MODULE FOR PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

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EDITED BY

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FOREWORD

I am extremely proud to introduce this training module on Participatory Action Research, which was created in partnership with the Department of Sociology at Loyola College in Chennai and Child Rights and You (CRY). This work reflects CRY's long-held conviction that communities themselves must be at the centre of knowledge creation, decision-making, and action if lasting change in children's lives is to be accomplished.

CRY has been fighting for the rights of all Indian children to participation, development, protection, and survival for more than 40 years. To combat the injustices of child labour, child marriage, malnutrition, exclusion from school, and violence against children, our field coordinators and grassroots partners have been on the front lines of this journey, working with families, communities, and systems. Their work is based on relationships of trust with the most marginalised people and lived realities. But far too frequently, formal discussions of research and policy fail to acknowledge this experiential knowledge.

This module is a step in the right direction. Based on the tenets of action research, it affirms that the people who deal with the problems the most – field coordinators, community workers, and the kids themselves – are not only implemesnters or beneficiaries but also knowledge co-creators. It aims to give them the instruments and frameworks they need to examine their surroundings, record their observations, and turn their experiences into proof that can affect structural change. It also gives academics and facilitators a way to interact with communities

in a meaningful way while maintaining a spirit of humility, collaboration, and shared inquiry.

Our sincere gratitude goes out to Loyola College for their cooperation, as well as to the facilitators and participants whose commitment, originality, and critical thinking helped to shape this work. Above all, we recognise the children and communities whose voices must constantly direct our work.

In addition to providing CRY's partners in Tamil Nadu with a resource for enhancing their research capabilities, I hope that this module will encourage similar initiatives throughout the nation. It provides a model of knowledge production that is democratic, participatory, and firmly focused on justice by fusing academic rigour with firsthand experience. By doing this, it fortifies our shared determination to establish a society in which every child's rights are upheld, safeguarded, and fulfilled.

Puja Marwaha

Chief Executive Officer

Child Rights and You (CRY)

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PREFACE

This training module is a result of a yearlong sustained engagement to learn research with 20 fieldworkers from various partner organisations of Child Rights and You (CRY) from across Tamil Nadu in collaboration with Department of Sociology, Loyola College, Chennai. We, Ragini Pant from CRY and Venkata Narayana from the Department of Sociology, Loyola College, had framed this workshop as an attempt to break the violent amputation of knowledge from action. The three modules of the Workshop on Qualitative Research Methodology for CRY Partners happened at Loyola College, Chennai, during which resource persons trained in sociology and social work engaged with the participants about research. The workshop, which was aimed at providing a holistic qualitative research competency for the participants, articulated research not as a mere reified process of producing commodified knowledge. Modern knowledge production has trapped and straitjacketed knowledge into the control of specialists. These specialists, claiming to be the sole producers and owners of knowledge, curtail knowledge within the bastions of elite institutions. This module is made opposing this and affirming the prescriptions that all people think and that knowledge exists whenever and wherever people think.

The resource persons who worked through the workshops with the participants built upon this premise of thinking knowledge beyond its reification. Deriving primarily from the action research framework for intervention, this module seeks to build on and structure the existing knowledge of the fieldworkers. The first step in this process is to acknowledge the immense knowledge about the communities

which the fieldworkers, even with a few months of experience, possess.

A pedagogical approach that treats them as mere receivers of knowledge must be discarded because it does not take this into account. To treat fieldworkers as mere receivers of knowledge is a refusal to acknowledge their actions and their respective fields as processes and sites of knowledge production. Rather than thinking within the orthodox scientific framework of structuring knowledge as something that exists only under the condition of neutrality to satisfy curiosity, we begin from a scaffolding which thinks of knowledge as a pervasive presence in all human actions.

Therefore, the general framework of research training in this module is developed as ways of exploiting the existing knowledge that the fieldworkers already have to produce structured research. To do this, the module provides tools of action research where the fieldworkers need to bring in the members of the community and produce knowledge along with them. Knowledge production here is not seen as a privilege of the researcher but as a process mediated by the researcher where knowledge is produced for and by the community. The prescription towards an equal society is embedded throughout this process because the aim and end from the beginning is not the production of knowledge in itself but interventions against inequality. The methods of research in this module are aimed towards aiding these interventions, wherein knowledge produced about the society helps in identifying and bringing together the stakeholders towards making informed decisions and interventions. We hope this module serves this purpose.

Although we both edited this module, various resource persons primarily worked on its chapters based on their areas of expertise.

Ragini Pant has contributed the first chapter that introduces the reader to action research and lays out what this module tries to do. Venkata Narayana has contributed the second chapter, which explores the knowledge within the social, historical and political context in which it is produced. The third chapter, which deals with social science research, has been written by Dr M. Gautaman, who teaches at the Department of Sociology, Loyola College. Chapter four, which deals with qualitative research, and the last chapter on ethics were worked out by Dr Francis Adaikalam, who teaches at the Department of Social Work, Loyola College. Chapters five to nine, where an extensive discussion of action research and its tools has been presented, were prepared by Mr Stanley Joseph, who is an action research practitioner based in Chennai.

NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS

As mentioned in the preface, the following manual is a result of a yearlong engagement with a group of 20 fieldworkers of partner organisations of CRY. In order to do this, an action research pedagogy had to be developed and learnt along the way. Teaching research to the fieldworkers will not be fruitful in any way if done in a traditional classroom pedagogy of lectures. This is because of the immense knowledge about the society that the fieldworkers bring to the classroom. Even a fieldworker who has just a year of experience working in the field has had deep exposure to the way in which the society functions and the issues that marginalised people face. These fieldworkers engaged at the grassroots level are enmeshed in the social fabric. The instructors of this manual visited the participants in their work environment, where the participants demonstrated their deeply embedded knowledge and exceptional clarity regarding the communities they work with. Many of them were from the marginalised communities with whom they were working. Teaching research to someone who has such immense experience in the field cannot be approached through unidirectional methods, because they seek only to merely impart knowledge, without learning anything from the participants. So the first step is to acknowledge and learn about the ways in which the fieldworkers have come to experience and understand their work. This will help the instructors understand the participants and frame their content accordingly. There is no

fixed method to do this that can be suggested. This is because with each group of participants their experiences will differ. The only methodological suggestion that can be helpful across contexts is empathy. The ability of the resource persons to put themselves in the shoes of the participants is crucial and will immensely help in framing the specifically tailored pedagogy of each group.

We also realised that none of the participants were new researchers. Most of them had participated in some kind of research. Either they had been asked to undertake data collection, or some had formulated small-scale research to help them effectively work for the community in the field. Most of them had plenty of experience doing the former by filling questionnaires or even mapping the areas where they were working. What they were rarely involved in was the process of framing research. In some cases, in spite of the lack of any formal knowledge of research frameworks, we came across in-depth studies that had been formulated and undertaken by the fieldworkers.

This is the context and the usual kind of participants that the instructors will encounter. Rather than enforcing and teaching an existing rigid method of research that progresses down the hierarchy to violently subsume the knowledge of the researchers, we suggest a pedagogy and method that first understands the kind of work that the fieldworkers do and then develops ways of doing research along with them. This is how we understand action research pedagogy and action research itself. The tools in this module also follow this method of thinking with the par-

ticipants rather than away from them. The tools can be adopted and taught only by someone who has adopted this critical, empathetic worldview of research that is dialogical in nature.

For following the above-mentioned pedagogy for this module, it is necessary to have a small group of participants. This is so as to facilitate a more interactive environment where the instructors can get the participants to articulate and think about their experiences in the field. We conducted the three workshops for the same group of CRY partners as the residential ones, to allow the participants to engage in a relaxed manner, in an environment away from their fields. Most importantly, we would recommend anyone attempting to train fieldworkers using this module to not do a single workshop where they cover the whole module.

We separated the three workshops we conducted by at least three months. This allowed the participants to engage with the ideas introduced to them during the workshops in their respective fields. The first workshop introduced the participants to action research and focused on structuring, framing and planning a research study. The second workshop taught the participants qualitative data collection tools. And the final workshop focused on analysis of the data. Each participant was also made to undertake each of the steps they were taught so that they would conduct research along with the workshops. The resource persons also visited the participants in their fields to understand the societies where they were working and to help them better frame their researches.

INTRODUCTION

This module is a culmination of an iterative process of the integration of critical pedagogy, participatory approaches, and field-based praxis towards the promotion of children's rights. This initiative was developed through a partnership between Child Rights and You (CRY) and the Department of Sociology at Loyola College. In the following pages the module responds to a structural gap in the field, i.e., the persistent disconnect between the deep, tacit knowledge of field coordinators and the dominant academic frameworks that shape policy and practice. While coordinators working in the thematic areas of education, health, nutrition, protection, child marriage, and child labour engage daily with the realities of marginalised children, their insights are often absent from formal research discourse. This module attempts to correct the imbalance by trying to equip them with an introduction to the skills and confidence to act as co-researchers, knowledge producers, and critical analysts.

Grounded in the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR), the conceptualisation of trainings rejects the positivist notion of a detached and objective researcher extracting knowledge from their "subjects". Instead, it is rooted in the communities and their understanding, affirming the view articulated by McNiff and Whitehead (2002) that knowledge is something people do—a living process—and that those most closely engaged with an issue are best placed to investigate and act upon it. In the children and their rights context, this principle is essential:

rights violations are not isolated events but are rooted in systemic structures of caste, class, patriarchy, and state neglect. Addressing them requires methods that not only document reality but also mobilise communities, challenge inequities, and foster transformative action.

Action research, as theorised by Lewin, Kemmis, McTaggart, Reason, Bradbury, and Freire, is inherently cyclical—observe, reflect, act, evaluate, and modify—and dialogical. It dissolves the hierarchical boundary between researcher and participant, replacing it with collaborative inquiry where both learn and teach in the process (Freire, 1998). Informed by critical theory and emancipatory epistemologies, this module invites both facilitators and participants into a collaborative space where knowledge is co-produced. It draws from traditions of feminist research, anti-caste thought, postcolonial critique, and social justice frameworks to interrogate the politics of knowledge: who is authorised to know, how that knowledge is legitimised, and to what ends it is used. Through this lens, research is not considered a neutral exercise in documentation but as a strategic practice—one that can contest structural violence, amplify marginalised voices, and inform transformative action. In this module, these principles are operationalised through interactive and iterative training cycles: participants learn to frame research questions, design appropriate tools, collect and interpret data, and integrate findings into advocacy and intervention strategies. The module is aimed towards not creating the perfect replica but customising the module as per the realities of their society and

communities. Crucially, the content is tailored to build on the coordinators' lived experience, encouraging them to connect empirical observation with theoretical frameworks, thus strengthening their analytical capacity.

For field coordinators, this module offers:

- A structured pathway to transform field observations into credible, evidence-based insights.
- Exposure to methods that integrate community participation—such as problem trees, transect walks, photovoice, and participatory ranking—ensures that children's voices and perspectives are central to the inquiry.
- Skills in reading and interpreting government and non-government datasets to link local realities with broader policy debates.
- An understanding of ethics in research with children and vulnerable populations, aligning with international child rights standards.
- For facilitators, the module functions as:
- A pedagogical guide to cultivate critical consciousness among participants, drawing on reflective practice (Schön, 1983) and thematic investigation (Freire, 1971).
- A framework to adapt training based on participant feedback, maintaining flexibility and responsiveness.
- A resource that bridges academic theory and grassroots application, ensuring that research outputs are not merely archived but actively shape interventions.

The module's action-research orientation positions it as both a training manual and a political tool. As Budd Hall (1997) notes, participatory research with marginalised communities is most effective when it begins with their own definitions of the problem, engages them in all stages of the process, and directs the outcomes toward the radical transformation of social reality. In the child rights sector, such transformation means not only preventing violations but actively constructing environments where children's rights to survival, development, protection, and participation are fully realised. This module is made for field coordinators who might not have formal research training but have valuable local knowledge. It provides tools, frameworks, and exercises that make research easier to understand and show that it is an active process of asking questions, taking action, and making changes. It equips them to move from being data gatherers to critical thinkers and co-investigators in the process itself.

By combining the theoretical insights of social science with the field-based knowledge of coordinators, this module offers a model for building grassroots research capacity across CRY's work in India. It envisions research not as a neutral exercise in knowledge gathering but as a praxis of justice—an ongoing, collective endeavour to generate knowledge that challenges inequity, amplifies the voices of children and communities, and informs systemic change.

CHAPTER ONE

POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE

Before getting into research and its nuances, there is a need to question certain concepts that are taken for granted. Central amongst them is the idea of knowledge, which is what research aimed to create.

Let's begin by asking ourselves a very rudimentary question:

WHAT IS KNOWLEDGE?

The word 'knowledge' comes from Old English, meaning 'recognise or identity'. We do know the world around us through recognition or identification. This recognition and identification does not happen in isolation. It happens within the historical and social context within which we are brought up. It is of utmost importance to acknowledge the role played by our surroundings and the social structure in our modes of recognition and identification, and therefore knowledge. Social structure here means repetitive behaviours that come together as patterns that govern our behaviour in society.

Let's take an example.

Woman.

How does a patriarchal society identify or recognise women? How does someone brought up in such a society know a woman? What are the characteristics that are identified with a woman?

Patriarchy usually identifies and recognises women as weak, dependent, and submissive. To the extent that research has shown that even the 'neutral' sciences like anatomy and biology have read these characteristics into the physiology of the female reproductive cell, the ovum (the egg is described as passive while the sperm is described as active). Such an identification and recognition emerges from the social and historical context of the society wherein anything associated with women is characterised as weak, dependent and submissive.

Today, there are sections of society that will contest this notion of women being weak and dependent. They would contest that women are seen as submissive and weak only because of the social structure of the society, which seeks to keep them in an inferior position to men. Rather, they would argue that women possess strong and independent characteristics in light of the daily hardships they face.

Both the above-mentioned instances are certain ways of recognition and identification. How then do we understand knowledge about the same concept (women) which is polar opposite to one another? It can only be done by acknowledging the role of social and historical context in identification and recognition, i.e., knowledge.

Therefore, before starting to understand knowledge, we have to situate the position and the intent of the knowledge producer within the social and historical context. As seen before, a society that wants to keep women enslaved (intent)

will identify, recognise, and understand them as weak and submissive. If the knowledge production is primarily controlled by the section of the society with the intent of keeping women enslaved (position), it also understands them as weak and submissive. In the case of the feminist understanding of the world (knowledge and knowledge production) in light of their prescription of equality (intent) and its knowledge production towards this end (position), there is a refusal to read weakness and submission into femininity or women.

Thus we begin by rejecting the notion that knowledge can ever begin from neutrality. The ability to identify and recognise is acquired not through a neutral similarity of our biological senses like hearing, seeing, etc. The way in which these senses help us feel the world around us is also predicated on the social and historical context.

For example, let's take the smell of dried fish or the taste of fermented food.
While there are many cultures across the world that look at these as delicious flavours, there are also many that would find them repulsive. How do the same organs of the same species that sense the same object identify and recognise them differently? What role do socio-cultural and historical contexts play in the difference in identification?
What does it mean to identify and recognise in this context?
Does this mean that a particular dish tastes good or bad?

Or is it to contextualise the perception of these smells and tastes across different cultures?

The above section points out that knowledge cannot be understood as a standalone production of facts. But the process of production of knowledge (identification and recognition) is contingent on many factors. The main factors that have been identified are:

- The position in the social structure from which knowledge is produced
- The intention with which knowledge is produced
- The context within which the knowledge production is situated . This includes the organisation of the society, economy and politics within which the knowledge is produced.

The sections following this are framed to help someone with the intention of producing knowledge to create an equal and just society. The position and intent of knowledge production are very clear. Understanding the context so as to bring about equality is the process. The next chapter provides a general overview of social science research. The chapter after that specifically gets into the aspects of qualitative research. The later chapters focus specifically on tools that the learner can use to frame research, conduct data collection and analyse the data, which make informed action possible. Throughout this process the cycle of action research, i.e., inquiry, action and change, is kept in mind.

CHAPTER TWO

INTO THE FIELD – AN INVITATION TO SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

Imagine stepping into a village just after dawn. The ground still holds the night's coolness, goats bleat and birds chirp in the distance, and someone, somewhere, is making tea. You are here not just as a visitor, but as someone trying to understand — to observe, to ask, to listen, and, above all, to learn. Welcome to the beginning of social science research.

This book is your companion, not in a lab or behind a screen, but in the alleys and lanes, in homes, schools, markets, and shelters. This is where social research breathes. And for the curious, compassionate, field-based social worker — the kind who wants to dig into the "why" of human behaviour, not just the "what" — this chapter is your trailhead.

WHAT IS SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH?

Social science research is, at its heart, a quest. It's an organised effort to understand the intricate networks and structures of people, communities, relationships, and institutions. Like any worthwhile quest, it requires tools, maps, companions, and a spirit of adventure.

Unlike the physical sciences that measure mass, energy, or speed, social science

deals with messier things: beliefs, identities, power, conflict, and hope. These aren't easily packed into formulas, but they matter profoundly. And social science research is how we begin to make sense of them.

It involves collecting information (data), asking questions (formulating research problems), spotting patterns (analysis), and explaining what we find (theory-building). And it does all this while keeping its boots firmly planted in the reality of people's lives.

WHY SHOULD FIELD-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS CARE?

Fieldwork without research is like sailing without a compass. You can move — perhaps even fast — but you might not know where or why you are going.

Imagine a social worker trying to improve school attendance in a rural area. Without research, they might assume the problem is disinterest. However, careful observation and interviews might reveal that it's about safety on the walk to school or the need for children to help with harvests. Research helps us replace guesswork with insight.

Research isn't just a tool for community-linked practitioners — it's an ethical responsibility. It's how we validate our assumptions, amplify unheard voices, and build interventions that actually work.

THE TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Let's begin with a peek inside the social research toolkit. Like a good travel pack, it contains a little bit of everything:

- **Surveys:** Structured questions are asked of many people. These surveys are effective in identifying patterns. Think of it as casting a net wide.
- **Interviews:** One-on-one conversations. Like holding a lantern close to someone's face, you see details.
- **Focus Groups:** Group discussions that uncover collective views. Imagine sitting around a community fire.
- **Observation:** Watching what people do. Observation, not what people say they do, is a quiet but powerful method.
- **Case Studies:** Deep dives into specific situations. These case studies are ideal when you seek to understand the complete story, not just the summary.

Each of these methods has variations and flavours, like dishes from different regions, but they all help us make sense of the social world.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES: LENSES FOR LOOKING

Now, imagine standing in front of a landscape. Depending on the way in which you make meaning, a mountain might be a sacred place of gods or just a pile of rocks formed over time or a place that holds stories or the resting place of spirits. Even within the scientific understanding of the mountain, there might be differences

in the explanations given for its existence. These differences in explanations and meaning-making are what are called 'theoretical perspectives'. They don't just help you see; they shape what you notice.

- **Positivism:** This view believes that the world is orderly and can be studied objectively. It likes numbers, statistics, and patterns. **Example**: Measure the percentage of girls who drop out of school and correlate it with family income.
- **Interpretivism:** The world is made of meanings. People act not just because of facts, but because of what those facts mean to them. **Example**: Interviewing girls to understand how they experience school and what dropout means to them.
- **Critical Theory:** Society is full of inequalities. Research must not just observe but challenge injustices. **For example,** this study examines how caste and gender discrimination influence school policies and access to education.
- **Feminist Theories:** Pay attention to how gender shapes experience, especially how women and marginalised genders are often unheard or unseen. **Example**: Designing a study that ensures women speak and are not just spoken for.
- **Postcolonial Perspectives:** Warns us from taking Western ideas as the default. It encourages us to listen to local knowledge. **Example**: Valuing traditional dispute resolution methods rather than imposing external models.

Each lens has strengths and blind spots. The wise researcher learns to switch lenses—or better, to carry several and compare the views.

ETHICS: THE COMPASS YOU MUST ALWAYS CARRY

It is easy to forget in the field that people are not data points. They have lives, stories, and dignity.

Ethical research means:

- Getting informed consent
- Ensuring confidentiality
- Avoiding harm
- Sharing results with the community

Imagine interviewing a domestic worker about workplace abuse. Do you have a plan if they ask for help? Ethics is not just a checklist — it is your constant companion.

COMMON CHALLENGES IN THE FIELD

Social science research is not neat. Expect these bumps:

- People cancel interviews.
- Forms get lost.
- Answers contradict each other.
- You realise you've been asking the wrong question.

This is not failure. This is fieldwork.

You will often be both a detective and diplomat, a translator and listener. There will be moments of frustration, but also moments when something someone says lights up a whole new path of understanding.

THE LIMITS OF RESEARCH

Let's be honest. Research won't give you all the answers. Sometimes it will give you better questions. It can miss nuance, reinforce biases, or be co-opted by power. Also, people change. Contexts shift. The truth today might be only part of the truth tomorrow.

But if done with humility and rigour, research will get you closer to understanding than any assumption ever will.

SO, WHERE DO WE BEGIN?

Begin by being curious. Ask questions that matter to the people you work with. Start small. Observe. Reflect. Document.

You don't need a PhD to be a researcher. You need care, clarity, and a willingness to learn. You already have a community. You already have stories. What you need now is a method — a way to listen deeply and make meaning.

In the chapters ahead, we will walk you through how to craft research questions, choose methods, collect and analyse data, and share your findings.

CHAPTER THREE

INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH

The previous chapter introduced social science research in general. It's a way to learn new things, understand people or situations better, and solve problems. Now we undertake into a specific type of social science research.

There are two main types of research:

- Qualitative Research – deals with words and feelings
- Quantitative Research – deals with numbers and data

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?

Qualitative research is a method used to understand human thoughts, feelings, and experiences. It doesn't use numbers or statistics i.e., quantity, but rather personal experience and opinions i.e., qualitative characteristics of things, such as the words people use, stories they narrate, and observations they make.

FEATURES OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

1. Explorative in Nature: Tells why and how something happens.
2. Focuses on People: Brings out people's emotions, behaviours, and cultures.
3. Uses Open-Ended Questions: Can you describe your experience? How did that make you feel? How did that happen?

Rather than trying to quantify the data, it discusses the qualitative nature of things, social facts and phenomena in its quest to understand social reality.

DATA COLLECTION

Qualitative research uses the following specific data collection tools:

- Interviews (Talking to People)
- Focus group discussions (group conversations)
- Observations (Watching People in Real Settings)
- Diaries, videos, photos, and more.

RESULTS ARE DESCRIPTIVE: They describe the situation or people's opinions through detailed stories or themes rather than relying on numbers.

PRACTICALLY

Choose a topic or an issue you wanted to research.

Consider the usage of mobile phones by young adults.

- In a village/locality map the number of the young adults. Choose the required number so as to represent the cross-sectional population in the village or locality.
- Choose one or multiple qualitative methods of data collection:
- Ask open-ended questions like:

  - What makes you to use your phone so much?

  - What is your preferred way of communicating on the phone, and why?

  - Why is the mobile phone the preferred way of communicating among young adults?

- What type of social media do you prefer to use, and why?
- Describe your experience spending time on the phone.
- What do you feel when you spend a lot of time on your phone?

- Write down their answers and find common patterns or stories.
- Organise it thematically. This would help us in analysis.

WHAT IS QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH?

Quantitative research is a method used to collect and analyse numerical data. This is to identify patterns and make conclusions. It is generally answers questions like:

- How many people…?
- How much time…?
- How often does it happen?

FEATURES OF QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Measurable and Countable

- This job involves dealing with numbers, percentages, and statistics.

Structured Questions:

- Uses closed-ended questions like:
  - How many hours do you study daily?
  - Do you use mobile phones for more than 6 hours a day? Yes/No

This helps in the quantification of the data.

Data Collection Methods

- Surveys/Questionnaires (printed forms or survey apps like Google Forms or the KOBO toolkit)
- Polls (election prediction polls, opinion polls for an issue, company or firm)
- Statistical databases (using existing databases like Census, sample surveys (NSSO, NHFS, RCH in India))

Results are presented in numerical values using tables, graphs, charts, and percentages.

Example for quantitative method

Topic: Screen time among college students.

- Go for the Census method or through sample selection. Administer the questionnaire to the selected sample. The questions may include
    - How many hours do you use your phone per day?
    - How many hours do you sleep at night?
- Analyse the answers and find the average hours of phone use, the most common sleep time, etc.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE METHODS

	QUANTITATIVE	QUALITATIVE
DEFINITION	Data that can be numerically analyzed and quantified into hard facts.	Non-numerical data that describes qualities, opinions, or feelings.
COLLECTION METHODS	Online, in-person, and phone interviews or surveys with closed-ended questions, controlled experiments, and more	Open-ended survey questions, unstructured interviews, focus groups, observation, and more
BEST FOR	Drawing conclusions through larger-scale studies, conducting statistical analyses.	Formulating hypotheses and gathering detailed information from smaller groups
ANALYSIS	Statistical analysis through charts, tables, and statistical programs.	Manual analysis through grouping of common themes and other methods.
QUESTION EXAMPLE	“Did you buy ice cream today? 1) Yes 2) No”	“Why did you buy ice cream today?”
DATA EXAMPLE	67% of respondents bought ice cream today.	“I saw ice cream on sale by the checkout and it was an impulse buy. I wanted to treat myself.”

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

What is analysis?

It means looking closely at the data you collected from interviews. You try to find patterns, ideas, or common answers in what people said or did.

What is interpretation?

After finding patterns, interpretation is understanding what those patterns mean. Interpretation involves deciphering the hidden meaning within the data.

What is an insight?

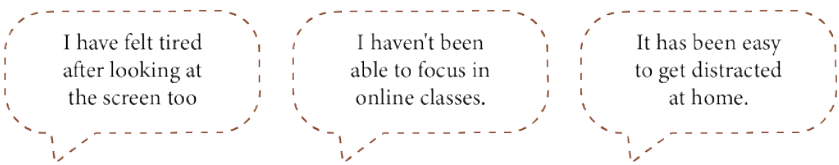
An insight is a deep understanding you get after analysing data.

What is an action plan?

An action plan is what you suggest should be done after understanding the problem.

EXAMPLE

If you have interviewed 10 students about online classes, then some students might have said:



ANALYSIS

If 7 out of 10 students have said they feel tired or distracted, then you have identified a common issue.

INTERPRETATION

If many students have experienced screen fatigue, then it has shown that online classes have been mentally exhausting and have required breaks.

INSIGHT

If students have consisstantly reported low focus, then it has suggested a struggle with attention and screen time.

ACTION PLAN

If the findings have shown these patterns, then you should suggest short breaks, more interactive

TRIANGULATION

In research, triangulation means looking at the problem from all sides to get a complete picture. It then calls for applying more than one method or source to study the issue or problem.

Types of Triangulation with Examples

TYPE	WHAT IT MEANS	SIMPLE EXAMPLE
METHOD TRIANGULATION	Using different methods to collect data	You do interviews, observe behaviour, and give a diary to the person.
DATA SOURCE TRIANGULATION	Getting data from different people or times	You ask different stakeholders. For example, students, teachers, and parents about online classes
INVESTIGATOR TRIANGULATION	More than one person analyses the data.	You and your fellow researcher/ field staff read the interviews and share your understanding.
THEORY TRIANGULATION	Looking at the data using different theories	You study the social/psychological/political/cultural/economic phenomena by applying different theories.

Example of Triangulation

Topic: Mobile phone use among young adults.

- Interview 10 girls (Method 1)
- Observe their phone usage in college (Method 2)
- Ask teachers about their phone behaviour in class (Source 2)

This is triangulation – you will get a complete view.

Importance of Triangulation

- It increases accuracy.
- It avoids bias.
- It gives a richer understanding.

What is validation?

Validation means checking if the information the researcher got was reliable, accurate, and believable.

How to Validate the Data With Examples

VALIDATION TECHNIQUE	WHAT YOU DO	EXAMPLE
MEMBER CHECKING	Show your findings to the participants and ask them if it's right.	After the interview, you say, "Is this what you meant?"
PEER REVIEW	Ask a fellow researcher or your colleague to review your findings.	They read your interpretation and say it makes sense.
RICH DESCRIPTIONS	Give clear, detailed examples so people can understand.	You describe not just what they said, but also their expressions and tone. It is called as THICK DESCRIPTION.
CHECKING FOR BIAS	Be aware of your own opinions, and don't let them affect the results.	You keep a journal about your feelings while doing the research. To ensure that your opinion doesn't affect the results

TRIANGULATION + VALIDATION = TRUSTWORTHY RESEARCH

ETHICS IN RESEARCH

Ethics in research means doing research in a way that is fair, honest, and respectful to the people involved.

How do we ensure ethics in participatory research?

In participatory research, we don't just study people, but we ask them to join and be partners in research.

Some pointers on ethics in participatory research

I. During Data Collection (When we gather information from people)

- Ask for permission: Before posing questions or gathering data, please ensure you provide a full explanation and obtain the individual's consent (informed consent).
- Be honest: tell them why you're doing this research and how their information will be used. (Share purpose of research)
- Keep it private: Don't share their name or personal details with others (No Harm Approach).
- Don't force anyone:If someone doesn't want to take part, that's okay. (Voluntary)

II. During Data Analysis (when we study the information we collected)

- Be truthful: Don't change the answers to fit what you want. (Don't return.)
- Respect all opinions: every person's answer is important (respectful).
- Protect people's dignity: Don't judge or make fun of anyone's answer. (Treat

with dignity)

III. During Consultation and Participation (When people help in the research)

- Treat everyone equally: just because you're the researcher doesn't mean you're above them. (Partners in research, treat them equally)
- Listen to their ideas:Value what people say – they are experts in their own lives. (Value their voices)
- Give back something:Share and validate your findings with them. Facilitate actionable points. (Validate your findings with people.)

Smart Reminder:

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

What is Stakeholder Involvement in Research?

Stakeholders are people who are affected by the problem/issue and have something to contribute to the research. It means letting the people who are part of the problem contribute to a solution or an action in the research journey. They are not simply silent spectators, but including them, talking to them and getting their help in each step.

Who Are Stakeholders?

Stakeholders can be:

- The people you are doing research about
- Local leaders or community members
- Teachers, doctors, or social workers
- Government officers, NGOs, etc.

Why Should We Involve Stakeholders?

- They know what's happening on the ground.
- They help you ask the right questions.
- They help you avoid mistakes or misunderstandings.
- They make sure your research is useful to the people.
- It builds trust and makes the work more inclusive.

When do you involve them?

- Throughout the process, not just once.
- Before you start – to understand the real problem
- During your work – to get ideas and support
- After finishing – to check if your findings are correct (validation) and share it with them

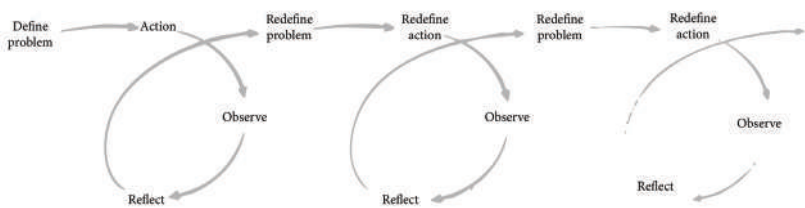
CHAPTER FOUR

ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE

WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (PAR)?

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a collaborative method designed to engage community residents, marginalised groups, and other stakeholders in research aimed at driving social change. In this approach, participants work closely with a facilitator to identify pressing community issues, develop research methodologies, collect data, and analyse findings. Participants then use the insights gained from this process to formulate actionable recommendations for resolving the identified problem. Participants often advocate for broader societal, systemic, administrative, legislative, or governmental changes to implement these findings. The ultimate goal of PAR is to alleviate oppression, enhance community well-being, or improve the quality of services. Unlike traditional quantitative research, where the researcher is seen as the sole authority, PAR emphasises collective knowledge and empowerment, positioning it as a transformative alternative to conventional research methods.

PAR CYCLE



Steps in the Action Research Cycle

The key steps in the action research process were explained during the training.

• The process begins with **identifying the problem area** & the desired change **(A)**.

• The next step is **gathering relevant data (B)**, focusing on the simplicity, availability, and structure of data collection.

• This is followed by **analysing and interpreting the data (C)** to understand the findings.

• Afterward, **acting on evidence (D)** involves designing and implementing a plan based on the data.

• Finally, **reflecting and evaluating results (E)** assesses the outcomes to determine the effectiveness of the action taken.

This cyclical process ensures continuous improvement and adaptation based on evidence and reflection.

The PAR cycle typically consists of the following key stages:

- **Identifying the Issue:** Community members and stakeholders come together to define and prioritise a shared problem or challenge. This stage ensures that the research focuses on issues that are meaningful and relevant to the community.
- **Planning and Designing the Research:** Participants collaboratively develop the research questions, objectives, and methodology. This stage emphasises inclusivity, ensuring that the research design reflects the perspectives and needs of those most affected by the issue.
- **Data Collection:** Community members and researchers work together to gather data using participatory methods such as interviews, focus groups, surveys, or community mapping. This stage values local knowledge and ensures that the process is accessible and empowering.
- **Data Analysis:** Participants collectively analyse the data to identify patterns, root causes, and insights. This stage cultivates critical thinking and mutual comprehension, guaranteeing that the community's lived experiences serve as the foundation for the findings.
- **Action Planning:** Based on the analysis, participants develop actionable recommendations and strategies to address the issue. This stage focuses on

creating practical, community-driven solutions that can lead to tangible change.

- **Taking Action:** Participants implement the planned actions, which may include advocacy, policy changes, community programmes, or other initiatives. This stage emphasises collective effort and empowerment to bring about systemic or social change.
- **Reflection and Evaluation:** After taking action, participants reflect on the process, outcomes, and lessons learnt. This stage helps assess the impact of the actions and identifies areas for improvement or further research.
- **Iteration:** The PAR cycle is not linear but iterative. Insights from reflection often lead to revisiting earlier stages, refining strategies, or addressing new issues, ensuring continuous learning and adaptation.

The PAR cycle is rooted in principles of equity, collaboration, and empowerment, aiming to transform power dynamics and create sustainable, community-led solutions to social problems.

CHAPTER FIVE

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

A. INTRODUCTION

In this section, we'll understand why having a clear research question is so important for action research. A well-defined question keeps the study focused, guiding how we collect and analyse data to find meaningful solutions.

We'll also highlight the role of the community in research—since action research is all about collaboration, involving people in both identifying problems and working toward solutions is key. Lastly, we'll break down the difference between issues and problems—issues are specific challenges that need attention, while problems are bigger, more complex, and require a more profound understanding and collective action to solve. A research problem is a broad issue or gap in knowledge, while a research question is a specific, focused inquiry that guides the study. The research question narrows down the problem into something actionable and researchable.

THE CONTEXT

- A research question is the foundation of any study. It helps us focus on the most important problem to address.
- A well-defined question guides how data is collected and analysed, leading to meaningful analyses and solutions for the community.
- Action research ensures that the community is involved in both identifying the problem and finding solutions.

DEFINING ISSUES VS. PROBLEMS

• Issue: The problem is multifaceted and has many aspects that require attention

• Problem: A larger challenge that affects many people and has a broader societal impact requires a deeper understanding and community action to solve.

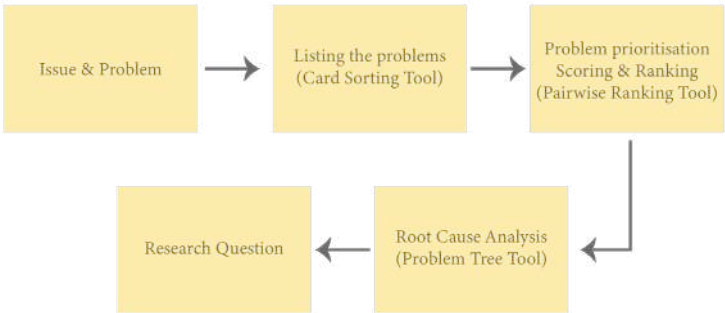
ISSUE	PROBLEM
• An issue has a readily recognisable solution. Although it might seem like a superficial issue, it frequently originates from more profound power systems • Often localised (e.g., school lacks clean water) but can be indicative of larger problems. • Can sometimes be addressed through **small-scale interventions or individual actions.**	• Problems are life altering, temporarily or permanently. These problems are systemic, deeply rooted, and **interconnected with social, political, and economic realities.** • It necessitates structural adjustments, such as the uneven allocation of resources in the field of public health. • Problems must be handled openly, to resolve them in government, societal or business capacities.

ISSUE	PROBLEM
• May be framed as a **"symptom"** of an underlying injustice. • An issue may have the potential to cause harm	• Demands **collective, long-term efforts** for resolution and systemic change. A problem develops when the harm or impact begins to surface. Dismantling the structural cause is often necessary.
Example - A school lacks enough teachers for certain subjects.	**Example** - Over time, students receive poor-quality education, leading to **low literacy rates, limited job opportunities, and perpetuation of poverty** in the community.

B. STEPS TO DERIVE A RESEARCH QUESTION

Deriving a research question in action research involves a structured process to ensure the study addresses real and pressing community issues. It begins with **listing problems**, where participants identify key challenges in their community or field. Next, these problems are **ranked based by priority** to determine the

most critical ones based on severity, impact, and feasibility. Finally, a **root cause analysis** is conducted to explore the underlying causes and consequences of the selected problem. This process helps refine the research focus, ensuring the question is relevant, actionable, and community driven.



Step 1: Listing Problems

Activity: Participants list key problems faced in their community or working area.

How to list the problems in your field areas

1. Involve relevant participants. For instance, involve children and mothers in matters related to them.

2. Facilitate them to list the problems they face in the given cards (it could be relating to livelihood, education, health, etc.).

3. Participants share or list a host of problems. This will be agreed upon by others too. Write it down and stick it on the board or wall for all of them to see.

4. Allow them to discuss and come to an agreement on the list of problems.

Guiding Questions:

o What are the major challenges faced by people in your community?

o How do these challenges imapct different groups?

Step 2: Prioritising Problems

Activity: Use scoring or ranking methods (e.g., pairwise Ranking) to identify the most critical problems.

Stepwise

• Limit the group to **12-15 participants**, depending on the issue.

• The facilitator picks **one card at a time** and reads it aloud.

• The card is placed in front of the participants for discussion.

• The next card is read and, based on participants' input, positioned **relative to the existing card(s)**.

• This process continues until all cards are arranged according to the participants' priorities.

• Problems are then **ranked based on participants' scores and collective discussion**.

Use a pairwise ranking matrix to systematically score and prioritise issues or problems. This method helps the community compare options, identify key concerns, and reach a consensus on the most critical issue for Participatory Action Research (PAR). Additionally, other participatory methods can also be used to determine which problem should be the focus of the research.

TYPES	seeds	tools	insecticide	Canals	Markets	pipes	Transport	Training	Road	SCORE	RANK
Lack of seeds		Tools	Seeds	Canals	Seeds	Seeds	Seeds	Training	Seeds	5	3
Lack of tools			Tools	Canals	Tools	Tools	Tools	Training	Tools	6	2
Lack of insecticide				Canals	Insecticide	Pipes	Transport	Training	Insecticide	2	6
Canals					Canals	Canals	Canals	Training	Canals	7	1
Lack of markets						Pipes	Markets	Markets	Markets	3	5
Lack of pipes							Pipes	Training	Pipes	4	4
Transport								Transport	Transport	3	5
Training									Training	6	2
Road										0	7

Criteria for Prioritisation:

• Severity of Impact – the intensity and extent of harm caused by the issue.

• Number of People Affected – The scale of the community impacted.

• Feasibility of Research – The practicality of conducting research, considering available resources, time, and community participation

Step 3: Root Cause Analysis (10 minutes)

Once the problem is identified, the next step is to analyse its root causes using the problem tree analysis. This method helps the research team break down the issue by identifying its underlying causes and consequences, rather than just addressing surface-level symptoms. By mapping out the problem in a structured way, participants can visually explore the connections between causes and effects, uncover systemic patterns, and highlight key areas for intervention. This more profound understanding enables the team to formulate a clear and focused research question that directly addresses the core issues, ensuring that the Participatory Action Research (PAR) process leads to meaningful and actionable insights.

Activity: Use a problem tree to analyse the causes and consequences of a selected problem.

Steps: Encourage participants to repeatedly ask, "Why? Why? Why?" for each identified problem to uncover its deeper root causes. This iterative questioning process helps move beyond surface-level symptoms, revealing the underlying cause-and-effect relationships that sustain the issue. By systematically probing the reasons behind a problem, the research team can develop a more comprehensive understanding, leading to more targeted and effective interventions in the Participatory Action Research (PAR) process.

- Select **one issue** and identify its **causes** and **consequences**.
- Place **cause cards below** and **consequence cards above** the core problem.
- Establish **upward and downward links** to show relationships between causes, the issue, and its impacts.
- Adjust card placement based on **participants' discussions and consensus.**

TRUNK (Core Issue)

1. Participants write down the core issue that needs to be addressed.
2. Share, discuss, and collectively decide on the main issue.
3. The agreed-upon issue serves as the foundation of the problem tree.

BRANCHES (Impacts & Consequences)

1. Participants pair up to discuss: "What are the impacts or consequences of the core problem?"

2. Record one impact per card for clarity.

3. Organise the impacts on the branches of the tree.

4. Each pair focuses on specific aspects of the impact.

5. Identify and list causes and sub-causes, analysing their relationships and effects on each other.

ROOTS (Root Causes)

1. Participants identify and record underlying factors contributing to the problem.

2. Ask, "Why does this problem exist?" repeatedly to dig deeper.

3. These root causes form the tree's roots.

FINAL REFINEMENT & DISCUSSION

• Once the tree is mapped out, participants review the roots, trunk, and branches to ensure completeness.

• Discuss relationships between causes and effects, refining the analysis as needed.

• This activity can be conducted through group work, encouraging collective reflection and deeper understanding.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

• Does this represent the reality? Are the economic, political and socio-cultural dimensions of the problem considered?

• Which causes and consequences are getting better, which are getting worse, and which are staying the same?

• What are the most serious consequences? Which are of most concern?

• What criteria are important to us in thinking about a way forward?

• Which causes are the easiest/most difficult to address? What possible solutions or options might there be?

• Where could a policy change help address a cause or consequence or create a solution?

• What decisions have we made, and what actions have we agreed on?

C. Formulating the Research Question

Formulating a research question is about precisely defining what youare looking for in your study. It helps focus the research by breaking down the problem—who is affected, what is happening, where and when it occurs, why it matters, and how it impacts people. A well-crafted question ensures the research remains specific, relevant, and actionable, guiding the study toward meaningful insights and solutions.

Key Components of a Research Question

A strong research question should address:

• **Who**: Which stakeholders or communities are affected by the problem?

• **What**: What is the current situation, the desired outcome, or the unmet need?

• **When**: What is the timeframe—when does the issue occur, and is it ongoing or

periodic?

• **Where**: Where does the problem exist—within a specific location or community?

• **Why**: Why is this issue significant, and why does it need to be addressed?

• **How**: How does the problem impact stakeholders, communities, or organisations? What is its scale, and how large is the gap between the current and desired state?

D. Framing the Research Question

Activity: Participants draft a research question based on their problem analysis.

Example Format:

"How does [Problem] affect [Group] in [Location] during [Timeframe]?"

"What are the root causes of [Problem] in [Community], and how can they be addressed?"

Peer Review: Participants refine their questions through feedback.

E. Connecting Research Questions with Ideology & Frameworks

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is grounded in equity, empowerment, and social justice. A research question should reflect these values and align with the theoretical framework guiding the study. When shaping a research question, it is crucial to connect it to a broader ideology or framework that shapes how we understand the issue. Ideologies influence what we prioritise and how we define problems, while frameworks provide structure for analysing and interpreting data. This connection ensures that research remains focused, meaningful, and well-reasoned. It prevents vague or one-sided questions and strengthens the research's

ability to address real-world issues. By grounding the study in a clear perspective, we can better unpack complex problems and develop impactful, solutions-driven insights. Different **ideological perspectives** shape the way problems are framed, analysed, and addressed. Selecting the right framework ensures that research remains **critical, focused, and transformative**.

For example:

• Dr B.R. Ambedkar (Social Justice & Dalit Rights) – If the research focuses on caste-based discrimination, exclusion, or access to rights, an Ambedkarite framework helps examine structural inequalities, historical oppression, and pathways to social justice.

• Paulo Freire (Critical Pedagogy & Liberation Education) – If the study explores education, literacy, or empowerment through learning, Freire's approach emphasises problem-posing education, consciousness-raising (conscientização), and challenging oppressive systems.

• Amartya Sen (Capabilities Approach & Development) – If the research focuses on poverty, human development, or economic justice, Sen's framework helps analyse freedom, choices, and access to resources as key indicators of well-being.

• Naila Kabeer (Gender & Intersectionality) – If the study examines gender inequality, women's empowerment, or labour rights, Kabeer's perspective highlights agency, access to resources, and power dynamics in decision-making.

• Karl Marx (Class Struggle & Economic Systems) – If the research looks at workers'

rights, exploitation, or economic disparities, a Marxist lens would emphasise class conflict, labour relations, and systemic inequalities in capitalism.

• Michel Foucault (Power & Knowledge) – If the study delves into institutional control, surveillance, or power dynamics, Foucault's framework can help unpack how power is exercised through discourse, knowledge production, and social structures.

By aligning the research question with the appropriate ideological framework, the study remains grounded, contextually relevant, and capable of driving real change. This approach helps avoid one-sided or superficial analyses, ensuring that the results generate meaningful, actionable solutions.

Discussion: How research questions reflect social realities, ideologies, and frameworks.

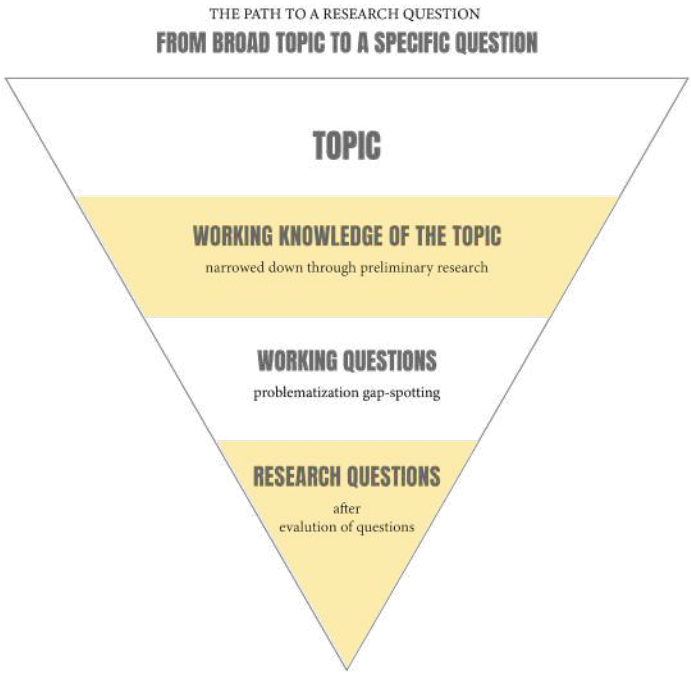
Activity: Participants discuss how their research question aligns with participatory research principles.

F. Framing the Research Question

The final step in the research design process is to frame the research question in a way that is actionable, relevant, and meaningful to the community. A well-structured question serves as the foundation for the entire study, guiding the research process and ensuring that the findings lead to practical solutions.

The primary importance of developing a research question is that it narrows down

a broad topic of interest into a specific area of study (Creswell, 2014). Research questions, along with hypotheses, also serve as a guiding framework for research. These questions also specifically reveal the boundaries of the study, setting its limits and ensuring cohesion.



To achieve this, the research question should:

1. Be clear and specific – avoid broad or vague questions. Instead of asking, "How can education be improved?", a more precise question would be, "How do language barriers impact the participation of marginalised communities in adult literacy programs?"

2. Reflect community priorities – the question should emerge from the lived

experiences and concerns of the community. It should **amplify their voices** rather than impose external perspectives.

3. Align with a Theoretical Framework – Depending on the focus, the question should be framed within a relevant ideological perspective. For example:

o **Dr B.R. Ambedkar's framework** might guide a study on caste-based discrimination in access to healthcare.

o **Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy** can shape a study on participatory learning methods in grassroots education.

o **Naila Kabeer's gender perspective** can apply to research on economic empowerment and decision-making among women.

4. Be Action-Oriented – The research question should not just describe a problem but **enable action**. For instance, rather than asking, " How does caste discrimination affect economic opportunities?", a more actionable question would be, " What community-driven strategies can help Dalit entrepreneurs overcome barriers in business?"

5. Be Feasible and Researchable – The question should be grounded in realistic methods and available resources. It should allow for **data collection, analysis, and community participation** within the scope of the study.

6. Lead to Meaningful Change – The ultimate goal of **Participatory Action Research (PAR)** is to drive **tangible improvements**. A strong research question

ensures that the study's findings can **inform policies, practices, or grassroots interventions**.

By carefully framing the research question with these principles in mind, researchers can ensure that their study remains **impactful, inclusive, and transformative**, leading to solutions that truly matter to the communities involved.

CHAPTER SIX

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

A. INTRODUCTION

This section is designed to support researchers, facilitators, and community partners in effectively using participatory qualitative tools such as interviews, focus groups, photovoice, and participatory mapping while ensuring inclusivity, ethical rigour, and actionable outcomes. Unlike traditional research methods, these tools prioritise the voices of marginalised groups, promote equity in decision-making, and transform data into meaningful steps for change.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research is defined as a method to collect data via open-ended and conversational discussions. This method is not only about **"what"** people think but also **"why"** they think so.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative research methods provide deep, nuanced insights into human experiences, behaviours, and social phenomena. Unlike quantitative approaches that focus on numerical data, qualitative methods explore the why and how behind actions, beliefs, and interactions.

Each method has distinct strengths and is suited to different research objectives, whether uncovering cultural insights (ethnography), testing ideas in a group setting (focus groups), or analysing existing records (content analysis). By selecting

the appropriate approach, researchers can gather rich, context-driven data that informs theory, policy, and practice. There are different methods that are given below.

- **Ethnographic Research** – Immersive, long-term observation of cultures, communities, or social settings to uncover underlying norms and behaviours.
- **Focus Groups** – Facilitated group discussions that reveal shared attitudes, perceptions, and group dynamics around a specific topic.
- **One-on-one interviews** – in-depth, personal conversations that allow researchers to explore individual experiences, motivations, and emotions.
- **Online Interviews** – Remote interviews conducted via digital platforms, offering flexibility and access to geographically dispersed participants.
- **Content Analysis** – Systematic examination of texts, media, or documents to identify patterns, themes, and cultural meanings.
- **Case Study Research** – Detailed investigation of a single instance (e.g., an organisation, event, or individual) to understand complex real-world contexts.

Usually, participants are not taken out of their ecosystem for qualitative data collection to gather information in real-time, which helps in building trust.

Participatory Tools for Data Collection

Adapt tools to local contexts.

- Mind Mapping – Visual representation of ideas around a central theme.
- Prioritisation Card sorting and ranking - groups identify and rank preferences,

needs, or issues and perspectives in order of importance.

- Transect walks – walking through an area to observe and discuss issues.
- Participatory Mapping – Community members create maps of their area (resources, risks, etc.).
- Venn Diagrams – Visualising relationships between different groups/ institutions.
- Pairwise Ranking – Comparing options in pairs to prioritise.
- Matrix Scoring – Ranking criteria against options in a table.
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) – Structured group discussions on specific topics.
- Timeline Mapping – Creating a historical timeline of events.
- Seasonal Calendars – Mapping seasonal changes (agriculture, livelihoods).
- Photovoice – Using photography to document and discuss issues.
- Storytelling & Oral Histories – Sharing personal/community narratives.
- Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is a powerful approach that flips the script from focusing on what communities lack to what they have — their strengths, resources, and potential. It's about building from the inside out, using what's strong rather than what's wrong.

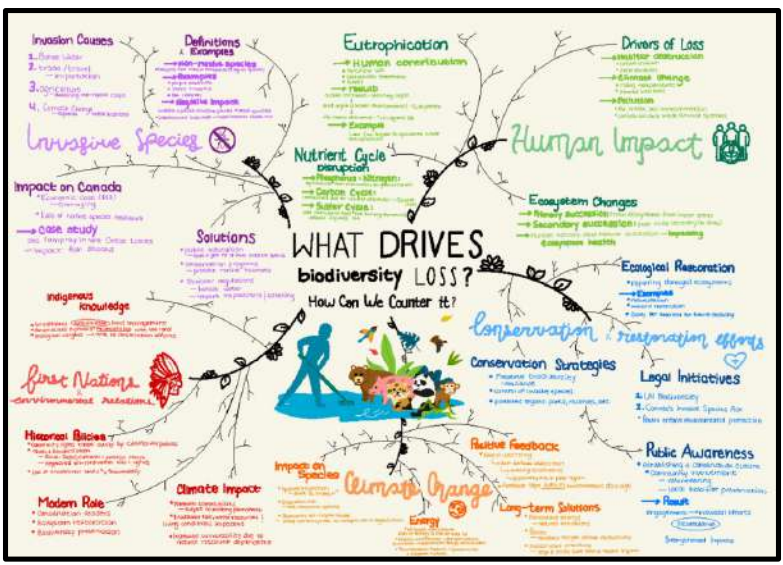
These tools could be used as per the context and need during data collection, analysis, action planning and taking action for change.

MIND MAPPING

Mind mapping is a visual tool used to organise ideas around a central theme, allowing community members to brainstorm and explore connections between issues, solutions, and stakeholders. In Participatory Action Research (PAR), it helps capture collective knowledge, identify root causes of problems, and foster creative problem-solving. Researchers facilitate sessions where participants draw diagrams linking related concepts (e.g., "lack of clean water" to "health risks" or "school absenteeism"), ensuring marginalised voices contribute to framing the research agenda.

Use: Brainstorm root causes of an issue (e.g., "Why is school dropout high?").

PAR Link: Helps structure community discussions during problem identification.



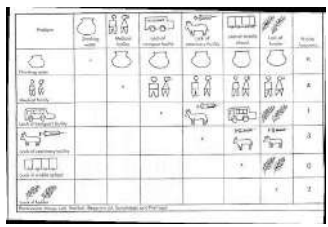
- Start with a central theme — like “health problems” or “village development.”
- Draw it at the centre of a large sheet (or on the ground using chalk, rangoli powder, sticks, etc.).
- Ask villagers to **suggest related ideas**. Each idea becomes a **branch**.
- Keep branching: sub-topics, causes, consequences, solutions.
- **Use symbols, pictures, colours, and local languages** to make it accessible.
- Encourage **everyone to contribute** — elders, women, youth, even children.

PRIORITISATION CARD SORTING AND RANKING

This method involves groups collaboratively sorting and ranking cards representing needs, preferences, or issues to determine priorities. In PAR, it democratises decision-making by allowing communities to weigh options (e.g., “health clinic” vs. “road repair”) through discussion and consensus. The process reveals shared concerns and power dynamics, ensuring interventions align with local values. Data from rankings can be quantified to advocate for resource allocation.

CARD SORTING

WELLBEING RANKING



PROBLEM RANKING

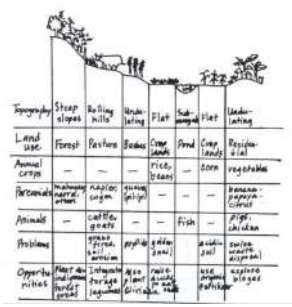
Problems	Score	Rank
Poor soil	13	2nd
Low yields	15	1st
Many crop pests	4	4th
Lack of good seeds	6	5th
Cannot afford fertilizers	10	3rd

POSSIBLE SOLUTION RANKING

Possible Solutions	Score	Rank
Improve soil fertility by using organic fertilizers	8	3rd
Prevent soil erosion by using conservation techniques	10	2nd
Make compost so we don't have to buy commercial fertilizers	6	4th
Plant multi-purpose trees like Leucaena as hedgerows	13	1st

TRANSECT WALKS

Transect walks involve researchers and community members walking through an area to observe, discuss, and document socio-environmental conditions (e.g., deforestation, water access). In PAR, these walks blend local knowledge with outsider perspectives, uncovering spatial inequalities (e.g., flood-prone zones) and prompting dialogue about solutions. Photos or sketches from walks serve as evidence for planning interventions.

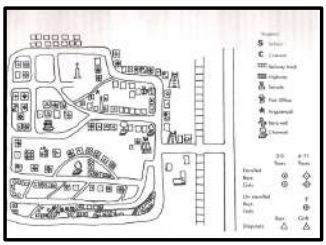


Resource systems	Hamlet and private land nearby	Mangrove forest and associated water bodies	Sea
Resources	Small piece of land around each house; palm trees in the private land	Fish, prawns, crabs, oysters, green mussel—in the water; wild cats, two tubers—in the sand dune associated with mangrove wetlands	Fish, prawn
Activities	Net mending & repairing; no farming; no rearing of livestock	Fishing in the mangrove waters mainly for prawn, hunting wild cats and gathering of tubers in drought season by a few; no firewood collection	Fishing by traditional fishers
Problems	No caste certificate; flooding during rain; saline groundwater; no fuel resource	No legal rights for fishing; fishing at the mercy of traditional fishers; lack of boats and nets; exploitation by traditional fishers	No boats and nets for sea fishing
Strengths or opportunities for the future	Traditional institutional mechanisms exist	Support from traditional fishers; community interest in mangrove conservation	Inular community gradually taking to sea fishing
Perceptions	Unsuitable living conditions	Mangroves are the only source of livelihood at present; must be conserved	Future source of livelihood

Source: Selvam et al. (2003).

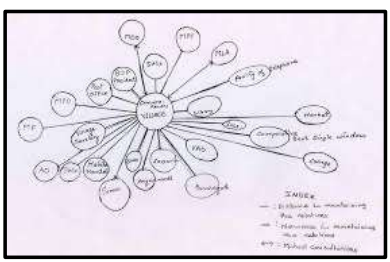
PARTICIPATORY MAPPING

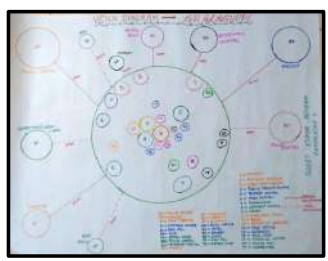
Communities collaboratively create maps of their area, marking resources (water points), risks (landslides), or social dynamics (marginalised settlements). In PAR, these maps expose disparities in resource access and power structures, empowering participants to demand change. Digital tools (GIS) or hand-drawn maps can later inform policy advocacy or development projects.



VENN DIAGRAMS

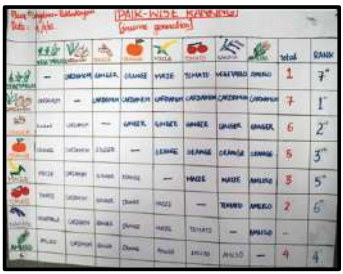
Venn diagrams visualise relationships between groups, institutions, or stakeholders by overlapping circles. In PAR, they clarify roles (e.g., NGOs vs. local government), collaborations, or gaps in services. For example, a diagram might show poor overlap between women's groups and decision-makers, prompting strategies to bridge gaps.





PAIRWISE RANKING

Participants compare options in pairs (e.g., “better seeds” vs. “irrigation”) to rank priorities. This method reduces bias in PAR by systematically weighing trade-offs. Results reveal consensus or conflicts the guide action plans. It’s particularly useful for agricultural or livelihood interventions.



Pairwise matrix ranking is a participatory method used to compare and prioritise items (e.g., crops, problems, solutions) by systematically comparing them in pairs. It helps communities make informed decisions based on collective preferences. This tool uses a matrix to compare and prioritise different options, allowing users to rank similar choices effectively. It also helps sort information gathered during assessments and is often used after tools like mapping. This tool helps to determine people’s preferences and provide valuable insight into their decision-making processes. It helps to prioritise problems of the community or prioritise stakeholders based on their influence and significance to the particular work/ objective. Discussion during the pairwise matrix process would determine what

significant factor is implied in prioritisation and how it is attributed to the people. In addition, in the context of an urban scenario, different social structures within the habitation can be prioritised; the prioritisation of various prevalent diseases that occur in the area; the availability of various sources of income within the vicinity of the locality; if there is any caste hierarchy implied within the community; or any other pertinent factors which you may like to understand from people's perspectives.

Step 1: Define the Objective

Determine what you want to rank (e.g., crop varieties, livelihood options, community problems).

For instance, "Which crops do farmers in our community prefer?"

Step 2: Identify and List the Items to Compare

Please collaborate with the community to compile a list of all relevant items, typically 5-10, for manageable comparison.

Example crops: maize, beans, sugarcane, rice, sweet potatoes

Step 3: Create a Pairwise Matrix

Draw a grid where each item is compared against every other item.

A maximum of 10 items could be listed for effective decision-making.

For 5 items, the matrix will be 5x5 (with diagonal cells left blank).

Step 4: Compare Items Pairwise

For each pair, ask the community, "Which is more important/preferred: [Item A] or [Item B]?"

Use voting, a show of hands, or consensus to decide the winner.

Ask the reasons from the community whenever they collectively choose

Mark the winner in the corresponding cell (e.g., "M" for Maize, "B" for Beans).

Example:

Maize vs. Beans → The majority prefers maize. → Write "M" in the Maize-Beans cell.

Sugarcane vs. Rice → The majority prefers rice. → Write "R" in the sugarcane-rice cell.

Step 5: Tally the Scores

Count how many times each item "wins" across all comparisons.

The item with the most wins is ranked highest.

Step 6: Discuss and Validate Results

Please share the rankings with the community for their feedback.

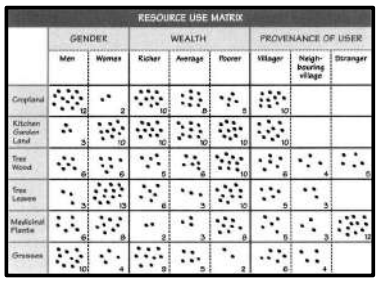
Make adjustments as necessary following further discussion.

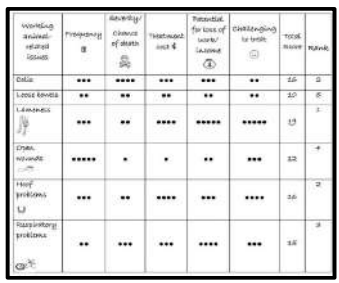
Step 7: Use the Results for Decision-Making

Apply findings to prioritise actions (e.g., focus on maize farming if it's the most preferred crop).

MATRIX SCORING

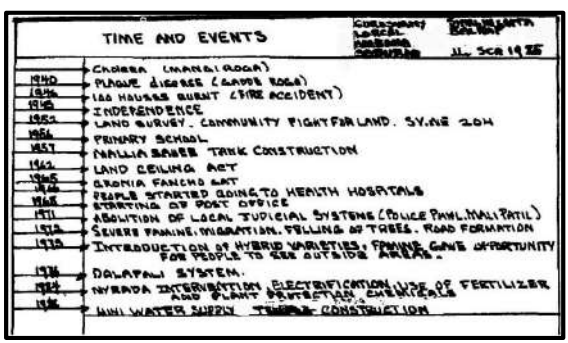
A table ranks criteria (cost, feasibility) against options (crop varieties, energy sources). In PAR, communities score alternatives collaboratively, blending local expertise with technical data. For instance, a matrix on sanitation options might weigh cost, durability, and cultural acceptance to select the best solution.

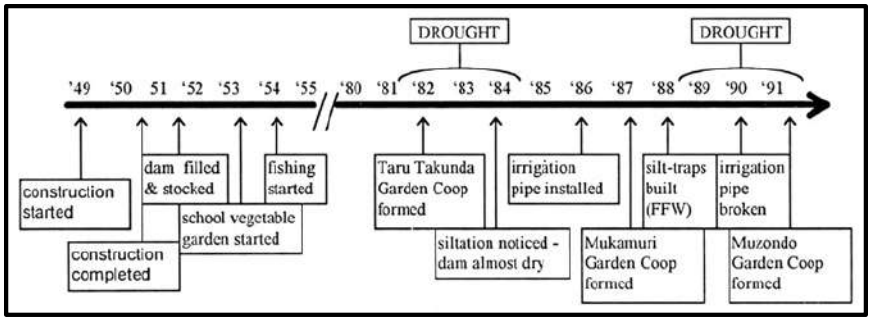




TIMELINE MAPPING

Communities create historical timelines of events (e.g., droughts, conflicts, infrastructure changes). In PAR, this tool contextualises current issues within past experiences, revealing patterns (e.g., cyclical hunger periods) and informing future strategies. Elders often lead these discussions to preserve oral history.





SEASONAL CALENDARS

Participants map seasonal variations in agriculture, health, or labour (e.g., "malaria peaks in monsoon"). In PAR, calendars identify critical periods for interventions (e.g., pre-harvest food shortages) and align projects with ecological cycles, ensuring relevance.

PHOTOVOICE

Community members use photography to document issues (e.g., broken water pumps), then discuss images in groups. In PAR, photovoice empowers marginalised groups to visually advocate for change, with photos serving as evidence for policymakers.

STORYTELLING & ORAL HISTORIES

Sharing personal or collective narratives (e.g., migration stories, ancestral farming practices) preserves tacit knowledge and highlights systemic challenges. In PAR, storytelling builds empathy, validates lived experiences, and inspires collective action. Recorded stories can influence advocacy campaigns.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ANALYSIS AND ACTION

OBJECTIVE

To help participants understand how to analyse and interpret data in action research using participatory methods, ensuring the findings are meaningful, community-driven, and lead to action.

INTRODUCTION

In action research, data collection is just the beginning—what truly matters is how we analyse and interpret that data. This process helps turn raw information into meaningful insights that can guide decision-making and action.

Unlike traditional research, action research involves the community in making sense of the data. By engaging in participatory analysis, we ensure that the interpretations are accurate, relevant, and grounded in real experiences.

In this session, we'll explore why analysis is important, different methods for analysing data, and how to validate findings with the community before acting.

UNDERSTANDING ANALYSIS IN ACTION RESEARCH

What is analysis?

Analysis in action research is the process of making sense of the data collected by identifying patterns, trends, and key insights. Unlike conventional research, where data analysis is often done solely by researchers, action research emphasises community participation in interpreting findings. This ensures that conclusions

reflect real-life experiences and perspectives.

The analysis process involves:

- Identifying key themes and patterns—in qualitative data (like interviews, focus groups, or case studies), recurring themes, words, or experiences helps understand the underlying issues.
- Making sense of numbers and statistics – In quantitative data (like surveys or census information), researchers look for trends, averages, or correlations to support findings.
- Engaging the community in interpretation – Since action research is participatory, community members should be involved in discussing what the data reveals and what it means for them.

By analysing data effectively, researchers and communities gain a deeper understanding of the problem, identify potential solutions, and develop informed action plans.

Why is analysis important?

Data alone doesn't create change—understanding and interpreting it is what leads to meaningful action. Analysis is a crucial step because:

- It turns raw data into useful information – without analysis, data remains just numbers or words. Organising and interpreting it helps uncover deeper insights.
- It ensures findings are relevant and actionable – community members can

validate whether the results align with their lived experiences.

- It helps identify root causes and solutions – by looking at patterns, relationships, and gaps, analysis helps in understanding why a problem exists and what can be done about it.

For example, if research shows that a high number of children are dropping out of school, analysis can help uncover reasons such as lack of transportation, financial struggles, or early marriage pressures. This insight helps design effective interventions.

STEPS TO ANALYSE DATA

Step 1: Organising and Reviewing Data

Before analysis begins, data must be well-organised and reviewed for accuracy. This step involves:

- Sorting and categorising data – Participants group similar responses together, separate qualitative and quantitative data, and organise numbers into tables or visual formats.
- Reviewing completeness and consistency involves ensuring that all necessary data has been collected and verifying that there is no missing or contradictory information.
- Identifying initial patterns or trends – Look for commonalities, unexpected findings, or outliers in the data.

Activity: Participants will review their collected data and organise it into key

themes or categories. They will write down any immediate observations about trends or gaps.

Step 2: Using Participatory Analysis Tools

Different tools help structure and simplify the analysis process, making it easier for communities to engage with the findings. Some commonly used participatory methods and tools include:

Case Study Analysis

- Content Analysis
- Narrative Analysis
- Thematic Analysis
- Conflict Analysis

Focus Group Discussions

- Time Trend Diagram
- Service/Infrastructure Mapping
- Force Field Analysis
- Grounded Theory

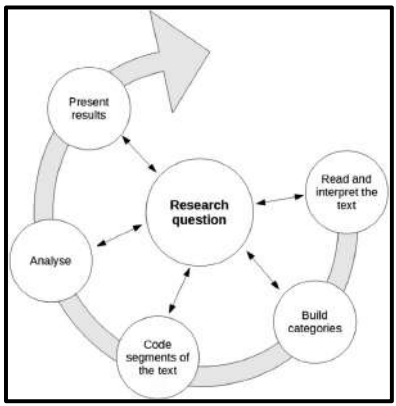
Content Analysis in PAR

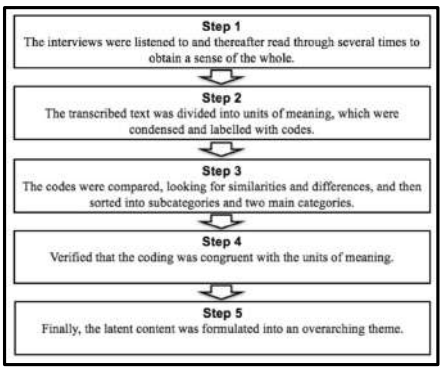
Definition:

Content analysis is a systematic method for categorising and interpreting textual, visual, or audio data to identify patterns, themes, and meanings.

Purpose: Systematically examine texts/media to uncover patterns and power

dynamics. **Steps**: (1) Collaboratively select sources (e.g., policies, social media); (2) Train participants in coding (e.g., highlighting biased language); (3) Group-analyse frequencies/themes (e.g., "How often are Indigenous rights ignored?"); (4) Co-create counter-narratives (e.g., community-led reports). **PAR Focus**: Ensures marginalised voices define what "counts" as data.





Application in PAR:

- Participatory Data Collection: Community members can help gather documents, social media posts, policy texts, or interview transcripts for analysis.
- Collaborative Coding: Researchers and participants work together to identify key themes, biases, or power structures embedded in the content.
- Empowerment Through Findings: Helps marginalised groups recognise how their issues are (mis)represented in media or official records.

Example:

In a PAR project on **indigenous land rights**, participants and researchers might analyse government policy documents and media reports to uncover how indigenous voices are excluded or misrepresented.

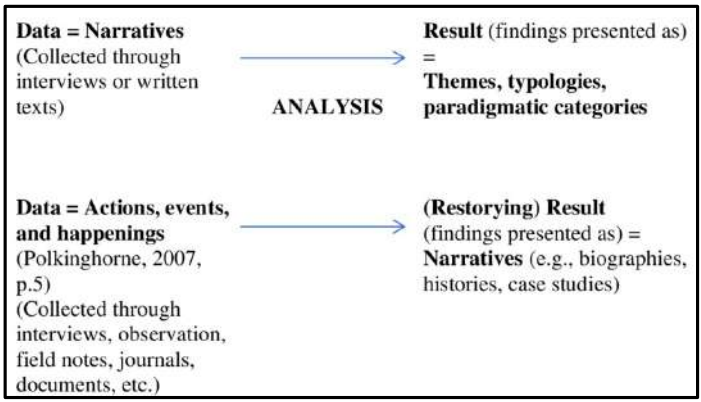
NARRATIVE ANALYSIS IN PAR

Definition:

Narrative analysis examines personal or collective stories to understand how people construct meaning, identity, and experiences.

Purpose: Elevate lived experiences through storytelling. **Steps**: (1) Collect stories (oral histories, diaries); (2) Map key themes (e.g., resilience, oppression) via group discussions; (3) Identify gaps (e.g., whose stories are missing?); (4) Amplify narratives through action. PAR Focus: Participants own their stories—no outsider interpretation. Example: Migrant workers recording exploitation experiences to

demand labour reforms.



Application in PAR:

- **Storytelling as Empowerment:** Participants share lived experiences (oral histories, diaries, interviews) to highlight systemic injustices.
- **Co-Interpretation:** Researchers and community members jointly analyse narratives to identify recurring struggles, resistance strategies, or cultural resilience.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Personal stories can be used to influence policymakers by humanising data.

Example:

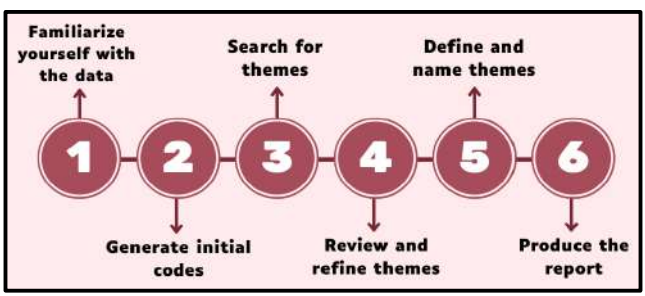
A PAR project with refugee communities might collect and analyse personal migration stories to challenge dominant stereotypes and advocate for better support services.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS IN PAR

Definition:

Thematic analysis identifies, analyses, and reports patterns (themes) within qualitative data, such as interviews or focus groups.

Purpose: Identify recurring themes in qualitative data (interviews, focus groups). Steps: (1) Co-conduct interviews (participants as researchers); (2) Group-code **data** (e.g., sticky-note sorting); (3) Refine themes (e.g., "lack of healthcare access"); (4) Prioritise actions (e.g., community health drives). **PAR Focus**: Themes emerge from collective analysis, not top-down. Example: Youth identifying "unsafe schools" as a theme, then designing anti-bullying campaigns.



Phase	Description
Phase 1 Data familiarisation	• Careful reading of the transcribed data by being critical and analytical of the informants' words • Note-taking important details from the data
Phase 2 Generate initial codes	• Generate relevant code(s) or phrase(s) with respect to the research question(s)
Phase 3 Search for themes	• Group codes into themes according to their unifying features
Phase 4 Review potential themes	• Determine whether the generated themes reflect the entirety of the data
Phase 5 Define and name the themes	• Name each theme that reflects the research questions (Ideally, each theme should have a singular focus and reflects the essence of the related data in a single sentence)
Phase 6 Produce the report	• Write a clear and analytical report of the findings by making arguments based on the research questions

Application in PAR:

- **Participatory Coding:** Community members help label and group data to ensure themes reflect their perspectives.
- **Iterative Process:** Themes are refined through ongoing dialogue between researchers and participants.
- **Action-Orientated Insights:** Themes guide collective action (e.g., identifying "lack of healthcare access" leading to a community-led health campaign).

Example:

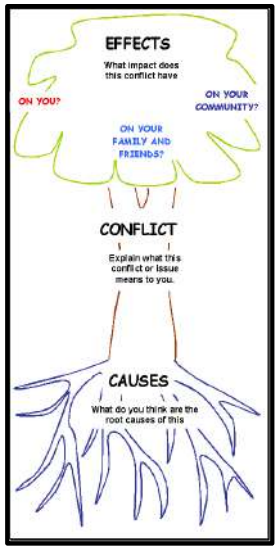
In a study on youth unemployment, participants and researchers might identify themes like "discrimination in hiring" or "lack of vocational training", leading to a youth-led skills-sharing programme.

CONFLICT ANALYSIS IN PAR

Definition:

Conflict analysis examines the root causes, actors, and dynamics of conflicts to inform resolution strategies.

Purpose: Uncover root causes of conflicts and co-design solutions. **Steps**: (1) Map conflict actors/power dynamics (e.g., through timelines); (2) Analyse root causes (e.g., "land disputes" via tree diagrams); (3) Identify leverage points (e.g., shared resources); (4) Test solutions (e.g., mediation circles).



Analyse the conflict using problem tree analysis.

What is a Problem Tree?

Problem tree analysis (also called situational analysis or just problem analysis) helps to find solutions by mapping out the anatomy of cause and effect around an issue in a similar way to a mind map, but with more structure.

Why develop a problem tree?

The problem tree structure brings several advantages:

- The problem can be broken down into manageable and definable chunks. This enables a clearer prioritisation of factors and helps focus objectives;
- There is more understanding of the problem and its often interconnected and sometimes contradictory causes. This is often the first step in finding win-win

solutions;

- It identifies the central issues and arguments and can help establish who and what the political actors and processes are at each stage;
- It can help establish whether further information, evidence or resources are needed to make a strong case or build a convincing solution;
- Present issues – rather than apparent, future or past issues – are dealt with and identified;
- The process of analysis often helps build a shared sense of understanding, purpose and action.

PROBLEM TREE ANALYSIS - STEP BY STEP

Problem tree analysis is best carried out in a small focus group of about six to eight people using flip chart paper or an overhead transparency. It is important that factors can be added as the conversation progresses.

Step 1: Discuss and agree on the problem or issue to be analysed. The problem can be broad, as the problem tree will help break it down. The problem or issue is written in the centre of the flip chart and becomes the trunk of the tree. This becomes the 'focal problem'. The problem should be an actual issue everyone feels passionate about, described in general, key wording.

Step 2: Identify the causes of the focal problem – these become the roots – and then the consequences, which become the branches. These causes and consequences

can be created on Post-it notes or cards, perhaps individually or in pairs, so that they can be arranged in a cause-and-effect logic.

The heart of the exercise is the discussion, debate and dialogue generated during the process of creating the tree. Take time to allow people to explain their feelings and reasoning, and record related ideas and points that come up on separate flip chart paper under titles such as 'solutions', 'concerns' and 'dilemmas'.

Discussion questions might include:

• Does this represent the reality? Are the economic, political and socio-cultural dimensions of the problem considered?

• Which causes and consequences are getting better, which are getting worse, and which are staying the same?

• What are the most serious consequences? Which are of most concern? What criteria are important to us in thinking about a way forward?

• Which causes are the easiest/most difficult to address? What possible solutions or options might there be? Where could a policy change help address a cause or consequence or create a solution?

• What decisions have we made, and what actions have we agreed on?

Analyse the conflict using Mediation circles (also called **peacemaking circles, healing circles, or restorative circles**) are a structured, community-based dialogue process designed to address conflict, harm, or collective decision-making in a participatory and egalitarian way.

- Inclusivity: All affected parties sit in a circle, symbolising equality.
- Shared Leadership: A facilitator (often a trained community member) guides the process, but all participants have an equal voice.
- Restorative Justice: Focuses on repairing harm rather than punishment.
- Storytelling: Participants speak from personal experience, often using a "talking piece" (an object passed to signify whose turn it is to speak).
- Sharing Perspectives: Each person speaks without judgement, often answering prompts like:
    - "What happened?"
    - "How were you affected?"
    - "What do you need in order to move forward?"
- Collective Accountability: Solutions emerge from group consensus, not top-down authority.

Application in PAR:

- **Participatory Mapping:** Community members identify conflict triggers (e.g., resource competition, historical grievances).
- **Power Dynamics:** PAR highlights marginalised voices often excluded from formal conflict resolution.
- **Collaborative Solutions:** Findings lead to locally owned peacebuilding initiatives.

Example:

A village faces deep caste-based conflicts, with dominant-caste landowners denying Dalit families access to water sources and farmland. Historical grievances, economic disparities, and social exclusion fuel tensions. A PAR team (including Dalit activists, NGO workers, and villagers) collaborates to address these issues through mediation circles.

1. Identifying the Problem (Participatory Research)

- **Community Mapping:** Villagers map sites of conflict (e.g., disputed wells, segregated pathways).
- **Storytelling Workshops:** Marginalised groups (Dalit women, landless labourers) share experiences of discrimination.
- **Data Collection:** The PAR team documents caste-based violence, economic barriers, and broken trust.

2. Co-Designing the Mediation Process (Data Collection and Analysis)

- Circle Planning: Mixed-caste focus groups design the circle structure:

- Who participates? Dalit and dominant-caste families, elders, youth, and local leaders.

- Facilitators: Trained villagers (respected elders, women's self-help group leaders).

- Cultural Adaptations: Opening rituals (e.g., lighting a lamp), use of local proverbs, and regional symbols for the talking piece (e.g., a farming tool).

- Rules: No interruptions, no caste-based slurs, focus on solutions.

3. Testing the Circles (Action)

- **First Circle Topic**: "Access to the Village Well" (a disputed resource).
- **Dialogue Prompts:**

  - "How has the well's use affected your family?"

  - "What would fair sharing look like?"

- **Outcomes**:

  - Dalit families report experiencing threats while fetching water.

  - Landowners argue they "maintain" the well and fear "overuse".

  - **Solution**: Co-create a shared schedule for well access; a mixed-caste committee to monitor.

4. Evaluating & Scaling Up (Reflection and Review)

- Feedback: Villagers vote/describe whether the circle reduced tensions.
- Adjustments: Add youth-only circles to address intergenerational trauma.

Why This Works in PAR

- Breaks Silence: Dominant-caste members hear Dalit experiences firsthand, challenging stereotypes.
- Ownership: Solutions come from villagers, not outsiders.
- Systemic Change: Circles expose caste-based power structures, paving the way for advocacy (e.g., demanding local government enforce water rights).

Challenges & Adaptations

- Power Imbalances: Dominant-caste voices may dominate. Mitigation: Separate preparatory circles for marginalised groups to build confidence.
- Retaliation: Fear of backlash. Mitigation: Anonymous feedback systems and NGO safeguards.
- Sustainability: Solution: Train Dalit youth as facilitators to sustain the process.

Step 3: Interpreting Findings and Making Sense of Data

Once data has been categorised and analysed using participatory tools, the next step is to interpret what it means. This involves:

- Asking, "What does this data tell us?" – Encouraging participants to discuss the findings openly and share insights.
- Discussing connections between different factors – identifying how various causes and effects interact.
- Spotting areas that need more clarity or validation – If the findings reveal contradictions or missing links, researchers may need to gather more data.

Activity: Participants will work in small groups to present key insights from their analysis. They will summarise their findings and discuss what actions could be taken based on the results.

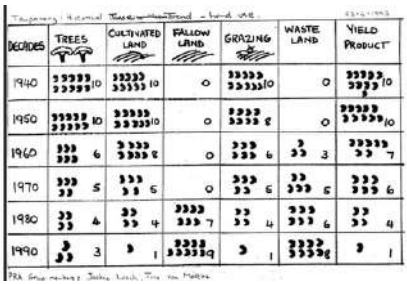
For instance, if a Venn diagram reveals that local authorities and NGOs have minimal interaction regarding a specific issue, this might suggest the need for better coordination and collaboration to address the problem effectively.

Focus Group Discussions

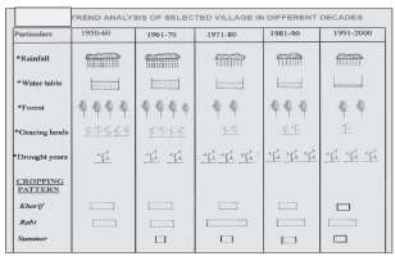
- Time Trend Diagram
- Service/Infrastructure Mapping
- Force Field Analysis

Time Trend Diagram

Purpose: Visually track changes in an issue over time to identify patterns, triggers, and opportunities for intervention.



DECADES	TREES	CULTIVATED LAND	FALLOW LAND	GRAZING	WASTE LAND	YIELD PRODUCT
1940	10	10	0	10	0	10
1950	10	10	0	8	0	10
1960	6	8	0	6	3	7
1970	5	5	0	6	5	6
1980	4	4	7	4	6	4
1990	3	1	9	1	8	1



PAR Application:

- **Example**: In a PAR project on caste-based water access, villagers collaboratively plot:

X-axis: Time (e.g., past 20 years).

Y-axis: Key metrics (e.g., number of water conflicts, well construction projects).

- Participatory Process:

  - Elders share oral histories ("Before 2005, Dalits could use the well, but

then a wall was built").

- Youth add recent data (e.g., smartphone videos of denied access).

- **Outcome**: Identifies critical moments (e.g., a land dispute that escalated exclusion) to target interventions.

Tool: Use chalkboards, large paper, or chart paper for collective mapping.

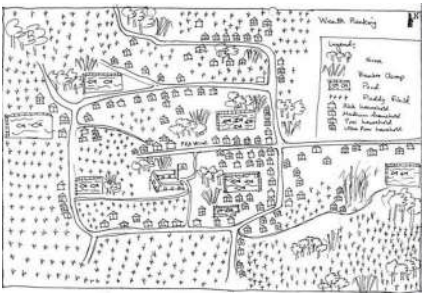
Ask the participants to explain the diagram. Encourage them to discuss their findings and reflect on them. Some key questions for the discussion could include: Major trends and findings

- Causes of the trends
- What can be done?
- Who can play a role in it?
- What can the participants and local people do themselves?
- What can they do with a little assistance from outside?

SOCIAL / RESOURCE MAPPING

Purpose: Visually document resource distribution to expose inequities and advocate for change.

Social mapping is a visual participatory tool used in Participatory Action Research (PAR) to analyse and represent the social structures, resources, and dynamics of a community. It helps researchers and community members collaboratively identify key social elements such as households, institutions, power relations, and vulnerabilities.



1. Objectives of Social Mapping in PAR

- Identify social hierarchies (e.g., caste, class, gender dynamics).
- Locate key resources (schools, health centres, water sources).
- Highlight marginalised groups (landless labourers, women-headed households).
- Understand power structures (local leaders, decision-makers).
- Facilitate participatory planning for development interventions.
- Analyse the situation through the diagram and questions.

2. Steps in Conducting Social Mapping

Step 1: Preparation

- Engage the community: Explain the purpose and encourage participation.
- Select facilitators.
- Materials needed: Paper, coloured pens, sticks, stones, or ground drawings.

Step 2: Drawing the Map (Participatory Exercise)

- Villagers sketch their community layout (roads, houses, fields, rivers).
- Use symbols to represent different groups/institutions (e.g., ▲ for rich households, ● for poor families).
- Mark key locations (schools, temples, water pumps, health centres).

Step 3: Analysing Social Structures

- Wealth & Caste Distribution: Who lives where? Are marginalised groups clustered in certain areas?
- Access to Resources: Who has easy access to water, schools, and markets?
- Power Dynamics: Where do influential leaders reside? Who controls resources?

Step 4: Discussion & Validation

- Participants discuss findings:
- "Why are Dalit households located near the riverbank?"
- "Why do women have to walk far for water?"
- Correct any biases or errors collectively.

Step 5: Using Findings for Action

- Identify interventions (e.g., new water points for excluded groups).
- Advocate for policy changes (e.g., land rights for marginalised communities).

3. Example of a Social Map

Key Elements

KEY ELEMENTS	SYMBOLS/REPRESENTATION
Wealthy households	▲ (Triangle)
Poor households	● (Circle)
Scheduled Caste (SC) homes	Red colour
Water source	Blue circle
School	■ (Square)
Health center	 (Cross)

Observations from the Map:

- SC households are far from the main water source.
- Wealthier families live near the road and market.
- The health centre is only accessible to dominant caste groups.

Action Plan:

- Lobby for a new water hand pump in the SC hamlet.
- Advocate for better health outreach in marginalised areas.

4. Advantages of Social Mapping in PAR

- Empowers marginalised voices – Ensures their concerns are visible.
- Visual & easy to understand – Helps illiterate participants engage.
- Reveals hidden inequalities – Shows spatial segregation and exclusion.
- Guides advocacy & interventions – Directs resources where most needed.

5. Challenges & Solutions

CHALLENGE	SOLUTION
Dominant groups may control the mapping process	Ensure facilitators include marginalised voices.
Sensitive issues (e.g., caste discrimination) may be suppressed.	Use anonymous voting or small group discussions.
Maps may become outdated quickly.	Update periodically with community input.

Social and resource mapping are used in action research to visually analyse community structures, inequalities, and resource distribution by engaging local participants in creating maps that highlight social hierarchies (e.g., caste, gender, class), power dynamics, and access to key resources (e.g., water, land, schools). These maps reveal spatial patterns of exclusion, disparities in resource control, and opportunities for intervention, enabling researchers and communities to

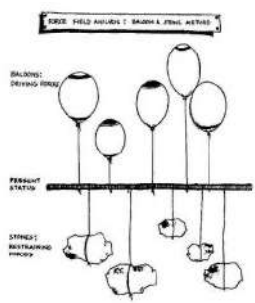
collaboratively identify problems, advocate for equitable solutions, and design targeted development initiatives based on participatory insights.

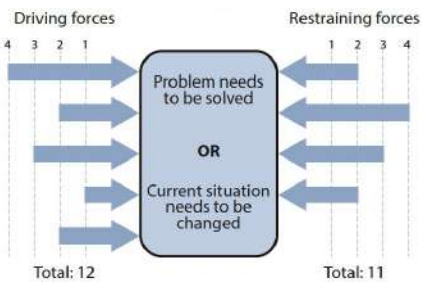
FORCE FIELD ANALYSIS

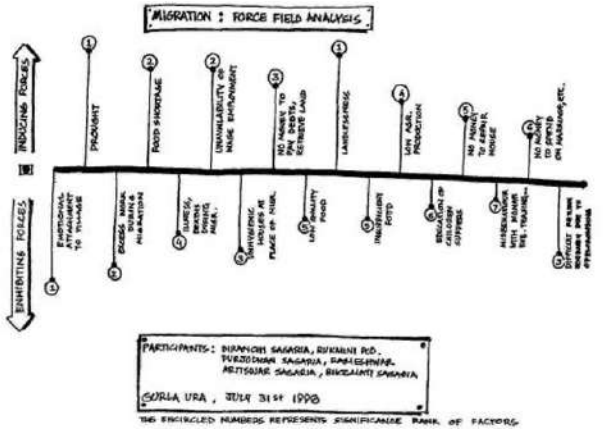
Force field analysis is a tool that helps you visualise and evaluate the forces that affect the situation or a change. Force field Analysis is a decision-making tool that helps identify and analyze the **driving forces** (positive factors) and **restraining forces** (negative factors) affecting a particular situation or problem in a community. It is often used in Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) to help villagers understand and address development challenges.

Purpose: Analyse forces driving or blocking change to strategisee action.

- Assess why a particular development project is succeeding or failing.
- Understand barriers to change (e.g., resistance to new farming techniques).
- Plan strategies to strengthen positive forces and reduce negative ones.







PAR Application:

Steps to Conduct Force Field Analysis in a Village PRA

Step 1: Define the Issue (e.g., low adoption of organic farming)

- Discuss with villagers to clearly state the problem or desired change.

Step 2: Identify Driving Forces (Positive Factors)

- These support the desired change. Examples:
- Government support for organic farming.
- High demand for organic produce in markets.
- Training provided by NGOs.

Step 3: Identify Restraining Forces (Negative Factors)

- These hinder the desired change. Examples:
- High cost of organic inputs.

- Lack of awareness among farmers.
- Traditional farming habits.

Step 4: Visualise the Forces (Diagram)

- Draw a diagram with the desired change in the middle.
- List driving forces on the left (pushing forward).
- List restraining forces on the right (pushing backward).

Step 5: Analyse and Plan Actions

- Strengthen Driving Forces: e.g., more training, better market access.
- Weaken Restraining Forces: e.g., subsidies for organic inputs, awareness campaigns.

Benefits of Force Field Analysis

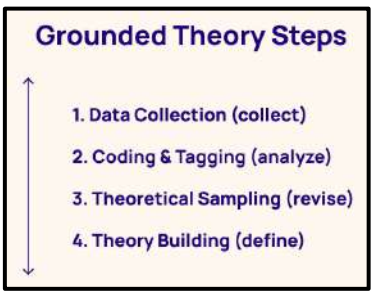
- Encourages community participation in problem-solving.
- Helps in prioritising actions based on key forces.
- Provides a clear visual representation of challenges and opportunities.

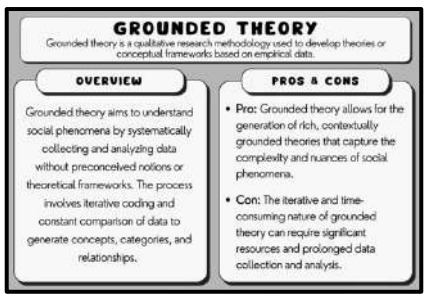
There are many other relevant tools that could be used for analysis based on the context and need

GROUNDED THEORY

Grounded Theory (GT) is a qualitative research methodology that generates theory directly from data (e.g., interviews, observations) rather than testing pre-

existing hypotheses. When integrated into Participatory Action Research (PAR), it becomes a powerful tool for co-creating knowledge with communities while centring their lived experiences.





Key Principles of Grounded Theory in PAR

- Emergence Over Imposition

- Theories arise from community narratives, not external academic frameworks.
- Example: In a PAR project on urban homelessness, researchers and unhoused participants analyse interview data together, identifying patterns like "survival trust networks" rather than relying on pre-defined poverty theories.

- Iterative Data Collection & Analysis

- Constant comparison: Data is collected, coded, and analysed in cycles (not linearly).
- Example: A village PAR team studying caste discrimination might:
- Conduct initial interviews → Identify themes (e.g., "silenced grievances") → Design follow-up focus groups to deepen understanding.

Participatory Coding

- Community members help label and interpret data (e.g., through group workshops).
- Example: Indigenous farmers code agricultural resilience strategies using their own terminology (e.g., "seed kinship" instead of "biodiversity conservation").

Theory Building as Empowerment

- The process helps communities name systemic issues and advocate for change.
- Example: Migrant workers co-develop a theory of "invisible labour traps" to demand policy reforms.

GROUNDED THEORY	PAR INTEGRATION
Focuses on generating new theories	Ensures theories reflect community wisdom, not just academic perspectives
Uses open/axial/selective coding	Participants co-define codes (e.g., youth in a PAR project label "resistance" as "quiet rebellion").
Prioritises saturation (no new themes emerge)	Collective decision-making determines when analysis is "complete".

Grounded theory in PAR ensures that **theories are rooted in collective struggle and usable for liberation.** It bridges academia and activism, turning lived experience into transformative knowledge.

CHAPTER EIGHT

REFLECTION & EVALUATION IN PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (PAR)

1. INTRODUCTION TO REFLECTION & EVALUATION IN PAR

Participatory Action Research (PAR) emphasises a cyclical process of inquiry, action, and change, driven by collaboration between researchers and community stakeholders. A critical component of this process is systematic reflection and evaluation, which ensure continuous learning and meaningful impact. Reflection involves a deep, critical analysis of the research process, including power dynamics, challenges, and outcomes, fostering accountability and adaptability. Evaluation, on the other hand, assesses the tangible and intangible effects of actions taken, both intended and unintended, to determine their effectiveness. Unlike traditional research, PAR prioritises participatory evaluation, where stakeholders collectively define success metrics, interpret findings, and shape future actions. By integrating reflection and evaluation at every stage, PAR strengthens its commitment to democratic knowledge production, empowerment, and sustainable social transformation.

Objective: Understand how systematic reflection and evaluation strengthen PAR's cyclical process of inquiry, action, and change.

Key Concepts:

- **Reflection:** Critical analysis of the research process, power dynamics, and outcomes.
- **Evaluation:** Assessing the impact of actions taken, both intended and unintended.
- **Participatory Evaluation:** Stakeholders collaboratively define success metrics and analyse results.

2. STEPS IN REFLECTION & EVALUATION

A. Individual & Collective Reflection

Reflection in Participatory Action Research (PAR) occurs at both individual and collective levels, deepening understanding and fostering meaningful change. Researchers and participants use tools such as journals/logs to document personal insights, challenges, and emotions, while focus groups create space for structured dialogue, allowing diverse perspectives to emerge. Timeline mapping helps visually trace key milestones and turning points, revealing patterns in the research process. Critical reflection is guided by questions such as, 'What worked well, and why?' How did power dynamics influence decision-making? Were marginalised voices truly included? By engaging in continuous and intentional reflection, PAR ensures that learning remains dynamic, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of all stakeholders.

Tools/Methods:

- **Journals/Logs:** Researchers and participants document insights, challenges, and emotions.
- **Focus Groups:** Structured discussions to share diverse perspectives.
- **Timeline Mapping:** Visually track key milestones and turning points.

Guiding Questions:

- What worked well, and why?
- How did power dynamics affect decision-making?
- Were marginalised voices adequately included?

B. Participatory Evaluation

Participatory evaluation is a cornerstone of PAR, ensuring that assessment is democratic, inclusive, and action-orientated. Unlike traditional evaluation methods, it engages stakeholders in defining and measuring success through collaborative approaches such as Outcome Mapping, which tracks shifts in behaviours, relationships, or policies, and the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique, where participants share impactful stories that are collectively analysed for key themes. Additionally, rubrics or scorecards can be co-developed to evaluate progress based on community-defined criteria—for example, "Did this intervention strengthen collective agency?" Evaluation metrics blend qualitative methods (e.g., testimonials, case studies) with quantitative data (e.g.,

surveys, pre/post-intervention comparisons) where relevant, providing a holistic understanding of impact. This approach not only measures outcomes but also reinforces ownership, learning, and adaptive strategies among all participants.

Approaches:

1. Outcome Mapping: Identify changes in behaviour, relationships, or policies.
2. Most Significant Change (MSC): Stakeholders share stories of impact, then collectively analyse themes.
3. Rubrics/Scorecards: Co-create criteria for success (e.g., "Did this action increase community agency?").

Example Metrics:

- **Qualitative:** Participant testimonials, case studies.
- **Quantitative:** Surveys, pre/post-intervention data (if applicable).

C. Critical Analysis

At the heart of PAR lies critical analysis—a rigorous examination of power, ethics, and sustainability to ensure meaningful and equitable outcomes. This involves conducting a power analysis to ask: Who benefited most from this process, and whose voices were marginalised or excluded? An ethical review assesses whether principles like informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity were upheld throughout the research. Finally, sustainability is interrogated by

questioning: Can these changes endure beyond the project, or do they rely on ongoing external support? By embedding critical analysis into every phase, PAR challenges systemic inequities, promotes accountability, and fosters long-term, community-driven transformation.

- **Power Analysis:** Who benefited most? Who was excluded?
- **Ethical Review:** Was consent and confidentiality maintained?
- **Sustainability:** Can the actions continue without external support?

3. INTEGRATING REFLECTION INTO THE PAR CYCLE

Reflection and evaluation are not final steps but rather dynamic processes that fuel continuous improvement in PAR. By systematically integrating reflection into each research cycle, communities and researchers engage in adaptive learning—using insights to refine strategies and actions. For example, a PAR project addressing a lack of local healthcare might begin with community members planning a pilot health workshop series. After implementation, participants reflect on challenges like attendance barriers or cultural relevance, then revise the approach—adjusting timing, location, or content—for the next cycle. This iterative process ensures that interventions remain responsive, inclusive, and effective, deepening impact with each phase.

Adaptive Learning: Use findings to refine the next cycle of research/action.

Example Workflow:

- **Plan:** The community identifies an issue (e.g., lack of local healthcare).
- **Act:** Pilot a health workshop series.
- **Reflect/Eval:** Participants discuss attendance barriers and cultural relevance.
- **Revise:** Adjust workshop timing/location for Cycle 2.

4. CHALLENGES & MITIGATION STRATEGIES

While reflection and evaluation are essential to PAR, they often face practical and structural challenges that must be proactively addressed. A common issue arises when dominant voices overshadow marginalised groups during evaluation, skewing results and reinforcing inequities—this can be mitigated through methods like anonymous feedback or structured small-group dialogues to ensure inclusive participation. Another frequent challenge is time constraints, which may limit opportunities for deep reflection; embedding brief but consistent check-ins (e.g., 15-minute reflective segments in regular meetings) can help sustain critical thinking without overburdening participants. By anticipating these barriers and implementing adaptive strategies, PAR teams can uphold the integrity of the process and foster more equitable, meaningful outcomes.

CHALLENGE:

- Dominant voices overshadow marginalised groups in evaluation.
- Time constraints limit deep reflection.

Example - Case Study Exercise

Scenario: A PAR project on youth unemployment conducted job-training workshops.

Task: In small groups, design a reflection/evaluation plan using:

Method: MSC stories + outcome mapping.

Questions: "What skills did youth gain?" "Did employers engage as planned?"

CONCLUSION

Reflection and evaluation in Participatory Action Research (PAR) are not merely final steps but ongoing, embedded practices that drive meaningful change throughout the research cycle. The success of PAR hinges on genuine stakeholder ownership—where community members actively shape the process, interpret findings, and apply lessons to future actions. This requires adaptable tools—from timeline mapping to participatory rubrics—that can be tailored to a community's unique cultural, social, and logistical context. Whether through structured focus groups, anonymous feedback mechanisms, or iterative cycles of action and adaptation, PAR's power lies in its commitment to inclusivity, equity, and responsiveness. By centring reflection and evaluation as dynamic, collective practices, PAR transforms research from a one-time project into a sustainable process of empowerment and social transformation. The next chapter discusses certain ethical questions regarding research, especially when dealing with children.

CHAPTER NINE

THE QUESTION OF ETHICS

We want a world (research) fit for children, because a world (research) fit for us is a world (research) fit for everyone.

-UN Special Session on Children, 2002.

One of the important and universally accepted instruments for children is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, known as UNCRC. Adopted by the UN in 1989, this convention requires the State to adopt, apply and bring mechanisms as mandated by the UNCRC. The cornerstone of the convention lies in **'The Best Interest of the Child' (BIoC)**. In fact, BIoC has been a mandatory protocol among various international agencies and UN bodies. This must be the key element to conduct, administer and engage children in research.

As children come from varied physical, social (family), economic and psychological situations, they must be protected with utmost vigilance while conducting research. In fact, the World Medical Association's Helsinki declaration summarises how physicians (medical professionals) conduct research. It states that it's the duty of the physicians doing "medical research to protect the life, health, dignity, integrity, autonomy, privacy, and confidentiality of personal information of research participants" [1]. This not only applies to medical research but also to all kinds of research work conducted across the globe. More particularly for children since their life, health, dignity, autonomy, privacy and confidentiality

are vulnerable and must be protected. In research child protection includes data privacy. How the data is going to be used and stored is required to be mentioned in the ethical form and explicitly stated in the consent form.

WHO's operational definition of child protection is 'daily work, including monitoring, policymaking and research activities, or sexual misconduct under the PASM' [2]. The key stakeholders for children are parents and caregivers. They act as gatekeepers to protect the child from being harmed. Such protection is required, based on the child's age, who might not be able to comprehend the consequences of research. On the other hand, in some instances parental or caregivers' consent is irrelevant or not beneficial in situations where research is about child abuse in the residence or in institutional care. 'Do No Harm' or 'Zero Harm' should be the yardstick/standard position, and it should never be compromised.

CHILD PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

The best way to decide if we act in the best interest of the child or not is to make the child participate from the beginning, i.e., have the child co-create the study itself. This would be in line with the method of action research and the tools mentioned above. The type of research determines the depth of child participation in research. In some studies, children attend as participants (primarily medical studies), and in others, children attend not as participants but as co-researchers. Children as co-researchers as a method has not been formally explored much in India or across

the world. Child participation, an important element of child rights, is not fully operationalised in research. Co-creation of participatory research tools not only adheres to the ethics of research but also brings out the best research outcome for better intervention.

Participation should be right from the beginning: developing research concepts, design, methodology and application of research tools. The key element is research 'with' children and not 'on' children. For example, a child advisory group can be initiated for the research study.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES TO BE FOLLOWED IN CONDUCTING RESEARCH

INTEGRITY	Demonstrate intellectual and moral honesty in proposing, planning, conducting, and reporting research. Truthfulness and responsible conduct underlie the integrity of research proposals, information, data, analyses, reports, and publications.
ACCOUNTABILITY	Public transparency throughout the research process.
INDEPENDENCE AND IMPARTIALITY	Personal views, bias, prejudice, convictions, previous experiences or future ambitions do not compromise the objective scientific process. To maintain professionalism while conducting research.

RESPECT FOR PERSONS AND COMMUNITIES	Respect for the dignity of persons and communities. Mindful of potential risks and benefits to the individuals and communities due to research. As researchers we must make every effort to minimise risk and maximise benefits
PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT	Integrity and personal commitment in protecting and developing children. Objectivity, accuracy, efficiency, and impartiality are expected while engaged in research.

Adapted from WHO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Research, 2017. Ethical principles to be followed in conducting/supporting research. Figure 2. Page 11. [3]

Challenges to Ethics:

- Children in research: Their inability to give informed consent, understand the depth of research and engage in the process.
- It's much more challenging if a child experiences violence, , exploitation, or sexual abuse. How do we collect data from these children?
- Can parents/ caregivers act in the best interest of the child? As gatekeepers/ guardians.
- If the research causes distress and harm, who will address physical, emotional, psychological, moral and ethical issues for children?

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[1]https://www.wma.net/policies-post/wma-declaration-of-helsinki/

[2]Ethical Principle 51. Page 9, WHO, 2023. https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/ethics/code-of-ethics.pdf?sfvrsn=d56578a6_8&download=true

[3]https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/wpro---documents/regional-committee/nomination-regional-director/code-of-conduct/ccrr.pdf?sfvrsn=b2cb450_2&ua=1

MODULE FOR PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

CHILD RIGHTS & YOU IN COLLABORATION WITH LOYOLA COLLEGE, CHENNAI