



# Enterprise Impact News

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## Contents

- Grassroots action learning 1
- Publications on participation and civil society 3
- Web sites and conference 4

# Grassroots action learning

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*This is a summary of a new paper, Grassroots Action Learning: Impact Assessment for Downward Accountability and Civil Society Development, recently added to the Toolbox section of the EDIAIS web site.*

**It is now widely accepted that poor people can provide analyses of complex states of poverty and propose reliable poverty solutions. However we must ask what type of information is most useful to them to justify the time and energy they spend collecting it. The process also needs to be made more manageable, especially for those with low or no literacy and few other resources.**

Grassroots action learning (GRL) is the ongoing collection by people, including the very poor, of information which is useful to them, in ways that are convenient to them and in ways that can be used by them. It is generally a group or community based participatory process, but it may also consist of individual recording for personal use. Learning is linked to action through representation in decision-making or lobbying and advocacy. GRL builds on a long established tradition of participatory action research which has begun to be applied to impact assessment, monitoring and evaluation.

People often have to keep regular records for development agencies. This can be time consuming and fail to give useful information. For example the minutes of one group visited by the author gave the impression that it was very top-down. A whole paragraph was devoted to the opening prayer. Two paragraphs on the chairman's speech were followed by a handwritten list of attendees that duplicated the separate attendance register. There was little reference to group discussion. On further probing it emerged that in fact the group had been extremely active in countering alcoholism. Members had also been promoting gender equality and the women were vocal and articulate on gender issues. The problem was that nobody thought these were important things to put in the minutes.

Often promoting GRL need not mean adding to the information collecting burden but rather redesigning existing collection processes to improve the information's usefulness to its collectors.

## New Directions in Impact Assessment for Development: Methods and Practice

24 - 25 November 2003, Manchester, UK  
Details on [www.enterprise-impact.org.uk](http://www.enterprise-impact.org.uk)

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## Current initiatives

A number of organisations have begun to take grassroots action learning processes seriously and to fund them appropriately. They aim not only to collect reliable information but also to increase participants' understanding of their situation and how to change it.

**Internal Learning System (ILS)** methodology has been developed by Helzi Noponen with several Indian organisations including PRADAN and the Handloom Weavers Development Society (HLWDS). ILS involves individuals keeping diaries based on simple questionnaires using symbols designed through a participatory process.

In PRADAN the diaries integrate two common Indian cultural themes, the "boat of life" and "seven rivers to cross". The latter is a seven-point self-assessment scale of an individual's social and economic position. The "boat of life" concept is used in a series of pictures of good/bad scenes which introduce the values in each of the diary's sections. At member level these illustrate positive and negative aspects of living conditions, diversified livelihoods, group versus individual approaches to securing credit from banks and individual versus group efforts to solve community problems.

A woman reflects first on her living conditions and material welfare and ranks herself on the seven rivers scale. She then examines her financial situation. The livelihood module which follows guides her through analysis of her total "availabilities" and prompts her to make strategic use of credit and other scarce resources to improve them. The next module focuses on the life enhancing effects of better gender relations, greater mobility and women's fuller participation in decision making. The impact of her participation in her self help group and PRADAN activities on her progress over time is explored in the concluding synthesis module.

Women have repeatedly expressed how important it is to them to have their lives reflected back to them in their diaries. A HLWDS member said that every night when she lay down to rest she took out her ILS diary and thought about her day and her life in general. The demand for ILS diaries is so high that, when there was a delay in printing, members accused the NGO staff of selling them to outsiders instead of giving them to group members! Local rural development officials are investigating using ILS diaries in their own government development projects.

In HLWDS domestic violence and male alcohol abuse have decreased in groups using ILS. After seeing the scenes relating to these issues women began to discuss these widespread problems in their meetings. When male family members realised this they began to change their behaviour.

The ILS diaries have been used to lobby for improvements in local services. (Information

from the diaries can be aggregated for lobbying purposes.) For example, in HLWDS, women began to take their diaries to meetings with officials. Their diaries are being used to verify low income status and demonstrate eligibility for livestock grants and ration cards. Responses to the health scenes, especially information on respiratory problems from poorly ventilated sheds, have been used to lobby for health clinics.

**The ANANDI mela** is an annual fair which brings together women leaders of self help groups funded by various NGOs. This provides a forum for sharing experiences, highlighting emerging models and positive trends in strategies for securing women's basic human rights and initiating networking for collective action.

At the first mela, ten stalls, each covering a different issue, were set up. Each issue was represented by a symbol. For example cups and saucers represented caste discrimination. As the women registered each was given a badge with symbols representing issues where their group had been active. The women then split into ten groups of 60 each, according to the colour on their badges.

Over the next two days, as the women visited each stall, they constructed the road map of their work and achievements as they shared their struggles in their new roles as community leaders. Scoreboards showed the aggregated savings and credit reported by each group.

Other activities included a cathartic mass release of balloons, each bearing a woman's fear and the construction of an enormous tree of dreams. The main aim of the first mela was not specifically impact assessment but rather the empowerment of participants and the development of longer term collective action. Nevertheless it proved a good way of critically analysing and quantifying activities and successes and subsequent melas have enabled comparisons to be made over time.

**Participatory Action Learning System (PALS)** is being developed by Kabarole Research and Resource Centre in Uganda. This helps grassroots groups to identify their information needs, use simple diagram techniques (see *Thinking it Through in the EDIAIS web site Toolbox*) and exchange information through networks and an annual fair based on the ANANDI model. The diagrams produced by PALS enable people to do follow up analysis later and can be integrated into existing record keeping



REFLECT group discussion, Uganda

Linda Mayoux

practices. They can be redrawn at intervals to track changes over time. Group minutes focus on illuminating the diagrams through recording differences of opinion, particular problems of poorer members and so on. Groups in PALS have been very enthusiastic about the respect for illiterate members and focus that using diagram techniques have brought to their meetings. They conduct the methods themselves and when asked illiterate people could easily repeat the conclusions of tree diagram analysis from more than a month before.

### External support

A focus on grassroots learning may not avoid the need for external expertise, at least in the initial stages. Firstly, grassroots analysis may not always be reliable. Secondly, advisors may be needed to facilitate the participatory process to help overcome barriers caused by existing power relations. Capacity building may be needed to enable particularly disadvantaged groups to join in. Thirdly, groups may need help to initiate safe discussion of sensitive issues. Finally, support will probably be needed for lobbying and advocacy.

The main aim of supporting a grassroots learning process should be the empowerment of those involved through developing their skills, knowledge and networks and hence their voice in decision making. Nevertheless such a process can make a significant and cost effective contribution to meeting the information needs of development agencies themselves. Increasing the ability of programme participants to collect and analyse their own information would also improve relations between programme staff and participants. It is possible to integrate grassroots learning tools into existing training and programme information systems in ways which make these more streamlined, cost-effective and empowering for participants. Costs could also be shared between development agencies working in the same area or on the same issues. In the longer term collaboration between agencies to build local skills and capacity would be a very cost-effective way of gaining sustainable access to reliable information. ■

# Publications on participation and civil society



## **Legal frameworks for citizen participation: a synthesis report.**

McGee, R. et al *LogoLink 2003*

[www.ids.ac.uk/logolink/resources/downloads/SynthesisRep-Web.pdf](http://www.ids.ac.uk/logolink/resources/downloads/SynthesisRep-Web.pdf)

Experience suggests that national and local laws and policies mandating citizen participation are important enabling conditions for participation in local governance. (This report acknowledges that legal frameworks alone are insufficient to guarantee citizen participation and that the institutional and organisational environment also plays a major part.) This research project aimed to conduct a comprehensive, comparative study of legal and policy frameworks for citizen participation in selected countries in East Africa, Latin America, South Asia and South East Asia, to synthesise existing knowledge about how these work in practice and to draw lessons about their effectiveness. Selected countries in the North were included for purposes of comparison.



## **The democracy-poverty nexus: summary on issues of participation.**

Kamal, S.

*Paper presented at International IDEA Forum "Democracy and Poverty: A Missing Link?" Stockholm, Sweden, June, 2000*

[www.idea.int/2000df/papers\\_presented\\_1.html](http://www.idea.int/2000df/papers_presented_1.html)

This paper summarizes the discussions, debates and recommendations of four regional workshops covering South Asia, the former Soviet block, South America and Africa. However, based on this review of regional perspectives on participation, this paper puts forward the argument that genuine democracy offers a unifying force, participatory institutions and a process that can bring groups within nations (and also different nations) together to deal with poverty. The paper also looks at the nature of the essential institutions that make democracy genuine, and also examines the impact of external participants on participatory processes within countries. It presents the argument that the 'missing link' between democracy and poverty is the political participation of the poor and redistributive justice, which can be made possible under a democracy that is not subservient to market forces and that strengthens the government through the participation of all sections of society.



## **Global civil society 2002.**

*Centre for the Study of Global Government, LSE*

[www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/Yearbook/yearbook.htm](http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/Yearbook/yearbook.htm)

*Global civil society 2001* traced the emergence of a global civil society, the vast contradictory process by which NGOs, social movements, individual activists and even academic experts became powerful actors on the international stage. It demonstrated how globalisation from below is just as important for understanding globalisation as is globalisation from above. This second yearbook aims to deepen and broaden our understanding of global civil society and begins to explore its relation to the events of September 11, 2001. It also provides documentary evidence of the creative, civilising and empowering character of global civil society. Case studies on corporate social responsibility, HIV/AIDS and the International Criminal Court are included. The web page quoted above also provides links to related LSE seminars and reports.



## **Engendering democracy - workshop report.**

*British Council 2003. For this and other British Council resources on governance see [www.britcoun.org/governance/resources.htm](http://www.britcoun.org/governance/resources.htm)*

This publication is a summary of discussions at a British Council seminar in January 2003 on 'Engendering Democracy'. Professor Yvonne Galligan at the Centre for Advancement in Politics at Queen's University Belfast designed and facilitated the event. Women from all over the world attended and contributed their own experiences as activists, politicians, civil servants, academics and other walks of life. They looked at the barriers they had faced as women and shared strategies used to counter these. Alongside very specific problems women faced for example, in countries in transition the recurring theme echoed by all participants was the need not just for equality of numbers but for women's issues to be heard at all levels of the decision-making processes.



## **Sustainable learning for women's empowerment: ways forward in micro-finance.**

*Mayoux, L., Ed. 2002. New Delhi, Samskriti ISBN: 81-87374-18-7*

This book brings together workshop papers by activists and academics involved in innovation in impact assessment and grassroots learning methodologies. These include the ILS system and ANANDI's melas described in our lead article. The workshop was organized by PRADAN as a first step towards moving away from extractive impact assessment, towards developing participatory learning methodologies to meet the information needs of staff and the self-help groups they promote, as well as the programme for self-help group promotion. The book proposes a framework for sustainable learning which will in itself be empowering. It is argued that there is a need for an integrated and strategic participatory methodology to strengthen self-help groups as an organizational structure. The various papers in the book discuss different tools and methods which might form part of this framework.



## **Fostering community-driven development: what role for the state?**

*Das Gupta, M., Grandvoinnet, H. and Romani, M. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 2003*

[http://econ.worldbank.org/files/24036\\_wps2969.pdf](http://econ.worldbank.org/files/24036_wps2969.pdf)

Using case studies from Asia and Latin America, this paper shows how state efforts to bring about land and tenancy reform and income diversification can broaden the distribution of power in rural communities, laying the basis for more effective community-driven collective action. It also shows how higher levels of government can ally with communities to pressurise local authorities to improve local development outcomes. It is argued that such powerful institutional changes do not necessarily take long to generate, can be achieved in a variety of settings and lead to strong political pay offs in terms of legitimacy and popular support for those who support such development action. ■

# Web sites on participation and civil society

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

How may participation be learned, and how can institutions of higher learning facilitate this learning? This IDS site provides an opportunity for a global dialogue on the learning and teaching of participation in higher education. Inherent in the idea of participation is that poor and marginalised people should take part in, and indeed drive, the decision-making processes that shape their lives. This involves the use of a range of approaches and methods, and requires changes in behaviour, attitudes and power relationships by everyone involved. There is increasing global interest, by many actors engaged in development, in promoting the institutionalisation and spread of participation in society. But there is also a growing fear that lip-service is being paid to participation simply out of deference to fashion or the current jargon of development aid. In order to promote and increase participation effectively, and also ethically, there is a growing need for experienced and well-trained people who are active and open to its meaning, methods and practice.

## [www.civicus.org/new/default.asp](http://www.civicus.org/new/default.asp)

CIVICUS is an international alliance established in 1993 to nurture the foundation, growth and protection of citizen action throughout the world, especially in areas where participatory democracy and citizens' freedom of association are threatened. Details of the Call for Proposals for the CIVICUS World Assembly 2004 "Acting Together for a Just World" are included. The site includes details of various Civicus programmes aimed at strengthening and protecting civil society, news of recent events, media releases and occasional papers. The toolkit includes several toolkits to build organisations' capacity in areas such as communication and planning. A monitoring and evaluation toolkit, among others, should be added soon.

## [www.loka.org/](http://www.loka.org/)

The Loka Institute is a non-profit research and advocacy organization concerned with the social, political, and environmental repercussions of research, science and technology. The site includes details of the 2003 Community Research

Network conference "Powerful collaborations: building a movement for social change". It also hosts the Living Knowledge Database which is an interactive "information warehouse", providing users with resources and tools related to community-based research. The database has information about organizations, individuals and institutions involved in independent, participatory research support in response to concerns experienced by civil society. News, publications and details of Loka projects are also included on the site.

## [www.changemakers.net](http://www.changemakers.net)

Changemakers focuses on the rapidly growing world of social entrepreneurship. Its mission is to provide inspiration, resources, and opportunities for those interested in social change throughout the world. New, improved ways of dealing with problems that won't go away, such as poverty, illiteracy, hunger and violence, have profound relevance for many lives and areas of work. But the major problem faced by social entrepreneurs is the lack of access to current relevant practices beyond their own area of expertise. This is the service Changemakers aims to provide. Stories in *Changemakers Journal* reveal how the creative energy of social entrepreneurs drives innovation in diverse fields, including education, health, the environment, and other areas of human need. The *Library* offers a collection of global resources focused on these concerns. The *Studio* section showcases multimedia, and in the *Community* section social innovators offer opinions, perspectives, and ideas for social change.

## [www.twinside.org.sg](http://www.twinside.org.sg)

The Third World Network is an independent non-profit international network of organizations and individuals involved in issues relating to development, the Third World and North-South issues. Its objectives are to conduct research on economic, social and environmental issues pertaining to the South; to publish books and magazines; to organize and participate in seminars; and to provide a platform representing broadly Southern interests and perspectives at international fora such as the UN conferences and processes. The site contains details of newsletters, books and other

publications and a wealth of material on issues such as Trade, Environment, Economics, Women's Rights and Gender, UN Peace and Security, Biodiversity and Human Rights. There is also a section on Action Alerts and Statements.

## [www.esrftz.org/ppa/Index.html](http://www.esrftz.org/ppa/Index.html)

This is the Home Page of the Tanzania Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) Process. Here the primary difference between participatory and survey-based research is defined as the former systematically involving poor people in the analysis of its findings. It is this analysis, as much as the raw data, which is then synthesised to inform pro-poor policies. The site offers a very detailed insight into the process as carried out in Tanzania. Detailed information on the methodology and much process documentation is available here, as are updates, links to other countries' s PPAs and other materials, including highly critical analysis about the PPA process and poverty reduction strategies in general.

## Conference

### Contesting Citizenship and Civil Society in a Divided World

#### Sixth International Conference of the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR)

11-14 July 2004

Ryerson University and York University, Toronto, Canada

On almost all fronts, civil society organisations both face and create forces that seek to change the rules of international, institutional and civic relationships. These complex dynamics raise questions about the way in which citizen-based organisations resist, create and lead new ways of changing conditions. For details of the call for proposals (deadline for abstracts 30 Sep 2003) and access to papers from previous ISTR conferences see [www.jhu.edu/~istr/conferences/toronto/](http://www.jhu.edu/~istr/conferences/toronto/) ■

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