

How to Institutionalize Participatory Approaches in Extension Systems: The Case of Turkey¹

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ABSTRACT

Participatory approaches have an increasing importance in extension in many countries. But instead of “empowering people” and “giving the stick to people” the power elite of the world found ways to use this tool for their benefits. In many countries participation is destroyed.

In general, three elements are important in success of institutionalization of participation: institutional support and context, interactive learning environment, participatory approaches and methods.

In the time being there is a tendency for participatory approaches as a result of different reasons in Turkey. In one of the workshop result report which is collectively prepared by the academics and Agriculture Department’s experts and officials the participatory approaches had been seriously taken into account. The report accepted participatory approaches as a new paradigm.

If the process can not be progressed rationally, either the participatory attempts in Turkey will not be succeeded, the existing top down approaches will be continuing to be the main stream or the participation will be abused.

In the very beginning the top managers and a core group of experts in the Agriculture Department and related organisations should be trained on participatory extension approaches. The research organisations will be included in these training also. In parallel the participatory research approaches should be introduced in research organisations. These training activities should not be planned in a short period and sufficient time and other sources should be devoted. Including research organisations all related organisations should create a learning organisation situation.

INTRODUCTION

Participatory approaches have an increasing importance in extension in many countries. Many international organizations like World Bank and development organizations like GTZ begin to advocate participatory approaches. In Turkey Department of Agriculture have many problems. Unsatisfactory extension results, financial problems depending on national budgeted deficits, heavy paper work for direct payments and insufficient numbers of extension workers in the rural area are some of them. Department is looking new ways to tackle the existing situation. If Turkey chooses the participatory approaches for an effective extension the process may flow to either a good or a bad direction. The situation will be chaotic in the very beginning. In this paper the fundamentals of institutionalization of participatory approaches into extension systems in general and a strategy in Turkey for a better flux will be examined.

REAL PARTICIPATION OR RHETORIC

The participatory approaches brought a very fresh air to agricultural extension and rural development in the world. But it became suddenly a buzz word. Instead of “empowering people” and “giving the stick to the people” the power elite of the world found ways to use this tool for their benefits. There was “a potential that a PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) based focus on ‘people knowledge’ has to provide a radical challenge to existing power structures, professional positions and knowledge systems.... On the contrary, participatory approaches have proved compatible with top-down planning systems, and have not necessarily heralded changes in prevailing institutional practices.” (Mosse, 2001) In the very beginning of the dissemination of participatory practices in extension in Turkey this danger may appear also in Turkey. Participatory approaches may be hijacked for use to top-down attitudes. We may speak participation while doing different things. (Wordofa, 1998) So it very useful to examine the experiences in the world.

For example, J. Wolfensohn, the ex-president of World Bank, in a foreword of the book published by the Bank on participatory techniques writes:

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“It is now commonly accepted that participatory approaches and partnerships in development are essential for improving the livelihoods of the poor”. (McCracken and Narayan, 1998)

It is very clear that so called “structural adjustments” policy of the Bank had created millions of jobless people in many countries including Turkey. But here we will concentrate on the “participatory practices” of World Bank. The reality of World Bank practices on the ground is very different from the Wolfensohn’s rhetoric. “As Larry Lohmann points out in a critique of the Bank’s record on participation”: (Hilyard et al, 2001)

I have in front of me hundreds of pages of a pre-Investment Study for a GEF project called The Conservation Forest Area Protection, Management and Development Project, which is a project in the pipeline for an important protected area in Thailand...The project is slated for an area- the Thung Yai-Huai Kha Khang sanctuaries- inhabited by thousands of Karen people, who speak a language distinct from that of the Thai majority. The project calls for their eviction. Yet not one of these hundreds of pages of bureaucratic English has been translated in Thai, much less in Karen: much less communicated to, much less discussed with, much less agreed to by the local Karen people in the sanctuary to be affected. This in spite of the fact that NGOs have requested Thai translation of all this material.

The task manager of the GEF project I’ve referred to .. perhaps provided some insight into this novel concept of ‘participation’ and ‘empowerment’ when he told a Thai audience.. that the eviction of the Karen people- a course of action which is, by the way, opposed by the chief of the Thaug Yai sanctuary himself- would have to be carried out by means of ‘the sword, the carrot and the stick’. (Lohmann, 1994)

The attitude and the practice of the project managers ‘is not an isolated individual aberration’; it is ‘embedded thorough the culture of the World Bank’ (ibid) ‘To dangle the carrot of the participation, on the one hand, while continuing to apply the stick, on the other, by maintaining a strict control over resources, time, procedures, as well as methods and criteria for evaluation, is plainly unacceptable’ (Blackburn, 1998)

In many countries participation is destroyed and dependency created by: (Gaventa, 1998)

- Failure to understand the philosophy of participation and PRA
- Pressures to scale-up PRA rapidly, sometimes on a national level
- Demand for instant PRA training one-off and on a large scale
- Low quality PRA training, limited to routine methods
- The rush to prepare projects and programs
- Top-down procedure
- Drives to disburse funds
- Time bound targets for products, neglecting process
- Inflexible programs and projects
- Neglect and underestimation of the knowledge and the capabilities of the local people
- Lack of staff continuity
- Penalization of participatory staff
- Failure to recognize the ABC of PRA, namely the primacy of the personal behaviour

THE ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS IN INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF PARTICIPATION

In general, three elements are important in success:

- Institutional support and context
- Interactive learning environment
- Participatory approaches and methods

These elements can be visualized by three intersecting circles referring to Pretty and Chambers’ conceptual framework for a New Learning Paradigm (1994)

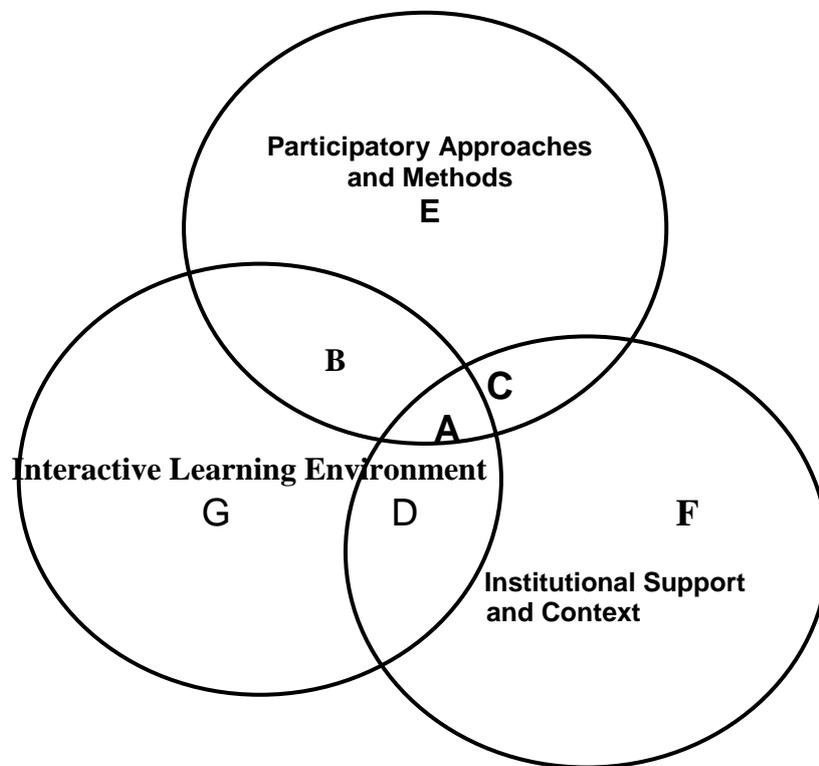


Figure: Conceptual Framework for Beyond Farmer First (Scoones and Thomson, 1994, p. 187)

Sectors G, F, and E represents starting points and preconditions, but no initiative is likely to spread well unless it receives support by moving into D, C, or B, and then into A. (ibid, p.188)

Building critical masses in organizations is a very effective strategy in fostering participation.

TURKEY'S SITUATION ON PARTICIPATORY EXTENSION APPROACHES DEVELOPMENT

Construction and the practice of Turkey's agricultural extension system is generally top-down. The last extension project was "Training and Visit System". This project was supported by World Bank credits, and the approach had a top-down philosophy. At the last period some attempts have been realised to make this project more sensitive to farmers' problems could not succeed. Nearly there is no a real difference amongst the project provinces and without project provinces extension organizations. Also after the termination of project a strong and healthy evaluation and reflection could not be realized.

In agricultural faculties the students don't have effective participatory training except in some courses in Ege University. Even today in many of the extension courses in faculties the main paradigm is still technology transfer.

But in the time being there is a tendency for participatory approaches as a result of different reasons and developments. One reason may be the good results of some pilot projects realized by Ege University using participatory approaches. (Özkaya, Karaturhan, Boyacı, 1998-2000-2003 and Dinç,2005) Some Turkish participants attending to seminars in abroad on participatory extension became another reason. Also the situation of Agriculture Department urges the top managers to find a new way to solve the department's and agricultural sector problems. Unsatisfactory extension results,

financial problems depending on national budgeted deficits, heavy paper work for direct payments and lack of extension workers in the rural area are some of them. Participatory approaches may be perceived as a solution to these problems. Also in one of the workshop result report on extension which is collectively prepared by the academics and Agriculture Department's experts and officials, the participatory approaches had been seriously taken into account. The report accepted participatory approaches as a new paradigm. Also some top managers declared that the Department will follow the participatory approaches after now. Although the practice and rhetoric always different in these organizations, at least there is a danger that the "participation" will be abused.

This situation is very critic in Turkey. If the process can not be progressed rationally, either the participatory attempts in Turkey will not be succeeded, the existing top down approaches will be continuing to be the main stream or the participation will be abused. The world experiences showed that by asking a few producers opinion some projects label themselves as "participatory". As it is seen in the World some so called NGO's established in the cities with multi national companies' funds claims themselves to have a participatory philosophy, but they empower only powerful elites instead of farmers. Developing real local and national NGO's will support the application of participatory extension approaches.

As it is seen in the World before, rapid and nationwide application of participatory extension approaches will not be successful. To be patient will be very rational. It is better to have some pilot projects in provinces or in counties in the beginning.

In the very beginning the top managers and a core group of experts in the Agriculture Department and related organisations should be trained on participatory extension approaches.. The research organisations will be included in these training also. In parallel the participatory research approaches should be introduced in research organisations. These training activities should not be planned in a short period and sufficient time and other sources should be devoted. Including research organisations all related organisations should create a learning organisation situation. Otherwise top down managed organisations can not perform participatory extension approaches.

The same logic can be performed in the pilot projects. The top managers and core expert groups in extension and research organisations should have adequate training on participatory extension approaches. The training of the extension workers should not be less than three weeks. These workers should be supported in the field with senior experts at least one year.

Every approach and philosophy abused until now in the world including religions and democracy, the participatory approaches are not the exception. If there is a transition to participatory approaches in extension, it should be carefully planned.

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