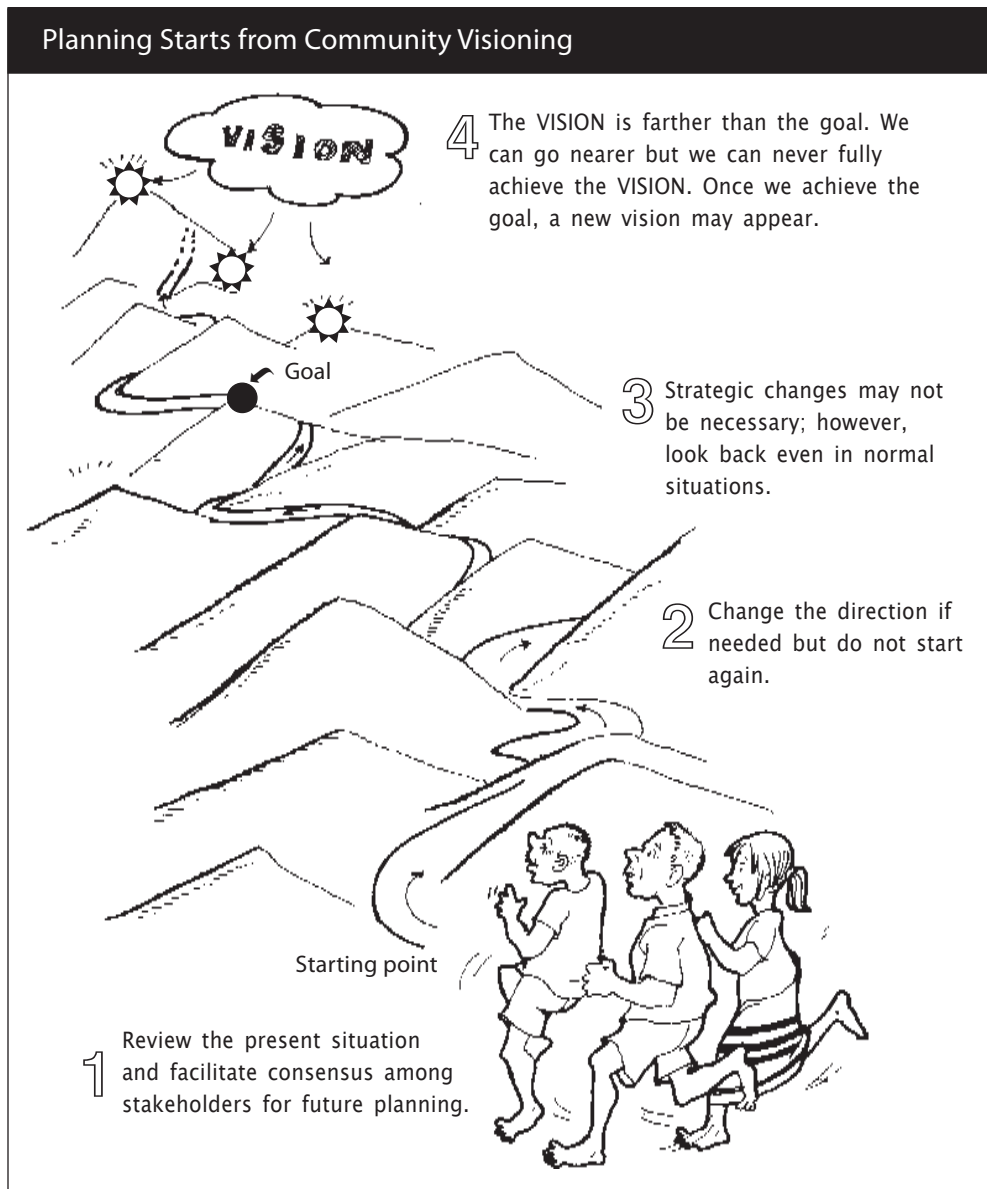
Nepal has had a long tradition of development interventions. Planned development formally started in 1956 and efforts have been recently made by the government to make the planning process more participatory and transparent. Promulgation of laws and acts, restructuring of the bureaucracy and modification of the political structure are some of the efforts made in this direction.

Besides the government sector, several external agencies have joined hands in strengthening planned development in the country. These agencies have largely influenced the state policies related to development. As a consequence, the local Self-Governance Act (1998) and Associated By-laws (1999) were passed by the parliament. These marked the beginning of the “one-door policy in planning” within the legal framework of the state. This new policy has encouraged many groups in the non-government sector to join and support the mainstream of government planning structure.

Realising the importance of participatory planning, the Government of Nepal has introduced the Participatory District Development Programme (PDDP) and the Local Governance Programme (LGP) with the technical assistance of the UNDP. These programmes cover 60 out of the 75 districts of the country, covering some 16 million people.

One-Door Policy in Planning

The multiplicity of agencies, including NGOs, has sometimes posed problems in planning and implementation of development plans. The one-door policy of the PDDP envisages the convergence of all such efforts to one stream through participatory planning. This will not only facilitate the planning process, but also make the process more transparent and location-specific.



Participatory planning encourages a bottom-up approach that will promote local autonomy and discourage the tendency to follow guidelines and instructions from the top. PDDP believes in convincing local leaders, bureaucrats, etc. of the effectiveness of genuine decentralisation in the system.

Objectives of PDDP

PDDP seeks to empower people to take increasingly greater control of their own development and enhance their capacities to mobilise and channel resources required for poverty alleviation. PDDP works simultaneously at the local and central levels to achieve its objectives.

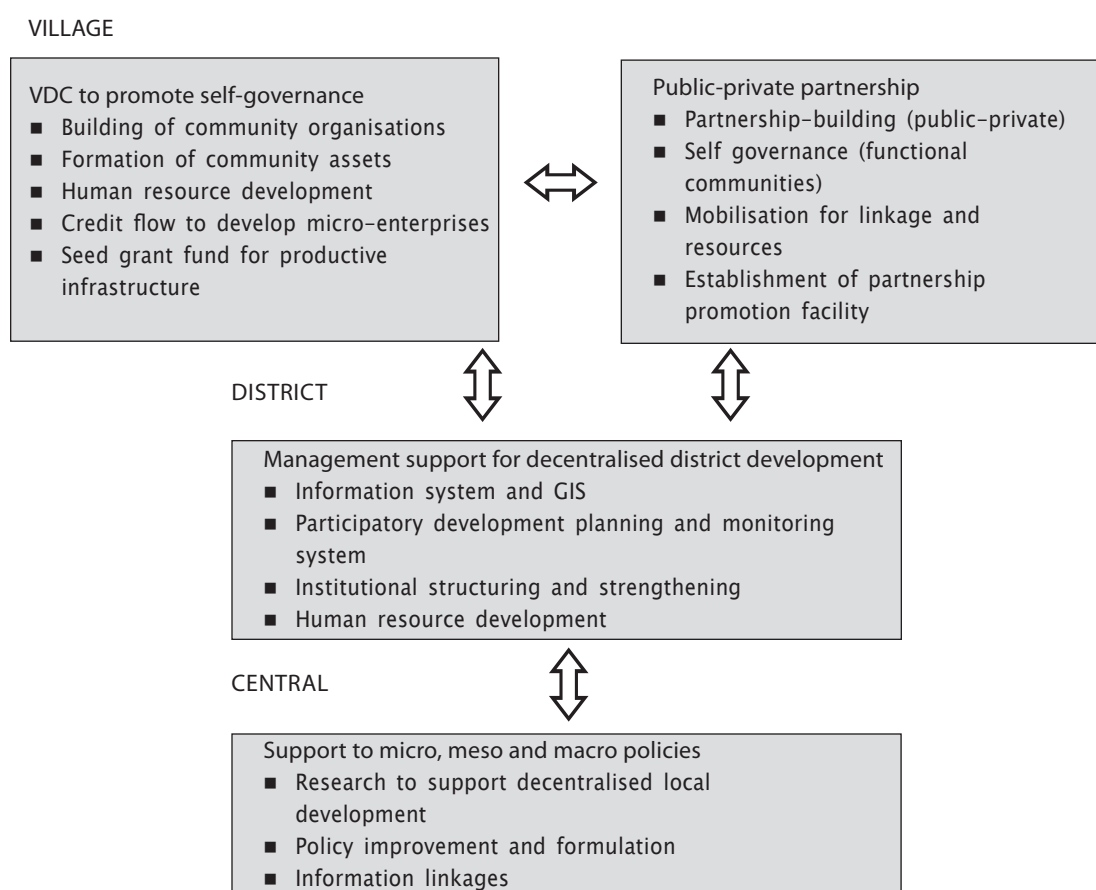
At the micro level

PDDP supports the improvement of the governance system and social empowerment processes at the village level through the development of self-governing community institutions.

At the meso level

PDDP supports the strengthening of development programming and management capabilities of District Development Committees (DDCs).

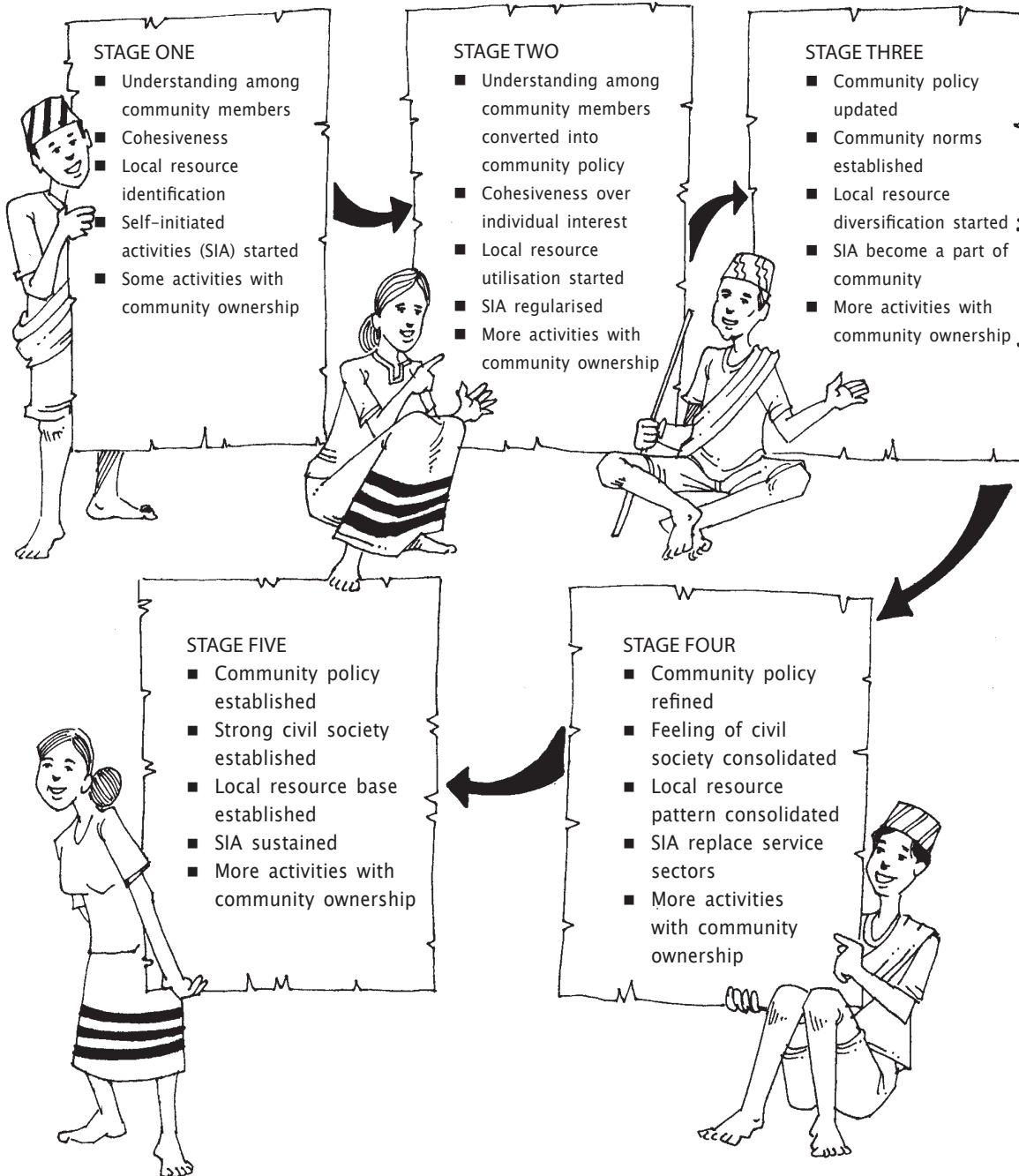
PDDP at a Glance



At the macro level

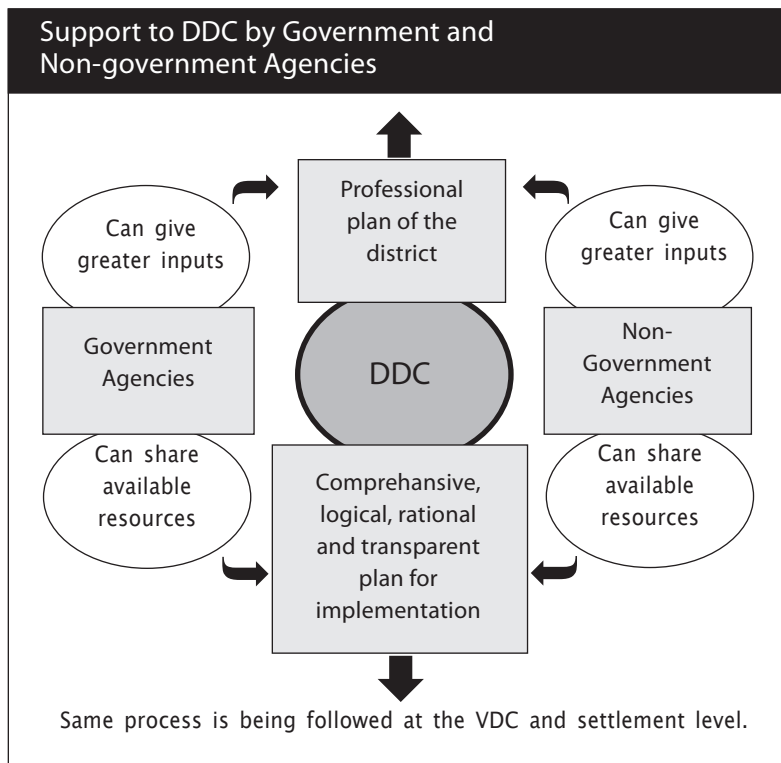
PDDP supports the National Planning Commission (NPC) and the Ministry of Local Development (MLD) towards policies that reflect and support local-level development initiatives.

Stages of participatory planning



Major Learnings

- PDDP has recognised importance of people's participation in the planning process, encouraging them to make their own plans.
- A step-by-step approach is used to avoid attempting to do too many things and not doing anything well.
- PDDP helps communities to formulate their own visions and plans to meet their development needs. Visioning sets the stage for broad-based planning and specific operational plans.
- PDDP makes plans flexible and enables the people to make periodic revisions at various levels.
- PDDP advocates that the planning process has to start at the community level. Complicated planning concepts like periodic plan, strategic plan and so on may confuse the people and they may not cooperate.
- A professionally-sound district plan document is necessary to avoid possible manipulation, political favouritism and subsequent cuts in the budget imposed from the outside. Although adequate human resources, skills and equipment are available in the districts, plans are often unprofessional, leaving scope for manipulation from the centre. On the other hand, professional district plans with specific activities and justification for budget requirements discourage impositions from district and central officials.
- It is often believed that grassroots institutions are incapable of handling a development process, on the grounds that trained manpower and adequate resources are not available at this level. PDDP advocates a greater role for NGOs and civil society organisations and the government has mobilised internal and external resources to build capacity at the grassroots level through training.



Policy Shift in Local Governance

The passage of the Local Self-Governance Act of 1998 has given a major impetus to the promotion of decentralised local governance in Nepal. The Act has provided extensive authority and responsibility to DDCs and VDCs at the district and village levels, respectively. The authority of the local bodies can only be exercised if their capacity is enhanced. The new Act and its Regulations, when fully implemented, will have substantial impact on the role of the state and local authorities in Nepal. DDCs and VDCs are expected to have:

- substantially increased revenues;
- greater responsibilities for the services presently carried out by sectoral line agencies;
- periodic plan and annual plan for implementation; and
- policy feedback to and from the High Level Monitoring Committee.



Development Fund

As a part of decentralisation of financial powers, the DDC and the VDC are empowered to spend around Rs.2 million and Rs. 0.5 million per year respectively on developmental activities that are part of the approved plan of DDCs and VDCs.



- The multiplicity of development agencies often creates confusion because of individual activities and funds. PDDP calls for a single vision at the district level, providing a common ground for various activities in the district.

PDDP has given a new direction to the development planning in Nepal. It has made the planning process more democratic, professional and transparent. It will enable people to reflect their aspirations in the plans and to prioritise their own needs. PDDP also enables them to mobilise their own resources and make best use of the capital grants made available to them.

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Participatory Self-Monitoring System: The Maharashtra Rural Credit Project

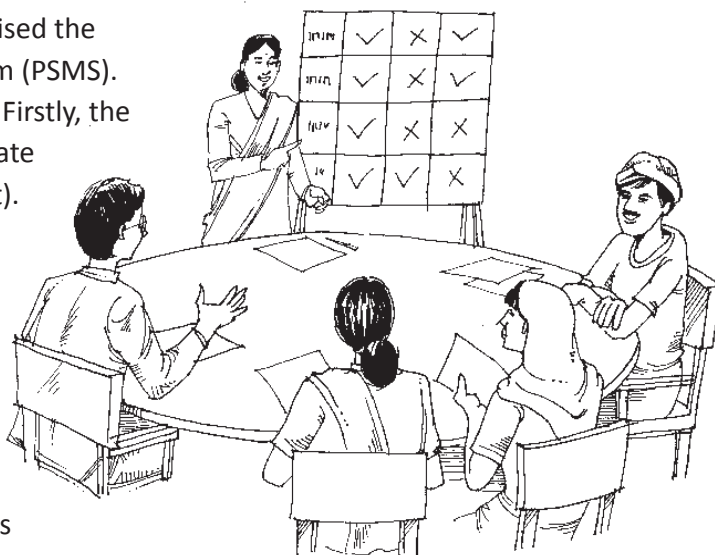


In the early 1970s, groups were promoted as an extension of the delivery system of the extension agencies and banks in India. But two decades later, with the change in refinancing policy of the national bank, groups could borrow large amounts from the banks and distribute these to members at ceiling-free interest rates. The Maharashtra Rural Credit Project (MRCP) was designed within this changed framework for the functioning of small informal groups – the self-help groups (SHGs). The changes implied that the groups virtually could have an indefinite life, much beyond a project or a programme of fixed duration. It also required groups to take decisions on lending terms such as interest rates, repayment period, etc. Groups, thus, became management units by themselves and required effective planning and monitoring systems. Although this need was identified by the financier, no system as such was suggested. Group activities were monitored on selective basis using a survey-based concurrent monitoring system implemented by one of the banking training institutions promoted by a consortium of state-owned banks.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)-assisted Tamil Nadu Women's Development Project began in India in the late 1980s, with MYRADA as the lead non-government organisation (NGO). When the project was implemented, some of the operating parameters changed; instead of banks collecting the savings and utilising it in the manner they liked, savings were kept at the group level. In due course, these savings were internally lent to the group members. Thus the philosophy for which groups were formed changed. In early 1990s, the National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development changed its refinancing policy and the groups were recognised as financial intermediaries. The Maharashtra Rural Credit Project (MRCP) was designed by IFAD in this background.

Why PSMS?

Those involved in promoting groups soon realised the need for a participatory self-monitoring system (PSMS). A number of factors triggered this realisation. Firstly, the amount saved was increasing at a very rapid rate (partly contributed by the high rate of interest). Secondly, groups started showing significant variation in terms of performance and thus, some sort of rating system had to be developed to facilitate the loan appraisal process. Thirdly, as this project had some very innovative features, the pressure to report on outputs and impact from the central and state governments and donors was high. As the number of groups had already crossed 4,000, even a sample-based external monitoring system would be expensive. A widely-used participatory system was also considered necessary in order to facilitate the process of loan approval.



Highlights of the PSMS Manual

Principles

- For sustained existence, the quality of groups needs to be ensured.
- A system should evolve from among the members themselves.
- Since many members are illiterate, PSMS should be in the form of pictorial charts.

Operationalisation

- PSMS should have two subsets: monthly and annual.
- After participatory self-assessments in the group meeting, members are required to rank the group on each indicator.
- The grading is represented in green for good, yellow for average and red for bad.
- "Impartial comparison" is possible with this system.



PSMS Design Process

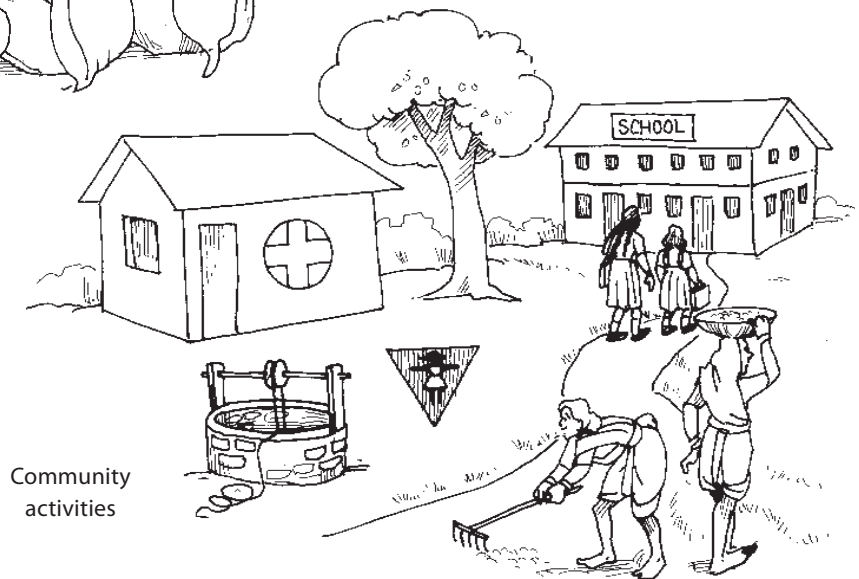
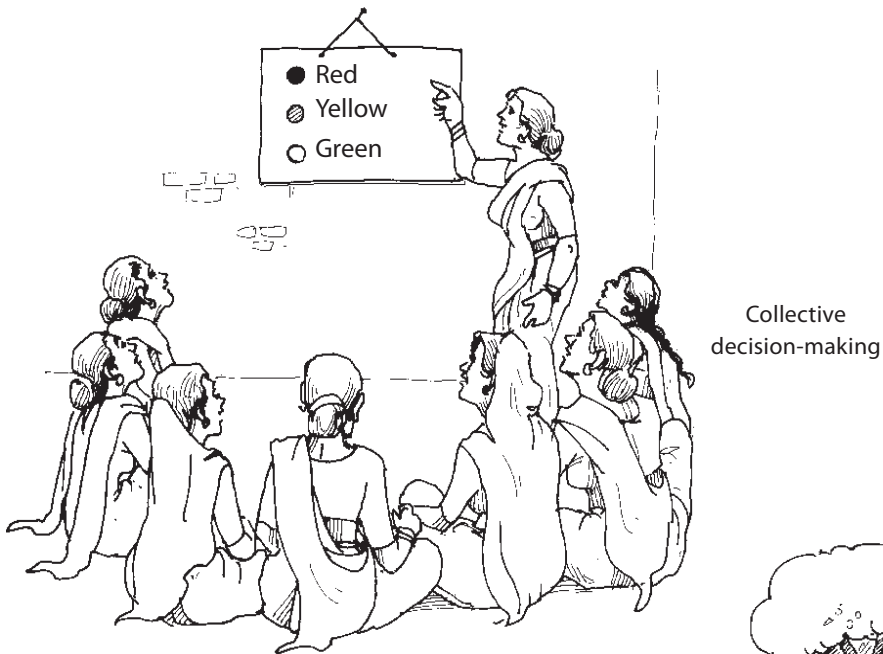
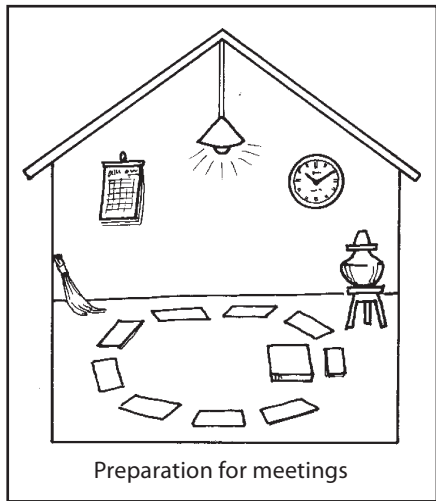
The design process began with the NGOs explaining to the groups the rationale for the monitoring system. Mature groups who had a significant amount of savings and who visualised the importance of groups as a permanent feature of the village, quickly appreciated the need for such a process. Bankers contributed to the process by specifying important indicators. After initial discussion with selected groups and obtaining a wide range of indicators, a meeting of group leaders was convened in various districts. Views naturally differed on the utility of various indicators. Project management invariably felt that a localised (as opposed to standardised) set of indicators would be too difficult to manage. NGOs however were willing to consider a more localised version but not a unique set for each group. With further discussions (spread over four months), two sets of indicators were finalised. A simple manual was produced, first in English and after initial testing, was translated into Marathi, a local language. The manual – Participatory Self-Monitoring System for Self-Help Groups – is the outcome of collective thinking of the National Bank, the NGOs and the project clientele.

The monitoring indicators chosen for the monthly and annual monitoring system under the MRCP are shown below.

Indicators for Monthly Monitoring Under the MRCP

Indicators	Grading Criteria		
	○ (Green) Good	◐ (Yellow) Average	● (Red) Bad
1. Preparation for meetings: activities should include cleanliness and arrangement for lamp, drinking water, sitting (on the floor), monitoring chart and a clock.	All necessary arrangements	More than half	No preparation
2. Regularity of the meetings	As scheduled	On dates other than predetermined	No meeting
3. Timeliness	As scheduled	Late (<2 hours)	Late (>2 hours)
4. Attendance in the meeting	All members	< 75 %	< 75 %
5. Recording the proceedings, decision of the meeting, and presentation at the next meeting	Recorded and presented	Recorded but not presented	Not recorded
6. Savings: deposited on the fixed date	All members	>90% of members	<90% of members
7. Account keeping for transparency	All financial transactions are recorded during the meeting itself	Accounts are completed after the meeting	Accounts are incomplete or not kept at all
8. Collective decision-making: all members are expected to participate actively in the meeting so that the group's functioning is democratic	Decisions are taken collectively	Only few members participate	Decisions are taken without discussion
9. Repayment of loans: for the credibility and sustainability of the groups	Repaid on time	>95% loans are repaid on time	<95% loans are repaid on time
10. Lending: to meet the credit requirement of the members	Up to 95% of the available resources	<95% of the available resources	No loan disbursement
11. Petty cash: for meeting emergency needs, but not too much as there is an opportunity cost of keeping the funds idle (fix a limit)	Cash within the prefixed limit	More than the limit	Entire savings kept as cash
12. Insurance: against damage to the life of the member or the assets	Insurance of members and assets acquired under the group loan	Insurance of some members and assets	No insurance
13. Community activities: discussion and action on social issues such as public health and sanitation, adult and functional literacy, tree planting, drinking water, shramdan (voluntary labour contribution), or gender issues, mainly to create social awareness among group members	Discussed and undertaken	Discussed but not undertaken	No discussion and no action taken

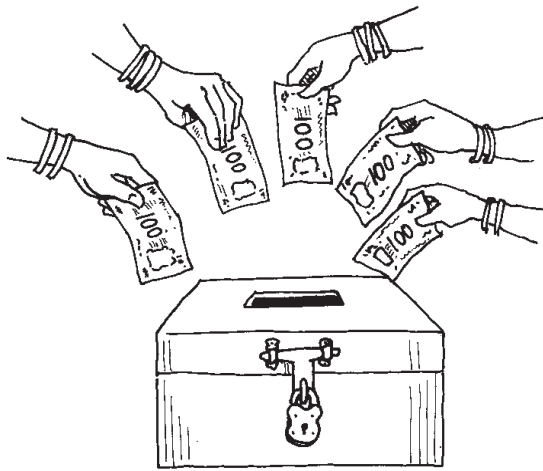
Examples of Visual Representation of Some Indicators for Monthly Monitoring



Indicators for Annual Monitoring Under the MRCP

Indicators	Grading Criteria		
	○ (Green) Good	⊗ (Yellow) Average	● (Red) Bad
1. Responsibility sharing: rotation of activities such as preparation for meetings, preparation of agenda, bookkeeping, dealing with banks, etc.	>50% members share responsibilities	<50% members share responsibilities	No sharing
2. Common fund: consisting of savings, interest received, penalties, etc.	Exists	No common fund	-
3. Lending: to meet members' needs	>60% of the needs met	30-60% of the needs met	<30% of the needs met
4. Income generation: to increase income and enhance living standards among those taking loans	>50% increase in income	25-50% increase in income	<25% increase in income
5. External financial assistance (e.g., from banks, as groups themselves usually are not able to meet all their financial needs)	Financial assistance taken	Financial assistance not taken	-
6. Insurance: against damage to life of members and assets	Facility availed with group loans by all members	Facility availed by some members and for some assets	-
7. Training: for skills development in managing SHGs such as book-keeping and accounts, vocational activities, transactions with banks, health, women's rights, etc.	As decided by the group, normally 4 or more training programmes	As decided by the group, normally 2 or 3 training programmes	Training is not imparted
8. Inter-group lending: for self-help and to maintain a balance between the resources needed and available	Lending resorted	Not resorted	-
9. Audit: by external knowledgeable persons/institutions but not necessarily by chartered accountants	Done	-	Not done
10. Formation of new groups to expand the self-help movement and help others, as a moral responsibility	Help extended	Help not extended	
11. Appointment of record keeper (not necessarily from outside)	-	Appointed	Not appointed
12. Repayment to the group by the members in time	100% as per schedule	95-99%	<95%
13. Formation of clusters of groups for cooperation with formal or informal body	Participation in cluster	No participation	-
14. Representation in local bodies (e.g., local village government, cooperative societies) as leadership ability increases by participating in the groups	Elected in local bodies	Not elected in local bodies	-
15. Community development (public health, tree planting, education, drinking water, family planning, village sanitation)	4 or more activities undertaken	1-3 activities undertaken	No activities undertaken
16. Annual meeting at the end of the year for review of income and expenditure, distribution of profit, group functioning, and planning for the next year	Meeting held	Meeting not held	No activities undertaken

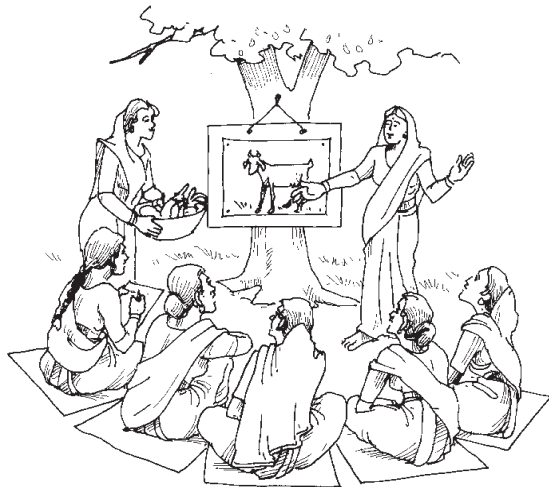
Examples of Visual Representation of Some Indicators for Annual Monitoring



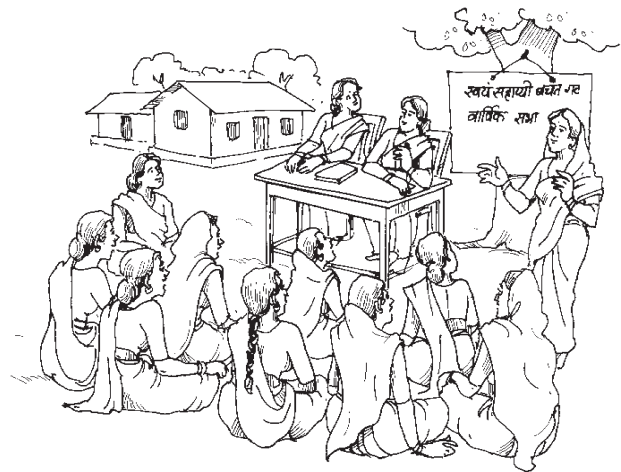
Common fund



Lending to meet member's needs



Training



Annual meeting



Inter-group lending

Monitoring charts

The charts provided for monitoring have the following format with illustrations for each indicator:

Monthly Monitoring Chart									
Monitoring period	Indicator 1			Indicator 2			3	4	5...
	Green	Yellow	Red	Green	Yellow	Red
January ↓ December									

Annual Monitoring Chart									
Monitoring period	Indicator 1			Indicator 2			3	4	5...
	Green	Yellow	Red	Green	Yellow	Red
Year 1 ↓ Year 5									

The charts have been printed in Marathi and distributed to about 5,000 groups. NGOs have been oriented to further orient the groups on how to use the system. The current plan is to use a system for group-level monitoring only; there are no plans to “extract” information from the groups and aggregate it at successively higher levels.

Some Reflections on PSMS

- The system has been used only for a short period and lessons have yet to be systematically extracted. But many groups showed enthusiasm in implementing the system. Members felt that a comparison with neighbouring groups (at least for some indicators) would allow them to compare their own performance. They could also monitor their own group’s performance overtime.
- The self-help movement in India is only about two-and-a-half decades old. In a way, it is of relatively recent origin and it is difficult to visualise how it will evolve over time. Due to the highly decentralised nature of this movement, a “vision” of the NGO promoters or that of the bankers, may not actually reflect the likely course of this movement.
- Developing a common set of indicators that will be universally relevant is thus difficult. Moreover, the indicators chosen already will most likely represent only a short- to medium-term vision.

- Although the project has a strong focus on poverty reduction, the PSMS does not measure performance against this goal. It may be said that the PSMS is not necessarily for measuring performance against the project-level goals and thus limits itself to the groups of beneficiaries who design, maintain and use the system.
- The current system is more standardised than it was initially. This perhaps makes implementation easier but it does not allow groups to contextualise either the indicators or grading of the quantitatively assessable variables.
- Some improvements can also be introduced at the operational level. While the grading should continue to remain simple, a five-scale grading system or an ordinal system with values ranging from 1 to 10 could perhaps replace the current three-scale grading system to provide more nuances. The quantitative variables, such as the repayment rates, could be measured in percentage terms while still classifying them into one of the categories. The current grading of “bad” could be replaced by “needing improvement”. Non-performance against certain variables should not be classified as “average” as done in some cases. If they are not important as indicators they should be dropped. Additionally, the indicators could be categorised broadly into economic, social, institutional development, etc., and presented in sub-groups.
- While the system need not be “extractive”, groups can be encouraged to review the status at cluster level. Cluster-level committees may even review and follow up on the corrective actions taken by the groups.
- Finally, the principle of “criticality” should be applied in choosing indicators and monitor only the important aspects. But overly simplistic systems can miss important dimensions. The system used in the MRCP is financially oriented (mainly savings and credit), whereas the project also has a very strong empowerment element. Groups decide on interest rates and other lending and repayment terms on their own. Women have started feeling very confident and have demonstrated freedom from fear and from various dysfunctional social taboos. There is difficulty in defining and measuring empowerment but this impact on gender relations is an important dimension to assess.



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REFLECT: An Empowering Approach to Education and Social Change



When people become conscious of the fact that their livelihood and other socio-political conditions are in turmoil and state of flux, and begin to discuss their concerns, an appropriate environment is created for using the REFLECT approach.

REFLECT aims to empower people by raising their critical consciousness, enabling them to find solutions to their problems and enhancing their communicative skills. REFLECT draws upon and has evolved out of diverse grassroots experiences of more than 100 organisations in 30 countries, who have contributed to its continuing development.

“ REFLECT is a structured participatory learning process which facilitates people’s critical analysis of their environment... Through the creation of democratic spaces and the construction and interpretation of locally generated texts, people build their own multi-dimensional analysis of local and global reality, challenging dominant development paradigms and redefining power relationships (in both public and private spheres).”

Proceedings of REFLECT Practitioner’s Workshop, 1998.

Characteristics of REFLECT*

- A political process creating democratic space in which existing cultural norms and power relationships are challenged.
- Challenges the view of communities as homogenous entities, recognising diversity, stratification and the power imbalances (by gender, class, caste, race, age, language, physical ability, etc.) which it is committed to transform.
- Aims to provide the space, time and tools for an internal community process that challenges the traditional externally dominated model of development.
- A learning process that starts from people's reflection on their socio-economic, cultural and political environment and that aims to promote change in individuals, communities, organisations and societies. It is an intensive, extensive, horizontal, educational process.
- Draws from a wide range of participatory tools and techniques, including a range of visualisation tools, theatre/role play, story-telling and diverse forms of cultural communication.
- Based on the generation of texts (in both visual and printed forms) by the participants themselves, through which they can identify their problems, needs, interests, capacities, expectations and priorities.

Basic Principles of REFLECT

- Gender equity is integral to all aspects of REFLECT as it is essential for social transformation.
- The REFLECT process explores and analyses the causes of power inequalities and oppression.
- Stratifications and power relationships affect everyone involved in the process; through REFLECT, these stratifications can become an integral part of the process of critical analysis.
- REFLECT is an evolving process, which must be continually recreated for each new context. Innovation is integral to the process.
- The equitable practice of power at all levels in the REFLECT process is essential for determining empowerment outcomes.
- Institutional and individual change at all levels is an integral part of the process, making the networking of participants, facilitators, trainers, staff and organisations an essential part of REFLECT.



- Recognises literacy (in the sense of reading and writing) as part of a wider set of communication practices (including listening, speaking, language, discourse and media), all of which are crucial to challenging power relationships.
- REFLECT seeks to promote a multidimensional approach to literacy and these wider practices.
- An approach to transformation, that seeks to impact not only communities but also the people and institutions involved in the process.

* Compiled by the participants of the REFLECT Practitioner's Workshop held in London, United Kingdom, 1998.

Key Actors in REFLECT

Local community forum

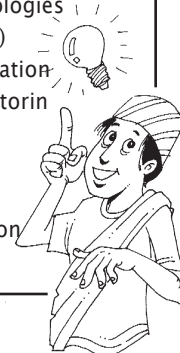
The forum discusses the problems of individuals and community or exchanges information in an informal manner. It is also used as a venue for collectively discussing social aspects such as the celebration of festivals and for the resolution of conflicts between people within the village.

Facilitators

The facilitators are selected from the local community by the implementing organisation. They should have some degree of education. They are selected based on their interest and commitment, knowledge about problems faced by the community, and creative skills (reading, writing, communication, etc.). Training programmes are conducted for both trainers and facilitators.

Training of Facilitators

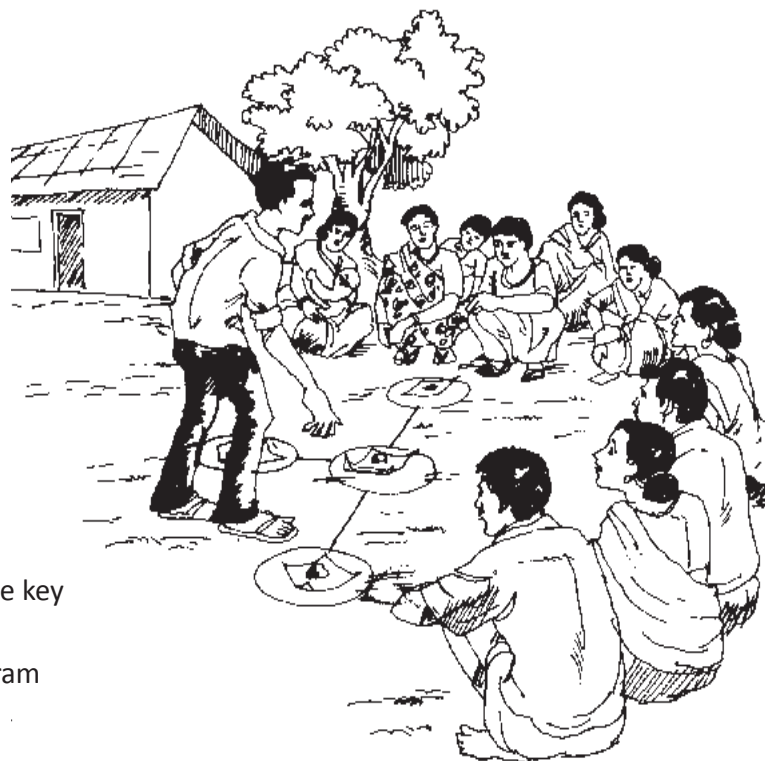
- Participatory research and analytical methods
- Conceptual clarity on development issues
- Communications (theatre)
- Teaching methodologies
- Pedagogy (literacy)
- Process documentation
- Participatory monitoring and evaluation
- Gender
- Livestock health, livestock production
- Human health



REFLECT in Practice: The Process

Visualisation of an issue

- People of the community prioritise the most important issues.
- The facilitator motivates the people to visualise the issue by using tools such as participatory rural appraisal (PRA).
- People use locally available materials (seeds, leaves, stones, sticks, ash powder, etc.) for construction of a map/matrix.
- The facilitator replaces the visual elements by picture cards (often, these are drawn on the spot by the facilitator).
- People spend ample time discussing the key issue, using the map/matrix.
- The facilitator transfers the visual diagram from the ground to the chart paper.



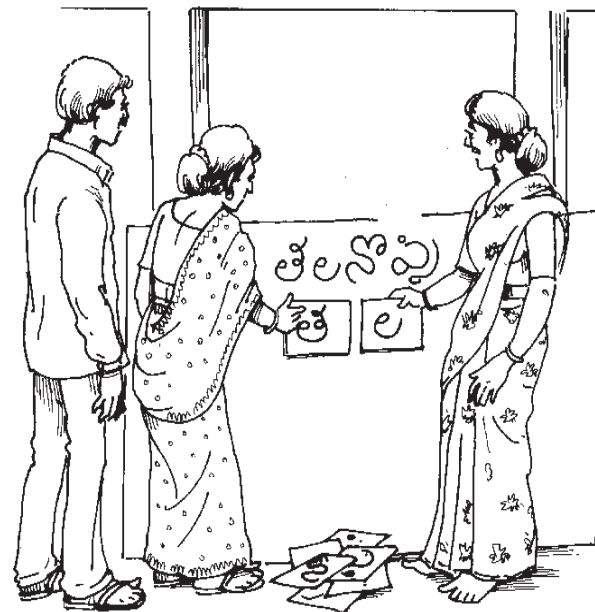


Analysis of the graphic representation of issue(s)

- People act out different elements of the PRA exercise (e.g., theatre). People share their knowledge systems and the issue is critically discussed to find possible solutions.
- The facilitator guides the participants in analysis by putting the issue in the larger context of the community.
- The facilitator documents the process on a chart paper along with the map/matrix to produce a complete “primer” of that particular issue.

Literacy programme

- The facilitator introduces the “primer” developed by the participants.
- He/she exhibits all the visual materials and initiates the discussion for a consensus to select the visuals for learning. Often, these visuals are closely related to the intensity of the issue (i.e., health, agriculture, indebtedness).
- When the group decides the words to be learned, the facilitator writes the text of the visual.
- He/she uses many innovative methods to involve people in learning (e.g., puzzle games; body movement to indicate shape of letters).
- Participants constantly refer to the manual developed by them and continue their discussion on how to address the issues.



Sustainable learning process

- The process documentation, regular debate, self evaluations and participatory monitoring help assess the progress of the process and to design the need-based training programmes for facilitators.

An Experience

Yakshi, a non-government organisation (NGO) was set up in Hyderabad in 1993 with the primary purpose of strengthening and supporting community-based peoples' initiatives and movements, and processes of participation. A major focus of Yakshi has been to use theatre as a means of education and communication. During the past five years, Yakshi has been working closely with Girijana Deepika located in the Adivasi areas of East Godavari district.

Girijana Deepika was set up in 1989 as an independent Adivasi peoples' mass organisation. It is an expression of Adivasi people's intent to struggle against oppressive forces, restructure the existing inequitable power relations, and gain control over their natural resources.

Anthra (in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra), is an organisation of women scientists that works on issues of biodiversity, people's rights over their natural resources, knowledge systems, health, livestock production and gender.

In 1996, for the first time in India, Yakshi, in partnership with Girijana Deepika and Anthra, practised the REFLECT approach to education and social change in the Adivasi villages of East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. Efforts of Girijana Deepika have been directed towards raising people's consciousness around critical issues such as land, agriculture, livestock, poultry, forest, health and conflicts between ethnic identity and contemporary or modern influences.

Yakshi and Anthra have played a critical facilitating role to strengthen Girijana Deepika through a process of capacity-building and finding practical means for strengthening participatory processes. The key actors in REFLECT is the gotti (local community forum). Theatre campaigns have been used effectively to revive the gottis in the villages. Both women and men are involved in the gottis.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Agriculture

- Community seed banks to preserve and make available seeds of food crops to farmers.
- Construction of water-harvesting structures.

Forest

- Debate and discussion on minor forest products amongst the community, especially women.
- Promotion of scarce/endangered plants through herbal nurseries or gardens.

Health

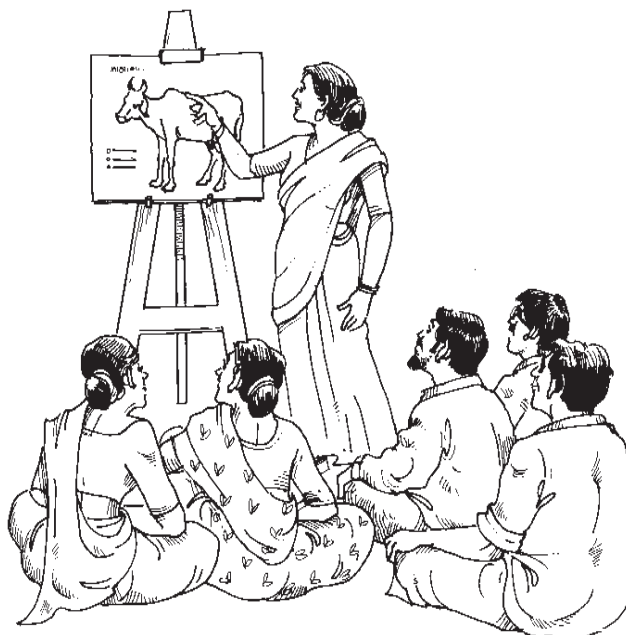
- Training of village community health workers.
- Preparation of local herbal medicines.
- Information dissemination and educational programmes using theatre, posters, slide shows and films.

Gender issues

- Regular capacity-building programmes for women leaders.
- Debates and actions on gender issues by the women's community fora.

Livestock and poultry production systems

- Training of community animal health workers in an integrated approach to animal health care.
- Educational programmes for the community using role plays, posters, slide shows, films, etc.
- Capacity-building of local healers.
- Preparation of a directory of local herbal medicines.
- Backyard poultry raising.



Impact of REFLECT

- Where people are living in abject poverty and exploitation, the REFLECT process has in a small but significant way enabled them to come together, critically analyse their social conditions and work towards some actions for change.
- A significant number of women have come forward to participate in the process. The work has been expanded from 20 to 200 villages, where women leaders of the community fora are involved in a process of leadership and capacity building.
- Adults involved in REFLECT have become more conscious of the importance of education for their children and show interest in local schools. Thus, REFLECT has indirectly created an impetus for improved educational opportunities for children.



- REFLECT has helped in designing developmental interventions, gender integration and organisational development process, monitoring and evaluation.

Lessons Learned

- Participatory learning processes are dynamic and help the people to directly link these with their lives and existing communicative practices. Conventional categories such as literacy, post-literacy and continuing education do not apply in participatory learning, as these are closely interwoven with one another. People's involvement in the process occurs at different levels.
- With the help of the facilitator, people create their own "primers" based on their concerns and critical analysis.
- People soon "demand" more information about a particular issue. This information is not only provided in the form of simple booklets/posters but also created by the people themselves.
- The success and continuation of REFLECT depends critically upon the commitment of

the facilitator and the implementing agency.

- The REFLECT approach can be used for development planning and implementation and for increasing awareness on human rights and gender rights. Its success depends on the political and ideological vision and goals of those who are practising it. A high degree of continuous motivation and innovation at all levels is essential.
- REFLECT requires skilled individuals to facilitate the process. Continuous need-based capacity-building and training is necessary for facilitators. A sense of ownership on the entire process invariably results from a well-designed REFLECT exercise.

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