UNIT 5  ACTION RESEARCH FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

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Structure

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5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this last unit of Block 1, you will be reading about what is action research and its importance in feminist research. The unit also discusses various tools and methodologies to carry out action research. Next section deals with key principles, gender perspective, critique, examples and institutions that have undertaken this type of research studies while working in the field.

The unit also discusses importance of evaluation in action research and also throws light on various result indicators at three levels, viz. micro, meso and macro. Let us now read the objectives of reading this unit.

5.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to;

• Explain the concept, need and aims of action research;
• Describe various tools, methodologies and methods of participatory research;
• Critique participatory research from gender perspective; and
• Design a research proposal for participatory research study.
5.3 CONCEPT AND NEED

To begin with, let us understand what is action research and what is the purpose of this kind of research.

Action Research is a community based method, aimed at transforming the status quo. It is participatory as this research sees the respondents as co-creators of knowledge and is potentially empowering to the community. It places the research tools in the hands of the researched and minimizes the hierarchy between the researched and the researcher. It enables the community to identify their wants, their strengths and initiate change with the support of the researcher. The targeted community is involved in the identification of the problem, the planning and execution of the project. Such research can begin with consciousness raising discussions, identification of available resources to initiate change and initiating change. Creating space for participation in the research, is often cited as what is most important in research on participatory development.

Attempts as these are made in participatory research so that the hierarchical relationships associated with research - between the researcher and those being researched can be broken down.

Aims of action research are to:

- develop shared ownership of the research;
- enable other participants to direct the research process, have a say on what to do, and how;
- create opportunities for collective data-gathering and analysis;
- create space for participants to reflect on the research and provide critical feedback;
- build trust and non-threatening environment;
- allow research to progress toward action and doing if desired by other participants.

Women’s empowerment is a central aim of feminist action research. Close relationships between researchers and participants engaged in a feminist participatory action research project have brought joy and insight, but also challenges. Through the project the research team collaborates to enhance participants’ quality of life/careers and, among some, develop feminist consciousness. The methodological and ethical issues that derive from the closeness of the relationships between many of the participants and researchers also make it imperative to explore their subjectivities, the issues associated with interpreting participants’ stories, actions and conversations, the risk of perpetuating uncritical assimilation or ideological baggage, and the challenge of matching practice with ideals of emancipation for all women.
Here, it becomes imperative to start the discussion with the types of needs women have. These may be related to the roles women play in any society or help them look beyond their gender roles and aim at providing ways and means for empowerment. These are termed as practical and strategic gender needs.

**Practical and strategic needs:**

Caroline Moser’s work on gender planning methodology provides definitions that distinguish between practical and strategic gender needs. Practical Gender Needs are those that:

**Women identify in their socially accepted roles in society.** *Practical gender needs do not challenge the gender divisions of labour or women’s subordinate position in society, although rising out of them. Practical gender needs are a response to immediate perceived necessity, identified within a specific context.* (Moser, 1993, p.40)

According to Moser:

**Strategic Gender Needs are the needs women identify because of their subordinate position to men in their society... They relate to gender divisions of labour, power and control and may include such issues as legal rights, domestic violence, equal wages and women’s control over their bodies. Meeting strategic gender needs helps women to achieve greater equality.** (Moser, 1993, p.39)

The distinction between these two types of needs can provide a useful tool to aid us in analysing how gender is being addressed and proposed in policy or project interventions.

Let us now look at the tools that are used in participatory research.

### 5.4 PARTICIPATORY TOOLS

The participatory tools used for participatory research appear to be somewhat similar to Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques. However, the tools shared in this unit have been specifically developed to address gender and social stratification.

The **first participatory tool** that can be used with small groups of women is a popular tool often used at the beginning of a process. It is known as landscape mapping, and is similar to transect walks. This exercise consists of having a small group of women take on a walk through an area where each of the women meets her survival needs. In this exercise, women are
asked to tell the researchers about their practical and strategic needs. This is followed with an exercise to map out the identified area with the same group of women.

The second tool that can be used is a modified version of a *life-history interview*, conducted at their homes. These interviews reveal a great deal about the background of the women, which enable the researchers to get to know each of them on a more individual level. It reveals information about their migration from rural areas to the city, their educational backgrounds, when they started working in the city, their employment experiences and much more. Flip-chart paper can be used so that the women can see what is being written. This exercise helps in preparing a check-list of priorities.

**Check Your Progress:**

i) What are Practical and Strategic Gender Needs of women?

ii) What are participatory tools? How are they useful in feminist research?
5.5 PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Next, we will discuss various methodologies that are used by researchers in the process of participatory research.

Innovative applications

- **Consciousness raising methods**: This is a strategy that has grown out of feminist attempts to understand women’s lived experiences within autonomous women’s groups. Because of feminist distrust of hierarchies, there is no leader. Sharing of ideas, experiences, analytical vision takes place in a non-threatening environment.

- **Group diaries**: It draws from psychological/literary techniques aimed at un-folding of streams of consciousness. Anonymous entries are made in the diary of the group. These recordings of stories, anecdotes and recollection written by the group may be discussed in group interviews and then documented.

- **Dramatic role-play**: This is an effective method that can trigger discussions in a group. By presenting the issue under discussion in the form of a drama, the researcher can get the group members to reflect on their attitudes and express them. The process helps to generate consciousness on issues and enables participants to introspect on their values and ideas.

- **Genealogy and network tracing**: Used in biographical writings, this involves locating the history of a woman’s life within the context of her relationships, friendships and origin.

- **Non-authoritative community-based research**: This technique is useful in research that has to empower the community. This involves gathering data on issues that affect the community and then presented back to the targeted community, to make sense of the evidence. Emphasis is placed on the respondents and on subjectivity.

- **Conversation/dialogue**: This technique could be a face to face group discussion or on the internet. It involves conversations and discussions across a wide spectrum of e-group members. The division between the researcher and the researched is minimized. Based on the topic at hand discussions may be triggered through the impersonation of historical persons or through focused discussion on events or issues. In the research process the lines between the researcher and participants are blurred. Questions asked and ideas expressed are free floating.

- **Using intuition or writing associatively**: These are techniques that seek to uncover streams of consciousness. This uses a way of blended
dreams, readings and thoughts in which the writer brings out themes in a deep non-chronological, non-topical intuitive process. It is premised on the understanding that language is male centered. It cannot express women’s experiences. Therefore, to uncover the many layers of experiences in women, it is necessary to break accepted norms of writing and allow for a free flow of consciousness.

- **Identification instead of keeping distance:** Based on the feminist critique of the notion of objectivity in research, this technique calls for empathy with the subject. It requires that the researcher sees reality from the standpoint of the researched and makes evident her bias in her writing so that the reader appreciates the point of view of the researched. This is particularly useful in studying marginalized groups whose viewpoints have rarely entered our theoretical frameworks.

- **Studying unplanned personal experiences:** Personal experiences, for example, of illness or operations (alone or with additional data), is used as a basis of study.

- **Photography or talking-picture techniques:** This involves a collection of pictures taken at certain intervals to be used in an interview kit. These duly categorized pictures used with the questionnaire are useful to jolt memory. This technique has varieties of use. It can be part of awareness generation activities (which can be documented and presented as group diaries) or it could be used in oral history/life history narratives. Family albums for instance could elicit anecdotes and recollections. There can be other forms of analyses of these pictures in themselves.

- **Speaking freely into a tape recorder or answering long essay-type questionnaires:** This technique involves a set of questions sent to the respondent with instructions to record the answers on tape.

**Description of Innovative Applications**

Developed in response to the ‘top-down’ methodologies used for development research during the 1950s and 1960s, Participatory Research Methodologies stress a ‘bottom-up’ approach guided by the principle of participation. Influenced by social scientists from the global south such as Paulo Freire, participatory approaches critique research (and development in general) as something that is ‘done to’ people by governments, development agencies and international NGOs from the global north. In response, these methodologies stress the importance of recognizing that those who are the targets of research and development policies should have a say in their formulation and that local knowledge should be privileged. Feminist researchers have adapted many of these methods, and Participatory Research Methodologies are among the most used in the field of gender-specific research.
Participatory Approaches have also been adapted for use in the monitoring and evaluation of development programmes. Supporters of these approaches suggest that: “Participation is the key to sustainable development initiatives, since it will lead to building on existing potentials and capacities, a greater sense of ownership on the part of the stakeholders, increased commitment to the objectives and outcomes, longer term social sustainability, increased self-help capacities, stronger and more democratic institutions and partnerships.” (UN INSTRAW)

**Key Principles**

- “Bottom-up” approach applied to all development activities, including research and programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Empowerment through facilitation: Supporting capacity-building, especially among marginalized peoples to analyze and improve their lives by validating and privileging their experiences and knowledge.
- Facilitated dialogue: Used to recognize the various ways in which power operates. Linking the personal (experiences) to the political in order to understand local level problems as part of a larger political/theoretical context, a process referred to as conscientization.
- Traditional and innovative methods: A combination of written, oral and visual communication methods are used in the design, implementation and documentation of participatory research. This include theatre and visual imagery, collectively written songs, cartoons, community meetings, community self-portraits and videotape recordings.

**Gender perspectives**

Women working in gender and development have both critiqued participatory approaches and offered suggestions to strengthen their applicability to gender and other social differences.

- Use clear and commonly used terminology as conceptual clarity lays the basis for practical application. Problematic terms such as Gender, Empowerment, Participation, and Community need careful attention.
- Develop appropriate methodologies in each circumstances e.g. understand the practical conditions that can affect women’s involvement.
- Ensure that women have access to appropriate forms of expression to articulate their needs, interests and concerns.
- More focus on developing inclusive methods that can analyze gender.
- Gender-sensitive participatory training must be developed to suit the structure and objectives of specific organizations.
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• Stimulate continual critical reflection and innovation within organizations.
• Gender-focused and sex-disaggregated monitoring is essential to ensure that men's and women's perspectives have been incorporated into plans, and that these plans are translated into action.

Main Critiques

• When used for the larger aims of development - driven primarily by a poverty-reduction agenda - there is a heavy focus on class-based analyses, rather than analyses that take sex, ethnicity, age, sexual-orientation and other variables into account.
• When gender is considered, it is often confused with ‘women.’ Additionally there is a tendency to focus on ‘women’ as one homogeneous group.
• Participatory research approaches are often gender-neutral, which can mean that they do little to address gender inequities unless the research explicitly includes gender considerations.
• Often there is a restricted way of looking at gender relations (i.e. solely between spouses/partners) that does not examine relations between mother/son, father/daughter, younger women/older women, etc.
• Tendency to romanticize both ‘local knowledge’ and the idea of communities as socially homogeneous and harmonious entities without conflicting or mutually exclusive interests.
• An uncritical emphasis on the participation of local communities can replicate or perpetuate inequitable status quos, leaving the facilitator with little scope to work towards changing gender inequalities.
• Many aspects of gender discrimination are embedded in traditions and beliefs that are perceived by many communities as either biologically or divinely ordained. That is, gender inequalities are not easily recognized as something in need of change.

Examples

Following are some commonly-used participatory approaches:
• Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA)
• Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)
• Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs)
• Participatory Action Research (PAR)
• Participant Observer
International institutions that have used the methodology include Action Aid, CONCERN, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), United Nations (UNDP, UNIFEM, FAO, INSTRAW), Oxfam, UK Department for International Development (DFID), World Bank, SIDA.

5.6 RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH (RBA)

Description

Marking a shift from satisfying basic needs (needs-based approach) to fulfilling and securing fundamental human rights. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has defined the Rights-Based Approach to development as a conceptual framework that integrates “the norms, standards and principles of the international human rights system into the plans, policies and processes of development.” United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) describes a rights-based approach as one that “strives to secure the freedom, well-being and dignity of all people everywhere, within the framework of essential standards and principles, duties and obligations.” Development is conceived of as a right to be realized rather than a need to be fulfilled - as such, individuals and groups are seen as “rights-holders” and governments and non-state actors as “duty-bearers” with obligations.

Key Principles

Although there is no universal framework for a Rights-Based Approach, the following principles are common to this approach:

- An explicit link to human rights (economic, social, civil, political and cultural)
- Capacity-building (for the awareness and realization of rights)
- Accountability
- Empowerment
- Participation
- Non-discrimination and attention to vulnerable groups

Gender Perspectives

There is also no one ‘formula’ for using the Rights-Based Approach as a gender research methodology. Rather the approach should be viewed as a vision and set of tools to be used in strategic ways. Generally, a feminist interpretation of a rights-based approach for the purpose of gendered research, policy and analysis includes:

- A focus on non-discrimination and gender equality.
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• Recognition of the right to self-defined, multiple identities (including gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality and other variables).

• Clear understanding of empowerment and participation and the application of these principles throughout research, implementation, and evaluation processes.

• Emphasis on the nature of rights, social/collective as well as individual rights.

• Accountability of governments, bilateral and multilateral donors, private contractors, NGOs, etc. for respecting and working to strengthen human rights.

• Transparent and comprehensive policy responses to the structural causes of a problem (e.g. poverty) as well as its concrete manifestations.

• Concrete and transparent legal responses to rights violations in the process of development.

Because human rights include economic, social, civil, political and cultural rights. The research needed to provide a comprehensive analysis must be collected from a variety of sources using qualitative as well as quantitative data. Because, the rights-based approach stresses participation and empowerment, qualitative methods are often the most useful in terms of fostering a strong sense of involvement and ownership within local communities.

Main Critiques

• The historically problematic nature of women’s relationships to the state and to the law makes a ‘rights-based’ approach difficult. The state itself often ignores or works against women’s needs, rights and interests, and in some instances can be the main perpetrator of gender-based oppression or discrimination.

• The historic emphasis on civil and political rights has led to underdeveloped frameworks for economic, social and cultural rights.

• Cultural relativism influences discussions on women’s human rights. For example, indigenous or certain religious principles regarding gender rights might conflict with the ‘universal’ human rights framework.

• An emphasis on highly-technical legal frameworks and language can sometimes work against the idea of empowerment, making the concept of human rights hard to understand for the general public.

• Accountability mechanisms tend to focus on governments and individuals in the global south leaving few mechanisms in place for accountability of governments, donor agencies, development organizations and individual researchers from the global north.
• The transformative potential of the rights-based approach is limited. The ‘rights’ in question must be secured through the dominant neo-liberal economic and social framework, meaning that certain ‘rights’ may be secured, but the overall structure of oppression and unequal distribution is left intact.

Examples

A variety of methodologies can be combined for use under a rights-based approach, including:

• Participatory Action Research
• Women’s Empowerment Framework

International institutions that have used the methodology include:

Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), FAO, World Bank, SIDA, DFID, CARE, Action Aid

Activity:

Look into project reports of any of the Organizations mentioned in the above two sections. Analyse the reports in light of discussion on participatory research methodologies.

Let us now read about various methods that are employed to carry out participatory research in gender studies.

5.7 METHODS OF PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

There can be many different ways of carrying out participatory research. The choice of method depends on the topic of research, resources available and the ease to handle a particular method by the researcher. The flow chart given in Box No. 5.1 on page 86 will make the process and stages in participatory research clear to you.

Some of the commonly used methods are discussed in the following paragraphs.

• Social gender analysis (SGA) takes project stakeholders through a series of exercises that analyze the disadvantages faced by various groups in the research area and the resources and strategies required for them to achieve social sustainability. Class, gender, access to and control of resources, benefits from participation, and links between local and national or global levels are all key elements in SGA workshop discussions. The SGA process results in a research strategy that includes
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clear objectives, an implementation plan and measures for monitoring and evaluation. SGA is a gender-sensitive tool.

Box No. 5.1

- Another group of tools involves field-based techniques. Perhaps the best known of these techniques is Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), which evolved from rapid rural appraisal. Originally developed for rural areas and farming systems by the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex, England, PRA has spread around the world to many other sectors, including research involving the urban poor. PRA employs group animation techniques and problem analysis exercises to promote sharing of information and joint action among stakeholders. To this end, PRA uses semi-structured interviews, focus groups, wealth ranking, community meetings, needs assessment, mapping, transect walks, and other participant-observer techniques.

- Another approach is Participatory Research or Participatory Action Research (PR/PAR), representing quite a different tradition. PR/PAR involves both workshops and fieldwork, but with two elements that make it distinct from the other approaches. First, PR/PAR takes a relatively longer time to implement—months, even years, rather than days or weeks. Second, PR/PAR emphasizes issues of power more than most other methods, both in its analysis and its action. PR/PAR uses a more oppositional framework vis-à-vis elites than other participatory methods, which tend to co-opt elite involvement and acceptance.

Apart from these distinctive features, PR/PAR makes use of a full range of workshop facilitation techniques, field observation methods and particularly, group dialogue methods. Research in this tradition have also employed computerized data analysis, oral history, popular theatre and other media, and many other techniques. The insider-outsider dialectic is monitored carefully in PR/PAR, with special efforts made to give voice to the insiders who are on the margins of local communities. The same obstacles faced by other approaches like obstacles related to class, gender, ethnicity, wealth, and power must be continually addressed by PR/PAR, as well. PR/PAR is often carried out by social movements and frequently has a longer-term goal of broader, structural transformation.

**Box No.5.2**

Here is an example of a cluster of self-assessment tools that uses both workshops and PRA techniques but focuses on the analytic work on communities developing their own indices of development for planning and impact assessment.

In northern Ghana, for example, a North-South monitoring team on a large rural development project developed a tool entitled the Village Development Capacity Index (VDCI). Funded by the CIDA and the government of Ghana, this index was designed to rank communities in the project area in terms of their performance on poverty indicators and on village development capacity indicators. Poverty indicators, for which data was collected through household interviews, included safety of water sources, literacy rate, food security, and household expenditure patterns. The tools permit other relevant indicators to be added, as appropriate to the project context.

Village Development Capacity Indicators, the data for which were collected through key-person interviews, field observation, and focus groups, included status of village organization, previous experience of the village in managing development interventions, level and types of village cooperation and mutual aid and the status of infrastructure and assets under village control, both collectively and by individual residents. Stakeholders participated in the process of allocating scores on each of these indicators to the villages under study. Village representatives then reviewed the findings of the VDCI exercise in a workshop, provided feedback, and discussed action to be taken through the overall development project to redress weaknesses identified in the communities. Scores on the VDCI for each village were then tracked by monitoring teams over time in order to assess progress.

The same research team then developed a matrix for measuring the extent and nature of partnership between African and Canadian NGOs.
A partnership and institution-building matrix was constructed, based on the experience of ten case study partnerships from several sub regions in Africa. This matrix included indicators of the compatibility of the two partner-agencies, operational principles, operational mechanisms, commitment, support modes, intervention modes, outcomes, and sustainability of the partnership. Data for these indicators were collected through key-person interviews, document review, field visits, and stakeholder workshops and meetings. Further work on this index has been carried out for additional Canadian-African NGO partnerships.

Source: Robert Chamberlin, Sussex University, UK, 2002.

In the following section, you will read about how to develop appropriate indicators that focus on the results of participatory research. But, before reading further attempt the following questions.

**Check Your Progress:**

Write short notes on:

i) Social Gender Analysis

ii) PRA

iii) PAR

iv) VDCI
5.8 DEVELOPING APPROPRIATE RESULTS INDICATORS

Participatory planning and evaluation efforts demand simple, reliable indicators of development results that are agreed upon by participants and other stakeholders. In the case of antipoverty, human rights and basic needs research, the most crucial results indicators relate to money and power. It is also important that these indicators of results should be identified at different levels: macro, meso, and micro. Although they are the most difficult and complex indicators to achieve, they are, ultimately, the most important tests of whether a development intervention has succeeded.

5.8.1 Micro-Level Impact Indicators

Much work has been done on impact indicators of individual, household, business, and community gains in income by the poor. One finding from this work is that, even at the micro level, there are multiple levels or sublevels, of impact. In rural development projects, for example, improved grain varieties and expanded irrigation works (inputs) may result in increased dry-season rice production (output). Such increased production is then sold, generating new income for participating households (impact). In turn, this new income (an impact at another level) is used to purchase rice-milling equipment, start a small kiosk, or construct a new well (impacts), all of which could further influence the quality of life of the household. These potential ‘onward’ impacts must be tracked in the future. Such income gains may also be used by households to pay user fees for village services such as schools, health clinics, or marketing cooperatives, thus boosting infrastructure assets at the community level and serving as inputs to those services.

Microcredit programs also involve multiple levels of impact. Loans and technical training provided by such programs (inputs) can result in increased owner drawings through improved profitability, expanded sales, and commercial sustainability in participating micro businesses (enterprise-level impacts). In this way, very small enterprises create employment income for individuals and households (inputs), which generate multiplier effects in the community when households purchase other goods and services and pay taxes or user fees (impacts). The growth of participating microenterprises may also foster the establishment of new businesses by other households to supply the successful enterprises in the program. And revenue accruing to each community in which such programs are operated can reinvest taxes and user fees in new infrastructure, services, and training, thereby further building the capacity of the community to develop itself.
Like all development interventions, however, enterprise support programs must assess cost as well as benefits. Fiscal cost-benefit studies seek to assess the return on taxpayer investment. Cost includes tax credits and deductions as well as grants associated with the program under study. A percentage of the cost can be allocated to the specific enterprises assessed. Among the benefits calculated for this type of analysis are increased tax revenues from the operations of the enterprises that are attributable to program support and avoided income-support costs (unemployment insurance, welfare). In addition, tax revenues from the firms’ suppliers and employees attributable to the support of the program are estimated. Comparing fiscal costs and benefits thus, enable evaluators to estimate a payback period for overall public expenditure on the enterprises under study and, if desired, on the program as a whole. Although this approach is obviously more appropriate to Northern contexts, it can be adapted to suit situations in developing country as well.

Box No. 5.3

The work of Moser (1993 in the field of gender and development has generated useful micro-level impact indicators on power in particular. The gender and development approach is based on an assessment of women’s practical and strategic needs, especially as indicated in gender roles in both productive and reproductive work in the household and in managing the community.

Practical gender needs relate, for example, to women’s access to adequate water supply, health care, and employment. Strategic gender needs relate to the legal and property rights of women, access to credit, equality of wages, freedom from domestic violence and women’s control over their bodies. As the impact of development interventions yield positive impact in these areas, women’s power increase at all levels: in the household, in the community, in the nation.

5.8.2 Meso-Level Impact Indicators

Let us now discuss impact indicators for another level. Increasing the income of the poor also demands impact assessment at the meso, or institutional level. Institutions promoting poverty alleviation like ministries, NGOs and donor agencies, must build their own capacity to assist the poor in achieving gains in income and power. All institutional assessments must include analysis of the external environment, organizational motivation, organizational capacity, and organizational performance. With respect to organizational performance, some key impact indicators in antipoverty efforts include financial sustainability of the organization as a whole, self-sufficiency or sustainability of poverty alleviation programs run by the institution, and the percentage of communities assisted by the organization that have moved
from being categorized as poor to being categorized as less poor or moderately well-off. Other relevant indicators can include income per capita, unemployment rates, and labor force participation in the area served by the institution, as measured over time.

The relationship between institutional capacity and performance, on one hand, and community development capacity on the other, must be assessed in detail. The perceived relevance of the services of the institution to its clients (or ‘customers’) is also a crucial factor deserving careful study. Further, gender-disaggregated data must be collected for all indicators to permit an assessment of the comparative gains made by men and women as a result of the institution’s efforts to strengthen it.

In the field of social development, Oxfam-UK has suggested that indicators of participatory management structures and processes are especially relevant. Such indicators include:

- Evidence of shared decision making among participants and staff;
- Signs of commitment among participants to the group’s goals and activities;
- Evidence of shared leadership;
- Signs of solidarity and cohesion;
- Capacity for self-reflection and critical analysis; and
- Capacity to take action in relation to problems identified.

Such indicators may be applied to test the performance of development institutions, NGOs, project management teams, and local-partner organizations.

**5.8.3 Macro-Level Impact Indicators**

Next, we will look into impact indicators that are required for macro level. All macro-level income gains by the poor can be measured by conventional indicators over time, particularly gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. Other key indicators, some of which are used to calculate the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI), include share of national income of the lowest 40 percent of households; percentage of the population in absolute poverty; and public expenditures on social programs, health, and education as a percentage of GDP. Additional relevant indicators include daily calorie supply, access to health services, and the prevalence of household assets such as radios, telephones, and motor vehicles.

Other indicators that can be assessed at the macro level as well are new policies and legislation in favor of the poor. These can be attributed to the demonstration effects of antipoverty projects or to the lobbying of NGOs,
government ministries, donor agencies, and social movements on behalf of the poor. Such programs may confer new economic benefits (for example, food prices, credit availability) or civil rights (for example, the general right to organize, women’s rights to own land or business assets). These impacts, in turn, will serve as “inputs” that can be transformed, at all levels, into further gains in money and power for the poor. Assessing whether and how such transformation occurs is an important task.

Box No.5.4

At the national level, research indicates that one year of schooling for girls or young women can reduce the fertility rate by 5 to 10 percent. Reduced fertility boosts economic growth rates on a per capita basis. In addition, increased access to credit for women has been found to do more to reduce poverty and spur investment than does increased credit provision for men. At the macro level, educational attainment, fertility rates, and access to credit are all important indicators of gains in power and money by poor women and by women in general.

Useful work had been done on basic indicators of gains (or losses) in human rights in development projects. Norway’s Madsen (1991) developed guidelines for project design and evaluation at the micro level that test project performance against international conventions of the Intentional Labor Organization (ILO). The specific rights that Madsen recommends be tested in this way relate to forced removals and resettlements of peoples, land rights, the right to organize, child labor, forced labor, gender discrimination, conditions of employment (including health and safety, as well as worker remuneration), and the rights of participation. The ILO and some Scandinavian aid agencies have included protections for some of these rights in project agreements with Southern government ministries and Northern consulting firms. The World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee published specific guidelines intended to protect project participants against forced resettlement.

Madsen argues, as do most advocates of human rights, that project-level, that is, usually micro-level performance on human rights indicators must be tested against the standards of international conventions and, if relevant, national laws. Thus, human rights impact assessment must necessarily be multilevel in nature.

Further, it is likely that, among marginalized peoples whose rights have been systematically denied for centuries, impact assessment practitioners will need to educate project participants about their rights while the research is being carried out. There is a moral obligation to do so, as well as a
programmatic or professional obligation. Such an educational process can be facilitated greatly by participatory assessment techniques, especially the direct representation of project beneficiaries on assessment teams.

Box No.5.5

South House Exchange (SHE), a consulting firm specializing in human rights and development, has authored a training curriculum based on case studies of NGO interventions in this field. One case study is about a project involving Guatemalan refugees living in refugee camps in Mexico who are planning their return home. Trainees using the case study are asked to draw up a plan for the refugees’ return; the plan must set out the roles of the refugees, a local women’s NGO, and foreign partner NGOs. Trainees are also asked to identify indicators. Almost by definition, such indicators must:

- Relate to gains or losses in human rights by the refugees and the local NGO, measured through the application of international standards;
- Disaggregate data by gender;
- Assess the effectiveness of the intervention at the micro (individual) and meso (institutional) levels in the South and at the meso level in the North; and
- Pay special attention to impacts related to NGO capacity-building and North-South partnerships.

Such multilevel, multidimensional impact assessment can be significantly enhanced by participatory methods. The participation of women refugees in a Southern-led project evaluation process would yield especially rich insights and also build additional project commitment and capacity among participants.

5.9 LET US SUM UP

The unit in the beginning dealt with the concept and need for adopting action/participatory research in the ambit of feminist research methodology. After reading about Gender Needs, you read about different methodologies and methods in action research followed by impact indicators. It can be said that the potential of action research and participatory evaluation are only beginning to be understood. It will be through collective action and reflection, globally and locally, that this area of development cooperation practice can be advanced. There will be pitfalls and complexities. But substantive gains can be made, especially if engaged practitioners are able to regularly exchange views, experiences, and techniques at the country, regional, and global levels.
Participatory research and evaluation are compatible with a rights-based approach. There is an array of practical tools and indicators that can be mobilized to measure impact. Participatory development programs at micro, meso and macro levels. This promises to be a rich and creative site of development cooperation practice in the years ahead.

5.10 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1) Discuss practical and strategic gender needs and the importance to understand these needs in light of feminist research?
2) Explain Participatory Research Methodologies.
3) Describe possible methods of participatory research and evaluation.
4) Write short notes on:
   - Rights-based Approach (RBA)
   - Participatory tools
   - Developing Appropriate Results Indicators

5.11 REFERENCES


5.12 SUGGESTED READINGS
