

# **Unit - 1**

## **Introduction to Participatory Research**

# Units of Certificate in International Perspectives in Participatory Research

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## **Unit 1: Introduction to Participatory Research**

- Knowledge is Power
- Dominant Social Science Research: Characteristics and Critiques
- Participatory Research
- Historical Roots of Participatory Research
- Participatory Research in the Third World
- Europe, Canada and the United States
- The Participatory Research Network
- Contributions of Feminist and Anti-Racist Researchers
- Participation in Development Programmes

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## 1.1 Introduction

Unit-1 will familiarise you with the concept and context of emergence of participatory research. In Section 1.3 you will understand how knowledge is linked to power. You will also get an exposure to critiques of the dominant social science research paradigm. In Section 1.4 you will trace historical context of participatory research; learn about participatory research in the Third World, Europe, Canada and the United States and find out the contributions of Participatory Research Network and Feminist and Anti-Racist Researchers. In Section 1.5 you will be able to draw the links between participatory research, adult education and development.

## 1.2 Learning Objectives

After completing this unit, you should be familiar with the following concepts and issues:

- How knowledge is linked to power
- Critiques of the Dominant Social Science Research Paradigm
- The emergence of Participatory Research
- The links between Participatory Research, Adult Education and Development

## 1.3 Knowledge is Power: Monopoly of Knowledge

Human beings have always drawn upon their traditional knowledge systems in order to adapt to their local environments. Yet, the spread of industrialization along with the organization and development of modern institutions of knowledge production, such as educational and religious institutions, created widespread hierarchies between competing knowledge systems. These social institutions rose out of already existing interconnected systems of power, for example class, caste, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, ability and geographic location, which enabled powerful groups — social elites, rulers, and experts — to further alienate, oppress and discredit the knowledge systems of such groups as indigenous or Tribal peoples and women. The monopoly of knowledge systems by the powerful led to the social legitimization of modern knowledge and the de-legitimization of people's own knowledge, or popular knowledge. This knowledge monopoly was and continues to be a means of exerting control over those who do not have access to and — on many occasions — are not permitted access to these dominant knowledge systems.

Over the last few decades, the exercise of power through control over knowledge has been consolidated, among others means, through social science research methodology. As researchers began adapting and applying the scientific method to the study of social systems, a new paradigm of social science research emerged. As a result, the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a tremendous rise in various disciplines of social sciences and their utilization in development policies of the state. Much of the research conducted to generate new insights and theories remained in the domain of professionals, experts and their institutions. The knowledge thus produced and disseminated on one hand largely supported the status quo (i.e. it reinforced existing social hierarchies), and on the other hand, it systematically deprived ordinary people from participating in the process of knowledge production and distribution. (See textbook, p.1)

### **1.3.1 Dominant Social Science Research: Characteristics**

Given that knowledge is power, it must always be kept in mind that policy makers represent a major market for the ideas and information gathered through research processes. Most social science research carried out in the Third World (and elsewhere) is related to either of two purposes. First, the need and desire of administrators and policy makers to gather information from and about those who do not make decisions in order to make decisions for them. A second purpose of research relates to researchers' own economic and professional needs. Summarizing and packaging their findings in ways that can be consumed by journals, books, seminars, and international conferences leads to greater access to research funding and to the researcher's career advancement. Researchers who presume an ethical obligation to disseminate their findings to the general public through other avenues must work doubly hard to do so, with very little professional reward. (See textbook, pp.10-11)

The following are some salient characteristics of the dominant research paradigm:

The purpose of research is the collection and generation of knowledge about a given subject. The knowledge generated is used to develop general laws about various phenomena. Once approved by other experts in the field, this knowledge then adds to an existing body of knowledge within academia. Over a period of time, the 'truth' about the nature of phenomena is established through scholarly publications and is taught to new generations of students. (See textbook, p.3)

To develop these general laws that establish socially accepted truths, methods of research must be completely objective. The research situation should be controlled in such a manner that no unaccounted for or spurious influences can invalidate the conclusions. As such, researchers must attempt to be neutral, objective and value-free in their data collection and analysis.

Observation, rather than experience and abstract conceptualization are central parts of the research process: knowledge is enhanced by thinking and theorizing about various phenomena, not by experiencing them.

Researchers have a responsibility to communicate their findings to add to the existing body of knowledge about their subject. Written form is most aptly suited for communication of findings to other professional colleagues, thus publication of research findings in scholarly journals is deemed the most important form of communication.

In the classical research paradigm, the above rules are well developed and strictly adhered to. Researchers who deviate from these rules can be severely penalized through professional ostracism, financial restrictions, and public criticism. (see textbook, p.4)

### **1.3.2 Critique of the Dominant Research Paradigm**

The above description of the dominant research paradigm provides the basis for the critique given below. New directions and different approaches to research in social sciences have to take these critiques into account (see textbook, pp.4-7).

### *Absolute critique*

In social science research, knowledge-generation, not action is the key purpose. There is therefore a wide gap between available knowledge and its utilization. This lack of utilization of generated knowledge leads to research that cannot be used to improve our social, economic, and political systems. Further, influenced by the research paradigm of natural sciences, social science research has also assumed that there is one truth about social phenomena. It is difficult to present a realistic representation of any social phenomenon by believing in one truth.

### *Purist Critique*

Under the guise of achieving objectivity, rigour is maintained by the researcher's control over the focus and methods of inquiry. Professional researchers know all and they control the entire process of research. However, this attempt to achieve objectivity by maintaining a strict separation between the researcher and the subjects is problematic. Firstly, researchers share essential humanity with their subjects; they are, therefore, subject to same laws that they are attempting to understand. Secondly, the sheer presence of another person has impact over the research 'subject', or the people under study. Therefore, despite researchers' best efforts to be objective, controlled social realities is always a distortion.

### *Rationalist Critique*

The rationalist critique questions excessive reliance on thinking, observing and conceptualizing as main modes of knowing and researching. The overemphasis on thinking and conceptualization in the dominant research paradigm intends to reduce subjectivity, but as a result, the feeling and acting processes have been largely neglected. It is possible to engage in entire faculties of thinking, feeling and acting in research process.

The critique is also relevant from the adult learning perspective. Research implies knowing and knowing comes from learning. Therefore, theories of adult learning can illuminate approaches to research. The dominant research paradigm only supports two of the four types of adult learning processes: reflective observation and abstract conceptualization. The other two modes of learning, concrete experience and active experimentation, are de-emphasized. This limitation constrains the classical research paradigm in two ways. Firstly, those persons who are not comfortable in observation and conceptualization modes of learning do not easily enter the research profession. Secondly, even those who are strong in these two modes and engaged in research, lose some of their insights by denying or neglecting the other two modes.

### *Elitist Critique*

The final critique of the dominant research paradigm is aimed at its elite control over the methods and outcomes of research. The techniques of research are presently available only to a body of professionals who are enjoying elite status. Similarly, since most research findings are communicated in written form, it is researchers, journal editors, and publishers who essentially control the outcome of research. Those who assist the research process as respondents or subjects, that is, those who are researched, have no control over the research and its outcome. The dominant research paradigm tends to ignore ethical issues in that the providers of information are denied any control over it, and political issues in that as knowledge is power, the research process further enhances the power of the elites.

**NOTE BANK**

What would be your critique of the dominant research paradigm?

## 1.4 Participatory Research

Participatory Research (PR) has been actively rooted in the history of human beings' struggle for survival and growth. As a theoretical concept, however, PR evolved as a critique to the dominant system of knowledge production perpetuated by social science research methodology. PR represented an alternative system of knowledge production that challenged the premise upon which traditional social science research methodology was based: the premise that scientists could approach research sites in a neutral, objective, and value-free manner. Instead, PR attempts to present average people as researchers themselves, in pursuit of answers to the questions of their daily struggle and survival (see textbook, p.1).

With the support of the International Council of Adult Education (ICAE), many researchers around the world are formally and informally experimenting with and developing different aspects of participatory research. Some of the guidelines that have emerged from these efforts to date are: (see textbook, pp.17-19)

- A research project — both the process and results — can be of immediate and direct benefit to a community (as opposed to serving merely as the basis of an academic paper or obscure policy analysis).
- A research process should involve the community, or the expected 'beneficiaries' in the entire research process, from the formulation of the problem and the interpretation of the findings, to the planning of corrective action based upon them.
- The research process should be seen as part of a total educational experience, which serves to determine community needs, and to increase awareness of problems and commitment to solutions within the community.
- Research should be viewed as a dialectic process, a dialogue over time, and not as a static picture of reality at one point of time.
- The object of research, like the object of education, should be the liberation of the human creative potential and the mobilization of human resources for the solution of social problems.
- Research has ideological implications and researchers are not value-neutral. Research that allows for popular involvement and increased capacities of analysis can sometimes make conflicting action possible, or necessary. For example, as the research unfolds, it may be necessary for the researcher to choose to side with one group or another within the community.

**NOTE BANK**

In what ways should Participatory Research address the different critiques of dominant research paradigms?

### **1.4.1 Historical Roots of Participatory Research**

The development of the theory and practice of participatory research has been a collective process in and of itself. It has benefited from the creative and thoughtful work of hundreds of practitioners, scholars, and activists in about 60 countries. PR has been and will remain an international debate and discussion among people concerned with the issues of research, adult education, popular knowledge, and power. The people who have contributed to the present state of affairs have included literacy teachers, community organizers, artists, singers, factory workers, administrators, social scientists, organizational analysts, and many other activists from around the world.

### **1.4.2 Participatory Research in the Third World**

By the late 1950s and the early 1960s, the dominant international research paradigm reflected North American and European models of research. As described above, this dominant paradigm has derived from empiricism and positivism, and is characterized by rigorous attention to instrument construction, as well as statistical precision and replicability.

Third World perspectives on research methodology grew out of a reaction to approaches developed in North America and Europe. The Third World's contribution to social science research represented an attempt to find ways of uncovering knowledge that work better in societies where theorizing about social reality must take second place to the changing of that social reality.

PR was greatly influenced by the practice of adult educators in the countries in the geographic South — particularly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America — and their critique of classical research methodology. These adult educators realized that rise of specialization, and professional expertise had lead to the devaluation of both popular knowledge and alternative systems of knowledge production.

Control over knowledge production systems was thus being used by development elites to preserve the status quo and make people dependent on the government and the elite section of society for all resources and services, including knowledge.

PR among Oppressed People

Much participatory research has been undertaken in developing countries, where problems of adult education and social oppression are particularly acute, but many projects have also been undertaken in developed nations. The participatory research tradition emerged from work with oppressed peoples in the Third World.

In early 1960s Latin American social scientists, stimulated in part by the success of the Cuban revolution, began exploring more committed forms of research. Paulo Freire and his colleagues in Latin America developed widely influential concepts for adult education among the urban and rural poor. Freire's dialogue approach to adult education engages individuals in critical analysis and organized action to improve their situations (Freire, 1970, 1974, 1978). In these dialogues, educators and "students" move toward a critical consciousness of the forces of oppression and the possibilities for liberation. One of the most useful roles Paulo Freire played was to bring some of the current ideas of Latin American scientists to the attention of people in other parts of the world. His work on Thematic Investigation (1973), first in Brazil and later in Chile, was an expression of this search. (See textbook, p.91)

At the Tanzanian Bureau of Resource Allocation and Land Use Planning, Marja-Liisa Swantz and teams of students and village workers were involved in questions of youth and employment in the Coastal region and later in studies of socio-economic causes of malnutrition in the Central Kilimanjaro region. A visit by Paulo Freire to Tanzania in 1971 was a stimulus to many social scientists who otherwise might not have been as impressed by the existing experience of many adult educators or community development workers.

It was also during the seventies that Participatory Action Research (PAR) gained impetus from Fals Borda's work with grassroots groups in Columbia. Borda's aim was to legitimize "popular knowledge" and develop a "science of the proletariat" with which the masses could conduct their own struggle for social transformation. Both PR and PAR focused on the importance of learning and organising as vehicles for empowerment. Conscientisation, which includes process of collective action and reflection by the people, was an important component for achieving empowerment.

### **1.4.3 Europe, Canada and the United States**

While the specific term "participatory research" developed in the Third World, the concerns PR attempts to address are present in rich countries as well. Therefore, while the terminology may be different, consciousness around the limitations of the classical research methodology in a world of immediate and urgent problems was growing in Europe and North America as well. Several examples of participatory and action-oriented research traditions in Europe and North America are:

- The early fieldwork of Engels in his alignment with the working classes of Manchester.
- The Second Generation of the Frankfurt School of Critical Social Theory and the work of Adorno and Habermas placed "Action Sociology" at the forefront of the Academy.
- In Switzerland, researchers in curriculum development adopted methodologies from political research to suit their needs
- In Canada, Stinson developed methods of evaluation along action research lines for community development work
- In the Netherlands, Jan de Vries has explored alternatives from a firm philosophical base. The National Institute for Adult Education pioneered in participatory research through its evaluation of the British adult literacy campaign.
- In Italy, Paolo Orefice and colleagues at the University of Naples have been applying the methodology to their investigation of community and district "awareness" of power and control
- In the USA, the Highlander Centre in Tennessee has been using approaches similar to participatory research for years, most recently to deal with issues of land ownership and use.

#### **1.4.4 The Participatory Research Network**

The PR process has been possible through the support and stimulation of a loose and voluntary network of individuals who, since 1977, have formed the Participatory Research Network. From the beginning, it appeared that the concept of participatory research, with its emphasis on ‘people as experts’, shared a common premise with adult education. The network has therefore been encouraged and supported by the International Council for Adult Education.

The Secretary General of the organization has summarized the characteristics of participatory research as follows:

- Participatory research is an integrated activity that combines social investigation, educational work, and action. Some of the characteristics of the process include:
- The political [impetus] originates in the community or workplace itself.
- The ultimate goal is fundamental structural transformation and the improvement of the lives of those involved.
- The workplace or community is involved in the control of the entire process
- The awareness in the people of their own abilities and resources is strengthened and mobilizing or organising is supported.
- The term “researcher” can refer to both the community or workplace persons involved as well as those with specialized training.
- Outside researchers as committed participants and learners in a process that leads to militancy rather than detachment.

The network of those involved in such challenges and problems for participatory research is composed of six autonomous and geographically-based groups working or interested in participatory research. The groups have been financially independent, have worked on a volunteer basis, and have agreed at annual meetings on some common strategies and ways of mutually supporting each other. All relations have been those of equality in the face of similar problems, with the Canadians learning from colleagues in Venezuela, Tanzanians learning from Indians, and so on.

#### **1.4.5 Contributions of Feminist and Anti-Racist Researchers**

- Because of its link with the theory and practice of adult education, theories that pertain specifically to women’s learning have started to influence PR. While careful not to essentialize women’s experiences of learning, Morrish & Buchanan (2001) have documented some of the insights stemming from women-centred adult education, including the observation that women are significantly underrepresented in the literature. This is especially problematic because “while women make up the majority of adult education participants and practitioners in the field, there are few women scholars and many gaps in the literature” (p.257). Where women are present, they are frequently represented as somehow deficient, either in lack of skills or lack of social analysis. Moreover, the subtleties of women’s forms of resistance have often been overlooked because silence or inaction is inadequately interpreted and not conceived as a legitimate choice of resistance.

For Hart (1995), the continued refusal to see ‘motherwork’ as work and ‘feminine’ qualities as valuable, both in the home and in the workplace, has perpetuated the gendered and racialized division of labour that devalues women. These social norms can be linked to a

structural increase in poverty among women, particularly racialized<sup>1</sup> women, since poor mothers (often single) become dependent on welfare or are forced to seek employment in low paying industries. She proposes that the term worker must be exploded to include the reality of ‘motherwork’, so that the concept of having a ‘family orientation’ would be reframed as “living and working with children” (p.119). Further, she argues that

Concealing the economic importance of the work done mostly by women also feeds into the predominant Western masculinist dichotomies, whether they are Marxist or mainstream. These are the binary oppositions between ‘family’ and ‘work’, between ‘private’ and ‘public’, and between the ‘reproductive’ and the ‘productive’... and even feminists consider child care a form of ‘chore’. (pp.120-121)

Anti-racist feminist scholars have further questioned whether theory and practice with an appended instead of inherent analysis of gender, race, class, nationality, disability and other dimensions of difference is sufficient for analysing today’s society where such oppressions are so thoroughly interconnected? Such activists have argued for a need to begin with a social analysis that acknowledges the multi-directional nature of power relations and articulating systems of oppression. Example of such theories include hooks’ (1994a & b) ‘white supremacist capitalist patriarchy’, or Brah’s (1992) attention to the specific ‘positionality’ of individuals within oppressive ideological hierarchies, such as racism and global capitalism. While incomplete themselves, these theories do start with an understanding that no one structure is sufficient for analysing relations of oppression (Wharton, 1991).

While both feminist research and participatory research seek to shift the centre from which knowledge is generated, feminist critiques of research have specifically emphasized a need to work with people in a way that empowers them. Callaway (1981) demonstrates that women have been largely excluded from producing the dominant forms of knowledge. She argues that the social sciences have been not only a science of male society, but also a male science of society. Jackson & Kassam (1998) reiterate this point by claiming that “women are systematically excluded in most societies from knowledge-production processes that are dominated by men—even ones that claim to be participatory” (p.8). In relation to this fact, Spender (1980) urged that women must learn to create their/our own knowledge. Participatory research is one avenue for this to occur.

#### NOTE BANK

What, in your opinion, is the most important historical influence in the growth of Participatory Research?

## 1.5 Participation in Development Programmes

In addition to its influence from the field of Adult Education, PR also drew strength from debates around participation in development programmes. Several encouraging developments occurred through international dialogues between participatory researchers and development practitioners, including expanding definitions of poverty to include such concepts as deprivation of education, human rights, dignity, and autonomy, in addition to access to basic

<sup>1</sup> The term ‘racialised’ is used here instead of such descriptors as ‘of colour’ to remind readers that race is a socially constructed category. Different ‘races’ do not exist, only different physical/phenotypical features such as skin colour, hair texture, etc. This is not to say that *racism* does not exist, only that the concept of race has been scientifically rejected (Miles, 1989)

needs (Cagatay, 1998). There has also been a growing recognition of the validity of popular and indigenous knowledges, and a rising international commitment to community members' participation in development and evaluation initiatives (Jackson & Kassam, 1998). From the 1970s onwards, there has been increasing pressure from policy makers, development managers, and civil society groups to keep people at the centre of development initiatives and thought.

Feminist researchers have also been working to draw attention to inequitable participation levels between women and men. As a result, special programmes specifically aimed at ensuring that women can participate in and benefit from development schemes have been in effect since the mid-1980s (MacDonald, 1994). Increasing analysis of the constraints of women's participation has led to a conceptual shift from 'women and development' (WAD) or 'women in development' (WID) to 'gender and development' (GAD) strategies. The former simply attempted to draw women into pre-existing schemes, while the latter took into account gender-specific roles and constraints of both women and men into the planning process.

#### **NOTE BANK**

How have the historical roots of Participatory Research shaped its practice in current context?

## **1.6 Summary**

A quick summary of what has been covered in this unit:

- You learnt the implications of monopoly of elitist knowledge;
- You critiqued the conventional dominant social science research paradigm.
- You traced historically the evolution of participatory research as an alternative to conventional dominant social science.

## **1.7 Acknowledgement**

Excerpts and ideas contained in this module have been drawn from the textbook:

- Chapter 1: A Critique of Monopolistic Research by Rajesh Tandon
- Chapter 2: Breaking the Monopoly of Knowledge: Research Methods, Participation and Development by Budd Hall
- Chapter 3: Participatory Research: Main Concepts and Issues by Rajesh Tandon
- Chapter 8: People-Centred Development and Participatory Research by David L. Brown

## 1.8 Required Reading

### Textbook Chapters

- Chapter 5: Ideology and Political Economy in Inquiry: Participatory Research by David L. Brown and Rajesh Tandon
- Chapter 6: Occupational Health and Participatory Research by Harsh Jaitli and Vijay Kanhere
- Chapter 7: Reflections of a Feminist Political Scientist on Attempting Participatory Research in Aotearoa by Delle Small
- Chapter 9: Research and Participatory Social Action by Rajesh Tandon

## 1.9 Recommended for Further Reading

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