

Action-Research for Capacity Development

Peter Clarke
P.Clarke@ids.ac.uk

The Participation, Power and Social Change (PPSC) team at the UK Institute of Development Studies (IDS) has been facilitating a collective inquiry into capacity development for emancipatory social change. The “Capacity Collective” seeks to realise the emancipatory promise implicit in the discourse of capacity development—which has yielded meagre results despite substantial investment by development agencies.

Through participatory action research, the Capacity Collective is asking:

1. What capacities are most needed to contribute to emancipatory social change?
2. How do successful endogenous processes of capacity development take place?
3. How can processes of capacity development be supported purposefully?

We argue for an approach that engages with the complexity of specific contexts, including issues of power, and that builds on existing energies rather than transferring preconceived skills and knowledge to fill externally defined capacity deficits.

Action research has proved useful for building understanding and improving practices of capacity development, and importantly, has potential itself to contribute to capacities for emancipatory social change.

WORKSHOP PROPOSAL

In the first hour, panellists will make 10-minute presentations on specific PAR initiatives, followed by a similar period for questions.

Using “Systemic Theories of Change” to support organisational capacity development in Peru and Ecuador (Peter Clarke)

What are the conditions that are necessary for social change and what is the relationship between those conditions and internal ‘organisational’ conditions, in order to effectively support social change? The AR is questioning assumptions about the dynamics of change in the specific context and the role of the organisation in supporting it.

- Action-Research to understand learning and capacity development within the Pākehā Treaty Workers’ Movement in New Zealand (Jen Margaret)
- A member of the Pākehā Treaty Workers’ Movement explored the following questions: *What influences learning for members of the Pākehā Treaty workers’ movement? What impacts on the sharing of learning between movement members? What are the implications for future practice and research in social justice movements?*
- Action-Inquiry for capacity development in the Lake Victoria Water and Sanitation programme (Danny Burns, if available)
- Action Learning for a practical understanding of power (Jethro Pettit)

The PPSC team has been working with donors and voluntary organisations to help bring a stronger 'power perspective' into their work, using an experiential learning process which combines short workshops with applied learning and reflection, supported by coaching, and including the use of drama, storytelling, and creative writing.

In the final hour small groups will engage in a short action-learning exercise, aimed at challenging assumptions about how capacity develops.