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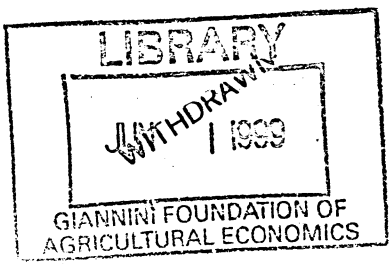

'PEOPLE'S KNOWLEDGE' IN PROJECT PLANNING: THE LIMITS AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

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ACRONYMS

CDS	Centre for Development Studies, University of Swansea, Wales, UK
CO	Community Organiser
CPA	Community Problem Analysis
FAMPAR	Farmer-managed Participatory Research
GoI	Government of India
KRIBHCO	Krishak Bharati Cooperative Ltd
KRIBP	Kribhco Indo-British Rainfed Farming Project
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
ODA	Overseas Development Administration (UK)
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RRA	Rapid Rural Appraisal

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ABSTRACT

For reasons of efficiency, equity and sustainability (among others) participatory approaches to planning are now accepted as necessary in public systems of rural development as well as among the NGOs who pioneered them. Yet, there are significant social and institutional constraints to people's participation in planning, which this paper examines. The first issue concerns the relationship between local knowledge, for example that generated through PRA methods, and programme decision-making. The paper suggests that enhancing local people's role in knowledge production does not in itself remove obstacles to their role, or the influence of their perspectives, in programme planning. It shows that local knowledge production and use is determined by planning systems. These involve divergent agendas and negotiated compromises between local needs and project objectives and also have to meet wider organisational demands. The second issue concerns the difficulties of sustaining participation from the planning stage through into implementation to ensure long-term local commitment to project innovations. The paper points out the need to identify the social conditions for sustained participation within rural development projects. Two responses to the difficulties of participatory planning are described. The first is to build into projects the ability to analyse and interpret problems, needs and priorities as social constructs. The second is to identify appropriate social contexts (local groups) for planning and sustainability. Finally, the paper suggests some problems in the transfer of rigorous group-based participatory planning approaches between different institutional contexts.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been a convergence of opinion as to the importance of people's participation in rural development planning and there now exist a common language and a widely shared set of techniques for participatory

planning. At the same time there is growing awareness that development activity takes place in particular social and institutional contexts and that the 'new participatory orthodoxy' has so far dealt inadequately with the relations of power, such as dominance and gender, which set the limits and social conditions of participation in research, decision-making and development action (Pottier, 1993; Mosse, 1994; Scoones and Thompson, 1994; Wright and Nelson, 1994). Such constraints are part of the experience of planning even for those small-scale NGOs which are most committed to the direct involvement of local people in programme decision-making, and which have the human and financial resources necessary for the promotion of intensive community-based approaches to development. And yet, under the influence of both international donors and domestic-policy shifts towards local resource management and cost recovery, participatory planning techniques have now been incorporated into far less well-equipped public sector systems. There they place new demands on resources, imply a significant departure from normal procedures and decision-making systems, and/or are implemented in the field by people who may as yet have little to gain from the new accountabilities they signify.

'Popular participation' is a development planning value with near universal appeal, which comes with an assumption that participation is everywhere equally achievable and desired. In part this view is encouraged by a packaging of participatory goals in the form of transferable tool box methodologies. This leads to an emphasis on field methods and techniques rather than on the institutional and political context in which they are employed. Even though it is recognised that 'many methodological limitations are the result of insufficient attention to the institutional contexts in which they take place' (Cornwall, Guijt and Welbourn, 1993:35), this is often under-emphasised and these are rarely the subject of analysis. The adverse results of such neglect include: the development of unrealistic expectations; an over-simplification of participatory planning methods; claims to achievement which do not stand up to close scrutiny, and over-optimistic assumptions about the replicability and transferability of certain participatory approaches from NGOs into public sector systems.[1] Conversely, a better appreciation of the social dynamics of participation can help make planning more responsive and enabling (Pretty and Scoones, 1995:164).

The first aim of this paper, then, is to explore some of the constraints to people's participation in planning and to show how such processes are shaped by a range of interests and power relations within and beyond a project. Participation is often taken as a development solution rather than as an objective or even an assumption. There are surprisingly few descriptions of the practical ways in which social and institutional factors influence participatory research and development in given project settings, and even fewer cases to illustrate

why this is important and how projects have responded to this challenge. In the absence of such material, the current debate on power and participation is likely to remain largely theoretical, and to fail to provide lessons for policy or practice.[2]

The central issues in a discussion of participatory planning concern knowledge (particularly the importance of power in the production of knowledge for planning) and the relationships between local knowledge, outsider knowledge and bureaucratic planning. Discussion of these themes follows from an earlier paper on methods (Mosse, 1994) in which it was shown how, in one project's early experience, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) as a public activity constructed local knowledge in specific ways. In that paper I argued for a more differentiated view of local knowledge – differentiated in terms of actors and ways of knowing (see also Hobart, 1993) – but pointed out that the social relations which produce local knowledge publicly (in public PRAs) conspire to conceal such relevant differences.

In PRAs, public representations of livelihood constraints provide opportunities for assertions of dominance and, conversely, for the muting of subordinate opinions. The analysis of PRA contexts also shows how the social position of project outsiders contributes to the generation of local knowledge and so illustrates the unhelpfulness of polarising 'insider' versus 'outsider' knowledge. The present paper takes the discussion further by showing that it is not simply information *generation*, through PRA, which is a product of local social relations and the influence of outsiders. Perhaps even more clearly, the *uses* of local knowledge in programme decision-making and implementation are determined by relationships of power within villages, between locals and projects and by the institutional exigencies of development agencies as organisations. In short, if the articulation of what is accepted as people's knowledge through PRA is seen as problematic, the translation of 'people's knowledge' into programme choices and action within project organisations is even more so.

In this paper, I do not take 'people's knowledge' or 'local knowledge' to be bounded categories. Rather I take these to be normative constructs or labels which can also serve to conceal the complex nature of information production in programme planning, especially where they imply static and consensual insider knowledge separate from the knowledge of outsiders and the planning process itself. Even though in planning contexts, distinctions between insider and outsider, indigenous and exogenous become difficult to sustain, these polarities continue to characterise much literature on participatory approaches (cf. Okali, Sumberg and Farrington, 1994:2-3). I will suggest several ways in which the

concept of 'people's knowledge' misrepresents information-production in the planning process and gives a deceptively participatory gloss to the more complex social dynamics of knowledge and the processes of negotiation involved (cf. Long and Long, 1992).

The second aim of the paper is more practical. Analysis of some of the constraints to participation in knowledge production in the planning area suggests two questions: what are the *social conditions* for effective participation, and how can poor people have a greater involvement in, and increased control over, knowledge generation and use in planning? Drawing on the experience of a particular project, the paper addresses these questions and indicates the key lessons learned and the type of adaptations to PRA-based planning which seem to be necessary. These have the aim of deepening local farmers' involvement in planning and therefore their commitment to decisions. Given the project's commitment to raising farmer contributions, minimising subsidies and achieving cost recovery – in short, the commitment to long-term sustainability – these are critical issues.

A reasonable question at this point is, what concept of participation is involved here? There are of course many different understandings and definitions of participatory planning and, even within agricultural research, there is a sizeable literature which discriminates between different forms of participation (e.g. Biggs, 1989; Farrington and Bebbington, 1993). In this paper 'effective participation' in planning for natural resources development is intended to convey some inter-related ideals: joint information generation and analysis; increased control of information and responsibility for decision-making and action by villagers; adoption of development choices which respond to diverse perspectives and different local needs, rather than to external agendas; the acquisition of knowledge, skills and the establishment of forms of organisation necessary to mobilise resources, implement sustainable changes in local resource systems and to take independent initiatives in the future. These are ideals. They do not define a coherent type or mode of operation. Indeed the problem with typologies of participation (such as Pretty, 1994) is that they imply coherence, when most development organisations operate simultaneously in a wide range of participatory modes. Moreover, it is often the case that non-participatory practice is re-interpreted or represented in terms of higher participatory goals. This paper shows that the nature of participation is shaped by context, and that practicable participation is very difficult to define.

An understanding of how relations of power *might* shape knowledge, choices and project outcomes, and a theoretical idea about the social conditions for effective participation are not, however, of great practical use unless projects are

able to devise *methods* of social analysis to understand local social processes, and strategies to respond to this information. The paper therefore concludes with some methodological comment on the issue of *how* the social analysis of power can be built into project work, what methods of participatory appraisal or process monitoring are effective, and how the information they generate can modify planning methods. These questions cover a large area and are raised as much to encourage debate and innovation as to provide solutions. The issues are, in fact, the subject of a separate article (Mosse, 1995b), which describes the efforts of one project to generate and use knowledge of local social and political processes within its programme.

Although this paper focuses on the social conditions of participation in planning at the micro-level, there are two other sets of questions which are critical to a review of participatory planning practice. The first set of questions concerns the wider organisational preconditions for effective participation in planning. What are the appropriate institutional environments for participatory planning in rural development, how can they best be established and what has been the experience to date of efforts directed at this sort of institutional change? Answers to such questions would need to challenge the common isolation of issues in community participation and decision-making from similar questions applied at the level of donors and their partner organisations (how participatory are *they*?). The second set of questions concerns the issue of whether there are there circumstances in which participatory planning approaches might **not** be appropriate or necessary and where there might be other arrangements (market mechanisms perhaps?) which would prove more effective in identifying and meeting local needs? Both issues have been raised in a recent review of the new book *Beyond Farmer First* (Scoones and Thompson, 1994), which (referring to work on China) points out that 'participation is not a *prerequisite* for effective small-farm orientation on the part of government researchers and extensionists' (Farrington, 1995). Proper discussion of these issues falls beyond the scope of the present paper which largely focuses on field conditions for participation in planning in a quasi-NGO context. However, the questions are important, particularly in their implications for policies aimed at replicating NGO models in different institutional environments.

THE PROJECT SETTING

The discussion of this paper is informed by the experience of one project in particular, the western India Kribhco Indo-British Rainfed Farming Project (KRIBP). The issues discussed largely concern planning processes at the micro-level (i.e. village level). The project – a bilaterally-funded initiative implemented

by a special NGO-like unit of a large cooperative sector organisation – is not selected because it provides a particularly good example of the problems and constraints involved in participatory planning. On the contrary, the project is one of very few which has given explicit attention to processes of participation in planning. It has also sought constantly to engage in critical reflection on practice and to modify its planning approach and strategy in the light of experience. The project, in fact, illustrates the necessity and advantage of the 'learning process' approach (Korten, 1980) in participatory rural development. Finally, it should be clear that this is in no way a descriptive account of the KRIBP project. Project experience is selectively cited only to illustrate some more generally applicable points.

KRIBP (described in detail elsewhere, see Jones *et al.*, 1994; Mosse, 1994) is a participatory farming systems development project situated in the Bhil tribal region of western India (the border areas of Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh states). The project strategy, oriented towards the goal of improving the livelihoods of poor farming families, involves an extended process of participatory planning in order to generate location-specific natural resources development plans. In principle, local problems are identified and prioritised by villagers, workable solutions found (a joint process) and implementation regimes agreed and negotiated between project staff and members of communities.

Programme activities cover a range of farming system areas: crop trials and community seed multiplication, agro-forestry and 'wasteland' development, horticulture, soil and water conservation, minor irrigation, livestock development, and credit management for input supply. As far as possible these interventions are low-cost, involve minimal subsidies and/or encourage cost-recovery. Planning such activities requires a high degree of villager commitment, and the sustainability of benefits beyond the life of the project depends upon continued involvement of communities in resource management, often through village-based groups (e.g. irrigation groups, credit management groups). The project aims to achieve sustainable farming system improvements through enhancing the capabilities of tribal villagers in local resource management and in gaining access to external resources, including those provided through government programmes. Special attention is given to enabling women to occupy a central and active position in relation to these changes. In terms of most scales of participation, the project aims for an intense relationship with farmers and a fairly high (or deep) level of participation, at early stages in decision-making (Biggs, 1989; Farrington and Bebbington, 1993).

A critical principle of the project's planning methodology is decentralised information generation, analysis and planning at the village (or cluster of

villages) level. In order to achieve this the project works intensively with local farmers through trained Community Organisers (COs – women and men) who are placed in village clusters and given the task of generating, in a participatory manner, needs-based village development plans. In common with the new generation of rural development projects, initial rapport-building work in villages was followed by organised participatory appraisal events (PRAs) in order to generate a base of knowledge and to identify problem areas.[3] The next section examines some of the problems experienced in effectively translating PRA-based planning into sustainable action, even within the context of the type of intensive interaction characteristic of NGOs. Placed mid-way between an NGO and a bureaucratic form of organisation, the KRIBP project also offers a unique opportunity to consider the wider implications of these problems for the transfer of participatory approaches between institutional environments.

PEOPLE'S KNOWLEDGE AND PROJECT DECISION-MAKING

Those involved in implementing new participatory approaches to rural resources development often comment that the enthusiasm, participation and the richness in the experience of change in PRA exercises is not matched in the structures and practices of implementation. At worst, knowledge generation (through PRA or other methods) on the one hand, and programme decision-making on the other become, in time, separate and parallel streams of activity: PRA reports sit on office shelves and charts and maps provide attractive wall decoration and public statements about participatory intentions. The PRA (as one worker in a participatory project recently put it) provides a licence which permits any subsequent activity and decision-making to be labelled 'participatory'. The worry that rapid participatory research methods would, in practice, often perform a legitimising function for decisions already taken was raised well over a decade ago in the early debate on RRA (Wood, 1981). However, the observation also points to a problem of data management. As Freudenberger suggests, the evolution of tools to generate information on local knowledge has been far faster than the collective willingness to change perspectives in response to that information (1992, cited in Okali, Sumberg and Farrington, 1994:104). This is perhaps nowhere clearer than in the case of gender relations. Despite constraints (Mosse, 1994) PRA methods have contributed significantly to the understanding of gender differences within development projects. It is unlikely, however, that there has been a proportionate change in programme design. It is quite possible to find PRA-based analysis of women's core productive/managerial roles in, for example, the management of seed, manuring, livestock, fodder and household finances, coexisting with project initiatives in credit, input supply (e.g. fertilisers) or crop trials which are largely, if not exclusively, controlled by men,

while 'women's' programmes focus on food preparation, kitchen gardening, handicrafts or other supplementary income generating activities (cf. *ibid*:105). Similar problems of dealing with difference occur in the use of information from wealth-ranking, now well established as a PRA tool (*ibid*).

The following sections look at these issues in more detail and explore some of the complexities of the social control of knowledge production within project contexts. The main point is very simple, but rarely acknowledged. It is that even where sophisticated methods of participatory appraisal are sensitively and effectively used, the local knowledge which they help to generate does not in any straightforward way translate into programme decision-making and action. Alternatively put, enhancing local people's role in knowledge production (e.g. in PRA) does not in itself remove constraints to their role, or the influence of their perspectives, in programme planning. There is a need here, firstly, to question simplistic assumptions about the nature of people's knowledge (stated needs etc.) and its relation to project action in externally-induced programmes; and, secondly, (and as a part of this) to admit the existence of competing or even conflicting development agendas among the different actors – locals, project organisations and wider institutions – who contribute to planning. Planning information is generated in the context of these competing agendas; it results from bargaining, negotiation and, above all, is shaped by relations of power.[4] There is also a third point, namely that local knowledge (irrespective of its origin) is a *resource* which is not only used as a basis for programme decision-making, but also employed (by outsiders and locals) in bargaining for pre-determined desired outcomes.

Drawing on KRIBP experience, I will look at these three issues in turn. In doing so it will become clear that planning ideas are situated socially, that knowledge and its uses are rarely separable, and that underlying interests and relations of power determine both the production of knowledge and courses of action. Micro-planning, of the sort discussed here, takes place within a project initiative which is itself the outcome of a wider political process reflecting configurations of interests which are both national and international (Wood, 1981:5). The project context determines the development strategy, and imposes decisions about when and whose 'local knowledge' is sought, or which external ideas require local confirmation and so forth. These broader constraints should not be obscured in my focus on the micro-level. But even here (i.e. locally), I argue that understanding social processes in planning is just as important as generating people's knowledge through PRA. In a later section I will suggest how such understanding can be enhanced and employed within a project.

Livelihood constraints and expressed needs *(the gift horse and a bird in the hand)*

The planning principle in KRIBP is that programme decisions (technology choices etc.) are based on an open-ended analysis of livelihood constraints by village people (in different groups) themselves. The project does not have a set of technologies to transfer, but will respond to people's ideas about livelihood needs. We find, however, that these ideas (including the livelihood constraints and needs on which planning focuses) are significantly determined by social context. The importance of the question, 'whose knowledge?' and the need to differentiate perspectives was the focus of a earlier paper (Mosse, 1994), but equally important is the question, 'knowledge for what?'

As others (e.g. Scoones and Thompson, 1993; Fairhead, 1991; Hobart, 1993) have pointed out, it is almost certainly wrong to conceive of a constant body of farmer knowledge about rural livelihoods or the farming system, independent from either explanations of specific past action or intentions for action in the future. The issue here is that knowledge for planning is strongly influenced by project objectives. A simple project illustration makes the point. In KRIBP villages, the matrix ranking of tree species was used in PRAs to identify a wide range of species and multiple uses for them.[5] The focus of discussion was on the actual *uses* of trees. When however, village-level nurseries were being established and farmers (women and men) were asked about their needs, and which species should be raised in the nurseries, a far more limited range of options was considered. Indeed, there was an overwhelming preference (reflected in the nurseries raised) for one particular species – eucalyptus.[6] There was a significant gap between patterns of usage (reflected in PRAs) and the expressed needs (or desires) which ultimately influenced decisions. Actual uses were even reinterpreted in terms of needs expressed in the light of project deliverables. Some villagers, for example, expressed strong preference for eucalyptus as timber for housing when, in fact, they had little or no experience of using the species for this purpose.

At the point of project action the needs articulated were rather different from those earlier implied. In fact, they were significantly conditioned by the *relationship* between villagers and the external agents involved, in particular by expected benefits and villager perceptions of the agency and what it was able to deliver.[7] The village nursery programme was sponsored by the State Forest Department, which was perceived as strongly favouring eucalyptus (which was indeed the most commonly planted tree under 'social forestry' programmes). The expressed need for this species was, in effect, a low risk community

strategy for securing known benefits which might have been jeopardised by some more complex and differentiated statement of preferences.[8]

Activity planning also foreshortens time horizons. Unlike other tree species, eucalyptus offered short-term returns. In a similar way, interest in soil and water conservation initially focused on its short-term wage-earning potential rather than the longer-term (and more uncertain) soil protection benefits. It is clear that in these cases farmers' ideas *about* livelihood constraints, and knowledge employed *for* action involving external agents are not the same thing. The latter in particular tends to emphasise short-term, low risk, concrete gains, and those things perceived as being immediately on offer.

One implication here is that programme and technology choices are, perhaps, rather often determined not so much by villagers' *experience* of livelihood constraints (even if the complexity of these is well articulated through the sensitive use of PRA techniques) as by extraneous factors such as those which govern technology *availability* or determine which needs, requests or demands (on the project) are seen as *legitimate* (i.e. compatible with project objectives). Projects not only have their *own* sense of what is legitimate but also, often unintentionally, determine which needs or desires are perceived by villagers (or their leaders) as legitimate. Following a KRIBP-organised visit to the local Krishi Vigyan Kendra (agriculture science centre), for example, some village women prioritised the planting of subabul and lemon – species to which they were exposed during the visit. These are important and valuable innovations, but the point is they may not be those which follow first from the more descriptive understanding of women's livelihood constraints through PRA analysis.[9] These instances are only illustrative of the more general problem of needs and their identification. They point to the patently mistaken 'myth of a value-free identification of problems' or solutions (Pottier, 1992:4). They also suggest that, despite belief to the contrary, 'insider' and 'outsider' are inseparable. Knowledge produced by people in planning is firmly attached to projects, and significantly conditioned by 'the passing presence of resource-bearing agents' (Cornwall *et al.*, 1993:32).

Common plan, divergent agendas

In order to make things happen, planning often conspires to produce a consensus expression of needs and rationalities (reasons for doing things), which conceals underlying differences of interest and motivation. These differences exist both within communities and between them and external project agencies. In the context of activity planning, not all of the many villager motivations or

aspirations for action come to light. In the first instance those which comply with the project's own interests (as understood locally) tend to be forthcoming. In the forestry example, the project's stated interest was the promotion of tree growing within the farming system. In retrospect, however, it was clear that project initiatives in this area in fact served a wide range of local material and social needs which were only indirectly related to the use of trees in the farming system. The nurseries in question provided employment and cash incomes. They also secured a link with the project for dominant families and clans and provided new opportunities for patronage within villages (as leaders distributed seedlings to clients) and, as subsequent thefts revealed, the occasion for inter-clan conflict or revenge. Indeed, the decision to plant trees in general (like other land use or crop choices) has many social meanings and in different cultural contexts may signify concerns ranging from land tenure to gender relations or resistance to state intervention (Pottier, 1991:10). The same can be said of other activities in which 'needs' represent aspirations, status ambitions or political strategies rather than responses to narrower project definitions of livelihood constraints.[10]

There are two points here: the first is that, within any project, problems, needs and priorities are social constructs (Pottier, 1992:4) which require *analytical interpretation*; the second is that behind the planning consensus lie divergent notions of need, interests and motives among different players (e.g. project staff, village leaders, migrating farmers). Some of the community's technology choices and priorities will arise from motivations which the project will question. These may lie outside the *project's* understanding of legitimate needs. Indeed, at the early stages of a project, and despite agreed action plans, there might be limited common ground between the underlying perspectives and motivations of the community, on the one hand, and the project on the other.

In several respects, villagers and the KRIBP project had divergent ideas about 'development' and different interests and motivations for participation. Thus, in the early stages villagers' problems and expressed needs were often defined by the interests of dominant groups, by popular ideas about the sort of schemes KRIBP would implement, and by a desire to maximise short-term gains from subsidies, employment and wages. In the planning of soil and water conservation work, for example, villagers were, unsurprisingly, motivated more by a desire for off-season wage employment than by the more abstract goal of overall watershed development. The expectations of villagers and the aims of the project – namely to identify options and equitably equip villagers with capacities to meet long-term natural resource development needs – were quite distinct. The project's commitment to people's *self*-help, its negative evaluation of subsidies, its desire for local contributions and cost-recovery, for example, were far from

self-evident development truths to tribal villagers accustomed to high-subsidy government schemes.[11] When it came to need identification, prioritisation and activity planning, villagers and project personnel often appeared to be in agreement, for both had a definite interest in producing a plan which would legitimise concrete action. In reality they were communicating imperfectly; each party had a set of ideas about the other and a strong agenda of its own. Where interests and motivations vary greatly they are likely to cause serious problems for participatory implementation and sustainability, evident, for example, in the collapse of physical (soil and water conservation) structures or new community management arrangements.

In practice, project fieldworkers (e.g. KRIBP Community Organisers) often play an important practical role as brokers, bridging the gap between villagers and project management and 'translating' villager desires into activities acceptable in terms of project objectives (cf. Arce and Long, 1993). Their role as 'motivators' implies bringing about change in the relationship between the project and villagers, achieving a forward movement in negotiations and a gradual convergence of understandings and interests, so that externally initiated change will be sustained through local effort and local resources. Later I suggest how this can be part of a planning strategy. However, project fieldworkers may not be the only, or even the most important, brokers. Their interaction with the community can become selective (particularly once village volunteers take on minor project functions) and their understanding of community perspectives is often mediated by key villagers (not necessarily identifiable leaders) who have acquired a decisive role in communication with the project. As a study in Badeku (Western Nigeria)[12] has demonstrated, such intermediaries, along with project workers, can be under pressure from the rest of the community to make the project succeed (and deliver) and to this end play a role in creating an 'illusion of communication between projects and their client groups' which can seriously undermine the chances of achieving objectives of equity and sustainability in implementation.

Who uses peoples' knowledge?

The role that participatory appraisal plays in planning is rarely limited to ascertaining the immediate interests of different sections of the community and turning them into planned activities. Knowledge produced with community participation also serves to advance external interests and development agendas. As already mentioned, programme planning involves negotiation, but negotiations are not between equals. Power plays an important part in participatory planning by, amongst other things, ascribing legitimacy to certain

activities/technologies and not to others. Whatever the rhetoric, the reality is that people participate in agency programmes and not the other way round.

In relation to its tribal villagers, the KRIBP project was clearly the most powerful player. However, given its participatory strategy, the project could not legitimately (or overtly) impose its development agenda. Indeed, in the early months, following initial PRAs, project staff found it difficult to manage villager demands and petitioning. In effect, villagers insisted on subsidies and schemes as a condition for attending meetings. Fieldworkers ('Community Organisers') found it impossible to generate community discussions in the absence of concrete action. It became clear at this stage that the acquisition of local knowledge was essential to the project's ability to negotiate coherent long-term resource development plans (i.e. for the project to advance its own development agenda), and to pull out of an unprogressive cycle of patronage and welfarism. On the other hand, it was also clear (and this point is taken up below) that concrete action was a necessary and important part of this learning process.

Participatory appraisal or learning is sometimes misconstrued as knowledge generation *by the people for the people.* Populist conceptions of self-determined change obscure the fact that, in the first instance, it is outsiders not locals who lack locality-specific knowledge. Moreover, outsiders use this knowledge (often generated through PRAs) in different ways from locals. Knowledge about livelihoods is often used by project staff to bargain with villagers, to negotiate compromise between short and long-term perspectives, and as a basis for argument.

A deep familiarity with local livelihoods, knowledge of political ambitions and the interests shaping initial villager demands enable project staff to challenge claims on the project, to reject as well as accept villager proposals, to negotiate subsidy levels, to allocate labour benefits (or other resources) and to identify the limits of local capacity (in management or cooperation). In KRIBP, for example, the issue of farmer contributions and wage rates for soil and water conservation could only be negotiated with farmers in the light of knowledge about patterns of seasonal migration and earnings from competing labour opportunities. Similarly, local knowledge was necessary to negotiate gender roles, credit supply, savings, cost-recovery and resource sharing arrangements.

Moreover, an understanding of social and gender differences (e.g. through wealth ranking) provides a basis for arbitrating between different or conflicting interests, or for advocating the interests of minority or inarticulate groups. In this sense, PRA knowledge is part of the project's exercise of power in *constraining* as well as enabling 'self-determined change'. The polarity set up between

extractive and participatory modes of learning obscures the fact that, once produced, information will be used in various ways by a project system, including to privilege certain subordinate perspectives within communities. People's knowledge can therefore serve to advance and legitimise the projects' own development agenda as well as to conceal villagers' private or short-term interests from the project. The fact that PRA information has been set as a new scientific standard by donor and other agencies does not, in itself, democratise power in programme decision-making. Participatory approaches and methods can even represent external interests *as* local needs, dominant interests *as* community concerns and so forth. In short, participatory approaches *can* leave planning much unchanged.

Local knowledge also provides a means to negotiate the participatory approach with actors in the project other than villagers, including funders (ODA), technical consultants, Kribhco, project management etc. PRA information on the customary role of tribal women in decision-making about household finance, livestock management, manuring and seed selection and management, for example, is necessary in arguing a case for women's central role (as policy) in the project activities of credit and input supply or crop development which would otherwise, by default, come to be controlled by men. Moreover, since knowledge-building itself is often viewed as competing with programme activity for staff time and energy, its acquisition also has to be negotiated within a project – 'Do we really need to know about that?' 'This is not a research project.' 'Villagers will lose interest with all these questions'.

THE WIDER CONTEXT OF PROJECT DECISION-MAKING

Quite apart from problems surrounding the use of 'people's knowledge' in planning systems, programme decisions are usually influenced by other interests altogether. The simplistic assumption that better access to local perspectives (even supposing this was unproblematic) will ensure that programme decisions are more participatory is, perhaps, only too obviously blind to the institutional realities of rural development. It is rare and unlikely that a programme will be designed purely on the basis of the information generated through PRA – even if this information is assumed to express enduring livelihood constraints or to represent real needs.

For one thing, a new project such as KRIBP has its own needs. Firstly, the project had to work out an acceptable compromise with villagers (in practice key village leaders) – a compromise between their hopes and expectations and project objectives – as a basis for continuing to work in the area. On a smaller

scale KRIBP project field staff (like others, Arce and Long, 1993) initially found that the acceptability of their presence in villages was largely based upon benefits they could, or promised to, deliver. They therefore felt constrained to initiate activities and provide solutions to problems as a way of meeting new social obligations, demonstrating their influence and retaining status as educated experts. Indeed, early programme choices were often shaped by the pragmatic need to manage villager petitioning while securing a social position in the project area. This may have been exaggerated by competition with peers working in other villagers or by a perception that concrete actions would be rewarded over knowledge building.[13]

Secondly, choices and programme delivery are constrained by organisational systems and time-bound procedures (financial systems, procedures for approval and sanctioning, fund disbursement, etc.). There are often pressures for a local planning system to be sensitive to these realities as well as to villagers' livelihood constraints. For example, fieldworkers may give greater priority to familiar, conventional programmes over innovative initiatives which take longer to be granted management approval. Observable and preferably quantifiable indicators of achievement are required at intervals. New concepts of process and the abolition of targets have not obviated these institutionally-grounded needs. Project managers still face other pressures to get things done, and other measures of efficiency than those provided by measures of participation. Efficiency in planning, for example, may become measured in terms of the extent of uptake of physical activities or new technologies rather than in terms of the quality of participation. This is especially so during programme implementation. There may then be a tendency for a project's work to cluster around a fixed set of standard interventions, limiting the potential creativity of participatory problem solving.

Fieldworkers develop their own operational interpretations of both villager needs and project goals. They also develop their own strategies of intervention which are sensitive to the managerial and institutional environment as well as the village contexts in which they work.[14] Moreover, as villagers adapt their expression of needs to reflect a project's administrative realities – requesting only what they know is most easily deliverable – these institutional constraints become self-repeating, built into community perspectives and therefore perfectly 'participatory'. There are some serious problems with popular ideas of the use of 'indigenous knowledge' in planning (see Hobart, 1993), not least of which is the failure to appreciate this 'bureaucratic construction' of local knowledge, needs (etc.) in the context of new, participatory as well as older, bureaucratic planning approaches.

Projects also have to meet wider organisational expectations concerning the amount and type of activity. These are, in turn, determined by the broader goals of the implementing agency (in the case of KRIBP, a national fertiliser cooperative). Combined with pressure from villagers, it is not surprising that an initial project-wide anxiety to keep up momentum resulted in an acceleration of activities and commitments before a real understanding and the participation of the wider community in defining needs were achieved. Related to this was the fact that villagers were initially able to bargain for programmes or subsidies which were not directly justified by livelihood constraints emerging from PRA research.

Thirdly, priorities are influenced by the project's wider institutional setting. Projects such as KRIBP have to establish links with a range of other agencies, government departments, research centres, collaborating NGOs, donors and their consultants. Each of these has its own development agenda which both provides opportunities and gives external shape to programme choices. Programmes of tree nurseries, crop trials, seed loans etc., had their origin, at least in part, in the development of these institutional contacts. Of course, watershed and forestry development meet other institutionally defined (national and international) environmental objectives. More generally, participatory planning methods are employed in projects – especially donor supported ones – which form part of wider coalitions contending for influence within national or international policy arenas (cf. Biggs, 1995). A project such as KRIBP may, in fact, participate in several coalitions pursuing various different objectives, for example increases in agricultural production, improved environmental protection, more effective poverty reduction and greater gender equality.

If projects end up ventriloquising villagers' needs it is not only, or primarily, because artful and risk-averse villagers ask for what they think they will get. It is also because development agencies are able to project their own various institutional needs onto rural communities. This institutional interpretation of people's livelihood needs is an important dimension of the social production of participatory rural development. Participatory approaches to development strongly supported by donors, in fact, place enormous demands on established organisations such as KRIBP, which still have to satisfy other (stated or unstated) criteria for success.

PARTICIPATORY IMPLEMENTATION?

The value of participatory planning in natural resources development lies in the improvements in resulting programme implementation which it can bring.

However, it is not uncommon to hear that while planning within rural development organisations is influenced by a new participatory culture, implementation witnesses a reassertion of organisational norms and procedures (Fernandez, 1993:65). People's perspectives then fail to influence important decisions, and local people are, in practice, relegated to the roles of low status project employee, foreman, beneficiary or wage labourer. Women may be visible as labourers but are often under-represented or absent during decision-making, which becomes more centralised (at the project office or in male-dominated village meetings). The social hierarchies challenged in participatory planning are thus reasserted at implementation. For example, one KRIBP Community Organiser pointed out that when he began to pay wages for soil and water conservation work being implemented in villages, the honorary suffix to his name used by tribal villagers changed from *bhai* (brother) to *sahib* (sir). Handling money confers power and where male staff took on the role of wage payments, gender inequalities within the field team were seen to be reinforced.

A scenario common to many rural development projects may be the following: under pressure to get things done, the delicate negotiation of participation – agreements with villagers over responsibilities, contributions, decision-making – begins to break down. As project staff increasingly take over the organisation of activities, villagers withdraw from new roles of researcher, planner or decision-maker, and retreat into the more familiar role of passive beneficiary. At this point they begin strategising to maximise short-term benefits from wages, subsidies etc. Sometimes, this also occurs because sufficient time has not been invested to equip villagers with the skills required for the new role (managerial or organisational, or skills in record- or book-keeping), or because structures and procedures (groups, committees etc.) have been imposed from outside. In agricultural research too, a weak link is reported between initial PRA-based participatory diagnosis and the subsequent research programmes which follow more conventional sets of experiments (Okali, Sumberg and Farrington, 1994:104).

In early, 1994, KRIBP implemented its first major programme of soil and water conservation. In most respects the programme was successful and, in technical terms, performance was acceptable. However, judged by the criterion of the extent of people's *control* over activities, there were problems: farmer groups formed to implement the work broke down;[15] compromises on bund alignment were worked out between individual farmers and the project rather than through group decisions; farmers sought individual advantages of field boundary marking; farmers prioritised wage earnings over quality of work and the village volunteers responsible for laying contours felt accountable to the project rather than to the villagers (Mosse *et al.*, forthcoming). These difficulties are

illustrative. They do not point to a lack of technical skill, nor of farming system knowledge, nor mistaken prioritisation. They suggest, rather, a relative weakness in the farmers' commitment to the programme and a low level of involvement in its management. This, of course, had important implications for sustaining these interventions in the future.

The quality of soil and water conservation work in KRIBP improved markedly in the second year (1995) by which time farmers had experienced the benefits of the previous year's work and were prepared to take a longer-term view, and village volunteers were better trained. The above-mentioned difficulties in sustaining participation throughout implementation, for which there are many reasons, are not, however, uncommon (e.g. Fernandez, 1994). As mentioned already, pressures set up by financial or physical targets may divert energies away from sustaining participation (*ibid*:65-7). Also, as Fernandez points out, bureaucracies tend to differentiate planning from implementation – the former has a higher status than the latter. Senior officers are exposed to PRA exercises as a state-of-the-art prestige activity. Junior implementing and supervisory staff face the more challenging task of putting people's management into practice (*ibid*). There may be few rewards for success. Indeed, fostering people's (and especially women's) involvement is time-consuming, slows progress towards targets (against which performance is measured), and exposes field staff to undesired monitoring and criticism from villagers (*ibid*).

Some such difficulties may have occurred in KRIBP, but the experience of this project suggests another problem. The project was, in fact, highly consultative in developing its programme and yet was still unable to ensure that control of the details of planning remained with farmers themselves rather than with project staff (Mosse *et al.*, forthcoming). This had obvious implications for implementation. In part this reflected the low level of skills acquired by farmers (in planning, in keeping records of works etc.) up to that point. However, the problem was not centrally one of methods or the skills of farmers or project staff. The staff were proficient in the use of PRA, and farmers were critical in the generation of plans at all stages. Rather, the reason why control of planning was so much in the hands of staff was that the project had not identified appropriate social groups, or viable sets of interests with which to work; it had not adequately embedded the planning process in the local social networks which would make the acquisition and retention of power in planning possible. In other words, the success of the participatory planning strategy was limited, initially, by the fact that the processes involved (PRA, problem analysis, prioritisation, negotiating workplans etc.) were insufficiently located in social groups. Such group contexts were needed to sustain dialogue between project workers and farmers beyond initial needs assessments.[16]

While the early experience of the project showed that social relations of dominance and gender might limit effective participation by controlling/muting the articulation of information and priorities (Mosse, 1994), later experience suggested that the absence of a coherent social group also presented an obstacle to the translation of people's concerns into programme action. Both too little, and the wrong type of social control could inhibit participation in planning. Where PRA (etc.) as a planning tool is not grounded socially in a coherent set of social ties or common interests, it rapidly becomes little more than a project activity. Planning knowledge is extracted rather than being embedded socially in ways that make its local retention and use possible.

The tribal villages in the KRIBP project area are often scattered and bring together wide-ranging interests and priorities. There is very little possibility of the village *as a whole* establishing an agreed, coherent plan of action, certainly not within any time-frame likely to be agreeable to externally-funded projects, or without compromising the project's equity and gender objectives by being narrowly focused on the interests of powerful leaders. As a consequence, it is often project staff who take a leading role in analysing, prioritising, and developing a coherent 'Village Work Plan'. Perhaps PRA has, in practice, reverted to being RRA (rapid but not participatory). The consequences of this are then evident in programme implementation, for example: the collapse of group-based action; the need for external support to sustain activity (soil and water conservation/forestry with wages) and the emergence of managerial dependence on the development agency.

In a variety of ways I have been making the point that planning processes – including the generation and use of local knowledge in planning – are situated socially. Needs and priorities are shaped by relationships within the community and between it and the project. Local knowledge is an instrument in bargaining development plans and changing these relationships. Programme decisions are influenced by the need to maintain local and wider institutional relationships and effective planning and implementation depends upon its location within an effective set of social relations.

There are several reasons why it is important to understand the social dynamics of planning and choice-making as they take place. It is claimed that participation in planning improves project design by more closely orienting it towards meeting people's needs. This claim can only be substantiated if we know more about how needs are socially constructed. Vague notions of popular local opinion often obscure divergent perspectives and motivations both within communities and between them and project agencies. The concern with issues of equity and gender means that it is important to understand patterns of

exclusion and subordination in planning which may affect the distribution of opportunities and benefits arising from external interventions. Also, the way planning decisions are made has implications for the way in which programmes are implemented and sustained in the longer term. If, for example, expressed needs or technology preferences are, in reality, expressions of the relationship between villagers and programme agencies (conditioned by expectations or hopes of subsidies, wages etc.), rather than experienced problems, few of the supposed benefits of participatory planning (e.g. commitment from meeting real needs) are likely to be forthcoming. Indeed, 'participatory' strategies might be rather less effective at identifying needs than market mechanisms (especially if subsidised inputs are involved).

If a project is going to foster long-term local commitment to programme activities, the social basis of that continuity has to be identified and tested. This means some appraisal of local power relations and identification of appropriate 'spaces' or 'levels' for planning and action (and the social forms – groups – in which these can take place) must occur. This social analysis is, arguably, as fundamental to sustainable development as the expression of people's knowledge and needs through PRA.

The KRIBP project has worked with two responses to the hazards and distortions evident in people's planning. The first has been to set up a planning framework which avoids making a simplistic link between initial PRA outputs and programme action. It attempts to identify, minimise and correct bias, and to improve the involvement of all sections of a village in a process of problem analysis and prioritisation. The second response (and current focus) is to identify and strengthen viable social groups as the basis for planning, implementation and sustainable management of local resources. Among other things, this has involved finding methods of understanding and monitoring social processes.

A FRAMEWORK FOR PARTICIPATORY PLANNING

The KRIBP framework for village-level planning has been described in more detail elsewhere (Sodhi *et al.*, 1993; Mosse *et al.*, 1994). In the first place, the project accepted that problems, needs and priorities are social constructs which require analytical interpretation. It then formalised this interpretation as a step within an ordered planning sequence. Through what is termed 'community problem analysis' (CPA),[17] project staff critically review expressed needs and other information arising from initial PRAs in terms of how problems were articulated (by whom, in what context) and the extent to which problems are important, shared and solvable within the framework of the project. They also

consider at this point whether the project has enough information to decide upon this. In addition, CPA identifies the difference or gap between project objectives and community objectives, and between common and competing objectives within the community. This process tends to be an analytical and interpretive exercise for the project, based on a gradual understanding of the social situation in project villages (often through participant observation). It must also be matched by focused efforts to develop villagers' own awareness, skills and confidence in problem analysis and planning. Through informal discussion, exposure visits and focused PRA work, villagers (in small groups) are encouraged to move away from a focus on of desired solutions towards an analysis of problems. The intention is to identify the inter-relatedness of problems, to look for causal links (separating symptoms from causes) and to find alternative types of solution (and here the project's wider review of technical options plays an important role).

Subsequent planning stages focus on prioritising and appraising different options and sequencing and phasing activities (e.g. in terms of social or technical complexity). Often more important than technical appraisal is gender and social appraisal. This includes looking at issues such as which particular actions or activities are managerially and politically possible at a given stage, who would be the winners and losers, when and in what order should things be done and what training inputs are needed from the project? The product of planning is a negotiated 'village' workplan (although it should be built up from more localised small group based planning, see below). In principle this is a joint exercise between project staff and villagers. The details of implementation modalities, roles and responsibilities, organisation of labour, cost-recovery and so forth are then worked out in smaller planning groups (see below).

In its wider purpose, the KRIBP planning framework aims at a convergence of project and villager understandings and motivations for action. This, of course, means recognition of divergent agendas and the need to negotiate realistic compromises. Educational inputs (not just training, but experimental activities, trials, visits etc.) both help the project to put across its point of view and give villagers new confidence in the benefits which follow from linking their long-term interests to project-supported work (for example soil and water conservation or tree-planting activities). In this way they help effect a shift away from a focus on immediate wage employment benefits, which is itself a pre-condition for beginning negotiations on farmers' contributions, wage rates, the payment of volunteer specialists and cost recovery.

In KRIBP, small-scale entry-point activities (e.g. health camps, pump repairs, revival of village schools, exposure visits etc.) were initiated in response to

immediately articulated community needs. These admittedly arose in the context of mutual project-community uncertainty. However, they were quickly turned to advantage in providing an important means by which the project was able gradually to challenge misplaced expectations and explain and negotiate its participatory approach and poverty focus. This helped facilitate, for example, the gradual withdrawal of subsidies, local mobilisation of resources (e.g. for schools or health camps), small-scale cooperative action (e.g. agreements on water sharing arrangements from repaired wells), and the participation of women and the poorest households. Bargaining participation with villagers through small-scale activities, rather than simply explaining project intentions or asking about community needs, proved important as a means of preparation for joint planning of larger, more complex activities such as soil and water conservation, or forest protection. It would be self-deluding to deny the importance of relations of power in the project's orchestration of participation.

THE SOCIAL CONDITIONS FOR PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING

To be useful the steps in planning – analysis of problems, search for solutions, prioritisation – need to take place in an appropriate social context. While certain resource allocation questions have to be resolved at the level of the village, in KRIBP it has been necessary to abandon ideas of the 'consensual village' as the principal domain for collective decision-making and action. Early PRA experience had shown how public systems of decision-making could exclude or silence the opinions of women and marginal social groups. Furthermore, the public village meetings which had been very much part of the project's initial interaction with villagers did not permit broader discussion or analysis of problems. Instead they tended inevitably towards a narrow focus on activity planning in which decisions affecting the whole village were taken by a few. A shift in the social locus of planning to small neighbourhood meetings broadened not only participation, but also the scope of discussions. In village-wide meetings the presence of women was explained only by specific social factors such as the high social status of their families or the fact that they were in their natal village. In neighbourhood meetings women's participation was less unusual. Here it was possible to analyse problems and identify different options for action. Also new (often younger) leaders could emerge.

Thus the project now aims to identify and work with pre-existing small cooperative social units. These are units (including informal networks of women) within which social and economic exchange and networks of mutual assistance operate. They are willing to plan and undertake action to meet collective needs and their functioning is not determined by manipulative

patronage relations. In this tribal area, such viable planning contexts are not, for a number of reasons, 'village communities'. Rather they are small, neighbourhood, gender or interest-specific groups, often defined by kinship ties and areas of residence. Indeed hamlets in these villages tend to correspond to agnatic groups (male kin groups) (Mosse and Mehta 1993).

Apart from the ties of kinship and residence, there are other existing networks of mutual obligation such as *chanda* (an exchange system through which households raise funds for marriage payments etc.) or *halmo* (networks employed for exchange labour). The project has been cautious about creating new groups or promoting higher levels of cooperation than appear to be socially realistic. It is the existing solidarity (whether based on residence, kinship or gender etc.), common purpose and skill of the small, social group which are so important to the initiation of sustainable activities. So, in a reversal of its original design, the project now aims to make the identification and strengthening of social groups the starting point for planning, instead of the development of functional activity groups on the basis of planned programmes.[18]

The identification of appropriate groups may not be straightforward. In KRIBP it has depended upon the project's acquisition of skills in social analysis (see Mosse, 1995b). Entry into project villages is often through local leaders, but Community Organisers had to find ways of evading manipulative leaders. They also had to avoid the problems of working with groups of poor people who were *clients* of village leaders. In fact the project was able to use its early entry-point activities to identify the social conditions for effective participation. Through observations about patterns of participation and the success, or partial collapse of initiatives it was possible to learn where best to initiate planning and activity. A recurring component of success in early project activity, for example, was the ability to bypass but not confront unsupportive leaders, and yet obtain the authoritative backing which new ventures in these villages required. Finding the right 'spaces' in which to work was often a matter of identifying an appropriate combination of authority and yet independence from patronage. Sometimes this was defined in kinship terms, as for example in one village where change, blocked by the headman, was introduced through a group of younger men led by the headman's nephew (brother's son).

Early project work was often most effective where, as in this case, it left formal structures (relations between senior men) intact, and found informal contexts for innovation. In some cases this meant shifting attention from the older to the younger generation, from central to marginal hamlets, or working with independent clans or returned migrants with whom there was relatively more room to manoeuvre. From the community's point of view such an approach

entailed fewer risks; new ventures could be tried without posing the threat of disrupting more formal social relations and leaders could observe and change their attitude to the project without losing face. Such instances point to the need for responsiveness to local social contexts, critical observation and constant feedback to identify social groups to plan and sustain development activity. In a separate paper I have discussed the methods for the sort of reflexive process monitoring which might be required for this (Mosse, 1995b).

KRIBP's emphasis on groups and finding the right social context for participatory planning is neither unique nor new. The Karnataka-based NGO Myrada, for example, has convincingly argued from wide experience in south India that the existence of cohesive affinity groups is a necessary basis for effective management of watershed development (Fernandez, 1995). Indeed, the importance of workable social groups as the basis for sustainable action of various kinds is well known. Initiatives in several sectors suggest the appraisal of group performance, rather than economic activity, as the most important indicator of long-term success, even in areas which are directly economically-related (such as savings and credit schemes) (Fernandez, 1992). Group approaches also offer better opportunities for building on insights on social differences gathered during PRA, for example in the area of gender relations. If separate women's programmes are established there is a risk that women will be tied to marginal activities. Myrada avoids this by promoting women's groups (formed around savings and credit) as the sole institutions through which programmes are planned and implemented (pers. obs.).

The identification of cohesive groups, however, is not in itself sufficient to ensure effective participation in planning. The degree to which existing social networks can take on new planning roles will vary with context. Groups must be equipped with skills and understanding to enable them to develop and take ownership of a phased workplan of activities. Initiating complex activities before groups have acquired the necessary skills and understanding will only throw the management of planning and implementation back onto the external agency. Also, group performance criteria have to be developed to judge the ability and readiness of groups to take responsibility for undertaking large-scale programmes (e.g. of watershed development). There may be several ways of building up group skills for natural resource planning, including non-formal education and training, the implementation of pilot activities, group management of small assets (e.g. pumps or deepened wells), or the mobilisation of resources for small collective activities. One of the most promising approaches – successfully used by the NGO Myrada in large-scale watershed development work and now a part of KRIBP strategy – is the promotion of small savings and credit management groups, which are then equipped to participate in other

resource management activities (forest management, soil/water conservation, irrigation management).

Small groups can take part in larger-scale activities in conjunction with other groups through apical structures at, for example, the village or 'watershed' level. In relation to watershed development, Myrada's 'experience has shown that if [small savings and credit groups] acquire the skills necessary to run their meetings, resolve conflicts and decide priorities, the [larger] Watershed Associations which emerge are more effective and take control of the process much quicker, enabling the NGO to withdraw and move to other areas' (Fernandez, 1993:39).[19]

The integration of different and perhaps conflicting interests at a higher level does, of course, present new problems. These are particularly evident in the case of common resources (wasteland, irrigation, forest resources). Small-group planning helps identify the different interests involved (e.g. between head and tail reach farmers, who may also belong to different castes, in an irrigation command; between herders, artisans and landless fuelwood sellers using a forest resource). It also provides a means more equitably to negotiate compromise. However, this is neither simple nor conflict-free, especially where 'traditional' social systems of resource use, which integrate different users on an unequal basis and give privileged access to socially dominant groups, are challenged. Elsewhere, I have discussed examples of the sorts of problems involved in the 'development' of indigenous irrigation systems having these characteristics (Mosse, 1995a, forthcoming). The presence and action of project outsiders often plays a crucial role in determining shifts in the local balance of power on which negotiations concerning common resource management depend.

The findings from the KRIBP project, namely that some of the social constraints to participatory planning can be managed (a) by establishing a clear framework for problem analysis and planning; and (b) by identifying appropriate local contexts (groups) in which planning can take place, seem to be fairly generally applicable. Certainly self-help groups are rapidly gaining a prominent place in strategies for participatory farming systems or watershed development elsewhere. Group action has even become *definitive* of more advanced levels of participation in certain typologies of participation (Pretty, 1994, cited in Pimbert and Pretty, 1995:26).

Groups may, in time, become another panacea. Like other universal solutions they entail certain risks. Firstly, as top-down impositions, groups may serve project rather than local needs. The strong emphasis within KRIBP on organisation around *existing* social groups arises from awareness of the powerful

ways in which agencies are able to burden communities with exogenous structures, procedures or offices. These often serve to meet a project's need for orderliness, record-keeping or reporting, or to reconceive people's institutions in bureaucratic terms – a tendency which has often spelt death for indigenous institutions and undermined their ability to function in rural resource management (Mosse n.d.). Secondly, groups may disguise local forms of dominance and control. The important question will be, how can such self-help groups be defined so as to avoid these risks? For this, experience from KRIBP suggests that, beyond skills in PRA, projects require skills in social analysis to understand power relations and identify appropriate social contexts for planning.[20] In addition, projects need a broad repertoire of educational, animation and non-formal education skills to develop (though not impose) effective groups and equip them with capabilities to take on new responsibilities. Traditions of animation and non-formal education are well developed, the challenge is for them to be incorporated into PRA-based methodologies.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The primary argument of this paper has been that rural development programmes which classify themselves as 'participatory' need to focus critical attention on the social conditions for effective participation (whether in research, planning or action) in given settings. I suggest that this is at least as important as acquiring a set of participatory planning techniques, and, indeed, is a pre-requisite for their effective use.

The paper has described the complex ways in which decisions are made in programme planning, and has proposed the need to identify appropriate contexts for participatory planning or group development. In a separate paper (Mosse, 1995b) I discuss the types of social research necessary to achieve this and point out the limitations of certain rapid participatory appraisal techniques in analysing dominance, factional conflicts, patronage relations, leadership struggles and other power relations which determine the social conditions of participation itself. Indeed, in KRIBP, critical reflection on project-initiated action has generated an understanding about power relationships which is generally not easily achievable through conventional interview methods or rapid appraisal techniques (RRA/PRA). In order to institutionalise this, the project is evolving a form of participant observation and process monitoring which draws on the practical difficúlties and frustrations experienced by fieldworkers charged with promoting project activities.

This paper has indicated several social and institutional constraints to participation in planning. These are potentially manageable within a carefully structured planning process. This has to ensure rapid information feedback, the adaptation of fieldwork in the light of social information and the identification, testing and development of viable groups for planning and implementation. This is possible within, although not always achieved by, adequately resourced NGOs which have a firm mandate to deal with the social and institutional aspects of natural resources development and also management cultures supportive of learning process approaches. But the question raised at the outset remains – how replicable are such participatory approaches within more bureaucratic or technocratic institutional environments?

This is an important question, not least because NGO approaches within India have come increasingly to shape government guidelines in rural development. Arguably, within India, influencing the strategy of organisations of the centre (e.g. government departments) has been a particularly effective approach to 'scaling-up' the impact of NGOs (Edwards and Hulme, 1992; Pretty and Scoones, 1995:162-3). For a variety of reasons, including donor pressure and macro-economic policy shifts towards public sector cost-cutting, the government of India has become highly responsive to NGO policy inputs. The national guidelines for watershed development recently issued by the Government of India, Ministry of Rural Development (GoI, 1994), for example, not only insist on the use of PRA in planning but also emphasise training for community organisation and the formation of self-help groups organised around savings and credit. The income-generating activities of such groups can then provide financial resources for the self-sustaining development of watershed resources. These guidelines have been substantially shaped by, and have adopted models from, rural development NGOs.

It would be premature to make judgements about the extent to which these models are implementable within government systems on a large-scale. However, a strong policy emphasis on the leading role to be played by NGOs (rather than government agencies) in programme implementation indicates concern about institutional constraints within public systems among government planners themselves. Thus, the watershed development guidelines imply that planning and coordination and community organisation should, as far as possible and as a priority, be through non-governmental Project Implementation Agencies (KRIBP, for one).

The 'guidelines' are undoubtedly an example of the successful transfer of NGO participatory approaches into the public system. However, insofar as the models and methods that are transferred do not also consider the institutional

environments necessary for their operation, their overall impact may be limited. The worry here is that the success of NGO policy influence in shaping programme design will result in guidelines which *only NGOs* can fully implement. NGO lobbying, then, sets up a loop which leaves the wider system largely unchallenged. NGOs may have succeeded in placing government programmes in their hands (and with this, accepted the need to scale-up their own activity under government funding) but will not have seriously addressed the wider institutional constraints to an adaptive and people-oriented planning system. If a focus on methods for promoting farmer participation has outstripped our 'understanding of how that participation can be institutionalised' (Farrington and Bebbington, 1993:xvii) this is not principally a question of local institution building, but of wider organisational politics.

There can be no doubt that changing institutions to fit community-based models of development is a daunting task (and certainly not one that can be discussed here). But, there is perhaps equally a need to re-examine participatory models in the light of an analysis of public systems. A first step is to differentiate participatory approaches in terms of the institutional conditions necessary to support them. Clearly, some types of participation are more replicable across institutions than others. The approach to crop varietal trials in KRIBP which is participatory but not community-based, for example, is more readily transferable across institutions than group-based approaches. Here, through farmer-managed participatory research (FAMPAR) an upland rice variety (Kalinga III), not officially released in the project area, was identified and judged by farmer-relevant parameters (including taste, cooking quality, market value etc.) to out-perform local varieties. In contrast 'all of the released material recommended for these states performed poorly in the low-input, low-fertility, drought stressed environments of the project area' (Joshi and Witcombe, 1995:7). The results of this farmer-managed participatory crop research (FAMPAR) are less likely to be conditioned by local power relations (although the distribution of the limited supply of high performing cultivars which it identifies may well be) and there is no particular need to locate research in social groups.

Participation in the FAMPAR trials involves establishing a consultative mechanism, in this case used for crop research. It is as *consultative mechanisms* that participatory approaches (including PRA methods) are currently being adopted in public systems, where planning time-frames are short. Participatory approaches aimed at *capacity building*, at sustaining local processes of innovation (Hinchcliffe *et al.*, 1995:14), and at local resource mobilisation and management through group development, non-formal education etc., demand time-scales and an intensity of work which will be hard to accommodate in public systems. They are therefore unlikely to be suitable for replication on the

same scale as participatory technology development programmes.[21] If this is indeed the case, then policy discourses such as those concerning watershed management or irrigation transfer (to farmers), which are also strongly influenced by donor agendas are generating expectations out of line with the reality of implementation. This may not be a new situation, but it is one which will either lead to programme failure, or to participation becoming 'make believe'.

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ENDNOTES

1. I recognise that there is probably as much variability within as between the categories 'NGO' and 'public sector'. These are 'ideal type' categories; a shorthand for opposing types of institutional environment used within development discourse in India today.

2. The great gap between intellectual discussion of participation and field reality is the focus of recent work on farmer participatory research (Okali, Sumberg and Farrington, 1994). This gap arises as much from the political and ethical problems of producing analytical descriptions of development practice in terms new theoretical frameworks as from any failure to put participatory rhetoric into practice.

3. See an earlier paper (Mosse, 1994) for discussion of this PRA experience.

4. Relatively neglected until recently, the importance of relations of power in participatory development is the subject of a recent collection, Wright and Nelson, 1995, see Mosse, 1995a.

5. In one women's group 37 species were ranked in relation to eight different uses (Mehta *et al.*, forthcoming).

6. Of course the earlier PRAs were not free of omission or selectivity. Fruit trees, for example emerged as an important priority but were not mentioned during the initial tree matrix exercises (Bezkorowajnyj *et al.*, 1994).

7. This relationship has changed over time, and correspondingly there has been a change in the proportion of eucalyptus seedlings raised. This has fallen to 50-60% in some well-established project villages.

8. There is of course no uniformity of needs. A strong bias towards eucalyptus might meet some people's needs, but not others. Some people have the power and authority to influence the collective decision in favour of options which better meet their particular needs (cf. Mosse, 1994). Women, typically, lack this power, and in this case their unarticulated experience of burdensome labour and time devoted to the collection of fuel and fodder (for which eucalyptus is not a first choice) or the economic and nutritional importance of forest species and the collection of non-timber forest produce did not overly shape programme choices, even though they clearly featured in separate informal PRAs.

9. Widening choices is always a good thing, and there is no suggestion that farmers are not able to judge for themselves the usefulness of particular innovations once they have been tested. Indeed, one of KRIBP's most successful programmes to date is the farmer participatory crop research in which farmers test and select different crop varieties currently unavailable locally (see Joshi and Witcombe, 1995, see below).

10. Certain development deliverables, for example the ownership of a bio-gas plant, may meet needs which are primarily social ambitions (Anil Bhatt, personal communication).

11. There is now considerable evidence to show that poor farmers take the long view when it comes to tree-planting and investments in land development (cf. Chambers *et al.*, 1989), and ample proof of this locally in the form of protected woodlots, soil and water conservation structures and so forth. This important reappraisal of farmer perspectives is, however, to be distinguished from their equally pervasive view of external initiatives as opportunities to maximise short-term gains. Farmers, in many situations, perceive that they are not the only party making tactical moves in this direction (agents, contractors etc. are others) and they are naturally sceptical about the possibilities of reaping long-term benefits from tying personal interests to officially promoted schemes. This is an institutional reality which any participatory programme has to accept and deal with. Indeed, poor farmers are more acutely aware than many development professionals of the paradox of externally assisted self-help (Hulme and Turner, 1990:197). But, there are also other factors of risk and uncertainty, including those of uncertain tenure (of trees or land) and opportunity costs of seasonal migration, which may conspire to bring forward time horizons.

12. Study by Peter Ay, reported in Hoffman (1990) and cited in Okali, Sumberg and Farrington (1994:106).

13. The way in which gender relations ensure that women fieldworkers are placed at distinct disadvantage in generating information from women and presenting this in terms of readily implementable programmes is properly the subject of separate discussion (cf. Mehta, forthcoming).

14. Arce and Long (1993) examine in some detail the way in which a Mexican fieldworker (a *tecnico* or technical agronomist) devises his own strategies of intervention in both the village and official administrative arenas, which enable him to retain legitimacy in the eyes of both villagers and bureaucrats.

15. The fact that arrangements for collective labour and payments also fell apart because women found them inconvenient, pointed to the relatively limited involvement of women in planning.

16. For a comparable issue within farmer participatory research see Okali, Sumberg and Farrington, 1994:104).

17. The approach to 'community problem analysis' (CPA) draws on Davis Case (1989).

18. The context of institutional development and the issues involved and linkages required for natural resources management in the tribal area in which the KRIBP project is situated are discussed in detail in Mosse and Bhatt (forthcoming).

19. Self-help savings and credit groups are now a widely-employed strategy used to encourage the mobilisation of local resources and development of management skills in agriculture.

20. Even in functionally-specific 'user groups' – e.g. irrigation water or forest user groups – social analysis is important. The operation of such groups is, in practice, determined by the social relationships between their members as much as by their economic relationship to a particular resource.

21. These participatory approaches also focus on increasing effective demand on public service providers (e.g. agricultural extension, forest, rural development or public works providers). It is arguable that the organisation of the means to petition for and acquire development resources from the state cannot, and should not, derive from the government system itself, but from private and voluntary action.

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