

PERSPECTIVES OF PARTICIPATORY TRAINING

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Development Context of Learning and Change

Development is a process of change from the present situation to a better one through planned, systematic and deliberate interventions, in the context of individual families and communities. The overall purpose of development is to create an opportunity for people's participation to acquire control over the developmental processes and decision making, leading to individual and collective growth as well as community betterment.

At one level, the change includes change in physical infrastructure. This may include provision of roads, buildings, irrigation and transportation mechanisms, communication, land improvement, etc. At another and perhaps more complex level, development also implies change in social and human infrastructure. Improvement in health care, for example, does not only occur through the provision of primary health care centres and district hospitals. It comes about through the work of actors like Auxilliary Nurse Midwife (ANMs) and doctors and multi- purpose health workers, in the field, as well as (and perhaps most critical) the actions of the individuals, families and communities towards improved health care practices. Thus, any development effort requires strengthening human and social infrastructure, for which structured preparation is essential.

Strengthening of human and social infrastructure necessitates changes in attitudes, behaviour, skills, capacities, knowledge, information etc. which in turn requires learning on part of the people. Training has always been viewed as a learning process- learning of new skills, concepts and behaviour. Training is not something new to development managers. It is through training that we prepare our field workers, multipurpose health workers, teachers, agriculture extension workers and their supervisor.

How is participatory training different? Participatory training is all about learning. If the purpose of training is to promote learning among individuals, families and communities then this purpose must be translated in practice. Much of the training in its conventional sense does not focus on learning, but on training. As a result, the training, training goals, training structure, training methods and trainers' become the focus of conventional training while the learners are missed out. This is where participatory training methodology makes a radical departure. It focuses on the learners and it therefore, concentrates on learning for change.

Participatory Training and its Role

Participatory training needs to be looked at separately from the term 'training.' Participatory training is based on a certain value premise that believes in the empowerment of the poor and other marginalised section of the society, including women.

It would be a mistake to interpret the word 'participatory' as synonymous with methods like role play, simulation and other training exercises. No method makes training participatory or non-participatory. Participatory training is based on the article of faith of the trainers which in turn, is biased towards the marginalised groups. Participatory training is rooted in certain basic values, which gives centrality to poor people's participation in rebuilding their own future and creating their own reality. The trainer makes an educational intervention, whereby the people start thinking about their situation. Participatory training facilitates learning and critical thinking process to create an enabling environment.

Ordinary people, which include the poor, oppressed and marginalised, whose basic knowledge and experiences have been devalued and de-legitimised for centuries, lack confidence to exercise control on issues which affect their lives. They suffer from low self- esteem. The underlying reason is the conventional approach to education for the poor and oppressed, which presumes they are ignorant and thus promotes top down delivery of information.

Training related to social development and change does not focus only on information giving or skill - building but encourages the practitioners and people to articulate their own knowledge and need to learn more. This principle is the same for any programme, whether it is watershed development, forestry, income generating activities, food security or savings and credit.

Illustration

In a community health programme, for health workers can be trained on how to conduct a safe delivery. The training however will only enable the health workers to practice the learning, if they are given the opportunity to analyse their own experiences of conducting deliveries. This would enable them to evaluate the 'good' and 'bad' in their own practices and understand the need to adopt new methods. This kind of training raises self-confidence and increases participation of the health workers.

Principles of Adult Learning and Learning Environment

Participatory training deals with adults and has its theoretical base in principles of adult learning. Various efforts in adult learning and adult development have so far brought in a variety of experiences. Some experiences are encouraging while others are not.

Adults learn, adults grow, adults change contrary to the belief that learning is difficult to alter once it has taken place, and learning can only happen with children and adolescents. Adult learning is based on principles and conditions different from the formal set of learning principles.

- ◆ Adult behaviour changes in response to various pressures - both internal as well as external. Therefore, adults can and do learn throughout their lifetime.
- ◆ Adults enter learning activities with a perception about themselves that influences the learning process. This perception is based on their past experiences interpreted and valued by them. This, therefore, influences new learning.
- ◆ The past experience of adults needs to be valued and nourished during the learning process. Otherwise, adults may feel worthless or threatened by the learning process.
- ◆ Adults learn best when the environment is safe, accepting, challenging and supportive.
- ◆ Adults enter learning programmes with immediate and personal needs, problems, feelings, hopes and expectations. The 'here and now' feeling must be respected and recognised, if their motivation to learn is to be enhanced.
- ◆ Solutions that adult learners seek must come from their own understanding and analysis, and be congruent with their life-style and functioning.
- ◆ In skill - oriented learning, there should be active participation on the part of the adult learner in those activities, which use the relevant skills.
- ◆ Continuous monitoring of progress of learning needs to be done by adults. Relevant information and feedback are essential and should be available to the adult learner.
- ◆ Success in satisfying the expressed learning needs and achieving the desired objective is a powerful reinforcement for further learning. Therefore, this element should be built into the learning process.

- ◆ Learning creates several emotions in adults - excitement, agitation, tension, confusion, disorientation, fear, frustration, etc. Stress and anxiety can affect a learning process and should be sensitively tackled.
- ◆ Different adults learn differently. The variety of learning styles and preferred modes of learning necessitate a heterogeneous design for learning by adults. This also demands use of diverse sets of learning methods to enable the learner and the learning process.

Principles of Participatory Training

The principles of participatory training are based on a set of value premises, built on the adult learning principles and learning environment.

Some of the principles are:

- ◆ It is learner-centred and learner's learning-need specific.
- ◆ The learning focuses not only on the knowledge but also on enhancing awareness and skills. This makes the learning complete, critical and useful.
- ◆ Learning is derived from the experiences of the participants. Experiential learning is crucial to participatory training.
- ◆ Participatory training requires a learning environment where participants and their experiences are valued and participants feel psychologically secure and safe to unlearn, try their new ideas and share their experiences.
- ◆ When participation is valued, participants develop their own norms and values and take responsibility for their own learning.
- ◆ Since, ensuring participation and building a safe environment are key requirements of participatory training, the role of the trainer becomes very crucial. The trainer should not only believe in the participatory principles, but must demonstrate it as a way of life.

Characteristics of Learning Environment

Besides principles of adult learning, building conducive environment is the pillar of participatory training. In the context of learner and learning process, the challenge of building and sustaining an environment that would facilitate both individual and collective learning becomes very crucial. The trainers have to create conditions for the principles of adult learning to become operationalised. Some of the key characteristics of learning environment are:

◆ Valuing Learners and Their Experiences

The fundamental aspect of the learning environment is valuing the learner, his/ her uniqueness, experiences, contributions, knowledge, and capacity to learn, grow and change. Valuing and respecting the learner becomes the

hallmark of creating a learning environment. This involves that the trainer, both during formal and informal sessions (outside the training) pays keen attention to the learners, tries to understand what they are saying and sharing and provide support.

◆ **Sharing Personal Experiences**

Since adults learn from their experience, conditions have to be created for an easy, open, systematic and effective sharing of their past experiences. Sharing of experiences doesn't mean endless, open-ended story-telling sessions. Sharing has to be focussed in relation to specific learning objectives. The purpose of sharing is also to promote critical analysis and encourage experimenting with new ideas, feelings, behaviour and action. Mutual sharing processes involve not merely learners' sharing, but the trainers also sharing information about themselves and their experiences.

◆ **Openness**

Another principle of the learning environment is openness- to oneself, to others, to question, to examine and to observe. Conditions have to be created so that learners and trainers can be open with their thoughts, their feelings and their actions.

◆ **Challenging**

The next characteristic of learning environment is that there should be a challenge to the learners. Conditions must be created for people to be stimulated, to stretch themselves beyond their immediate capacity, to utilise their potential creatively, to utilise their capacity, to unfreeze themselves and to realise their critical faculties.

◆ **Safety**

Another key characteristic of the learning environment is psychological safety and comfort. The learner should be challenged, stimulated and provoked but never undermined. The learner should be questioned, but not demolished. A sense of psychological safety- I can be myself, I can say to my self, "I can look at myself, I can try myself, I can make mistakes and yet be acceptable to and by others", is an essential aspect of the learning environment.

◆ **Support**

A related aspect, therefore, is support - emotional, intellectual and behavioural support. This support should be available individually and in small groups. To facilitate this conditions need to be created so that learners are supporting each other as much as the trainers and facilitators are supporting the learners.

◆ **Feedback**

And finally, the learning environment must have conditions built in for feedback to come back to the person and to the group. This information should be obtained through mechanisms which are easy and relaxed, and not constrained and difficult for feedback process.

Conventional Vs Participatory Training

Conventional Training

In conventional training, the trainer defines what is to be taught and the method to be used to teach. This approach to training believes that trainer knows everything, while the learner knows nothing. The trainer defines what a particular set of learners need to learn and how these learning needs can be met. Learners do not have any other role except passively learning during this process. In conventional training, the trainer becomes the central point around whom the entire process revolves. It is thus a trainer - centred approach and not learner - centred.

Underlying Assumptions in Conventional Training are:

- The acquisition of subject knowledge by participants leads to action.
- Individual action leads to improvement on the job.
- The participants learn what the trainer teaches. Learning is a simple function of the capacity of the participant to learn and the ability of the trainer to teach.
- Training is the responsibility of the trainer and the training institution.

Participatory Training

Participatory training on the other hand believes that people cannot be developed, they develop themselves through their own actions and reflections.

The participatory training is an educational process which encourages participants to see themselves as a source of information and knowledge about the real world. It recognises the value of popular knowledge and encourages people to participate in their own learning process. The process of learning during participatory training is controlled by the participant, and not by the trainer. The trainer plays the role of a facilitator in this learning process. This process of involving participants in the learning process gives them a sense of empowerment. They start recognising their existing knowledge and its value, and are more open to seeking new knowledge.

This educational experience takes place in several ways

Existing popular knowledge is recognised and valued

Participatory training believes that participants already possess some knowledge. Participants do not start with a clean slate. In the participatory approach, the synthesis of popular knowledge with existing scientific knowledge strengthens the educational experience of the participants.

❑ **New knowledge is built on the existing knowledge**

In participatory training, the starting point for creating new knowledge is the existing knowledge that people have. As people begin to appreciate what they already know, they are more open to seek new information. This desire to seek new information and knowledge enhances the learning process.

❑ **Participants learn to exercise control**

The participatory training puts emphasis of the active participation of learners in generating own knowledge. This encourages them to take responsibility for their own learning. This process helps learners to exercise control over their learning.

❑ **It becomes a collective process**

One of the elements of participatory training is the promotion of collective responsibility for seeking new knowledge. As a result, participants learn to get together, collectively seeking and analyse information.

❑ **It creates informed options**

The very process of collectively analysing a particular situation gives rise to various alternatives. As part of the process of analysis, options are debated on the basis of concrete information. As a result, participants 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 interpreted and understood.

❑ **Actions emerge out of this analysis**

The very act of involvement in the process of analysis of a given reality creates a sense of ownership of that knowledge and willingness to transform that situation. The participants are then able to take concrete action.

Building Approach	Alternative Approach
Learning as a product	Learning as a process
Teacher controlled	Student centred
Transfer of knowledge	Discovery of principles
Trainer-Expert	Trainer-Facilitator Resource person
Learner-Knows nothing	Learner-Full of capacities, Knowledge of reality
Learner-Passive, Receptive	Learner-Active, Discouraging
Encourages Conformity, Coping	Stimulates Independent thought, Creativity

Adapted from FMD Consultant, BV, Apeldoorn

Strategic Use of Training

Much of the discussion on training assumes that it is a set of events conducted to acquire a limited set of skills and knowledge that can then be used by a group of learners to accomplish their objectives. This gives a very mechanical and limited meaning to training. How can we look at training in its strategic sense? How can training contribute to a larger strategy of social change?

Training can be utilised in a strategic way to contribute to the process of strengthening forces engaged in social transformation. This encourages us to look beyond a preconceived notion of training as an event and look for ways in which it can contribute towards a wider and more substantial intervention in the process of social change.

□ Training and change

In order to proceed, we need to look at some key issues of social change:

- In our theory of social change, is there a place for individual and collective learning and thereby its contribution towards the wider process of social change?
- If individual and collective learning is important in our framework of social change, how does it relate to the wider issues of control over the minds of people?
- If individual and collective learning is an important element in our framework of social transformation (particularly as a mechanism to counter the forces engaged in controlling the minds and thinking of ordinary people) the educational opportunities and interventions that need to be created should be examined to bring about the desired learning at the individual and collective levels.
- What roles can training play in bringing about such an educational opportunity to facilitate the desired individual and collective learning necessary for enabling the over-all process of social transformation?

An educational intervention focusing on the desired individual and collective learning can bring about an important contribution towards the larger process of social transformation, and training as a specific form of educational intervention can make that possible.

□ Strategic assessment

In a simple and yet critical way, the following steps can help us think through the strategic use of training in relation to specific issues of social change.

Step 1: Analyse the external environment

Define the overall strategy of change and its key components by analysing the external environment, such as:

- What are the key favourable and hindering trends that influence this process of change?
- Who could be the potential allies, interested persons, groups, and organisations in this process of change?
- Who are likely to oppose this change?

Step 2: Identify educational goals for different constituencies

In examining the educational goals for different constituencies, it may be useful to keep in mind that different constituencies may require different educational approaches as well. The educational goals for our allies may be of one type and those for opponents may be of a different type.

Step 3: Examine the educational goals for individuals and groups

The third step essentially involves examining the educational goals for individual and collective learning, by members of those constituencies who are our allies. It is important to keep in mind that all educational goals need not be met through training.

Strategy for use

It is at this stage, when the strategic use of training has been outlined and simplified that we can begin to look at the question of resources and capacities. We can then examine how this training would actually be carried out in different locations and different ways, and what kind of resources and capacities would be needed to carry this out. Possible mechanisms for intervention need to be discussed in detail. Alternatives and a concrete action plan must also be chalked out at this point of time.

Some of the strategic uses of training practiced and experienced by the practitioners are:

- Promotes capacity building
- Develops organisational competence
- Changes peoples' attitude towards equality, social and gender justice etc.
- Helps in perspective building
- Promotes critical questioning
- Develops faith in peoples' capacities
- Helps in building faith in training

Current Issues in Training

Training has become an integral component of most development programmes whether in areas of community health or improvement in agricultural production, social forestry or income generation, organising of the poor, landless, women, etc. Both government and non-governmental organisations in the country use training extensively in various forms, with varying and diverse impacts. The current training scenario in the country is accompanied by a number of serious issues and concerns. It will be worth while to identify and reflect on some of them.

□ **Learner centred vs. trainer centred training**

In the last ten to fifteen years, increased attention and resources available for training have made it predominantly a trainer-centred activity. The purpose of training is to support the learning of a group of learners individually and collectively. However, in each step of the training intervention, the needs, interests, and preferences of the trainers are determining these aspects. By and large, training has become trainer-centred as opposed to its essential focus on learners.

A lot of training today is patterned after, and is an extension of, the formal educational system. It perpetuates the "Banking" concept of education and does not recognise the differences between children and adults. The trainer's analysis, beliefs, frameworks, opinions, are introduced or attempted to be introduced to the learners.

□ **Commercialisation of training**

There has been a growing commercialisation in training. Different people, training institutions, training firms, training teams and trainers have come into existence. They use training to serve their vested interests rather than to enhance individual and social change.

□ **Misuse of Methods**

The use of participatory methods in training has become rampant. Various development actors from donors, government to the grassroots groups are interested in finding methods that facilitate participation. This has resulted in extensive abuse and misuse of exercises, games, role-plays, group discussions, simulations, etc. There have been instances where these methods were used to fill up the training time, with no concrete learning agenda. Innovative methods are not documented.

□ **Uniqueness vs. diversity of learners**

Most of the training designs, materials and methods are insensitive to the uniqueness of the learners. They do not seem to take into account the

needs of the learners, their preferred learning styles and modes. The learners' sense of self, self- concept, its relation to their willingness and ease of learning, etc are disregarded. The current practice seems to look at learners like "clones" who have to be treated identically. Experience suggests that each learner is unique with a unique learning style. This issue needs to be recognized to facilitate learning.

□ **Building training capacity**

Most people who are involved in training, whether they are from the government or voluntary organisations, have themselves had very little opportunity to go through the experience of becoming trainers. Many see it as an opportunity for their own development as trainers, for their own growth and learning. Even where attempts have been made to increase the trainers' capacity there is much greater focus on props and fixtures, on aids and tools, on building and equipment and not on the personality of the trainer. It is of crucial importance that ways of strengthening the capacity, the potential and the competence of trainers as individuals, as a team, and as institutions are found and developed.

□ **Training designs**

The issues and concerns related to training designs are:

- Need assessment has been reduced to a ritual.
- Though participants receive insights and become aware of the self in the participatory training, they find it difficult to relate to behaviour change in the work context.
- There is less emphasis on follow up and practice which shows that follow up is rarely considered as part of the design.
- In recent years there have been advancements in participatory philosophy as well as methodologies. There is a need to incorporate these concepts and methods in our training designs.

□ **Evaluation**

Issues related to evaluation are:

- Evaluation is treated as a ritual rather than an essential component.
- Standards for comparison of the training are missing.
- Stereotyped formats are being used.
- Focus of evaluation remains on assessment of immediate effect of the training rather than on impact.