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**Conventional and Participatory
Research Methodologies**

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Conventional and Participatory Research Methodologies

Kenneth Fernandes

Abstract

This paper highlights different research methodologies for different types of users. The author talks about the social survey method which is the conventional approach and the ethnographic method which adopts a more participatory approach. He goes on to criticise the conventional method for a number of reasons e.g., uncritical acceptance of the research methodologies of the developed world by the third world countries, the power and control aspect i.e., when research is funded by developed countries they control the policies and how the people on or for whom the research is being conducted are not involved in the process and are marginalized from the decision making process and thus a status quo is maintained. The author prefers the participatory research method as it leads to development action - reflection - political action, which contributes towards structural change at the local level. The author concludes by emphasizing that the participatory research method helps people become aware of their situation and provides them with strength and incentive to rectify it, which turns participatory research into an ongoing process.

Introduction

At the very outset of doing any research, the question arises for what purpose is data being collected. Or another way of putting this question is for whom is the research being carried out. This is not only a matter of who is sponsoring the research (government, university or research institute) but who is going to use the research when it is completed. Users may include policy makers, who may want to know development trends, the nature of particular social and economic problems and the effectiveness of government programmes. They may also include development planners and other change agents, who need information about the population and target area in terms of the characteristics, attitude and behavior of those whom they are seeking to affect or reach. Another group of users may be international donors, who frequently commission studies to evaluate programmes they have sponsored, or simply to explore an area that is of interest to them. Pressure groups of lobbyists also need research and data to support their case for particular policy position and action.

There are also different types of research, oriented to different users. Census provides demographic, social and economic data for policy makers and development planners, primarily of a factual kind. Public-opinion polling is also of this type. Action-research uses research as an integral part of planned social change as it happens, oriented to users who are policy makers or planners. Specific problem-oriented research is oriented to the same type of user and is designed to provide the answer to practical, operational problems.

The Social Survey

The social survey is one of the most common and powerful tools for collecting social data. Probability sampling is at the heart of survey procedures, for they enable inferences to be made from a small sample (from whom data are collected) to a very much larger population (whose characteristics are unknown or inadequately known).

The procedure of the social survey is quite simple. The unit of response (the respondent) in a survey is usually a person. A number of respondents, large enough to permit generalization are selected as the sample, and are asked questions, the answers to which form the data to be analyzed at the end of the research process. Usually these questions are asked by means of a personal interview, in which a trained interviewer asks the respondent questions face to face and records the verbal answers given in writing on an interview schedule.

Most large scale surveys use a structured interview schedule, in which responses are standardized to a limited range of alternatives permitting rapid numerical analysis of the results. The duration of the interviews is usually relatively brief. The primary aim of the survey is to collect standardized information from a relatively large number of individuals in order to generalize from the sample to the population from which it is drawn.

The Intensive Research Methods

Intensive methods like ethnographic research uses the case study method and participant observation methodology. It usually involves the indepth study of a particular milieu (village, association, organization, institution) rather than of a random sample of individuals drawn more widely. The researcher, rather than briefly interviewing a large number of respondents using a standardized instrument, relies on a repertoire of methods to gather data, including informal interviewing, the use of knowledgeable informants in the locale being studied (to interpret that locale to the social investigator) and participation in and observation of events in the setting as and when they occur. In terms of coverage, such methods are more limited than the social survey, but their proponents argue that they gain in greater richness of data and depth and penetration of analysis.

The Collection of Ethnographic Data

Ethnography, the study of the cultures of living peoples, provides most of the raw data for the cultural anthropologist. Once the location is identified, the research must develop an understanding of the people studied. Without empathy, the ability to project oneself into the feelings of others, success is unlikely. The researcher also must develop a high tolerance for ambiguity, accepting the fact that many things do not make sense at first and refusing to make early judgements or conclusions. The ethnographer must be tolerant of behaviors, attitudes and values found repugnant; the job is not to change or condemn but to understand. Most cultural behavior has a reason or is consonant with established value structures. The researcher at the same time is a product of culture. Usually total abandonment of one's own values is not expected and may even be repugnant to the people studied.

Three initial approaches are common: participant observation, unstructured interviews, and the use of key informants. Participant observation simply is to observe and record as much behavior that seems relevant

as is possible, and to take part or participate in as many activities as opportunity affords. Through this, one is plunged into some event or ritual.

The unstructured interview involves preparing a series of possibly significant questions to ask whenever opportunity offers. The purpose is not primarily to secure answers to the questions but to stimulate the subject to talk, in the hope of learning what the subject thinks is important.

The key informant is a person who has a good knowledge of the culture and is interested in talking about it. Frequently, one can find an individual with a basically philosophical bent of mind who really understands the purpose of the research. The key informant can give systematic preliminary outline of the culture and identify the most fruitful problems for more intensive research. One must also be cautious about the key informant for he or she may be involved deeply in factional (party baazi) disputes. The research also must not be too closely identified with one person, it will probably antagonize the rest of the community (if the community is small), especially the important individuals or groups. The researcher should try to "hang loose", talking briefly with as many people as possible in the early stages. At a later stage a variant of the key informant, a person with special knowledge (of an occupation, ritual, politics, law) may be useful.

Once the data is collected the researcher then analyses it, drawing upon the existing body of knowledge and methods and techniques developed by others. An historical approach may be used trying to explain the variety of phenomenon discovered. Because cultures in part represent traditions, historical events may be examined which may account for some of the characteristics of the culture.

Another approach is the ecological approach, which maybe combined with the historical approach. This approach seeks to explain a culture in terms of responses or adaptation to its environmental situation.

Critique of the Conventional Approach

Some Considerations about the Social Survey Method

In our given situation of high poverty, marginalization and illiteracy, an important question a researcher will have to ask when doing a study with poor, illiterate people, especially in rural areas, where mass communication is limited, to maybe a radio, is whether a social survey will yield reliable and valid data. This is largely due to the different milieu the researcher and the respondent come from. Both linguistic and cognitive processes are different.

The anthropologists have been the biggest critics of this method, promoting the case study or ethnographic studies or participant observer method, they have asserted that surveys entail measurement by fiat and yield inferior results compared to indepth ethnographic studies.

"There is a wide range of sociological phenomena which are intrinsically inaccessible to statistical investigation of any kind... The anthropologist is constantly made aware of the difficulty of fitting items of human behavior and experience into numerical categories. It is not that they are necessarily false but that they draw the inquirer's attention away from what is of crucial significance" (Leach 1967, 77&82).

Indian anthropologists have also been critical of the social survey method asserting that it generally gives a distorted picture.

"Survey research based on schedules and questionnaires is the most popular form of research in the social sciences. Research is generally organized in such a way - particularly the huge and expensive projects - that there is a sharp division of labour between high level analysts, who decide such matters as the problem to be investigated, and the methodology to be employed and who write the final draft, and low level investigators who canvass the questionnaires and punch, code and tabulate the replies. The former are upstairs people while the latter live below. The investigators who collect the information are generally not highly motivated; as a result, the data gathered in the big surveys do not have a high degree of reliability. However, this is not peculiar to India - It is a universal phenomenon. No amount of statistical sophistication can set the distortions and falsifications introduced by wrong data (Srinavas, Shah and Ramaswamy 1979, vii).

Noleen Heyzer emphasizes this aspect with regard to women.

"No amount of statistics can provide a realistic account of women's life and work in the dynamics of South-East Asian societies. In depth situational profiles are necessary to enable countries and international agencies to define their policies and to intervene in innovative ways which would improve the situation of working women in South-East Asia. If countries and agencies are to come up with strategies that benefit the poorest of the poor, a perspective of development from the view point of women in the poorest strata of society must be developed" (Heyzer 1987, 11).

Eurocentric Mind Set

How to develop a perspective of development from the viewpoint of the poor is the dilemma. It is here we need to return to the fundamental question of who is the research for? We know that the early history of social science research in the Third World is the history of colonial science. Their methodologies were originally meant to study the colonized people in order to better control them. The study of anthropology, for example, began with the discovery of 'savage people' in the Americas, Asia and Africa. Initially most work would be done in the direction of collection of data about the customs and manners of the conquered people. It is because once Europeans decided to subjugate the people they had 'discovered', they had to learn the manners and customs of the conquered people in order to better control them.

Their methodologies inevitably have been passed on to Third World researchers who have been trained in the universities and institutes staffed by scholars of western origin or those promising young local scholars in colonial society who were given opportunities to study the social sciences in the colonizing country.

Today scholars and activists committed to social change express the fear that uncritical acceptance of methodologies developed in the West can lead to continuing dependence on the rich countries. This dependence is made possible by the attitudes of the scholars, the capital-intensive methodologies and funding pattern and the role played by multi-national foundations.

The transfer of methodologies, developed elsewhere, to a developing country, and the consequent need of funds for the capital-intensive inputs, many institutions in the Third World are forced to depend on foreign aid for major research projects. The researchers may only be having scientific interests, but the foundations and universities may have other intentions. The 'Green Revolution' is a classic example of

this. Rockefeller and Ford Foundation having funded IRRI (International Rice Research Institute) along with major agribusiness companies, the output of these researches have meant more profit for these companies (Feder 1983).

It is a well known fact that prestige in American and European Universities depends on the amount of research done. Foundations are more willing to give grants for research done abroad (generally they choose the area of interest and even the country in which the research should be done), than their own country.

Power and Control

Those who fund researches often control policies of institutions and even of countries (our own country is a case in point). Even when financial power is not involved, one should bear in mind that knowledge itself is power. In the methodologies outlined above, most decisions are top-down. The researcher or the institute decides upon the focus, methodology and outcome of the study. The people who are studied are only used as objects who are there for the convenience of the researcher.

The scholar has complete control over the research from its inception till its outcome which is either a scholarly book or paper or data required by policy makers or industrialists for action. There is very little involvement of the persons affected.

This is objectionable because it is highly unethical. "The researcher is neither accountable to them nor responsible for the knowledge thus generated. A researcher can do that in the natural sciences without any ethical considerations because the subject matter is natural phenomena. Can we follow the same argument for inquiry in social phenomena?" (Tandon 1981, 20).

Learning From Below

Viable alternatives are not developed in sterile atmospheres for groups of people who are on the fringe of society. They are marginalized or on the fringe of society precisely because they have no say in the larger decision making processes, with the result that decisions are made that affect them deeply and further marginalizes them. The first step to creating viable alternatives is to do what Illich recommends: "The only way to reverse the disastrous trend to increasing underdevelopment, hard as it is, is to learn to laugh at accepted solutions in order to change the demands which make them necessary. Only free men can change their minds and be surprised; while no men are completely free, some are freer than others. " (emphasis mine.) (Illich 1978, 67)

To begin the relevant development processes, I think the communication revolution has to be completed, as Mina Ramirez explains in her book, aptly titled, "Communication From The Ground Up" (Ramirez 1990). For too long has been a one way process. For the dominant to the dominated. It is time to hear the other side. The large majority continue to find ingenious methods to cope with their growing lack of access of opportunities for self fulfilment. How they do it is precisely what has to be discovered.

Those that have been spared the onslaught of a dominant development process, by not going through the education system, still maintain a rich body of knowledge that is rooted in thousands of years of experience and application. I am not denying the importance of academic knowledge nor sanctifying traditional knowledge at the expense of the former. However, for many of us, academic knowledge has become sacred and the key to salvation. A fusion of social and academic knowledge needs to take place

so that there is an enrichment and knowledge needs to take place so that there is an enrichment and progress of ideas that are relevant today for the majority of the people.

Paulo Friere's theory of cultural action for liberation (Freire 1973) is very relevant in our context. Men and women create culture. They make decisions, that, what they do will improve and enrich their lives. With years of subjugation and domination they do sink into a culture of silence and lead lives of quiet desperation. Many times they have lost belief in themselves and believe that others are superior to them. Affirmative action is needed to reawaken what is deepest within them, and together to look at life in a critical and creative way.

Chardin talks about a layer of ideas that blankets the universe-noosphere is what he calls it. (Chardin 1970). Everybody-all people, possess consciousness. Nobody possesses complete consciousness. Through a deep interaction we do move towards higher levels of consciousness. This is basically the relationship we should have with people - all people. An openness to all ideas and forms of thinking and critically evaluating it to see whether it further humanizes us.

Some Alternative Research Methodologies

Conscientizing Research

Relevant research with marginalized groups has to lead to action. The 'expert' has to be committed to a process of social change in which the imbalance of power in our society is rectified. In this way the research becomes an action-reflection-action process of interaction between the outsider, who no more functions as an 'expert' scholar but as an animator, and the local people.

The critical resources in the process are the people who are capable of contributing ideas, information, insights, analysis and above all, provide the context for inquiry. An essential result of this approach is that control over the entire process or research and action has to be shared by the 'expert' researcher (animator) and the people, with the former only playing a supportive role to the latter.

In other words, it is essentially people's research and entails a framework that evolves from the local context and technology that is small and appropriate. Methods of data-collection and analysis should contribute towards an understanding of micro-situations in their macro-contexts.

It is in this framework that conscientizing research has evolved. So far, the word conscientization has been used as if its meaning is easily understood. However, this is not the case. The word conscientization has been abusively used in many cases, stripping it off its political content.

"He (Paulo Friere) also attracted the attention of those agencies that were developing an educational methodology for the incorporation of the small peasant into the consumer economy under the auspices of the Integrated Rural Development strategy. These agencies found in Friere's terminology a progressive gloss which could make their approach marketable in the Third World. By co-opting Friere's terminology and concepts, they could hope to influence the direction of political change." (Kidd and Kumar EPW January 3-10 1981, 27-82).

I use the word conscientization here in the context of liberation of alienated and marginalized social groups and classes, who have to win for themselves the right to being subject of their history and not

mere objects of other social groups and/or classes. The liberation I am referring to only takes place in actions initiated by the oppressed and the marginalized by themselves in an effort to solve their concrete day to day problems.

The use of the word 'conscientization' stresses the rejection of blind ideological indoctrination, of bureaucratic dogmatism and also of often inefficient spontaneous actions. It points at the development of the creativity of the oppressed and marginalized in their process of acquiring power to transform structures and mentalities.

The principle characteristics of conscientizing research are:

1. Instead of the people participating in a research project led by research 'experts', the conscientization is carried out by a group or groups from the people themselves. The 'experts' participate as animators providing methodological support to the group/groups doing the research.
2. The groups mentioned here are groups of activists who are engaged in organizing actions to bring about change in the community.
3. The results of the research are disseminated to all the people concerned and in their own cultural idioms. Hence the results of the research will not be known to the 'experts' only as in the conventional methods of research.
4. The research starts with action groups at the grassroot level and is oriented towards achieving a deeper and a more organized form of commitment and action.
5. It assumes the position of helping the people to progress dialectically towards critical analysis of the actions taken by the groups and the process of conscientization that determines to a certain extent the success and failures of the actions taken. The research hypothesis is the hypothesis of transformative action.

Participatory Research

Participatory research and conscientizing research are similar in nature. Both believe that the research should lead to concrete action. However, conscientizing research has emerged from experiences of the work of Paulo Friere in Third World countries. its emphasis is on political action that leads to structural change.

On the other hand participatory research has emerged from western anthropologists. Claude Levi-Strauss gives the first feature of the approach.

"... the first concern of people made aware of their independent existence and originality must be to claim the right to observe their culture themselves from the inside." (Levi-Strauss, 1966, 127)

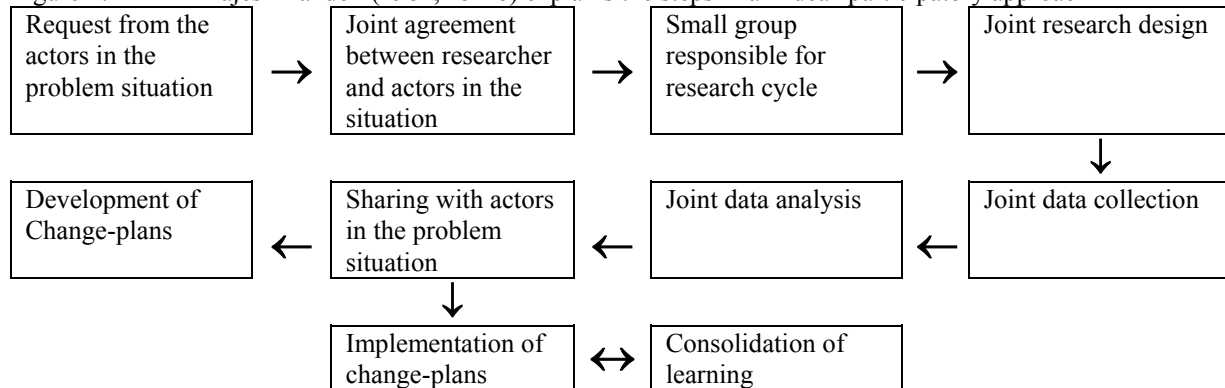
Budd Hall (1975, 24-32) mentions the following points as the main features of participatory research:

1. Research method has ideological implications.
2. Research has to be a process whose primary purpose is some direct benefit to a community, i.e., it has to be instrumental in social change. An academic paper is only a secondary product and not essential to the process.
3. This process, to be effective, has to involve the whole community at every stage of research, from the formulation of the problem and discussion on the search for a solution, to the interpretation of the data. Involvement of all groups is essential if we accept social change as the goal of research.

4. The research process thus becomes a part of an educational experience of the people and increases awareness and commitment within the community. Obviously, it is a dialectical process spread over a long time and not a one time static study which may be more efficient but not as effective as the process the people go through.
5. The outcome of this process is liberation of the creative potential that is present in every community but is often suppressed and reduced to silence by the dominant sectors. This liberation is also part of a process of mobilization of human resources for the solution of social problems.

Participatory research leads to development action and later on leads to political action, i.e. it contributes towards structural change at the local level. But in the whole process, it is important to keep the concept of ownership knowledge, for knowledge is power. Hence it is important for the people affected by this process to own all knowledge not only the questions defined, but also the definition of what methods are used, who records the findings and why they are recorded.

Figure 1: Rajesh Tandon (1981, 25-26) explains the steps in an 'ideal' participatory approach



Some comments on figure 1 are needed here:

1. The initial request in an ideal participatory process may come from the actors in the situation. But in reality, this may not be so. The request may come from someone powerful within the situation, or outside it. Yet, the researcher can transform it into a participatory process by following some later steps, provided his/her ideological stance is explicit.
2. Various steps outlined in figure one appear to be one-shot, fixed ones. In reality, a participatory process has to be cyclical, as mentioned earlier, it is a process spread over a long period of time. For example, joint agreement may need to be worked and re-worked many times, over the entire cycle.
3. As presented here, various steps in the participatory process assume the involvement of an outside researcher. In reality, groups of actors in a particular setting may go through the entire process without any assistance from the outsider. In fact, effective participatory research must have the increased capacity of the actors in the situation to inquire into and change their situation as a valued outcome. To that extent, an outside researcher will become redundant soon.
4. The participatory process as explained in the figure may appear identical to action research. However, there are two significant ways in which participatory research is different. First, the ideological stance and emphasis on making the researcher's value-premises explicit are generally not mentioned in the action research approach. Second, action research can be, and is being, undertaken without the participation and control of the actors in the situation. In essence, then action research becomes another method in the exclusive control of the professional researcher.

Tandon (1981, 22) broadly classifies the research methodology in the following way which clearly shows how participatory approach differs from other methodologies.

Steps in Research	Academic Research	Policy/Evaluation Research (Commissioned)	Participatory Research
1. Choice of Problem			
What?	Choice based on the interest & discipline of the professional researcher	Choice based on client's administrative needs	Choice based on immediate problem situation
Who?	Professional researcher	Client (Who is outside the problem area)	Jointly by the actors in the problem situation and professional researcher
2. Choice in Methodology			
What?	Experimental research designs, use of reliable instruments, statistical analysis	Quasi-experimental field research designs, use of reliable instruments, statistical analysis	Consensual-validity-based research designs, use of empathic instruments, multiple analysis methods
Who?	Professional researcher	Professional researcher	Jointly by the actors & the professional researcher
3. Choice of Outcome			
What?	Publications (Presentations in 'learned' seminars)	- Report (to the client) - Publication (if the researcher negotiates)	- Changes in the situation - Increased knowledge base - Increased capacity among actors to inquire into and change their situation
Who?	Professional researcher	Client (primarily)	Jointly by the actors and the professional researcher.

Some Questions on the Participatory Research Methodology

If participatory research is not to be imposed upon people, along with the issue that it deals with, is one to wait until the people themselves feel the need to tackle the problem and only after they express the need to approach them and support them in their effort? Or is it not an integral function of participatory research to create this awareness and make people see the need for a change in the status quo? This assumes that the need is lying dormant and unexposed in the people. Hence participatory research does not oppose it but helps to clarify and articulate it.

Another question that arises is whether the gap between conventional research and participatory research can be completely bridged? Or is conventional research necessarily to precede participatory research? In other words is an integration of the two methodologies possible or have we to be satisfied with merely keeping them adjacent to each other? Actually it is very much possible as long as we remember that the knowledge of the people belongs to them.

SPARC, (Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centres) an NGO in Bombay, has helped a number of slum dwellers use conventional social survey methods to gather information about the area. People develop the questionnaire, conduct the survey, tabulate and analyze it themselves, along with a researcher. This information in turn is returned to the people through drama, mime, corner meetings, puppet show, etc. Through this process people have got a clearer picture of themselves as a community, and in turn have also been able to counter false propaganda about them by government agencies and others. URC (Urban Resource Centre) in Karachi has just begun a similar process with a group in a katchi abadi.

A Case Study: The Orangi Pilot Project

Dr. Akhtar Hameed Khan, a well-known social scientist was asked by the BCCI Foundation to do some welfare work in Orangi. They expected him to build some hospital or educational institution. However, Dr. Khan had different ideas. He realized that there was no instant blueprint. He believed that people need to be organized and where people's organizations do exist they need to be strengthened and developed. If social and economic organizations grow and become strong, services and material conditions, sanitation, schools, clinics, training, employment will also begin to improve.

Realizing that the *mohalla* organizations were going to be the real base, efforts were made to strengthen them. This was done through the introduction of preventive inoculation and public health education, in collaboration with the District Health Officer (DHO). Water purifying tablets were distributed to hundreds of households through the *mohalla* organizations.

The Orangi Pilot Project did not believe in subsidizing any constructions, buildings or services. It confined itself to increasing as much as it can, organizational and technical skills of Orangi activists.

Orangi, being a low-income area and not officially recognized by the authorities, lacked many basic facilities - water, health, education, sanitation were some of them. The people with the help of the All Orangi United Federation continued lobbying so that government agencies could respond to these pressing issues of the people. A time came when Dr. Khan realized that through lobbying not much could be achieved. A shift was needed from a demanding, grumbling mentality to a responsible organizing mentality.

Attempts were made by the OPP to tackle these problems by also involving various academic institutions to try and find solutions to problems of the people. Engineers were asked to develop simple technology to sink wells and purify water. Social workers were invited from the Karachi University to research and document efforts of local organizations, so as to understand the people and their response to the situation in a systematic way.

Sanitation was one of the most pressing issues confronting people. It not only affected people's health but also the houses, as the waste water in the lanes began to affect the foundation of their houses. Lobbying for a sewerage system by the concerned agency was unsuccessful.

Meanwhile the OPP posed the sanitation problem to an architect. People's response to the problem was studied. It was observed that people had in some way or the other tried to solve this problem through the bucket-latrines system, soakpits and even through pipes. However, all these solutions lacked a deeper engineering skill. The engineers after studying these responses came up with a simple technology of

underground sewerage system that the people could lay themselves. The cost worked out to be around Rs. 350 per house.

Dr. Khan and his team began to have meetings in the lanes to explain the impact of their unsanitary conditions. Evenings were the best time as most people were at home from work and in a much more relaxed mood. Slides of the lanes with sewage flowing were shown to people. Detailed plans along with the costs were made. People at first were reluctant to construct their own sewerage system, believing that it was the government's responsibility. No doubt it was the government's responsibility.

It was explained to them that even the government agencies took money in the form of development charges for the various work that they do. But, in the meantime the sewage in the lanes affected their health - it affected their houses and it was causing a drain on their already meagre resources either through ill-health or repair of their houses or trying to construct something to dispose of the waste water.

After many months of meetings, people in one lane were convinced and approached the OPP to help them. The lane was surveyed. A detailed plan and cost was explained to the people. They were asked to choose a lane manager. The lane manager would be a person:

- everybody trusted;
- selected by consensus;
- responsible for the collection of the money from each household in the lane;
- responsible for the purchase of pipes, cement, etc.
- who would supervise the work so that it is according to the plans made by the OPP;
- give a detailed account of all the collected money spent on the underground sewerage system.

Once the people in the lane selected their lane manager, money began to be collected and the lane manager kept close touch with the OPP staff for guidance. Once all the money was collected, digging began. The OPP staff also closely supervised the work so that pipes would be laid correctly. Pipes, if laid incorrectly can break and leak causing further expense for the people.

When the work was complete the effect was dramatic. From a dirty, squalid lane it was transformed to a dry, clean lane. People in the other lanes also saw this dramatic effect and soon began to request the OPP to assist them construct their underground sewerage system.

Lessons on Participatory Research to be Learnt from OPP

On entering Orangi, Dr. Akhtar Hameed Khan did not have any fixed idea in his mind. Initially, he spent many months learning about the area and the people.

"The first task before me as director was to educate myself. My ignorance of Orangi was total. I have lived only a short while in Karachi and never seen Orangi. I have been explained on the maps and in the course of several trips, on the ground, the geology and geography of Orangi. A great deal more remains to be learnt, and is being learnt gradually from KDA planners and Orangi residents.

The social problems and efforts to solve them are far more significant than the geography and the envisaged town plans. Therefore the former has become the focus of our attention. We began to observe the institutions and associations, thriving or

otherwise, in Orangi. And as their quality depends on their promoters we observe more closely the promoters themselves." (Dr. Akhtar Hameed Khan: 1st Progress Report April 1980).

The problem of sanitation was perceived by the people themselves. They had tried in some ways to solve it, however, they lacked adequate technical knowledge to solve their solution. It is here we notice that a socially concerned architect, Mr. Arif Hasan was invited to study the problem (Hasan 1991). The solution was arrived at through a constant dialogue between the people and the 'expert'. The solution was implemented through local activists, when convinced of its viability.

What one sees presently, is that the OPP is constantly engaged in research of problems encountered by the people. The solution is usually arrived at through a dialogue with people. The outcome of the research is in turn given back to the people.

Here a variety of research methodologies are seen - conventional, participatory, action and conscientization - however, knowledge is always returned to the people. The conscientization process is notably observed when people have been able to pressurise their local councillors to improve their areas. The transfer of knowledge and technical skills is so high that people supervise the work done by government agencies and ensure that quality work is being done. Recently, people are even supervising the laying of the main drains by Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC). which is Asian Development Bank funded. Where shoddy and substandard work is being done by the contractors, they have pressurised them to re-do the work.

The OPP Health and Family Planning Programme

In June 1984, OPP started a pilot programme of imparting basic health education to low income housewives. A study was conducted to ascertain the common diseases in Orangi. The research showed that there was a very high incidence of disease. Typhoid, malaria, dysentery, diarrhoea and scabies were very common. There was a high record of infant and mother mortality.

The two principal causes for the prevalence of so much ill-health were: i) lack of sanitation, and 2) ignorance.

In order to arrive at some solution, the obstacles were studied. The poor women of Orangi are truly traditional and segregated. The traditional outlook teaches that disease is a mystery, a punishment or perhaps the work of evil spirits. The women go readily to a doctor or an exorcist or seek the intercession of ancient or living pirs (holy men). But usually they are ignorant of the real cause of disease and are unfamiliar with the concept of prevention.

The traditional viewpoint about women is that they should remain in *purdah* (segregation), while the men should feed and clothe them. A wife should regard her husband as *majazi khuda* (human god); should produce as many children as possible; and she should firmly believe that God will always provide for every one of them.

Traditionalism imposes segregation and segregation enforces traditionalism. In addition, segregation makes illiterate or semi-illiterate women almost inaccessible to outside agents of change.

New social and economic forces and urban pressures are disrupting and destroying both traditionalism and segregation. For the poor women it is becoming more and more difficult to follow the traditional code of conduct; and yet when they have to discard old conventions they do it with a guilty conscience.

The OPP grappled with two questions in trying to develop a programme which seeks to promote new attitudes and practices among tradition-bound segregated women of low income families: i) how to gain access? and ii) how to create trust? A third question also arose which was: how to build an efficient and convenient system of delivery for this strange clientele: the segregated housewife?

Generally, the women of Orangi are bound by custom which decrees that women should stay at home. They go out only in emergencies and on special occasions. In developing a health education programme the main problem is that of access.

The OPP found that welfare centres' become ineffective on account of customary segregation. To be effective, i.e., to be within reach of segregated women, a welfare centre' or family planning clinic, should cover no more than 20 or 30 lanes, which requires that there should be 200 to 300 centres for the 6000 lanes in Orangi. This was impossible.

Instead of a fixed centre or clinic the OPP introduced a new system:

- mobile training teams
- a selected activist family or contact lady for 10 - 20 lanes
- regular scheduled meetings at activist's home
- formation of neighbourhood groups by the activist.

Each mobile team consisted of a lady health visitor and a social organizer. The teams were directed by lady doctor. The teams were provided with transport and they held as many meetings as possible on every working day.

In the beginning it was considered advisable to hold separate meetings for family planning. The separation was made because it was found that, although in the general meeting there were many women who were eager to know about birth control, there were also a few who were belligerently inclined to raise traditional objections and browbeat the needy ones.

After a year's experience in the field, the OPP's health programme learnt the following lessons:

1. that there was a need for preventive health. People were aware of this need, but what was lacking was the fruitful contact between the health workers and women.
2. the creation of bond of trust was as important as the variation of access. The segregated women of Orangi dearly cherished personal relationships and personal advice.
3. the creation of the bond of trust depended on the frequency of contacts between the educating teams, local activist and the neighbourhood groups.
4. the contact lady activists proved essential links. As friendly neighbours they became trusted advisers and convenors. They eagerly welcomed the teams and cooperated fully. The neighbourhood meeting was not a serious challenge to the tradition of segregation.

With regards to family planning the following lessons emerged:

1. After six months the subject of birth control became ideologically non-controversial in the neighbourhood women meetings. At the request of the groups themselves separate meetings were discontinued and family planning became a common topic.
2. It became necessary to arrange a decentralised system of delivering supplies. For the men, the chemist shops were readily available as agents and supplies were delivered to them on cash payment. The women cannot go to a chemist shop to purchase contraceptives.
3. For the women, the group activist, the contact lady became an ideal distributing agent. An intimate neighbour, she became a permanent and confidential source of supply for the members of her group. IUD and ligation's were taken care of by LHVs of the OPP mobile team.
4. The greatest change was the emergence of birth control adopters, especially IUD and ligation adopters, as strong advocates to their neighbours of the practice of birth control.

Since January 1985 the OPP's basic health and family planning education and services were confined to 3000 families in order to fully test the approach and ascertain the response of segregated housewives. Much has been learnt: how to create access, how to establish a bond of trust, how to build a convenient delivery system, how to spread knowledge and practice of disease prevention and family planning among tradition-bound segregated women. Above all, how to reach out to large numbers of women.

A survey conducted by the Aga Khan Medical College amongst the 3000 families found that 95% children were immunised, 44% families practice birth control, epidemic diseases were controlled and hygiene and nutrition had improved.

In the light of its experience the OPP revised its model to reach out to a larger number of families. Instead of continuing to visit the same families for a long period of time, the OPP prepared a three-month course on:

- Prevention of common diseases in Orangi
- Method of family planning
- Nutrition and hygiene
- Kitchen gardening

Twenty family activists are selected every three months and neighbourhood group meetings are held four times a month in the activists home. Upto 15 women attend these training meetings. The women are eager learn. They pay one rupee to the woman activist for attending the meeting.

The existing four teams are able to train 2-3 thousand families every year.

Some Possible Guidelines for Doing Participatory Research

Understanding People's Situation

Understanding the Area

Often researchers enter an area with the specific aim of studying a specific problem. However, a good researcher is basically a student and enters a community to learn from the community what their situation is.

Once an area of work is selected, the researcher will have to understand this area and the people. Through a walk around the area, (this could be done in stages if the area is large) the researcher will get a fairly good idea of the physical conditions of the place. Some points which the researcher can observe are:

What type of houses and their condition? The conditions in the lanes? Are they paved or kutcha? Is it clean or dirty? What type of sewerage system is there? Community tap or individual? Is there electricity? What kind of facilities are available in the area: education (number of schools and type i.e. primary, secondary, government or private); health (hospitals, dispensaries, doctors, hakims, etc.); transportation; police thana; postal services, etc.

If the researcher is able to keep notes on his/her walk it will come in handy in the future. In fact a daily diary of one's reflection, thoughts and ideas may prove useful.

Understanding People's Perspective

This is a long process as relationships take time in being established. The researcher could use the participatory rapid appraisal method.

Through slowly building up relationships with people and sharing with each other another type of information is gained. A researcher can come to know the people well if he/she develops a close relationship with people - as someone interested in all aspects of people's lives. An introduction to some of the people there through an acquaintance or through some welfare organization will facilitate tremendously the building up of a relationship.

People will initially view you as an outsider and if you are from an NGO, they may expect you to give them some help either monetary, or something. It is important that nothing should be promised. Be frank and open with them. Tell them that you have not come to dole out money or any thing nor are you going to implement a ready made project but are here to understand the situation and if the people have an issue that they would like to work on, you are willing to support them through technical and managerial advice. The project will be the people's and not of the research.

People will open up and share their lives when they stop perceiving you as an outsider.

"Dialogue is not possible without a profound love for the world and for people. Love is both the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. Only responsible people -- the subjects of their own history -- can participate in dialogue, and it cannot exist in a situation of domination.

How can I enter into a dialogue if I always imagine that others are ignorant, and never become conscious of my own ignorance? How can I enter into a dialogue if I see myself, as a person apart from others - if I see them only as 'its' not as another 'I'? How can I enter into a dialogue if I consider myself a member of an 'in group', the owners of truth and knowledge, the 'pure people'?

If I am closed to, and even offended by the contribution of others; if I fear being displaced, how can I hold a dialogue? At the point of encounter there are neither utterly ignorant people, nor perfectly wise people. There are only those who attempt together to learn more than they know.

Adapted from Paulo Friere's "Letter to a Development Worker".

The researcher can use the snowball approach by asking the initial contacts to introduce him/her to other groups. Through this, contact with as many groups in the area could be made and a variety of topics could be discussed. Evenings are usually the best time to talk to the men as they are free from work and are generally more relaxed. For house wives, the latter part of the mornings, when they have finished most of their morning household chores, may be the best time.

In establishing a rapport with people, the notes on what one has observed during the walk around the area, may come in handy. From here the researcher may begin to try to understand the things he/she does not understand. It can also help people ask important questions about their lives and their situation.

Through these dialogues with people the researcher can begin to understand the issues people are facing.

Understanding People's Institutions

In order to cope with their situation, people have been able to build institutions that support and serve them. It is important to discover these institutions as these have evolved from the people themselves as a response to their needs and they are vital to people's survival. Furthermore, if any programme or project is to be initiated it needs to be aimed at these institutions, so as to strengthen them and enable them to serve in a more efficient manner.

Economic

How do people manage their economic affairs? Especially in time of need. What are the credit mechanisms? Where do they get credit from? At what rate of interest? Who are the people that give credit? How do they ensure that the loanee will repay them? How do people return the loans that they take? Usually for what purpose do people take loans? How do people save? Is it in the form of cash or assets?

Health

What is the most common ailment that people suffer? How do people perceive their sickness? Who do people go to when they are sick? Is it a doctor, compounder, hakim, pir, etc.? Other than the doctor, why do they go to the others, if they do go? Is it because he is cheaper or is it because he is effective? How much do people spend on an average per month on medicines? Other than the doctor, where have the others received their training in medicine? How do they perceive their role in the community?

Education

Where do children go to learn? Do they go to school? Who runs the schools? What are the fees? Do most children attend school or are there other places of learning e.g. apprentices at mechanic shops, other businesses? What is the arrangement here? How do the children become an apprentice? Are they paid anything? How long do they remain an apprentice? What do they do afterwards?

Political set-up

Who makes the decisions in the area concerning community or mohalla improvement or problem-solving? Which are the groups opposed or complementing this authority? How many tanzeems are already existing in the area? How do people relate to these tanzeems? Which people control the most assets in the area, such as water, land, education, credit system, etc.? Which sectors of the community control the least? Who are the discriminated groups?

Gender set-up

What part do the men play in determining roles for women? What part do the women play in determining roles for men? Who owns the basic resources in the area? Who controls access to these resources? Who uses the resources most? How much role flexibility is shown by people in the area? How many men and how many women are income earners in each family?

Cultural set-up

How do people spend their free time? What are the meeting places for women, for men and for children? What amusements are available to men, to women, to children, and to teenagers for recreation? How many people are involved in some kind of cultural pursuit, writing poetry, songs, play musical instruments, theatre groups, etc.? What problems do they face in this regard? What is the incidence of violence in the area? (This may be learned only through indirect questioning, e.g. from a clinic or hakim, or nurse in the area). What is the most popular media in the area?

Problems and Solutions***Problem Identification***

The poor have many problems. All of their problems may not be shared by the whole community. The problem that the researcher decides to focus his/her attention, needs to be a common issue with the majority of the community members. By common issue it is meant that most people are talking about it, are concerned about it and are affected by it.

Understanding the Problem

If the problem is confronting a large number of people, then they must have attempted to solve it. The researcher will need to understand the various ways and means, people have attempted (if they have) to solve it? Who are the actors involved in their attempt to solve it? and why have they have failed? What are the social, economic (which includes health) and physical consequences of the problem? Does it relate to a government agency? If so, which one? What are their views on the problem? It might be a good idea to take some community members to the agency when discussing the problem so that they can get an idea why the government agency is not solving it.

Finding a Solution

In order to find a solution to the problem, the researcher may need to involve people who have some expertise on the issue. The researcher will need to facilitate exposure, meetings and dialogue between the community and the expert. The expert will need to be a socially concerned professional who is willing to talk with people at their level.

The professional may assist the researcher to understand the problem. Once the researcher has been able to understand the dynamics of the problem, she/he in consultation with the professional and community members, will have to decide what would be the best way to solve the problem. Can the present response of the people be improved by removing constraints that the actors involve face, or whether an altogether new approach is required to deal with it?

With the interaction between the professional and community members a solution may emerge. The solution will need to:

1. be simple: so that people can easily grasp it.
2. be low-cost: the poor can afford it.
3. promote organization: people will have to come together to implement it.

Conclusion

In a country like ours where the majority of people are marginalized from the decision making process, research methodologies are often used by government agencies, institutes, NGOs, etc., to gather information of these marginalized groups. The target groups are not involved in the whole process and neither the information generated benefits. This process of research maintains the status quo.

Alternative research methodologies have been developed in order to rectify this situation. Participatory research is an attempt to involve people in the research process to unveil the various factors that keep them in their state of helplessness. As they acquire new insights into their situation, they feel within themselves their inner strength which this process has been instrumental in creating. As a result, they feel confident to implement their plan of action thus turning participatory research into an ongoing process.

Participatory research is an attempt to demystify knowledge in the understanding of people. Poor, illiterate people are capable of handling research methodologies that help them to understand their situation. The task of communicating these techniques lies with the researcher. The researcher him/herself needs to be fully convinced about the method and be a very participatory person. He/she needs to be fully convinced that poor, illiterate and marginalized people are equal partners in the whole process.

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