

Community Participation in Research

**Proceedings of a
colloquium held in
Nairobi, Kenya,
23-27 September 1991**

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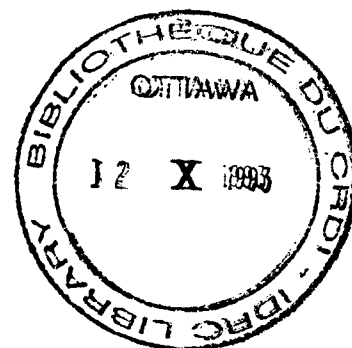
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Community Participation in Research

Proceedings of a workshop
held in Nairobi, Kenya, 23-27 September 1991

Edited by
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Contents

Foreword v

Executive Summary

Jenny Cervinkas and Sandra Baldwin 1

Working Groups 13

Tools for Community Participation: Learning from
the PROWESS Experience 20

Participatory Research: An Alternative Approach
Jenny Cervinkas 26

Rapid Assessment Procedures: The East African Experience
David Nyamwaya 42

Participatory Rural Appraisal for Sustainable
Resource Management in Rural Kenya
Isabella L. Asamba, Julius Muinde, and J. Ayieko 48

Sudan Reforestation and Antidesertification Project
Diana de Treville 53

Assessment of Decentralized Health Services Using LQAS
Joseph J. Valadez 65

Participatory Village Development Planning in
Morogoro, Tanzania
Sizya Lugeye 73

Participatory Research in an Academic Setting
Sizya Lugeye 85

Problem Areas in PRA and Related Methodologies
Diana de Treville 88

Appendices

1. Participatory Research Bibliography 93
2. Additional Resources 99
3. Evaluation Feedback 105
4. Workshop Agenda 109
5. Participants 113

Participatory Village Development Planning in Morogoro, Tanzania

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How can the food and cash crop production problems of village households be solved? How can the traditional forms of village government planning be improved so that it is villagers themselves, from all social groups, who have a say in the policies and plans that affect their lives?

In a selected number of villages in the Morogoro region of Tanzania, the Sokoine University Extension Project (SEP) is grappling with these questions and is working to create linkages with village planning structures to promote popular participation in village-level development. The way this is being explored by the SEP team is through the use of participatory approaches to rural development planning and program formulation.

The Need for a Participatory Approach

This outreach to rural communities by the SEP team originated from its concern that many failures in community development efforts are due to the way policies and projects are conceived and implemented. Often they are based on preconceived ideas of outsiders about what local problems are and how they should be solved. Planning takes place without any involvement of the people concerned and implementation of the plan is viewed simply as a technical action without any consideration of the cultural and societal attitudes and the experiences and local knowledge of the population. The fact that the planning of a village development program is meaningful and viable only when appropriated by the people who are meant to benefit from these plans is often overlooked.

Also, it is often acknowledged that, although rural development programs of the last decade or so have placed the interests of small-scale farmers high on their agenda, the results so far have failed to measure up to expectations because of a failure to address the question of popular participation. This results either in

inappropriate innovations or in support for the least appropriate groups in the farming community. Typically, project inputs fail to work as intended or they end up in the wrong hands, with the most marginalized groups again excluded from development programs.

Village Development Planning

"Planning is choosing," goes a wise saying. This is true in view of the fact that planning involves a careful analysis of the situation and charting out possible means of solving the identified problems to fulfil the community, group, and individual needs.

Plans can be categorized into short-term, medium-term, or long-term planning horizons. Whatever planning horizon is adopted, the plan must show clear and concise objectives as well as spell out how these will be fulfilled.

A planning exercise should address three basic questions:

- Who should be involved in planning?
- What should be planned?
- How and for whom should the plan be addressed?

To ensure that the village development program is relevant both to villagers and to planners, it is essential that the programs are *planned*. Planning village programs involves the selection of activities and their prioritization and can help to:

- Assist in the identification and selection of village needs and problems,
- Ensure appropriate allocation and use of resources,
- Identify constraints during implementation of projects and programs,
- Increase cooperation between institutions involved in planning and implementation of projects/programs, and
- Solicit funds for projects from the government as well as donor agencies.

Sokoine Extension Project (SEP)

Project Aims

SEP is a collaborative research cum extension project that involves collaboration between academic institutions (from Tanzania and Ireland), government ministries, and selected villages. Specifically, those involved in the

project are the Department of Agribusiness, Extension and Rural Development, Faculty of Agriculture, University College, Dublin, Ireland; the Institute of Continuing Education (ICE), Sokoine University of Agriculture, Morogoro, Tanzania; the Agricultural Extension Service, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, Morogoro region; and selected villages in the Morogoro region. SEP began in 1988 with 20 villages, and by the end of 1990 was operating in 41 villages in three districts of the Morogoro region. A second expansion of the project brought the number of participating villages up to 47 by the end of 1991.

SEP has become involved in working closely with village leaders in planning and developing programs for villages to meet these aims:

- To upgrade the training and programs of village-level extension workers in project villages;
- To bring the university, extension service, and village government together in solving the food and cash crop production problems of village households; and
- To identify the critical level of inputs needed to sustain and replicate the SEP approach both from the ICE and from the Extension Service. The inputs include the resources (personnel and financial) required to provide training and the support/monitoring and management structures needed to help extension workers implement extension programs and projects.

Participatory Village Development Planning in SEP

Over the past 3 years the evolution of this project (SEP) has taken place in four progressive stages. Each stage has built upon the cumulative knowledge and lessons of the past:

- The examination by the SEP team of the development planning process and development of a recommended format for promoting village-level development planning,
- The establishment of stronger links between the SEP team and village leaders to improve the village development planning process,
- The establishment of village research committees, and
- The further consolidation of the improved planning format.

Stage 1. Gathering Information

In the first stage, project staff gathered as much information as possible about the villages to arrive at recommendations about programs and solutions

needed to improve village life. The active involvement of villagers was minimal. According to these findings interventions were then tried out. Monitoring and evaluation was done by project staff and focused mainly on whether the solutions had worked or not. Although there were many successes, there were difficulties in determining whether the solutions addressed the real needs of the communities.

Stage 2. Building Links With Village Leaders

In the next stage, project staff were encouraged to listen to local people so that they could better understand what the village perceived as its needs and priorities. Based on this information, actions were taken. Feedback from villagers was sought to evaluate these actions.

In this stage, a village leader's training (VLT) program was initiated by project staff and villagers. The VLT program emphasized the enhancement of the capacity of village leaders to plan and select problems and solutions of high priority to a majority of the people. This approach encourages the project team and the villagers to work as partners because it is built on a two-way communication, problem-solving techniques, and a commitment to what works for the community. In forging links with the villagers, the relationship between the village extension workers (VEWs) and the village community is built upon.

The VLT program was conducted by way of seminars and workshops held in village centres in the districts of Morogoro, Kilosa, and Kilombero. Participants came not only from the district centre but also from the surrounding villages. About 280 villagers from 47 villages have participated in the training program. Of the six participants from each village, there are one or two village leaders, one VEW, and two to three members of the finance, planning, and production committee. Although a target had been set to have women make up close to 20% participation, the actual number of women in the VLT program was very low.

The workshop served as a discussion forum where the use of methods familiar to the peasants permits their active participation. Cognitive and emotional engagement and actions are stimulated through group discussions and case studies. The role of the SEP team is to facilitate the learning process. The team recognized that local knowledge is culturally signed and specific to the social organization.

External and local knowledge are both seen to be valid, so the external agent creates a bridge between the two by means of an intercultural communication process, permitting the exchange of different ways of perception, common agreement, and joint planning of social action. It is at this stage that

local knowledge is combined with outside knowledge. It is based on the premise that it is the villagers who are the ultimate beneficiaries of the project inputs. Sustainability depends, to a large extent, on the village leaders' ability to analyze, judge, and explain to others the value of various options.

Through the SEP workshop, farmers produce detailed technical information, which is verified by the experience of the whole group. Constraints to the solutions they pose themselves are identified by the group. They feel proud of their contributions and are motivated to report the value of their own knowledge to others. This strengthens their commitment to build upon and use their leadership skills and practices and to mobilize social efforts to enhance development. Analytical skills are thus supported and strengthened enabling them to ask and answer their own questions. An important spin-off benefit of the workshops is that they contribute to the learning experiences of both the project staff and the village leaders, as well as to the development objectives of self-help and sustainability.

Joint Assessment and Planning

Besides holding workshops, seminars were held with village leaders and VEWs. The village leaders included the village chairman, the village secretaries, and two members from the finance, planning, and production committee of each village. The objectives of the seminar were:

- To exchange information about the process by which village leaders and the SEP VEWs, respectively, prepare development plans;
- To develop an improved format for village development planning that would combine the desirable elements of the SEP development planning process with those of the village development planning process; and
- To prepare an action plan and test the improved planning format.

Through these seminars, it was revealed that village planning for most villages in the Morogoro Region followed a similar process. Traditionally, it is the village government and its leaders who are responsible for making decisions that affect the development of a village. The village is the basic administrative unit in Tanzania, and it usually is made up of 250 – 450 families. The village government determines the needs of the villagers, draws up plans for village development, decides on which projects are to be implemented, and ensures that they are carried out.

Decisions at the village level are made following the established hierarchy with a chairman at the top, down to the people. The village development plans are then presented to the government, in a sequence moving from the village to

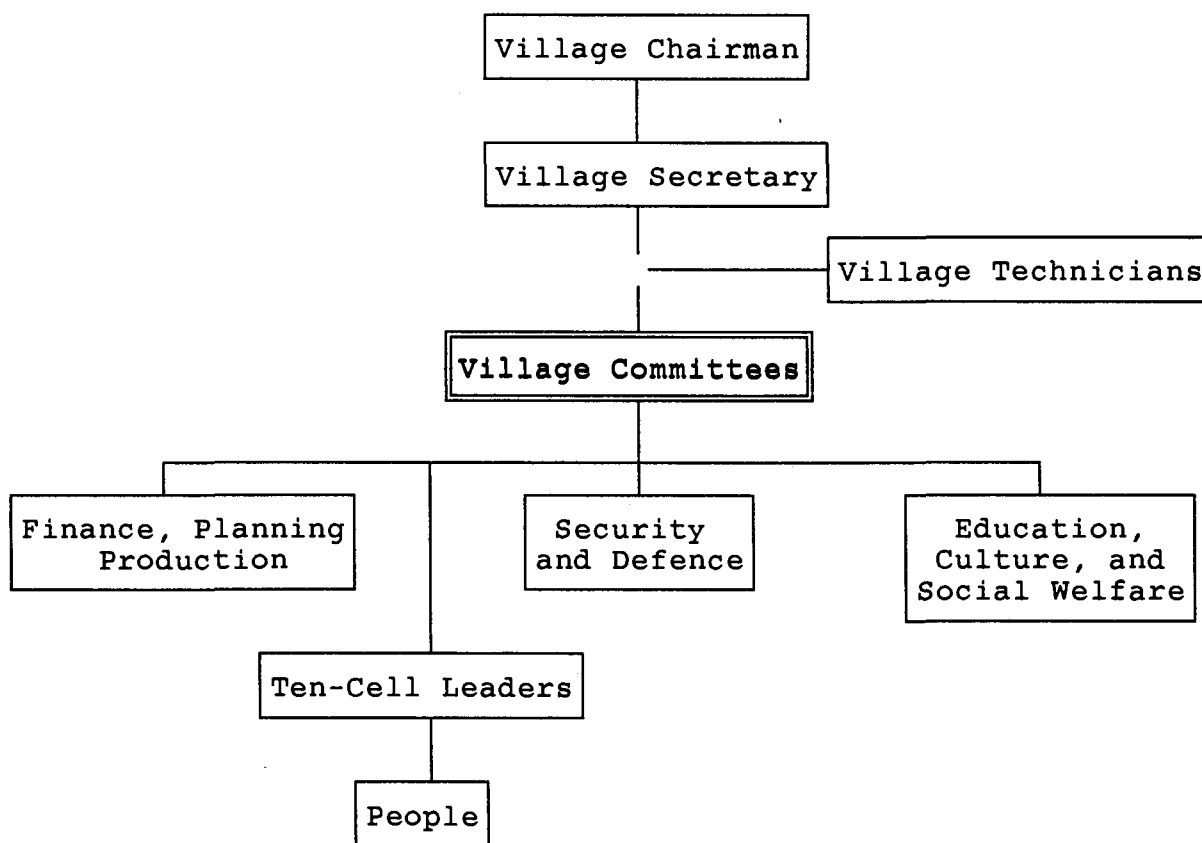


Fig. 1. The village administrative structure in Tanzania.

the ward, division, district, regional, and finally national level. The administrative structure of the village government is illustrated in Fig. 1.

One of the major benefits of the villagization program in Tanzania is its potential to enable villagers to have the power to contribute to their own development plans. The village development planning process is usually carried out by deliberations and actions at five different levels of the administrative structure.

- *The Ten-Cell Unit* People in the village identify their problems. Meetings at the 10-cell level are called to discuss the cell's problem.
- *The Village Committee* The relevant committee is informed about problems from 10-cell leaders in the village.

- *Village Government* All village committees meet to discuss the village problems and plans for their solution.
- *Village Council/Assembly* Open meeting to all villagers to receive village government's decision on plans and implementation procedures to solve the problem.
- *Villagers (the People)* Villagers' participation in the implementation of the plans and program is agreed upon. The 10-cell leaders are the key resources in following up the implementation of plans that have been accepted at the village level.

In describing this structure, seminar participants noted that, as per a Village Act (1974), the introduction of committees to the village government structure was permitted. Accordingly, one can find subcommittees related to forestry, water, and health in some villages. Participants also said that the village government, especially village committees or the village secretary (VC/VS), made most of the decisions. The 10-cell leaders played key roles in the identification of problems and implementation of village development plans. The village meetings were used for publicizing the village plans and gave people a chance to state their views and participate in decision-making before the implementation stage. An important disclosure was that, although women and youth play important roles in the social and economic life of the community, they are rarely involved in the planning process.

First, the village development plans start with situation analysis and problem identification. The villagers, together with village technicians (community development, forestry, teachers, etc.), assist in situation analysis including the identification of casual factors.

In the second step, the priority problems are discussed and ranked according to their perceived priority for action and their solutions discussed. A decision is then made about which solution should be pursued, and objectives and plans of action are developed with the involvement of the villagers and technicians in the village.

Third, implementation plans are developed. In this stage, the village leaders, technicians, and other village resources arrange for implementation of the plans of action. During the implementation stage, constant follow-up is maintained and periodic consultations are conducted. During the follow-up, the SEP staff, along with village leaders, makes the necessary adjustments, discusses problems, and evaluates the progress made.

Proposed Village Development Planning Format

The planning process proposed to seminar participants by the SEP team has three main steps as shown in Fig. 2.

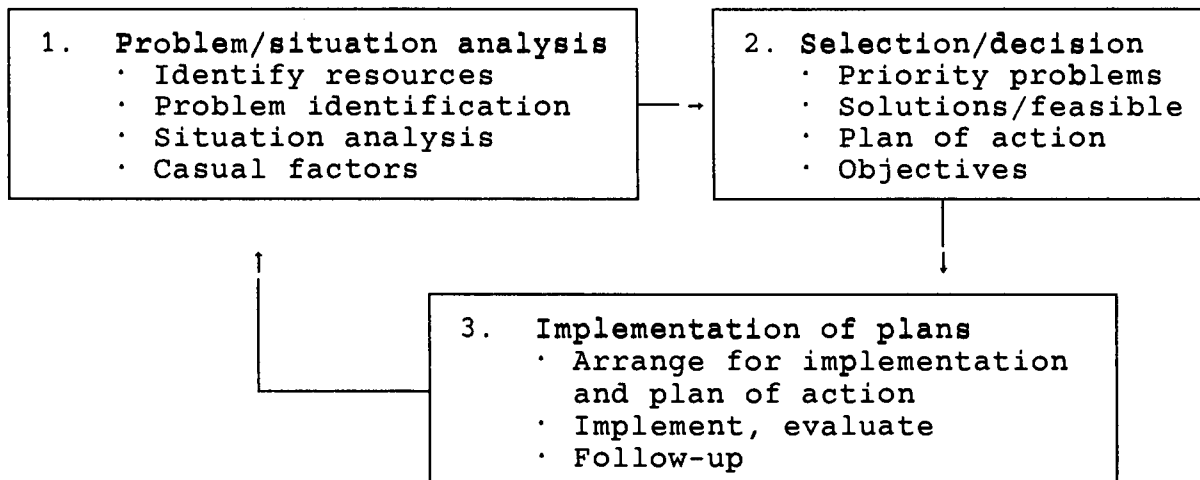


Fig. 2. Stages in the SEP village development planning process.

Recommendations

As a result of interchanges during the seminars, between the SEP team and villagers, the following recommendations were made:

- An improved format for the village development planning process was agreed upon.
- It was recommended that research committees be established in each village and include technical staff from the village and emphasis on increasing women's representation.
- The need to develop plans for the orientation and training of research committees was agreed upon.
- An action plan was agreed upon to enhance uniformity in implementation of the activities.
- Recommendations regarding measures to improve the performance of the VEWs were made.

Steps in the Improved Format

- The villagers or groups of people and village leaders participate in the selection and identification of problems and solutions.
- The village research committee assists in the investigation and identification of priority problems and solutions.
- The village finance, planning, and production committee receives findings about the village situation as identified by the research committee. It considers these problems in relation to other village plans, projects, and programs and makes recommendations to the village government.
- The village government considers recommendations made by the finance planning, and production committee and selects relevant problems of high priority to the village. The action plans to be followed are formulated.
- The village assembly receives decisions made by the village government. At this stage, the village assembly discusses problems, solutions, and action plans that need to be followed.

The process proposed by SEP seminar participants for the village development planning process involves a number of people situated within the village government administrative structures (see Fig. 3), and relies particularly upon the finance, planning, and production committee and the village government and assembly. The establishment of a village research committee is proposed to serve the critical function of allowing for the systematic input of villagers' views regarding priority needs and feasible solutions into the village government structure.

Stage 3. Village Research Committees

The third stage of the SEP has been the experimentation with the introduction of the improved planning format in the villages, with the establishment of the VRCs playing an important role in promoting enhanced village-level input into the planning process. There can be 6–12 people on the committee including:

- A village extension worker (VEW),
- One to six village technicians with representation from a variety of sectors (e.g., teachers, community development personnel, forestry officer, medical officer, a women's representative),

- Two village production committee members, and
- Two women representatives.

The function of this committee is to:

- Identify village problems, needs, and solutions,
- Identify village resources,
- Study the village situation (food, social/economic),
- Make recommendations to the village governments,
- Conduct and direct research activities in the villages,
- Comment upon the use of data collected in the village, and
- Contribute and influence planning and development of the villages.

Village research committees have been formed in all 41 villages that are involved in the SEP as well as the six other villages that are administered under another project.

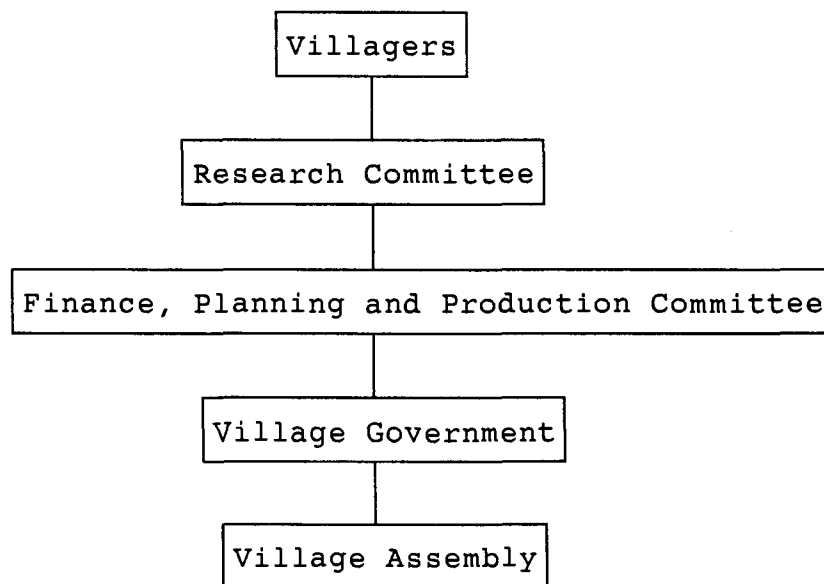


Fig. 3. The SEP village planning structure.

Stage 4. Consolidation of the Project

The fourth stage of the SEP project is to continue training and assisting village government leaders and research committees to fulfil their functions. Constant follow-up is maintained to keep villagers further motivated, with

weaknesses being identified and corrected as part of an ongoing evaluation process. It has been realized by most villages that the role of the VRC must be supported and maintained continually if the overall standards of living in the village are to be improved. The active and full representation of all village members continues to be a challenge, with women and youths underrepresented. By the end of 1990, only about 5% of VRC members were women. One approach taken by the team to overcome this problem is the VRC's deliberate efforts to approach women's groups for discussions about problem identification.

Data generated through the improved planning format have been used to prepare village development plans that are then submitted to the district development council and to some donors for assistance. It has been relatively easy to convince them of village problems and priorities and attract their support.

As result of these efforts, a number of microprojects have been developed and implemented, including the following:

- Ozonization project,
- Small animal projects (rabbits, goat keeping),
- Agroforestry,
- Sunflower oil extraction,
- Vegetable gardens (especially among women, youths, schools),
- Citrus fruit gardens,
- Irrigation channels,
- Storage structure, and
- Green manure.

Conclusions

Planning of village programs needs to involve the village leaders and their governments. They are responsible for making decisions that influence local development. It has also been pointed out that other technical people in the villages must be involved in planning and executing the village development programs. The SEP experiences show that women and youths play an important role in the village activities but are rarely involved and do not participate in the planning of village development programs.

It is emphasized that sustainable change and development at the village level can only occur when the beneficiaries are involved. The use of the village leader training programs and village research committees are means to enhance local participation in identifying and solving community problems.

This project is based on the firm conviction that sustainable change and development at the local level can only occur when the beneficiaries are involved. The current activities of the VRCs are very encouraging and are facilitating bottom-up planning, which effectively feeds into the village, district, regional, and national levels. By utilizing a participatory approach and by building upon existing political structures and local knowledge, it is hoped that this experiment in rural development planning will help realize local development goals.