



## What makes an Engaged Community?

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**The workshop will facilitate an interactive dialogue between Practitioners and Educators on the potential of PAR approaches in building Engaged Community**

### I. RATIONALE

The need for Community Development initiatives to be inclusive and participatory in order for them to be sustainable is being recognized universally. It is an integral part of the International Development discourse. A number of Community Development approaches have been used to mobilise and empower communities. Participatory Action Research is one such approach, which has immense potential for facilitating the active participation of the community, esp. of the marginalised section, in development interventions, which influence their lives.

### II. THRUST

Drawing learnings from across cultures and regions, the workshop will collectively address the critical question - “What makes an Engaged Community?”, while exploring the potential of **PAR approaches** in Community Development practice and discourse.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The **workshop methodology** will be participatory and interactive, with use of power point presentations and small group discussions to facilitate effective learning and sharing among the participants.

With the help of **2 innovative case studies**<sup>1</sup> from India and Australia, the workshop will highlight the use of innovative Participatory Action Research (PAR) approaches and methods, to :

- Strengthen inclusion of communities in planning for their village, in Mandi district of India
- Strengthen leadership capacities of community members to build engaged community, in Mt Druitt, Australia

The workshop will facilitate **further discussion in smaller groups**, wherein on the basis of their own experiences the participants engage in:

- Critical analysis of the relevance of PAR methodologies in community development interventions –esp. in strengthening community engagement & addressing issues of power

<sup>1</sup> Details of Case Studies in Annexure 1 and 2

- Analyse relationship between CD and PAR approaches
- Identify cross cultural learning on the theme

#### IV. TENTATIVE DESIGN (*90 MINS*)

- Introductions (*10 mins*)
- Brief presentations of 2 Case studies (@ 15 minutes each, with 8 minute presentation and 7 minute discussion)
- Small Group Discussion (20 minutes; 5-7 members in each groups)
- Group Presentations and Consolidation of Learning (*30 minutes*)
- Closure

## ANNEXURE 1

### AN INDIAN CASE STUDY ON MICROPLANNING-PRIA FACILITATING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING USING PAR APPROACH

*This case study is based on the work of PRIA as a part of their work on strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions (Rural Local Self Governance Institutions) in Himachal Pradesh, India.*

The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment has transformed the face of pantheist nation-wide, from a situation in which they were considered as the implementing agencies of state governments to one in which they can begin to function as local government bodies. Panchayats<sup>2</sup> today have their own constitutional existence and sanction to prepare plans for “economic development and social justice”.

With these developments in the background, the process of bottom-up planning is receiving renewed attention. Based on this and the perspective that bottom-up planning or micro planning is the basis of local self-governance, an initiative was taken up by PRIA and a grassroots NGO, Rural Technology and Development Centre (RTDC) to facilitate the process of panchayat level planning (village level planning) with peoples participation. The facilitators initiated the planning process in Kehar panchayat, which is located around 25kms from Mandi the district headquarters of Mandi district, Himachal Pradesh. The panchayat is divided into 11 wards and has 6 villages and has a population of about 4000 and around 900 households.

The initial phase of the planning process was very crucial since it laid the foundation for all future activities. The selection of Kehar panchayat by PRIA was mainly due to the presence of RTDC, whose co-ordinator is also the President of the Panchayat. This greatly enhances the ability to establish a rapport with the local community there.

As micro planning requires active involvement from the local community, it is essential to motivate them from the onset. The approach adopted was to form a core team who would work directly with the community. A workshop organised for the core group marked the formal commencement of the exercise. Following this, meetings were held with the gram panchayat leaders and in individual wards. Through these activities it was possible to generate a considerable amount of awareness about the process of planning and how to involve the people in it. At the same time two volunteers were identified from each ward and they were provided with additional training. During the ward wise meetings where a large number of people gathered especially women, some educational materials in the form of posters and pamphlets were distributed amongst those present.

After this initial phase of rapport building with the people and generating interest amongst them, the next phase was to understand the existing situation in the area through systematic data collection and resource mapping. This is important because in order to plan for the future is necessary to know about the present reality. The focus of this phase was on getting the community members to reflect upon their individual realities employing a combination of data collection methodologies.

As the tabulation of the data was done by the facilitators, it was thought essential to share all the findings with the community soon afterwards. The village level meeting approach was favoured and this enabled the facilitators to move from ‘individual’ to ‘group’ realities. The focus of these meetings was on getting the community members to understand the socio-economic situation of the village as a whole and the major problems therein.

This was followed by the phase of community problem analysis and identification of development priorities. They were encouraged through a series of village level meetings to analyse problems faced at the

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<sup>2</sup> Village Panchayat- Elected local governance body at the village level

individual, village and panchayat level and then rank these according to their felt needs and priorities, using participatory research methods.

The community members then went on to identify possible development actions to address these needs. Some guidance was required at this stage in order to get the community members to select the right development strategies. Emphasis was laid on people's contribution (in terms of labour, material and money) towards the betterment of the village. Optimal use of the locally available resources was also stressed. At this stage Village Development Committees (VDCs) were formed in each village. The main function of this Committee (comprising of technical experts, men and women etc.) was to help in the formation and implementation of the development plan.

After this the VDCs organised village wise meetings to draw up and finalise the plans along with the people. These plans were then submitted to the Gram Panchayat who consolidated all the plans to form a Panchayat level plan which was then approved by the people in the Gram Sabha (Village Council) meeting. These Gram Sabha meetings are a mandatory provision of the Constitution and are held twice a year.

Namrata Jaitli, PRIA, Delhi

Adapted from: Paul, S (1997) Micro Planning : The Mandi Experience *Participation and Governance* Vol 4, No 9

## ANNEXURE 2

### AN AUSTRALIAN CASE STUDY – CHAIN REACTION FOUNDATION “WHAT MAKES AN ENGAGED COMMUNITY”

#### In 2002

Twenty-five focus groups taking in citizens interviewed from Tasmania to Cape York were conducted across Australia by Chain Reaction Foundation. Only one question was being asked “What makes an engaged community.”

#### In 2003

A social capital framework was developed from the citizen responses received, which basically said:

1. There are tangible dimensions for building engaged communities.
2. There are links between the tangible dimensions.
3. There are underlying conditions for the tangible dimensions to exist and then to thrive.

#### A. *TANGIBLE DIMENSION FACTORS:*

##### **Abundance of social gatherings.**

*i.e. sporting events, art and craft shows, local markets. Community festivals.*

##### **Organised spaces for interaction.**

*i.e. community centres, village greens, parks, and picnic spots, schools, libraries, places of worship, council chambers.*

##### **Catalytic organisations.**

*i.e. newspapers, radio, internet, chambers of commerce, libraries, ngo's, business recreation or regional arts clubs, elders councils, local councils, neighbourhood centres.*

##### **Safe havens for decision makers.**

*i.e. Some of the above, where transparent and accountable decisions can be made.*

#### B. *THE LINKS BETWEEN THE TANGIBLE DIMENSIONS;*

##### ***Strong diverse leadership .***

Drawn from elected leaders, business community faith or government leaders, teachers, local identities, poets, musicians, writers, dancers, or sports people.

##### ***Informal links and networks.***

Teachers natural leaders, service clubs, local theatrical groups, sports heroes, doctors, dentists, pharmacists and other shopkeepers, hairdressers and people in hospitality.

##### ***Conscious community discussion.***

Where community has an opportunity to think about and sort out public concerns. Everyone feels free and welcome to play a role.

#### C. *THE UNDERLYING CONDITIONS FOR THE TANGIBLE DIMENSIONS TO EXIST;*

##### ***Visible norms for public life.***

These help guide people in they way they think and act individually, as a family, and in community. Out of these norms comes community standards.

### ***Shared purpose for the community.***

When visible this sends explicit messages about community's aspirations with everyone headed towards a common goal.

“We're all in this together.”

“We want our public institutions to thrive”

The schools, tertiary institutions, libraries, and sports and arts centres.

#### **In 2003/4**

Using the above framework 1000 citizens were interviewed in the communities of Mt Druitt, Illawarra, and Kempsey. Later a further 500 were interviewed in Fairfield Smithfield and Cabramatta, all communities in New South Wales Australia.

Chain Reaction Foundation was seeking a local community in which to invest time and energy to assist in enabling a community accustomed to living in an excluded environment to become socially included and an actively engaged community.

In Mt Druitt the people's voices said, “We want”

Immediate assistance to achieve self-determination

A real community development leadership programme

Youth mentoring programme across the suburbs

Improved public transport and public meeting spaces

Community action plan on mental health substance abuse prevention and family violence

#### **In 2004/5**

Together with a group of natural local leaders we put together an “**Enablers Leadership Programme**” and offered it to 30 people who had been repeatedly put forward as natural leaders in the community. We took a holistic approach to examining how leaders and potential community leaders might develop skills to realise a deeper personal growth firstly for themselves, then their family group, and the community in which they lived, worked, or lived and worked. Participants came to the programme with a range of abilities from extremely low literacy and numeracy skills to a PhD student. One participant had four generations of family members present at her graduation. Over the period of learning as a group we discovered the tangible dimensions for creating an engaged community in Mt Druitt, we recognised the links we needed to assist those dimensions to be of value to the community, and finally we had an enabler's view of a community norm “We're all in this together”.

#### **2005**

The Enablers Programme continues and is now offered to increasing numbers of citizens in an on-going series each year. A Train-the-trainer programme is in place and local leaders are able to offer the programme in schools, faith communities, citizen resident groups and many other environs. Enablers are everywhere, changing the face of the eleven suburbs of Mt Druitt.

The Enablers Programme is dynamic, changing, developing, engaging and inviting the people's voices to be heard and to engage in building the community.

Out of the conscious community discussions arose a demand for a way in which to work together to meet the challenges of creating deep intergenerational change for families who for an entire life time in many cases had not believed mainstream living had anything to offer them. We were not thinking of families who were looking for work, suffering ill health, whose children needed a helping hand at school or

even needing new housing considerations. We were thinking about people who had a deeply held belief that they and their families were worthless, invisible, without kinship, loyalty or sense of any belonging. Without spirit or self-knowledge and certainly without hope.

The dispossessed. An aboriginal colleague speaking about this reality said at one meeting “Living in Mt Druitt is like living on the mission” (an assimilation system served on aboriginal people introduced in Australia resulting in what is known as the stolen generation) but here white fella’s live on the mission too.” Such exclusion experiences we could see resulting in drug and alcohol abuse, self-harm, domestic violence, hunger, suicide and other behaviours occurring out of a cycle of total despair following continuously by the destructive measures one takes to deaden pain.

## **2006**

Mt Druitt Learning Ground was born out of self-knowledge and increased community awareness. Learning Ground is for young people eight to eighteen years old accompanied by an adult family member if possible. If an adult cannot accompany a younger person a volunteer mentor takes a special role of care. All mentors have complete enabler training and work in a one-on-one capacity with each young person.

Learning Ground is the gift of deep aboriginal traditional and contemporary thought together with a wealth of experience in modern personal development skills. Around 50 families participate in the programme each year. Young people and adults alike work side by side in a slow personal discovery exploration connected to the dreamtime, totemic discovery, and modern skills of self-knowledge, communication, anger management, restoration and preservation of oneself and ones community and the acquiring of new knowledge and new leadership regarding human rights and responsibilities. In the last two years around 45 children have joined or returned to school, adults have made huge life changing decisions too many of whom have gone on to study, or to paid or voluntary work.

Learning Ground is a safe haven. Everyone who comes to the programme knows they are respected and most learn to show respect as a result. Some do not stay, but not many. This year for the first time we have five young people who have been with us for between two and three years now and who will sit school certificate.

Mentors are drawn from the participant group. Adults who have lived at the bottom of the ladder and who today are at the forefront of settling community aspirations and are headed for the common goal of social inclusion as a reality in our community.

Learning Ground is a perfect example of reconciliation in Australia, where black and white Australians have come together to create respect and affection and to make it grow. With a policy of each one teach one we thrive on a word, a look, an understanding, a decision for the common good no matter how small.

Until now Learning Ground has had difficulty in receiving funding. Private Trusts and Foundations have given seed money expecting government to come to recognise the value of Learning Ground and to grant it on-going funding. No government either Commonwealth or State has been willing to do this. In time Learning Ground will be able to draw funding from the local community but it is still a little too early to expect that, we hope to survive until that can happen.

Margaret Bell, President, Chain Reaction Foundation