Dr. Rajesh Tandon

BACKGROUND

The decade of the seventies began to generate a critique of the dominant development paradigm which was practiced in the countries of the North after the second World War and adopted in the newly independent countries of the South in the fifties and the sixties. The experiences of the fifties and the sixties has demonstrated the fundamental weakness of the top-down, GNP-foosed, growth-centred strategy of development based on professional expertise and modernising technologies. The critique of this strategy of development was developed from the experiences in a variety of sectors in the countries of the South in general, and in India in particular. The critique was applied to education, social welfare, health, agriculture, etc. With the convenlng of the 'Health for All by the Year 2000' in the mid seventies the focus of health care delivery shifted from expertise and high technology to what came to be known as primary health care. The cornerstone of this approach of primary health care, according to the declarations of Alma Ata and subsequent reports of a variety of committees and studies, was proclaimed as community participation.

Though described as the inevitable pillar of community health under the primary health care approach, community participation was rarely defined clearly, mostly confused and largely ignored in practice. Yet outside the purview of global slogans and national\international declarations, practises in small micro settings in different parts of this country had demonstrated, in a concrete and specific sense, the meaning and the relevance of community participation in health care. Many of these experiments, innovations and programmes had been documented in a variety of modes and styles and more recently in the Anubhav series of 12 case studies of community health in the country. An analysis of these and other grass-roots health care experiments and projects, both in the governmental and non-governmental sector, in the country has brought about a much deeper, realistic and potentially useful understanding of community participation in health care. This chapter is an attempt to articulate this understanding, and to highlight the variety of meanings of community participation that can be developed in practice; it also describes multiple strategies that have been used to ensure community participation, and finally it lists a series of enabling factors which have contributed to the initiation, sustenance and strengthening of the processes of community participation in health programmes. Towards the end, certain implications for the policy framework in health programmes and programme planning and staff-development of such projects are enumerated.

MEANING OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The most important and at the same time most difficult task in this arena is to specifically define the meaning of the phrase community participation as it applies to health programmes. One of the first concerns in this regard is the meaning of the word "Community". "Community" in this context is not merely understood in sociological sense, or a physical sense, but also as groupings of households around common interests. The access of, and influence by, the rich households on the resources of a health programme are already known. It is the systematic and structural denial of access and influence to the poor in a village or a city - the 'have-nots' - that is implied in the phrase 'Community Participation'. Hence, Community Participation in health has to be seen in this context. It implies participation by these individuals (women, for example) and families like tribals, harijans, illiterates, etc.) who otherwise do not participate in health programme.

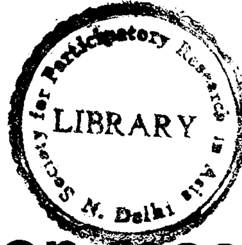
It will be naive as well as impractical to assign a unified and singular meaning to this phrase of community participation. In fact, attempts to provide such singular meaning of community participation have led to rigidity as well impracticability in utilising this approach in strengthening the health of the people. Based on the concrete experiences prevalent in different parts of this country, several meanings of Community Participation can be described and explained. One of the key dimensions on which these meanings differ is the dimension of control that a community exercises in determining its own health needs and implementing programmes and services to meet them. The degree of control can be also understood as the extent of influence exercised, or the depth of participation in decision-making. It has been seen that the extent to which different communities, groups, villagers or slums have exercised this control varies considerably due to a variety of factors. The meaning of Community Participation can therefore, be seen t vary in different settings, depending upon the conditions prevalent in that community and the overall approach of the health programme itself.

It is with this in view that six different meanings of community participation can be described here. It is important to note that in itself none of these meanings is superior to other and that apriori preferences can not be attached if we are to examine the multiplicities of ways in which community participation has been promoted in health programmes.

1. Consultation with a Community about its Health Needs

The easiest and perhaps the most widely practiced form of community participation in health programmes is consultation with members of the community about their health needs. This consultation is carried out in formal and informal ways, periodically and regularly, initially at

8283



2 Before embarking on research

The chapter describes how to tackle the difficult early stages of designing a piece of research that will eventually provide useful information.

Research commissioned for the wrong reasons *Although practical research is meant to be undertaken with the purpose of providing information that will influence the work of the distance-teaching organisation (the 'action'), pieces of research are often commissioned which do not have any hope of influencing action. I describe some of the ways this can happen so that researchers can try to avoid getting into useless research projects.*

Research methods *You choose research methods that fit the problem but you also define the problem to fit your research methods. I draw a quick sketch of the methods that are described in this book.*

Defining the questions for research *It is important to get as clear an idea as possible about the information that people want from the research and about what they will do with it when they get it. I describe some ways of clarifying the questions.*

Consulting documents and experts *You may find that the information you want already exists. Experts can help in designing pieces of research.*

Time and money *Ways of estimating the cost of a piece of research and the time it will take.*

Practical research has to be linked to action. That is the purpose of doing it. But forming this link is not easy. The action problem that the research is meant to illuminate has to be clarified early on, so that a piece of research can be devised which will produce results that are relevant to that problem. Later, when the research has been completed, the results have to be fed back in such a way that the action people can and do take notice of them. These two stages - before and after the actual conduct of the research - usually get less attention than they deserve. This is unfortunate, since these are the points at which there is the greatest danger of the research and action drifting apart.

Research commissioned for the wrong reasons

Some pieces of research, though supposedly undertaken with the purpose of guiding action, do not really have any chance of influencing action. They are doomed, from the outset, to be ineffectual. There are many ways this can happen and I will describe a few so that the researcher, thus forewarned, can try to avoid such wasted effort.

One reason is, simply, vagueness. The educators feel that information of some kind would help them and they look to research to provide it, without ever thinking out clearly what information they want. If a researcher is given such a job, the best he can do is to assemble bits of information that he thinks might be useful. This information, by a lucky chance, might be exactly what the educators needed, but this is unlikely.

An example of this (not from Lesotho) concerns some research that was undertaken before a radio campaign on family planning. The educators had already decided to use radio, and they asked for background information. From the report, it looks to me as though they never took their thinking any further, so a kind of research programme was carried out without anyone deciding what it was to find out and why. Some interviewers talked to a few people in a dozen market-places around the country. They found that people in one place seemed to like film music; somewhere else they liked folk music; somewhere else they listened to the news; and somewhere else they preferred programmes in their local dialect. I cannot imagine that this was of much use to the campaign organisers. Almost certainly, it was not of enough use to justify several months of research.

People sometimes commission research without having any action problem in mind. Perhaps they simply like the idea of having some research done; they feel that it confers prestige. Or perhaps they think it would be interesting just to find out about something. If the research is not directed towards an action problem, not even vaguely, then the results are unlikely to influence action.

Another misuse of research is when people have a decision to make but, for some reason, they are reluctant to make it. They often call for more research into the topic, not because they really need more information to help make the decision, but just to postpone the decision making.

Probably the most common cause of ineffectual research, however, is when the action, which the research is supposed to be influencing, is not in fact open to influence. A project director might request an evaluation of the project even though he has no intention of modifying the project in the light of the results. Perhaps there is not even any possibility of making significant changes to the project. He is not looking to research to provide guidance; he is seeking reassurance. Or someone might commission research to provide support for his point of view in a policy debate. Again, he is not intending to be guided by the research; he just wants it to confirm something he already believes.

One might argue that research, even though commissioned for the wrong reasons, will sometimes throw up findings that force people to change their minds - the people did not want guidance, perhaps, but the research has clear implications which they cannot ignore. It would be nice if this was true, but in my experience it isn't. People who have made

up their minds are inflexible. Put yourself in the shoes of a policy-maker who is faced with a research result which suggests that he should change his policies. Either you can accept the research results and change your policies or you can keep your policies and ignore the research results. The second course is much easier.

The Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre's commitment to radio provides an example of this. International Extension College, who initiated LDTC, had coined the expression 'three-way teaching' to describe the combination of correspondence courses, broadcasting and face-to-face teaching that they advocated, and LDTC was established to explore the use of any available media for distance-teaching, so it was part of the original plan that LDTC would use radio. Early research suggested that radio ownership was fairly low (about 17% of households had radios in 1975) and that reception of the national radio station was poor. Nonetheless, when the first students had been enrolled for correspondence courses, several sets of radio programmes were written, produced and broadcast to accompany the courses. More than one evaluation survey over the next two years reported that the audience for these programmes was very small, even among LDTC's own correspondence students. If research had influenced action in any straightforward way, LDTC would have reduced its radio work. But the commitment to radio remained and indeed increased. The radio section was expanded; more programmes were produced; an adviser on radio was recruited from overseas, and eventually a whole studio was built and equipped. People who like an idea are not easily put off it. *

Research methods

You might think that the logical way to design a piece of practical research would be to define the problem and then to select the most appropriate research method to tackle the problem. What happens in practice is a bit more complicated. You begin with an idea of the range of research methods at your disposal and, as soon as you are given the problem, you start thinking how you might tackle it. As a research design begins to form in your mind, you see the ways in which the problem needs to be defined. You develop a research design to fit the problem, but you also define the problem to fit the research design. The two parts interact.

In this section, I draw a quick sketch of the research methods that I am going to describe in more detail later in the book. Then I suggest ways in which, with these methods in mind, you can define

---

* In all fairness I should mention some of the arguments that were put forward for building up the radio section. Radio Lesotho had plans to increase its transmitting power; radio ownership was likely to go up rather than down; and it was part of LDTC's job to exploit the educational potential of radio, so it should continue this work even though the early results had been disappointing. But I think the example still illustrates my point: research results, even when they are clear, repeated and not in dispute, do not necessarily influence policy in the way you might expect.

a problem so as to make it susceptible to research.

Observation is a research method. Before designing materials to teach basic numeracy at LDTC, we wanted to know what sort of calculations people were called upon to make in their everyday lives. We spent some time in village shops noting down the purchases that people made. We found that three-fifths of the shoppers bought just one item and that four-fifths of them spent less than 50 cents. To get an idea of the uses of literacy in Lesotho, we catalogued all the reading matter in a number of rural homes (with the owners' permission, of course). You could learn a lot about rural life from observing fields, gardens, crops, livestock, farm implements and so on.

Consulting records is another research method. LDTC used the official statistics on road accidents and traffic offences to assess the impact of a road safety campaign. In that case, the records were collected by another agency as part of its regular operations. You can, of course, collect records of your own. A correspondence college, for instance, generates a set of records in keeping track of its students' progress.

Talking to people is, obviously, a basic research method. Social scientists distinguish broadly between two ways of doing it. The first way is that you hold something like an ordinary conversation, either with an individual person or with a group. You might ask certain questions to guide the conversation on to the topics that you are interested in, but the people are free to tell you anything they want to tell you in their own way. The other way is that you interview people with a questionnaire, reading out the questions exactly as they are written and recording the answers in a systematic way. For example, if you wanted to know how many farmers owned oxen, you might take a sample of farmers and put the same question to each one, 'Do you own any oxen?' Then you add up the answers to find, say, that 20% own oxen. This second method is known as a social survey. A variation on this is to give people the questionnaire, or to send it through the post, and get them to fill in the answers themselves.

Experiments can also be used in social research. For example, if you wanted to know whether long letters of encouragement had any effect on correspondence students, you might arrange for some students to receive long letters and other students to receive short ones, and you would see if it made any difference. A special kind of experiment is when you investigate the feasibility of some idea by actually putting it into practice, perhaps on a limited scale, and seeing how it goes. This is sometimes called 'action research'. For instance, to find out if there was any demand for a radio magazine programme for housewives, you might broadcast one for a few weeks, to see what response it received.

There are other methods apart from these. Later in the book I will describe some specialised techniques for assessing instructional materials, for example. But these are the basic ones.

Different methods provide different sorts of information. In an

experiment, you alter things in some way in order to see what happens. With the other methods, you don't alter things, or at least you try not to; rather you try to get a picture of the way things are. Methods which involve counting and calculating provide a picture in figures; they can answer questions of the form 'How many ..... ?' 'What proportion of ..... ?' 'What is the average ..... ?' Methods which don't involve counting, especially conversation and group discussion, provide a picture rather in words or images.

Defining the questions for research

When people want some research on a problem, they often present the problem in a way that is not immediately susceptible to research. They tend to use vague phrases like 'investigate the feasibility of' or 'assess the effectiveness of'. But if there is to be any hope that they will use the results when they get them, they have to say more precisely what sort of results they want.

The first step in defining the research question is to ask them 'What do you want to find out?' Unfortunately someone who has begun with a vague phrase is likely to continue with more vague phrases. A group of educators might request information on 'community involvement in education', for example. If you ask them what they want to know, they are likely to make more statements, using different words but equally vague - 'the concept of community-based schooling', 'the whole area of village perceptions of the formal school system', 'what goes on across the interface between school and community' and so on. People like talking in this way. It sounds good and it saves them the effort of thinking. But if it is not clarified, it leads to poor research. If the researcher doesn't know what the questions are, how can he find the answers?

Another ploy is to ask people to guess what the results of the research might be. This forces them to think of what they might expect to get out of the research, and their answers might reveal more precisely the questions that they are interested in. I gave the example earlier of a vague piece of research that was conducted in response to a vague request for 'background information' about radio. If the campaign organisers had been asked,'What results do you expect?' they might possibly have given answers like these:

'I expect that only a very few people own radios.'
'I would guess that the news is the peak listening time.'
'I think people only listen for entertainment; if it sounds like serious talk, they will switch off.'
'I'm worried if only the rich have radios; it's the poor we really want to reach.'

Statements like these are a great improvement on a vague request for background information. One could begin to frame a research project around them, to find out what proportion of people own radios, how radio-owners differ from other people, which programmes people listen

to most, at what times most people listen, and so on.

If that fails, you have to make your own suggestions about questions that the research might tackle, making use of any hints you can pick up from their vague statements. To the people who were interested in 'community involvement in education', you might offer ideas along these lines: 'We can find out about the membership of school boards from records at the Ministry of Education. We can talk to a few teachers to see if they welcome parents' interest in the children's education. We could do an interview survey of parents to find out how often they visit their children's schools. Is this the kind of thing you want?'

If, despite your efforts, the research questions remain vague, you can sometimes do a quick piece of research to clarify the questions. This is known as 'exploratory research'. To continue the same example, you might visit a village school and talk to some teachers, in a very general way, about their contacts with parents and any other aspects of the relationship between the school and the village. You might then be able to identify more precisely the topics for more detailed research.

When you have made the research questions sufficiently specific, you can then put another important question to the people who are commissioning the research - 'What will you do if we find that ... ?' (you insert your own guess of what the result will be). It is important to get people thinking about this early on. People who commission a piece of research are often unable to visualise what the results will look like. The danger is that, when they eventually get the results, they won't know what to do with them.

If people force themselves to face this question, they sometimes realise that the research results will make no difference. They have asked for research on a particular course of action, but they are not seriously considering any alternative course of action; perhaps they cannot even imagine an alternative course of action. So the research is not really needed at all.

Thinking about this question also prepares people for the possibility that the research results might not be decisive. Suppose that two people are preparing literacy materials for out-of-school children; they have different opinions about whether to expect parents to help their children with the materials. They will probably express their opinions in sentences like, 'I'm sure parents will take this opportunity to help their children,' or 'I don't think we can rely on their help.' They commission a piece of research to find out whether or not parents help their children with reading and writing. Almost certainly, the research will find that some do and some don't. The result of the research will be a percentage, such as '40% (or 20% or 60%) of parents have given their children some help with reading and writing, and 15% (or 5% or 30%) have done so in the last month.' If the literacy people can think, in advance, about what they would do with such a result, there is some hope that they will actually use the result when it comes. But if they commission the research in the hope of getting a 'Yes/No' answer

to their question and then they eventually get a percentage instead, they may not know what to do with it.

Since part of the purpose of this book is to convince people of the usefulness of research in distance teaching, the point I am about to make might seem out of character. But there is a danger of thinking up so many questions that seem to require research that you prevent yourself from taking any action at all. Consider an organisation that is wondering about publishing an instructional booklet. What would be the best topic? How long should the booklet be? What style should it be written in? Should it use illustrations? What sort of illustrations? Should it use colour? Should it be sold or given out free? If sold, at what price? And so on. You could spend years doing preparatory research for this one booklet.

You cannot research everything. In fact, of all the possible questions that you might think up, you can only research a few. Two pieces of advice follow from this. First, select those questions on which research can provide the most help. Second, don't forget action research. If you wanted to find out if people would buy a booklet priced at 20 cents, the best research method would be to offer booklets at 20 cents and see if people bought them. Research does not necessarily have to precede action. An alert researcher, by arranging to gather data from an action project, can use the action itself as a research method.

Consulting documents and experts

In academic research, when you are hoping to contribute to knowledge on some topic of general interest, it is well established practice to review previous work. For example, if you were investigating whether children of a certain age can or cannot grasp certain scientific concepts, it would be foolish to proceed with a research project without having consulted the substantial literature that already exists on this topic.

In practical research, the questions are usually more specific to the place, time and project that you are working on. What are the main cattle diseases in this country? What beliefs do these people have about types of food? How good is radio reception in the northern districts? So there is not so much relevant literature that you have to consult. Nonetheless, even in a small country like Lesotho, government departments and other agencies carry out many pieces of research, so you may find that someone else has already obtained the facts you want. At LDTC, for example, before we wrote a booklet on vegetable growing, we were able to use figures from the Ministry of Agriculture on the proportion of people who grow vegetables and on the types of vegetables they grow. When preparing a booklet on child care, we were able to use reports from two health education projects on traditional child care practices.

If the problem is about the design of distance-teaching materials, or the organisation of a distance-teaching programme, the experience of other countries might be relevant. There are various agencies you

can write to for this kind of information; some are listed in Appendix 6. Try to describe precisely the problem you have or the sort of information you feel you need, perhaps enclosing background papers on your project. This will help them to locate material that is really relevant to your research. There is a possibility that the people who answer your letter may not know any more than you do about work that has been done that is relevant to your problem, so they may just refer you to another agency or send you publications that they happen to have, which might be quite irrelevant. However, they do sometimes produce something useful, so it is worth making the effort to consult them.

In addition to international agencies, it is useful to establish contacts with colleagues in similar organisations in other countries. People tend to be more honest in informal letters or telephone calls than in formal reports, particularly about mistakes they have made or awkward problems they have encountered.

On technical matters connected with research design, you might be able to consult experts in research and statistics, perhaps in the government statistics department or in the university. If you do need expert advice, it is better to seek it early on. If you embark on a badly designed piece of research and gather a pile of faulty data, there is not much that an expert can do at a late stage to put it right.

A word of warning about experts, especially statisticians. When consulted for a professional opinion, they tend, naturally, to be conscious of their professional status. They do not want to condone a research design which another expert might consider shoddy. So they are inclined to give you advice that comes straight out of the text-books. This can lead them to recommend a research design that is more ambitious than you can handle and more refined than it needs to be for your purposes. I am not suggesting that you ignore what they say. But you should be prepared to question their recommendations and discuss the research design with them, rather than just accept what they tell you.

Time and money

Educators generally need information fairly quickly. If a new college requests a survey of correspondence students to help it decide which subjects to offer first, it does not want to wait two years for the results; it needs them in a month or two. If a course writer wants to know whether to adopt this style or that style, he needs to know before he has written too much of the course.

It is important to be realistic about this. A social survey of the kind described in later chapters will take at least two months and probably much longer. If this means that the results will arrive too late, it may be better not to embark on it at all. You might decide not to do any research on the topic, or you might select a research method that will produce results more quickly. A quick piece of

research will probably produce results which are less reliable, less academically respectable, than a larger one. (But rough results at the right time are much more use than elegant results that arrive too late.)

As well as being short of time, the research department is often short of money. Here again, it is important to be realistic. A piece of research has to reach the stage of producing some results before it can hope to have much effect on action. If it is abandoned, for lack of money, at any point before that stage is reached, the money already spent on it will have been largely wasted. So the researcher must be confident that the research he has designed can be completed with the funds available for it.

In order to design a piece of research with full regard to time and money, it is of course necessary to be able to estimate how much time a piece of research will take and how much money it will cost. This is not easy. To estimate the time, it is best to divide the research into its different stages and to make an estimate for each stage. For an interview survey, for example, you might divide the research into questionnaire design, recruiting and training interviewers, fieldwork, data processing, analysis of results, writing report. You estimate the time that each stage will take and then you add them up. Similarly, in estimating the money it will cost, try to think of all the separate items that will cost money, e.g. salaries of research staff, travel expenses, use of data-processing equipment, typing and printing of final report.

If you have little experience of research, ask the opinions of people who have done it before and revise your estimates accordingly. Then, when you have made the best estimate you can make, multiply it by 1.5 or even by 2. This might seem ridiculous, but people's estimates (mine included) are almost always too optimistic. This is partly because you do not want a piece of research to take too much time and cost too much money, so you persuade yourself that it won't. And it is partly because you assume that things will go smoothly, whereas in fact they never do.

With more experience you will get better at making these estimates. Keep a record of the time and money that your pieces of research actually do take. This will provide the most reliable basis for making estimates of future research projects.