

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in India on seeking alternatives in research, training and evaluation methodologies in development promoting activities in the field. The conceptualization of development strategies has moved away from top-down, preplanned programmes to bottom-up, peoples' initiatives. People's participation in their own development has begun to acquire central focus in these strategies. Though as yet scattered, efforts in research, evaluation and training have also begun to base themselves on these participatory processes. Consequently, participatory research, evaluation and training have been and continue to be attempted in diverse settings.

Some interesting illustrations include the typical form of 'Shibir' --- a camp -- where tribal women (in Shahada, Maharashtra, for example) assemble for a day or two to analyse their problems and to take collective action in common interests. Cadre-building of activists in urban and rural unions of workers and landless labourers utilize a participatory approach to education. Evaluation of field projects like Seva Mandir and Gram Vikas have been utilizing principles of participation. Similarly, new models of peoples' inquiry are emerging: a study of the state of Indian environment had several activist groups and professionals joining hands; a study of the impact of a proposed hydel project was carried out by a team of professionals in collaboration with local peoples' organization, and studies on the impact of present forest policy of forest-dwellers are being carried out by professionally trained researchers, local activists and forest-dwellers constituting the study teams.

Several theoretical and methodological characteristics of these experiences in participatory research, evaluation and training are beginning to emerge. However, very little is available in the form of documentation, analysis and synthesis of these experiences. Moreover, the field level

activists, organizers and educators have little material their own learning as whatever little is available is in form that is inaccessible to them. This study proposes fill this gap by documenting and analysing several such experiences in participatory research, evaluation and training.

Key characteristics

Several identifiable characteristics of participatory research, evaluation and training are emerging from the Indian experiences. There are :-

1. The control over the process of research, evaluation and training is jointly exercised by professionals and ordinary people. The control over knowledge, outcomes and learning is mostly in the hands of others - other than professionals.
2. Ordinary people - poor farmers, illiterate workers, employed youth, women are capable of producing their own knowledge, awareness and skills. In fact, popular knowledge, in different forms and methods, is available almost parallel to what is termed as 'scientific' knowledge.
3. Participatory research, evaluation and training methodologies attempt a praxis of theory and practice. As practice informs theory, and this theory guides practice.
4. Central to this methodology is empowerment of the people. Participatory research, evaluation and training empowers people to take initiatives in their common interests. It makes them self-confident, skilled, aware and knowledgeable.
5. The processes of undertaking participatory research, evaluation and training strengthens (or creates where none exist) organizations of people in a manner such that social change in the interests of have-nots is in motion.

Objectives : This study will have the following objectives :

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- 1) To document participatory research, evaluation and training efforts in India;
- 2) To analyse the nature of participatory process in these efforts;
- 3) To synthesise this analysis of participatory processes;
- 4) To disseminate the findings to other professionals and grass-roots activists.

Study Questions :

In order to fulfill the above mentioned objectives, the study questions will have to assess the characteristics of participatory research, evaluation and training efforts. The preliminary identification of these characteristics has been made earlier, but considerate more indepth questioning is necessary for each of these.

- (1) How do people exercise control? How do they control experts? How is the unilateral control of experts reduced? How is the myth of experts broken through the exercise of control?
- (2) What is the nature of popular knowledge? How is this knowledge created, articulated and acted upon?
- (3) What mechanisms are used to promote praxis? How do theory and practice interact?
- (4) What is the nature and extent of empowerment? How does this empowerment challenge ideological hegemony?
- (5) Where peoples organizations exist, how do these processes strengthen them for undertaking collective actions in common interests? In other circumstances, how do these processes contribute to organization building in common interests?

Variables associated with Central Concepts

1. Control

How is control exercised in different stages of research and evaluation effort? Who defines the problem for research? Who defines the objectives evaluation? Who defines training needs? How do this process of definition take place.?

Who chooses methods of data-collection and analysis in a research or evaluation effort? Who decides o methods of learning? How these methods promote an enhance participation?

How are the results of research or evaluation used Who benefits from these results? How is learning from a training effort utilized?

2. Popular Knowledge

People have shared knowledge about a situation. It is personalised, emotion-laden knowledge. It is not recognised or legitimised knowledge. But people pride and cultural identity is linked with this knowledge.

Does a research, evaluation or training effort recognise popular knowledge? How is popular knowledge utilized? Are there certain culturally appropriate methods of articulating popular knowledge? Do the methods find a place in participatory research, evaluation and training efforts?

3. Praxis

The continuous interaction between theory and practice is called praxis. How is this praxis attempted in a participatory research, evaluation or training effort? How are actions taken based on preliminary theory? How do these actions influence theory? What is the interactive nature of interaction between theory and practice in a concrete setting? Does

preliminary finding in an evaluation effort impact on the project ? How ? Is learning derived from a training effort utilized to change field practice ? How ?

4. Empowerment

Empowerment entails reduction of fear, enhancement of self-confidence. It implies a self-critical orientation and self-reliance. It means understanding the importance of collective strength and developing a sense of comradeship. Empowerment means reduction of isolation and acquisition of skills. It also implies taking decisions in common interests.

How does participation in a research, evaluation or training effort enhance empowerment ? Does the process itself contribute to empowerment or is it an outcome of the research, evaluation or training effort ? Or is it both a processual as well as end-result phenomenon ?

5. Organizational Strength

How does participatory research, evaluation and training contribute to strengthening of organizations ? Organizational strength implies clarity of goals, shared vision, appropriate division of labour, influence vis-a-vis outside environment, effective initiatives in collective interest, sufficient internal skills.

In certain circumstances, organizations of people may not exist. There participatory research, evaluation or training effort contributes towards building of peoples organizations. How does this collectivization process take place ?

Study Methodology

The methodology of the study will be essentially congruent with the very principles it seeks to study. It will be essentially a comparative methodology where all the study questions will be posed to a select sample of

6-8 participatory research, evaluation or training efforts. It should be noted that focus of the study is not on participation per se, but on participatory processes of research, evaluation or training. Hence, the selected sample will comprise of those projects where participatory research, evaluation or training activities have been undertaken. The focus will be on these activities, not projects as a whole. The following sequential steps are envisaged in the methodology :

1. The first step will be to identify participatory research, evaluation and training efforts in the country. Existing network of partners and associates of the Society for Participatory Research in Asia will be utilised to generate this list. Other agencies engaged in similar efforts will also be approached to help generate this list. Information is already available about where such activities are being undertaken.
2. From this initial list, a smaller sample (say 10-12 projects) will be chosen through the application of preliminary characteristics. The study team will make an initial assessment.
3. Further exploration with these selected projects will be undertaken by the study team. It is important to ensure that the project selected for study should see the value of the study for itself as well as agree to actively involve some of its own staff in the study. Based on this exploration, 6-8 projects where such activities have been undertaken will be finally chosen.
4. One (or two) staff persons from each project chosen will be invited to a planning workshop. Along with the study team, this group will develop detailed plans for study in each project. A study team, comprising of one external member and one (or two) internal staff, will be constituted for each project. This workshop will also be useful for developing methods of data-collection. It appears that direct observation will be a very important method in this study. This field observation of participatory research, evaluation and training activities will be carried out in the following manner:

lized as a dominant method. Other methods the interviews, group meetings, questionnaires, records analysis, etc. will also be utilized. The concrete design of methods, however, will evolve during this step only.

5. The next step will be data-collection in the field. This process will be carried out by each study team under the overall supervision of study Director and Assistant Director.
6. A midterm review meeting will be planned for all study teams to share their experiences; This meeting will also be used for problem-solving. A few other professionals may also be invited to this meeting.
7. Final round of data-collection will follow.
8. A preliminary analysis of each project's experiences will be made by each study team. Draft report prepared by each study team will be shared and discussed with other members of the project.
9. A workshop will be called to bring together all the study teams to analyse the draft reports of each team. Common and differing elements will be arrived at from this step. A few outsiders, professionals as well as additional project staff, may be invited to this workshop as well.
10. The final report containing synthesis of all the projects will be prepared.
11. This report will be translated and printed in two-three languages, besides English. The report will be distributed widely.

Time Table :

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| Steps 1 - 3 | 3 months |
| Steps 4 - 7 | 9 months |
| Step 8 | 3 months |
| Step 9 -10 | 3 months |
| Step 11 | 3 months |

Total time period : 21 months.

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