



# Services for Rural Development

Sector Project "Knowledge Systems in Rural Areas"



## Reader: Participatory Approaches

### CONTENT

#### CONTENT 1

##### 1. INTRODUCTION 1

##### 2. CONCEPT OF PARTICIPATION 1

##### 3. PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AND INNOVATION DEVELOPMENT 2

3.1. *Farming Systems Research (FSR)* 3

3.2. *Participatory Action Research (PAR)* 3

3.3. *Participatory Technology Development (PTD)* 3

3.4. *On-Farm Research (OFR)* 4

##### 4. SCALING-UP OF PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES 4

##### 5. PARTICIPATORY EXTENSION 5

## 1. Introduction

Governmental and non-governmental institutions increasingly acknowledge the need to move away from top-down instructions and pure technology transfer towards a more participatory approach that directly involves farmers, rural populations or rural communities in defining and achieving their own development goals. The starting point for this change is the recognition that rural people are the owners of their own development. Rural people have to take the initiative and think about their own problems and appropriate solutions.

The participation of beneficiaries is a key principle in the development debate. Participation has to be combined with the service concept and agricultural research and extension in particular to make it useful for development cooperation.

The majority of participatory development approaches have been developed in initiatives deriving from community development, agricultural extension or agricultural research, as well as in the health sector. Past experiences have clearly shown that participatory development approaches depend strongly on a conducive political and administrative environment.

## 2. Concept of Participation

In a development context, participation has recently become highly fashionable. The participation of concerned people in the development process that affects them has a rather short history. In the past participation usually tended to be practised by NGOs, with varying depth and intensity. But overall developments like democratisation, decentralization, development of institutional arrangements and organisational development cannot be dealt with appropriately without the participation of all the actors involved

Participation in service provision is an integral part of development services, e.g. services in the context of technical cooperation. In a development context, participation has become very fashionable in the last decade. In the past participation usually tended to be practised by NGOs, with varying depth and intensity. But overall developments like democratisation, decentralization, development of institutional arrangements and organisational development cannot be dealt

Commissioned by:



## **Reader: Participatory Approaches**

---

with appropriately without the participation of all the actors involved. Participation, as the GTZ understands it, is a process which concerns the relationships between different stakeholders in a society, such as social groups and community, policy-level and service-delivering institutions. Participation aims at increasing self-determination and readjusting control of and influence over development initiatives and resources.

In many cases projects have succeeded over time in adapting to more client-oriented modes of operation. This may be a painful process, advancing by trial and error. Crucial elements are shared decision-making, flexible and process-oriented management cycles that have built-in mechanisms reflecting attitudes and behaviour. This makes it very clear that participatory development requires excellent facilitation skills - a factor which becomes all too apparent when the participation process concerns natural resources management, and the facilitator usually has more of a mediation or conflict resolution role.

Facilitation in participatory processes often builds on tools like Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), the GRAAP method, LePSA, SWAT/SWAP or Road to Progress, or Training for Transformation. These tools are based in many cases on the work of Paulo Freire, who worked on the liberation theology, and applied adult education concepts to local partners in development projects. Agricultural extension and participatory technology development projects had already started to apply parts of the tool box by the 1980s.

In relation to community development, the existence of a local government and a decentralised administration is a fundamental requirement. If the local government is not dominated by local elites, then the accountability, effectiveness and efficiency of local services can be substantially improved. Many governments nowadays stress the importance of popular participation. Reality still looks different, but too much political pressure from donors could mean that solutions are imposed (which would also contradict the principle of participation), running the risk of being rejected and subsequently degenerating into a merely mechanistic application of the instruments.

The enabling environment implies changes at an organisational level, e.g. in procedures, structure and culture. For example, in order to institutionalise participatory extension, one has to consider the overall institutional set-up in which agricultural extension takes place. This is not done simply by writing new job descriptions: extension agents are supposed to change their attitude and behaviour, while the organisation has to adjust its structure, the roles and responsibilities of staff at different levels, as well as its overall strategy. In this context the role of formal training is negligible. Training can not replace the learning process which is necessary if the participatory approach is to be internalised. It needs coaching, providing the necessary encouragement to staff to surmount their inertia and fear of transition. It means giving up old teaching methods and entrenched attitudes, and instead trying to apply a new approach. Mistakes and feelings of insecurity before a new level of self-confidence is achieved are inevitable parts of the learning curve. These are also the stages, of course, that farmers go through when they get involved with participatory approaches.

### **3. Participatory research and innovation development**

Agricultural research results only translate into innovations if rural people actually apply them in practice. This is especially true for farming under precarious conditions. In order to make sure that research takes the needs of technology users, local resource constraints and risks into account, clients need to be directly involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of research activities. Participatory research is a generic term for a series of methods which are designed to achieve this. Participatory research and technology development seeks to create an equitable partnership between research and farmers or other stakeholders in agricultural innovation. A wide range of approaches and methods to achieve this exist, which makes it difficult to clearly separate participatory methods in agricultural research from those used in rural development in general.

For participatory research approaches to work, some institutional conditions must be fulfilled. One is the existence of an organised local community that outside researchers can work with. These conditions can be created through a lengthy prior process of mobilisation. The other condition concerns the internal organisation of research institutes. Institutionalising participatory research is costly and raises a series of difficult issues in relation to organisational culture, career development and qualification.

## **Reader: Participatory Approaches**

---

The set of tools in participatory rural appraisal (PRA) is part of participatory research and is also used in agricultural extension and community development. Nevertheless, two fields of study may be regarded as the specific source and intellectual foundations of participatory research: the farming systems concept in agriculture, and the concept of action research in social science.

### **3.1. Farming Systems Research (FSR)**

The farming systems concept recognises the complexity of agriculture by integrating all the relevant factors (ecological, as well as social, cultural and economic) needed to comprehend the evolution of farming. Many farming systems in the tropics are highly location-specific, corresponding to the diversity of the ecosystems and cultural traditions that manage them. They have often developed over a long period of time and are deeply embedded in the traditions of rural communities. FSR analyses these systems in a comprehensive way, combining ecological and social research. Empirical work on the ground, therefore, involves farm families and rural communities, leading them to analyse their own systems. Even more important than the analysis, farming systems development (FSD) needs to build on the wealth of local experience in managing ecosystems. Finding suitable technologies presupposes the incorporation of local knowledge and judgement. See the page on FSR for an account of the methodology and practical experience gathered by introducing it via national research institutions.

### **3.2. Participatory Action Research (PAR)**

The second source of participatory research in agriculture is the concept of (participatory) action research, which has emerged as a powerful social science methodology in the last 30 years. PAR sees research as being embedded in the social world, and argues that social research is, in fact, a form of social practice. Action research is not only motivated by practical problems - the mere fact that researchers participate in solving them, asking questions and encouraging reflection already changes initial situations. PAR consciously involves communities in the research process, enabling people to articulate their views and try out new things. Research and social change are, therefore, parallel processes. The basic model of action research is an action/ reflection cycle. It starts with a (participatory) diagnosis of problems, continues by planning and implementing practical actions (trying out new ideas), and ends by observing and evaluating the activities. The cycle can be repeated several times, thereby generating first-hand insights into the dynamics of change as well as concrete recommendations.

### **3.3. Participatory Technology Development (PTD)**

PTD is a generic term for a range of variants (e.g. "OFCOR" - On-Farm, Client-Oriented Research). What they all have in common is that research is done in cooperation with research involving farmers, farmers' organisations and extension agents. The objective is to develop appropriate and readily applicable technologies by using action research principles in agriculture. Farmers are given an active role in technology design and contribute their knowledge on local farming systems, equipment and practical skills, while researchers bring their scientific knowledge and methodological expertise to bear on the situation. PTD projects follow a sequence of steps, typically including:

1. Identification of interested farmer groups and villages
2. Joint problem analysis and site selection
3. Joint research design
4. On-farm trials / farmer experimentation
5. Joint evaluation / sharing of results with others.

Within the scope of PTD, a balance needs to be found between the contribution of both partners involved. The degree of control exercised by farmers depends on the objective of the PTD exercise. In a researcher-dominated mode, farmers would be confined to evaluating existing technologies. At the opposite extreme, indigenous knowledge systems can be strengthened, enabling farmers to find solutions on their own.

## Reader: Participatory Approaches

### 3.4. On-Farm Research (OFR)

While PTD describes a general methodology, OFR is a set of techniques for conducting research in close cooperation with farmers and under real-life conditions. The aim is to rapidly identify factors limiting production, and test potential solutions for their economic and social acceptability by way of on-farm experiments. OFR takes different forms depending on who designs and manages the experiment. The conventional classification distinguishes between trials that are:

- designed and managed by the research team
- designed by scientists and managed either by the farmer or jointly, and
- jointly-designed, farmer-managed experiments.

Irrespective of its type, any OFR applies farm survey techniques so as to extrapolate the findings and communicational methods so as to enter into a dialogue with the farmer. At the same time, OFR uses conventional research techniques for trial design, the choice of treatments and data analysis. OFR, therefore, is demanding and costly.

## 4. Scaling-up of participatory approaches

All participatory approaches (PA) in community development, research and extension are designed to be used at a local level. The very idea of participation implies that the number of people involved is small. Participatory approaches thus provide the methodological foundation for more effective research and extension services, but do not provide a complete solution to overall development problems. Therefore, "scaling up" is a vital task in any development strategy.

The methods described above in chapter 3 work with local groups and villages. Virtually all examples of successful participatory projects address the community level. They present achievements in institutional development at a local level, but remain limited to the number of villages included. Moreover, participatory development schemes often depend on the availability of support or donor funds to function. In order to be used on a large scale, they need to be self-sustaining, i.e. maintained and funded after external support is withdrawn. Scaling-up participatory approaches two questions need to be addressed:

- 1.) How can participatory approaches (PA) be institutionalised in research and extension organisations, allowing them to function sustainable even without external support?
- 2.) How can PA become generalised practice, i.e. be “scaled out” or scaled up” to benefit large numbers of people?

Referring to the first question of concerning organisational structures, incentives, funds, and staffing these problems have to be addressed by a capacity development effort at the level of the entire research or extension organisation.

The second question refers to the objective of actually applying PA on a large scale. Here, the problem is that the widespread replication of a single success takes a coordinated development effort at a provincial or national level. In fact, extending efforts beyond the local level involves additional institutional arrangements that are different from the local participatory approach. Farmer participation at the local level has to be complemented by ways of forming and communicating the collective demands of large groups of smallholders, and linking them to the sector-wide supply of technology services.

Generally one can distinguish between the horizontal and the vertical scale of participatory approaches. The **horizontal scaling-up** of PA means the quantitative expansion and increased geographic coverage of PA. This means repeating a success case of participatory development in other places, so that the methodology attains regional or national significance. This implies that public research and extension services adopt it as the general approach to be used. However, such a strategy is only feasible where funds are available and the institutional conditions permit widespread introduction. Horizontal scaling-up uses the following strategies:

- making participatory approaches simpler and cheaper,
- fostering communication about PA and training research and extension agents,

## Reader: Participatory Approaches

- carefully selecting sites where participatory research & extension can be implemented
- projecting determining conditions favourable for the successful introduction of PA.

Horizontal replication of PA is hampered by the fact that public institutions still adhere to a supply-driven mode of service provision. Resource-poor farmers in difficult locations who would benefit most from participatory approaches are often marginalised and unable to actively request participatory services. Mainstreaming PA requires changes in the organisation as well as the political economy of service provision. This is also known as **Vertical Scaling-up** which includes changes in institutional arrangements and policies in order to encourage the use of PA. Vertical scaling-up refers to interventions at higher institutional levels, i.e. the promotion of organisational policy change. Strategies here comprise:

- adjustments in institutional arrangements, e.g. by forming farmer committees and giving farmers greater influence on public services,
- policy change-providing incentives for PA through appropriate mechanisms to release funds, e.g. competitive agricultural technology funds (CATF) which stipulate PA. Policy change also includes the fostering of decentralization, as well as the nurturing of PA by increasing resource allocation to local level initiatives
- capacity development of service organisations including bonuses for using PA.

Unfortunately, there are hardly any examples where smallholders have gained sufficient self-organisation and influence to actively ask for participatory approaches. The reason behind this is probably that all institutional arrangements require farmers to become partners of equal rank and play an active role in the game, i.e. exert pressure in committees, contribute to decisions on research projects or raise money to pay for extension and other services. In any case, political decisions have to be made that lead to structural reforms of the public administration and a different allocation of financial resources. A successful introduction of new institutional arrangements beyond the local level presupposes that farmers are organised around shared technical, economic or social interests and that they are capable of voicing their demands to public decision makers.

### 5. Participatory Extension

Experiences with successful extension indicate that innovations or acceptable solutions for the problems of farmers or rural communities are best developed together. As the overlap between research and extension becomes increasingly larger, innovation systems seems to be the most appropriate umbrella headline. The following participatory approaches have both strong research and extension aspects:

#### •Farmer-first (FF)

In order to advance the new paradigms for rural development by promoting active participation, empowerment and poverty alleviation, attitudes to agricultural research and extension started to reverse in the late eighties with the ‘farmer-first’ approach. Farmer-first sees the starting point of development as an active and equitable partnership between rural people, researchers and extension agents. Outsiders are primarily viewed as catalysts or facilitators for the open exchange of ideas and information between the various groups (e.g. farmers, local leaders, researchers, extension agents, etc.). Proponents of this populist approach emphasise the rational nature and sophistication of rural people’s knowledge, believing that knowledge can be blended with or incorporated into formal scientific knowledge systems.

#### •Beyond farmer-first (BFF)

While the original focus of the populists was rather limited to indigenous technical knowledge, in the early nineties a follow-up movement, beyond farmer-first expanded this perspective to consider indigenous knowledge as the cultural knowledge of rural people, producing and reproducing mutual understanding and identity among the members of a farming community, where local technical knowledge, skills and capacities are inextricably linked to non-technical ones. The BFF programme incorporates a socio-politically differentiated view of development - where factors such as gender, ethnicity, class, age and religion are highlighted - with important implications for research and extension practice. Beyond farmer-first advocates argue that different types of local and non-local people hold many divergent, sometimes

## **Reader: Participatory Approaches**

---

conflicting, interests and goals, as well as differential access to vital resources. Knowledge, which is diffuse and fragmentary, emerges as a product of the discontinuous and inequitable interactions between these competing actors.

### **●Farmer-to-Farmer Extension**

The farmer-to-farmer approach originated in areas where government services were chronically weak. The International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR) claims to have been using the farmer-to-farmer extension approach for quite some time. The first applications of this method are said to have been implemented in China in the 1920s. During the last three decades, however, most approaches have taken place in Central and South America, for example in the campesino-a-campesino movement. Features associated with the farmer-to-farmer approach are group-based learning, cross-visits, farmer trainers, and farmer extension agents, etc. In Latin America the approach has strong self-learning elements, as well as group level cooperation in the context of natural resources management. In some cases the approach relies on external facilitation and offer of technologies.

### **●Participatory Extension Approach (PEA)**

This approach was developed in Zimbabwe in cooperation between AGRITEX (Department of Technical and Extension Services) and two GTZ-supported projects. PEA is understood as an extension approach which involves a transformation in the way that extension agents interact with farmers. Community-based extension and joint learning is central to PEA. It integrates elements of participatory technology development with social development approaches like “Training for Transformation”. The PEA learning cycle suggests a holistic and flexible strategy with process steps in which a variety of extension methodologies and tools can be easily accommodated. Important steps in the PEA cycle include:

- Social mobilisation (with problem identification, awareness creation, etc.)
- Action planning (prioritising needs, searching for solutions, mandating, etc.)
- Experimentation during implementation
- Sharing experiences
- Self-evaluation.