

PARTICIPATORY TRAINING FOR PROMOTION OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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I. THE CONTEXT :

During the last one decade or so, "training" has become a common activity in all development projects. But it needs to be recognized that the "most extensive and far reaching learning has proceeded with no trainers at all or with the trainers involved marginally and from a distance." ¹ If learning can happen without training, why is so much energy being put into training in general and participatory training in particular? Before we address this question, perhaps it is most appropriate to state that during the last decade, training has become reduced to a pre-planned technique-happy mass of simulations and role plays without any contribution to critical thinking and generation of understanding and awareness. In certain development circles, the practitioners opt for doses of trainings if a programme is not doing well. There are great expectations from training - "as if knowledge and action are related". ²

On the contrary, the work experience of the agency and projects are often not systematically articulated and analysed for further use in action. As long as it is assumed that increasing knowledge will automatically lead to changes in action, training cannot contribute anything to the development process. Such thinking only shows a type of development which is more technical in nature. Participatory training relates to a type of development which believes in enabling the poor to gain control over their lives in a more active manner, facilitates to break

the culture of silence, instills confidence to express their individual and collective interest, helps to understand the social dynamics and helps in identifying solutions.³

II. PARTICIPATORY TRAINING PRINCIPLES

Participatory training needs to be looked at separately from its generic word 'training'. Participatory training is based on a value premise which believes in empowerment of the poor, including women; believes in sustainability, ecological soundness and social justice. Participatory training cannot be held in every situation. It would be a mistake to understand the word 'participatory' as synonymous with methods like role play, simulations and other structured exercises. No method makes a training participatory or non-participatory. Participatory training is based on the article of faith of the trainers which, in turn, is biased towards the marginalised groups. Participatory training is rooted in certain basic values which gives centrality to poor people's participation in rebuilding their own future.

A participatory trainer does not make magic to alter the social inequality. The trainer only makes an educational intervention, whereby the people start thinking about their situation.⁴ Participatory training facilitates critical learning.

Agencies and projects believing in participatory development process have concepts like 'organising', 'empowerment', 'participation', 'self-managed', 'community control', 'sustainability' in their project document.

Ordinary people whose basic knowledge and experiences have been devalued and delegitimised for centuries do not feel confident to exercise control. They suffer from low self-esteem and their trust in themselves is shaken. The reason for this is to be found in the conventional approach of education of the poor. If poor people are considered ignorant and if the approach is to simply feed them with information that is useful to them, it will never lead to instilling confidence or empowerment. However, this does not imply that poor people should not be provided with technical information.

Taking an example of a community health programme, there may be trainings conducted for health workers on how to do safe delivery, but the training will only enable the health workers to practice, if they are given the opportunity to analyse their own experiences of conducting deliveries. This would enable them to find out what is 'good' and 'bad' in their own practices and why there is a need to adopt new ones. This raises the self-confidence and increases participation of the health workers.

In other words, the trainings related to social development change do not focus on information giving or skill-building but encourage the practitioners and people to articulate their own knowledge and need to know and learn more. This principle is the same for any programme, whether it is watershed development, forestry, income generating activities, food security, savings and credit.

Though participatory training principles are based in a set of value premises, it is also built on the adult learning principles. In participatory training, we hear some common statements like

"start where the people are", "learn from their experiences", "learning is a social event". These are nothing but principles derived for adult learning. Hence, participatory training is structured keeping in mind both value premises and adult learning principles.

The key features of this training are

- i) It is participant-centered. It is learner's learning- need specific.
- ii) The learning focusses not only on the knowledge but also on the awareness and skill. This makes the learning complete, critical and useful. The combined focus of these three makes the choice of training methods complex.
- iii) Learning is derived from the experiences of the participants. Experiential learning is crucial to participatory training.
- iv) Participatory training requires a learning environment where participants and their experiences are valued and participants feel psychologically secure and safe to unlearn, try their new ideas and share their experiences.
- v) When participation is valued, participants develop their own norms and values and take responsibility of their own learning.
- vi) Since, ensuring participation and building a safe environment are key requirements of participatory training, the role of trainers becomes very crucial. The trainer not only believes in the participatory principles, but needs to demonstrate it, as a way of life.⁵
- vii) Participatory training not only helps in developing critical understanding but also appropriates the relevant and useful

knowledge of the dominant system.⁶

III. PARTICIPATORY TRAINING IN PRACTICE :

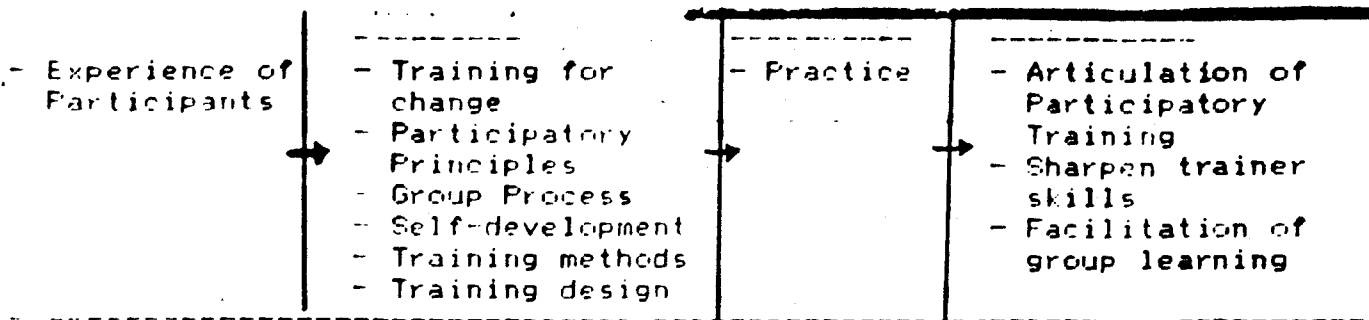
Agencies and projects that give importance to people's empowerment and control are involved in critical liberating education with the disadvantaged groups that they work with. In order to build the people's competencies, the project and agencies conduct series of trainings. Hence, socialisation of development workers on participatory principles as well as building internal competency to facilitate participatory learning is very much needed. In India, many agencies have been working towards building the competency of grass root development agencies on participatory training.

For the past decade, Society for Participatory Research in Asia, New Delhi and several regional support institutions have been involved in building competency on participatory training among grass-root groups. All these institutions individually and jointly have trained large number of development workers in India as well as in South Asia. The objectives of such a programme are (i) to build internal capacity of the grass root development agencies to facilitate participatory learning with the disadvantaged groups they work with, (ii) to help the agencies to systematise their training interventions and to create a cadre of people who believe in participatory philosophy and practice them in training. Some of the key features of participatory training elaborated here are drawn from the experiences and practices of various support organisations including UNNATI where the authors work.⁷

The methodology used in strengthening the participatory training competencies is based on participatory principles elaborated in the previous section. It is based on experiential learning and building internal competencies of the development workers so that they emerge as participatory trainers. The training includes modules like :

- i) Why do we do training - Role of training in social change
- ii) Developing insights into how disadvantaged people learn
- iii) Developing insights into group behaviour - group process and dynamics
- iv) Self development of trainers
- v) Developing an understanding on the effective use of training methods
- vi) Training design
- vii) Developing Facilitation skills.

These seven primary modules are taken up in a three phased training programme. The first and third phases are residential programmes with eight day duration each. Between the first and the third phase, there is a gap of four months. During this period the participants make use of some of the principles they have learnt in the first phase. This is the second phase. This phase also provides a chance to articulate the learning needs of a trainer. While the first phase is devoted to understanding the methodological principles of training, the third phase is spent in developing skills to practice those principles. However, in both phases, experience, analysis and articulation is in-built. In the first phase, the participants enter into the learning situation with individual identity. But as they are encouraged to learn from each other's experiences, the purpose of



understanding the value and strength of experimental learning is met. From the analysis of their own collective learning process, the participants derive insights into group processes. From the trainer's behaviour and facilitation, the participants derive insights into role of trainer and facilitation skills. During the whole training, the trainer performs as a model learner, trainer and practitioner of participatory training. Besides the content of the programme, the process of training is very important. We have found that the participants learn more from the training process and trainers behaviour than from the content per se. The seven key modules are as follows :

1. ROLE OF TRAINING :

There are polarised opinions on the role of training in the social change and development process. As practitioners of participatory training, we need to develop a balanced understanding on its role. When training is understood as a structured, deliberate, directed and purposive learning intervention, it makes the learning focussed. In a participatory learning perspective, it provides learning on the daily issues central to the life of the people who are undergoing the learning and also helps the people to critically look into their experiences. The process helps the learner to instill faith in his/her self. The content of the training is of little value if the training does not create an environment where the learners feel confident to share and analyse their experiences. Participatory training does not provide information and skill alone but breaks the "culture of silence". People, particularly the poor, who undergo participatory training of any nature need

to get structured space to gain confidence. Making people feel empowered and capable in a learning context enables them to practice in their own real life context. Besides this, learning in a group provides a microcosm of group functioning to the participants. From the training, the participants draw the relevance of 'group' and understand the norms, values and principles of group-building which later can be used in organising themselves.

2. HOW ADULTS LEARN :

Insights into the learning process of adults can help in structuring the learning programme. People often avoid structured learning as it requires unlearning which is painful. Learning creates several emotional feelings like stress, anxiety, fear, confusion, agitation and happiness. It has been found that people learn best when learning is useful, relaxing, concrete and when their own experiences and understanding are valued. Such an understanding helps in building an appropriate learning environment and in preparation of the trainer. This module highlights the importance of the learning process rather the content. Developing insights into the issue of why people do not participate in learning as well as in the development process is very crucial for a trainer. If people are treated as objects rather than as active participants they feel alienated. Adults participate best in learning when they are provided a safe, supportive and accepting environment to express and take action.

3. GROUP PROCESS :

The group is basic to experiential learning and action for change. Thus there is a need to understand how a group performs

its tasks while maintaining its group identity. There is also a need to understand the process of participation, communication, leadership building, conflict resolution and decision making in the group while they are undergoing learning. Any inability to recognize these processes creates a problem in helping the group to get involved in the learning. Therefore, trainer's insights into the group process is essential in order to facilitate collective learning.

4. SELF DEVELOPMENT OF TRAINER :

"Knowing oneself is the basis for knowing others." Since, during the training, the trainer needs to know how the participants are feeling, how comfortable they are to pursue learning, whether the participant's experience and knowledge is being valued, the trainer needs to know himself/herself completely. Without this, the trainer might impose herself/himself, her/his own views, pressures, anxieties and tentativeness on the participants. Hence, the trainer needs to undergo an analysis of his/her own understanding of micro and macro reality, perspective on social development and change, have clarity on liking, disliking, sensitivity towards gender, communal, cultural, racial and caste issues. The trainer needs to be clearly aware of her/his own self-concept and needs to respect his/her self. Having a balanced understanding of self helps in understanding others in a similar 'situation'. As it is said, if you are sensitive to your own needs it helps in developing sensitivity towards others. Self understanding and self development are very crucial to a trainer's overall development.

5. TRAINING METHODS :

Since participatory training focusses on knowledge, awareness and skill development, the methods used are consistent with the focus of learning. The methods used in the trainings are lecture, group discussion, simulation, role play, case analysis and practice and other variations of these major methods. Besides giving centrality to focus of learning, there is also a need to keep in mind the participant's sustained involvement, valuing learners' experiences, sharing of experiences and group building of learners while choosing methods. Methods should contribute to learning, they should not be a bag of tricks and games used to entertain the learners. In fact, the entertainment value has become so over-popularised in recent times that it has made participatory training synonymous with fun and having a good time rather than critical and liberating learning.

6. TRAINING DESIGN :

"Developing an appropriate design for the learning objectives of a group of learners is one of the most creative and challenging first steps in any training".⁸ But many trainers feel that in participatory training one should not develop a pre-planned design. Such thinking only leads to blurring of training objectives and lack of preparation by the trainer. A participatory trainer ought to know about the background and learning needs of the participants. The trainer should also be clear about the organisational and socio-economic context in which a particular training is organised. Based on this preliminary understanding, a training design is prepared which includes articulation of training objectives, spelling out the contents and its sequencing and selecting appropriate learning

methods. Once a design is prepared, the trainer can prepare for each session. But each design needs to be re-examined jointly with the participants taking into account their articulated learning needs and training objectives. The preparation of a design, stepwise, is as follows : learning needs identification -> objective setting -> content spellout -> sequencing -> method identification.

This helps in breaking the trainers obsession with methods and techniques which often happen to many trainers. Many trainers first look for an attractive method then identify the content. This approach makes participatory training into a series of games without contributing to learning. Hence, competency in training design preparation is an essential skill.

7. FACILITATION :

In participatory training, the trainer facilitates group learning. Small group facilitation does not have one single theory or conceptual basis. The diversity of approaches expose a multi-stylistic approach to small group facilitation.⁸

In participatory training, one facilitates individuals as well as the group to develop understanding and awareness. In a training situation, an individual or the group as a whole may get stuck in arriving at the cognitive understanding or may show resistance or blocks in relating to the learning issues. In these situations, the trainer makes facilitative interventions. The facilitating styles can be 'interactive', 'inclusive', 'intrusive' and 'interpretive'. The mix of different styles is helpful in a mix of learning goals, differential trainer

personalities and various stages of group development. However, one needs to understand various approaches to facilitation such as psychoanalytic, NTL, Esalen model Rogerian model, etc. The individual models are very powerful methods and grass-root trainers may not develop competency to handle them. We have found that grass root workers find it easy to use a mix of styles in promoting collective learning.

All the above learning themes are carried out with the use of variety of methods like analysis of experiences of participants, analysis of cases and analysis of simulated experiences with adequate input to sharpen the theoretical base.

IV. IMPACT AT THE GRASSROOTS :

Though we have not undertaken any formal study to assess the impact of training to build the trainer's competencies in participatory training, we have witnessed some of its use at the grass roots.

The first and foremost important change is that the grass root trainers have been able to understand why people do not participate. The grass root practitioners realise the dangers of the 'imparting' model of educating people. There is an increased understanding in promoting experiences, mutual, learner-centered and interactive model of learning. It has helped them to promote participation in the programmes as well as deriving people's knowledge to make programmes people-centered and locally relevant.

The second nature of impact is increasing the grass-root worker's faith in people's knowledge. The practitioners see and value the

wide range of knowledge and resources people have. This breaks the dependance on external resource persons and experts. The trainers do value expert knowledge, but integrate it critically with people's knowledge-base. This training enhances understanding and insight into development issues.

The third nature of impact is in terms of self-development. Development practitioners' examination, evaluation and assessment of their people centered values in learning helps them to develop as individuals sensitive to poor people and their needs. The critical re-examination of social conditions also helps the practitioners to develop a concrete, practical, dynamic approach to social development. In sum, participatory training not only promotes people's participation, but creates alternatives to social development frameworks at the micro level and helps to build development workers committed to the empowerment of the poor.

Training Design Adopted During 1993 for Gujarat Based NGOs

DAYS	PHASE	METHODS
PHASE-1 -----		
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Setting the context of the training - Introduction of participations^{nts} - Rearticulations of learning needs - spelling out the objectives of training * Understanding Training and Participatory Training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -dyads - Group Work -Group distiction
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Understanding Participatory Training (Continued) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Group Work - Self study - Consolidation
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Articulation of Participatory Training Principles * Role of Trainer * Small group dynamics and processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Group Work - Consolidation -Group distiction -Simulation, Role Pla
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Small group process (Cont.) * Inter group process * Mid-Term Review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Video Review -Exercise -Open-Verbal
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Trainers Capacities - Trust, Respect, Gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Exercise
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Self-Awarness and Dev. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reflection
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Training Design * Training Methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Case Analysis -Demonstrations and Analysis
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Follow-up Planing * Evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Group Work - Open & Ques.

PHASE-II

Participants practice training at their work place and review their performance. Trainers help the participants during the training.

PHASE-III

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|---|--------------------|
| * Analysis of training experience | - Group Work |
| * Training design preparation | - Group Work |
| * Training design preparation | -Case work |
| * Use of Training Methods | -Practice in Group |
| | -Video review |
| * Facilitation | - Group Work |
| | -Video review |
| | -Lecture |
| * Training Evaluation, Follow up,
Report | -Case Study |
| * Insight into Gender Issues,
Trainer Authority, Team Work,
Participation | -Guided Group Work |
| *Self Development Of Trainer | -Group Discussion |
| | -Lecture |
| * Participatory Training Philosophy | -Group Discussion |
| * Follow-up Planning | - Group Work |
| * Evaluation | -Open |
| * Closure | |