

POLICY ARENA

PARTICIPATORY ACTION LEARNING SYSTEM (PALS): IMPACT ASSESSMENT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT AND GRASSROOTS-BASED ADVOCACY IN ANANDI, INDIA

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Abstract: This paper discusses preliminary experiences of ANANDI in developing a new methodology: Participatory Action Learning System (PALS). Building on both new and established participatory tools and processes, the aim is to develop participatory, integrated and sustainable information systems for local level empowerment, grassroots-based advocacy and programme-level decision-making. Individuals and groups are supported to fulfil their own information needs. The individual and group level processes are scaled-up and given additional strength through networking events where information is exchanged and consolidated for lobbying and advocacy. Although the methodology is still very much in the development phase, the quantitative and qualitative information has been rich and probably more reliable than surveys conducted under the same conditions. The PALS training process has already led to changes in peoples' lives, group functioning and staff/participant relationships. It has facilitated discussion of complex and sensitive issues like empowerment, domestic violence, and wider institutional impacts and strategies. Copyright © 2005 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

1 INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s there has been increasingly widespread use of participatory diagram methods for collecting information. It is now generally accepted that poor people can provide complex analyses of their situation and problems and can propose realisable ways forward. Participatory diagram methods are often used in programme monitoring,

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planning and advocacy interventions. These methods can be made both rigorous and cost-effective.¹ However, despite claims of empowerment, participatory monitoring and evaluation may amount to little more than one-off extractive exercises which use participants as unpaid data-collectors and from which they benefit little. Participatory consultations may be ignored in decision-making and aggregate findings are rarely fed back to participants to justify planning decisions. Even in advocacy programmes the process of participatory policy analysis may be pre-determined by programmes and stops once a programme has collected sufficient information to support its case.

This paper discusses the experience of a new and innovative approach: PALS (Participatory Action Learning System) which builds on both new and established participatory methods to develop information systems for local level empowerment, grassroots-based advocacy and programme-level decision-making. In PALS individuals and groups are supported to identify *their* own information needs and use participatory diagram methods to collect information which is useful to them. The diagrams and discussions are then recorded in individual and group diaries to make these an accurate reflection and accessible record of decisions, activities and achievements. The diagrams are revisited and/or redrawn at intervals to track changes/benefits/worrying trends over time. The individual and group level processes are scaled-up and given additional strength through the use of networking events and fairs where information is exchanged and consolidated for lobbying and advocacy. These events also provide a forum for more systematic programme-level aggregation of information, ideas and participatory planning.

PALS is currently still in its development phase where tools and methods are continually and rapidly evolving and being refined for different purposes in different organizations.² The paper examines the experience and wider methodological implications of innovations in one organization at the forefront in developing PALS: ANANDI in India.³ ANANDI is currently further developing the tools to increase their usefulness and benefits for participants, and the rigour and usability of the information in advocacy and impact assessment. Considerable challenges exist, and will probably continue to be inherent in any methodology which attempts to subvert existing power hierarchies. Nevertheless the very positive experience of ANANDI, and also of other organizations where PALS is being piloted in Uganda, Pakistan and Sudan indicates that if given similar levels of support as conventional 'top-down extractive' approaches, this methodology has considerable potential as a reliable, cost-effective and above-all empowering methodology for sustainable and participatory strategic learning at community, programme and ultimately macro-levels.

2 ANANDI'S AREA NETWORKING 'MELAS': INNOVATION IN GRASSROOTS-BASED ADVOCACY

ANANDI (Area Networking and Development Initiatives) is a non-political secular NGO in India working with women's organizations and partner NGOs to promote an empowerment approach and gender mainstreaming throughout all development activity. Since 1995

¹See Barahona and Levy, 2002; Chambers, 2003; and Mayoux and Chambers, 2005 this volume.

²For more details of PALS in international perspective, links and updates see www.lindaswebs.info [Accessed February 2005].

³4 Discussion focuses on ANANDI's own lateral learning methodologies and introduction of PALS during a 5-day Rapid Participatory Review by Mayoux in December 2003. This is supplemented by further learnings from a second 5-day visit by L. Mayoux in September 2004 to pilot individual and group-level tools to investigate intra-household relations and by discussion of developments elsewhere (See text below).

it has worked with the poorest women of the tribal and other marginalized communities in Saurashtra and Panchmahals-Dahod Districts of Gujarat State to help them organize themselves for collective action and gender advocacy. It manages a large field programme to facilitate and support women's groups or 'mahila mandals' and form self-managed women's federations or 'sangathans' addressing locally defined issues including health, food security, livelihoods, domestic and communal violence, savings and credit, post-earthquake rehabilitation and housing and capacity building of women panchayat members. In Panchmahals-Dahod over 3000 women are members of these sangathans, which now plan and manage some of their own activities. In Saurashtra this work is done through partner NGOs. ANANDI is an active member of the various state NGO networks of women, environment and health⁴ and has conducted many research studies on gender equity issues within different arenas/fields.

As part of their commitment to participatory development, and particularly to a more grassroots-based form of advocacy on gender and poverty issues, ANANDI has been facilitating area networking through holding of area 'mela' events or fairs. These networking events were well-established in ANANDI prior to their introduction to PALS (Dand, 2002) and have become an important element of the PALS process as ANANDI shares its experience with other NGOs elsewhere. ANANDI's melas aim to provide a forum for giving positive value to women's capabilities, sharing experiences and identifying common concerns and interests. They also provide a forum for identifying new roles, developing innovations in strategies for securing women's basic human rights and initiating a process of horizontal networking and solidarity for collective action between women's groups from different areas. Elected officials, government and mainstream institutions are also invited to encourage dialogue and discussion of concrete steps forward. Importantly they provide an environment where women are free from the constraints of family and village and can freely express themselves.

The idea of women's fairs was not new in India. Handicraft fairs at local, state and national levels are often attended by women's organisations to sell their products. However the idea of using a 'mela' event to form the focus for networking between women's groups in order to strategically address gender issues was somewhat new. In Gujarat the first experience was a state wide 'mela' in 1997 for elected women and leaders. ANANDI's first mela was held in Rajkot over a period of three days from 4th to 6th December 1999. The 16 collaborating organisations brought together over 600 women leaders from 211 Self Help Groups and NGO organizers. The various organizations were working in different sectors like education, health, rural development or water resources. Other organizations working with theatre, film and design were drawn in to assist the mandals to share their strategies/actions in an interesting manner to a large group of women. The activities involved are described elsewhere (Dand, 2002) and are reproduced in Appendix 1. Since 1999 many more melas have been held on different topics including tribal identity, income generation, women's political leadership, women's perspectives on development and food security. Each has involved 500–700 women leaders of participatory organizations and collaboration with other NGOs.

The melas have in themselves made significant contributions to women's empowerment. At the mandal level, intra-mandal coordination and action has improved. At later melas it was found that mandal themselves have taken the initiative to act locally on a wide range of issues. Their interaction with government agencies has increased. NGOs in the

⁴For more details of ANANDI see ANANDI's website: www.anandiindia.org [Accessed January 2005].

region have become more active in forums/networks addressing violence against women, women's political participation in local bodies, health. Smaller events of such nature have regularly been held by NGOs for savings and credit groups in their areas. Press coverage of the event and participation of various state level agencies in the event as resource persons led to women's issues getting a wider audience and increased awareness of the contribution of rural women's groups to development.

As well as providing an empowering space for women to learn and reflect the melas also provide an ideal forum for rapidly gathering information on what different groups are trying to do, how far they are succeeding, what the main challenges are and any innovative strategies which other groups could learn from ie an ideal participatory action learning venue for aggregating information over a whole area. The first mela in 1999 was able to get a wealth of both quantitative and qualitative information in a way which was not only useful for the organizers, but also facilitated detailed discussion and learning between participants (See Box 1).

Box 1. Mandal Problems and Achievements Identified at the First Mela

Savings and credit: 140 mahila mandals had saved a total of Rs. 9 00 389. On the strength of this capital base these mahila mandals have accessed Rs. 5 22 600 from nationalized banks and have lent a total sum of Rs. 11 84 010 to their own members.

Water: 60 mandals complained of lack of proper drinking water: no source at all, source contaminated, distribution problems or broken handpumps.

Health: 61 mahila mandals stated that they do not have access to proper health facilities: inadequate infrastructure, services or numbers of health workers in villages. 83 mahila mandals have worked to ensure better health care in the villages.

Education: problems of infrastructure, attitudes to girl children, irregularity of teachers attendance. 18 mandals have worked towards providing education in the village.

Fuel and fodder: 1354 women from 38 mandals have raised nurseries of 5 69 916 saplings.

Diminishing common lands: problems of land encroachment and industrial development.

Violence against women: 70 mandals have won cases against injustice to women.

Alcoholism: Although Gujarat is a dry state, alcoholism is a major problem leading to violence against women and economic ruin of a family.

Infrastructure: 30 per cent of the mandals stated they they still do not have access to basic services such as road, bus or other transport, electricity or ration card.

Employment: there is a lack of local opportunities leading to migration and inadequate income from work. 96 mandals have undertaken some form of income generating activities such as nursery raising, embroidery, organic manure etc.

Untouchability: Discrimination based on caste is common. 116 mahila mandals have broken down the barriers of the untouchability and now sit together for meetings and have tea together.

The melas themselves are however only a focus for the ongoing process of in-depth reflection and action at mandal level. Within the village-level mandals intensive discussions take place to identify learning needs of the women, choose representatives and generally prepare for the event. Each mandal representative brings a 'toran' (a traditional welcome wall hanging put at the entrance of the house) depicting the mandal's name and symbolic representation of their 'mandal image'. In recent melas one of the key methodological innovations has been to use PLA tools to collect information from the

mandals beforehand in order to increase representation of members who cannot attend the event. The full integration of PALS processes prior to these events gives the possibility of aggregation of quantitative and qualitative information for large numbers of people and engaging them in a collective participatory planning process. Part of the aim of the Participatory Review below was to develop tools which could be used to collect this information more systematically for advocacy purposes.

3 PARTICIPATORY ACTION LEARNING SYSTEM (PALS)

Participatory Action Learning System (PALS) is a recent introduction to ANANDI. The PALS tools and processes discussed here were first developed and piloted by Linda Mayoux with Kabarole Research and Resource Centre (KRC) in Uganda, starting in October 2002 and were further developed in a series of papers for the DFID-funded EDIAIS website (Mayoux, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d). ANANDI was invited to present their experience with melas at the second PALS training workshop in Uganda May 2003. In addition to ANANDI, PALS is currently being piloted in Sudan for poverty-targeted micro-finance, organizational development and enterprise diversification, as part of an integrated enterprise training, impact assessment and monitoring system by a US-based poverty-targeted grant programme, Trickle-Up, and is being developed to look at women's empowerment and micro-finance in Pakistan.⁵

PALS is based on three underlying principles outlined in Box 2.⁶ The main goal is to empower individuals and groups to collect the information *they* need in order to achieve their aspirations, solve at least some of their problems and ultimately to increase pro-poor accountability of the whole development process. As a means to these ends the primary focus is to build up action learning skills, capacities and networks at individual, group and community-levels, particularly for the most disadvantaged and marginalized people. However the aim of learning is not only to produce information, but for the action learning process itself to build institutional structures and networks for participatory decision-making and collective action. Information collection is not seen as an end in itself, but as a means for improving programme interventions, increasing accountability of local governance, and ultimately macro-level economic and social policies. Sustainability and dynamism are further maintained through building on existing information systems at group, programme and donor level, refining and streamlining each and linking them into a loose 'system' for more strategic institutional learning. Networking events like those of ANANDI provide a focus for bringing the different interests together for grassroots-based advocacy and programme and policy change.

PALS builds on a long-established tradition of grassroots participatory action research. Community conscientization with organizations following Paolo Freire and community-level planning processes have used participatory diagram exercises and involved people collecting their own information eg in housing, sanitation, resettlement and environmental management programmes.⁷ User-led technology development based on peoples' own

⁵Further details of PALS developments elsewhere and a copy of the original draft Manual for KRC (Mayoux, 2003a) can be obtained from www.lindaswebs.info or from Linda Mayoux at l.mayoux@ntlworld.com.

⁶This Section updates and extends an earlier discussion in Mayoux, 2003d.

⁷See for example the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights who use community-based enumerations, mapping exercises, and horizontal exchange programmes in and between grassroots community networks for advocacy on housing rights and also environmental improvements. Details can be found on their website: www.achr.net. See also examples in Mayoux and Chambers, 2005.

Box 2. Participatory Action Learning Systems (PALS): Basic Principles

Participation for empowerment

- Individual and group information needs determine the whole process
- Develops individual and group capacity for investigation and collective action
- Ensures the inclusion of the views and interests of the most disadvantaged throughout, and at all levels of, the action learning process.
- Prioritizes downward accountability to programme participants over upward accountability to donors.

Action learning

- The main aim is to yield practical recommendations for collective action and programme improvement in future, rather than simply 'policing' what has happened in the past.
- All investigation includes not only 'what' and 'who' questions, but 'why' and 'how to improve' and leads directly to individual, group and programme decision-making.
- These practical questions are the starting point for identification of indicators, sampling and design of investigation questions and process.
- The participatory process of investigation and dissemination strategically builds partnerships and networks for decision-making and action.

Sustainable system

- Information is collected and analysed at first point of use in order to maintain interest and commitment.
- Networking events form a focus for aggregation, crystallisation and converting individual and group level action learning into grassroots-based advocacy and programme decision-making.
- Integrates learning into existing training and information systems and all routine programme/participant interactions to minimize cost and time.
- In order to maintain rigour and credibility it develops complementarities between information collection of the different stakeholders including donor reviews and evaluations and academic research so that these build on and serve as triangulation rather than ad hoc duplication of each other.

experimentation and record-keeping started in the late 1970s and early 1980s, forming the basis for diagram techniques used in Rapid Rural Appraisal (Chambers, 1994; Biggs and Matsuert, 1999). In REFLECT methodology for literacy and community empowerment developed by Action Aid non-literate⁸ people start by using participatory diagram techniques to explore problems and their solutions through drawing and then gradually progress to documenting these in writing. These individual and community drawings and writings are kept in the form of diaries which are then used for local level lobbying and advocacy as well as awareness-raising.⁹ The Internal Learning System (ILS) being

⁸In PALS the term 'non-literate' is preferred to the term 'illiterate' which has come to have derogatory connotations beyond the fact that these people have not had access to the benefits of literacy education.

⁹Details of REFLECT (Regenerated Freirean Literacy Through Empowering Community Techniques) can be found at www.reflect.org.

developed by Helzi Nojonen (2005, this volume) in a number of micro finance programmes in India uses diaries by women themselves for local level lobbying.

PALS is nevertheless distinctive in the way it attempts to combine the different experiences and innovations into an empowerment process which is both based on grassroots information needs and feeds into advocacy and programme planning. In this it most resembles the REFLECT process. However although the intention is to combine it with literacy development and the drawing and analytical skills learned are a good step in this direction, PALS itself does not require literacy. It rather focuses on developing skills which can be used by non-literate people to increase their voices in programme discussions and local governance. PALS also differs from ILS in that people themselves draw and collect all the information at individual and group level with no externally produced formats or checklists and determined by their own information needs. The tools used and the information collected continue to be innovated, designed and determined by people themselves as a continually evolving process. Information needed by programmes or donors for their accountability is then extracted from the individual and group-level recording. Information which is not directly useful for people themselves is collected through other means eg specific focus groups, management information systems or separately funded reviews and research in order that people are not used as unpaid data collectors.

At all levels PALS is based on the use of a number of very basic diagram types which analyse different types of logical relationship (see Box 3). Some of these diagrams are derived from PLA and/or had already been used by ANANDI. For example it was ANANDI which contributed the Road Journey Tool to the PALS tool kit at the Uganda workshop. The Diamond Tool was developed at that workshop itself. However in PALS the tools are used more systematically at all levels from individuals and groups to programmes and donors as a cumulative process of awareness raising, training, planning, monitoring and impact assessment, lobbying and advocacy. Each tool, depending on its purpose, can be used to collect both qualitative and quantitative information on a range of economic, social and political issues.¹⁰

The sequencing of the exercises themselves and the ways in which different diagrams is combined is guided by principles of Empowering Enquiry (See Box 4).¹¹ The focus is not on 'identifying and examining problems' or 'policing correct implementation or programme or donor prescriptions' but on looking at:

- *who* is involved, differences and potential conflicts of interest
- *what* different people themselves want and what they have achieved
- *why* things are as they are and the opportunities and risks for the future
- *how to improve* strategies and support to better achieve those goals which both people themselves and programmes have identified.

Wherever possible PALS tools are mainstreamed in all training programmes at individual, group and staff levels and people are taught how to use the diagram tools creatively for different purposes. This ensures that the training itself is more participatory and responsive to the needs of these people than is frequently the case. Individual diaries

¹⁰Full details of these tools and methods and how they can be made rigorous for qualitative and quantitative analysis are presented in 'Thinking it Through' Mayoux, 2003b and the PALS Manual Mayoux, 2003c and reproduced with ANANDI diagrams on ANANDI's website www.anandiindia.org.

¹¹The discussion here substantially updates and clarifies the discussion of Empowering Enquiry in Mayoux, 2003b.

Box 3. Diagram Tools Used in PALS

Road journeys: chart a journey from point a to point b, generally over time. This may be a 'Vision Journey' forward-looking to the future, or an 'Achievement Journey' backward-looking to the past. These are the starting point for individuals and groups to examine their vision for the future (enterprise, life, empowerment etc.) and how they plan to get there in view of the lessons from the past. The road is divided into stages/bridges/hurdles with quantitative targets which can be revisited or quantitative values from the past. External opportunities and constraints are presented as signposts or bugbears along the outside of the road.

Diamonds: show distribution around an average. These start by identifying where the majority of a population are or an 'average situation' as the middle of the diamond. Then the criteria or examples at the extremes of the diagram are identified. Numbers of people/objects/incidence are then marked at each level. These have been used for poverty analysis and targeting, assessing levels of food security and domestic violence and empowerment impact. Plans are made for addressing the situation of those at the bottom of the diamond. Before and after diamonds can be drawn.

Trees: start from a trunk representing an issue or an institution like a household or community. Inputs are then shown as roots and outputs as branches. These can analyse problems and solutions, causes and effects, incomes and expenditures, costs and benefits and so on. Both roots and branches can be of different sizes and quantified. They can also be arranged or coloured, grouped and ranked for qualitative analysis. The roots or branches can represent targets which can be quantified and revisited for assessment—and can grow or be cut in action plans.

Circles: show the relationships between different elements represented as overlapping circles. Venn or chapatti circles can also be combined with pie charts to quantify each circle. Circles can be of different sizes, with different colours, lines and other shapes can also be used for qualitative and quantitative analysis and re-analysed for changes at a later date.

Calendars: show the seasonal changes in livelihoods, health problems and other issues. These can be put along the margins also of other diagrams eg road journeys or trees.

Matrices: show the relationship between two variables as a table. These have been used in gender training for access and control profiles, in groups for voting and prioritizing strategies and are being adapted for other purposes.

Maps: show the geographical locations of things like households, resources, markets. Qualitative and quantitative information can be marked and 'target maps' drawn to be revisited.

rather than pre-designed training materials form the main focus for training programmes. These enable people to progressively think through concrete and realizable plans for their business, lives, participation and contribution to groups or whatever the particular subject of the training might be. This includes designing their own questions and recording procedures to track progress in relation to these plans, analyse why their progress (or lack of progress) is occurring and how they can improve.

Group-level and organizational training includes identification of group goals and objectives, how groups can use diagrams for their own participatory planning and monitoring and how group diaries of minutes can be kept in a way which avoids long

Box 4. Empowering Enquiry: Key Steps

Step 1: Who? Stakeholder analysis

To identify lines of difference, consensus and conflict of interest:

- Who is to be represented in the PALS process?
- How can the interests of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged be promoted?
- What is the role of external agencies and the currently powerful?

Then with different key stakeholder groups:

Step 2: What? Visioning change and appreciating achievements

- What are the different elements of a future vision?
- What positive changes have already been achieved?
- What do people still want to change?

Step 3: Why? Identifying opportunities and challenges

- How were past changes achieved? What were the opportunities? What were the crises and challenges?
- What is preventing further positive changes from occurring? What opportunities exist which have not been seized? What risks and challenges need to be addressed?
- What have been the relative roles of people themselves, programmes and external factors?

Step 4: How to improve? Identifying strategies

- Which past strategies indicate ways forward for the future?
- How can other opportunities be taken advantage of? How can risks and challenges be addressed?
- What are the implications for what people themselves can do individually? As a group? For support needed from programmes? For policy changes needed through lobbying and advocacy?

Step 5: What, who and when? Negotiating change

- Exactly what steps are needed, when and by whom to move forward?
- How can the different views and potential conflicts of interest be negotiated in practical programme or policy change?

pages of documentation through focusing on the diagrams supplemented by notes relevant to understanding differences of opinion, participatory process, particular problems of poorer members and so on. All diagram sheets are kept by the groups or individuals who drew them to guide their own activities, monitor and evaluate programme interventions, and also lobbying and advocacy campaigns. The use of diagrams, participatory process and analysis are then progressively and cumulatively reinforced through use in lobbying and advocacy, aggregation for mela events, routine staff appraisal and monitoring processes and any in-depth research processes.

Particular attention is paid to ensuring that individuals who are not used to drawing and expressing themselves are given every opportunity to gain confidence and skills. A recent innovation has experimented with ways of rapidly developing the drawing skills of those

Box 5. Process for Increasing Participation in Group Discussions

Use of symbols rather than words

Participatory energiser: begin with some sort of energizer which encourages people who might not otherwise speak to come forward. For example people should talk in pairs for five minutes about the topic in hand and then report back on what the other person has said.

Everyone is respected and equal: make it clear to everyone that everyone's word is to be valued and respected, particularly the views of those who may be more disadvantaged than others in the group. This includes women, non-literate people and also men if they are in a minority and not in leadership positions.

Passing the 'microphone': introduce some sort of tool like a stick, or some groups prefer a banana or other object to represent a microphone. It is only the person holding this tool who is allowed to talk. It is then possible to ensure that everyone has a turn to hold the stick and limits on the numbers of time or length of time anyone can hold it can also be introduced.

Make sure everyone has contributed: at the end of each stage anyone who has not spoken or drawn on the diagram must be given the 'microphone' or pen and encouraged to comment/draw on the diagram.

who have never held a pen over a one hour period from first circles and lines to complex symbols for different types of livestock, houses, people and so on.¹² This then increases their confidence and skills to participate equally in group PALS processes. In group discussions a number of participatory process guidelines are followed to ensure more equitable participation and particularly to reinforce participation of the poorest and those who are non-literate and (See Box 5). Use of symbols and drawings, rather than words enables non-literate people to fully participate in discussions and also to remember and recall discussions based on the drawings produced. In some contexts and for some purposes separate interest groups (eg by gender, age, ethnicity, health status etc.) are formed to enable people to develop and discuss particular viewpoints before presenting these in a more general participatory forum.

The diagrams are revisited and redrawn at intervals to track changes over time or following changes in programme interventions or economic policies. The degree of rigour and cross-contextual standardisation with which each tool is used depends on the precise purpose. For consciousness-raising it is not necessary to spend a lot of peoples' time in rigorous quantification. For livelihood or enterprise training however very detailed discussion of costs and incomes is needed over a period of time and enables far more reliable information to be collected than in one-off survey questions, or even repeat recall surveys. Where quantification is needed eg for lobbying, this is included on diagrams or put on easy-fill formats, again mainly using symbols.¹³ For use at programme level diagrams are photographed using a digital camera and filed together with checklist and points needed by programme staff for programme implementation and programme

¹²This was developed in recent work for Trickle Up and will be described in detail in the forthcoming 'Trickle up guidelines' and a paper on Mayoux's website www.lindaswebs.info.

¹³This has been most fully thought through in recent Manuals for training and monitoring in Sudan and for Trickle-Up partners. For further details and links see Mayoux website www.lindaswebs.info.

improvement. The integration of 'why' and 'how to improve' questions on the digrams themselves, and use of specific tools like preference matrices enables much more systematic and accurate assessment of attribution and action recommendations.

Although participatory diagram tools form the basis of the system, more conventional qualitative and quantitative methods are also used if needed for in-depth investigation of particularly sensitive issues and/or to produce statistics on these issues and/or where for some reason the participatory process cannot reach and fully involve certain key stakeholders. This is particularly the case if the information is needed mainly by programmes or donors rather than by people themselves. Other methods used are photography and video to provide a visual and universally accessible means of communicating information. Where groups or programmes keep photo albums these focus on providing a progressive history of the development of groups and programmes and a graphic indication of programme impact and group strategies and campaigns. It is also envisaged that video will be used to provide an entertaining and immediate means of communicating information between groups either for training or simply as 'visual letters' to exchange specific information.

4 THE ANANDI PARTICIPATORY REVIEW: TOOLS, PROCESS AND FINDINGS

PALS is still very much in its development phase. Although experience has been mainly positive, full documentation and evaluation remains to be done. The discussion here focuses on the ANANDI Participatory Review as the most fully documented set of exercises to date.¹⁴ This is supplemented by observations and suggestions for ways of improving the Tools based on a subsequent five-day visit to ANANDI in September 2004 which piloted tools for Intra-household analysis.¹⁵

The Participatory Review was conducted in December 2003 by Linda Mayoux with ANANDI staff, mandal members and partner NGOs and funded by Concern Worldwide, India.¹⁶ It was conducted over a very busy five days in Saurashtra and Devgadhi Baria. It combined multiple aims competing with each other for time: to assess the effectiveness of ANANDI's empowerment strategy, to train staff in use of PALS Tools and to further develop the tools themselves for future use by ANANDI. The participatory meetings were designed not only to obtain information, but to introduce staff to as many Tools as possible and to try out new tools. Staff were asked to focus on those issues within the programme which they felt were most interesting and useful rather than on a pre-determined set of indicators. Above all the Review Process aimed to benefit the women members attending the meetings and ensure that they and their leaders became motivated to use the tools again. In some places the numbers of women coming to meetings were far greater than expected, but had to be accommodated as they had taken the trouble to travel long distances. The final day in Devgadhi Baria was attended by around 100 women when far fewer had been expected. None of the women had ever done the exercises before and many had never even held a pen and had to be encouraged to make their first ever marks on

¹⁴A review of PALS in Trickle-Up partners working with KRC in Uganda took place in November 2003.

¹⁵These tools are described in detail in Mayoux, 2004b.

¹⁶The full text can be found on ANANDI's website www.anandiindia.org

paper. All this meant that the Review was less systematic than would have been possible with a longer time in the field and/or staff and women members already skilled.

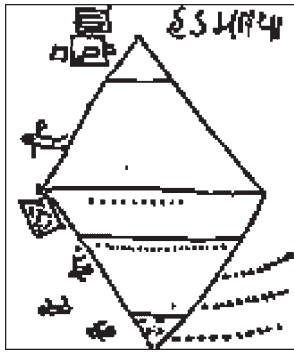
Nevertheless, even at this initial training stage the tools were able to obtain a wealth of qualitative and quantitative information on poverty targeting of ANANDI assistance, food security, women's empowerment, gender violence, and organizational development. All the diagrams remained with the women and have since been followed up and the tools further refined and developed by ANANDI and/or other organizations in the PALS network.

4.1 Assessing Effectiveness of Poverty Targeting

ANANDI has a specific and explicit commitment to targeting its activities to low income women from particularly disadvantaged groups. ANANDI's rehabilitation housing programme following the devastating earthquake which struck Kutch and northern districts of Saurashtra on 26th January 2001 is a good example of ANANDI's distinctive approach to development. ANANDI's aim was not only to provide housing but to do so in a way which had a sustainable impact on decreasing vulnerability to future earthquakes and improving livelihoods. ANANDI demonstrated not only that women can build earthquake safe and cyclone resistant houses, but also manage such programmes in a more effective and equitable way than programmes which exclude them. Moreover that the changes in women's lives can be a sustainable challenge to gender inequality and form the basis for organization around other issues.

ANANDI's programme was delivered through women's organizations (mahila mandals). However instead of the project benefits flowing to the members of women's groups, the members were entrusted with identifying the poorest and most needy families. The government lists were widely recognized to be inaccurate because of political interference and did not give names of those who had not received any compensation. A survey was conducted with the women and drew up community maps. The mandals were in a better position to select the user group because they are aware of which families, were really in need. They used very simple observable criteria to define the most vulnerable groups. The mandal held several meetings and made individual house visits along with engineers and social workers to verify authenticity of the cases. The aim of the Participatory Review process was to provide follow up information on the effectiveness of poverty targeting, identify reasons why any very poor people had been excluded and how poverty targeting of current activities like savings and credit could be improved.

The Review conducted a series of poverty diamond exercises in different groups (See Box 6). The Khirasarai example (See Figure 1) was the second poverty diamond drawn, and only the second time ANANDI staff had used any of the PALS tools. Women were first asked who are the richest and the poorest in their villages. They discussed among themselves giving names. Then they were asked to draw on the sheet how they would depict the status of the richest and very poorest. Each of the women gradually held the pen—many for the first time and drew pictures to depict the various economic strata of the village. The women were then asked how they would classify and represent the groups in-between and drew lines to divide the diamond into 5 parts as shown below in the example from Khirasarai village, Saurashtra. After discussing poverty levels, the women put dots to mark their own position on the diamond. Then they added marks at the appropriate level in the diamond for other households who had received benefits from one



Very Rich
Rich

Medium: poor but can sustain themselves as they have some kind of income generation activity, like working in the salt pans.

Poor: poor but are in the mandal and can fall back on the safety net that has been created by the mandal members. They are also the ones among the others who have received benefits of the houses.

Very Poor: people who are very poor and lack any kind of resources. These are people who are unable to do even wage-work.

Figure 1. Poverty diamond from Khirasarai, Saurashtra

or other type of assistance from ANANDI. Twelve of the poorest families were not members of the mahila mandal and were marked outside the diamond.

Box 6. Steps in Poverty Targeting Diamond

Step 1: Establishment of poverty criteria

Women were asked what were the characteristics of the richest people in their villages. Then characteristics of the poorest. Then how would they grade the people in between. They drew these with symbols on the diamond.

Step 2: Scoring members/beneficiaries

The women marked where they were and then also marked the number of families who have received benefits from one or other type of assistance from ANANDI.

Step 3: Why are some of the poorest excluded?

The poorest families who are not members of the mahila mandal were marked outside the diamond.

Step 4: Practical implications

How can those women marked as poorest be brought into future initiatives?

Note: The Poverty Diamond Tool was originally developed by Rosette Mutasi of SATNET, Uganda at the first KRC workshop October 2002.

The aim of the Review was not only to monitor effectiveness of poverty targeting, but action learning to find out why anyone had been excluded and how the poorest could be included in future. The ranking was therefore only the first stage of discussion which then moved onto detailed consideration of those outside the diamond. Six of these twelve had still benefited by way of houses constructed. Reasons for two families who had not got houses were that one was not willing to give her share of the contribution and the other was a single old aged women who was being looked after her sons one of whom had a house. Discussion then progressed to suggestions of how the group could harder to bring the very poorest women placed outside the diamond into the mahila mandal through for example

giving loans to cover the initial savings requirement, or varying the savings conditions in specific cases.

The tool proved a very useful and rapid means of not only ranking and scoring, but also assessing the reasons for exclusion and possible ways forward. The whole exercise took only two to three hours and would not take significantly longer with more people as it is the discussion rather than the plotting and ranking which takes time. The use of symbol drawings greatly increased participation. The first time the Diamond Tool was used one of the staff had written the answers in Gujarati on the diamond. However a show of hands revealed that only two of the women present could read the writing! There is no reason to suspect, given the depth and openness of discussion and the identification of problems and shortcomings, that the ranking was unreliable. ANANDI staff who had used Participatory Wealth Ranking in work with other organizations found the Diamond Tool both more open and transparent in promoting discussion and much quicker enabling them to move from analysis to practical discussions about ways forward in the same meeting. For greater confidentiality in ranking the Board could be turned round and people can mark themselves on in privacy, or on pieces of paper. In organizations which are less open, the Tool might need cross checking with some sort of Census mapping using the criteria established in the Diamond. Crosschecking could be also done as in Participatory Wealth Ranking by dividing the group into subgroups to independently rank the households and then the degree of error assessed.

Subsequent exercises like the Food Security Diamond described below obtained much more precise information. Where particularly rigorous information is needed the Poverty Diamond could be divided into a series of separate Diamonds on different dimensions/ indicators like nutrition, housing, clothes etc and identify the degree of correlation between the different rankings.

4.2 Investigating Food Security

Food security is a serious problem for most of the households with which ANANDI works. In preparation for a series of melas on Food Security ANANDI wanted the Review to try out a number of tools which might subsequently be used more systematically at group level to look at the extent of food insecurity, its different patterns, specific gender dimensions and possible ways forward. A combination of a calendar and diamond tools were used to investigate patterns of food security in Devgadh Baria Block with the Devgadh Mahila Sangathan (DMS) women Leaders. The aim was to identify: which households were unable to get two square meals per day all 12 months? Which are the particular months when there is a shortage of food? How do families cope when they do not have food?

The exercise started by producing a Food Security Calendar of seasonal availability of food. The women divided the year into three periods of four months each:

- **Rainy season:** represented by an umbrella, rain and a plough. During this time there is acute shortage of grain. There is tension within the family marked by fights over food shortage. There is no money left to buy seeds for sowing. There are fights between the husband and wife as the wife is expected to go and borrow from better-off families. The women felt that the husband works, comes home eats whatever is there but does not share the responsibility of going and borrowing from neighbours.

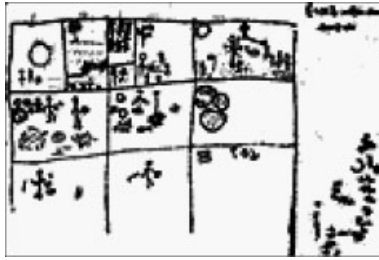


Figure 2. Food security calendar from DMS, Devgadh Baria

- **Winter season:** during this period there is enough to eat and nutritious foods like green leafy vegetables available. The drawing depicts green fields, basket full of 'rotlas' bread. Families sit around a fire near their homes to ward off the cold.
- **Summer season:** during this time dust blows, some farms that have irrigation will have green fields. It is also the season of marriages and festivals. There is water shortage and not enough food but the men drink a lot and get into fights. Families prepare to migrate in search of wage-work to other parts of the state or even travel to neighbouring states like Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

The period of most acute food shortage occurs as the summer comes to an end and the rainy season sets in. There is no food to eat, there is acute water shortage for human and animal consumption, and there is no fodder for the animals either. Families have to either borrow money at very high rates or purchase grain paying almost one and a half times or double the normal price. When there is not enough food the women said that they break the 'rotla' bread into several pieces and give one piece to each member. For the younger children the women hide away some bread from their own share to give them when they cry. If the food shortage arises in the season of the 'Mahuda' flower the families roast the flower which is otherwise collected for brewing local alcohol. Men, women and children collect roots and other edible forest produce if they live close to the forest. In the beginning of summer known as the 'Timru' (a leaf used to roll bidis) season they eat the fruit of Timru, and or they eat small seeds 'charoli' normally used as garnish for expensive urban sweets and in June they eat the 'Ankala' fruit or other types of fruit.

After drawing the Food Security Calendar, the women were asked if they could categorize the different levels of food insecurity experienced by the families in their area. The categories they came up with were:

- **Food sufficiency:** have grain for all 12 months, four pairs of Bullocks, large land holdings, big storage bins for grain
- **Medium sufficiency:** 1 pair of bullocks, two to three bins of grain, food for ten months.
- **Poor food security:** only one to two bins of grain, more children, no cattle, food for only six months
- **Very poor food security:** grain only for three months, no plough of their own, no cattle, and very small grain bin.

Lines were drawn on a Food Security Diamond to represent the four levels with corresponding symbols. Then the women plotted themselves in level they felt they

belonged. Most of the women there marked themselves in the poor or the very poor category. A few marked themselves in the medium sufficiency category. These latter said seven years ago they had been in the poor or very poor categories, but with the support of the mahila mandal, the loans and other sources of income, they have been able to move into a better position. As with the Poverty Diamond discussion moved from plotting to discussion of why food insecurity occurs. There then followed a discussion of possible ways forward to be investigated in detail in future meetings of the group.

These two exercises combined took three hours. The information obtained is far more detailed than what was previously known by staff, particularly in relation to the gender dimensions of intra-household conflict. Again there is no reason to believe that the ranking of households is unreliable. All these issues could be followed up by further quantification and discussion. Other Tools like maps and trees could also be used to quantify and crosscheck the findings outside the participants in the exercise and to look in more detail at the many causes and potential part-solutions to food insecurity. Some suggestions for ways in which diagrams can be systematically sequenced for investigating Food Security are given in Appendix 2.

4.3 Assessing Contribution to Empowerment

One of ANANDI's key goals is women's empowerment. However empowerment is notoriously difficult to define and measure. Although external indicators can be identified and measured, an inherent dimension is women's own ability to define and achieve their own goals. In the Participatory Review ANANDI was interested not only in measuring progress according to their own criteria, but understanding women's own aspirations, how far they had fulfilled them and how they think they could advance further.

A diamond exercise following roughly the same process as the Poverty Diamond was developed and used for the first time for one group of 22 women from Ankali village in Devgadh Baria. This village had been involved in a watershed and sustainable agriculture programme. The diamond exercise was preceded by a process of individual visioning and drawing before the group discussion of criteria. This was in order to give women time to develop drawing skills and more time to reflect and decrease the need for external steering of the process.

The women were first asked to divide into age groups and draw their individual visions of empowerment on a sheet of paper. This was done in a circle around the edge of one sheet of paper to encourage them to discuss and draw. The older women in particular had never held a pen before, but after the staff had left them alone they all eventually found the confidence to draw. The women's visions are shown in the drawings below—all of which the women took away with them.

Once the drawings had been made the sheets of paper were then cut up into women's individual pictures and the women described to the group what had been drawn. The women were then given two votes to put on which drawings they thought were the most important indicators of empowerment. These were then pinned in order of popularity onto a diamond shape. The order of voting showed the following hierarchy.

- (i) An empowered woman is one who gets development related funds for the village, one who is able to stop migration due to wage work availability in the village and one who aids women to solve problems of family harassment.

Box 7. Assessing Empowerment

Step 1: *Visioning*

The women were asked to divide into age groups and draw their individual visions of empowerment.

Step 2: *Ranking*

The women then voted and ranked the different visions which were placed on a diamond shape.

Step 3: *Scoring: before and after*

Then they were asked how many of them would rank themselves as empowered or not empowered before the programme and now and the responses were plotted on the diamond.

Step 4: *Practical ways forward*

There then followed a discussion of how those women who did not consider themselves currently empowered could be further supported.

- (ii) Who does high status men's work.
- (iii) One who works as an equal alongside the husband/men
- (iv) One who is educated and aware of the laws and brings new information for other village women

A least empowered woman is one who cannot stand up to the wrong harassment of the forest official.

After the criteria themselves were ranked, the women were asked to plot themselves according to the ranking before the programme and now. Out of the 22 women only four

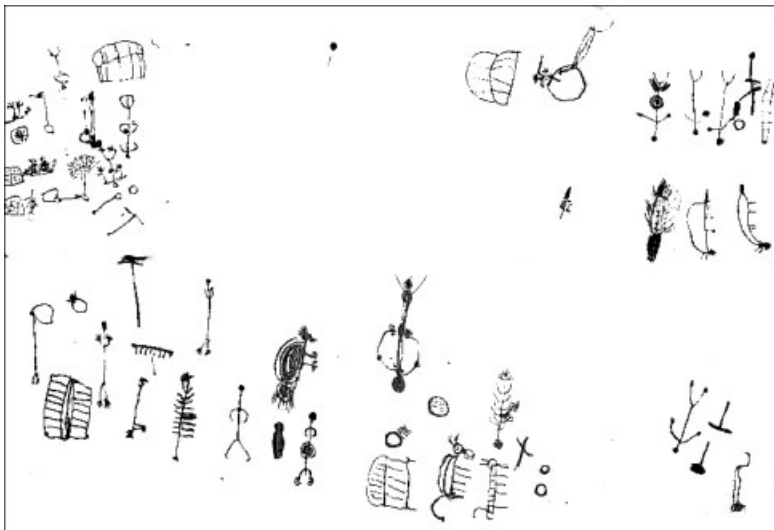


Figure 3. Old women's views. Focusing on livelihoods, doing men's work on their own fields and having livestock

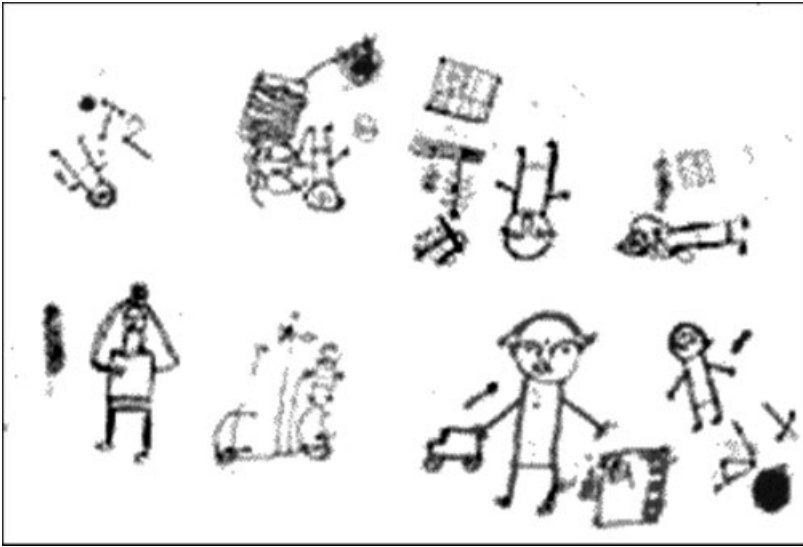


Figure 4. Young womens views. Focusing on wage work and going to panchayat office

women saw themselves as highly empowered, ten women as women who now do work like men and eight women said that they now work as equals alongside men. In the group present none of them saw themselves as least empowered. All these changes were said to have taken place since ANANDI started working in the village. Only one woman not in the mandal was considered to be empowered by their criteria. She was an elected representative to the District Panchayat—who does the work of a man. There then followed a discussion of how those women who did not consider themselves currently very empowered could be further supported.

This exercise was very exploratory and had not been done before in this form. The drawing exercise proved very valuable in opening up the discussion and giving women the confidence to express their own views free from interference by other women or ANANDI staff. It was very useful for highlighting which of the different activities ANANDI had supported were valued. The voting process then enabled a full discussion of the different views which was in itself a useful process. As with the other exercises there is no reason to doubt the reliability of the ranking of the women. Many of the women had never held a pen before and were obviously very pleased to go home with their diagram.

This exercise is obviously only a start for a serious investigation. With hindsight a number of things could have been improved. In particular many of the drawings used composite criteria. These should have been discussed and separated before the voting to get a clearer ranking. As with the poverty diamond, for more in-depth analysis, there could be a series of separate diamonds for the different dimensions of the emerging criteria eg gender division of labour, household decision-making, political participation. The exercise would also ideally be followed up with more qualitative discussions and, as is being done by ANANDI, then feed into an ongoing planning process for collective action to be taken.

4.4 Investigating Gender Violence

A key issue which has come up again and again in ANANDI's work, including women's description of food security problems and empowerment above, is that of gender violence in the household and community. However beginning discussions of gender violence is often far from easy and even women will often deny that it exists. Gender violence takes many different forms, some of which are so common as to be seen as 'natural'. Other forms are very extreme but are hidden behind closed doors, and even disguised as 'suicide' or attempted suicide. Women are often reluctant to talk about such violence for fear of reprisals from men, and also often fear of being blamed by other women for 'bringing it upon themselves'.

ANANDI was therefore looking for a tool which would help to understand both the different forms which violence takes, the incidence of such violence, whether or not ANANDI's work was leading to an increase or decrease in conflict and what sorts of further support will be most effective in countering violence. During the Participatory Review staff experimented with the Diamond Tool and Road Journey to start to investigate these issues both qualitatively and quantitatively. They used the Diamond to examine the different types of violence and how women rank their relative seriousness (20 women from Saptala village). They used the Road Journey to examine how women see themselves coming out of this situation and the role of the organization (18 women Ambaji Mahila mandal). The extent of gender based violence and the effects on women's lives as revealed by these participatory exercises was quite shocking.

For the Diamond Tool the discussion began with women collectively trying to recall issues/problems they have collectively discussed/talked in their meetings. The facilitators then asked specific questions about their experience of violence at home and/or in the community. It took about three hours for the women to fully open up and share their experiences of violence.

The women first discussed their ranking of violence and after initial hesitation each woman began to draw pictures on the diagram (See Figure 5). Their ideal situation was 'When husband-wife stay together peacefully without any kind of mistrust and suspicion, children go to school, no illness, adequate water, and agriculture produce, do not have to migrate out for work and above all prohibition on liquor and ban on torture would bring peace.' The only women who considered themselves in a 'peaceful situation' free of violence were those without a man: widows, divorced, young and unmarried. 'Beating till you get wounded (bleeding) and you feel like committing suicide was agreed to be extreme, unbearable violence.' Everyday violence: Women said that they also had to live with everyday forms of violence like verbal abuse, fights over money, daily consumption of alcohol by men, minor beating by the husband because the 'meal is not tasty' 'There are no answers, we have to deal with them everyday and hence we do not call it violence.'

Once the ranking had been discussed, each woman plotted herself in what she saw as the most applicable level of the diamond. None of the women were initially willing to talk about their experience of violence in the family—physical harassment and mental torture. They started by saying that 'such episodes used to happen but now it is over and done with so why to remember or raise them again and create further problems in the family'. It was only when some of the women who had experienced the most extreme violence started to talk that other women began to open up and discuss their experiences also.

The extreme cases were very serious by any standards, but women had had problems discussing their experiences publicly before the mandal had started. Kamtiben, age 40,

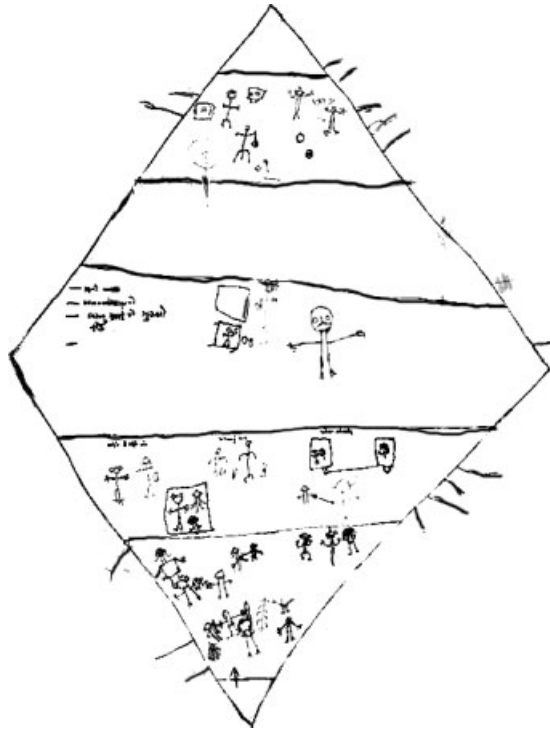


Figure 5. Violence Diamond. (ideal at the top, extreme violence at the bottom)

said her husband used to beat her everyday. He once burnt her clothes saying he would do same to her. Kamtiben had not even shared the problem with her family until another woman raised the issue on her behalf in a mandal meeting. (She drew the symbol: husband beating, liquor bottle in his hand and a stick in another hand, cloths ablaze, children watching the whole episode, including young sons and daughters in law and the grand children helpless and unable to do anything). The discussion also highlighted the difficult decisions women were faced with. Reshamben's (age 30) situation was known by everyone. She had got back from her parental house a couple of days back. 'I have left his home and gone away at least 10–15 times, but every time the panch sits to resolve the case, he says he will not do it again. I also come back to this house. If I left I feel I would find peace but what would happen to my children, who would feed them and bring them up?'. Of the women who experienced extreme violence, Reshamben's case was very serious and unresolved and the women started discussing how they would help her.

As a tool, the Violence Diamond was very effective in stimulating detailed discussion where women were initially hesitant. The focus on the pictures helped women to be more open and spontaneous. The combination of Diamond and Road Journey also provided a focus for open and probing discussion of the role of the mandal and ANANDI in helping women to address the problem. In the road journey it became clear that the mahila mandal had worked on many cases and that the women had moved from being very vulnerable to becoming more vocal in resisting violence. The road journey showed that the increase in the number of women within the mahila mandal supporting such cases grew gradually as the group members gained confidence in each other. For some women the frequency of

violence had decreased or stopped since they joined the mandal. The mandal has collectively been able to build pressure in the community to be more supportive towards women suffering from violence. They have also created space and acceptability in the village council which makes men think twice before resorting to violence.

At the same time it was clear that there was still a very long way to go, and likely that many women in the area were suffering extreme violence but still not able to join the mandal and get support. There would also need to be more individual and confidential research with women who were not members of the mandal and hence had no group, preferably by the mandal members with their neighbours. This could be done on a community map.

4.5 Looking at Institutional Development

In ANANDI's approach women themselves are actively involved in identifying their problems and achievements. This takes place with the mandals and collated in preparation for the mela events as discussed above. In the Participatory Review Road Journeys were used to assess and quantify group achievements.¹⁷

A road journey drawn in one of the groups in Lakhwad, Saurashtra charts a process whereby about three years previously four mandals had been set up. These had now grown into 11 self-sufficient mandals and the detailed documentation of achievements included the following:

- distribution of fodder during drought and acquisition of 70 chaff cutter machines, which every body can access on need basis;

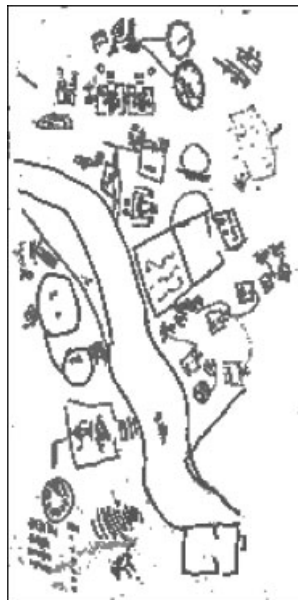


Figure 6. Lakhwad Road journey

¹⁷For an account of the Road Journey tool see Mayoux, 2003c.

- labour contribution in repairing of roads, cleaning funeral areas, building wells and 105 rainwater harvesting facilities and 4 check dams, building water stall for village cattle;
- meeting local government officials to get grants for a well in the village and water supply, getting bank loans for 5 mandals for consumption as well as farm needs, getting an innocent victim of police atrocity released from prison; and
- beneficiary selection and distribution for specific development programmes: ten widow and disabled women received sanitation blocks, three eligible widows received houses and pawned objects were returned to extremely poor people;
- awareness raising about hygiene and sanitation by breaking the public urinal near the drinking water stand;
- they selected an 11 member gram vikas samiti for the overall development of the village; and
- they were able to bargain and get the actual remuneration for the work that the villagers had done under the government relief work during scarcity periods.

ANANDI also wanted to look at women's perceptions of their organization and ANANDI's role, and what women saw as future avenues for influencing powerful institutions through lobbying and advocacy. For this an institutional circle map (Venn diagram) of the Devgadhi Mahila Sangathan (DMS)—Women's Federation of Devgadhi was used. Devgadhi Mahila Sangathan (DMS) is a four-year-old federation of women's groups with an executive committee, accounts committee and several sub-committees responsible for different issues: Food Security, Environment, Health, Savings/Credit/Livelihoods, Education, Social Justice, Development Education and Communication.

Participants were asked first to talk about the changes they had seen as a result of the formation of DMS. After this they were asked to draw a picture of the sangathan and the different institutions with which it has interacted on five large sheets of paper organized as a cross (See Figure 7). The *central round figure* is the sangathan as they see it the women in the outer circle represents the sangathan members. The *inner circle* represents the Executive Committee and the house represents their office building which is nearing completion.

The group was then asked in which places/offices they feel they can now exercise influence. They began with the block level offices shown as the red or orange circle on the *lower side* divided into four sections. One section is the block level development department and the second section is the block level revenue department. Next they drew the green rectangle depicting the forest department and the nursery raising schemes issued by the department. To the *left* is a diagram depicting the water department at the block level. To its left is the education system depicted by a school and children studying regularly and the teacher attending regularly due to the monitoring of the mahila mandal. Above the school diagram is the Primary Health care Centres. They have depicted a pregnant woman getting antenatal care, patients getting service free of cost as stipulated by the government. To the *bottom* of the sangathan in the extra sheet attached is a police station which looks like a house with three doors. Above the police station is wholesale shop from where they bought the grain for the grain bank, which they then lent to the women whose families were facing acute food shortage. To the *left* of the above picture is the local dispute resolution mechanism—the 'panch' which sits under a tree in which sangathan leaders and mahila mandal leaders go to represent women's cases and ensure that the male judges listen to the woman's side carefully. Above the dispute resolution mechanism is the bank which now gives the groups credit at a low rate. Below the dispute

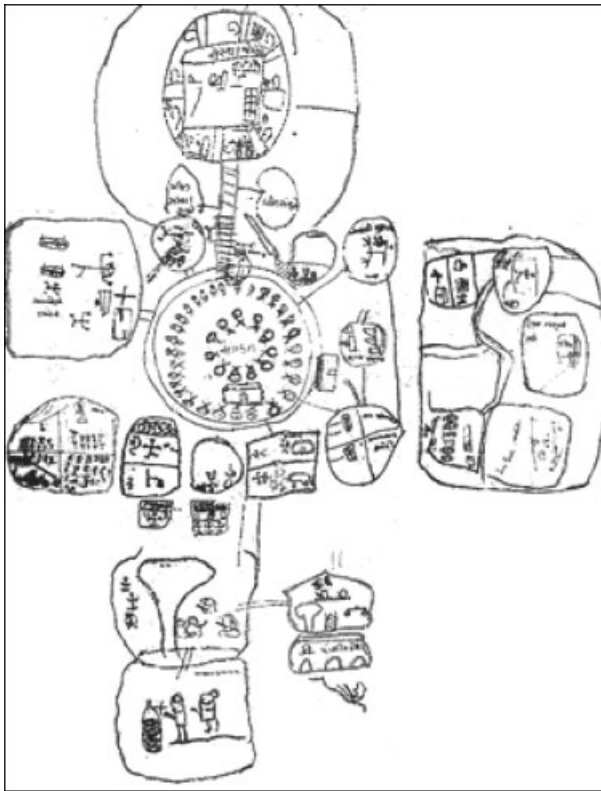


Figure 7. Institutional map of Devgadh Mahila Sangathan

resolution picture is the local medicine man who uses unhealthy, superstitious and exploitative practices to treat illness. To the *right* of the sangathan an extra sheet has been attached—this depicts the various district level offices to which the DMS has access and has gone to make representations—the Collectors office depicted by several phones on his table, The District Development's office, the Elected District Panchayat head, Water Department. In the *circle above the sangathan* in the extra sheet they have drawn ANANDI.

Participants were then asked to explain the different relationships they had drawn, the relative sizes of the circles and how they had changed. Two vertical lines with rungs like a ladder connotes that there is a very special relationship between the two organisations. On asking if the small size of the ANANDI circle and the large size of the DMS circle was deliberate the women said 'yes, the DMS is larger because today if ANANDI wants to do anything in the area or with the community it cannot do without the support of DMS'. After this there was a discussion about whether they had also thought of the size of the block level offices vis-vis the DMS and the size of the District offices. They said 'yes, today we do not have to think twice about going to the block level office and we have some influence there'. At the District level they have only gone to make representations but often have been able to influence it as yet. They were asked that if in eight years of beginning to form Mahila mandals the block offices now seem smaller than the DMS, in the next three to five years do they think the District offices too will become smaller? They all answered almost in unison—Yes!!

Both the road journey and institutional map proved to be very good ways of capturing a wealth of both quantitative and qualitative information—both ‘facts’ and peoples’ perceptions and interpretation of the importance of the facts. The Road Journey proved a very good means of getting a detailed participatory history of the group in a way which the women themselves could understand. It was much easier for people to contribute and mark in forgotten details on a road map than on a linear written account. Peoples’ accounts of events often progress from the broad sketch of key events to detailed discussion of qualitative details, reasons etc. It is much easier to insert these additional details on a diagram than to insert them in a linear text. The circle diagram provided the focus for a very in-depth discussion of power relations and processes which could then be recorded and presented pictorially. This provided the basis for both an analysis of the past and a projection and discussion of the future.

5 PALS ACHIEVEMENTS AND ONGOING CHALLENGES

The Participatory Review of ANANDI graphically documented the significant contribution of their programme to many dimensions of poverty reduction and empowerment. Moreover it did so in an open and detailed manner which allowed also for disagreements between participants and discussion of shortcomings and areas where more attention is needed in future. It can therefore be assumed that most of the information is relatively reliable. The Review captured not only what had changed according to local criteria and priorities, but how far very poor people had also benefited and how things could be improved. The group participants involved could readily read the diagrams to give a detailed account of discussions to other women in plenary sessions and in follow-up interviews said the diagrams helped them to remember in detail the discussion and analysis even a long time after the event.

At the same time the wealth of information collected inevitably raised even more interesting questions than were answered about the processes which have led to the types of impacts reported by the women. The participatory exercises were only conducted with a few selected groups and would have to be systematically conducted for a purposive or random sample of groups. More qualitative modelling of the ways in which ANANDI’s support complemented and reinforced women’s own spontaneous strategies and actions is also needed. Such a systematic action research study would be extremely important in fully demonstrating the effectiveness of their empowerment model, indicating further ways forward and the implications for other programmes.

PALS is currently at a stage of rapid innovation adaptation for different purposes. As noted above, PALS is also currently being piloted in Sudan for poverty-targeted micro-finance, organizational development and enterprise diversification, as part of an integrated enterprise training, impact assessment and monitoring system by a US-based poverty-targeted grant programme, Trickle-Up, and is being developed to look at women’s empowerment and micro-finance in Pakistan.¹⁸ Inherent in the methodology is an emphasis on local creativity and experimentation rather than mechanical replication of ‘top-down’ guidelines. Both diagram tools and participatory processes will continue to be developed at all levels, crystalized into provisional guidelines for specific purposes and

¹⁸Further details of PALS developments elsewhere and a copy of the original draft Manual for KRC (Mayoux, 2003a) can be obtained from www.lindaswebs.info or from Linda Mayoux at l.mayoux@ntlworld.com.

then further refined and adapted to changing needs and contexts. In all the organizations where PALS has so far been piloted the focus has been on community-level empowerment rather than rigorous impact assessment—and rightly so in the view of the authors. This final Section focuses on the potential use for rigorous pro-poor impact assessment in the light of the ANANDI experience and subsequent work elsewhere.

5.1 PALS Achievements

Experience so far indicates that the methodology has considerable potential to bring together reliable and rigorous quantitative and qualitative information at group and community level which is relevant to resolving practical problems which people face.¹⁹ Recent refinements in both the diagrams themselves and their sequencing for enterprise training facilitate systematic collection of quantitative data on profits, assets and vulnerability which is much more reliable than that possible through surveys because respondents are helped to think through and record calculations. Where they are conducted on an individual level as part of training and/or individual reflection for input to group activities it is possible to get information for all participants, or a random or purposive sample. Recent refinements of the diagram methods are also able to examine in detail patterns of attribution, the relative roles of individual strategies, groups, programmes and external factors and identify specific strategies to take advantage of opportunities and address risks.

Moreover information is obtained in a way which itself empowers participants both in the short and longer term. As noted above, many of the women involved in PALS have never even held a pen before. In ANANDI, West Bengal, Uganda, Pakistan and Sudan within two hours women have moved from being diffident and reluctant to holding a pen to fighting to come forward and have their say. Women obviously enjoyed the experience of drawing their own vision and ideas and were proud of the drawings they produced for the first time. One further two-hour session enables detailed plotting and calculation of past or anticipated profits and losses including allowance for inflation, shadow prices asset depreciation etc. Women themselves progress during this time from initial lines and circles, to complex drawings of objects to banknotes marked with multiples of 10/100/1000 etc. (ie combinations of lines and circles in most alphabets) which can then be added and subtracted. They also during this time progress from being shy to say much in front of strangers to confidently presenting their drawings to a group and outsiders.

It is clear that without use of diagram tools and symbols in focusing and recording group discussions many women (and men) are excluded from real participation. Women said after the PALS exercises in the ANANDI Participatory Review that the PALS process helped them all to participate in discussions and also to think more clearly and to remember what had been discussed. There have been significant changes in awareness, participation and social inclusion in the groups who have so far used PALS. These views are almost universally expressed by participants in PALS in other programmes in response to in-depth probing which actively seeks to identify challenges and dissatisfaction with the methodology. The main sources of dissatisfaction have come from more educated

¹⁹For general discussion of how the diagrams can be used to collect quantitative and qualitative information see Mayoux, 2003c. These ideas have since been refined and developed in the field but have not so far been systematically documented.

members and programme staff for whom separate training in more complex diagramming and analysis is needed. At this level concept drawing and mapping and combining diagrams with words and shorthand and symbols has demonstrated the usefulness of diagrams in clarifying ‘fuzzy’ concepts, differences in visions and understandings, causal assumptions and summarizing information.

It is clear also that groups using the tools have been motivated to continue using them for their own problem-solving and planning. In KRC in Uganda where PALS was introduced at community level in 2003, groups are still continuing to use the Tools without external facilitation to analyse their problems and plan for the future. They are not only using the diagrams but also following the participatory guidelines to ensure that all are participating in discussion.²⁰ Individual entrepreneurs are also systematically recording incomes, profits and savings using indigenous knot systems which are transferred to PALS calendars. Over a period of training and follow-up meetings of e.g. savings and credit groups’ individuals and groups progressively build up ‘jigsaw’ accounts which help them plan both at the individual and groups levels.

The most cost-effective way of developing grassroots capacity for action learning is to first integrate skills training in participatory action learning into all training programmes. Initial piloting for Trickle-Up indicates that this significantly improves the quality of the training itself through the rapid progress of the women described above. Rather than artificial exercises, trainees are facilitated to produce reliable diagram or symbolic documentation of context, analysis of aims and plans and so on. Training programmes become more participatory with trainers also becoming learners from participants and establishing more egalitarian relationships. The diagrams and analyses can then feed directly into programme information systems as well as individual and group learning through providing baseline data and/or targets against which achievements can be assessed.

Increasing the ability of programme participants to collect and analyse their own information increases respect for programme participants by programme staff. The focus on diagrams improves the listening skills of staff and improves not only the reliability and quality of information, but also relations between programme staff and participants. The insights staff gain from the process are qualitatively very different from the routine box checking in most conventional monitoring and evaluation systems—these latter had completely broken down in KRC before PALS. PALS significantly increases the job satisfaction and interest of program staff in monitoring their interventions and learning how to improve. There are ways of using digital media to record diagrams and discussions at programme level. It also means that advocacy activities of organizations have a much more solid grassroots base and documentation to ensure their relevance to the needs of the very poor.

The same PALS tools and processes can also be used by programmes in a somewhat more extractive way for existing information gathering like appraisal, targeting and monitoring processes. These participatory tools can be used rigorously and cost-effectively for rapid collection of many types of information (See Mayoux and Chambers this volume). Programme staff can integrate symbol or diagram tools into existing forms and appraisal processes to make them both more reliable and also accessible to

²⁰Unpublished field report by Marinke Van Riet April 2004 on TrickleUp partners working with KRC. Also confirmed during a recent visit by Mayoux. Unfortunately however KRC staff do not have digital cameras and so have not been able to record these processes in detail.

respondents.²¹ There are ways of using digital media to efficiently record diagrams and discussions at programme level with little cost beyond initial purchase of equipment. Costs could also be shared between development agencies working in the same area or on the same issues. In the longer term collaboration between organizations to build local skills and capacity would be a very cost-effective way of gaining sustainable access to reliable information. Using the same tools and processes at programme-level rather than conventional survey methods also serves to reinforce the skills and further build the capacity of programme participants.

Increasing the ability of programme participants to collect and analyse their own information improves relations between programme staff and participants. It also means that advocacy activities of organizations have a much more solid grassroots base and documentation to ensure their relevance to the needs of the very poor. Such a process can also make a significant and cost-effective contribution to meeting the information needs of development agencies themselves. The reliability of external assessments would be increased through the wealth of existing information on which to base decisions about indicators and sampling. The grassroots led process proposed here, in bringing together and comparing different subjective views, is potentially far less arbitrary and more objective than conventional approaches to selecting indicators and sampling.

5.2 Ongoing Challenges

This is by no means to say that there are no challenges—or that challenges will ever go away. PALS faces similar challenges to those identified in other participatory diagram approaches. Challenges inherent in the diagram methodology itself include documentation and aggregation. Experiments in Uganda to assess how far local staff and local people could ‘read’ each others’ diagrams found that, local people’s readings were about 95 per cent accurate without any clues or hints. However for outsiders unfamiliar with the complexities of cassava or coffee production even apparently simple diagrams of local activities require a key and some documentation. Systematic ways of documenting the quantitative and qualitative information are needed by programmes and donors e.g. checklists similar to those used in surveys, and guidelines for recording of specific processes (see note 20). Although aggregation of disparate local indicators is a challenge, appropriate weightings and categorisations can be devised on the basis on piloting. The difference from conventional quantitative weighting and scoring methods being that categorisation is based on consideration of local priorities rather than a priori decisions by outsiders.

It is important to stress that the long term focus on local learning does not avoid the need for external expertise, at least in the initial stages. This is true of any learning process which aims to take people beyond what they are already able to do themselves. The initiative for training and mainstreaming participatory action learning has to start with programmes and will require adequate donor funding in the initial stages.

Firstly intensive *training* is needed in the tools and processes themselves, with *follow-up* for some time to maintain momentum and interest. Although PALS tools are accessible

²¹One example is the ‘Eat that fat cat’ loan assessment methodology developed in Sudan. Another are the guidelines for trickle-up monitoring based on enterprise training diagrams. For details contact Mayoux at l.mayoux@ntlworld.com.

and rapidly grasped, they are new and most people are not used to regular collection and discussion of information or even thinking strategically about their lives and businesses. Individuals and groups may have only limited access to many external sources of information which they need in order to assess their actions and make decisions for the future. To some extent this can be overcome through lateral learning and networking at the melas and other forums. Nevertheless there will be an ongoing need for support from people with wide networks who are experienced in accessing and disseminating information through the group networks on the issues they identify.

Secondly it may be necessary for external people/NGOs to facilitate the *participatory process*, at least in the initial stages. Groups are not necessarily empowering or socially inclusive. There is the need for an initial process of awareness-raising and training in participatory techniques to overcome barriers posed by existing power relations. Where groups are mainly from very disadvantaged groups and communities that they will need specific funding and training in order to participate on an equal footing.

Thirdly it may be difficult for groups themselves to initiate discussion of *sensitive issues*. This is not necessarily because they are not seen as important. It may be either because many issues concerning underlying inequalities and vulnerability may not be seen as up for discussion. Or to be seen discussing such issues publicly and openly in a participatory process may make groups and individuals vulnerable to various forms of discrimination and even violence. For example, in Anandi in the preparatory phase for the first mela there was a lot of disagreement among the NGOs as to whether untouchability, alcoholism and violence against women should be listed as topics for discussion. These issues had not come up in the list of topics submitted by the groups. After much discussion, it was felt that only if the issues were explicitly raised would the extent of these problems amongst the groups be clear. Although women hardly ever articulated these social problems in the group meetings, in the large gathering of the mela a large number of groups identified violence against women, alcoholism and untouchability as priority concerns. It may therefore be necessary for outside agencies to initiate discussions and negotiate where necessary with vested interests.

Finally external support is likely to be necessary in order to *translate learning into action and lobbying and advocacy*. Where the aim is effective lobbying and advocacy or programme learning, qualitative and quantitative methods are also used to increase the credibility and impact of the information. These methods are also used where the extent of inequality and conflict makes use of participatory tools unreliable and/or likely to increase vulnerability and conflict. It is unrealistic to expect very poor people to bear all the costs of the action learning process—any more than one expects other researchers to bear the costs of their investigation. Networking and advocacy campaigns also entail costs. External information and advice may be necessary in order to supply necessary information on the macro-level opportunities and constraints. Lobbying and advocacy will need professional expertise at certain levels and to present the findings of grassroots learning in ways which will be persuasive for national level administrators and policy-makers.

The levels of explicit support and funding needed will depend on context. The initial costs of setting up such processes may be higher until methodologies have been adapted and systems and networks established. Nevertheless, costs are unlikely to be high compared to existing costs of existing external assessments or training. The costs of an event like Anandi's annual fair are similar to the average cost for any training event in the area, per person per day. Costs like travel and production of tools are shared partially by the organisations and the participating groups. The largest cost is in terms of time from

various NGOs in the area and volunteers from other civil society institutions (students groups, teachers, self help group leaders/family members).

Perhaps the most serious challenge in using PALS for impact assessment is how external agencies can build on grassroots learning without dominating the process for their own needs. There is a need for a change in attitude towards what constitutes credibility and priorities for impact assessment. Is the priority to be able to identify precisely what percentage of a (generally small) random sample has enjoyed precisely what increase in income (based often on unreliable respondent data and raising issues of attribution)? Or is the priority to have an in-depth qualitative understanding of why things are happening and a participatory consultative process about realistic ways forward? If the main focus of external assessments truly moves towards 'improving practice' rather than 'proving impacts', then programme participants would have an inherent interest in participating in the types of grassroots learning processes discussed here. Moreover building the skills, information networks and knowledge base of poor and very poor people as well as others in the 'information chain' is in itself a contribution to empowerment and civil society development.

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APPENDIX 1: MELA ACTIVITIES: SOME COMMON EXERCISES

Activity 1: Problem Matrix

Step 1. Before the mela a list of problems facing poor women is drawn up through a participatory process, consultation with field workers and where relevant from secondary sources.

Step 2. At the mela women represent the problems they face through developing a large two dimensional graph pasted on a wall. Participants put pictured icon stickers on the matrix against the problems they are facing in their villages. This rapidly gets a quantitative idea of the extent of the different problems as perceived by the groups.

Activity 2: Recording Achievements and Strategies

Step 1. Stalls are set up where each participant go and to register their mandal details. Each issue is assigned a symbol. For example a large tray of mud along with paper trees have been used to represent afforestation. Cut-outs of cups and saucers pinned on a soft board have represented mandals which have overcome caste discrimination.

Step 2. As women leaders are registered each is given a badge with icon buttons representing activities/action taken by their mandal. A volunteer notes down details, using a highlighter pen to colour the symbol on the badge of the participant.

Step 3. Women then split into groups of about 60 each, based on the colour of their badges. Over the next two days as they go to each stall women construct a road map of their work and achievements as they share their experiences. They exchange experiences of their struggles in taking on new roles as community leaders.

Step 4. Scoreboards are kept for savings and credit which aggregate the amounts reported by the mandals. The cumulative figures are reported in the plenary.

Activity 3: 'We Shall Let Our Fears Go'

Apart from looking at the tangible achievements of the Mahila Mandals the women share their journey of struggle, negotiation and triumphs as they have stepped out of their homes into the groups and then to government offices at taluka and district level.

Step 1. In the same group discussions facilitators use charts to document the fears shared by the women.

Step 2. At the end of group discussions, women identify the fears they had overcome and each woman writes one fear they want to be free from on a gas balloon.

Step 3. Women gather in the open ground and to the sound of drums and chanting 'beek udadishu . . . himmat lavishu . . . ae.. ae.. gai' (we shall let our fears go and bring in strength), women collectively let go of all the balloons symbolizing their fears. It is moment of rejoicing and great enthusiasm for everyone. The entire sky is filled with colour and energy.

Activity 4: Tree of Dreams



Step 1. Towards the end of the mela, the women are asked to write a dream—personal or for the village or the community on to a leaf.

Step 2. Each leaf is then stuck on a panel to create a beautiful tree of women's dreams for the future.

Step 3. The huge tree of women's dreams is exhibited at the end of the mela for everyone to see.

Step 4. The mela ends with women exchanging plant saplings between mandals of different regions with the promise that they will nurture the plant saplings just as they would nurture their dreams. One day they will all grow into the kind of tree they had collectively created.

Source. Based on Dand 2002 account of the first Rajkot mela and activities which were carried over to many subsequent melas.

APPENDIX 2: POSSIBLE PALS TOOLS AND ISSUES FOR INVESTIGATING FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOODS

Stakeholder Analysis and Criteria Identification

- **Calendar:** seasonal analysis of food security, incomes and expenditures to see what common patterns emerge.
- **Food security diamond:** at household level and gender disaggregated to show gender specific dimensions and gender differences in quantitative distribution.

Visioning Change and Appreciating Achievements

- **Road journeys:** from the past to the future with people from households of different levels of food security to show and plan both ways those who are now food secure have advanced and possible ways out for those who are still food insecure

Identifying Challenges

- **Problem and solution trees:** for food security and income/expenditure trees. Quantification of roots and prioritization of branches. Disaggregation by gender i.e. are women getting less food? Earning and controlling less income?
- **Problem and solution trees to go into greater depth for particular roots:** (causes) e.g. women's land ownership, women's role in decision-making in the family, lack of income earning activities, poor nutrition practices, male alcoholism and other luxury expenditure.
- **Circle diagrams:** of intra-household decision-making with quantification and for institutional analysis.

Looking at Possible Solutions

- **Road journeys:** to identify stages of action. These could also be retrospective to analyse experience of any actions which have already been taken and analyze the implications for future actions.
- **Input/output trees:** for more detailed planning of particular branches (possible solutions) e.g. possible activities for income generation, ways of increasing women's land ownership, increasing women's control over decision-making, improving nutrition, decreasing alcoholism and other luxury expenditure.
- **Chapati diagrams:** of household decision-making and institutional analysis to see which are the key decisions and institutions, the possibilities for change and how this might be done.

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