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Environmentally Sustainable Development

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Cover Note: The artwork reproduced on the cover is from the Warli tribe, who live in the Sahyadri mountains in Maharashtra state, north of Bombay. These tribal peoples are renowned for their mythic vision of Mother Earth, their traditional agricultural methods, and their lack of caste differentiation.

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MOROCCO

ENHANCING THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT

Sunita Gandhi is the Task Manager for the Economic and Sector Work: Enhancing the Participation of Women in Development.



Photo by Sunita Gandhi

CASES

“Why not ask the women themselves?” This was the question that kept running through my mind as I sat around the table one afternoon with members of my division. We had been called together to discuss an issues paper that had been prepared as a forerunner to the Morocco Women in Development sector study. Here we were, sitting in Washington, talking about the different things that could be done to help the women of Morocco, yet no one had thought to ask the women what they wanted. So when it came my turn to comment, I expressed this thought. My division chief immediately endorsed it. Both he and our director were receptive to the idea of a “bottom-up” approach. Shortly after our discussion, I was asked to manage the Morocco Women in Development Sector Study.

STARTING IN A “COLD CLIMATE”

Because participatory sector studies were not customary in Morocco, I realized we would have to start by bringing together key Moroccan stakeholders from government, academia, and the NGO community to share their experiences in working with women and get their ideas on how we should proceed with the study. To do this, we organized a one-day workshop in July 1993 in Rabat. This event marked the beginning of the preparation process for the study. It was also the start of a long and involved effort to build consensus for participation at all levels in the country and within the Bank.

Now, you must understand that we were starting all this in a “cold climate.” The Moroccan government finds the question of women’s economic

independence to be controversial and up until this point had been reluctant to even *discuss* it with the Bank. Direct participation of the local population in development strategies is also a sensitive issue. As a result, getting the ministries to attend a workshop on women's development turned out to be much more complicated than first envisioned.

IDENTIFYING STAKEHOLDERS

The first step was figuring out whom to invite. We knew we wanted to involve all those working with or interested in the affairs of women. With regard to government stakeholders, we invited all relevant ministries, which totaled nine. We also had local consultants compile lists of all NGOs and academic institutions that were doing work in this area. By the end of this process, we had identified all potentially interested parties—or so we thought.

Our government counterpart for the study was the Ministry of Agriculture. Due to the nature of the topic, however, we were faced with a prevailing reluctance on the part of the other ministries to participate in such an event. Nevertheless, I persisted in organizing this meeting because I believed that without a consensus at the ministry level, we would never achieve the support and legitimacy needed to move the process forward. I soon realized that I would have to change tactics to bring the different ministries to the table. So, instead of billing this as a high profile workshop, I decided to present it in a much less threatening way, as a “joint discussion” with those involved in women's activities. I visited each ministry personally and asked them to attend an informal gathering to discuss the issues. On the day of the workshop more than sixty people attended when we had expected only twenty-two. Not only was every ministry we visited represented, but participants from women's NGOs and other groups we hadn't known even *existed* heard about the meeting and turned up. I think those who attended were a combination of people who were genuinely interested as well as those who were just curious to see what the Bank was doing.

THE FIRST WORKSHOP

The objectives of this first workshop were to determine priority areas for the sector study and discuss a participatory approach that would enable us to identify women's perceptions of their own development. I should mention that this was the first time that government officials and NGOs had sat down together at the same table to discuss

women's issues. I think the neutral banner of the World Bank helped facilitate dialogue between the two sides. Through the course of the afternoon, I could see that people were gradually shedding much of their initial skepticism and were beginning to think more about cooperating toward a common goal.

By the end of the workshop, the group had endorsed the use of a participatory approach. With regard to priorities, different views emerged during the debate, which were integrated with those of Bank consultants who were preparing the background document based on a review of existing literature. Out of this emerged four principal areas of concentration in order of their importance: (a) literacy and education, (b) labor-saving technologies, (c) maternal health and preventive health care, and (d) access to credit.

This list represented *our* collective view of *their* priorities. Now the big question was if the women would come up with the same priorities. If not, *whose view counts?* In addition, how would we reconcile these differences in views not only between *us* and *them*, but also between various parts of the country, because it was also quite possible that views would differ among regions.

CHOOSING A TECHNIQUE

When I returned to Washington, I was cautiously happy about the general consensus on using a participatory approach for the strategy development. The next step was choosing the right technique. I believed that local women are probably the best experts around when it comes to knowing what they need and what they are (or are not) willing to do to bring about the desired changes in their communities. I knew I needed an approach that would not only allow us to talk with women about what was important to them but go beyond this to involve them actively in the policy formulation process. This was my shopping list, but I didn't know where to look.

I mentioned this to a Bank colleague one afternoon over a cup of tea. He suggested that I consider using participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methodologies (see Appendix I). This was completely new to me, but I decided to look into it. The first thing I did was call Dr. Robert Chambers at the Institute for Development Studies in Sussex. After an encouraging conversation, he graciously sent me all sorts of materials on PRA. I immersed myself in them, drawn by the seeming dynamism of the process and the way it allowed people to modify their views as their contexts and priorities changed. PRA seemed well suited for our purposes, but I still had many questions. How could we correlate qualitative responses with “scientific” data?

Is it worth the extra time, money, and effort? Will the Moroccans want it? Where will the money come from? Could this be done on a large scale? Although I still remained a bit skeptical, it seemed worth a try—particularly after a comparison with other approaches. A few weeks later, I hired two PRA experts and took them with me to Morocco for the second workshop.

THE SECOND WORKSHOP

We held the second workshop in November 1993 with approximately the same set of stakeholders. This time around, the purpose was to discuss the specifics of undertaking participatory fieldwork and the possibility of using PRA. One of the PRA consultants introduced the participants to the basic principles of PRA and explained how it could be used to contribute to the study. A great deal of debate followed her presentation. Many questions were raised about how the regions would be selected for PRA and who would conduct it. One prevailing concern expressed was that the results would be qualitative and not “scientific.” How would this kind of information be incorporated into the rest of the study?

The consultants and I did our best to respond to the questions and concerns. During this discussion, we made a point not to try to influence the participants in any one direction. I certainly didn’t have all the answers, as this was new to me as well. I simply presented the pros and cons of using the methodology and why I thought it made sense within the context of Morocco. Then I asked them what they thought.

As I look back, I see that detachment is an important principle when presenting options, particularly on the part of the Bank. The Moroccans are particularly sensitive about anything “assumed” about or forced on them. So I made it clear that they could take it or leave it—the choice was theirs. This approach put the Moroccans immediately at ease. It let them know that they were in control and that nothing would happen without their approval. This really set the “learning” mood. From this point on, we were flooded with questions and ideas. Everyone was interested and eager to know more. We received many suggestions regarding regional site selections for the PRA.

A NEW DILEMMA

The main outcome of the one-day workshop was a general consensus on giving PRA a try. Participants, especially government representatives, held the strong view that Moroccans should be the ones to carry out the PRA, *not* foreign consultants. First, it was felt that talking to

local people is a sensitive matter and should be done by Moroccans. Second, it was an issue of capacity building within the country. This left me in a difficult position. I knew that there weren’t many PRA experts worldwide, let alone within Morocco. How was I going to find twenty or so Moroccans experienced in this area?

In the end, there was really only one option. We would have to train local people to do this. As you probably know, training programs—let alone PRAs—are not commonly a part of Bank-financed economic and sector work exercises. As such, this issue was debated quite vigorously at the departmental and regional level at the Bank. My managers were not as concerned about the methodology *per se* but more about the cost effectiveness of incorporating local-level participation in a sector study. I would have to do some convincing to get the funds to do this work.

PRESENTING THE PROS AND CONS

At a seminar on gender hosted by the regional vice president, I was given the opportunity to talk about the sector study. At this time, I mentioned the problems of finding funds for participatory work. I ran through the benefits compared with the costs of using a participatory approach, which in my view were that it would (*a*) lead to a greater dialogue between government and nongovernment institutions (something that was currently lacking in the country), (*b*) lead to greater ownership of the strategy by Moroccans at every level, (*c*) contribute to empowering people in rural and poor urban communities by giving them an opportunity to assess their own needs and propose solutions, and (*d*) likely lead to better implementation and sustainability of follow-on projects.

Then, of course, I stated the cons of using a participatory approach, that is, (*a*) participation may be time and resource intensive, (*b*) it raises expectations among local populations that may not be fulfilled if projects are not forthcoming, (*c*) it is organizationally and logistically troublesome, and (*d*) because methodologies used are not “scientific,” the legitimacy of the results may be questioned by various experts. Fortunately, the conclusion drawn from all this was that the benefits of participation were likely to exceed its costs in terms of extra time and resources required. The regional vice president’s special gender fund provided the critical funding we needed to move ahead.

TESTING OUR HYPOTHESIS

In February 1994 we decided to run a pilot PRA session. I had heard that Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) was running a program in the

Zagora area and had established a relationship with the local population there. I contacted the head of the program who offered his staff to carry out the pilot. We hired a PRA consultant from Singapore who joined two local women from GTZ and one from the local university to carry out the four-day exercise in the rural village of Tinfu. In this way, we were able to “piggyback” on the work of GTZ. All this, however, was done in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture, our in-country counterpart for the study. From the pilot, we learned that men’s and women’s views were different. Whereas men wanted to build bridges and roads, women’s top priorities were clinics, ambulances, electricity, running water, and collective ovens. This showed us that women’s time horizons are short and their greatest concerns lie in meeting their immediate needs and removing the burdens of their daily drudgery. Although rural women valued girls’ education, they viewed it as a long-term need, achievable only after their most pressing basic needs had been met. This was a significant finding given that *we*—that is government, NGOs, academics, and Bank experts—as well as quantitative studies had all identified education as the first priority above all else. These results confirmed my belief that we were moving in the right direction and that we would learn a great deal by conducting PRA on a wider scale. The central problem, however, of how we would integrate this information with the formal quantitative sector analysis remained to be seen.

DOUBTS START CREEPING IN

Task Managers who have supported participatory processes will tell you that it’s hard to do when you are only in the country for a few weeks at a time. I quickly found out that these sorts of undertakings are dynamic and require continuous interaction with the different stakeholders. Participatory economic and sector work is a completely new concept in Morocco, particularly when it attempts to bring local stakeholders into the policy dialogue. Anything new is bound to raise a lot of questions. So when new personnel in certain ministries began to ask questions—and I was not there to answer them—they started making assumptions. Unknown to me or my Bank colleagues, these misunderstandings and lack of in-country presence would lead to difficulties down the road.

GENERAL ORIENTATION WORKSHOP

Meanwhile, I was back in Washington busily preparing for the two PRA training workshops. The first was a three-day general orientation workshop held for government

staff, NGOs, academics, and a few members of the bilateral donor community. Its theme was “Using Participatory Methods.” We intentionally held it in the South of Morocco away from Rabat, in a town called Ouarzazate, so that fewer people would attend. The interest was so great, however, that despite the inconvenience of travel and expense—which had to be borne by the participants—more than 100 people showed up. Sixty participants were from government (it is interesting to note that this was a significant increase from the ten who had attended the first workshop and twenty who had attended the second).

The workshop began with an overview of the government of Morocco’s Strategy for Integrating Women in Development and the role of the economic and sector study. This was followed by a presentation on the importance of participatory methods in preparation of the sector study and the strengths and weaknesses of PRA compared with conventional survey research methods. Next came the fun part—the interactive and practical exercises.

GUESS WHO KNOWS?

Much of PRA training is based on the concept of “embodied learning” through social interactions, game-playing, group dynamics, and so on. We wanted to get people to shed their preconceptions and start thinking in new ways about whose knowledge counts. To set the right mood, we began with a warm-up exercise that I have since named “Guess Who Knows?”

With the exception of two people, the group was asked to gather in a circle and join hands. They were instructed not to let go or change the positions of their grip during the exercise. Next the facilitator asked them to entangle themselves any which way. They found this to be quite a lot of fun and came up with all sorts of contortions! The two outsiders were then asked to help untangle the mess. They were not allowed to touch—only give instructions as to who should do what. We started timing the process: six minutes to sort out the confusion.

Next, the group was asked to repeat the exercise and entangle themselves once again. This time it was the facilitator’s turn to give instruction, but she simply said to them, “Untangle yourselves!” Again we timed it. “Just over 10 seconds!” the facilitator announced. “What do you think of this?” The group was surprised and excited. They broke up into small groups to discuss. One conclusion was that “local people know better how to get out of their own mess because they live in it.” Another conclusion was that it took more time for outsiders to sort things out, despite their good intentions. Others, however, ques-

tioned if this really represents what occurs in reality. This led the group to ask, “What is our role as outsiders?”

The facilitators began a discussion around the role played by external experts in the development process. Through discussion, participants concluded that outsiders have another, more effective role to play as “catalysts” or “facilitators” as opposed to leaders of the development process. The exercise helped them to understand that when people are given the opportunity and encouragement to help themselves, they *learn* how to do it in the process.

The remainder of the seminar consisted of many such activities, which the participants enjoyed and ranked highly during the evaluation as preferable to the lecture format. The participants felt that learning about PRA by doing some of the actual group exercises such as mapping, ranking, and drawing matrices helped them better appreciate the value of participatory methods. I am certain that these interactions contributed toward a level of understanding and commitment on the part of the participants that no amount of lectures or book reading could have achieved. The flood of interest in the upcoming, intensive PRA training workshop came as no surprise.

AN EMBARRASSMENT OF RICHES

Everyone wanted to attend, yet we had spots for only twenty to thirty people. I was amazed that so many would go voluntarily into a village setting and endure such rough conditions. This was a bare-bones village with no electricity or running water. We had asked each ministry to restrict their nominations to two people and each NGO to one person. Even then we ended up with thirty-four (thirty-three women and one man) and a long waiting list. Many people came up to me personally that afternoon and expressed their disappointment in not being chosen for the training. None of us could have predicted such a level of demand for training in participatory techniques. In providing this training, the Bank is helping to build capacity within the country to undertake participatory work.

TRAINING IN A VILLAGE SETTING

For the ten-day intensive PRA training, we wanted the participants to live in a rural setting. We decided to hold the training in Sidi-Filah, a village two hours east of Ouarzazate, which was accessible only by dirt road. All the participants, trainers, and Bank staffers (a total of some fifty people) were to stay with village families to see if trainees could endure such living conditions for extended periods of time. We felt it would also give them

an opportunity to test some of the methods they were learning. It was agreed that at the end of the ten days, twenty people would be selected to go out and do the field PRA.

Preparations for the training were going smoothly, but on the other side—the bureaucratic side—we were experiencing lots of problems. We discovered that going into the field and talking to local people required a “visa” from the government. It took yet another round of personal phone calls and letters to get most ministries to agree. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Statistics—the key ministry when it came to fieldwork and research—however, did not respond. We were not sure until the last minute if the field mission would go through.

A SUDDEN BREAKDOWN

When I arrived in Ouarzazate for the training mission, I was informed that a new person had just taken over as government liaison with the Bank. Apparently, he was under the impression that the Bank was trying to circumvent the government and go directly to the people. These misunderstandings had in turn been passed on to the director of statistics—the man in charge of granting our clearance. He was angry and wary of our motives. He felt that we were trying to carry out the fieldwork without his knowledge, despite the fact that a representative from the Department of Statistics had agreed to the PRA at the November workshop. I decided to fly to Rabat to request permission to proceed.

In the meantime, the governor of Ouarzazate, who had attended the opening of the training workshop, had become interested in the program. His presence at the opening session had given our project national television and media coverage. Ironically, all this attention served only to fuel the suspicion of central authorities and made things worse for us back in Rabat. To add to the difficulty of my situation, the governor himself asked me to proceed with the PRA activities in Ouarzazate, regardless of whether we received permission to do so from the central government. I thanked him for his support, but knew instinctively that I was better off not making any promises. We had been working in an environment of uncertainty from the beginning. There was no telling what would happen next.

BACK TO SQUARE ONE

“Final clearance has been denied.” This was the message I received on arrival in Rabat. I was in a state of disbelief as the new government liaison with the Bank and director of

statistics started raising the same old issues and questions that we had been answering for the past year. It was as if I was starting all over. What were we doing in Ouarzazate? Why was the Bank siding with regional governments? Furthermore, the director didn't understand our methodology and did not agree with some of the selection criteria and the regions we had chosen for the study. He was angry because he perceived us as flouting the authority of the central government. Again, I did not try to debate the issues with him or defend my position. I simply presented the pros and cons of the PRA methodology and the rationale for wanting to involve local women in formulating the sector strategy. After this I said, "If you don't think we should proceed with this, I don't either. This entire effort has been based on consensus. Your support of this is important. We will do what we can to persuade you, but if you do not agree, we are willing to withdraw the team."

With that, the attitude of the director changed dramatically. He had been afraid that the Bank was trying to run the show and was visibly relieved to realize that the Moroccans were in the driver's seat. From this point on, he was much more receptive to everything I said. At first, he asked us to hold off while the government undertook their national census. This would mean a delay of more than four months and possibly much longer. I decided to present to him the risks of delaying as opposed to the benefits of doing. First, I explained, the newly trained Moroccans might forget what they had learned if the PRA was postponed; second, the outside trainers were already in the country, and I was not sure they would be available if we did this later; third, too much delay might lead the Bank to decide to withdraw its support for the study because of a perceived lack of government interest; and fourth, several critical projects were coming down the pipeline that would need a strategy for integrating women.

Little by little, I could sense his reluctance dissipating. The last obstacle to overcome was the selection of regions. At this point I realized how worthwhile it had been to spend the extra time and energy developing the elaborate (thirty-point) selection criteria and site designation through a process of consensus. The broadly based support we had garnered by involving the various ministries from the start gave legitimacy to the site selection process. In the end, the director made only one change to our regional lists. We received our "visa" for PRA the following day.

CARRYING OUT PARTICIPATORY RURAL APPRAISAL

Now that the director of statistics had given his final approval, we were ready to begin. The PRA was conducted

over a four-month period and covered five rural and two urban regions. The trainees were divided into teams of three. We sent five teams to rural areas and the remaining five people to urban areas. Within each region, the teams covered four or five *douars* or villages, often in isolated regions and desert communities. The first step was to meet with the local authorities and bring them on board. We explained what we had come to do and asked for their assistance in selecting which villages within their region would be most suitable for the PRA. We found that gaining their support from the beginning ultimately ensured that our work in the *douars* progressed smoothly.

Most *douars* contained anywhere from fifty to one hundred families. In doing the PRA, our objective was to bring together members of the community—both men and women—in an open dialogue to generate learning and spark innovative thinking on a wide variety of issues. The team used a number of techniques, including open-ended interviewing, focus group discussions, matrix ranking, mapping, and seasonal and historical diagramming to bring out the rich experiences and local knowledge of the villagers.

This was a highly interactive process in which the participants were able to modify their views as the PRA went along—adding to their previous models or maps, shifting priorities, rethinking their strategies, and inventing new options—as they began to view and discuss their problems, constraints, and opportunities in new ways. The process was iterative and continuous. Each exercise built on the information and ideas generated in the previous one. For example, during a focus group discussion, women identified certain top priorities but were undecided on which of these was most important. The matrix ranking exercise helped them clarify their priorities and think through the choices they were making by giving each a fixed number of points (representing money) and asking them to allocate these among a list of needs that they had identified earlier. When asked to look at the same issue in a different way, some women found that they valued one item more than another and as a group began to articulate and understand the reasons why. It was a learning experience for the team as well as the participants to see how their responses changed and evolved during the course of the PRA.

EMPOWERING WOMEN

In our efforts to discuss problems and find solutions to the constraints facing local women, we were always careful to include the men and work with them as well. We realized the importance of their participation in this ef-

fort and the need to sensitize them to the hardships women face. These group interactions helped them to understand how constraints on women affect the family and village as a whole. In this way, they became part of any collective solutions. So, although women remained the focus of our study, we knew it was essential that those who held the power—the village men—were involved in the process. It was clear that without their support, change would be impossible.

Having said this, we noted that organizing women into focus groups for discussion and decisionmaking had empowering effects on them; in at least one instance, it gave them confidence to take the initiative to improve their circumstances. Shortly after the PRA was completed in one village, local authorities visited the community. As was customary at such meetings, the men were seated at the front of the room and the women gathered at the rear. On this occasion, the representative of the local people was quite vocal in expressing the community's desire for installation of tube wells (in locations situated conveniently near his own home).

Suddenly, a woman at the rear stood up and voiced her objection to this request. As a result of the information generated during the PRA, she was much more aware of what was good for the village as a whole. Along with other women, she had worked through a cost-benefit analysis type of exercise that showed that a tube well would only benefit a few. She then put forth her own suggestion for a collective oven, which she argued would benefit many more of the families in the village. She received support in this from many of the other village women, who then also felt encouraged to speak. These women had gained strength from having done their own analysis and examining the pros and cons of various options. The consensus they had built around these priorities during group discussions and focus groups gave them the power to speak and the knowledge to defend their choices. We heard many similar stories from team members returning from their different regions following the completion of the PRA.

NEXT STEPS

The next step will be to bring representatives of the women who participated in the PRA together with senior ministry officials to present the priorities and strategies for their own betterment that they themselves have devised. Although we have taken our PRA results and

synthesized them, we will be presenting the information in a language and format that has been filtered and formalized through *our* lens. But, I believe it's equally important (and more powerful) for local women to present their own findings using their own locally constructed floor diagrams and models. I think lots of people assume that local people can't solve their own problems. My guess is that it will be quite a revelation for many to see that village women not only have the ability to identify constraints and invent solutions but that they can be quite good at quantitative analysis as well.

The locally derived strategies that will be presented to Moroccan policymakers will constitute a fresh source of information. With regard to the sector study, we will use these findings to enrich the strategy document and refine some of our assumptions. Not only will this input influence sector recommendations, but it will be available to help guide the future work of the participating ministries.

ON REFLECTION

We are not at the finish line yet—the months ahead may still bring further uncertainties—but I can say that introducing participatory economic and sector work in Morocco has not been easy. We have made many mistakes along the way, but I know that's part of the learning process. We hope that, by the end, we will have insights to share with those who are interested in undertaking similar participatory sector studies.

Already, I can see the impact that this consensus-building process has had on everyone involved: government ministries that only last year showed marginal interest in this initiative are now eager to be the main conductors and sponsors of this study; a broad range of government officials and NGO personnel have been exposed to a variety of participatory methods and techniques; a smaller group of their representatives have received PRA training and field experience that they will be able to pass on to others in the country; and the director of statistics is now in favor of utilizing PRA on a larger scale in Morocco—perhaps within the context of the nationwide census.

Participation in the context of economic and sector work has not only generated interest, ownership, and collaboration among different government agencies, NGOs, and research institutions, but, more important, it has opened up a realm of possibilities for involving local people in their own development.



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