



A NOTE

The Asian Network of Participatory Research has now been existing for about seven years. This note is intended to clarify certain theoretical and administrative aspects relevant to the Asian Network.

THEORETICAL

1. Participatory Research in Asia is beginning to be recognised as one of the contributions to the organised struggles of local people. This recognition has been slow in coming but now there are strong indicators to this effect.

The first issue is that the people have become increasingly wary of the experts and feel as if they have been 'captured' by them. Since there is an increasing role played by the experts in every aspect of people's life, ordinary people in most Asian countries feel uneasy and insecure about this growing control by the experts. And the experts, be they doctor, engineer or social scientist, are being challenged by the people. One of the challenges has come in the area of occupational and environmental health. Workers and citizens in India, Malaysia, Philippines and Australia are no longer willing to blindly accept what the experts say about occupational and environmental health. They have begun their own investigations and analysis of these issues. Another example is ^{the} whole question of large dams, irrigation or hydro-electric. ⁿ The techno-economic justification of large dams is being questioned by the ordinary people, particularly in the Philippines and in India. The expertise of the engineers and the assumptions behind their planning for large dams are being questioned by the people in the light of their own experiences and socio-economic costs to them.

The contribution of Participatory Research has been to facilitate this challenge of the experts and to explode the myth of expertise resting with the select few.

The second major contribution of Participatory Research has been in collective empowerment of the local people. This process of empowerment includes incorporation of local and external knowledge as well as a process of valuing their own position vis-a-vis others. Several examples of Participatory Research from different Asian countries clearly indicate this empowering process. As a process of empowering ordinary people, Participatory Research finds its most direct and useful role in supporting the organised struggles of the ordinary people.

2. The best examples of Participatory Research in Asia show their direct linkages with oppressed classes. It is now well established that PR is an ally of the oppressed. The following five categories of the oppressed people have been involved in PR in Asia:
 - a) Workers: Workers have been involved on the question of occupational health and safety, workers education and rights, critique of the process of industrialisation, preparing workers own history etc. We have the classic example of some textile workers in India for the first time analysing collectively the nature of the crisis facing the textile industry in the country and evolving proposals for policy changes.
 - b) Rural Poor: These are the marginal farmers and landless labourers, whose involvement in PR centres around the question of land ownership and alienation and land use pattern, wages and rights. We have an example from Bangladesh where landless labourers have created their own analysis of the dynamics of labour exploitation in rural Bangladesh.
 - c) Tribals: Tribals are the indigenous people in several Asian countries. The issues central to their concern, where Participatory Research has been in-

volved are forests and land. There is also the issue of rediscovering and protecting certain positive elements of their traditional culture. The best examples of this struggle tribals come from Philippines and India.

- d) Women: Women are increasingly recognising the need to organise and assert themselves in many Asian countries. There are many examples of women's utilisation of PR in this process of organising themselves. Many women's movements and organisations consider Participatory Research as the only methodology for investigating the problems affecting women.
- e) Urban Slum-dwellers: Urban Slum-dwellers are increasing in numbers in many Asian Cities. They face problems of inadequate facilities for health, sanitation, transportation, employment, etc. and we have some examples of Participatory Research being used by them. A major issue currently engaging Participatory Research is the housing rights of slum-dwellers in India.

3. The central issue in Participatory in the Asian Context is its ideological focus. We are clearly asking the question; whose interest does research serve? We see Participatory Research as openly and clearly allied with the interests of the oppressed classes. Therefore, their own production of knowledge and utilisation of knowledge produced by others acquires the main thrust in Participatory Research in Asia. Thus the debate on choice of methods and techniques is irrelevant to our perspective and work.

However, our central concern at the moment is to invent methods that facilitate storage of knowledge produced by PR (which does not depend on printed form). This can ensure wider dissemination and future use of knowledge produced through Participatory Research.

Administrative

1. Several decisions for administration of the Asian regional network were taken in the regional meeting held in Manila in December 1983. Accordingly, following decisions were made:
 - a) Regional Coordination should be continued by Society for Participatory Research in Asia, New Delhi.
 - b) Southeast Asian region should be coordinated by SEA RICE (Regional Institute for Community Education), Manila.
 - c) Society for Participatory Research in Asia should take initial responsibility to identify a person in all the Asian countries which are still unexplored. Once the network is extended to all the Asian Countries, it can be divided into sub-regions for effective networking.
 - d) National Coordination for each country should remain with one central person/organization which ~~will be chosen~~ will be chosen in National PR meetings in each country. For Philippines, Farmers Assistance Board has taken this responsibility.
 - e) In order to facilitate exchange of materials each organisation of the network should provide one copy of their documentation/publication to the national coordinator. A data bank will be thus formed in each country which shall be made available to all the members, a copy of which should go to regional coordinator for broader circulation.
 - f) To facilitate mailing of this Newsletter, it will be bulk posted to various National Coordinators for within country distribution.
2. The task of national coordination is being performed very satisfactorily in several countries and more and more new people are joining in. We are also able to

bulk post this newsletter in the following countries; Singapore, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, New Zealand, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia, Bangladesh, South Korea.

3. The quarterly newsletter has served as a useful vehicle of communication. However, it still lacks a two-way process as information from some Asian Countries does not come in regularly.
4. We have not succeeded in establishing any link with the socialist countries of Asia.

Future Proposals

1. I would like to propose that the function of international coordination be now taken over by somebody else. I have performed this function for the last three years.
2. There is a need to develop some concrete proposals for inter-regional collaboration on specific issues. We would like to get involved on the problems of land and occupational and environmental health, workers education, etc.
3. There is a need to consider evolving residencies in Participatory Research where people from one region could spend three to six months with others in another region.
4. The Networking Memo for inter-regional communication is still not firmly established. The flow of information between regions continues to be irregular and unsatisfactory. We need to evolve a more effective method for this to ensure solidarity across regions.

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