

## **Fifteen years of participatory research in Asia**

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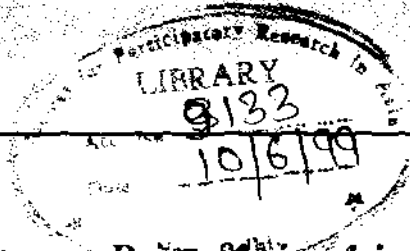
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# PARTICIPATION & GOVERNANCE

Vol. 4 No. 9

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## *Fifteen years of Participatory - Research-in-Asia*

EDITORIAL

*We have just completed fifteen years of our experience as PRLA. The seeds of this organisation were sown by the early work on participatory research during the late 70s. That experience provided the philosophical basis for our work: **Knowledge is Power**. This perspective inspired the early activities we undertook by promoting a number of initiatives which emphasised recognition and articulation of indigenous popular knowledge in the fields of education, health-care, natural resource management etc. Over the years, different ways of expressing that philosophy gained ascendancy in PRLA's work. Today, our work in strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions as mechanisms of local self-governance is its most explicit expression. We are using methods of organising and promoting the learning of leadership in local bodies to play their rightful role as self-governing institutions. Special emphasis is being placed on learning and empowerment of new leadership in these institutions: women and socio-economically weaker sections of society.*

*In building a body of new knowledge on Occupation and Environmental Health in India and South Asia, PRLA relied on deepening the understanding of processes which make work place and community healthier and safer. New knowledge has been generated on the basis of existing knowledge and experiences of workers and community members in this otherwise 'technical' field.*

*As government and international development agencies have begun to emphasise participation of primary stakeholders in large scale development projects, PRLA has undertaken a series of initiatives to ensure that learning and capacity building of primary stakeholders is seen as an integral part of the promotion of people-centred development. What was a decade ago merely an experimentation in micro areas by voluntary development organisations has now acquired an increasingly central place in development projects of a large scale nature. Thus, the greatest challenge facing us is to bring the principles of learning and knowledge as elements of empowerment into the design, implementation and monitoring of large scale development projects, particularly in the*



social sectors. This is indeed a new challenge because it involves sensitivity and competency in engaging a variety of stakeholders to value the centrality of participation as a vehicle for relevant and sustainable development.

From the early days of Participatory Research, this is indeed a long distance travel. Our work in PRLA today may appear as having increasingly focussed on macro issues and macro players, but our underlying philosophy and perspective continues to be that of knowledge as a source of power and control in the hands of those who are otherwise excluded from such development initiatives. For practitioners of Participatory Research, therefore, it implies building our understanding of macro forces, on the one hand, and sharpening our capacity to work simultaneously in micro settings. While organisationally PRLA is continuously equipping itself in this direction, it certainly poses new challenges for enhancing the capacities of our colleagues and partners. Our ability to utilise this opportunity to broaden the impact of our work demands our continued rootedness in the theory and practice of Participatory Research.

- Rajesh Tandon

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### Letter to the Editors

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