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**PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH AS A TOOL FOR
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: EXPERIENCES FROM
NORTHWESTERN GHANA**

by

Dakubo, Crescentia Y. ©

**A Graduate Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Science in Forestry (MSc.F)**

**Faculty of Forestry
Lakehead University
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DEDICATION

*To Gabriel and Collins
for their love and support*

ABSTRACT

Dakubo, C.Y. 1997. *Participatory Action Research as a tool for community development: Experiences from northwestern Ghana*. 97 pp. Advisor: Dr. K. M. Brown.

Key words: Charia, community development, environmental management, participatory action research.

This study reports on a community development project conducted in Charia, a small village in northwestern Ghana. The primary intent of the study was to field-test the participatory action research approach of actively involving local people in their own development efforts. Traditional approaches to helping rural communities have seldom provided the opportunity for people in problem situations to influence the solutions to those problems. In this study, a participatory action research approach was used to actively involve local people and other stakeholders in the design, execution, evaluation and implementation of activities influencing the lives of the people of Charia. Through strategic planning processes, community members envisioned the desired conditions for their village, the obstacles preventing them from achieving those conditions, the strategic directions to overcoming those obstacles, and the necessary actions required to fulfil those strategic directions. Results from this West African village seem to verify the predictions of intervention theory that was developed within a North American business and professional context. Specifically, I found that when people are helped to develop valid information about their situation and to make free and informed choices about the remedies to their own problems, then feelings of emancipation, empowerment, and psychological success are enhanced. The end result is internal commitment to implement the necessary actions leading to their own development.

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C.Y.D.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Rural communities in West Africa and other parts of the developing world face a wide range of environmental and social problems such as illiteracy, poor health, over population, environmental destruction, and malnutrition. Charia, a rural village in northwest Ghana, is one such community. Charia is faced with persistent environmental problems including nutrient poor soils, extensive soil erosion, overgrazing of poorly managed pastures, farm pests and intractable problems arising from drought and desertification. Environmental problems arise mainly from human activity and seem to remain unresolvable despite numerous attempts to intervene both from within and outside the community. As the human population increases, the problems of environmental protection and conservation seem to recede on the scale of priorities, and may soon be neglected altogether. In addition, the livelihood of the Charia community is also affected by health, education, socio-economic and political problems. A fundamental question facing community leaders and agents of both government and non-government organizations is how to help communities like Charia make effective use of available resources to improve the quality of community life.

Since the members of communities like Charia typically lack the motivation and confidence to initiate the solution to their own problems, they often wait for help from outsiders. The outside helper is often an expert in a specific discipline such as health,

agriculture, education, or forestry. Outside experts often attempt to help by taking it upon themselves to collect data, diagnose the problem, design a solution, and prescribe the solution to the community. Implementation of the solution may be left to the community members themselves.

The outside expert approach often leads to solutions that sound good in theory, especially to the outside expert, but fail in practice for a wide variety of reasons such as 1) the expert, being an outsider, has misdiagnosed the problem and prescribed a solution that does not really improve the quality of community life, 2) an important problem has been diagnosed correctly but the expert's solution cannot be implemented for reasons such as cultural blocks, lack of technical skills and knowledge, or interpersonal conflicts within the community, or 3) an important problem is diagnosed correctly and the prescribed solution is within the capacity of the community to implement, but community members lack heartfelt commitment to the solution and consequently elect not to implement it. In addition, the outside expert approach to community development does nothing to increase community members' capacity to solve problems for themselves in the future.

One alternative to the outside expert approach to community development is called action research. The action researcher focuses on the problem solving process rather than on the substance of the problem itself. The action researcher recruits members of the community and other stakeholders to participate actively in all stages of the research. The researcher and community members engage in a collaborative, joint process of inquiry. Collectively,

they decide the focus of knowledge generation, collect and analyse data, and take action to solve the community's problem (Deshler and Ewert, 1995). Through collaborative investigation and reflective dialogue, community members can learn to critically analyse their own problems and devise solutions to them. The action research approach offers an educational experience that serves to determine community needs and motivate people to develop internal commitment to a solution.

My thesis research project was an attempt to implement an action research intervention¹ in the community of Charia. The work had four objectives all of which had to do with learning.

First, I sought to foster learning within the community of Charia about the nature of the immediate situation and about how community members might better utilize available resources to make their situation better.

Second, I sought to help members of the Charia community become self-sufficient in their ability to manage inquiry, problem solving and decision making processes.

Third, I sought to draw general conclusions about community development interventions

¹ Intervention in this context refers to the use of facilitative and democratic techniques of helping a community participate in solving its own problems so as to become effective in problem-solving, decision-making and decision implementation.

that might be of value to other action researchers.

Finally, I sought to learn about and improve upon my own practice as an action researcher.

The intervention in Charia proved to be an invaluable learning experience for me and community members. The intervention exposed local citizens and associated organizational heads to a community-based method for analysing and solving problems. Community members developed a better understanding of events surrounding them and their role in influencing those events so as to create a brighter future for the entire community. Collectively, they mapped out a shared vision of their ideal community, identified the obstacles keeping them from achieving it, developed strategies to overcome those obstacles, decided on the necessary actions to take and began to implement those actions such as private woodlot establishment and active involvement in communal activities.

The intervention did not only contribute to solving practical problems, but contributed to the general knowledge of action research with regards to community development interventions.

ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

The thesis is divided into six major chapters beginning with an introduction to the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of theoretical perspectives. Chapter 3 describes the study community and the research methods used. Chapter 4, called “The Charia

Experience”, describes the outcome of the intervention and the processes leading to those findings. Finally, chapter 5 discusses the results and ends with some general conclusions.

2.0 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

This chapter describes the theoretical building blocks of the study. It begins by differentiating between the various approaches to applied social research. It then continues with a description of the PAR approach, the concept of participation, and the obstacles to rural participation. Following this section is a description of some strategies and tools that foster active participation. Among the tools described are group facilitation techniques such as search conference, cardstorming, and focused conversation methods. The next section gives a brief description of the role of adult education in community development. The chapter ends with a description of the principles of intervention theory and method, and the conditions of competent organizations and effective interventions.

2.1 TYPES OF APPLIED SOCIAL RESEARCH

There are two major approaches of applied social research based on the relationship between the researcher and the subjects of the research. In the first approach, the researcher dominates the entire research process and occasionally seeks information from some key people in the community. This approach has two models: 1) the top-down model, in which the researcher takes absolute control of the entire research process with no participation from the beneficiaries of the study, and 2) the bottom-up model, in which the researcher involves, to a little extent, only key informants in the community. It is still not clear how

much involvement is considered sufficient. The second major approach differs from these two models and it is called the collaborative / participatory model. In this model, the researcher and the subjects of the research become partners in a joint search for a solution to the community's problem. The three models are described below.

2.1.1 The Top-down model

The top-down model is the standard and most common type of social research. In this model, the professional researcher enters into an organization or community to study a situation or a set of problems, to determine what the facts are, and to recommend a course of action (Whyte et al., 1989). The recommendations are intuitively derived, not pretested, and usually come from the researcher's experience or knowledge. Often the recommendations are not put into effect by the client community (French and Bell, 1973). The professional researcher is completely in control of the research process, from initial design to the conclusions and recommendations emerging from the study. This type of research seems to be most appropriate in cases where there is urgency, need for professional advice, or the objectives of the researcher and decision makers are to get the facts and examine action implications (Whyte, 1991). The model creates dependent and submissive roles for community members and provides them with little responsibility. The process does not promote the effectiveness of problem-solving in the beneficiaries so that they can continue to take control of their situation after the researcher/intervenor has left the community (Argyris, 1970).

In situations where the aim is to help organizations and communities go through major processes of sociotechnical change, resulting in organizational learning, the top-down approach has been shown to be ineffective. There is, therefore, the need for a collaborative, participatory kind of relationship between the researcher and the researched in searching for a remedy to community problems.

2.1.2 The bottom-up model

In the bottom-up model, the researcher involves key informants in the community to help gather and interpret research data using tools such as standard interviews (Whyte, 1991). The research may not directly involve any planned actions. The researcher plays the role of a change agent and tries to persuade decision makers to implement her recommendations.

While there have been high expectations about the effectiveness of this approach, it has been observed that the process does not provide social interaction among people and does not provide for understanding of how communities function and learn (Payuan, 1985). There are still questions on how to enlist peoples' active participation? How much participation is considered appropriate? What factors affect the level of peoples' participation? Who participates in what? How, when and why do they participate?

2.1.3 The Collaborative / Participatory Model

The thrust of the collaborative model is to minimize dependent and submissive relationships between the researcher and the subjects of the research. The intention of the

collaborative model is to involve subjects of the research in the design, execution, feedback, and evaluation of all aspects of the research providing them with the opportunity to feel essential, experience psychological success, confidence and trust in others, and also promote effective group relations (Argyris, 1970). According to Argyris (1970), these attitudes will increase the probability that participants of the research will provide valid information, make free and informed choices, and develop internal commitment to any decision they make.

In the collaborative model, community members and relevant stakeholders are treated as partners in the research and their interests and points of view are incorporated in the research. The researcher acts as facilitator and coach in team building. The researcher uses a variety of methods and techniques to involve large numbers of participants in the process. Participatory action research, an approach in which the professional researcher goes beyond targeting community members as passive informants in order to involve the community as active participants in the research process, uses the principles of the collaborative model (Whyte et al., 1989). A brief overview of PAR as an offshoot of action research is given in the next section.

2.2 PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Participatory action research (PAR) is a structured process of inquiry in which those experiencing a problem in a community participate collaboratively with the professional

researcher as partners, in identifying needs, deciding the focus of knowledge generation, collecting and analysing data, and taking action to manage, improve, or solve their problem (Cunningham, 1976; Deshler and Ewert, 1995). PAR developed as an alternative to the “professional expert model”. Traditionally, the researcher enters the community experiencing the problem, gathers data, interprets the results and recommends the proposed action. PAR stresses the importance of involving the community members under study directly in the research process (Whyte, 1991). The assumption is that learning occurs through experience. Besides this point, the community members are better able to define their problems and propose solutions for them because they are more acquainted with their own situation. PAR requires that the researcher listens to the community members’ definition of their current situation, and the desirable conditions they want to achieve (Simonson and Bushaw, 1993). PAR embraces principles of participation and reflection, empowerment and emancipation of groups seeking to improve their social situation.

The relevance of PAR in community development lies in the fact that the process and results of the research are of immediate and direct benefit to the community. Anyanwu (1988) observes that when community members participate in the research process, they are better able to articulate their problems themselves and initiate the search for solutions to those problems. The process offers an educational experience which serves to determine community needs as well as motivate citizens to develop the commitment to the solution of their problems.

Six features that distinguish PAR from traditional research approaches have been described by Israel et al. (1992) as follows:

1. PAR is participatory. Community members are involved in most aspects of the research and action process, and the issues addressed are generated by the people themselves, not by the theories of researchers.
2. PAR is cooperative. Community members and researchers engage in a collaborative, joint process in which both contribute their expertise.
3. PAR is a co-learning process. Researchers both insert their theories and knowledge and also recognize and build on community members' local theory. This understanding is then used by the members to change the community.
4. PAR involves system development. Through the action research process, a system (community or organization) develops the competencies to diagnose and analyse problems and to plan, implement, and evaluate interventions aimed at meeting identified needs.
5. PAR is an empowering process. PAR can be seen primarily as a learning strategy for empowering both the participants and the professional researcher. Through participation, people gain specific insights, new understandings, and new possibilities about the circumstances they live with.
6. PAR achieves a balance between research and action. Researchers and community members jointly determine and strive to maximize both their knowledge and understanding of a given phenomenon and their capacity to take concrete actions to change the situation.

The Origin of PAR

PAR arose as a realization of the failure of most current forms of social and anthropological research to deal adequately with the political implications of people's participation in development (Huizer, 1997). According to Huizer, such research often served the most powerful in society and did not contribute effectively in finding solutions to conflicts and practical problems. Action research was introduced by Kurt Lewin in 1946 as a result of the need for social science research to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in a problematic situation and also add to the general knowledge of social science (Rappaport, 1981). He suggested learning about social systems by trying to change them. Lewin proposed iterative cycles of fact finding, analysis, conceptualization, planning, implementation, and evaluation to simultaneously solve problems and generate new knowledge (Lewin, 1946). Action researchers seek to make social systems more efficient and effective, and also promote the fulfilment of human potential.

PAR has been carried out over the last few decades in many countries including North America, Latin America, Asia and Africa. PAR has been used in fields such as community development, adult education, and grassroots development efforts (Huizer, 1997). Simonson and Bushaw (1993) describe PAR as evolving from three streams of intellectual development and action: social research methodology, participation in decision making by community members, and socio-technical systems thinking regarding organizational behavior.

The next section describes the importance of participation and the obstacles that keep people from participating in planning and decision-making processes.

2.3 THE CONCEPT OF PARTICIPATION

In recent years, participatory approaches to community development have blossomed in the fields of agriculture and rural development. Examples include: Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), Participatory Technology Development, Farming System Research and Extension, and Participatory Action Research (Pretty and Chambers, 1993). Despite the context in which each approach is used, these programs share common attributes of methodology. Many authors, including those listed below, have noted the importance of participation in human development efforts.

1. Maslow (1954) asserts that human growth and development are facilitated when people are involved in problem-solving and decision-making in their work or in their living conditions. It is through such involvement that people can develop the knowledge and skills, learn how to work together and, most importantly, learn how to solve problems and make decisions.
2. Spencer (1989) observes that when people participate in a planning process, they are more likely to be committed to the plans they make, because the plans reflect their own thinking, thus creating a sense of ownership.
3. Involvement of people from diverse backgrounds in a planning process allows for

different evaluations of the situation and can sometimes result in breakthrough strategies (Spencer, 1989; Pretty and Chambers, 1993).

4. Participation alleviates feelings of powerlessness and meaninglessness, and promotes understanding and empowerment (Sashkin, 1982; Hall, 1981).

5. Participation results in organizational learning. According to Kolb (1984), learning occurs through the active extension and growth of ideas and experiences in the external world through internal reflection about the attributes of these experiences. Thus, knowledge is created through the transformation of experiences. Despite the benefits associated with participation, local people still resist being involved in their own development efforts.

2.4 OBSTACLES TO RURAL PARTICIPATION

There are several reasons that explain why local people tend to resist being involved in problem-solving and decision-making processes. Some authors, including the following listed below explain why:

1. Boshear and Albrecht (1977) assert that in a problem situation, people are torn between the need to change and the desire to maintain their familiar patterns of behavior. When a solution to a problem has to be reached in conjunction with others, people feel reluctant to participate in the problem-solving process. To allow “outsiders”, even in part, to decide one’s fate requires a high degree of trust between the researcher and the people being researched. When this trust is lacking local people often do not want to be involved in the

process.

2. Bergdall (1993) observes that an atmosphere of passivity and dependence prevails in rural communities. Local people have become accustomed to petitioning those in authority, or donors with outside resources, to come to their aid. They portray themselves as submissive objects of development rather than active players. They wait for development to occur through the efforts of others and blame these others if things go wrong.

3. Rural people have minimal access to information and education opportunities. They have limited organizational and managerial skills, and so self-help projects are easily frustrated because people lack the ability to analyse problems and formulate simple solutions to those problems. When such failures occur, the negative experience goes a long way to discourage similar initiatives in the future (Bergdall, 1993).

4. The fact that something has never been done before, or has always been done in a particular way, sometimes restrains people from attempting new approaches. Fears of the change process, preference for certain problem-solving approaches, or distrust of others may lead some individuals to oppose a new course of action. Other influences include economic factors, sex-role stereotypes, personality characteristics of key people in the community, and rivalry between individuals and clans. These factors can be restraining forces that prevent people from participating in problem-solving processes (Boshear and Albrecht, 1977).

5. Finally, those who have the opportunity to introduce a PAR process may themselves be uncomfortable with the process because of lack of experience with the research methodology and because of the limitations of the process may be controlled by the

researcher. In other words, the nonlinear nature of the process may be too uncomfortable to some practitioner researchers.

It is evident that there are substantial impediments to active participation in rural community development. Professional researchers who attempt to implement PAR are faced with two challenges. The first is to use strategies and techniques that will break the barriers to participation and get people involved in finding solutions to their problems. The second is to design and implement interventions that will provide opportunities for people to give information about their problems and to develop the skills and confidence to overcome those problems.

The next section describes some tools and strategies used to enlist peoples' active participation in a variety of activities.

2.5 STRATEGIES AND TOOLS THAT FOSTER ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

There are a variety of group facilitation tools that are used to involve people actively in planning processes. A search conference is one such tool. Search conference is an event designed to bring together a possibly diverse group of stakeholders for the purpose of learning about and improving their common situation. In practice, search conference takes many forms (Weisbord, 1992).

The first section that follows describes the main features of the ICA² strategic planning process - the particular search conference design that I used in Charia. The next two sections describe two specific group facilitation tools, also developed by ICA, that I used to good advantage during my intervention at Charia. The first tool, sometimes called cardstorming, allows a group to gather and make collective sense of the diverse ideas of its own members. ICA calls its specific variation of cardstorming "The Workshop Method". The second tool is a method for directing group discussions and guiding groups through critical reflection. The method helps a group make collective sense of, and respond to a collection of things, ideas and experiences. The particular method used is called the "Focus Conversation Method". The underlying principles of the focus conversation, however, have been described by Dewey (1938), Kolb (1984), and Schon (1983).

2.5.1 Search Conference - The ICA Strategic Planning Process

Search conference is a way to assist groups of people to develop strategic planning capacities and meet community goals among diverse stakeholders (Martin et al., 1995). The process brings people together to establish common goals and to search for a desirable future for a shared activity. The search conference is an opportunity for groups to step back from their habitual patterns and relationships and think creatively about how they might jointly bring about change in their community. The process is designed to tap the knowledge base of participants in a way that capitalizes on group dynamics and group

² The particular ICA referred to here is the Canadian Institute of Cultural Affairs, 579 Kingston Road, Toronto, Ontario, M4E 1R3

learning. Reliance on participants themselves to create the necessary learning is a powerful motivation for subsequent work to carry the effort forward. The strategic planning process consists of six steps. Spencer (1989) describes the steps as follows:

Step 1: Historical scan of a community's events. This is a review of the community's history of accomplishments and failures. The historical scan examines the issues affecting the community, the emerging trends and the implication of those trends for the community.

Step 2: Practical vision. This is the desired future the community wants to move towards. It describes the practical elements and conditions that people want to experience in their community. Bergdall (1993) observes that vision statements are most exciting when they articulate peoples' true aspirations, are concrete and specific, and while attainable, are beyond immediate reach. Bold vision challenges people to stretch themselves to transform their dreams into reality. The vision is generally determined by asking people what they hope and dream for, what they need, long for, or anticipate. Some facilitators use visualization techniques to go beyond linear thinking and stimulate imagination (Stanfield, 1995).

Step 3: Underlying contradictions. This step identifies what is getting in the way of realizing the desired vision. Stanfield (1995) defines a contradiction as a shadow that intervenes between what we want to do and getting it done. Contradictions are obstacles or blocks standing in the way of the vision and must be addressed from the root cause. They are often related to social structures, patterns and policies.

Step 4: Strategic directions. Strategic directions are broad directions or proposals that deal with the underlying contradictions. They may be direct, addressing a contradiction head-on to remove it, or they may be indirect, circumventing the contradiction. They often take the form of new programs, projects, campaigns or systems (Spencer, 1989). The question considered is “ how can we overcome, by-pass, or eliminate these obstacles identified?”

Step 5: Action plans. Specific actions for each strategic direction are described and prioritized in terms of urgency and importance. Creativity and motivation are enhanced when people are allowed to make free choices about the actions they want to implement.

Step 6: Implementation timelines. Implementation plans identify all of the practical tasks that must be accomplished if an action is to be successfully implemented. For example, materials must be arranged for, tools gathered, and work days organized. Sometimes money needs to be arranged for, and coordinators designated.

Search conferences are often effective vehicles for positive change because people who have helped to shape the future own the future. They feel responsible for making the future happen and are less likely to feel that things are being done to them by agencies or political groups. Some benefits of the search conference include the following:

1. Search conference helps people to overcome negative stereotypes and shape new domains. Emery and Weisbord (1992) observe that when people reveal personal history they become more trustful of themselves and each other, and they are more likely to be open-minded and to shift their mental maps and behavior.

2. Search conference tends to foster collaborative learning and generates consensus. It allows people who normally would not work together to develop common objectives and collaborate as a team to achieve them.

3. Search conference allows people to develop creative, shared and achievable strategies to issues facing them and also breaks down institutional barriers to dealing with those issues.

2.5.2 Cardstorming - The ICA Workshop Method

The workshop method is a tool used to facilitate search conferences or strategic planning processes. The method is used to help groups of people make decisions, solve problems, or create plans. It is particularly useful in situations requiring innovative and creative solutions, multi-disciplined team involvement, and urgent commitment to design an action plan (Spencer, 1989). Spencer describes the workshop method as consisting of five steps:

Step 1: Setting the context. The context is set by explaining the purpose of the workshop, the intended result, an outline of the process and timelines for the workshop. The problem is usually framed as a focus question to which participants respond, or a videotape which provides enough background information about the subject to be discussed.

Step 2: Brainstorming. The purpose of the brainstorm step is to generate from the group as much objective data as possible. Suspending judgement, participants respond to the focus question by brainstorming a number of ideas. The best and creative ideas are selected and written on a flip chart. Brainstorming by different people generates multiple

perspectives on an issue, and also broadens and deepens participants' understanding.

Step 3: Ordering. In this step the data are grouped into similar categories. This is a creative process because participants identify relationships between data or issues that were not previously seen. In this way, new meaning is given to the data.

Step 4: Naming. The fourth step involves naming the categories that have been identified. In this step, the group decides the meaning of the information and the relationships between the bits of information. Each category is discussed for clarity and insights, and a consensus is reached about the significance of the information for the group. A name that is inclusive and describes all the items in a particular category is assigned to that category. Data that do not fit into any category are left to stand alone as "stragglers" and later discussed.

Step 5: Evaluation. The evaluation step allows the group to reflect on the work they have done. They discuss the significance of the work and its implications for their lives as a group and as individuals. The outcome and consequences of the workshop become part of each participant's life and responsibility.

2.5.3 Guided Critical Reflection - The ICA Focused Conversation Method

Focused conversation is a structured way of handling group discussions. It allows participants to reflect on an event or commonly shared experiences, interpret such experiences, decide what they mean to the group, and draw appropriate responses. The process enables a conversation to flow from surface issues to in-depth issues. A facilitator leads the conversation through four levels of the natural critical thinking process: objective, reflective, interpretive, and decisional.

1. **Objective level:** The conversation starts with objective questions that are related to the data, facts, external reality, for example “what did you actually see, hear or read?”
2. **Reflective level:** Reflective questions are those that evoke immediate personal reactions, internal responses, emotions or feelings, hidden images, and associations with the facts, for example “what was your gut level reaction?”
3. **Interpretive level:** Interpretive questions are those that draw out meaning, values, significance, implications, for example “what new insight did you get from this?”
4. **Decisional level:** Decisional questions bring the conversation to a close, bringing out a resolution and enabling the group to make a decision about the future for example, “what do you think we should do?” (Stanfield, 1997; Spencer, 1989).

Focused conversation allows a group to stand back and learn from what they have accomplished. It allows the group to discern patterns and directions that cannot be seen from the perspectives of other groups. It brings the whole picture into focus, giving each participant a more comprehensive understanding of the situation, the plan that is emerging, and the individual's role in it.

2.6 ADULT EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

For sometime now, many countries in the developing world have shown growing interest in the use of adult education programs as a tool or medium for enlisting peoples' active involvement in their own development activities. This section briefly describes the role of

adult education in community development.

Rugumayo and Ibinkule-Johnson (1987) define adult education as a process by which people seek to improve themselves or their society, by increasing their skills, knowledge, understanding or sensitiveness; or any process by which individuals, groups or institutions try to help people improve in these ways. In developing countries, adult education has been used to address basic problems of illiteracy, agriculture, health, technology, and the environment. In the process, adult education can bring about awareness among the people of political, economic and social problems. A prime objective of adult education is to involve citizens in their own personal and community problems (Kuhanga, 1982). Adult education is aimed at enhancing self-direction, sustainable learning and development, and provides the opportunity for learners to take responsibility for and control of their own learning. Adult education principles may be applied to community development programs to facilitate the community's involvement in its own needs assessment, project design, implementation, and evaluation. MacCall (1981) observes that literacy and technical education are valuable but are severely limited until they are able to make people aware of the reality that surrounds them.

Like participatory research approaches, people can be educated on environmental issues using adult education principles. This involves the identification of environmental problems, collection of environmental information, development of alternative solutions to environmental problems, and implementation of actions. Individuals who interact with

their environment are in the best position to know what dimensions are relevant and need manipulations to increase their adaptation or satisfaction. Just like the professional researcher, adult educators must be able to go to the villages and learn from the people, share knowledge and experience, and tap the rich store of local peoples' empirical knowledge and traditional wisdom. Using appropriate methods and techniques, people's knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes about the environment can be transformed. Participatory environmental education aims to enhance the capacities of people to pursue effective environmental management and to achieve sustainable development. This can be achieved if approached from a multidisciplinary perspective and not left entirely to the adult educator. PAR seeks to bring together people from various disciplines to engage in a joint search for solutions to community problems.

The next section describes the theoretical principles of facilitative intervention.

2.7 INTERVENTION THEORY AND METHOD

An intervention takes place when an individual or group enters an organization or a community for the purpose of giving help. Reasons for intervening may range from helping people make their own decisions about the kind of help they need to persuading them to do what the intervenor wishes them to do (Dimock, 1976). The strategy used depends on the situation at hand and the intentions of the intervenor. In this study, the intervention focused on helping people make their own decisions and, therefore, can be referred to as a

facilitative process carried out by a facilitator.

2.7.1 Role of the Intervenor

If an intervention activity is intended to foster the development of autonomy, learning and productivity in a community, then attention must be given to the type of relationship that exists between the intervenor and that community. One key process that must be altered is the intervenor's style of leadership. Traditional authority-based leadership diminishes the full utilization of human resources in communities, largely by placing problem-solving, decision-making and control in the hands of expert professionals rather than in the hands of the people who are living with the problem. This has serious negative consequences for the effective functioning, physical and mental well-being of community members (Argyris, 1957). When people are forced to obey others, a low level of trust tends to develop between people at different levels and this results in poor communication. A general absence of questioning, inquiry, innovation, and creativity occurs in such communities. The fear of failure stifles risk taking, entrepreneurial behavior, and action (Clarkson, 1989). Clarkson also notes that the coercive use of power and authority results in loss of independence and choice for those who must carry out the instructions. Loss of choice and independence result in feelings of powerlessness, anger, frustration, and destructive behavior.

On the other hand, collaborative leadership creates environments in which community members can participate in problem-solving and decision-making processes. Levels of trust become high enough so that decisions can be questioned and there is a continuous system

of inquiry about the results of action, all of which results in learning.

Sashkin et al. (1973) describe three basic roles of change agents and intervenors as: consultant, trainer, and researcher. In the role of consultant, the intervenor tries to help the client by placing the client in touch with information from outside the client system or helping the client to generate information from within the system. In either case, the purpose is to help the client find, through analysis of valid data, solutions to existing organization or community problems, or to make the client aware of new ideas which would, if used, result in increased effectiveness of the organization, in terms of both internal operations and output.

In the role of trainer, the intervenor tries to help the client learn how to use data to bring about change. The concern is two-fold. First, the intervenor is aware that simply making information available to the client will not ensure that the information is used to benefit the client system. The purpose then becomes one of helping the client derive implications for action from the information and building and testing action plans to be used in the client system. Second the intervenor wishes to leave the client with a new set of skills which the client can then use to retrieve, translate and use the information to solve future problems more effectively, even after the intervenor has terminated her service with the community.

In the role of researcher, the intervenor has two duties. First, the intervenor may model the role of researcher for the purpose of training the client in skills needed for accurate

evaluation of effects and effectiveness of action plans which have been implemented. This element of the researcher's role overlaps with the role of the intervenor as trainer. Second, the intervenor may be concerned with adding to the general knowledge of her profession.

Most intervention activities focus on assisting a community to become more effective in problem-solving, decision-making and decision implementation. The aim is to intervene in such a way that the community becomes increasingly effective in these activities and decreasingly in need of the intervenor.

2.7.2 The Primary Tasks of the Intervenor

Argyris (1970) describes the intervenor's role in terms of three primary tasks. The first task is to generate valid and useful information about the problem. This describes the factors creating the problem in the community and how these factors are interrelated. The second task is to encourage members to make free choices about how to proceed based on the information given. A freely-chosen course of action means that the action must be based on an accurate analysis of the situation and central to community needs. Choices must be made within people's capacities or they will become frustrated, which may lead to regression, decreased effectiveness, and psychological failure. The third task is to stimulate internal commitment in the people. Internal commitment means the course of action or choice made has been internalized by the individual, and the individual is acting under her own influence. Individuals who are internally committed experience a high degree of ownership in decisions and feel responsible for the choice and its implications. People who

feel responsible for their decisions tend to monitor them to see that they are being implemented effectively. They tend to seek feedback to correct errors and to detect unintended consequences (Argyris, 1970).

To undertake these primary tasks effectively, the intervenor must design or create situations whereby participants can experience psychological success. This means helping participants to define their own goals, identify the paths to these goals, develop their own realistic levels of aspiration, and relate goals to their central needs.

2.7.3 Fulfilment of the Primary Tasks

The achievement of the primary tasks of the intervenor requires active participation of community members in all stages of the research process. It is important for the intervenor's research activities to be consistent with the primary tasks. The intervenor should not make unilateral decisions, set rigid tasks, control the research process alone, or assume sole responsibility. Such research has unintended negative consequences and does not result in valid information, free choice, and internal commitment (Argyris, 1970).

PAR and what Argyris calls "organic research" involve community members in the formulation of research objectives, design, execution, feedback, and evaluation. Participation is emphasized and such participation will have to be based on effective interpersonal and group relations (Argyris, 1961). At the core of such relationships are factors like openness, mutual trust, the capacity to create minimal defensiveness in oneself

and in others and listening with minimal distortion.

Most rural communities are characterized by lack of cooperation, schisms, malice, fear, envy, distrust, harsh and unrelenting gossip, and quarrelsomeness (Lopreato, 1962). The intervenor, therefore, must create a conducive atmosphere for learning and to help improve the interpersonal relationships among community members.

2.7.4 CONDITIONS OF COMPETENT ORGANIZATIONS AND EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS

According to Argyris (1970), an organization or community is competent to the extent that it is able to (1) achieve its objectives, (2) maintain its internal environment, and (3) adapt to and maintain control over the relevant external environment, over time and under different conditions. A competent organization or community takes control over its own behavior and destiny. This means that the community is able to solve its problems and execute its decisions in such a way that it can continue to be in control. The criteria for community competence and effectiveness are, therefore, related to problem-solving, decision-making and decision implementation. An intervenor is often concerned with how to help the community increase competence and effectiveness in the long run to the extent that the community is able to (1) produce, understand and use relevant information, (2) solve and implement the solution in such a way that the problem remains solved, and (3) achieve these two objectives within their abilities. For an intervenor to be able to accomplish these tasks, the community, including individuals and groups must exhibit

certain conditions.

2.7.4.1 Characteristics of the Individual

Argyris (1970) has suggested three characteristics of individuals that increase their ability to increase the competence of the community they belong. They include self-acceptance, confirmation and essentiality. Self-acceptance refers to the degree to which an individual has confidence in himself and regards himself highly. Confirmation refers to the ability to validate one's view of, and confidence in oneself. Increased confirmation leads to increased confidence in one's potential to behave competently. Essentiality refers to the ability of an individual to utilize his central abilities and express his central needs. When these abilities are not utilized, the individual tends to feel less essential. When essentiality is increased, the more committed the individual tends to be to the entire community.

An intervention should, therefore, be designed to help individuals increase their degree of self-acceptance, confirmation and essentiality so that individuals can experience psychological success. According to Argyris (1970), individuals who are likely to contribute to community competence tend to manifest certain behaviors such as:

1. owning up to, or accepting responsibility for their own behavior;
2. being open to ideas and feelings of self and others;
3. experimenting with new ideas and feelings; and
4. helping others to own up to, be open to, and to experiment with their ideas and feelings.

2.7.4.2 Effective Group Functioning

Effective groups exhibit four essential attributes:

1. Group goals are congruent with member needs. The members should focus on defining group goals that will satisfy their needs and utilize the important abilities of individual members. The goals must represent a challenge to the group and its members and that the members are internally committed to the achievement of the goals.
2. Attention is paid to group processes. For example, are the members' contributions additive? Do the members focus on the history of the group to learn from its successes and failures, from its internal conflicts, from its problem-solving? Are the members owning up to their ideas and feelings? Are they experimenting and taking risks?
3. Norms are generated that reward the individuality of each member, that show respect and concern for the members' ideas and feelings, and that facilitate and maintain a sense of trust.
4. Leadership is shared so that each member is leading the group when that individual's skills are the most pertinent to the achievement of the group goals.

2.7.4.3 Conducive Learning Environment

Learning should be accompanied by feelings of psychological success and confidence in self and others, and in the group. The intervenor provides the opportunity for community members to define their own learning goal, develop their paths to the goal, relate the goal and paths to their central needs, and experience a challenge in achieving the goal that

stretches their present level of abilities. Good learning environments lead participants to increase trust and confidence in themselves. As trust increases, the probability of giving valid information increases, and so does the probability of self-awareness and self-acceptance. These changes, in turn, increase the predisposition for more experiences of psychological success (Argyris, 1970). Learning is internalized when people come to the conclusion that their old modes of behavior are no longer effective, and develop new modes of behavior that have been found more effective than the old ones.

The next chapter describes the study community - Charia, and the research methods used.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 THE STUDY COMMUNITY

3.1.1 Location and Population

The work reported in this thesis was conducted in Charia, a small village in the Upper West region of Ghana. Charia is located approximately 7 km northwest of the regional capital, Wa (Figure 1). It has a population of about 2,500 people who belong to the Dagaaba tribe, the predominant tribe of the region. About 70% of the population is illiterate.

3.1.2 Traditional and Local Government Status

Traditional authority in the village rests with the Charia-Na who is a divisional chief under the Dorimon paramountcy³. The chief is the custodian of land in the Charia traditional area. He is also responsible for settling disputes and conflicts in the community. The chief and his sub-chiefs exercise control over the Charia traditional area.

Administratively, Charia is under the Wa District Assembly. The District Assembly takes care of the provision of social services and infrastructure such as schools, sanitary structures, and roads to the community. The village is represented at the District Assembly by an elected Assemblyman.

³ Paramountcy is a collection of sub-chiefs within a specific jurisdiction of traditional administration.

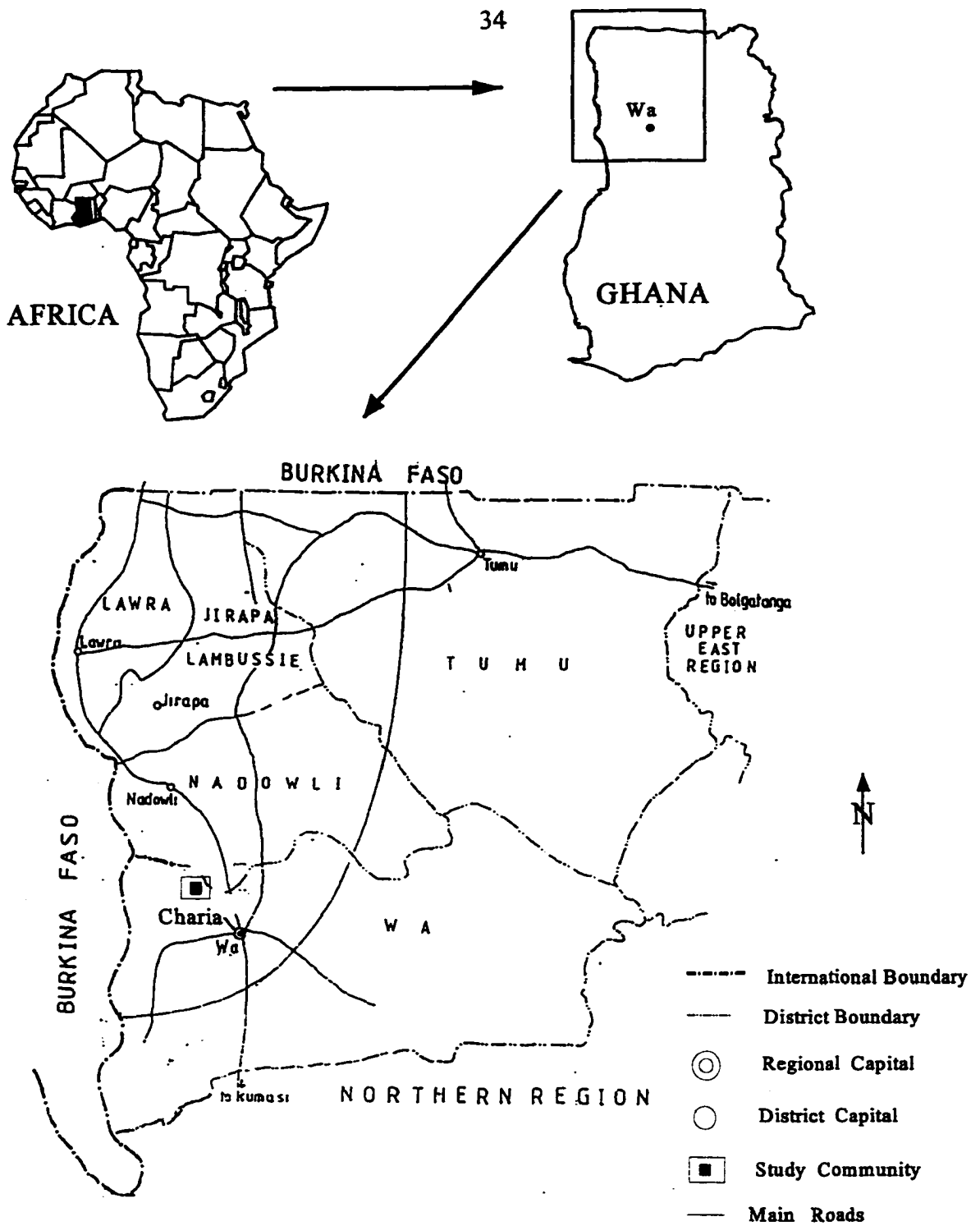


Figure 1. Study area: Charia in the Upper West Region of Ghana.

3.1.3 Climate and Vegetation

Northwestern Ghana has two seasons that are differentiated by rainfall. The rainy season starts in May and ends in September; the dry season begins in October and ends in April. A cold, dry wind called the Harmattan (Northeastern trade winds), blows across the entire region from December to February. The mean annual rainfall varies between 840 to 1400 mm.

Charia is situated in the guinea savannah grassland, a life zone characterized by short trees and shrubs with a continuous cover of grass. Common native tree species are sheanuts (*Butyrospermum paradoxum*), dawadawa (*Parkia clappertoniana*), kapok (*Ceiba pentandra*), and baobab (*Adansonia digitata*). Exotic species such as cashew (*Anacardium occidentale*) and mango (*Mangifera indica*) are grown in the village. The natural vegetation has been disappearing due to human activities such as farming, construction, grazing, bushfires, and charcoal burning.

3.1.4 Landuse Systems

Five commonly-seen landuses in Charia are residential houses, backyard gardens, grazing/pasture lands, cultivated farm lands, and natural vegetation. Landuse patterns fall into two categories: agricultural and non-agricultural. Agricultural landuses include crop lands, livestock, pasture, tree crops and natural vegetation. The non-agricultural landuses are residential, commercial and clay quarries. Crop lands are managed under rotational and bush fallow farming systems. Abandoned farms and other lands around the village are used

as pasture lands.

3.1.5 Social Services

Charia depends on Wa, the District Capital, for economic and social services. Wa is a city of about 90,000 people with banks, post offices, tele-communication facilities, police and fire services, hospitals and schools. Charia has its own health centre, junior secondary school, market centre, drilled wells, and communal sanitary structures.

3.1.6 Economic Activities

The main economic activity of Charia is agriculture, which engages about 95% of the inhabitants. Agricultural activities are mainly for subsistence. Crops for local consumption include cereals (millet, guineacorn, maize), legumes (cowpeas, bambara nuts, peanuts) and tubers (yam and cassava). Cash crops include cotton, soy beans, rice and recently, cashew. Sheanuts and dawadawa are harvested for both domestic consumption and export. Other economic activities include pottery, carving, pito⁴ brewing, charcoal burning, livestock rearing, and blacksmithing.

⁴ Pito is a local beer brewed from guinea corn.

3.2 THE CHARIA PROBLEM

Like most rural communities, Charia is characterised with social, political, economic and environmental problems. As mentioned earlier, Charia is situated in a savannah grassland and suffers a potential treat of desertification if its natural resource base is not sustainably managed. The few trees in the region are harvested indiscriminately by inhabitants for fuelwood and building purposes without replacement. This results in problems of soil erosion, land degradation, and low soil fertility, resulting in low crop production. Although these problems are evident to community members, very few are concerned about improving the situation. Community members often do not see these problems as a result of unsustainable human activities, rather they see it as the responsibility of government extension workers to salvage the deteriorating environment. In my opinion, they regard themselves as victims of the situation and seem unable to improve or solve their problems.

In addition to this feeling of passivity and dependance, there exists strained interpersonal human relations such as apathy, withdrawal, alienation, non-involvement, mistrust and intergroup rivalries among community members. Conflicts and disputes over diverse landuse interests and access to common property resources prevail.

Government and non-government organizations have met little success in an attempt to help the community overcome these problems and take responsibility for their lives. These organizations have encountered difficulties in sustaining the tempo of development projects

in rural sub-Saharan African communities, Charia being one such community. Reasons for failure may range from the project not addressing the central needs of the inhabitants to the use of inappropriate strategies of involving the beneficiaries.

An attempt to help a community with such problems must use processes that will allow for interaction among community members and provide the opportunity for them to directly influence the solution to the problem. The process must also provide for learning, improvement of interpersonal relations and leave community members with the confidence and skills to handle their own problems.

Charia has been a favourite site for a number of development projects including World Vision International and Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA). In 1995, Charia was chosen as one of the sites for the Ghana Environmental Management Adult Literacy Project, sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The project attempts to create environmental awareness in the community and to improve sustainable development through the use of adult literacy programs. To enable the project to achieve its intended objectives, it is important to instill in community members problem-solving and decision-making skills so that they can benefit from the resources available to them and become increasingly self-dependent. It was on this basis that I decided to use a participatory action research approach, since it allows for the beneficiaries of the study to participate in a pro-active manner with me to map out and implement the desirable conditions of the community.

3.3 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

A PAR approach was used for the study. PAR was used for two reasons. First, PAR emphasizes establishing a coequal and interdependent relationship between the researcher and the researched. Secondly, a long-term objective of PAR is to transfer ownership and control of the process of community development to community members themselves. The methods and techniques used are in accordance with the collaborative model. Participatory techniques such as the strategic planning process, workshop and focused conversation methods were used to involve participants actively.

As explained above, PAR requires that the people experiencing the problem collaborate with the researcher in all stages of the research process. In this case, some community members and representatives of four associated governmental organizations consented to participate as co-researchers. A research team consisting of eight individuals was formed including the following:

1. One representative from the District Forestry Department - Mr. O. Ntiri
2. One representative from the District Agriculture Extension Services -
Mr. Z. Alphonses.
3. One representative from the District Community Development office -
Mr. I. Saaka
4. One representative from the Institute of Adult Education - Mr. M. Puozaa
5. The community leader - Mr. P. Naah

6. Two adult literacy facilitators from the CIDA-sponsored adult literacy program -
 - a) Ms A. Abobo, and b) Mr. E. Tungbani
7. The external researcher - Mrs C. Dakubo

The four organizational heads first met in Wa, the district capital, on May 19, 1996. We arranged to meet the community leader and two adult literacy facilitators on May 25, 1996 in Charia. An orientation workshop was later on held with the research team. The purpose of the workshop was for the research team to develop an understanding of some data gathering tools, such as the Strategic Planning Process, the Workshop and Focus Conversation Methods. The collective agenda for the research procedure included the following activities:

May 30-June 7, 1996: Informal meetings with community groups.

June 10, 1996: Meeting with the chief and elders of the community.

June 17, 1996: Workshop 1: Orientation workshop with the research team.

June 20, 1996: Workshop 2: Historical scan of major factors affecting Charia.

June 24, 1996: Workshop 3: Vision workshop.

June 25, 1996: Workshop 4: Contradictions workshop.

June 26, 1996: Workshop 5: Strategic directions workshop.

June 27, 1996: Workshop 6: Systematic actions workshop.

June 28, 1996: Workshop 7: Implementation Timelines workshop.

July - August, 1996: Implementation and work sessions.

3.4 TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION

A number of strategic planning workshops were organized with community residents, and data were collected, analysed and interpreted using the search conference, workshop and focused conversation methods. The ICA strategic planning process was used as a vehicle for working with participants in the community workshops. The strategic planning process begins with developing a common vision of the community's future and ends with the construction of an implementation timeline, complete with assignments, deadlines and scheduled review sessions (Spencer, 1989). The strategic planning process consists of five steps (Figure 2), and each step is preceded by a focus question.

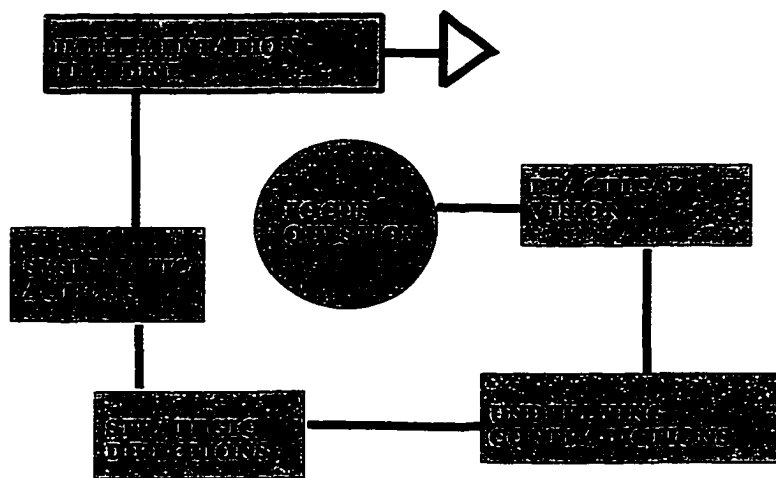


Figure 2. The ICA Strategic Planning Process [Source: Spencer, 1989].

Group facilitation techniques such as the ICA workshop and focused conversation methods were used to gather information. The workshop method was used to brainstorm ideas for each step of the process, organize the ideas into similar categories, name the categories and evaluate them. The focused conversation method was then used at the end of each step to help participants reflect on their ideas, put things into perspective, and respond creatively. The local dialect⁵ was used for community workshops.

3.5 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Participants of the community workshops included both community members and organizational heads. Participants came from all sections of the community. Participation was voluntary, although the community leader specifically urged certain individuals to attend. These individuals were noted as saboteurs who opposed and destroyed community projects. Of a total number of approximately sixty participants, half were enrolled in the adult literacy program and two-thirds were women. Participants' ages ranged from 15 and 60 years and they were mainly farmers with no formal education. Participants were randomly divided into three or four working groups each of which was facilitated by a member of the research team. The groups met separately during every step of the strategic planning process and then reconverged to share and collectively analyse, interpret, and

⁵ Dagaare is the local dialect of the community.

evaluate their ideas before starting the next step. Participants took part in the entire research process.

3.5 PROCEDURES FOR RECORDING DATA

A framework for keeping records and documenting the field experience included keeping a journal, video coverage and tape recording of community workshops, photographs, minutes at every meeting, and flip charts. Other methods included participant observation and informal discussions with groups, facilitators, and opinion leaders. Data collected at every stage of each workshop were reflected on and critically analysed by community members and used to inform the collection of data in subsequent stages. Direct interaction and participation in communal activities provided an insight into participants feelings, attitudes and perceptions.

The next chapter called “The Charia Experience” presents the findings of the Charia intervention and the processes leading to those findings.

4.0 THE CHARIA EXPERIENCE

This chapter presents the processes and findings of the Charia intervention. Participatory action research advocates that the process of solving a problem is as important as the solution itself, and so it is important to describe the processes that lead to the outcome. This chapter on the Charia experience describes events such as gaining entry into the community, orientation workshop with the research team, community workshops and the follow-up workshop with organizational heads.

4.1 GAINING ENTRY INTO THE COMMUNITY

On May 25, 1996 the four organizational heads and I visited Charia to meet with the community leader and two adult literacy facilitators. I was first introduced by the Regional officer of Adult Education (Mr. Mathias Puzaa) to the Charia community leader as a woman who had come to work with the people of Charia for four months. He explained that my work would involve organizing workshops, dialoguing with community members, and participating in some communal activities. The immediate response of the community leader was that “this lady can’t be called a woman, she is just like any of my daughters”. However, the community leader consented to pass the information onto other community members. He also arranged for me to meet with the chief, elders and opinion leaders of the community.

I made five more visits to the community to acquaint myself with the community. During these visits, I met informally with the women's group and learners of the adult literacy program. On June 10, I met with the chief, elders and opinion leaders of the community to explain the purpose of my visit. I described my role as a facilitator who had come to join them, map out an ideal future for their community, and work collaboratively towards the realization of that future. I also explained the expected outcome of the study, the time commitments, and the type of activities that will take place. Most importantly, I explained to them that their active participation in the entire research process was very important, since I was just a guide and knew little about the community. The chief and his elders responded positively, noting the importance of such a project for their community. They pledged to encourage community members to participate in the entire research process.

4.2 WORKSHOP 1. ORIENTATION WITH THE RESEARCH TEAM

On June 17, I organized an orientation workshop with the research team. The research team consisted of a representative each from the Forestry Department, Agriculture Extension Services, Department of Community Development, Institute of Adult Education, two adult literacy facilitators and the community leader. These organizations were chosen because of their role in assisting to improve the living conditions in Charia.

The purpose of the orientation workshop was to develop an understanding of some community data gathering, planning and facilitating tools. I explained how the strategic

planning process is used as a tool for gathering input from community members. I also explained how the focused conversation and workshop methods are used to organize data and put ideas into perspective. Other members of the research team contributed to identifying strategies of involving local people, such as using an information van to advertise workshops, in collecting and analysing information, and in taking action to improve life in Charia. Community workshops were scheduled in consultation with community members.

4.3. WORKSHOP 2. HISTORICAL SCAN

On June 20, the research team met with about 40 community members at the community tree nursery to identify and discuss the major factors influencing the life of Charia residents. Using the focused conversation method, I asked a number of questions including the following:

1. How would you describe the conditions in Charia over the past 50 years? 40 years? 30 years? 20 years? 10 years? 5 years? 1 year?
2. What significant changes have you noticed?
3. What are the causes of those changes?
4. How did we arrive at these conditions we are currently experiencing?
5. What do you think will happen if things should proceed this way?
6. What should we do to improve our lives in the community?

Participants observed that their community has undergone a gradual shift over the decades from a community with fertile soils, abundant trees, sufficient food, healthy lives to increasing deteriorating conditions. They became convinced that their current situation resulted from their own activities such as indiscriminate tree felling, bush burning and non-involvement in educative programs. Participants identified five critical issues influencing their community - vegetation cover, farm land, crop productivity, literacy status and birth rates (Table 1). They examined how these issues have changed over time, what trends were emerging, and the implication of these trends for the community. Generally, they observed that the situation may become worse if nothing is done to stop the deteriorating conditions. Participants discovered how practices such as bush burning was degrading their land. They agreed to penalize anyone caught setting fire to any piece of land. They were, however, optimistic that adult literacy and family planning programs would reverse the trend of rising population and low literacy rates in the future. As participants developed a shared perspective of events happening around them, they became better able to identify the sorts of things they desired for their community. The historical scan provided participants with an enlarged perspective from which to examine their current situation and set the stage for the visioning phase of the strategic planning process.

Table 1. Historical scan of some factors influencing the Charia community.

Factor	Past	Present	Future	Cause(s) of Trends
Fuelwood sufficiency	abundant	scarce	depleted	- fuelwood harvesting - charcoal burning
Farm lands	abundant	sufficient	scarce	- population increase - shifting cultivation
Crop productivity (yield)	high	low	lower	- decreasing soil nutrient level
Literacy status	low	rising	high	- growing awareness - adult literacy programs
Rate of population growth	high	declining	adequate	- family planning programs - scarce resources

4.4. COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

The strategic planning process was used to gather input from participants. Separate workshops were organized for each step of the strategic planning process. Participants of community workshops comprised of both organizational heads and community members. The events and outcome of each step of the strategic planning workshop are reported in the sections below.

4.4.1 Workshop 3. Mapping Out the Community's Practical Vision

On June 24, the research team met with 60 community members in the Charia primary school to develop a shared vision for the community. Prior to developing this vision of an ideal future, I showed participants a documentary movie (IFAD, 1992) on sustainable land use and agroforestry practices that had been adopted by some neighbouring communities. I used focused conversation to help participants reflect on the videotape, interpret the activities, discuss what they mean to them, identify some reasons that are keeping them from adopting those practices, and finally decide on a course of action. Some of the questions I asked at the end of the video tape included the following:

1. Which scenes from the video tape caught your attention?
2. How do you feel about those activities?
3. How do the activities in the video tape compare to those in your community?
4. What did you learn from the video tape?
5. What steps do you need to take to implement some of those activities in your

community?

Participants were particularly amazed at the vegetation of neighbouring communities, the enthusiasm demonstrated by members of that community in communal activities, and the fact that the inhabitants could work together as a team. One participant observed that disunity and lack of cooperation prevented Charia from achieving such success, and only a few people in Charia would participate in communal activities. Participants pledged to emulate the practices of their neighbouring communities and work towards the realization of similar conditions in Charia.

Having identified some of the steps needed to achieve their dream, participants were ready to envision the practical elements they would like to see in their community. Dividing themselves up into three working groups of twenty participants each, I asked the following focus question:

What noticeable features and/or conditions would you want to achieve in your community five years from now ?
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In response to the above focus question, participants brainstormed ideas, categorized them into similar groups, named the categories, reflected on them, and identified relationships between and among categories. Points of commonality and diversity were noted and a consensus reached⁶. The groups then reconverged at the end of each session, compared and

⁶ These activities were recorded on video tape.

shared ideas, selected the most practical and achievable ideas from each group, reflected on them, and reached a consensus. A chart of the group's practical vision elements was drawn and used as a reference for the obstacles workshop.

The main issues participants wanted in their community included the following:

1. improved agriculture;
2. increased afforestation and agroforestry practices;
3. formal and non-formal education for all in the community;
4. improved health conditions;
5. improved infrastructure; and
6. financial self-sufficiency (Table 2).

Detailed descriptions of the issues discussed by community participants are presented in Appendices I to VI.

Table 2. Summary of results produced by participants of four strategic planning workshops.

Vision	Contradictions	Strategic directions	Systematic actions
Improved agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Poor agriculture extension strategies -Unfavourable climatic conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Effective information dissemination strategies -Vegetation and land protection strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Use drama and visual aids to disseminate educative information -Adopt agroforestry practices
Increased afforestation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Land and resource use conflicts -Disunity and lack of commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Conflict resolution mechanisms -Environmental awareness campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Establish a representative conflict resolution committee -Involve community members in organizing education campaigns
Education for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ignorant about government education policies -Poor community coordination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Self-education and enlightenment strategies -Explore non-formal education programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Use community meetings as fora to educate one another -Attend adult literacy classes
Improved health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Poverty and ignorance -Inappropriate timing of health programs -Uncooperative husbands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Emphasize preventive medicine -Publicized health education campaigns -Family planning adoption strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Regular child immunization exercises -Use drama and documentaries for health education programs -Involve men in family planning lessons
Improved infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Unequal government resource allocation -Low self-help spirit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Develop petition and grievance channelling processes -Establish self-help projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Choose trustworthy and dynamic leaders -Solicit external and internal assistance
Financial self-sufficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Poor investment opportunities -No access to vocational training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Establish small-scale industries -Establish vocational training programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Request for assistance and direction -Engage in pottery, carving and basket weaving

4.4.2 Workshop 4. Analysing the Underlying Contradictions

On June 25, the research team met with 65 participants from the community to continue with the second phase of the strategic planning process. The number of participants had increased by five. We briefly reviewed the previous day's chart of vision elements. Once the common practical vision of the participants had been articulated, the next stage was to identify the contradictions, blocks or barriers to the realization of the vision. Participants divided themselves into three working groups and addressed the following focus question:

<p>What obstacles or roadblocks obstruct the realization of the vision we mapped out yesterday ?</p>
--

Participants brainstormed at least one block or obstacle for each vision element. Obstacles were ordered into categories of common root causes, named and reflected on (Table 2).

4.4.3 Workshop 5. Setting the Strategic Directions

On June 26, participants were ready to develop strategies to overcome the obstacles identified on the previous day. The third phase of the strategic planning process called for bold and creative directions and proposals that would deal with the barriers to realizing the envisioned future. Participants began this session by reviewing the chart of underlying contradictions, and dividing themselves up into their respective working groups, addressed the following focus question:

What new directions must we move toward to resolve the contradictions and realize our vision?

Participants listed at least three different proposals to deal with each contradiction. The proposals were ordered according to similar intent, named and evaluated. The groups reconverged, compared their proposals, selected the most innovative and attainable proposals, and reflected on which action arenas could be implemented, considering the resources available to them (Table 2) .

4.4.4 Workshop 6. Designing the Systematic Actions

On June 27, the research team met with about 68 community members to continue with the fourth phase of the strategic planning process. It was evident that community members began to show great enthusiasm in the process as the number of participants increased daily. The fourth phase of the strategic planning process called for the design of practical and attainable actions which when implemented would fulfil the strategic directions set out in the previous step. The strategic directions were divided among three working groups, and each group responded to the following focus question:

What are the individual, practical and attainable actions that can be achieved by us to fulfil the strategic directions we have mapped out?

In each group, individuals brainstormed three to four practical, independent actions that would accomplish each of the strategic directions for which their group was responsible.

the group discussed the actions and selected the most effective actions for each strategic direction. The groups then reconverged, shared ideas, put similar actions into categories, and assigned names to categories that defined the action arena (Table 2) .

Knowing that all the actions could not be carried out at once, participants prioritized them, taking into consideration those actions that could be undertaken in the rainy season, such as tree planting activities. Participants then reflected on the actions, noting the implications for them and their community.

4.4.5 Workshop 7. Drawing Up the Implementation Timeline

On June 28, the research team met with community members to draw up the implementation timeline for actions identified on the previous day. The final stage of the strategic planning process dealt with the steps required to implement each action. The resources, personnel, time, and space required were all outlined. Participants listed a number of activities to be undertaken in subsequent weeks including community meetings and field work at the community nursery and woodlots. Timelines were set and the various tasks divided among the groups. Field working days were scheduled on days following heavy rainfalls or days after market days. Community members objected to working on Charia market days and on the market days in Wa, the regional capital. The community leader was responsible for reminding everyone about an activity, and arranging for the necessary tools.

4.4.6 Concluding the Strategic Planning Workshops

The planning process ended with a reflection on the entire process, the outcome, and the learning that had taken place. Participants observed that the process was a learning experience for them. A lady in the village was surprised to learn about the policy on free basic education for girls. She decided to enroll her two daughters in the village primary school immediately. Some participants were particularly happy that they could dialogue and agree on common issues with some antagonistic individuals in the community, such as the wealthy local businessman who, hitherto, opposed every community development project in Charia. The lady facilitator of the adult literacy program observed that meeting with such people to discuss commonly shared ideas is a step in the right direction and she was optimistic that the local businessman would cooperate with other community members on subsequent community development projects. At the end of the workshop participants wrapped up the program with a forty-five minute cultural display of singing and dancing in Charia. The attendance was great, almost twice the initial number of forty on the first day.

4.4.7 Action Implementation

A number of activities were scheduled for the subsequent weeks (July - August). Among them were tree planting and nursery activities, and some private woodlot establishment. These activities were of high priority because of the short rainy season. The activities at the community tree nursery included enlarging the nursery, weeding, construction of a fire belt, and nursing and transplanting seedlings. About 8 ha of land was transplanted with cashew,

teak and cassia seedlings. The old community woodlot was weeded and gaps filled.

The number of tree planters increased daily as the field activities progressed. The Institute of Adult Education provided a vehicle to cart seedlings from the nursery to the planting site. Members of the research team participated fully in all the activities. The agriculture and forestry extension workers also came to the field and assisted with some technical knowledge. For example, they taught community members how to use correct methods for transplanting. At the end of the communal activities, individuals were encouraged to establish private woodlots in their backyards. About 15 individuals obtained seedlings from the community nursery and started woodlots in their own backyards.

4.5 FOLLOW-UP WORKSHOP WITH HEADS OF ASSOCIATED ORGANIZATIONS

Given the insights gained from the community workshops, a follow-up strategic planning workshop was organized with the research team on July 12, 1996. Participants included the four organizational heads from the Forestry Department, Agriculture Extension Services, Institute of Adult Education and Community Development. Also in attendance were the community leader, and two adult literacy facilitators.

The strategic planning process was used again to work with the participants. Data were collected for each step of the strategic planning process - vision, obstacles, strategic

directions, systematic actions and implementation timelines. Since these participants were literate, data were collected using the card technique. The card technique is a variation of the former workshop procedure. Instead of the workshop facilitator listing the data on the chalkboard or a flipchart, participants printed their ideas in bold pen on large cards. The cards were taped on the front wall, ordered into similar categories, named and evaluated. The procedure was repeated for each step of the strategic planning process. The context for the follow-up workshop was set as follows:

“Imagine it is five years after the community workshops and residents of Charia are implementing the actions they planned to carry out. What recognizable conditions would you want to see, so as to be able to tell how things have changed over the past five years?”

Organizational heads listed their vision elements on sheets of paper, checkmarked what they believed were the three best ideas on their list, and wrote them out on the cards provided. The clearest and most understandable cards were passed to me as facilitator. Questions were posed to clarify some of the phrases, while a co-facilitator taped the cards at random on the front wall. Cards with similar ideas were put together in one column, the column was assigned an inclusive name, and the ideas in each column evaluated. This procedure was used for subsequent steps of the strategic planning process.

Results of the strategic planning workshop with organizational heads shared similar concerns with community members. Organizational heads identified five major vision

components for the community. They are:

1. sustainable landuse practices by community members;
2. empowered community citizens;
3. intensified formal and non-formal educational campaigns;
4. improved strategies for community mobilization; and
5. coordination among the organizations and institutions that help the community

(Table 3).

In the next stage of the strategic planning process, organizational heads identified the obstacles that could prevent them from realizing this vision. They were particularly concerned about the poor coordination among the assisting organizations and believed that if they could work together effectively as a team and execute joint programs, they would be able to help community members achieve their vision. They, therefore, designed strategies to help them work together more effectively. For example, they decided to organize regular inter-organizational workshops where they could share ideas and develop plans for joint program execution. Organizational heads also resolved to use more practical modes of disseminating educative information such as drama and films (Table 3). Detailed results of the strategic planning workshop are presented in Appendices VII to XI.

Table 3. Summary of results produced by a follow-up workshop with organizational heads.

Vision	Contradictions	Strategic directions	Systematic actions
Sustainable landuse practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Poor land use practices -Inappropriate extension education strategies -Low adoption rates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Multidisciplinary intervention strategies -Practical and participative extension education programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Form an inter-organizational committee -Use debates and drama to educate communities on environmental issues -Involve community members
Community empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Individual and group saboteurs -Low self-esteem and confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Community involvement strategies -Poverty alleviation programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Involve saboteurs in program planning -Establish small-scale industries
Enhanced educational status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Uncertain of literacy benefits -Communication problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Intensify formal and non-formal community education programs -Effective information dissemination strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organize inter-village drama competitions on educative issues -Incorporate more practical sessions in training programs
Community mobilization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Diverse land use interests -Ineffective community intervention strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Create a participatory environment for all stakeholders -Effective consultation processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Involve stakeholders in planning and decision-making processes -Stimulate the generation of valid and useful information
Inter-organizational coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Uncoordinated program execution -Obsolete technology and information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Multidisciplinary program execution -Personnel development programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Inter-organizational workshops -Refresher courses and on-the-job training for personnel

After the strategic planning workshop with organizational heads, the subsequent weeks (July 13 to August 24) of the research were dedicated to field work, mainly tree planting and nursery activities. Organizational heads participated in all the field activities in the community. They each had a unique skill to share with other members of the research team and the community as a whole. The research finally ended on August 24, after the research team made home visits to individuals who had begun to establish private woodlots in their backyards. The research team then made their way to the chief's palace to bid him goodbye. The chief and his elders in turn presented a goat to the research team as a token of appreciation for the work done in Charia. The goat was later used for light soup and the research team had a small celebration and reflected on the activities over the last four months (May to August, 1996).

The next chapter discusses the outcome of the Charia intervention in the context of what the lessons were for community members, organizational heads, and the researcher. The theoretical implications of the findings are also discussed as well as the challenges and limitations of the study.

5.0 DISCUSSION

This chapter is divided into four main sections; 1) community workshops - what did we learn? 2) organizational workshops - what was learned? 3) what did I learn as a researcher/facilitator? The fourth section discusses the challenges and limitations of the research.

The intervention in Charia served as a learning experience for all who participated. The study served a dual purpose of solving practical community problems, as well as field-testing the principles of PAR. In my opinion, the research process resulted in genuine problem descriptions and analysis that circumvented the defensive attitudes of participants. The ICA strategic planning process was used as a vehicle to gather input from participants. The workshop method and focused conversation were used as facilitation tools for organizing ideas and putting things in perspective. The strategic planning process proved to be an effective tool of getting community members to discover a common ground for their opinions. It also provided the opportunity for participants to define their own objectives, and identified the paths to achieving and implementing them. The workshop method enabled participants to generate ideas freely, discuss them, make choices, and prioritize and evaluate them. The PAR approach seemed to provide an opportunity for peoples' beliefs and ideas to be influenced, opened them to learning, and made them express willingness to experiment with new ideas. As was evidenced in informal discussions and observations, peoples' feelings of distrust, confusion and indifference seem

to have been dispelled, while feelings of self-confidence and risk-taking seemed to be enhanced.

Bergdall (1993) observes that people's attitudes and perceptions are more effectively addressed and potentially altered when they experience a new reality rather than be told that they ought to think or act differently. In the following sections, the effect of the PAR process on the people concerned - community residents, organizational heads, and the researcher - is discussed. The lessons learned, and the theoretical implications of the outcome of the research are put into perspective.

5.1 COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS - WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Throughout the strategic planning process, the people of Charia envisioned the desired conditions they would like to experience in their community, identified the barriers keeping them from achieving those desired conditions, devised strategies to overcome those barriers, designed specific actions that would fulfill those strategies, and took the necessary steps to implement some of those actions.

The main vision elements suggested by participants of the community workshop included improved agricultural practices, increased afforestation, increased school attendance, improved participation in non-formal education programs, and improved infrastructure, health and financial stability. Their vision made clear that the people of Charia wanted to

improve their current living conditions by solving their problems of land degradation, illiteracy, high infant mortality rates and financial dependency. The vision articulates the community's felt needs and describes the conditions necessary for the effective functioning of their community.

Although it was easy to agree on a commonly shared future, it was not easy to identify the paths leading to the realization of that future. Most participants initially regarded themselves as helpless people who could not contribute to the alleviation of their problems as evidenced in their lack of problem solving skills and mostly relying on assistance from government and non-governmental organizations. Bergdall (1993) observes that the feeling of passivity and worthlessness is a common feeling that prevails in rural communities and any effective intervention activity should aim at dispelling this feeling or breaking this mindset.

The people of Charia first realized that they could take control of their own situation after they watched a video that showed how the people of a neighbouring village had successfully transformed themselves. In Charia, feelings of passivity and worthlessness were apparently dispelled by the video and villagers became willing to contribute to their own development efforts. Once participants were psychologically prepared, it was easier for them to identify and work to overcome the obstacles that prevented them from realizing their vision.

Participants identified three broad categories of obstacles that prevented them from realizing their vision. They included: (1) problems within the community, (2) lack of information about events surrounding them, and (3) inappropriate extension education techniques.

5.1.1 Overcoming the Community's Internal Problems

Problems within the community included apathy, alienation, disunity, noninvolvement and lack of trust among community members. Participants observed that some wealthy individuals in the community were resistant to change and sabotaged community development projects. Other people refused to participate in communal activities simply because of strained interpersonal relationships with those in charge. Still others refused to be involved because the immediate benefits seemed to be remote or the individual had experienced failure with past community development efforts. Conflicting interests about land use in the community was a contributing factor to strained interpersonal relations in the community. For example, a local businessman who traded in sheep and goats objected to the conversion of a piece of fallow land to a community woodlot. He wanted the land reserved for grazing livestock but residents defied his objection and planted trees on the fallow piece of land. This local businessman has, for many years, been in conflict with the rest of the community and on one occasion he set a community woodlot ablaze.

PAR is well-suited to helping people process these defensive attitudes and cooperate with other community members. Through collaborative investigation and open dialogue, people

develop trust in one another and gain new insights to events surrounding them. The search conference technique used in Charia provided the opportunity for community members to discover a common ground for their diverse opinions and reach consensus on activities that will improve the quality of life in their community. For example, the local businessman was invited by the community leader to attend the community workshops. Initially, he objected to almost everything that was said, but gradually began to understand and agree with the rest of his group members and even participated in communal field activities in the community nursery.

Weisbord (1992) explains that resistance and defensive attitudes is a necessary prerequisite in the change process and it is normal for people to resist change initially. Weisbord explains that the change process consists of four phases: contentment, denial, confusion and renewal. Given the circumstances at hand, people tend to find themselves in one phase or another and may require some form of guidance to make the transition between phases. The implication of this for theory is to use group processes and interactive learning atmospheres to guide people through the phases of change, and also improve interpersonal relationships among people. Brown (1985) observes that interpersonal human relations is very important in community development efforts but most often relegated to the bottom of some intervention activities.

5.1.2 Acquiring Information About the External Environment

Participants of the community workshops observed that ignorance and lack of information

about many events surrounding them are major obstacles impeding progress in Charia. For example, community members had no knowledge about government policies for rural communities such as the policy of free education for girls. They were also ignorant about the benefits of obtaining basic education. Community members were ignorant about the procedures of applying for bank loans for farmers and small-scale entrepreneurs, nor did they know how to channel grievances or petitions to the government. Some participants attributed their passivity and dependence to lack of information and ignorance. The dialogue-oriented process allowed community members to speak freely about these problems and began to search for solutions to them. As will be discussed below, community members expressed the desire for more practical ways of disseminating educative information to local people like them who have no formal education.

Designing strategies to counteract obstacles requires creative thinking. The facilitator must use a process that will initially incorporate everyone's idea as important, and eventually guide people to evaluate the strategies based on the resources available to them. Strategies must be practical and within their means. This is important because there is often a tendency for local people to suggest huge projects that are beyond their means. In Charia, it was difficult to get participants to suggest achievable strategies. For example, some people requested for the provision of hydroelectric power to the community. This request was beyond the means of everyone involved in the research. When proposals are beyond the capabilities of community members, the locus of decision making is shifted to assisting organizations, thus allowing local people to fall back into their roles of passive

dependence.

Bergdall (1993) observes that rural people are used to sitting and waiting for development to happen through the efforts of others, and pointing accusing fingers when projects fail. However, when they are involved in designing the strategies, there is a strong tendency to implement those activities. Argyris (1970) also observes that when people make free and informed choices, the tendency to be internally committed to those choices and see to their implementation is high. The implication of this for theory is that people should be guided to design activities they are capable of carrying out by themselves. The idea is to encourage as much autonomy as possible.

The majority of proposals suggested by residents of Charia comprised mainly of self-help projects and practical modes of disseminating educative information. The self-help projects included the construction of vocational schools, day-care centres, and establishment of small-scale industries - pottery, carving, and weaving - with assistance from bank loans.

In response to the problem of inappropriate extension strategies, participants and organizational heads agreed to use practical information dissemination strategies such as drama, films, songs, and regular community meetings. Participants believed that direct involvement and humorous ways of disseminating educational information would attract many village people who will receive first-hand information from the cast. In particular, participants suggested a drama on the causes and prevention of the six-childhood killer

diseases (measles, whooping cough, diphtheria, tetanus, poliomyelitis and tuberculosis) that plague most rural communities in Ghana.

Many authors including Kraai (1981) and Stanfield (1995) mention the adequacy and efficiency of using popular theatres and visual techniques to educate people in rural communities. In Charia, the gradual increase in the number of participants during each day of the workshop indicated that participants appreciated the process and continued to pass the information on to others. The use of an information van and documentary movies could have been responsible for the continuous influx of people to the workshops. These are important findings that further confirm the usefulness of group processes, in that if individuals were contacted separately in their homes and on their farms, they would not have had the opportunity to learn from each other. PAR provides for interactive learning among participants of the research.

5.2. ORGANIZATIONAL WORKSHOPS - LESSONS LEARNED

During community workshops, organizational heads discovered that major failures of community projects resulted from the use of ineffective strategies of disseminating information. For example, agriculture extension agents visited individual farms, demonstrated the use of different techniques of planting crops, and explained how to prevent and eradicate pests to individual farmers. Farmers are usually not given the opportunity to explain the type of problems they encounter. For example, pests may not

be a problem since farmers have their own local and nontoxic ways of eliminating pests from which the extension worker can learn and add to. In addition, teaching farmers on an individual basis does not provide the opportunity for them to interact and learn from one another. The agricultural extension worker leaves the farmer without any new knowledge or skill. Had the extension worker involved the farmer in defining his own learning objectives, the farmer would become internally committed to implement what he had participated in designing with the extension worker. Argyris (1970) explains that when people participate in designing activities that are central to their needs, they feel essential and confident. Feelings of essentiality lead to psychological success and effective functioning of the individual and the entire community.

Organizational heads discovered that separate program execution confused rather than helped community members. Community participants complained that on some occasions they would be expected to attend several activities or meetings scheduled to take place at the same time or at overlapping times. For example, a worker from the community development office may come around to speak with women on some entrepreneurial issues, an agriculture extension worker may be demonstrating how to use pesticide, and the community health nurse may be giving a talk on family planning issues at the same time. The three activities are all important but the individual cannot attend all at once. Organizational heads, therefore, realized the need to plan activities together and in consultation with community members, so that activities would fit the timing of local people as most of their time is usually spent on the farm.

Another problem was the mode of disseminating educative information to the rural populace. Educative information is usually presented in the form of lectures with no input or feedback from participants. The audience is usually comprised of a small fraction of the community, such as learners of the adult literacy classes or commercial farmers. This limits diffusion of information to the vast majority or reaches them in a distorted manner. Having had no input in the recommendations made, the privileged few often have little commitment to implement or adopt the prescribed strategies.

Following the insights gained from the community workshops, organizational heads decided to organize a follow-up workshop to discuss their own vision for the community. It was evident that they shared the same concerns with community residents and could only realize that vision if they (organizational heads) coordinated their interventions and used strategies that would provide local people with the opportunity to participate actively in the processes used. Organizational heads discovered that local people had a wealth of information and traditional knowledge about their own problems as well as informally learned skills that could be used to devise strategies to some community problems. They agreed to use more practical ways of disseminating information and to place the locus of decision making in community members. They also agreed to involve local people in the planning phases of most activities, and to use large community gatherings as fora to educate people.

Organizational heads also learned from the expertise of each other. For example, the forestry officer learned how to use some community development techniques to arouse people's interest in an activity. In addition, all those who participated in the workshops learned how to use the strategic planning process to design and implement actions. The organizational heads took copies of the ICA strategic planning process with them, hoping to use the process with other communities. One criticism of PAR is that it is case specific and does not benefit people beyond the boundaries of a study community. This may not be the case in Charia because, it is very likely for organizational heads, especially extension workers, to use some of the tools and strategies learned in other communities, thus, extending learning beyond the immediate beneficiaries.

Prior to the intervention, organizational heads were acting in isolation and did not realize how they prevented the community from progressing. Even if they realized it, they never thought they could work together as a team and plan programs together as they did in the Charia case. The implication of this for theory is that interventions should provide the opportunity for people at the top level and those at the grass-roots to interact on an equal basis. People at the grassroots should be treated as partners, co-researchers and co-learners. When the subjects of the research are treated as partners, there is the tendency for them to give valid information about their situation and feel empowered. By experiencing the process, participants would not only learn from it but be left with the skills to apply similar procedures to subsequent problems and improve upon their strained interpersonal relationships.

Reason (1988) describes three types of knowledge that can be acquired when participants go through such processes. They are: (1) propositional knowing, which takes the forms of ideas, propositions, and theories, (2) practical knowing, which takes the forms of skills and abilities, and (3) experiential knowing, which is acquired from sustained acquaintance and takes the form of tacit, intuitive, and holistic knowledge.

5.3 RESEARCHER / FACILITATOR - WHAT DID I LEARN FROM CHARIA ?

As a researcher/facilitator, I discovered that every phase of the intervention process offered new insights and learning. I gained a better perspective of the community's problems everyday. I was constantly conscious of my role as a facilitator and a co-learner and not an expert, and I continuously learned from other members of the research team. As will be discussed below, PAR is a dynamic and a continuous learning process. The researcher is constantly faced with new challenges, learns from those challenges and uses the knowledge acquired to inform subsequent stages of the research. PAR does not predefine the content of discussion of the research process; the context is determined by the beneficiaries of the research and the researcher guides the process by using a variety of facilitation techniques.

In Charia, there were lessons about the culture and how they perceived me as an external researcher. For example, during the introductory stages of the research, I was introduced to the community leader as a "woman" who had come to work with them for a while. The community leader's response was " this can't be called a woman, she is like any of my

daughters". This was a signal of how to approach the elderly in this community. Just like other communities of the Dagaaba culture, a daughter is not expected to be more knowledgeable than her father. Nor is an outsider expected to know the root causes of a community's problem better than the inhabitants. At that moment, I was perceived as a daughter and an outsider, but further interrogation revealed that I belonged to a clan in Charia and could be considered as a partial insider but still not expected to know much about the community's needs and problems. Boshear and Albrecht (1977) observe that most external researchers face such problems because they are often perceived as outsiders or intruders who have little knowledge about the community's problems and may not be of help. One may also explain the community's leader's response in light of the fact that I was not invited by the community to assist them and so they had no obligation to accept me into their community. However, Maclure and Bassey (1991) point out that rural communities in problematic situations often lack the confidence and motivation to initiate a PAR process, and eventually the researcher must ask to be let in, contrary to the principles of PAR.

My immediate task as an intervenor was to dispel these preconceptions amicably and to acknowledge community members as those with the vital information about their community and I (the external researcher) had come to learn and share with them. When the external researcher assumes such a role and treats community members as co-researchers, there is the tendency for them to accept you and be open and willing to give valid information about their situation. If an atmosphere of openness does not prevail,

community members may tend to harbour preconceived ideas and reactions about the research and may be closed to anything discussed, or refuse to give information. Group processes and reflective dialogues are tools that can break this closeness and open people to learning, dispelling feelings of low self-esteem. Clarkson (1989) observes that when the opportunity is not provided for people to influence decisions made about them, they feel a loss of choice and independence. When choice and independence are lost, feelings of frustration, anger and non-cooperative behavior result.

5.4 CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE INTERVENTION

Although in some respects the Charia intervention was easy for me because I am from the same cultural background, speak the Dagaare language, understood and appreciated what was being discussed, other aspects were difficult. Four main challenges and/or limitations to this research were: (1) difficulty in isolating and dealing with specific community problems, (2) difficulty in getting people to set achievable goals, (3) inability to continuously monitor the change process, and (4) extracting generalizable conclusions from the study.

5.4.1 Difficulty in Isolating and Dealing with Specific Community Problems

I discovered that community problems were interlinked and ought to be treated as a compound problem. Attempts to isolate environmental problems and deal with them separately was impossible. Environmental problems are affected by social, political,

economic and cultural factors. For example, adoption of agroforestry practices must go hand in hand with other practices of social well-being such as good health and financial self-sufficiency. It would be difficult to convince a rural woman not to harvest and sell fuelwood to raise money to send her sick child to the hospital. For environmental protection to be considered seriously in rural communities, conservation and management strategies must incorporate addressing and providing basic needs for community members. Should environmental issues be highly prioritized, designing strategies for them would still have to deal with other social factors. Treating environmental problems in isolation would, therefore, not reflect people's critical needs and choices and may result in people refusing to implement the necessary actions.

5.4.2 Difficulty in Getting People to Set Achievable Goals

The second challenge was to get participants to suggest strategies that were within their means. Some participants suggested unrealistic proposals, such as provision of hydroelectricity to the community which was beyond the means of everyone present. There was a temptation for the research team to exercise an authoritative role and play down such suggestions. However, this would have been wrong and could have stifled the generation of useful information from participants. Some suggestions such as bad roads and lack of incentives were intended to play on the emotions of the organizational heads present so as to get things done for them, but again participants were urged to design strategies they could implement by themselves.

5.4.3 Inability to Monitor the Change Process Continuously

The major limitation of the Charia intervention was the short duration of the research (four months) and my inability to monitor the change process continuously. PAR is a dynamic process that requires continuous monitoring and evaluation with the lessons from each stage used to inform the next. However, some activities were implemented during the intervention process. For example, activities like woodlot establishment, nursing and transplanting tree seedlings, and other nursery activities were undertaken. Participants were also encouraged to establish private woodlots. The process also increased people's awareness and self-confidence and made them feel essential. Interpersonal relations such as trust, unity, cooperation and self-acceptance were enhanced at the time as community members coordinated effectively during communal activities. In addition to the activities carried out, the processes participants went through proved to be an invaluable learning experience as they became convinced that the solutions to their problems rested with them. Organizational heads gained new insights about the community's problems and devised appropriate strategies to coordinate their expertise.

5.4.4 Generalizability of the Study

The findings reported in this study apply to the Charia community and may not be generalizable to other situations. However, the problems of rural communities are so similar that one might expect to find similar conditions in a neighbouring community.

PAR may, thus be ideally suited to conditions such as the following:

1. where there is the need for community-based learning and community-initiated action;

2. where there is the need to democratize knowledge generation and decision-making among all stakeholders; and
3. where there is the need and value for people to reflect, learn and change.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The intervention in Charia has worked well in developing local understanding of the environmental problems facing the community and in breaking down systemic barriers to dealing with those problems. The process allowed community members who normally would not work together or reach consensus to develop common objectives and collaborate as a team to achieve them. They mapped out a shared vision of the ideal community, identified the obstacles that kept them from achieving it, developed strategies to overcome the obstacles, decided on the necessary actions to take, and began to implement those actions within their capabilities. The intervention also field-tested the principles of PAR in environmental management and community development issues. The study confirmed the effectiveness of the PAR approach in solving practical community problems and in generating usable knowledge for action researchers interested in this field, as well as, for all who participated in the process. In my opinion, the PAR process left community members feeling emancipated and confident to take control of their own situation rather than become victims of it.

In Charia, the free interaction and open dialogue between organizational heads and community members seem to have provided an opportunity for both parties to gain specific insights into each others abilities and unique problems. Organizational heads realized that local people had sufficient knowledge and skills to contribute effectively to their own

development efforts. Both parties, therefore, devised strategies to work together as partners and collectively search for ways of improving life in the Charia community and also become more effective in problem- solving and decision-making.

For me as a researcher/facilitator, I gained a better perception of what action research entails. I gained a better understanding of rural community problems and became convinced that local people can play an active role in their own development rather than become victims of their situations. There was learning from both community members and other members of the research team. The research provided an opportunity for me to learn more about how to use the workshop and focus conversation methods with people who had no formal education. Generally, it was a great learning experience and an improvement upon my group facilitation skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Professional researchers and practitioners who seek to promote human development and effective community functioning must use strategies and techniques that will provide local people with the opportunities to participate in solving their own problems since local people have the knowledge and capacities to participate in their own development.
2. Additional skills on ethnography and community development may help participatory action researchers overcome the cultural barriers usually encountered in rural communities in sub-Saharan Africa.

3. Effective interventions must use strategies that will result in genuine problem description, generate valid and useful information from community members, and encourage them to make free and informed decisions. It is only then will they become internally committed to implement the decisions made.

4. In addition, researchers must involve community members in ways that will create a sense of ownership of the problem in them and guide them to solve problems in such a way so as to be left with the skills to solve similar problems in future.

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APPENDICES

WORKSHOP WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS**APPENDIX I. VISION 1 OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS: IMPROVED AGRICULTURE.**

Planning phase	Output
Vision elements	<p>Improved farming practices.</p> <p>Increased crop and livestock production.</p> <p>Sustainable landuse practices.</p>
Contradictions	<p>Unfavourable climatic conditions.</p> <p>Poor agricultural extension strategies.</p> <p>Shifting cultivation.</p> <p>Poverty.</p>
Strategic directions	<p>Vegetation and land protection practices.</p> <p>Information dissemination strategies.</p> <p>Crop and animal improvement strategies.</p> <p>Poverty alleviation programs.</p>
Systematic actions	<p>Adopt agroforestry practices.</p> <p>Use drama and films to disseminate educative information.</p> <p>Attend field demonstration exercises.</p> <p>Establish a loan scheme for farmers.</p>

**APPENDIX II. VISION 2 OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS: INCREASED
AFFORESTATION AND AGROFORESTRY ACTIVITIES.**

Planning phase	Output
	Increased afforestation projects.
Vision elements	Soil and water conservation practices. Increased agroforestry practices. Model community for others.
	Land and resource use conflicts.
Contradictions	Bush burning and fuelwood harvesting. Limited technical knowledge. Disunity and noncommitment.
	Conflict resolution mechanisms.
Strategic directions	Accountability and sanctions on culprits. Environmental awareness campaigns. Adoption strategies. Dynamic community involvement strategies.
	Form a representative conflict resolution committee.
Systematic actions	Fire volunteer squads and community watch dogs. Invite technical experts to community. Awards and incentives for adopters. Assign households to organize campaigns.

APPENDIX III. VISION 3 OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS: EDUCATION FOR ALL IN THE COMMUNITY.

Planning phase	Output
Vision elements	<p>Free and compulsory child education.</p> <p>Increased number of adult literates.</p> <p>Increased community awareness.</p>
Contradictions	<p>Ignorant about government policies.</p> <p>Poor eye sight.</p> <p>Poor community coordination.</p>
Strategic directions	<p>Self-education and enlightenment strategies.</p> <p>Occasional eye services program.</p> <p>Explore non-formal education programs.</p>
Systematic actions	<p>Use meetings as fora to educate one another.</p> <p>Contact the Ghana Red Cross Society for assistance.</p> <p>Attend adult literacy classes.</p>

**APPENDIX IV. VISION 4 OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS: IMPROVED
HEALTH CONDITIONS.**

Planning phase	Output
Vision elements	<p>Improved child and maternal health.</p> <p>Adoption of family planning methods.</p> <p>Attendance of health education programs.</p> <p>Sufficient community health workers.</p>
Contradictions	<p>Poverty and ignorance.</p> <p>Fear of complications.</p> <p>Uncooperative husbands.</p> <p>Poor timing of activities.</p> <p>Unattractive infrastructure for health workers.</p>
Strategic directions	<p>Emphasis on preventive medicine.</p> <p>Health educational campaigns.</p> <p>Family planning adoption strategies.</p> <p>Training programs for Traditional Birth Attendants.</p>
Systematic actions	<p>Use dramas, and documentary movies for health education programs.</p> <p>Regular child immunization exercises.</p> <p>Family planning lessons for men.</p> <p>Patronize health education campaigns.</p>

**APPENDIX V. VISION 5 OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS: IMPROVED
INFRASTRUCTURE.**

Planning phase	Output
Vision elements	<p>Good classroom structures.</p> <p>Good access roads.</p> <p>Permanent and potable drinking water.</p> <p>Hydroelectricity.</p> <p>Day care centres.</p>
Contradictions	<p>Little attention from government.</p> <p>Unequal government resource allocation.</p> <p>Low self-help spirit.</p>
Strategic directions	<p>Petition and grievance channelling processes.</p> <p>Explore external assistance avenues.</p> <p>Engage in self-help projects.</p>
Systematic actions	<p>Choose trustworthy and dynamic leaders.</p> <p>Solicit internal and external assistance.</p> <p>Initiate self-help projects.</p> <p>Cultivate self-help spirit and commitment.</p>

APPENDIX VI. VISION 6 OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS: FINANCIAL SELF-SUFFICIENCY.

Planning phase	Output
Vision elements	<p>Affordable school fees.</p> <p>Financial stability.</p>
Contradictions	<p>Ignorant about credit facilities.</p> <p>Poor investment opportunities.</p> <p>No access to vocational training programs.</p>
Strategic directions	<p>Vocational training programs for women.</p> <p>Establish small-scale industries.</p> <p>Educational programs on loan acquisition procedures.</p>
Systematic actions	<p>Request for assistance and direction.</p> <p>Engage in pottery, carving, and basket weaving.</p> <p>Apply for bank loans as capital.</p>

WORKSHOP WITH ORGANIZATIONAL HEADS

APPENDIX VII. VISION 1 OF ORGANIZATIONAL HEADS: SUSTAINABLE LANDUSE PRACTICES IN THE COMMUNITY.

Planning phase	Output
Vision elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tree planting adopted as a culture. Protected watersheds. Reduced land degradation activities. Increased farm productivity.
Contradictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inappropriate extension education strategies. Low nursery productivity. Unfavourable climate. Poor landuse practices. Limited material and human resources. Low adoption rates.
Strategic directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High seedling productivity. Develop sustainable landuse strategies. Multidisciplinary intervention strategies. Extension education campaigns. On-the-job training programs.
Systematic actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish private nurseries. Adopt agroforestry practices. Develop multidisciplinary committees. Use debates and drama to educate people on environmental issues. Arouse professional interest in youth.

APPENDIX VIII. VISION 2 OF ORGANIZATIONAL HEADS: COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT.

Planning phase	Output
Vision elements	<p>Increased community self-dependence.</p> <p>Expanded rural industrialization.</p> <p>Enhanced community image.</p> <p>Empowered rural women.</p>
Contradictions	<p>Opposition and sabotage by individuals.</p> <p>Poor investment opportunities.</p> <p>Low participatory spirit.</p> <p>Low self-esteem and confidence.</p>
Strategic direction	<p>Involvement strategies for opposition groups.</p> <p>Poverty alleviation programs.</p> <p>Active involvement of citizens in planning and decision making processes.</p> <p>Training programs for women.</p> <p>Initiate self-help projects.</p>
Systematic actions	<p>Involve opposition groups in program implementation.</p> <p>Establish small scale industries.</p> <p>Regular community meetings and workshops.</p> <p>Establish vocational training institutes for girls.</p> <p>Encourage cultivation of self-help spirit.</p>

APPENDIX IX. VISION 3 OF ORGANIZATIONAL HEADS: ENHANCED
EDUCATIONAL STATUS IN THE COMMUNITY.

Planning phase	Output
Vision elements	Increased adult literacy rate. Effective information dissemination processes. Increased environmental awareness.
Contradictions	Uncertain of literacy benefits. Communication problems. Low enthusiasm and patronage.
Strategic direction	Incentives for graduates of the literacy program. Information dissemination strategies. Environmental awareness campaigns.
Systematic actions	<p>Non-formal education</p> Awards and graduation ceremonies for adult learners. Use drama and documentaries to educate community members. Form functional literacy clubs and study groups. Regular community workshops. <p>Formal education</p> Refresher courses for facilitators. Incorporate more practical sessions in training programs. On-the-job training for school dropouts. Compulsory child education.

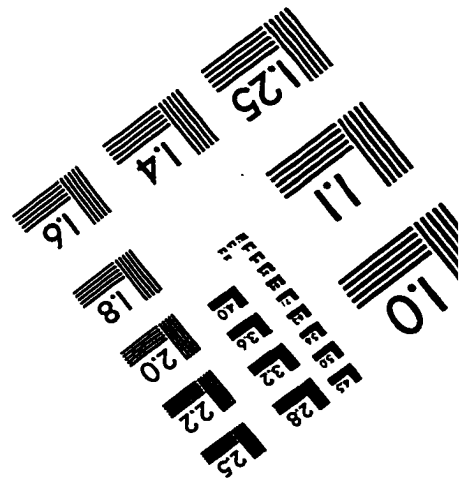
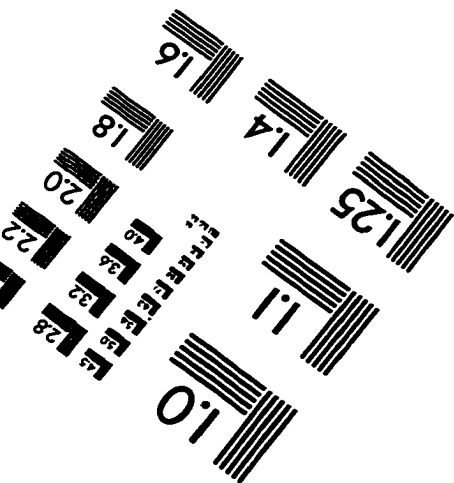
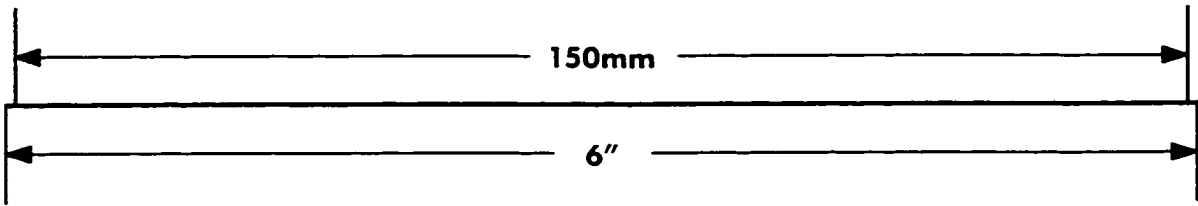
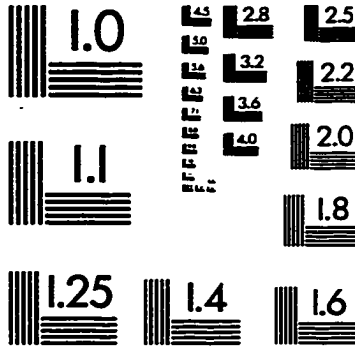
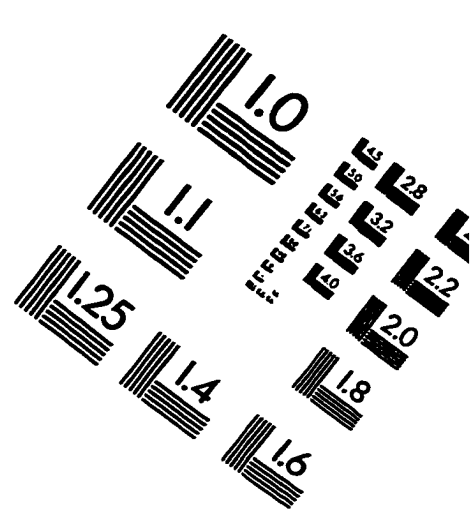
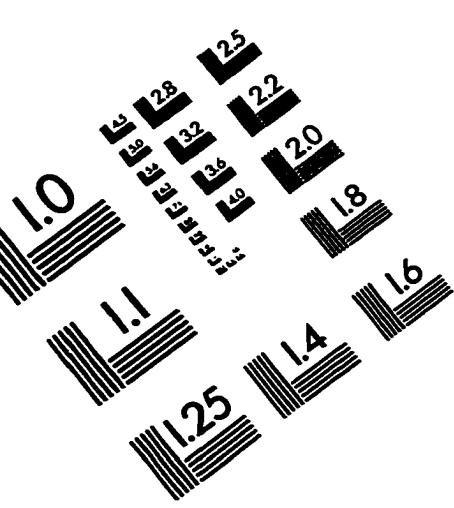
**APPENDIX X. VISION 4 OF ORGANIZATIONAL HEADS: COMMUNITY
MOBILIZATION.**

Planning phase	Output
Vision elements	<p>Effective leadership structures.</p> <p>Effective conflict resolution mechanisms.</p> <p>Common understanding in community.</p> <p>Active community involvement.</p>
Contradictions	<p>Lack of trustworthy citizens.</p> <p>Frequent land and resource disputes.</p> <p>Diverse landuse interests.</p> <p>Poor timing of communal activities.</p> <p>Ineffective community intervention strategies.</p>
Strategic direction	<p>Functional leadership programs.</p> <p>Conflict resolution mechanisms.</p> <p>Create participatory environments for all stakeholders.</p> <p>Effective community consultation processes.</p>
Systematic actions	<p>Occasional leadership training courses.</p> <p>Form a representative conflict resolution committee.</p> <p>Regular community workshops.</p> <p>Involve opinion leaders and stakeholders in planning and decision making.</p>

**APPENDIX XI. VISION 5 OF ORGANIZATIONAL HEADS: INTER-
ORGANIZATIONAL COORDINATION.**

Planning phase	Output
Vision elements	<p>Good coordination among involved organizations. Well-coordinated program execution.</p>
Contradictions	<p>Uncoordinated program execution. Duplication of programs. Ineffective consultation with opinion leaders. Obsolete technology and information. Limited trained personnel. Transportational problems. Language barriers.</p>
Strategic direction	<p>Coordinated planning. Multidisciplinary program execution approaches. Personnel development programs. Information and technological updates.</p>
Systematic actions	<p>Inter-organizational workshops and seminars. Plan and execute programs in an integrated manner. Refresher courses and on-the-job training for personnel.</p>

IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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