PRIA

INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY
Initiative in Education & Lifelong Learning

Certificate Programme

International Perspectives in Participatory Research

Unit 3

Participatory Research: An Alternative System of Knowledge Production

Units of Certificate in International Perspectives in Participatory Research

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Introduction

Unit 3 explains the concept of participatory research (PR). Section 3.1 shall draw your attention to the trends in the search for an alternative knowledge paradigm from the vantage point of those traditionally excluded from access to and control over information and knowledge resources. Section 3.2 explains the political economy of a knowledge society primarily with the intention of raising issues regarding power vis-à-vis knowledge production and knowledge utilisation. How does knowledge confer power? In what ways do existing knowledge paradigms delegitimize popular knowledge? The characteristics of participatory research are explained in Section 3.3. You will be familiarised with the participatory research process in Section 3.4 and its outcomes in Section 3.5. **The differences between social science research and PR paradigms have been enumerated in Section 3.6.** A case study on occupational health and PR in Section 3.7 helps illustrate some of the core concepts of participatory research.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this unit, you will be able to:

- *Understand* the trends that show the search for alternative systems of knowledge production;

- *Describe* the political economy of a knowledge society vis-à-vis issues in knowledge production and knowledge utilisation;

- *Identify* characteristics, processes and outcomes of participatory research;

- *Comprehend* the **differences between social science research and PR paradigms**; and

- *Analyse* the core concepts of participatory research in the context of a case study.

3.1. Search for an Alternative Knowledge Paradigm

It is now well understood that the impetus for PR came from *international adult education movement*s, which led to the search for an alternative learner centric research paradigm and required popular community mobilisation. The current forms of social science research were not adequately addressing the political implications of people's knowledge and their participation in development. As controversial were too often ignored, it was difficult for such research to contribute to any sustainable solutions. The *grassroots social movements* questioned the monopoly of knowledge by extensively critiquing and challenging the elite control over production and use of knowledge. *Whose knowledge counts? Whose interests are likely to be served by that knowledge? How can information and knowledge resources of a community be mobilised for* **community empowerment**? **They** advocated the creation of spaces for community participation and their meaningful engagement in development processes. After years of scepticism, actors involved in development transformation viz., government, private/corporate sector, consultancy firms, and academia started to accept the question of community engagement with new eyes and intentions. Consequently, research pursuits, hitherto theoretical with limited opportunities for improving the well-being of marginalised communities, began moving beyond individual projects and single focus centres to broader trans-disciplinary structures.

We can identify the categories of people who underscored the need for alternative systems of knowledge paradigm. These are listed below.

- Researchers who noticed that despite the increased volume of research, the life of ordinary people generally remained unchanged. For this set of researchers, this seeming irrelevance of social science research was intolerable given the continued existence of poor societies all over the world.

- Researchers who were concerned with the failure of existing programmes and models of development all over the world. These included activists and field workers frustrated and angered over the misdirection of development strategies.

- Researchers who fundamentally believed in education as a means of social transformation. They believed that unless research contributed to learning and was widespread enough to include those who were part of the social setting of the study, it remained a meaningless activity.

- Finally, groups of people, oppressed and marginalised for generations at the community level began to look for alternative systems of knowledge production. The reporting on community issues often distilled community knowledge to fit into predetermined external data requirements and consequently led to the designing of lop-sided interventions to reduce existing disparities/problems. Community priorities, however, remained unaddressed.

3.2. Knowledge as Power

Knowledge is a source of power and control. This control is made possible through the professionalization and the monopolisation of knowledge by a few knowledge specialists and experts. Theoretical knowledge is a strategic resource. The printed word is a dominant form of representing knowledge. Special disciplines and guilds of experts are subtly and powerfully regulating the modern knowledge industry by conducting research to evolve new insights and theories. Information, knowledge and corresponding knowledge productions are the key resources of power in much the same way capital is.

Unequal relations of knowledge result when those having greater access to and control over the sources of such power exert *power over* those having little or no access. The poor and the ordinary not only internalise the inevitability of socio-economic inequalities, but also doubt their capacity to produce and utilise knowledge to solve their own problems. The crisis of knowledge can be seen as fragmentation of their practical wisdom, distortions in the local, regional, and national ecosystems and economies, and tensions related to cultural revitalisation and reclamation.

Ordinary people and the have-nots have been facing two forms of assault in this regard. The first form is that their own knowledge (popular knowledge) has been completely devalued with the rise of modern, professional knowledge-producing enterprises. To establish such control, the dominant sections discard centuries-old popular knowledge as invalid, or 'superstitions' in the This case of is health most care, for evident example, where traditional health care practices have been made to appear ineffective with the rise of modern medicine. Over a period of time, the have-nots themselves begin to devalue their own knowledge and mechanisms of producing that knowledge, which have been relevant for their survival and development for centuries.

The second form of assault is that the have-nots have been systematically denied access to either the knowledge produced by experts or the means of producing that knowledge. In fact, research enterprises have created an impression that ordinary people are not considered capable of creating their own knowledge. This is further fortified by the credential systems that academic institutions follow, through degrees, scholarships, research grants, etc. Unless one has been 'properly' trained encounters with formal schooling, one is not considered capable of producing any Knowledge.

3.3. Participatory Research: Characteristics, Process and Outcomes

3.3.1 Characteristics

Participatory Research is based on the basic philosophy of empowering the 'have-nots' through their involvement in both valuing their existing knowledge and producing and using new knowledge. It is a method of social investigation of problems, involving the participation of ordinary people. Participatory research starts with the assumption that ordinary people already possess knowledge. They know their social realities well and can articulate this knowledge. Some elements of this knowledge may be distorted, and some may be the result of critical analyses. It is this existing knowledge which is used daily by the people in their on-going struggle for survival. Participatory research values diverse experiences of people from their own perspective and thereby challenges the taken-for-granted assumptions and stereotypes. Through recognising and valuing peoples' popular knowledge, PR contributes to the process of their empowerment.

Participatory research also attempts to ensure that people not only learn to value their own knowledge, but also use any new knowledge they create. The existing knowledge is examined through a reflexive process allowing both the researcher and the participants the opportunity to reflect on the content and process of research through dialogue, collective discussion and interaction and identify the elements that are authentic. The synthesis of popular knowledge with existing scientific knowledge strengthens people's educational experiences. When involved in the analysis of their realities, people develop an understanding and capacity to act to improve/change that reality. Knowledge about the existing oppressive reality and control over the process of knowledge generation is empowering. Participatory research, in this

sense, is a way to take collective action for social change. Outsiders often initiate the PR process as facilitators, catalysts or change agents.

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Change Agents in Participatory Research

There are three central elements in the facilitation role of change agents viz.,

- Stimulation of and assistance to people's groups to make the transition to action. Change agents stimulate critical reflection on social reality through a process of self-inquiry and analysis. They enable the people
  - ❖ To become aware of their interests, values and identity;
  - ❖ To relate to the interests of others; and
  - ❖ To participate in decision making and to influence such decisions.
- Assistance for initial conscientisation process- Change agents assist the people
  - ❖ To systematise their own experiences,
  - ❖ To recover viable elements in their own historical tradition and culture, which enhance their dignity and power;
  - ❖ To explore possibilities for changing the reality.
- Assistance to enhance people's knowledge base. Change agents provide
  - ❖ Relevant new knowledge which, inter alia, includes knowledge about:
  - ❖ Rights
  - ❖ Wider social contexts and macro processes relevant to people's life situations
  - ❖ Technology or modern knowledge which people creatively adapt to improve their conditions.

The key characteristics of PR are:

Conscientisation

Conscientisation is the critical awareness about present reality, the dynamics of society, values of one's identity and of being organised. The process of PR is an educative experience for those engaged in it. They become more knowledgeable about methods of knowing and analysis; they become critically aware of their situation and possible ways to change that situation.

Participation, Control and Empowerment

Participation is the active involvement of concerned persons in various stages of the learning process, viz. definition of the problems, the learning needs and goals, collecting and analysing the problems or designing the programmes, and using the analysis to enhance one's position and knowledge.

Learners have a greater degree of control, and responsibility, vis-à-vis research activities. They gain control over critical resources such as external expertise, know-how, capital and technology. The end-result of having knowledge about the existing oppressive reality and control over the process of knowledge generation is empowering. When people participate in determining their own future, they are empowered.

Collective Analysis

Participatory research is always 'collective' in nature; the process requires groups of people to engage together. The most important step in this context is collective analysis of a given situation. This is a significant distinction from classical social science research, which is typically an individual effort. Participatory research is a collective enterprise and this is reflected in its different steps.

Action Oriented

Participatory research is a process of knowing and acting. People engaged in PR do two things simultaneously. They enhance their understanding and knowledge of a particular situation and take action to change it to their benefit. Knowledge for the sake of knowing is de-emphasised; knowing is linked to concrete action. This enhances the quality of knowledge and informs the basis for action.

A Vehicle for Change

Participatory research, while instrumental in bringing about change at an individual level, also emphasises the importance of collectives of individuals in understanding and transforming social reality. The process of collective discovery and decision-

making enables individuals to accept change more readily. Participatory research has promoted the use of mobilisation and community organisation strategies, particularly amongst oppressed sections of society.

Collaborative Methodology

In theory PR draws upon all available social science research methods. However, because PR is premised on the principle that the people with a problem carry out the investigation themselves, it excludes techniques that require a separation of researcher and researched, such as when experimental "subjects" are kept ignorant of the purpose of the study. Methods that are beyond the technical and material resources of the people involved in the research are also excluded. Field observation, archival and library research, and historical investigation using documents and personal history, narratives and storytelling, as well as questionnaires and interviews, are used in PR (Sohng, 1995).

Participatory research stresses inter-personal communication among different stakeholders. The experiential ways of communicating knowledge, information, and elements of data are used and accepted. It draws upon creative combinations of written, oral and visual communication in the design, implementation and documentation of research (Sohng, 1995).

Mobilisation and Organisation

Mobilisation is the coming together of people around a specific issue to think, plan and act upon it. People start with problems of immediate concern. With increasing conscientisation and experience of participation in planning action, they diversify their actions to include larger issues. The success of one action sets in motion the flow of successive joint actions to improve their lives. Collective actions require consciousness of the (a) need for organising, and (b) availability of organisational mechanisms in which people have confidence, over which they have control, and which they can use as organs for their actions. People may organise themselves in a manner, as decided by them, that best suits their purposes. They may build new

organisations of their choice or use existing organisations over which they have effective control as instruments of actions.

Outsiders as Facilitators

Since PR is initiated in the context of the actual reality that the have-nots intend to change, an existing problem provides the initial motivation for engaging in the research process. In situations where people are already aware of a problem and articulate enough about it, they may initiate a PR project themselves. They may or may not use the resources of experts, such as the skills and knowledge of outside researchers.

In other situations, some outsiders, be they activists, educators, facilitators, community animators, or researchers, may initially identify the problem. However, the involvement of people living the reality of that problem, even if it begins with an external push, is a necessary element of the PR process. Interveners adopt the position of facilitators, catalysts or change agents rather than positions of dominance. Their role is to initiate a participatory process and take steps to ensure that the control local people and groups have over that process steadily increases**.**

3.3.2 Process

Participatory research views knowledge production as a dynamic process of "engagement, education, communication, action and reflection". Typically, PR begins with issues emerging from the day-to-day problems of living. Ideally actors cum researchers in a particular social setting conduct research themselves to change their

situation. Yet, as a community many a times is unable to consensually derive and articulate its felt problems clearly, the participatory process assumes the involvement of outside researchers who work with the community to help turn its felt, but unarticulated, problem into an identifiable topic for collective investigation.

Researchers develop an informed and critical view of the daily realities surrounding research issues before starting the research project. They try and understand the context of the problem, and the culture and life experiences of community members.

The context is important because it explains the gravity of the problem again from the vantage point of the community: how members of a community perceive and speak about their lives. This means researchers must learn everything that can be found out about the community and its members, both historically and sociologically, through available records, interviews, observations, and participation in the life of the community. As the researcher is not an established member of the community, he or she must be a committed participant and be accepted by the community (Sohng, 1995).

During this phase, the researcher explains the purpose of the project and begins to identify and solicit help from key individuals who would play an active role in the execution of the project. In this process, the researcher acts as a discussion organiser and facilitator and as a technical resource person.

Together with a collaborating organisation, such as a community development agency, social service agency, or community health clinic, the researcher contacts members of the community, activates their interest in the problem to be dealt with by action-driven research, and helps to organise community meetings where the relevant research issues would be discussed. This initial phase of organising the project can take considerable time and effort. This situation demands that the researcher has interpersonal and political skills (Sohng, 1995).

Once the community members begin to get together to discuss their collective problem, the researcher participates in these meetings to help formulate the problem in a manner conducive to investigation, making use of community knowledge. From this point on, the researcher acts more as a resource person than an organiser, this latter function being better carried out by community people with organisational skills and resources.

Through dialogue, people come together and participate in all the crucial aspects of the investigation, educational and collective action. It is through talking to one another and doing things together that people become connected, and this connection leads to shared meaning. Dialogue helps people to look at the "whys" of

their lives, inviting them to critically examine the sources and implications of their own knowledge.

The role of the researcher in this process is not only to facilitate learning but also to learn from the participants. Education here is to be understood not in the sense of the didactic transmission of knowledge, a characteristic of expert teaching, but rather in the sense of learning by posing questions and stimulating a normative dialogue: What are the conditions of participants' lives? What are the determining features of the social structure that contribute to creating those life patterns? What choices do the members of the group make, and why do they believe those are good things to do? What are the possibilities for their experience and action? Learning involves examining the self from a new, critical standpoint. This is the meaning of conscientisation, which Freire has helped popularise. Critical consciousness is raised not by analysing the problematic situation alone, but by engaging in action in order to transform the situation. Dialogue acts as a means for fostering critical consciousness about social reality, an understanding based on the knowledge of how people and issues are historically and politically situated.

A dialogic approach requires both the researcher and the participants to help create and maintain authentic and mutual relationships. This involves an on-going relationship and raises ethical issues around power, status and authority, as well as critical reflection over their roles, intentions, actions and content. The forging of a partnership is not easy to establish with people who have been victims of a dominating structure; traditional attitudes and negative self-images reinforce subordination to outside researchers. It may also be difficult for the researcher to relinquish the role of expert, imposing one's ideas consciously or unconsciously. To counter these tendencies, researchers must engage in explicit reflexivity, that is, they need to examine privately and publicly the sources of social power in their lives and how these sources appear in their research.

Researcher/community partnerships are more likely to succeed if all participants in the collaborative endeavour are expected to share responsibility for acknowledging

and discussing patterns of interpersonal conduct. In this way, the collaborative researchers strive for an equivalent voice rather than a dominant voice in the research process.

Note Bank below presents the general steps of an 'ideal' PR approach.

Figure 1: Ideal Participatory Research Process
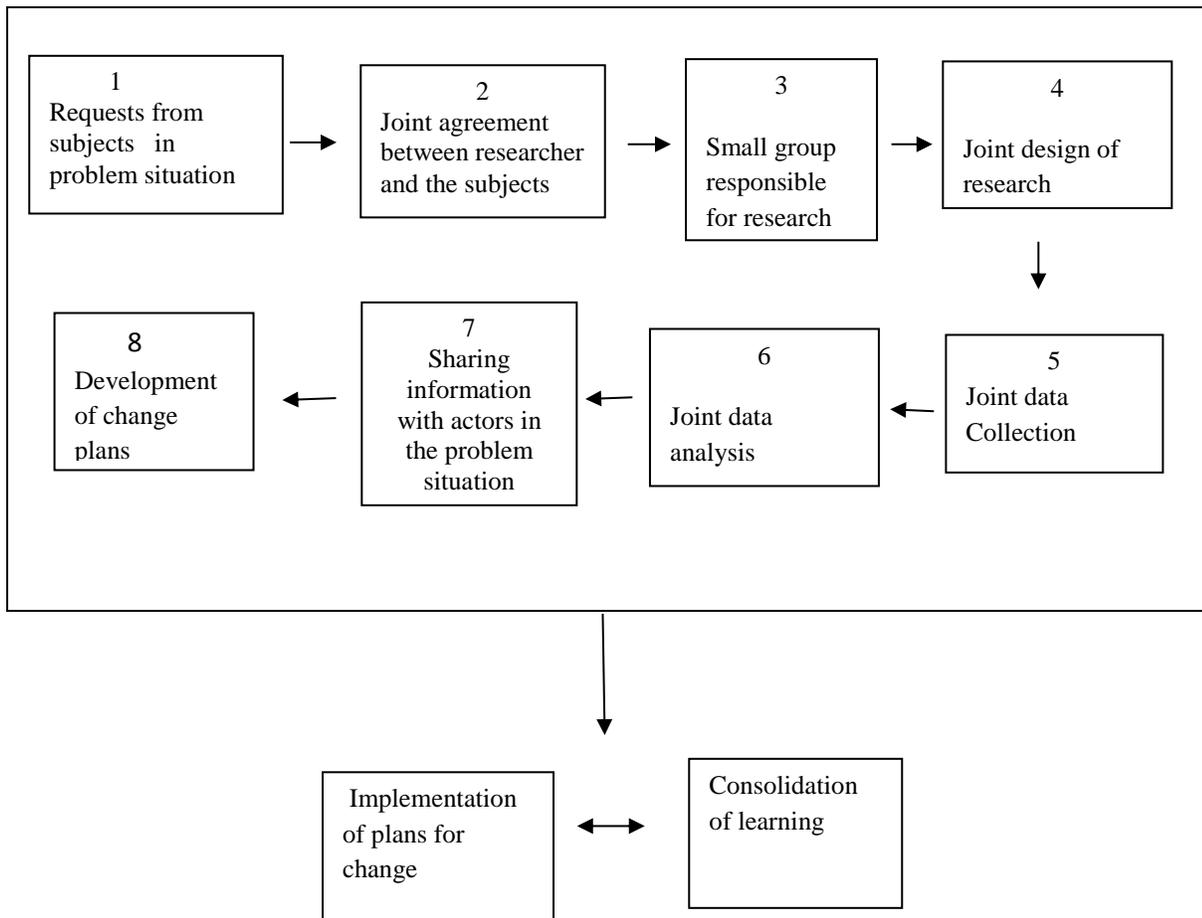
(Tandon, 2005, p. 30)

The aim of PR is to provide the catalyst for bringing forth leadership potential in the community in this manner. Here, the researcher shares his or her expertise with the people, recognising that the communities directly involved have a critical voice in

determining the direction and goals of change. It is also worth clarifying in this context that while the above steps appear to be fixed ones, with one following nicely after the other, they are in fact cyclical and iterative. For example, Step 2 'joint agreement' may need to be worked and re-worked many times between the researcher and the actors. Similarly, after analysing the data (Step 6), it may be necessary to collect more data (Step 5), or re-design the research (Step 4). It is also important to remember that simple statement of a problem does not automatically result in action; the group (actors) must express an interest in and commitment to solving it. Sometimes, people identify problems merely because someone has asked them about their situation. Researchers should try to ensure that there is a willingness to understand the problem in its entirety and its underlying causes, as well as an attempt to solve it. Questions like: "Why do we want to solve the problem?", "How will we benefit if the problem is solved?" may help in this process. It is essential that the actors understand and openly state both their goals and their limitations. Flight from the reality of their limitations, or an attempt to tame challenges through concealment of the truth, hinders the group from moving forward. Disagreements and power struggles within the group also hinder them from moving ahead. Action outcomes of PR processes based on partial truths or superficial social analyses will not be effective. Encouraging an atmosphere of openness and honesty prepares actors to confront their situation through the use of participatory research (Tandon, 2005).

3.3.3 Outcomes

It should be clear from what you have read above that PR is not value-neutral, but is ideologically committed to the weakest sections of society. It has a necessary relationship with social transformation and action, while social science research has

conspicuously avoided any active involvement. The very act of involvement in the process of analysing a given social setting creates a sense of ownership of that knowledge, and a willingness to transform that problem in a social setting. People are able to take concrete actions as part of their involvement in PR.

This pre-data gathering phase of PR is similar to traditional field research, in which the researcher establishes a rapport with the community for cooperation in the research process. However, the contrast is that PR puts community members in the role of active researchers, not merely passive providers of information.

Four key outcomes of PR are:

1. *New knowledge is built on the participants' existing knowledge:* The starting point for creating new knowledge is the existing knowledge of the people, particularly the authentic elements of it. As people begin to appreciate what they already know, they are more open to seeking new information. This desire to seek new knowledge is enhanced if it is done in the context of concrete problems that the people are facing. People will be motivated to create and use new knowledge if they see its relevance in solving some actual problems of their daily lives.

2. *People learn to exercise control:* The PR process puts emphasis on the active participation of ordinary people in generating their own knowledge. This encourages them to take responsibility for their own learning. It is this active focus, which constitutes a powerful impetus for people learning to exercise control over their own lives. This is particularly so since participatory research explicitly calls for and promotes the exercise of control by the people themselves.

3. *It becomes a collective process:* One of the elements of PR is promotion of collective responsibility for seeking new knowledge. Unlike classical research, it does not encourage the individual production of knowledge. As a result, people learn to come together, collectively seeking and analysing information. Many a time this forms the seed of a rudimentary people's organisation. This has been experienced particularly in those situations where have-nots are not yet organised. To initiate PR with underprivileged groups means to initiate the process of organisation building.

4. *It creates informed options:* The process of collectively analysing the given social settings provides many alternatives. As part of the process of data

analysis, options are debated on the basis of concrete information. As a result, people are able to accept and reject options on an informed basis. This creates a sense of 'empowerment', which is based on the confidence that information has been understood and interpreted.

Because of the outcomes it generates, PR is increasingly becoming synonymous with liberation processes of the people. For example, the involvement of poor, marginal farmers and landless agricultural labourers in PR has resulted in them enhancing their self-confidence and ability to take collective initiatives in their common interest.

Participatory research tends to lay emphasis on authenticity as opposed to the scientific validity of the information. This is for two reasons: firstly, knowledge *about* a social setting is not equivalent to the information obtained from it. Secondly, the social generalisation of information is not as important, since people are trying to change their own circumstances first, not address problems at a more general level.

Participatory research has made valuable contributions throughout the world. It has been effectively used in different sectors to bring about improvements in villages, urban slums, tribal habitats, and in countless other social settings. In all these efforts, particularly in Asia, PR has confined itself to micro situations (for example, in neighbourhoods, slums, or squatter colonies) and concerned itself with the have-nots in those situations (landless labourers, migrant workers, Tribal people, or women).
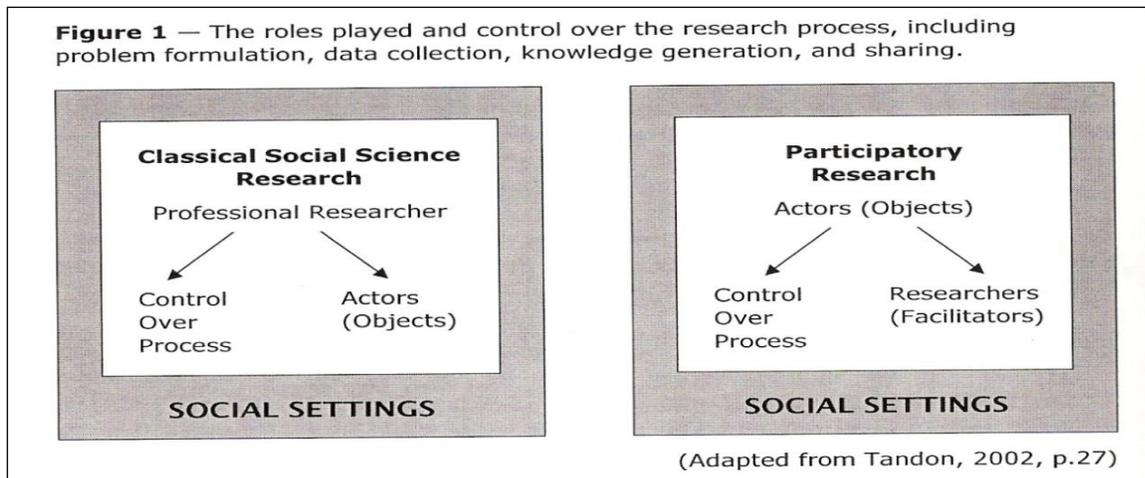
3.4. Social Science Research and Participatory Research Paradigms: Differences

The fundamental difference between classical research and PR has to do with issues of ownership and control over both the research process itself, and the knowledge created through that process. PR is attentive to questions such as:

"Who initiates? Who determines salient questions? Who determines what constitutes findings? Who determines how data will be collected? Who determines in what forms the findings will be made public, if at all? Who determines what representations will be made of participants in the research?" (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p.175)

In ideal forms of PR, the line between researchers and participants is blurred, with participants-as-researchers owning and in control of all parts of the research process. However, the terms of each of the above questions are negotiable in any research project. In classical research, control was seen as resting solely in the hands of the researcher. Lack of control over the research was seen to undermine claims of scientific objectivity and validity. In PR, facilitators, community animators, academics, or any other person in a position of relative power who is part of the research process must share or relinquish control all together.

Figure 1 below gives a diagrammatical depiction of the role played by the researchers and the actors in the two different approaches of research.

Figure 1 — The roles played and control over the research process, including problem formulation, data collection, knowledge generation, and sharing.

(Adapted from Tandon, 2002, p.27)

Classical social science research places the actors in the social setting under study as the objects of the research. The knowledge generated through this process will be controlled by the researcher from outside the social setting. In PR, however, the actors in the social settings play the twin role of 'objects' of the study, as well as the critical question-raisers or researchers (in academic parlance) and have control over the generated knowledge. Any researchers involved from outside the social settings become the facilitators who train and assist people in analysing their own data.

Figure 2 – Distinction between Social Research and Participatory Research

	Steps in Research	Social Research	Parcipatory Reseach
1	**Choice of Problem**		
	What ?	Choice based on the interest and discipline of the professional researcher	Choice based on priorities of the issues
	Who ?	Professional researcher	Actors within the problem area/social setting. Can be supported by outside facilitator
2	**Choice of Methodology**		
	What ?	Experimental research designs, use of reliable instruments, statistical analysis	Joint research design and data collection. Group discussions incorporate critical reflection. Can also be supported by theories introduced by facilitators.
	Who ?	Professional researcher	Actors within in the problem area/social setting. Can be supported by outside facilitator.
3	**Choice of Outcome**		
	What ?	Publications and presentations in academic circles	Action based on knowledge generation. Reports produced as by-products
	Who ?	Professional researcher	Actors within the problem area/social setting. Can be supported by outside facilitator.

(Adapted from Tandon 2002, p.28)

The above table demonstrates how in traditional social science research, control remains with the researchers, while in PR control remains with the actors and outside researchers serve as facilitators.

Having identified the role of the researcher and importance of control, now let us understand the processes involved in these two approaches. Figure 2 explains the distinctive processes between these two approaches in tabular form.

THINK TANK

Imagine a general research question. Think of how you might go about answering this question from the perspective of a classical social scientist, and from the perspective of a participatory researcher. How might the processes and outcomes differ?

3.5. Participatory Research in Occupational Health and Safety: Analysing the Core Concepts

Occupational health (OH) is a discipline with a broad scope involving many specialised fields. It is primarily concerned with protecting the health, safety and welfare of people engaged in work or employment.

Participatory research, recognising community as a social entity with a sense of identity and shared fate, draws upon the strengths and resources of the community. Working *with* rather than *in* communities, PR attempts to strengthen a community's problem-solving capacity through collective engagement in the research process. It facilitates collaborative partnership of community members, organisational representatives, and researchers. Each stakeholder contributes their expertise and shares responsibility and ownership to enhance the understanding of a given phenomenon. The research process is cyclical and iterative. The findings or the generated knowledge is disseminated to all partners. The knowledge gained is integrated with action to improve the health and well-being of community members.

PR on OH related issues focuses on understanding issues from the vantage point of those traditionally excluded from access to and control over information and knowledge resources i.e., workers (from organised and unorganised sectors), family members, nearby communities, other members of the public as well as the employers impacted not only by the workplace environment, but also by the environmental hazards caused by industries. Participatory research methods promote the active participation of each stakeholder. In the end, the research enables each stakeholder to find their own simple and practical solutions and increases their confidence in making changes in the workplace and environment surrounding the workplaces. The research findings can inform the government and employers about the needs of the workers as well as the community that are a priority and in turn promote preventive actions. In this sense PR is committed to the vision of social equity and justice.

Participatory research is a collaborative process. In order to transform a work situation it is important that all stakeholders are involved in the process including management. Together they analyse the dynamics of the oppressive work conditions / occupational hazards and related safety issues. Learning about the reality from each other's vantage point generates *awareness*. Together they become aware of their interests and how those relate to the interests of others. And together they realise the need to organise and participate in the implementation of findings for change; and to influence the policies that effect change. Consequently they *participate* actively in various stages of the learning process, viz. definition of the problems, the learning needs and goals, collecting and analysing the problems or designing the programmes. With increasing conscientisation and experience of participation in planning action, people are *mobilised* to think, plan and focus their actions on issues of immediate concern in order to challenge and transform the existing discriminating system. *Analysis* and m*obilisation* trigger action for social change.

An external facilitator is required to initiate PR interventions. In PR, the researcher adopts the position of a catalyst or change agent rather than a position of dominance. The role is to initiate a participatory process and take steps to ensure that the control of people and groups over the process steadily increases.

The chapter on 'Occupational Health and Participatory Research' in Rajesh Tandon (Ed) *Participatory Research Revisiting the Roots* critiques the conventional social science research methodology in addressing issues of OH. Participatory research enables workers to participate actively in the creation of new knowledge which has implications of concrete action to improve their lives. Drawing on this chapter, the following Section describes the steps in the PR process on OH issues.

Identification of Problem and Initiating the Process

The context is important because that explains the gravity of the problem from the vantage point of the workers. It could be the description of any problem issue such as occupational dust diseases, high risk exposure to pollutants such as cleaning agents, exposure to pesticides, risks due to biological agents as HIV, hepatitis virus, malaria, human influenza (H1N1) and risks associated with psycho-social factors and stress arising from multitasking, long working hours, monotonous job contents, sexual harassment at work place, home based work, etc. The understanding of the context would justify how the PR process would address the problem.

An example of the project given below would give an idea as to how the potential outcomes of changing the problematic situation could be envisaged.

How is need identified? Who identifies it? Who is involved (i.e., the stakeholders)? Often in conventional research practices there is a gap between the researcher and the subjects. The subjects are merely the tools to derive the data. Technical expert knowledge predominates over the knowledge derived from the workers' experience and common sense. For example, women workers in the fishery industry may be told that heart disease is their major problem and may be asked their opinion about various preventive health approaches. This may yield some valuable information, but it may miss the fact there are invisible issues such as work hours, violence, employment insecurity, which may have a bearing on the problem issue.

Data Collection

In doing PR on OHS issues we take the bottom-up approach. We are trying to understand the issues from the vantage point of the workers. Some of the tools for identifying the workers' needs and concerns include walking tours through the community, interviews with key informants, dialogues, multi stakeholder dialogues, focused group discussions, attitude surveys, diagnostic camps, campaigns, public hearing and creative art, etc.

NOTE BANK

Participatory Diagnostic Camps

One of the biggest problems faced in the treatment of workers suffering from various work related diseases is that of being incorrectly diagnosed. Very often workers suffering from byssinosis were treated for tuberculosis. Further, workers were kept in the dark about their disease. As a result their condition worsened due to sheer neglect. Workers also suffered from lack of awareness of the disease and their diagnosis. Participatory diagnostic camps were organised in various parts of the country (India) such as Maharashtra, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala and Orissa with different communities of workers such as textile workers, sewage workers in municipalities, dumping ground workers, construction workers, *bidi* workers, stone quarry workers, brick workers and cement workers. Individual counselling was provided to workers in these participatory diagnostic camps. Focus discussions were held with the representatives of the local trade union, workers and other community members. The workers provided information about their ailments, along with descriptions about the working conditions in the area. The researchers present shared information about occupational health hazards, legislation to safeguard workers' rights and techniques for prevention. Occupational histories were collected through open-ended questionnaires covering aspects such as occupational history, symptoms, legal provisions and the facilities available or absent and studied. A group of data collectors selected from those present in the camps was trained for data collection and analysis. Clinical examinations were done and the correct diagnosis of occupation related ailments was possible. The results of the check-ups were shared with the workers and medical certificates were issued to them. This enabled them to avail treatment as well as to claim compensation. The most common health problems that afflicted workers were byssinosis, silicosis, asthma, and noise induced hearing loss.

PRIA 2004, *Occupational Health in India*. PRIA, New Delhi

Data Analyses through Dialogue and Critical Reflection

A key methodological feature that distinguishes PR from other social research is dialogue. Through dialogue, people come together and participate in all crucial aspects of investigation, analysis and collective action. A dialogue process with the workers leads to a deeper understanding of their felt concerns and problems. Once community members begin to get together to discuss their collective problem/s, the

researcher participates in these meetings to help formulate the problem/s in a manner conducive to investigation, making use of the community's knowledge. The researcher's understanding of the problem/s and their de-mystifying the technical jargon by explaining terms and definitions to workers in correct, but simple language encourages the workers to critically reflect upon their own experiences and personal theories. Learning involves examining the self from a new critical standpoint. This is conscientisation, which Freire popularised. Critical consciousness is raised not by analysing the problematic situation, but also by engaging in action in order to transform the situation. Workers understand occupational health as a subject and use this knowledge for their well-being.

Outcomes

Questions like who identifies the need and who is involved in identifying the need gives us clues as to who controls the research process in terms of focus, methods, outcomes and utilisation of research findings. .As has been observed, workers became more aware of their suffering and the causes for it. A high degree of sensitisation and awareness-building took place not only amongst the workers, but also their families, local trade unions, etc.

- **Awareness**

If we work with the assumption that experts and workers or employers and workers will always be unequal then differences will persist. However, if we are interested and committed to the uplift of workers the opportunities to use PR in OHS are immense.

Participatory research is not just about conducting research to ensure safety and occupational health, it is also about the way we view ourselves, the workers and the role of research in improving their lives. Learning about present reality, the dynamics of employer-employee relationships, the value of one's identity, and of being organised generates critical awareness (conscientisation). It leads to an understanding of the problems and motivates people to undertake self-initiatives for change. Demystification of technical and medico-legal terms, awareness of

occupational health issues, knowledge of legal procedures for claiming compensation and the coverage of Employee State Insurance Scheme (ESIS) enabled the workers to articulate their demands and make use of available systems, for example, availing medical facilities and claiming compensation through social security schemes.

The process of collective analyses of given social settings provides many alternatives. As part of the process of data analysis, options are debated on the basis of concrete information. Participatory approaches like participatory diagnostic camps and multi stakeholder dialogue enhanced awareness and sensitivity on the issues of OHS amongst various stakeholders e.g., workers, government, industry, community and media and transformed the milieu of confrontation to one of mutual understanding and cooperation.

- **Participation and Control**

Participation is the active involvement of concerned persons in the various stages of the learning process, viz., definition of the problems, the learning needs and goals, collecting and analysing the problems or designing the programmes, and using the analysis to enhance one's position and knowledge. They develop a greater degree of control and responsibility vis-à-vis programme activities. They gain control over critical resources such as external expertise, know-how, capital and technology, etc. They learn to appropriate, incorporate and re-interpret the knowledge produced by the dominant system for their use. New knowledge is built on the existing knowledge. As people begin to appreciate what they already know, they are more open to seeking new information. This desire to seek new knowledge is enhanced if it is done in the context of concrete problems that the people are facing. People are motivated to create and use new knowledge whenever they see its relevance in solving the actual problems of their daily lives. The workers learnt to use diagnostic equipment such as the ventilomotor. They learnt to record the history of occupational health symptoms and conduct clinical tests such as the lung function test .They interacted with doctors and legal experts and became aware of the facilities provided by ESIS.

The data collection and analysis processes enabled workers to generate information about their problem issues. When additional information was provided by outside researchers/experts, the workers were also able to contribute to it. In other words, new data emerged. This two way process built a relationship of trust between the researchers/experts and workers and ensured the authenticity of data.

Workers developed the confidence to take initiatives to make changes in their workplace. Workers suffering from byssinosis, noise induced hearing loss and silicosis have claimed compensation from the ESIS.

- **Mobilisation and Organisation**

The coming together of people around a specific issue to think, plan and act, is mobilisation. People tend to start with problems of immediate concern. With increasing conscientisation and experience of participation in planning action they diversify their actions to include larger issues. The success of one action sets in motion the flow of successive joint actions to improve their lives. Collective actions require consciousness of the (a) need for organising, and (b) availability of organisational mechanisms in which people have confidence, over which they have control, and which they can use as organs for their actions. People may organise themselves in a manner, as decided by them, that best suits their purposes. They may build new organisations of their choice or use existing organisations over which they have effective control as instruments of action.

The process of mobilisation began with demystifying the diagnostic criteria, the knowledge of so-called professional medical experts. Control over the findings by learning to use the equipment, continuous face-to-face interaction with the experts empowered the workers. They now knew the rules of claiming compensation. They became sensitive to the issue of OH hazards and workers' rights. The issue of compensation was followed up with the ESIS. In many places a coalition of trade unions, civil society organisations, doctors, professionals, and media started a campaign against dust related lung diseases.

Challenges

We must remember that the participation of all stakeholders in the PR process is time consuming. Stakeholders may be sceptical about investing their time and energy. Management may, in particular, feel unconvinced about PR processes in terms of direct benefit to them. Management and other unorganised and fragmented stakeholders can easily be left out in the absence of definite political commitment to working with workers. The unintentional consequences of participation are very often difficult to handle. The newly empowered communities sometimes may challenge the established power structure, but in a hostile environment this may result in them being brutally repressed. Heightened awareness of oppression can increase unhappiness if no action is taken.

Challenges do not mean that we abandon PR. We need to consider an important dimension of PR, i.e., its value premise - what is intrinsically worthwhile in PR? For what purpose do we co-create reality? The answers could result in the development of the critical consciousness of both the researchers and the participants; improvement of the lives of those involved in the research process; change the world by transforming fundamental societal structures and relationships; enhancing responsible participation of people for common public good; and promoting the organisation of the have-nots. Its scope is immense; to the extent people begin to question their issues, understand the structural causes and the ways to overcome them, PR provides a base for social transformation and empowerment.

THINK TANK

Like Occupational Health and Safety, think of other areas/sectors where principles of PR may be used. How and why would you suggest PR in these areas/sectors?

Summary

In this Unit we explored the trends showing the search for an alternative system of knowledge production. We understood the political economy of knowledge society vis-à-vis issues in knowledge production and knowledge utilisation. We identified characteristics, processes and outcomes of PR. We grasped the differences between social science research and PR paradigms; and analysed the core concepts of PR in OHS.

Required Reading

Tandon Rajesh (Ed) 2005, *Participatory Research. Revisiting the Roots*, New Delhi, Mosaic Books

- Chapter 3: Participatory Research: Main Concepts and Issues by Rajesh Tandon

- Chapter 4: Knowledge as Power by Rajesh Tandon

- Chapter 6: Occupational Health and Participatory Research by Harsh Jaitli &Vijay Kanhere

- Chapter 12 — Participatory Research as a Contribution to Cultural Reconstruction by Rajesh Tandon

- Chapter 16 — Knowledge, Participation and Empowerment by Rajesh Tandon

- Chapter 20:Participatory Research and Empowerment of Adults by Rajesh Tandon

- Chapter 21 — The Socio-Political Implications of Participatory Research by Francisco Vio Grossi

Recommended for Further Reading

- Freire P., 1992, *Pedagogy of hope: Reliving pedagogy of the oppressed*, New York, Continuum
- Freire P., 2003, *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Rev. ed.), New York, Continuum
- Gaventa J., 1980, *Power and powerlessness: Quiescence and rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press
- Horton M., & Freire P., 1990, *We made the road by walking: Conversations on education and social change*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press

References

- Jaitli Harsh & Kanhere Vijay, 2005, 'Occupational Health & Participatory Research', In Rajesh Tandon (Ed) Participatory Research, Revisiting the Roots, Mosaic Books New Delhi
- Lincoln Y.S., & Guba E.G., 2000, 'Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences', In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.) The Handbook of Qualitative Research, (2nd ed.), Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage
- PRIA 2004, Occupational Health in India, PRIA, New Delhi
- Tandon R., 2005. Participatory research: Main concepts and issues, In, R. Tandon, (Ed.), Participatory research: Revisiting the Roots, New Delhi: Mosaic Books
- Sohng Sung Sil Lee, 1995. Participatory Research and Community Organizing. www.cdra.org.za