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Participatory Action Learning in Practice: Experience of a Rapid Participatory Review of ANANDI, India

Linda Mayoux with Jahnvi Andharia, Neeta Hardikar, Sumitra Thacker and Sejal Dand.

The full versions of the Participatory Review, further details of ANANDI's Programme and the Tools used can be found on the ANANDI website: www.anandiindia.org

The original PALS Manual and details and links for updates in other programmes, please contact Linda Mayoux at l.mayoux@ntlworld.com

Since the 1980s there has been a rapid expansion in use of participatory diagram methods for collecting information as part of both planning and research processes. It is now widely accepted that poor people can provide complex analyses of their situation and problems and propose realisable ways forward. Participatory diagram methods have often been used in programme planning and advocacy interventions. These methods can be made both rigorous and cost-effective¹. However, despite claims of empowerment, participatory

monitoring and evaluation may amount to little more than one-off extractive exercises from which participants benefit little. Even in advocacy programmes the process of participatory policy analysis may be pre-determined by programmes and stop once a programme has collected sufficient information to support its case.

This new paper for the EDIAIS website discusses recent developments in a new and innovative

¹ See Barahona and Levy 2002; Chambers 2003 and Chambers and Mayoux 2004



approach: PALS (Participatory Action Learning System).² The paper examines the experience and wider methodological implications of a Rapid Participatory Review in ANANDI in India in December 2003. ANANDI is an Indian NGO which helps women from some of the poorest and most marginalised communities in Gujarat to organize themselves for collective action on a range of issues from basic needs and crisis management to gender violence and gender advocacy. Activities also include livelihood development strategies, women's enterprise development and savings and credit³.

The Review used PALS tools to obtain a wealth of qualitative and quantitative information on poverty targeting of ANANDI assistance, food security, women's empowerment, gender violence, and organizational

² PALS was summarised as it was being implemented in mid 2003 in an earlier paper on the EDIAIS site (Mayoux Grassroots Action Learning) and elements of it have also been discussed in detail in the papers on Empowering Enquiry and Using Diagrams also on the website ² See Barahona and Levy 2002; Chambers 2003 and [Chambers and Mayoux 2004](#)

³ For more details see ANANDI website: www.anandiindia.org

development.



During the Participatory Review on which this paper is based a series of participatory diagram exercises were conducted with mandal members in Saurashtra and Devgad Baria. These included:

- [Poverty Diamonds](#) to examine effectiveness of poverty targeting and ways forward
- [Empowerment impact assessment](#) through visioning, diamonds and road journeys
- [Analysis of Food Security](#) Issues by calendars and diamond
- [Diamonds to investigate the nature and extent of domestic violence](#)
- [Examining women's perceptions](#) of their organization and opportunities for lobbying and advocacy through circle diagrams

The first Section of the paper gives a summary overview of the elements of PALS: underlying goals and principles, diagram tools, empowering enquiry and participatory process guidelines. The second Section discusses in detail the tools used, the findings they generated and ways in which the tools could be improved in future

exercises. The final section summarises some of the advantages and challenges still faced.

The participatory exercises proved very effective in rapidly obtaining both complex and sensitive information. Importantly the women mandal members benefited significantly from use of the tools. Many of the women had never even held a pen before. It was clear that without use of diagram tools and symbols in focusing and recording group discussions many women are excluded from real participation. At one meeting some participants had initially produced a Flipchart in Gujarati. When participants were asked to put up their hands if they could read what was written, only two women put up their hands. Women said after the PALS exercises in the Participatory Review that the PALS process helped them all to participate in discussions and also to think more analytically and to remember what had been discussed. They enjoyed the experience of drawing their own vision and ideas. The Participatory Review also demonstrated the usefulness of the PALS tools and process for enabling a more strategic and cumulative process of reflection and action within the groups. All the diagrams remained with the women and have since been followed up and the tools further refined and developed.

This is by no means to say that there are no challenges – or that challenges will ever go away. In all the programmes where PALS has been implemented so far the challenge has been documentation for the outside world. Systematic ways of documenting the rich information are needed to feed into programme information systems and aggregation for advocacy and lobbying. It is this challenge which will form a key focus of future development of the methodology, drawing on recent advances in rigorous use of participatory tools for quantification (Chambers and Mayoux 2004).

REFERENCES

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Related Resources

Participatory learning against HIV stigma Kidd, R.; Clay, S. *The Change Project, 2003*

www.changeproject.org/technical/hiv/aids/stigma.html

This toolkit, developed by AIDS activists from over 50 NGOs, for NGOs, community groups and HIV educators, is aimed at raising awareness and promoting actions to challenge HIV stigma and discrimination through participatory learning. It is based on research in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zambia, and contains more than 125 participatory educational

exercises. The exercises are divided into seven different modules: naming the problem; more understanding less fear; sex, morality, shame and blame; caring for people living with HIV and AIDS (PLHAs) in the family; PLHAs coping with stigma; understanding stigma faced by children and moving to action. The aim is to help people at all levels understand stigma – what it means, why it is an important issue, what are its root causes – and develop strategies to challenge stigma and discrimination.

Experiences from using action learning groups to develop sustainable farming systems for Central Queensland www.regional.org.au/au/asa/2001/4/b/collins1.htm

Farmer-based action learning groups have been used to conduct on-farm research in the "Sustainable Farming Systems for Central Queensland" project, with the aim of developing profitable and sustainable farming systems and having them adopted. Group facilitators and technical staff help guide the groups using the action learning process. This guidance, and the use of adult learning principles has ensured that groups remain focused on achieving their goals and that profitable and sustainable farming systems are adopted. This paper details the experiences gained in facilitating action learning at key points in group

development, including group formation, planning and implementing research and evaluation. Key factors needed for effectively using action learning to develop profitable and sustainable farming systems and improve adoption are identified and discussed.

Lessons from an activist intellectual: participatory research, teaching and learning for social change. Calderon, J. 2004 *Latin American Perspectives Issue 134, Vol 31, No 1*
www.dof.hmc.edu/icrn/Calderon2.pdf

In this short paper Jose Calderon, history professor and activist, opposes the positivist view that academics should remain neutral in the classroom and in research and explores the connections that can be made between teaching, research and action. His prior involvement as a leader in various community groups made it impossible for him to function as a neutral participant observer because the people he was working with considered him to be an insider. Instead he aimed to bring students and faculty together with community-based organisations to use research, teaching and learning to bring about fundamental social change. The paper gives examples of such work in various contexts including ethnic/racial conflict, trade unions and casual labour.

Report of the review of the Budget Advocacy Initiative (BAI) Uganda Debt Network 2003
www.udn.or.ug/pub/baireview.pdf

Uganda Debt Network is an advocacy and lobbying coalition, formed in 1996 to work on the issue of debt and its implications for poor people. The work takes place within a Government framework which sees a role for citizens in budget processes, by, among other things, monitoring the performance of the budget. This review looks at progress towards achieving the project purpose "To enable Civil Society to jointly and actively influence the formulation of pro poor budget policies at all levels". The review's main focus was an examination of the Community-Based Monitoring and Evaluation System, key elements of which are a participatory action learning approach and volunteerism in the community. The lessons learned from piloting this methodology are seen as critical to the overall success of the project.

www.careinternational.org.uk/resource_centre/agriculture/golda/back/lesson.htm

Part of a report on a **CARE International** project on Development through Aquaculture, this is the Lessons Learned page. Interestingly, the project ended up refining the Participatory Action Learning methods it had previously used in response to dissatisfaction from the farmers and

renaming the method Reciprocal Exchange Learning. The farmers did not want to exclusively "learn through doing" i.e. observing, experiencing, applying and sharing farming practices and information with each. Instead, they wanted some more proactive technical support from staff. This was logical since farmer experience with *gher* systems has been short because *gher* systems were a recent innovation. They had some serious problems with their production systems that they wanted to address and did not merely want to share their own experiences with each other.

www.ids.ac.uk/logolink/index.htm

LogoLink is a global network of practitioners from civil society organisations, research institutions and governments working to deepen democracy through greater citizen participation in local governance. LogoLink encourages learning from field-based innovations and expressions of democracy which contribute to social justice. The principal aims of the LogoLink learning network are to: create spaces for reflection, learning and exchange among and between partners; focus on field-based innovations and expressions of democracy which contribute to social justice; and contribute to making relationships between

citizens and governments more participatory and inclusive. The site includes downloadable research and working papers, a newsletter and links to other sites.

For further resources on participatory action learning and related topics see previous issues of Enterprise Impact News, particularly September 2003, August 2003, Jan/Feb 2003 and

September 2002. All back issues can be downloaded from the EDIAIS web site at:
www.enterprise-impact.org.uk/newsletter/index.shtml