

## Global Foundations of Community Based Research

Rajesh Tandon (India) and Budd Hall (Canada), Co-Chairs, UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education

This chapter explores the foundations of community-based research with a particular focus on the rise of the participatory research movement in social movement and civil society settings in the global South and its subsequent spread to the North eventually finding its way into universities. The authors were involved in both the creation of the discourse and the spread of the initial ideas through the International Participatory Research Network. In the 1970s Rajesh Tandon came to his initial thinking about participatory research while working with Tribal People's in Rajasthan, India. Budd Hall was working in the Institute for Adult Education in Tanzania during those days. The chapter further connects the early roots of participatory research to the contemporary CBR discourse through contributing to the creation of the Community University Research Alliance funding models of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the creation of the Global Alliance for Community Engaged Research (GACER), and the creation of the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, a Chair that is shared by Rajesh Tandon and Budd Hall. Finally, we contribute some reflections on knowledge, democracy and action with particular reference to the world of higher education

### **“Poor People Don't Use Money for a Weapon”**

This is something that the late President of Tanzania, Julius K Nyerere said often in support of his vision of a participatory nation based on African concepts of family hood (Ujamaa). He said that instead of money, ordinary people used knowledge and leadership. In saying this, he underscored the believe that people living subsistence lives in rural areas or in cities created knowledge that could be used to transform their lives and the lives of all in their communities. Tanzania was the place where the words 'participatory research' were first coined. They arose in a context of dialogue and debate amongst a circle of researchers working in civil society, the government and the University of Dar es Salaam who wanted to see their research linked to the aspirations and engagement of a nation that was said to be in transition to socialism, an African form of socialism.

The most profound early influences were the ideas, strategies and programmes of the Tanzanian government of the day articulated most effectively by the late President Julius K. Nyerere, Nyerere, himself a former teacher. He had written much about the capacity of education in an independent nation to unchain people just as it had been used by the colonial powers to enchain a people. The philosophy of Ujamaa and Self-Reliance, concepts of what we would call today Afro-centric development and local economic development were open challenges to the way that the rich countries saw the world. Tanzania and Tanzanians were in so many ways telling the world that the 'emperor has no clothes'. Nyerere and a generation of articulate and gifted leaders such as Paul Mhaiki, who went on to become the Director of Adult Education at UNESCO in Paris, challenged all who were working in Tanzania, nationals and expatriates alike, to look through a different lens to understand education, agriculture, development, history, culture and eventually for some of us even research and evaluation methods. We were all encouraged to 'meet the masses more' and while on a day-to-day basis this was difficult to understand, over time many of us were profoundly transformed.

In September of 1971 there had a visit by Paulo Freire, the Brazilian intellectual, to Tanzania. Budd Hall was responsible for organizing that visit and for working with him during his stay. One of the things that he was asked to talk about were his ideas about research methods. Most readers will remember Chapter Three in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* where Paulo writes about what he called "Thematic Investigation". In his account he began to talk about understanding research as engaged practice, not a neutral dispassionate act but an act of solidarity and active support. This talk was edited and published in the Institute series, "A Talk by Paulo Freire". Some passages from that 1971 talk,

First of all I must underline the point that the central question that I think that we have to discuss here is not the methodological one. In my point of view...it is necessary to perceive in a very clear way the ideological background that determines the very methodology. It is impossible for me to think about neutral education, neutral methodology, neutral science or even neutral God.

I think that adult education in Tanzania should have as one of its main tasks to invite people to believe in themselves. It should invite people to believe that they have knowledge. The people must be challenged to discover their historical existence through the critical analysis of their cultural production: their art and

their music. One of the characteristics of colonization is that in order for the colonizers to oppress the people easily they convinced themselves that the colonized have a mere biological life and never an historical existence. (Freire, 71:1-5)

The work of Marja Liisa Swantz was another early influence. Marja Liisa Swantz was a Finnish born social scientist attached to the Bureau for Resource and Land Use Productivity (BRALUP) of the University of Dar es Salaam. She and a group of students from the University of Dar es Salaam including Kemal Mustapha who was later to become the African coordinator for participatory research were working in an engaged way with women and others in the coastal region of Tanzania. Through this practice she and the others began to articulate what she called participant research. In an early BRALUP paper published in 1974 she notes,

Research strategies which developing countries such as Tanzania have followed have generally been patterned in the Universities of developed countries. In planning research on a subject related to development one has to first answer some questions: Who are the beneficiaries of this research? What are the aims? Who is going to be involved? What approach and methods of research should be used so that the research would bring the greatest possible gains for development? Research and researcher can become agents of development and change in the process while the research is being done... (Swantz, 1974:1-4)

In 1975, Budd Hall spent a year as a visiting fellow at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex. It was at that time that he began to find that people in many other countries were thinking along similar lines as those of in Tanzania. Francisco Vio Grossi in Chile, Rajesh Tandon in India, even researchers in England and Europe. The connection between research, politics and action had been opened up never to be closed again. It was during that period at Sussex that Hall edited a special issue of the journal Convergence (ref) on the theme of 'Participatory Research'. This was the first time that the term was used because it seemed to be the best common description of the various approaches that were described within the issue.

The first inkling that something like an international network might be possible or welcome came with the response to the publication of the special 1975 issue of Convergence. The adult education community and related community development and activists bought out all the copies of the journal for the first time in the history of

the journal. Requests for copies poured in from all over the world and the small item in the lead article inviting persons who were interested in exchanging information about their activities went from a trickle to a stream to a river. It was clear that many people in the majority world and people working with or for marginalized persons in the rich countries were actively engaged in research projects which were very different from the standards of the day often contradicting the dominant research paradigms of the university world of the day.

The next source of energy towards a network in this field came via the First World Assembly of the International Council for Adult Education which took place in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 1976. As Hall was serving as Conference Secretary, he arranged for one of the sessions of the conference to deal with a questioning of the then orthodox research methodologies. Helen Callaway of Oxford University and Kathleen Rockhill of the United States both presented papers putting forward more qualitative and more ethnographic approaches to adult education. In the debates and committees which arose from the Dar es Salaam conference, a recommendation was made to the world adult education community that, "adult educators should be given the opportunity to learn about and share their experiences in participatory research" (Hall and Kidd, 1978). Important for the next steps in the eventual development of the Participatory Research Network was the fact that Ted Jackson, an activist adult educator from Canada was a participant at the Dar es Salaam conference as part of a study-travel course organized by OISE in Canada.

By then Budd was living in Toronto and working full time as the Research Officer for the International Council for Adult Education. Roby Kidd, the Secretary-General of the ICAE, had agreed that in return for organizing the Dar es Salaam World Assembly, he would support the development what was initially called the Participatory Research Project. The PR project was begun by Hall, Edward Jackson and the late dian marino, the latter two PhD students at the University of Toronto. The first decision taken was that they were not going to support or create an international network without being engaged in the practices ourselves. They took very seriously the critique that researchers in the rich countries created careers through projects in the majority world without ever taking the responsibility to analyse and take action in their own countries first. They noted that the first goal was to become engaged in a variety of participatory research projects or struggles in their own community and their own part of the world. Links with the global South would be made on the basis of shared values, shared understandings of knowledge and power and shared political engagement.

## **The Cartagena Conference of April 1977**

Orlando Fals Borda, the Columbian activist scholar had made plans to hold a conference on his approach to action research. Hall was invited to present a paper based on the work that had begun in Tanzania, now picking up energies from Chile, India, Brazil and elsewhere. The April meeting in Cartagena was to become a critical piece of the foundation of the participatory research movement. Working as scholar activists these Latin American intellectuals had amassed a set of important experiences. Orlando Fals Borda through his links with the International Sociological Association had met others elsewhere who shared these visions. So to Cartagena came radical intellectuals from many parts of the world to debate new directions for the late 1970's and 80s. Orlando's profound vision of a science of the common people was at times sharply criticized by colleagues who felt that a more orthodox Marxist understanding of the role of an intellectual vanguard was the way to work. For those of us from the rich minority world what we saw was a sophisticated, committed group of activist scholars or militant intellectuals who totally and efficiently dismissed for once and for all the pretention of detached positivist science. The work of Fals Borda himself, of persons like Paul Oquist (writing on the epistemology of Action Research), of Ton and Vera Gianotten of Peru and the Netherlands, of Xavier Albo of Bolivia and so many other gave Hall and through him others in their group a huge burst of energy and enthusiasm. Hall met with Fals Borda on a chair in one of the large halls and asked him for his support for a network which would respect the values and energies which had brought so many to Cartagena. He was gracious and generous in his support but wanted to make sure that the countries of the majority world would be given the dominant role in driving the network that Hall and his colleagues had proposed to call participatory research. Orlando preferred the use of the term action research up until then, but after some reflection with others in the Latin American group, he shifted his discourse to 'participatory (action) research' some time later perhaps through interaction with the Latin American network of participatory research, he began to refer to this kind of work as 'participatory action research'. He was the first person, to my knowledge to ever use that precise combination of words.

## **Founding of the International Network**

Upon return from Cartagena and afterwards a visit with Francisco Vio Grossi, who Hall had met while at the University of Sussex and who was living by then in Venezuela, Hall returned to Toronto to start organizing a series of events that would provide a platform

to take a decision on starting an international network. The most important of the early meetings took place in Caracas, Venezuela at Simon Rodriguez University, where Francisco Vio Grossi was teaching. It was here that Rajesh Tandon, the person who was to lead the International Participatory Research Network first met with others from Europe, North America and Africa. This also marked the beginning of a 40 year period of collaboration between Hall and Tandon.

Among the most important political principles of the network was the insistence that each node or networking group working in the various parts of the world would be autonomous and self-directing. They would each be committed to building an international network but the Toronto group would not be in charge. The Toronto PR Group as it became known was to be one among equals engaged in a variety of community development, participatory research action and reflection activities. The early principles of participatory research, many of which can be seen in the formulations of contemporary community based researches that were elaborated in the late 1970s include:

1. PR involves a whole range of powerless groups of people--exploited, the poor, the oppressed, and the marginal.
2. It involves the full and active participation of the community in the entire research process.
3. The subject of the research originates in the community itself and the problem is defined, analyzed and solved by the community.
4. The ultimate goal is the radical transformation of social reality and the improvement of the lives of the people themselves. The beneficiaries of the research are the members of the community.
5. The process of participatory research can create a greater awareness in the people of their own resources and mobilize them for self-reliant development.
6. It is a more scientific method or research in that the participation of the community in the research process facilitates a more accurate and authentic analysis of social reality.

7. The researcher is a committed participant and learner in the process of research, i.e. a militant rather than a detached observer. (Hall, 1978:5)

They deliberately chose the concept of a network for their organizational form. This was long before the concept of a network, so ubiquitous today was in common usage. They wanted a structure which was horizontal in power terms, which allowed for and encouraged autonomous locally or regionally accountable nodes, which took the cues from the grass roots rather than the centre, and where power flowed according to the tasks at hand rather than funding, tradition, or imperial world divisions. They were also very much aware that the 'international' was a context which they could use to strengthen their local work and increase visibility for their ideas in the settings where they lived and worked every day.

By 1978 there were five nodes in the network: Toronto; New Delhi-Rajesh Tandon, coordinator; Dar es Salaam, Tanzania - Yusuf Kassam, coordinator; Netherlands - Jan de Vries, coordinator; Caracas, Venezuela - Francisco Vio Grossi, Coordinator. They organized a series of meetings to increase awareness of ideas, to deepen understanding, to build support for others who were trying such work and to show people in various locations that these ideas had world resonance and relevance. And in all of the work they honoured the fact that the majority world had been the intellectual source for these exciting new ways of working and continued to inspire. They also recognized that these ideas were as relevant in Europe and North America as they were anywhere that people wanted to use research as a contribution to changes in power relations. Their definitions of participatory research were explicit politically, were seen as valid in all parts of the world where unequal power relations persisted, and highlighted the use of cultural approaches to knowledge creation.

### Rajesh Tandon's Story

I came to Venezuela meeting in 1978.

I had come in contact with Budd Hall when I was trying to finish writing my PhD thesis at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland in 1977. I was doing field work in rural Rajasthan, trying to understand the dynamics of development in the context of government programmes. As I began to understand that dynamics, it also became clear

to me that the illiterate tribal communities were not really ignorant; they were knowledgeable about many aspects of their life and living.

“In my encounter, I had read and hear contradictory opinions about the wisdom of a villager. Some had seen a reservoir of untapped wisdom in the village-folk. Others considered them almost stupid. In my encounters with them, I found the villagers very wise in the ways of the world. They were mature in their understanding about life and living; they had time-tested wisdom which governed their day-to-day behaviour. They were insightful and astute in their judgements. Their views about the social and political order reflected their wisdom”. (Impact of Organisations Development In Underorganised Communities – Research thesis, Tandon 1978: 7)

The formation of various regional networks became the building block of the activity for practicing and supporting participatory research for social transformation.

The period 1978-79 was essentially used to sharpen, deepen and systemise our collective critique of conventional social sciences research and begin to articulate elements of what was then thought as characteristics of Participatory Research. The definition of Participatory Research even then had the alternative vision of society but it focused on separate elements of investigation, education and organisation. The political economy of research and questioning the basic objectives of research enterprise had only begun to be articulated during that period.

The regional coordinators met in October 1978 in Venezuela and then in the summer of 1979 in Sweden. It is in the second meeting that the idea of an International Forum of Participatory Research was mooted and planned. In April 1980, in Yugoslavia, such a forum got together more than 60 Participatory Researchers from different parts of the world. They brought with them their experiences, their case studies and spread over a period of a week, this event marked a major step forward in the articulation of meaning of Participatory Research as well as strengthening regional networks. The case studies, the theoretical papers, the debate in Yugoslavia were an important milestone. It began to raise the issues of links between Participatory Research and people’s struggles and organisations, the question of whose interest does research serve and the production and tools of production of knowledge and the appropriation of knowledge of the experts by ordinary people. This was also the first event where members of various regional networks came together to meet across regions and establish links and bonds

of solidarity. Many of us who attended that forum felt rejuvenated, affirmed and supported.

As I began to promote the network of Participatory Research in Asia, it became clear that a larger institutional framework was needed to pursue this methodology for social transformation. In consultation with then network partners, PRIA (Participatory Research in Asia) was set up as a not-for-profit civil society organisation with the motto 'Knowledge is Power'.

"The alternative institutional framework of PRIA was challenged on several accounts. As an effort to make it a part of the wider, voluntary non-government movement in the country and the region, PRIA was seen as a different 'animal' because it was not engaged in grassroots work on its own. PR was promoting the idea of knowledge as a basis for social transformation. **Learning was an integral component of organising**, and capacity building as a necessary step in bringing about a just and egalitarian order"(Tandon R, Studies in Cults,, orgs., and Socs., 1998, Vol 4, pp, 187-95) .

The initial years at PRIA were spent in practicing and innovating this methodology of participatory research; in partnership with local activists, knowledge from people's perspectives and experiences was generated in a wide range of issues—forests, land, occupational health, women's livelihoods, etc. While practitioners found great resonance in this process of enquiry, the academia initially ignored it, and then rejected it further.

"One of the clear implications of this was rejection by the academic enterprise within the country and the region. Our pursuits were labelled as unscientific and our phraseology was seen as contradictory. Some academics would call the phraseology of Participatory Research, Popular knowledge and Empowerment as a political ideology, while others would look at it as a Community Development tool. Our desire to link knowledge with participation of the excluded and the marginalised was challenged as they were seen as independent initiatives. Top down knowledge production could be utilised for bottom-up participatory processes was the message given to us in the early 80's" ( Tandon R, Studies in Cults,, orgs., and Socs., 1998, Vol 4, pp, 187-95)

However, the practice of participatory research expanded through its new 'avatar' of PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal). Robert Chambers was able to promote tools of PRA

in a wide variety of development organisations. His seminal contributions included ‘Whose Knowledge Counts?’ and ‘Who Counts?’

The streams of participatory research began to diverge in the 1990s. The practice of PRA, PAR, PR and AR became somewhat separated from each other. It was in this context that Orlando Fals Borda convened the second Cartagena conference in June 1997 to bring together these diverse streams for a multi-logue. The conversations in Cartagena turned out to be significant in expanding and deepening the discourse on participatory research among practitioners and academics.

“The inspiration for this manual came from a World Congress on Participatory Action Research held in Cartagena, Columbia, (June 1-5, 1997) where people from over 30 countries gathered to discuss participatory approaches to research, education and social development. The experience for most of those present was an eye-opener. It revealed that although the term ‘participation’ has varied connotations and participatory approaches or methodologies have been developed in response to different contexts and situations, yet the opportunities for convergence-to discuss, to share and learn from each other’s experiences- are immense.

The contents of this manual trace the roots, principles and practices of four well known participatory research approaches: Participatory Research (PR), Participatory Action Research (PAR), Action Research (AR) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) (Doing Research with People: Approaches to Participatory Research, PRIA 2000, pg 5)

As the field began to find many different outlets, the tension between the world of practice and the world of research seemed to grow. By the turn of the millennium, universities and practitioners continued to find themselves somewhat apart. Dave Brown, then at Harvard’s Kennedy School, convened an international consultation on ‘Practice Research Engagement’ to draw lessons from around the world and to explore the strategies needed to bridge the divides locally and globally.

Experience suggests that practice-research engagement is not always successful. The interests and perspectives of practitioners and researchers diverge as their methods become more sophisticated and specialised. The dominance of positivist research traditions in social science has often hampered its engagement with the complexity and uncertainties of many practice traditions. In spite of these tensions, some efforts to bring researchers and practitioners together have led to action research in the service of

organisational change, participatory research that has raised awareness of oppressed groups, and participatory rural appraisals that have improved understanding of grassroots realities. But PRE is not easy - too often the parties find themselves mired in misunderstandings, split by conflicting incentives and procedures, and unable to use their differences constructively, even with the best of interests (Practice – Research Engagement and Civil Society – in a globalised World, 2001, pg. 31).

It was in the 2008 CURA conference hosted at University of Victoria (Canada) that GACER was launched. As a global alliance on community engaged research, GACER attempted to bring the world of practice and the world of research together in a shared network. A wide range of international networks had emerged around this broad theme in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; GACER attempted to bring them together on a common platform for a set of shared agendas.

The convening of ‘Big Tent’ conversations amongst these networks by GACER became an instrument of promoting research for social transformation, carried out in partnership with the activists, civil society and community agencies.

The appointment of Dr Budd Hall and Dr Rajesh Tandon as UNESCO Co-Chairs on Community-based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education in 2012 became a landmark moment to further promote participatory research. In its new perspective, it has begun to find a meaningful place in the world of academia. The promotion of social responsibility in higher education is now being linked to the discourse on knowledge democracy.

## Reflections

The trajectory of participatory research over the past four decades has now culminated in a broader and more futuristic discourse on knowledge democracy. This discourse brings into focus the acknowledgement of multiple modes of knowledge and multiple epistemologies. Indigenous knowledge methodology and practitioners’ knowledge have thereby begun to gain recognition in the institutions of higher education. It has now been acknowledged that multiple sites of knowledge production are valid indeed—from laboratory to classroom to community and in struggle for justice.

Recent GUNI Report captures these issues rather succinctly:

One of the biggest challenges in moving towards a more holistic and synergistic approach to research is to provide greater opportunities to students in post-secondary educational institutions to engage with communities through community-based participatory research. Therefore, promotion of stronger, deeper and mutually respectful engagement with communities by HEIs will significantly advance the practices and innovations in knowledge democracy.

