

IDS Working Paper 137

'Of other spaces'

**Situating participatory practices: a case study from
South India**

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Summary

This paper analyses the particular approach to participatory development developed by SPEECH, an NGO working in Tamil Nadu, India. We explore the extent to which SPEECH's approach transformed gender relations in the communities where they work. The analysis suggests that SPEECH's approach is shaped by the particular way that their staff members understand participation, as well as by the understandings of local actors who take part in participatory development activities.

Going beyond the assumption that 'participation' simply 'empowers' those it involves, we argue that social relations in participatory arenas are shaped by a particular set of 'rules' (such as 'all voices are equal'). The rules established in participatory spaces are often different from those that shape people's everyday social practices. Our analysis suggests that the people in the two communities studied entered into a process of critical questioning through their experience of the different 'rules' governing interactions in participatory spaces. Their critical questioning has had wider effects, leading some community members to challenge the 'rules' of social relations outside participatory arenas, in some spheres of their everyday lives. The challenges to gender relations outside the participatory arena are different for different women, and also across the two villages studied.

The paper shows that even though the same NGO was implementing a participatory development process in the two villages, the shape of the processes was different. These differences are explained partly by the pre-existing community contexts, but also by the dynamics of the process: such as who actively participated at different stages, how this participation was understood, and the ways in which different people used their agency to extend the impacts of their work with SPEECH into dimensions of their everyday lives. Through documenting two situated examples of participatory processes, we have highlighted the problems inherent in promoting a generalised picture of how participation works and the social changes it can engender. It is only through such detailed, contextualised analysis of what approaches work and do not work, and for whom, that understandings of the realities of participation will develop, and its impacts for marginalised individuals and groups improve.

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Preface

This working paper is part of a series of papers arising from the **Pathways to Participation** project. The **Pathways to Participation** project was initiated in January 1999 with the aim of taking stock of experience with Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). In the ten years since PRA first began to gain popularity in development, it has come to be used by an enormous range of actors and institutions throughout the globe. Promoted as a common sense, inclusive, accessible and above all ‘people-centred’ approach, PRA has gained currency in diverse circles and given rise to as diverse an array of practices. Yet what ‘PRA’ means to the different people who use, commission and experience it has remained rather opaque. From the generalised promotion of PRA to generalised critiques, there is little of that clarity that Cohen and Uphoff (1980) argued so passionately for at the end of a decade in which participation first entered the mainstream of development practice.

The **Pathways to Participation** project grew out of a linked set of concerns. On the one hand, practitioners had been raising questions about issues of quality, depth and ethics for some years. With the rapid uptake of PRA, these concerns were deepening. On the other, with the multiplication of meanings and practices associated with PRA, it seemed increasingly important to gain a clearer sense of what was being done, as well as what worked, for whom and how. Building on the tradition of critical reflection that is embedded in many participatory methodologies, the **Pathways to Participation** project sought to set the meanings and uses of PRA within the particular contexts in which it is practised and with regard to broader currents in participation in development. As an action research process, the project has sought to catalyse and support processes that share the ultimate goal of deepening reflection in order to identify positive measures that could help enhance the integrity and quality of PRA practice. The variety of activities supported by the project range from collaborative case study research, national and international reflection workshops, networking activities, video and practitioner exchanges.

An initial process of open-ended dialogue with a spectrum of actors engaged in various ways with PRA in three focal countries – Kenya, Nepal and Mexico – formed a preliminary starting point for project activities. Three preliminary, agenda-setting country reflection papers were produced, giving rise to a series of focused case studies which explore different dimensions of participatory practice. Two of these initial reflection papers are reproduced in this working paper series; the case studies are to be produced locally. The third paper is to be published as part of a separate publication drawing together case studies from Mexico. The project also supported in-depth field research that sought to explore in depth the practices associated with PRA as set within particular organisational, cultural and social contexts. Studies in India, the Gambia and Vietnam provided further comparative material. National-level workshops and an international gathering of PRA practitioners served as fora for reflection and debate. The latter has given rise to two publications, a detailed workshop report and a collection of papers reflecting on individual practitioners’ own pathways to participation, capturing both a diversity of perspectives on PRA and practitioners’ views on current and future challenges.

This working paper series presents preliminary materials from the project. It includes an overview of key lessons learnt and their implications for practice, country reflection papers from Kenya and Nepal, and three case studies from Kenya, India and the Gambia. The **Pathways to Participation** project was funded by Sida, DFID and SDC, as part of support to the Participation Programme at IDS. As a collaborative initiative, the project took shape through the involvement of numerous individuals and organisations, who played a vital part in realising project activities and in the processes of reflection that the project helped set in train. While these papers represent some of the formal outputs of the project, the project has given rise to a wealth of informal forms of sharing lessons learnt and reflections on the past, present and future. It is our hope that this project has helped serve as a stimulus for ongoing processes of critical reflection from which so much remains to be learnt.

Andrea Cornwall and Garrett Pratt, IDS, November 2000

1 Introduction

With the mainstreaming of participatory development, the terms ‘participation’, ‘PRA’ and ‘PLA’ have become uncritically associated with ‘empowerment’. The tendency to call almost any development practice that in some way involves local people ‘participatory’ hides the diverse set of understandings and practices associated with the term in particular contexts. When project literature makes reference to ‘doing PRA’, the concrete reality of the processes which took place are most often reduced to listing a well known set of tools, and, sometimes, a generalised set of ‘rules’ around attitude and behaviour. Yet PRAs are inherently contextual processes, embedded in particular interactions of place, people, institutions, intentions, needs and expectations.

Ignoring the nuances of different forms of participatory practice lends itself easily to making unrealistic claims about the power of participation, in itself, to provide solutions to difficult development problems. Similarly, it is counterproductive to shout ‘participation’ at any development problem, and then, when the processes which took place *are* subject to analysis, to point out problems as if they are inherent to all practice taking place under the name of participation. Oversimplified representations of the diversity and complexity of participatory practice obscure the need for deeper, realistic, and constructive analysis of its potentials and pitfalls, as used by different actors, in different localities, for different purposes.

This paper analyses the particular approach to participatory development developed by SPEECH, an NGO working in Tamil Nadu, southern India. It draws on fieldwork conducted in two communities, Kottam and Maniyampatti, in which SPEECH have been working for a relatively long period.¹ Combining group visualisation analysis, interviews, oral histories and focus groups with participant observation in everyday situations, we sought to understand the understandings and practices associated with participatory development in these particular contexts. In order to explore the extent to which SPEECH’s approach to participation transformed existing social relations, we focused in particular on gender relations. For this reason, it was important that neither community had been the site of a ‘gender programme’ that might have otherwise influenced gender relations.

Our analysis suggests that SPEECH’s approach is not only shaped by the particular ways their staff understand participation, but also the understandings of actors from local communities who take part in participatory development activities. Different participatory processes have developed in the two communities, and this has shaped, and been shaped by, the different understandings of participation and PRA which community members themselves have brought to the process.

Going beyond the assumption that ‘participation’ simply ‘empowers’ those it involves, we draw on Kesby (1999) to argue that social relations in participatory arenas are shaped by a particular set of ‘rules’ (such as ‘all voices are equal’): ‘rules’ that are often different to those that shape people’s lives in everyday

¹ The research was undertaken in two parts. The first part was undertaken July to September 1999, by SPEECH staff, people from Kottam, Emma Jones and Roberto Castellanos, MPhil students representing the IDS participation group on this project (see Jones 1999). The second part was undertaken June to September 2000, by SPEECH staff, people from Maniyampatti and Emma Jones, as part of MPhil research (Jones 2000). Limitations included the short duration of the fieldwork, which limited its depth and scale and the level of trust and understanding between community members and the IDS researchers.

social places. Further, we suggest that rather than being something that can be won and held, empowerment is a relational and heterogeneous process shaped by the spaces in which people interact. Kesby contends that the ‘empowerment’ seen in participatory analyses might be limited to these arenas. Our analysis would suggest, however, that the process of critical questioning that people in these two communities entered into had wider effects on social relations in everyday life. To make sense of these transformations, we draw on Foucault’s (1986) notion of ‘heterotopian spaces’, the idea that people’s performance of unusual social relations in one place can engender questioning of previously normalised social relations in other places.

2 Participatory arenas as the construction of ‘unusual’ social contexts

The term participation captures a vast array of potential interpretations. It appears to offer to everybody what they would like to understand it to mean, evoking at the same time a warm sense of togetherness, common purpose and mutual understanding (Cornwall 2000: 2).

For many practitioners and advocates, the attitude and behaviour of facilitators and participants in participatory analysis are as important as the particularities of the techniques (such as PRA tools) themselves. Chambers, for example, emphasises the importance of facilitators ‘listening rather than lecturing or imposing ideas’, ‘relaxing rather than rushing’, and ‘handing over the stick to participants’ (1997: 105). People’s participation is also in principle shaped by ‘rules’ such as ‘all knowledges are equal, and ‘all have the right to speak and be heard’, which aim to enable and encourage the participation of marginalised individuals and groups, and thus construct an effective communicative environment.

Recent critical analyses of participatory praxis have questioned these generalisations, both in terms of their theoretical underpinnings and their application in practice. Several writers critique the notion that participatory arenas construct (Habermasian) ‘ideal speech situations’, in which difference and conflict are reformulated through principles of ‘open dialogue’ in spaces void of domination. As Crawley (1998) notes, the very structure of participatory work encourages the expression of consensus rather than conflict, often culminating in the production of community action plans assumed to be the product of negotiated consensus between participants. Whilst participatory arenas may promote negotiation, the notion that it is possible to construct arenas free of domination is fundamentally problematic, since social actors come to that arena with power/knowledges which shape the proceedings. Thus, even if people are present, they can not be assumed to be ‘participating’, and even if they speak, they cannot be assumed be participating on their own behalf (Cornwall 1998; Guijt and Kaul Shah 1998).

2.1 Participation as a social and spatial practice

The theory and practice of participation underplays the inherent complexity of participatory processes. Rather than simply ‘uncovering hidden knowledges’, participatory analyses are arenas of power and anticipation in which knowledges are constructed for particular purposes (Mosse 1994: 499).

As Jackson (1996: 238) argues, this knowledge is constructed at the interface between the interests and understandings of the participants and practitioners involved. Therefore, participatory analyses are necessarily situated social events in which processes and outcomes are produced at the interface between the power/knowledges and interests of the different actors involved.

Kesby (1999) usefully puts this situated social understanding of participatory processes as into explicitly spatial-temporal terms, arguing that participatory events produce particular arenas in which social relations are different to those normalised in everyday lives. Localised meanings of particular times and spaces interact to produce the meaning of social places (such as the house, street or temple) at different times (during night or day, or religious festivals). The meaning of each social 'time-space' (such as the street after dark) shape the thought and action of social actors, and different meanings may be evoked when different groups/ individuals are present. The practice of social relations within particular time-spaces also work to produce, maintain or transform these meanings. Thus, rather than time and space being neutral, static backdrops to social activity, they are active and interactive contexts in which social relations are produced (Giddens 1979; Bourdieu 1977; Moore 1996). The interactions between participants and practitioners in participatory arenas, then, can be seen as producing a space in which the practice of participatory principles, the attitude and behaviour and power/knowledges and expectations of different people, shape social interactions, processes and outcomes.

2.2 Empowerment as a spatial process

For many practitioners and advocates, the 'empowerment' of the marginalised is a central objective of participatory development (see Guijt and Kaul-Shah 1998; Nelson and Wright 1995). By opening spaces for people's participation in their own development processes, participation is often assumed to empower those it involves. Indeed, populist versions of participatory processes focus on those most often excluded from decision making processes (the poor, women etc.) analysing and planning on a seemingly equal footing with 'outsiders' and 'powerful people' within communities. This in itself is often seen as *empowerment*.

Yet, the potential for participatory processes to empower those they involve clearly depends on the particular approach taken and the understandings of 'empowerment' which inform these approaches (Crawley 1998: 30). And *who* is 'empowered' depends not only on the actions of outsiders, but also on the consciousness and capabilities of marginalised people to shape transformative processes for themselves. Moreover, empowerment in one context does not necessarily imply empowerment in another. For example, a woman putting forward an idea which contradicts with that of her husband in an NGO facilitated arena does not mean that she will do the same when they are alone at home, since there are likely to be significant difference between the 'rules' shaping their social relations in group participation environments and the home.

Much theoretical analysis of participation asserts a repressive, dichotomised notion of power which is to be 'overcome' through participatory processes, and empowerment as the 'winning' and 'holding' of power by marginalised individuals and groups (Kesby 1999). Crawley (1998: 31), for example, states

‘empowerment is a relative concept. It cannot take place without the relative disempowerment of another group’. In contrast, the analysis in this paper is underpinned by Foucault’s (1976; 1977; 1980) conceptualisation of power. For Foucault, power is not exerted by one individual or group over another, but is part of all social relations (1976: 92), dispersed through the network of normalising discourses and practices which construct boundaries of possibility around thought and action (1976: 32). He argued that power relations are produced partly through resistances to them, which makes power relations inherently unstable and necessitates that they are constantly re-performed if they are to be maintained (1977).

Drawing on this understanding of power, ‘empowerment’ is a process of dislocating and transforming the normalised discourses and practices which shape boundaries of thought and action for marginalised individuals and groups (Hayward 1998, cited in Gaventa and Cornwall 1999: 7). As Kesby (1999) argues, if empowered thought and action is to be maintained, reinforced and legitimised, it must ceaselessly be *re-performed*. And, drawing on the temporal-spatial understanding of social relations detailed above, this re-performance must occur over both time and space. Kesby therefore argues that, if empowerment is to be extended into the everyday lives of those who take part in participatory analyses, it is necessary to ‘facilitate the opening up sustainable material spaces in their everyday lives in which empowered thought and behaviour can be performed’ (ibid: 10).

Whilst Kesby’s argument is useful, he underplays the possibility that empowered thought and action can be extended beyond participatory arenas by participants themselves, without the overt facilitation of ‘an outsider’. This stems from three problematic elements of his argument: (a) his emphasis on the inherent instability of power relations, which leads him to underplay the stabilising effects of their institutionalisation and thus the possibility that empowered thought and action performed in participatory arenas can also be institutionalised and extended into other times and spaces; (b) his essentialist focus on ‘given subjects’ (‘women’ and ‘men’), rather than on ‘subject positions’, which leads him to focus on transformations of the thought and action of particular women and men, rather than transformations of social constructions of these categories, over time and space (see Mouffe 1992; Cornwall 2001). (c) His focus on short-term usage of PRA tools which leads him to present an understanding of ‘PRA processes’ different to that which underpins our analysis in this paper: PRA and other participatory arenas as ‘moments’ within long-term, iterative processes of development.

Thus, whilst we agree that for empowerment to be extended from participatory arenas into everyday time-spaces the empowered social relations played out in these arenas must be re-performed. In contrast to Kesby, we argue that it is possible that participants use their agency to themselves reflect upon the unusual social relations they perform in participatory analyses, and to critically analyse and sustainably transform their social relations in their everyday lives. This argument draws on Foucault’s conceptualisation of ‘heterotopian spaces’.

2.3 Participatory arenas as 'heterotopian spaces'

Foucault's (1986) notion of heterotopias examines unusual ('Other') places, and the social relations that constitute them, which stand out as different to normalised understandings of place and social relations.² Through their disturbing effect of unsettling regular categorisations of social relations, heterotopias can serve as conceptual and material spaces for resistance in other lived spaces.

We would argue that participatory arenas can be seen as heterotopian spaces; through their production of discrete arenas in which social relations are shaped by unusual 'rules' and in which normalised understandings of social relations are temporarily transformed. Despite the production of such 'rules', Kesby (1999: 10) usefully argues that normalised social relations in everyday lived spaces 'push-in-on' participatory arenas, such as young women not actually speaking because of ideas held by themselves and others that it is not 'proper' for them to speak in public fora. We would also argue, however, that the practice of unusual social relations within participatory arenas hold the potential to 'push-out-on' normalised social relations in everyday lived spaces. This might be through active processes of reflection and conscientisation, and re-performances of the empowered thought and action played out in participatory arenas in everyday social places. Thus, we argue that whilst participatory arenas are discrete arenas, they might serve as examples of the possibilities and benefits of alternative social relations, and if participants use their agency to critically reflect upon these possibilities and transform aspects of their everyday lives, participatory arenas might act as heterotopian spaces.

Our analysis in this paper explores how SPEECH's particular approach to participatory development in specific communities has shaped both localised understandings of participatory arenas and contextualised processes of gendered empowerment in people's everyday lives beyond these arenas. In the next section, we discuss the development of SPEECH's particular approach to participatory development, and the impacts of the incorporation of PRA into this approach on their work.

3 SPEECH's particular approach to participatory development

The aim of this section is to explore SPEECH's particular understanding of, and approach to, participatory development. We highlight how their PRA practice has been shaped by their particular understandings of development and the approach they established prior to incorporating PRA into their work. The analysis in this section is to a large extent a 'generalised' representation of their approach and institutional aims. This analysis is given further depth in sections 4 and 5, in which we explain, through the eyes of community members, how participatory processes in particular communities have been shaped by situated community contexts and the needs, knowledges and creativities of the people who participated.

² A 'wild' stretch of grass in an 'ordered' industrial area, or a nudist beach in a conservative tourist resort might function as heterotopias; through their disturbing effect of unsettling regular categorisations of social relations in other lived spaces.

3.1 SPEECH's approach to development prior to incorporating PRA

SPEECH was formed in 1987, and began to incorporate PRA into their work in 1990. Inspired by Freire's notions of conscientisation, SPEECH's initial aims were to facilitate processes of capacity building, conscientisation and empowerment of marginalised people (both communities marginalised in relation to wider political-economic power structures and individuals and groups marginalised within communities). Their initial aim was to focus on conscientisation, education and building community unity for five to six years before initiating any economic programmes.³ Central to their approach was the understanding that development is a process that should start from the needs of poor people, and be shaped by the aims of building capacity, institutional linkages and social and economic wellbeing (Figure 1).

Conscious that many communities would be suspicious of 'outsiders', SPEECH initially focussed on building trust and rapport. As Erskine expressed:

When there is trust, people can work together. We can show our trust and confidence in people, but only *they* can develop their own trust. It is related to honesty and co-operation; if people believe that they are working together well and honestly, then the process has begun.

In many villages, SPEECH initially drew people to come together and sit with them by sitting in an open space in the community and singing songs which told stories about aspects of life in rural Tamil Nadu. Many staff members expressed that song is an attractive, unthreatening and culturally appropriate medium to draw people to them as outsiders, and to build rapport and unity. Once initial acceptance had been gained, SPEECH staff spent several months in communities moving from home to home engaging in 'informal conversation' with individuals and groups.

Their initial aim was to develop understanding of social contexts, and to strategically work *with* social hierarchies rather than confront them directly at the outset which they felt would engender resentment and rejection. SPEECH staff implicitly 'performed' their understandings of hierarchical social relations of power, however, by giving no importance to their own identities (caste, gender etc.), and by eating with, and accepting the hospitality of, those of lowest status in each community.

³ Although heavy floods three years into their conscientisation projects necessitated that they facilitate economic projects earlier than initially intended.

Figure 1 SPEECH staff understandings of 'development'



Once a level of mutual trust and understanding had been developed (in many communities this was after six months of interaction), SPEECH would ask the traditional leader to call a community meeting to discuss initiating non-formal education centres. These centres were based on the Frieren method of ‘problem solving literacy’: facilitating discussion of community issues on which literacy sessions are based. Their aims were to increase literacy, facilitate discussion and consciousness of problems and people’s rights, and to create and enhance linkages with government institutions. The workshops were facilitated by SPEECH staff and literate community members, some of whom have now become members of SPEECH staff.

Over time (between 12–18 months in many communities), as the non-formal education centres became formalised and accepted, their role shifted to community development fora, institutionalised as *sangams* (Tamil for ‘unity’ or ‘community group’). Each community with whom SPEECH works now has at least one sangam with around 20 members. The sangams are often gender segregated, shaped by a combination of community members’ preferences, needs and understandings of gender, and SPEECH’s desire to work with these choices and understandings. Each sangam elects a president, secretary and treasurer, roles for which SPEECH encourages rotation – which has been more successful in some communities than others. Initially, SPEECH trained elected leaders individually, but realising that some leaders were using their position to gain power and control, SPEECH now trains all sangam members to both increase the accountability and rotation of sangam leaders, and to equip all members with leadership and negotiation skills. Sangams from different communities are now united into a structure of ‘clusters’ (a cluster encompasses 12–13 villages) to form ‘Cluster Level Governing Councils’ (CLGC): a body of representatives of village sangams. Their purpose is to link the sangams and to provide a learning and networking fora in which members can discuss and act upon common problems, and share successes in their work.

The constitutional change in the Indian political structure in 1996, which formally gave ‘greater power’ to the local levels of the Panchayat Raj Institution through election of a political representative in each village (a panchayat president) and hamlet (a ward councillor), has enhanced the channels through which *sangams* and CLGCs can work with formal political institutions. In many communities the *sangams* work closely with the panchayat presidents and ward councillors both as a pathway to active participation in the political system and to keep their political representatives accountable to the community. Facilitated by SPEECH, *sangam* members also interact directly with sectoral state departments (agricultural, forestry etc.) to tap into state development programmes.

3.2 The incorporation of PRA into SPEECH’s work

‘At first we were hesitant about PRA. It seemed that we were already doing similar work, and we did not see what PRA could add’ (Erskine, SPEECH staff)

SPEECH was first introduced to PRA in 1990, when, encouraged by the Oxfam southern India office, the founder of SPEECH, John Devavaram, attended a PRA training workshop held by Robert Chambers in Delhi. SPEECH's initial reaction to PRA was a little hesitant. John recalled that, at first sight, PRA methodologies did not appear significantly different to the conscientisation approach that they were already employing. They perceived that they were already working closely with communities, and that the people were already analysing their own situations and problems. However, after discussing the possible merits of the visualisation tools, SPEECH decided to try integrating PRA into their work.

In contrast to the practice of many development institutions, SPEECH first introduced PRA to communities with whom they had already built substantial rapport, trust and understanding, and in which aspects of social change such as greater unity and working collectively towards solving common problems were already occurring. Alongside the influence of integrating PRA into ongoing processes of conscientisation, the transforming social contexts into which SPEECH introduced PRA facilitated the input of community members' creativities and knowledges into the development of their particular PRA approach.

Erskine explained that incorporating PRA into their work catalysed a process of realisation that, whilst they were mobilising collective action and initiating processes of change, that SPEECH staff had been making the decisions and providing solutions:

It was through incorporating PRA into our work that we realised that we had been considering ourselves 'saviours' and 'responsible parents'. We had been analysing the problems and we had been offering the solutions and making the decisions. PRA enabled us to see ourselves differently, and place the partners at the centre. It helped us to recognise their analytical abilities, and their expertise and coping mechanisms. We realised that we did not understand the depth of the problems or their root causes. In our context, PRA helped the people become the masters of their own development.

The largest change they felt in their initial use of PRA was the shift in attitude and behaviour that its use engendered and required in both themselves and their community partners. This shift in attitude and behaviour, alongside the facilitating medium of visualisation tools, enabled their community partners to participate more fully in analysis and decision making. Using PRA methods transformed SPEECH staff perceptions of themselves from 'providers' to 'facilitators' and that of the communities with which they were working from 'beneficiaries' to 'partners' – the creators and owners of their own processes of development. On seeing the capabilities of their community partners to set into action their own processes of development, SPEECH staff began to internalise the shift in their attitude and behaviour that PRA had initially required.

3.3 SPEECH's particular approach to PRA

SPEECH conceptually and practically locate PRA analyses within broader processes of conscientisation and capacity building. They are critical of development institutions that use PRA as simply a project-based

tool, since ‘tacking PRA analyses onto projects does not constitute participatory development and empowering development cannot be engendered through isolated projects alone’. They stress that PRA should not be considered as a solution itself, but rather as a ‘helping hand’ in integrated processes of conscientisation and development. SPEECH use visualisation tools as and when necessary whilst integrating the attitudinal and behavioural dimensions of PRA into their whole approach to participatory development. They take a long-term, flexible approach to PRA, letting analysis develop iteratively over weeks or months, as community partners work through issues, make decisions and take action at their own pace.

SPEECH understand PRA as a method which aims to centralise community-partners’ perceptions of their realities, knowledges and analytical abilities. Unlike many practitioners, however, SPEECH staff argue that PRA should not be understood as merely a process of prescriptively ‘using the tools’, but rather a flexible process of developing visualisation analysis in the way that best makes sense to the people involved. They thus use tools as frameworks, rather than blueprints, and believe that they should be shaped by the interpretations and creativity of their partners. As Bala expressed, ‘handing over the stick’ should also encompass handing over the *creative* and *interpretative* stick; since freedom in creativity and interpretation are also pathways to development and empowerment. SPEECH staff assert that PRA tools are enabling but empty on their own, since the changes enabled through the use of PRA tools are shaped by the attitude and behaviour of facilitators and participants, the context into which they are introduced and the way they are used.

SPEECH assert that PRA requires a working environment of mutual respect and equality: ‘unless you see people as equals, there is no sense in doing PRA’. Many SPEECH staff members share their lives and troubles with their community-partners, in doing so actively blur the boundaries between ‘insider and outsider’. This distinction is further ‘blurred’ by the fact that the majority of the staff are themselves from rural villages in the area. Moreover, SPEECH encourage community members take facilitating roles in PRA. In some communities (such as Kottam), SPEECH’s encouragement that community members both facilitate PRA and use their creativity to develop PRA tools, has engendered a strong sense of community ownership over not only PRA processes, but the tools themselves.

3.4 SPEECH staff perceptions of the impact of PRA on their work

As explained above, SPEECH found that incorporating PRA into their work facilitated a shift in the relationships between SPEECH staff and their community partners, and enabled their partners to demonstrate and develop their capabilities and knowledges. Erskine explained that ‘we [SPEECH staff] used to be more emotional and erratic before incorporating PRA into our work, but now we are calmer. We became more open in our planning, and this has been intuitively felt by the people; they are more comfortable with us now’. He also expressed that the transparency of PRA processes has strengthened the relationship between SPEECH and their partners: ‘everything is on show, nothing is done in secret and the people are in control at every stage. This has helped us to build stronger relationships with our

partners'. PRA has thus not only facilitated processes of conscientisation for community members, but also for the staff themselves.

SPEECH has found that the visual and collective nature of PRA analyses has enabled more equal and active participation in group work and, through this, helped to build unity in communities. They also find that, because of its visual and colourful nature, people vividly remember PRA analyses, and are thus motivated to continue even if analyses take place over weeks or months. The possibility of recording visual analyses enables community partners to work iteratively towards problem solving, and to share the processes of their analyses with community members who did not attend. SPEECH facilitate direct interaction between communities in order that their partners learn about the processes and practicalities of development projects in other villages from the people of that village themselves. SPEECH also places importance on ensuring that external development practitioners, researchers and government officers learn from the community members' themselves rather than learning 'second-hand' from SPEECH. This reversal of roles is facilitated through the PRA trainings SPEECH now run for practitioners and government officials, a significant part of which take place in village contexts. Through this, community members are positioned as knowledgeable teachers.

Figure 2 SPEECH staff understandings of PRA

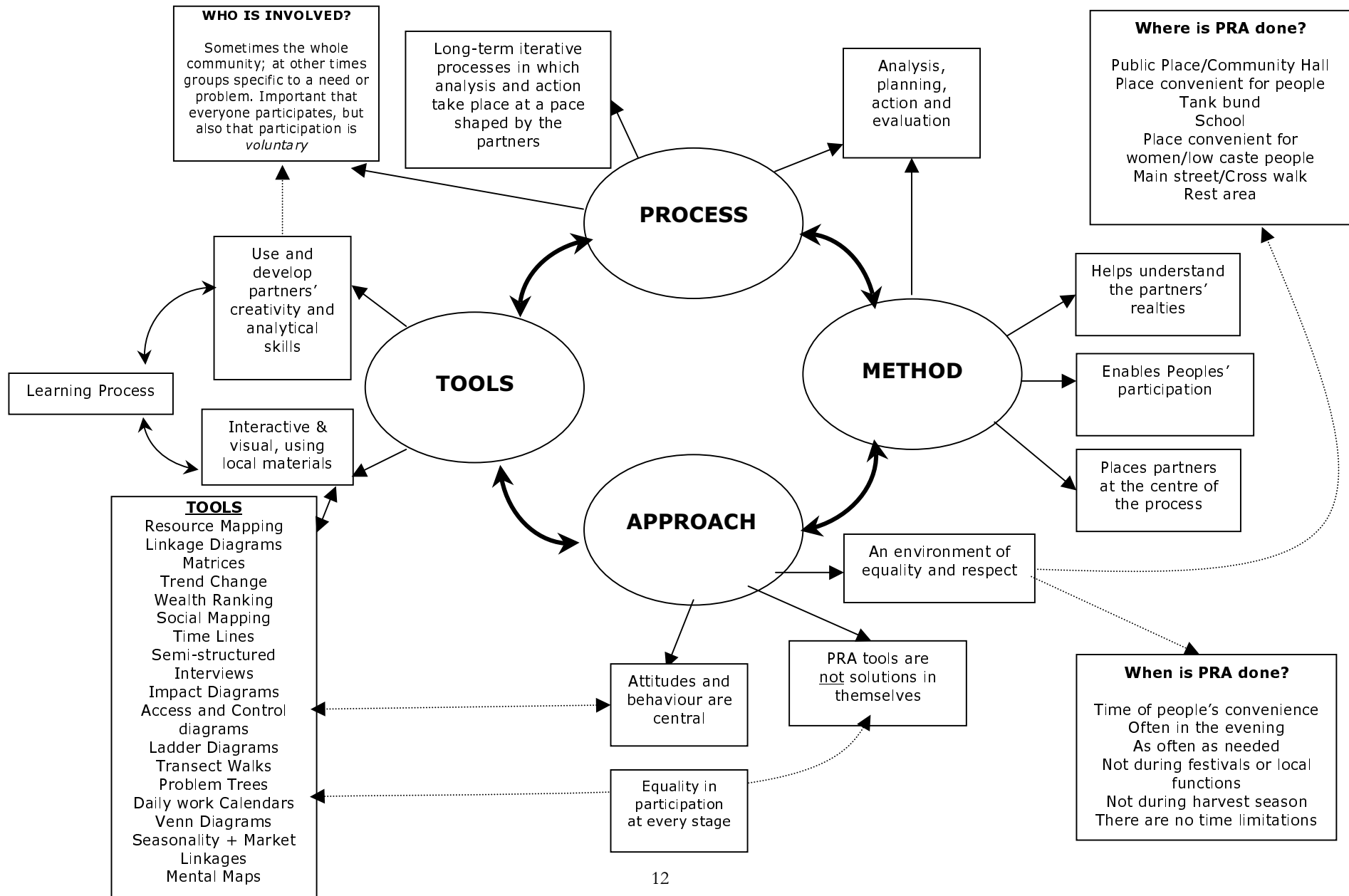
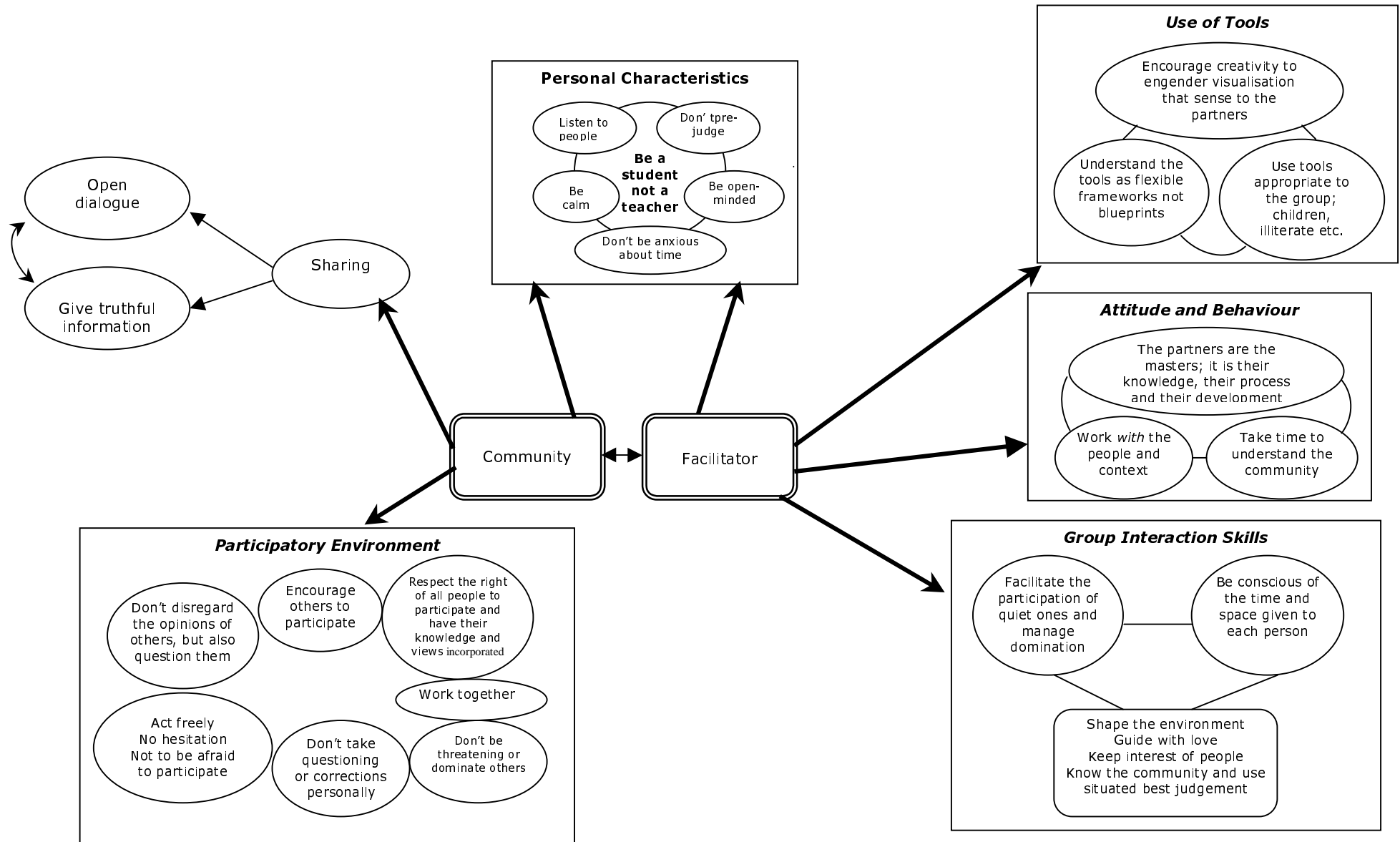


Figure 3 SPEECH staff understandings of good attitude and behaviour



4 SPEECH's approach to participatory development in Kottam

In this section we explore the dynamics of SPEECH's participatory work in Kottam; a scheduled-caste community of around 300 people who work mainly in either subsistence agriculture or in nearby farms and factories. The first part of the analysis focuses on processes of gendered social change facilitated through SPEECH's work with members of the community, the second part explains how particular people in Kottam conceptualise development, participation and PRA.

4.1 SPEECH's work with Kottam community before employing PRA

SPEECH began working with the people of Kottam in 1987, three years before they began to use PRA in their work. In line with their strategy to work with social-hierarchies rather than confront them at the outset, SPEECH staff initially focussed on building trust, rapport and mutual understanding through moving from house to house engaging in informal conversation. Once they gained an initial level of familiarity, they brought community members together in public spaces through singing and story-telling events.

Paciyam, an elder woman, stated that when SPEECH staff first entered Kottam, community members treated them with interest, but also great suspicion. She related this suspicion to the previous lack of unity in the community, which meant that SPEECH was trying to work with them in ways that they were not used to, and their broader fears of outsiders. This highlights the difficult realities of building trust, even when a rapport-building stage is built into the process, and implicitly questions the ability of practitioners to develop the rapport and trust necessary for participatory development through using PRA tools in short-term development projects.

After several months, SPEECH staff felt that they had gained a level of rapport, and asked the community to gather as a group to discuss initiating problem-solving literacy sessions under the name of 'adult education'. Following several meetings, 'consensual agreement' was reached. However, partly as a consequence of deep-seated male conflict that averted men from communal activities,⁴ but also related to the higher interest of women in their work and lower female literacy levels, it was only women that took part in the problem solving literacy sessions.

Karupae explained, 'when they [SPEECH] talked to us about the education lessons, and it was us women that took interest, the men opposed the idea, they did not understand why we would want to learn. They would ask "why do you want to learn to read and write, do you think you will become a government officer?" ' However, two young women from the village who had been educated to primary school level agreed to help teach other women, and with their help, SPEECH began to facilitate problem solving literacy sessions. Several women stated that their husbands continued to tease them for attending

⁴ During the fifteen years prior to SPEECH's first contact with the community, there had been conflict over rights to traditional leadership between two male cousins. Many men in the community had become active followers of one of the two cousins, producing two opposing male groups within Kottam. This internal antagonism was exacerbated by persistent conflict between Kottam and a neighbouring community, fuelled by struggles over access to natural resources and long standing caste conflicts. This external conflict had become a channel through which the two male groups played out their challenge for traditional leadership.

the sessions; 'they used to turn off the light, and disrupt the lesson in any way that they could'. Many women persisted, however, and Karupae (an elder woman) explained, '... the men carried on with their disruption. But we [women] grew closer. It felt good that we were learning together. We talked about the community needs and how we could solve the problems. We knew that our husbands did not see the sense us attending the meetings, but we wanted to continue'.

The problem solving literacy sessions took place in public spaces in the community, and constructed an arena of unusual female-female social relations, where discussion and learning was shaped by 'rules' such as free-speech and equality of knowledge; 'rules' different to those normalised in everyday lived spaces. This may have presented men with a threatening situation over which, they realised, they had little effective control. Whilst, for some women, the combination of male resistance and their own fears deterred them from attending the sessions, a large number persisted and in doing so demonstrated their agency and trust they had gained in SPEECH staff.

One issue women raised in their discussions was stagnant water around the community hand-pump, over which they decided to take action. Paciyam, to the agreement of other women, cited this visible act for the good of the community as a turning point in men's attitudes towards women's participation in the problem solving literacy sessions:

The work with SPEECH gave us a lot of information and ideas. We [women] took the responsibility to convince the men [of their benefit]. One event made them [men] change their view: When they saw our [women's] good work with the hand-pump. We talked about this problem, and SPEECH helped us clear the old soil and place fresh soil. This made the men see that we women were doing good for the community. Then they stopped teasing, and later some of the men started to help.

Whilst this changed attitude created a legitimised space for the women to gather and work with SPEECH, it should be highlighted that since fetching water is a female activity, in men's eyes it may have served to defuse the threat and thus legitimise the women's new communal activities and conceptually enclose the community development work within the 'female domain'.

The women explained that, over time, as their unity as women grew, they began to meet in smaller groups in informal spaces to discuss personal and community problems. As Crawley states, 'identification with other women strengthens their sense of connection to women as a distinct social group, producing a commonality that empowers personal and collective action, which is the 'first step towards empowerment' (1998: 27). Moreover, the women's self-inspired action to meet in places beyond SPEECH facilitated arenas can be seen as a re-performance of their empowerment and unity, and the first step towards its extension into everyday lived spaces.

In 1988, encouraged by SPEECH staff, the women formalised their communal activities through the creation of a women's *sangam*, and in doing so took the first step towards institutionalising their powerful unity as women. Further, in 1989, representatives of the women's *sangam* joined forces with representatives of other community *sangams* (male and female) to form a 'Cluster Level Governing

Council'. In this CLGC arena, these women are in the unusual position, for females, of acting as representatives of the community.

Significantly, it was after men's recognition of the benefits of working with SPEECH that the women's *sangam* began to organise more actively to tackle some of the pressing problems and needs of the community. With the facilitation of SPEECH staff, who provided details of government schemes which the community could tap into, they identified which needs could be met through existing state development provisions. Representatives from the women's *sangam*, accompanied by men from the community, then went to the district bloc development office to discuss specific needs with the government officials. Sahaya explained:

It was unheard of for village people to go directly to government offices, nevermind women, and even more unlikely that the official would actually take the time to see them. It was partly because of the facilitation of SPEECH staff that the official agreed to talk to the people from Kottam, but a significant factor was also that the *sangam* had themselves prepared the community's case – this impressed the official.

Through these actions, the community successfully tapped into government development programmes that provided for/subsidised, the electrification of the village, a public television set and the building of concrete houses.

Thus, to summarise, after SPEECH had worked with the community for two years, social relations had begun to transform. Women had begun to work closely together and to identify themselves with other women as women in private spaces beyond the public problem solving literacy arena. At the wider public inter-community and extra-community (government) levels, women had also begun to act as representatives of the community, and in doing so visibly re-performed the extension of previously normalised gendered boundaries of possibility that would have constrained such female public action. Further, men had begun to see benefit in working with SPEECH towards community development, and had begun to respect and support the work that the women's *sangam* were undertaking.

4.2 The introduction of PRA

SPEECH introduced PRA into their work in Kottam in 1991, into, it should be re-emphasised, an already transforming social context. The introduction of a new approach seemed to provide space for male members of the community to (re-)engage with SPEECH's work. Thus, in contrast to the female nature of the problem solving literacy sessions, PRAs included both women and men and social relations in PRA analyses were shaped by SPEECH's encouragement of gender equity. These analytical spaces thus produced a temporary transformation of male-female social relations.

Mrs Paciyam expressed the community's initial reactions to PRA:

At first we thought 'what is the sense in this art. No-one will know what we have drawn, how can it be useful?'. Then, SPEECH explained, and we trusted their judgement. So, we started to draw the

streets and houses ... We realised lots of information about our village that we did not know before. Then we understood. Everyone took part; the women, men and children, but we women took the lead.

This statement captures the initial querying of how the visualisation analysis could be useful to 'others'. And, then, through the processes of the drawing, the notion that that the information produced could not only be useful to others but also created knowledge that was useful to the community itself.

SPEECH actively involved a number of women as facilitators in the first set of PRA analyses, which can be seen as a political act on the part of both SPEECH and these women. Further, in the process of their facilitation, the women undoubtedly demonstrated, and thus re-performed, their empowerment to the other male and female participants. And, through their continued role as facilitators, the women have effectively re-performed and thus reinforced their empowerment in PRA public spaces over time.

Whilst men re-engaged with SPEECH and processes of community development at this stage, control over issues of community development was not removed from the women's *sangam*.⁵ Rather, men and women started to work together, and men seemed to respect women's capabilities to make decisions over issues that effect the wider community: 'The menfolk are more co-operative and more positive in nature now. They work well with the women's *sangam*, they volunteer to go to the government offices and show solidarity'. Moreover, this shared female-male decision-making has, in contrast to the earlier activities such as the water-tap development, extended into domains traditionally controlled by men, such as a watershed development project and maintenance of streetlights. This highlights that the extension of gendered boundaries of possibility which have enabled women to take action have not disempowered men, rather it has enabled men to also take action for the mutual benefit of the community.

Whilst women's empowerment has, to a degree, extended from SPEECH facilitated arenas into wider public spaces, there has been less change in social relations in private spaces, such as decision-making within the household. The aspects of life in women felt their relative decision-making power has increased were limited to (1) resources purchased through loans provided by SPEECH to women to (such as goats). Whilst many women stated that their male kin were party to the decision to take the loan, they emphasised that the responsibility for the loan and goats was largely theirs. Mrs Karupae explained 'before my husband used to sell our goats without asking me. Now I make the decisions over goats. I made the decision to borrow the money from SPEECH, and I was responsible for repaying the loan'. And (2) certain purchases located largely within the female domain, such as jewellery and household implements which are now possible only because of women's access to credit through their membership of savings and credit groups. With respect to other issues of importance to the women, such as decision-making over land and seed purchases, most women felt that their relative power in these decisions had not increased.

⁵ Whilst men have attempted to organise a men's *sangam*, it has not really got off the ground. This is partly due to lingering conflict between over male traditional leadership and, men explained, because their meetings are disorganised and often drunken and rowdy.

However, beyond increases in decision-making power, women's empowerment also encompasses dimensions of gendered social relations such as increased respect and dignity. There was general agreement amongst the women that their male-kin now have increased respect for them and their capabilities, and that this respect extends into their social relations in the home. For example, Mrs Valli explained that in the past, unless she was ill, her husband would leave all household work to her, but that he now often looks after their children whilst she is at *sangam* meetings and asks her what had been discussed and decided when she gets home.

Thus, to conclude this section, whilst this analysis of gendered social change in Kottam is in many ways a positive example of the possibilities of extending women's empowerment into spaces beyond participatory arenas, it also highlights that empowerment in some dimensions of life does not necessarily imply empowerment in others. Moreover, in this case-study, where women's empowerment has been extended to times and spaces beyond participatory arenas, this has not been an 'automatic process', rather it has been engendered through women's own agency, hard work and initiative.

4.3 Community-partner analysis of development, participation and PRA

Through the processes of their work with SPEECH, the people of Kottam who have actively participated have developed their own conceptualisations of development, participation and PRA. The aim of this section is to explore these contextualised understandings, and to highlight how they have been shaped by SPEECH's particular approach to working with the community.

Perceptions of 'development'

Many people highlighted that beyond gaining material goods *per se*, 'development' means the building of their own capacities to achieve material development for themselves. This emphasis on process was linked to their increased ability and confidence to go to government offices to tap into existing schemes. Many people explained this in terms of their rights; emphasising that they now know that it is their right to ask the government for resources, and expressed that they are now able to present their demands to government officials in a coherent and persuasive way.

Many people emphasised how working with SPEECH has engendered a sense of unity within the community, particularly amongst women, and expressed that this had been important to the processes of development in Kottam.

We did not know about such activities [working together] before; we lived our lives and our troubles separately. It was SPEECH that gave us the idea and brought us together. Our attitude has changed now. We are not individuals, we work as a team. It makes us very happy to work together.

This point resonates with Stirrat's (1996) assertion that participatory processes often produce and shape a particular sense and organisation of 'community', rather than the more common assumption that NGOs

work with pre-existing, harmonious communities who need only to be facilitated towards effective development activity.

Perceptions of SPEECH's particular approach to PRA

Most people find PRA tools useful to their work. Karupae, for example, expressed;

It is easier for us to identify if we draw. It is no use to us if it is in written form – we cannot read well. A picture gives us an idea of what can be done, even a child can understand. It is difficult for us to think about issue just in our heads, when we draw, it comes to life, and it is there for everyone to see... I remember when we draw.

In this, she highlights the importance of the transparency of PRA, a point also raised by SPEECH staff. PRA was seen to enable more people to participate in decision-making and analysis because of the way that analysis is drawn on the ground; enabling everyone to gather around and play a role.

‘It is very useful for us to draw [PRA]. When people ask questions, like you are now, it is people like me, the articulate ones, that will answer for the others. When we draw, we can all take part, it allows everyone to join in’.

[PRA] gave us the opportunity to know ourselves. Now we know how many people are in our village and in each house. We can tell this to people who come and need to know this information. We have taught many people about community development work ... government people, people from Europe and African people, and we have taught the men from Ammapatti about our watershed development.

These statements go beyond self-learning to the imparting of their knowledge, and teaching others. The emphasis that SPEECH place on situating their community-partners as teachers rather than beneficiaries thus appears to have enabled a shift in their community-partner's perceptions of themselves. Discussions with the people of Kottam about their role in PRA processes clearly highlighted their perception of themselves as experts, and as owners and creators of both the process and the PRA tools themselves:

SPEECH only gave us the idea. We do the analysis, it is our information and we do the work. We take goat droppings to show how many goats we have, and neem leaves to show where the neem grows in the village. These were our ideas.

Whilst this statement perhaps highlights the empowering potential of PRA processes, it should be re-emphasised that interpretations of PRA are related to the way that it is understood and employed by specific practitioners and community-partners. Factors of particular importance in this case are likely to be SPEECH's handing over the creativity of the process to their community partners and encouraging

community members to facilitate analysis; elements of their work not common to the PRA practice of many other institutions. Karupae expressed her experience of facilitating PRA analyses:

SPEECH told us about the job of the facilitator: to encourage everybody, make sure that everyone can speak up, to help everyone to be a leader and to help come to a decision... Yes, I am a good facilitator, because I know the people well and we can take time. In the discussions, I wait until everyone has spoken, I only speak when I feel differently to the others. I [know that I] will have a chance to speak later. We do not come to decisions until everyone agrees. This is our choice, SPEECH did not tell us this. We never vote on issues, we discuss until we all agree, sometimes this takes until late into the night, we argue for many hours, but we are responsible, and we should discuss well.

However, whilst most people felt that PRA tools are generally useful, and that they could and would continue do visual analysis after SPEECH withdraws, most people felt that there are some contexts where it is better to just discuss issues. PRA was felt to be inappropriate for monthly *sangam* meetings, for example, since a great deal of issues must be covered and PRA analyses simply take too much time.

Perceptions of SPEECH's particular approach to participatory development

When asked about the relationship between SPEECH staff and community members, one man expressed to the agreement of the others present;

The SPEECH people are one of us. They are not outsiders [laughter]. We share and work together. They tell us their concerns and worries, even in the community meetings. We help each other with these things. We are like family.

This statement highlights both the significant blurring of 'insider-outsider' relations in SPEECH's approach to participatory development, and, in the incorporation of their own lives into discussion, the active influence of facilitators on the knowledges constructed in participatory analyses.

In group-discussions of who participates in SPEECH facilitated arenas, there was consensus that everyone who had the time and energy, and wanted to participate, did so. When this question was asked in individual interviews, however, several people highlighted that powerful people often dominate: 'one problem is that the powerful people get their way. We cannot help that. They say their ideas and then it is difficult to change them, and difficult to say what I feel'. This highlights that participants themselves are aware of the influence of power relations over participatory processes, and, since such issues were brought up only in individual interviews, the difficulties of tackling the problems of power in community fora.

Observation of who participated in the course of the research highlighted that in oral group work, certain people (elders, and often the leaders of the women's *sangam*) tended to dominate and speak for the whole group. However, when the same issues were analysed visually, others took central roles. This was particularly the case for some young women who often take the role of 'drawers' in PRA analyses, and

children who often gather representative symbols. Both young women and children seemed to gain confidence through these roles, and so participate more actively in the following discussions. However, elder people did not appear threatened by this, rather they expressed that younger people are better at drawing because of their more recent schooling, and because they are flexible enough to sit low to the ground and move quickly and their fingers have the flexibility to sprinkle the powders evenly.

Older⁶ people were identified as often passive participants in analysis of any form (visual or oral). One older woman expressed, however, that her daughter always makes sure that her needs are raised and addressed. Her daughter backed this up separately;

I know what my mother needs, she is too old to talk for herself, there is no point in her tiring herself. She comes to the meetings, and is a member of the women's *sangam*, she is respected in the community, everyone knows that I speak for her when it is needed.

Other women similarly stated that when their women's *sangam* meets, they address the concerns of their male family members and children, as well as their own. Several *sangam* members also said that when people can't come to meetings, they sometimes come and discuss issues with them beforehand. This highlights that, whilst critical analysis of PRA practice is justified in its concern over the nature of participation and representation, community-members' views should be entered into this debate. Thus, the question should be asked 'can an outsider conclude that a person is *not* being represented simply because he or she does not speak, anymore than they can conclude that he or she *is* represented simply because they are present?' Moreover, is a young, energetic family member not is actually better positioned to represent their older relatives, or those that simply don't have the time to attend?

5 SPEECH's approach to participatory development in Maniyampatti

Our analysis of SPEECH's work with the people of Maniyampatti in this section centres around the assertion that participatory analyses construct particular arenas in which social relations are shaped by 'rules' different to those which shape lives in everyday places. The analysis focuses particularly on the interactions of gender and age/position in the life cycle on social relations in both participatory arenas and different everyday places at particular times of day.⁷ Our aim is to explore whether SPEECH's approach to participatory development engenders social change in people's everyday lives, and the processes through which this occurs.

5.1 Building rapport and mutual understanding

With the initial aims to increase school enrolment and improve the lives of child-labourers, SPEECH first began to work with the people of Maniyampatti in 1993. After talking with the male traditional leader and

⁶ 'Older' refers to people who are at an age that they are cared for by their families, as distinct from 'elder', which relates more to the respect-power of middle-age.

elders, SPEECH facilitated a meeting with ‘the community’. This meeting took place in the evening in the Old School, the time-space in which ‘village’ (married male) meetings take place, and was attended only by married men. After gaining initial acceptance, SPEECH staff spent several months talking informally with community members in order to build mutual rapport, trust and understanding. Many people expressed, however, that whilst they had not openly resisted SPEECH’s interactions,⁸ that they were initially hesitant about SPEECH’s intentions. Men particularly explained this through recourse to not having worked with an NGO before, and that whilst SPEECH had entered Maniyapatti through the traditional leader and the village committee, that they initially felt a little threatened by their ‘casual’ interactions outside of this traditional meeting arena, particularly when this involved male staff interacting with females.

After discussions with SPEECH, a group of married men came forward to form a Parents Committee. It is important to note that Maniyampatti is one of the only communities with which SPEECH works (all of which have similar socio-cultures and were approached with a similar ‘caution’ towards gender) that achieved large-scale male participation. Rajan explained this through the greater hesitance of (older) Dalit men to interact with ‘outsiders’ than women. This greater hesitance stems from the low status of ‘Dalit caste’ people in Tamil culture, which is felt particularly strongly by older Dalit men because, traditionally, only men ventured beyond village boundaries, which necessitated the performance of their ‘subordinate status’ to higher caste people.⁹ Rajan expressed that older male hesitance was perhaps overcome in Maniyampatti by Muthu’s enthusiasm and power over other men in the community.

5.2 The introduction of PRA

SPEECH first integrated PRA into their work in Maniyampatti after this initial six month rapport-building period. The first PRA analyses took place in the temple compound in the evening. Whilst SPEECH encouraged females and unmarried males to take part, it was largely married men that actually participated. Rajan recalled;

A few women peeped through the temple gates at the men doing the analysis, but even when I beckoned them over, only a few came inside the compound. Some of our female staff later explained that women who are menstruating won’t enter the temple. We are learning all the time; we don’t do PRA in the temple now.

This highlights how the meaning of the time-space in which PRA is undertaken shapes the arena produced. That only married men actively participated is likely to have been shaped by the timing of the analysis in the late-evening (when discourses around females located them in the house with a great deal

⁷ A more detailed analysis of understandings and practices of gender and position in the life cycle in particular time-spaces in Maniyampatti is provided in Jones (2000), the paper from which this case study is drawn.

⁸ Both married men and women emphasised that the financial stipends SPEECH planned to offer to parents who sent their children to school were central to overcoming their initial fears of working with SPEECH; since it indicated that working with the NGO was going to be to their overall benefit.

of work to do), the notion that only married men were *capable* of analysis and decision-making, and the fact that interactions with SPEECH had up to this point been a ‘married male domain’.

The context into which PRA was introduced in Maniyampatti thus contrasts with that into which it was introduced in Kottam, where SPEECH worked for two years before introducing PRA. In Kottam, the introduction of PRA into an already transforming social context, shaped PRAs as time-spaces in which women could demonstrate their empowerment *as women* to men. In contrast, in Maniyampatti PRA was initially constructed and legitimised as a ‘married male domain’. Rajan remembered females’ replies to his questions of whether they agreed to the perceptions of married men; ‘if they say so, then it is right, they know about these things’; highlighting their internalisation of notions that married men are the ‘holders of knowledge’ and possibly a fear of standing against married men in a public context. The married male members of the Parents Committee continued to dominate PRA analyses in Maniyampatti until SPEECH facilitated a children’s evening centre and *Sangam* and women’s *Nanayam* groups.

5.3 The formation of the SPEECH School and sangams

The decision to form a Children’s Evening Centre was taken by the Parents Committee, who decided that it should be located in the Old School. Alongside academic learning, SPEECH facilitated sport, watching the television, and encouraged children to play and chat; activities perceived to be ‘non-proper’ for mature¹⁰ females, along with their being out of the house after dark at all. Some women spoke of their initial resistances towards females’ attendance at the centre. Annalakshmi explained her story:

At first my mother said that it was not safe for me to go to the centre. One day, I said that I was going to fetch water, but really I went to the centre, my mother beat me when I got home. The SPEECH teacher came, and eventually my mother agreed, but still she carried on bringing work from the factory for me to do in the evenings, so I could not go. Then our neighbours told her about the things that their children were learning... Then she stopped bringing work home so often. Now that she is in the *Nanayam* group, and knows about the fun and things to learn, she demands that I go!

After six-months, SPEECH financed the construction of a new building for the evening centre (the ‘SPEECH School’), which due to its location in an open public space, enabled the extension of the children’s activities into the open air where they could be ‘surveyed’. Subbulakshmi (a married female) recalled that when she first saw mature females playing ‘I felt surprise, I had not played like that at ‘that age’. But I knew the SPEECH teacher was in control, and was working for their brighter future, so I didn’t complain’. This highlights how people’s trust in SPEECH staff influenced their understandings of

⁹ This point resonates with Mosse’s (1994: 505) argument that PRA can present a strange risky space for certain people, and with Cornwall’s (1998: 47) assertion that in particular contexts particular groups of men can experience greater powerlessness and voicelessness than women.

¹⁰ The term ‘mature’ refers to females or males who have reached puberty but are not yet married; an age perceived to be vulnerable particularly for mature females and their families – whose status would be at stake if she became pregnant outside of marriage.

the SPEECH School as a space in which SPEECH was in control, working in their interests, and would protect their female children.

Inspired by the men's *sangam*, the children who regularly attended the centre decided to form a 'children's *sangam*'. Making their decisions in monthly meetings in the School, the children's *sangam* undertakes a variety of community development activities. Such decision-making and activities were not previously within boundaries of possibility for either mature females or males, particularly since they involved working closely with each other beyond the 'safety' of the evening centre. Ramarajan (a young male) explained that they have been teased by older male youths for these interactions, yet that their participation in development activities have gradually changed older community members' understandings of the capabilities of children.

SPEECH first facilitated the formation of women's *Nanayam* Groups in early 1996, with the aims to bring women into community development processes and facilitate alternative sources of credit. *Nanayam* meetings take place in the SPEECH School in the late evening, a time in which normalised constructions of gender had previously positioned women within their house. In contrast to the experiences of women in Kottam, few women said they felt resistance from their male kin. This may be related to the rapport that many men had built with SPEECH staff, and, in contrast to Kottam, the institutionalisation of interactions with SPEECH as a 'married male domain' which may have given men a sense that they would ultimately be in control. *Nanayam* meetings centre around discussion of household finances and decision-making over loans; decisions not only previously understood to be only within married men's capabilities. The construction of this female time-space has shaped a unity among women *as women*, and, over time women have begun to discuss everyday issues of importance and to develop consciousness of the situation of females as a social group.

The Parents Committee changed name to the 'Men's *Sangam*' after the formation of the women's *Nanayam* groups. Whilst men initially dominated interactions with SPEECH they are increasingly working with the women's and children's groups. Many men spoke of how their work within the *sangam* has shifted their perceptions of themselves from 'individuals' to 'community members', and also their understandings of women and children who they now see as important decision-making members of the community:

Before we thought 'why think of common issues, we are individuals'. Now we work together because we can achieve more. Before, few men went to the government offices, [and] if they did it would be about their family, not the community. Now the whole community is involved, men, women and children. (Supramani, married male).

5.4 Constructing a 'transformative space': the SPEECH School

In combination with children's unusual activities in the SPEECH School, the meaning of this building has been shaped by its housing of all group meetings, and its institutionalisation as 'the space for PRA'. Analysis of the 'rules' felt to shape social relations in both PRAs and group meetings (Figure 4) indicates the influence of SPEECH staff understandings of PRA arenas (Figure 3). Moreover, the commonalities

between the 'rules' felt to shape social interactions in both 'community' PRAs and group meetings indicates that a mutually reinforcing dynamic between these different social contexts; a dynamic which is both shaped by, and shapes, the meaning of the SPEECH School.

Figure 4 'Rules' felt to shape social interactions within the SPEECH School

	'Rules' felt to 'govern' PRA arenas in which men, women and children are present	'Rules' felt to 'govern' group meetings
Men	<p>Listen to others</p> <p>Consider and <i>discuss</i> others' points, not just agree or disagree</p> <p>Not get angry</p> <p>Explain your own ideas and <i>explain</i> why you do not agree with others</p> <p>Understand that it is the '<i>point</i>' that is important, not who is saying it – men, the traditional leader, women or children</p> <p>We should not just accept the ideas of key responsible people (like the traditional leader) – we should decide if it is right or not and only then proceed</p> <p>We should all participate actively, not just go and watch or listen</p> <p>We have to decide on what issues are important, not talk about other things</p>	<p>All members should attend monthly meetings</p> <p>All should pay subscriptions on time</p> <p>Secretary should document the meeting</p> <p>Treasurer should take good care of the money</p> <p>All should talk their minds freely</p> <p>We should not all talk at once, but listen to each other and discuss in a good manner</p> <p>We should not be angry</p> <p>We should encourage others to speak, and listen to their points regardless of who they are</p> <p>We should answer others' questions and explain properly</p> <p>We should concentrate on common issues, not individual problems</p> <p>Decisions should be made together</p>
Women	<p>All should participate</p> <p>We should not talk over others</p> <p>We should not quarrel or force our ideas</p> <p>Be patient not angry</p> <p>We should listen to what the other women, men and children say</p> <p>We should not just accept what others say, but say what we think too and discuss</p> <p>If someone dominates, we should advise them to let others speak</p> <p>We should be confident and speak clearly</p>	<p>All members must attend and be on time</p> <p>Loans should be repaid on time, but we should be understanding if the person has problems</p> <p>Decisions should only be made if all agree</p> <p>We should listen to the others</p> <p>All should (learn to) sign their own name</p> <p>Give time for others to speak</p> <p>Make efforts to understand each other and have unity</p> <p>If we <i>all</i> discuss, the best decisions will come</p> <p>We should be calm and not shout</p> <p>Be confident and speak clearly</p>
Children	<p>Be calm</p> <p>Listen when others speak</p> <p>Don't talk over others</p> <p>Don't sing or play during analysis</p> <p>Listen to facilitator to stay on right track</p> <p>All should attend PRA analyses</p> <p>All should be brave enough to voice their feelings <i>themselves</i></p> <p>We should speak clearly and loudly</p>	<p>Pay subscriptions on time</p> <p>Meetings should only take place if all members are present</p> <p>Joint responsibility to ensure all are present</p> <p>All members should take part in activities decided on by the group</p> <p>When someone suggests something, we should try to understand and then discuss it, whether they are younger, a female or a male</p> <p>We should not make fun of another's point</p> <p>Be calm and concentrate on the meeting</p> <p>We should not get angry if someone does not complete the tasks assigned to them</p> <p>We should have unity and understanding</p> <p>Review progress of development work undertaken in that month</p> <p>We should try to come to consensus</p>

Importantly, the ‘rules’ which shape social interactions in the SPEECH School are different to those which shaped everyday time-spaces prior to SPEECH’s work with the community (Jones 2000). Several points were raised which indicate how practices normalised in everyday time-spaces push-in-on activities in the School, however. Men explained that whilst the traditional leader and elders do not hold authority in the Men’s Sangam, they are dominant in discussions because of their confidence and experience in negotiation. Children also explained that whilst males and females interact in *sangam* meetings, that their interactions in the evening centre are largely gender-segregated, since older female kin scold mature females and older male youths tease mature males.

Nanayam meetings are arenas of female-female discussion and laughter, activity previously negatively labelled as ‘gossiping’ and understood as ‘activity without purpose’ which would bring trouble to their families. *Nanayam* meetings are understood to be arenas of ‘purposeful’ discussion for the benefit of the whole community, however, which legitimises the women’s interactions. Muthu’s perceptions of female behaviour in *Nanayam* meetings highlights how the SPEECH School is understood to be an ‘other place’ in which behaviour normalised as ‘non-proper’ in everyday time-spaces is accepted:

It is not nice for women to laugh, they will attract attention and bring trouble ... Yes they are laughing in the *Nanayam* meetings, but no-one is criticising or commenting. We know that if they are in the SPEECH School that it is for a good thing. The SPEECH School is in the public place, they are laughing in a group of women, there are no hidden agendas. If laughing is between a male and a female, *then* there is a hidden agenda.

The acceptance and understanding of unusual social relations within the SPEECH School, alongside the respect the groups have for each other’s work and associated shifts in perceptions of particularly women’s and children’s capabilities, has engendered an understanding of unusual social relations within community PRA analyses which also take place in this time-space. Pandiyammal explained how women have developed their capabilities to participate in community PRA analyses through their participation in *Nanayam* meetings:

At first we were hesitant to speak up to the men, but the *Nanayam* group has helped us a lot. We have learnt about telling our feelings, being brave enough to talk loudly, and that we should work together. The men respect us [women] now, because we have shown our ... [capabilities] with money in the *Nanayam* groups. We felt confidence because of our [women’s] unity and numbers, and because of all the things we have achieved together. Now we [women] are the most talkative when we do PRA, and they [men] listen to us and accept what we say.

It is the observation of unusual social relations in participatory analysis that many practitioners and advocates perceive as the ‘empowerment’ of the marginalised. As we have argued, however, since social relations of power are shaped by, and shape, the meaning of the time-space in which they are practised, the observation of empowered social relations within such arenas does not necessarily indicate

‘empowerment’ in people’s everyday lives. The next section explores whether people’s involvement in participatory arenas engenders a critical questioning of their social relations in everyday time-spaces, and, if so, to what extent and through what processes people have *re-performed* their empowerment in other times and spaces.

5.5 Transforming everyday lives

The analysis in this section compares the experiences of one household in which four members are highly active in working with SPEECH (‘active’ household), with those of a household in which no members have participated (‘non-active’ household).

The early evening

‘Active’ household

Prior to SPEECH’s work with the community, Annathai (older married female), Ramalakshmi (young divorced female) and Dhrowbadi (young unmarried female) remained within the area of their house after dark, and both Ramarajan (young unmarried male) and Muthu (older married male) spent time interacting with other males in the wider community. After completing ‘their’ household tasks, both Annathai and Ramalakshmi often spent time chatting with neighbours. Dhrowbadi explained, however, that whilst until puberty she had been allowed to watch the public television and go to neighbours’ houses, that Ramalakshmi (her older sister) had felt this inappropriate for a mature female: ‘I was brought up this way, so I hesitated to allow her to do differently to myself. I felt that it was not safe for her ... that others might gossip and judge her, and that she might be misunderstood and not get a good husband’.

When the SPEECH School was built, Ramalakshmi explained that it was because it was within view of their house and both Ramarajan and their neighbours’ children were attending, that she felt her younger sister would be safe. Dhrowbadi’s participation in Centre activities represented a considerable extension of the boundaries of possibility which had previously shaped her life; she was not only leaving the house after dark, but also playing and laughing with (female) friends in a public community space. Over time, Dhrowbadi’s participation in *Sangam* activities began to shift both her and her family’s perceptions of her capabilities to take responsibility for her life. This, alongside her increasingly normal position outside of the house in the early evening, shaped Ramalakshmi’s decision to allow her to watch the public television on evenings when the Evening Centre was closed. This decision represented the first shift in Dhrowbadi’s everyday life; her situation in a public community time-space not ‘made safe’ by SPEECH staff and a place previously normalised as ‘male’.

Ramalakshmi explained that it was partly Dhrowbadi’s demonstration of the capabilities of females that gave her the confidence to join the *Nanayam* group and take-on the responsibilities of treasurer. Like Dhrowbadi, Ramalakshmi’s participation in *Nanayam* meetings situated her in a public community space after dark, albeit for her this was a female time-space. She explained that through her participation in

Nanayam discussions and ‘community’ PRA analyses, she developed consciousness of the restrictions that females faced;

I have felt many changes in my life, and I began to realise that Dhrowbadi should not be so restricted. When she asked me about dancing in the SPEECH Children’s Day, I hesitated, but the SPEECH teacher persuaded me. Later I also danced, men stood outside and teased, but we ignored them. I think differently now. Before, she stayed in the home, there was no question of her dancing! Some years ago SPEECH bought her a *churidad* [modern trousers and long over-dress], before I would have been against this, in our tradition females of ‘this age’ wear half-sari, but I thought it looked nice and others did not criticise, now I even buy her *churidad*.

Whilst Ramalakshmi is now critically questioning gendered constructions, she highlights her continued control over her younger sister’s life, and moreover that she does not question this normalised dimension of gendered power relations. The transformations in Dhrowbadi’s life have gradually changed her understanding of what is possible to ask for, however, and she explained that her participation in *sangam* meetings and ‘community’ PRAs has shaped a new understanding that she has the ability to speak-up to her older kin. Through this she has gained permission to learn to ride a push-bike, attend festivals in other villages and visit friends in the wider community in the evenings, activities places and people she spoke of not previously being possible for her to know.

As Ramalakshmi built friendships and unity with other females, she began to talk with other women in the streets, and her work as *Nanayam* treasurer requires visit other houses after dark to share information and call meetings:

Before, I did not know many other women, only their names, I had no reason to talk to them, we only raised our eyes. Now I know so many, we stop and talk. Because I am treasurer, I go to other women’s houses to tell them about *Nanayam* issues, we stop and talk about so many things. It was not possible before, we had many restrictions then.

Muthu explained that he did not scold his daughter for talking with other women or moving through the community after dark – activities he had previously negatively interpreted as ‘roaming’ and ‘gossiping’, the behaviour of ‘loose women’. He explained that ‘it is necessary that she goes to their houses, she has community work to do now, she is discussing things which will be good for all, not gossiping or talking with men’. In this, he highlights a shift in his conceptual understandings of female behaviour: ‘roaming’ and ‘gossiping’ have shifted to ‘going’ and ‘discussing’ – since she now has a ‘purpose’ known not only to him but to others who will also benefit, and who might have otherwise negatively judged her and brought trouble to the family.

Whilst Dhrowbadi now regularly leaves the house after dark, Annathai and Ramalakshmi (unless she has *Nanayam* work) mainly stay within the house in the early evenings, which they explained through the large amount of house-work they have to achieve at this time. That both they and their male kin consider

this to be *female work* is indicative of the maintenance of gendered discourses around divisions of labour. Muthu, for example, expressed 'my wife and daughters do the cooking, cleaning and washing clothes, it is their duty'. Women and men also highlighted the understanding that men who undertake household work are 'pampering' their wives, and that this is shameful for the family.

'Non-active' household

None of the four members of this household are members of *sangams* or *nanayam* groups or have taken part in any community PRA analyses. Karrupayee (married older male) related this to his 'family always being separate to the others', and his personal lack of involvement to;

The men in the sangam talk in many voices, they are pulling in different directions and are not coming together because they are not listening to one voice. It is because of this that I do not want to get involved.

This can perhaps be interpreted as an aversion to the 'participatory' nature of decision making in the *sangam*, which is in direct contrast to the authority of elders and the traditional leader (who comes from this extended family) within the Village Committee. Chinnakarupayee (married older female) related her family's lack of involvement in SPEECH activities to the number of young children in their family who require constant attention, and her own lack of involvement to her old age. Packialakshmi (unmarried female) expressed that she does not know why her family is not involved or whether she would join a Nanayam Group after marriage, perhaps indicating that she does not consider such choices to be hers. Selvam (unmarried male) stated that 'like my brothers and father, I am not so interested in the sangam', and expressed dislike for;

The 'equality' the women in the Nanayam groups are talking about. They say that they are not slaves to men. It is not a good change. A wife's role is to serve her husband. They say that they are equal to men. After I am married, I would hesitate to let my wife join a group, if she did she should not talk like that, I will not do any violence to her, so she should not speak about equality.

Both before and after SPEECH's interactions with the community, Chinnakarupayee and Packialakshmi have remained within the house in the early evening. Chinnakarupayee explained this through recourse to her 'duty as a wife to cook and serve food for my husband at this time'. Selvam explained that he has never undertaken any housework, since 'there are people to do this, what is the need for me also to do it?'. Whilst this indicates their internalisation of such household responsibilities as 'female', it is important to recall that this is a dimension of gendered discourse and practice that has been maintained whilst other many other aspects of life are in flux.

Chinnakarupayee also expressed that, unlike other married women, neither before or after SPEECH's interventions has she interacted with female neighbours in the evenings. She explained that 'it is not nice for women to gossip, I have much work to do in the evenings. I don't know the other women

who live in the street, only my relatives'. This indicates that she maintains the notion that all female-female interactions are inherently shaped by 'gossip'. Packialakshmi similarly explained that she stays within the house after dark because she has household work and 'it is not nice for females to go outside'.

The female washing place

'Active' household

Shaped partly by the notion that non-purposeful female-female interaction was not proper in any time-space, the female washing place had previously been an arena of silent washing. Over the course of SPEECH's work with the community, however, the washing place in the early morning has become a context of laughter and chatting. This shift in female-female interactions first stemmed from mature females activities in the SPEECH School. Dhrowbadi explained that the lack of scolding she received from Ramalakshmi for her actions in the School began to shift her understandings of laughing, chatting and playing, and that since her new-found friendships with other females were based in such behaviour, she began to laugh, chat and play in the female washing place; re-performing these extensions of her boundaries of possibility in this everyday place.

Ramalakshmi explained that she had not scolded Dhrowbadi because the female washing place is bounded by bushes and thus the view of others, particularly her father who she knew maintained the understanding that laughing was 'not nice' for females. Moreover, she explained that over time the washing place has also become a context of chatting and laughter for married females, including those who are not *Nanayam* members, thus extending female-female friendships beyond those who participated directly in SPEECH facilitated arenas. Since Annathai works in the fields rather than factories, she goes to the washing place in the late mornings when no other women are present, thus for her this remains a silent time-space.

'Non-active' household

In contrast to most females who work in fireworks factories and catch the early factory bus, Packialakshmi works in a match factory which is walking distance from the village, and therefore goes to the washing place later than other females. Chinnakarupayee, like Annathai, works on family land rather than in a factory and so goes to the washing place in the late morning where she rarely meets other women. Thus, like Annathai, neither Packialakshmi or Chinnakarupayee have felt a change in the time-space constructed by the women's washing place. Therefore, not only do they not participate in the transformative arenas facilitated by SPEECH (PRAs and group meetings), but their own routinised activities shape their non-participation in this transformative time-space opened up by females themselves.

The late evening in the house

'Active' Household

The late evening had previously been a time in which Muthu had shared 'his' decisions around family matters, and not only had other household members rarely asked him questions, but when they had, he had rarely answered. Annathai explained:

He was not used to answering questions, men weren't, it was not our tradition. We used to argue a lot and sometimes we would not speak for months afterwards. He made all the decisions those days – money, purchases and who would go where. Now things have changed. We are all calmer, and Ramalakshmi makes many decisions because she holds the money now, but we discuss together. He [Muthu] will answer the questions now.

Some of the changes Annathai highlights stemmed from Muthu's decision to pass responsibility for buying household vegetables to Ramalakshmi, which was after his joining the men's *sangam* but before the formation of women's *Nanayam* groups. Ramalakshmi explained that her father was becoming old, and increasingly unable to manage all the household responsibilities himself. She joined the *Nanayam* Group one-year later, and her success as the Group's treasurer, alongside her demonstration of her capabilities in vegetable purchasing, encouraged Muthu to gradually pass her responsibility for all household decision-making around finances; responsibilities previously normalised as 'married male domains'. Yet, over time, household decision-making has shifted from an individual to a communal undertaking. Ramalakshmi related this shift to the multiple dimensions of the household's work with SPEECH;

We have become used to working and discussing together. We have to do it for the community work, so it came to the family issues also. In the *Nanayam* Group, we discussed about the unity, the decision-making ... we decided that this should also happen in the family, that we should insist. My father is used to answering our questions now, he has to do it when in the *sangam*, so he does it without thinking now with us also. We are all better at discussing now, and like with the meetings, we try to be calm – this makes the best discussion.

This emphasises a conscious extension of the attitude and behaviour normalised in the group meetings and PRAs which take place in the SPEECH School into everyday household life, indicating that, in this case, the School has acted as a heterotopian space.

'Non-active' household

Decision making has long been in the hands of Karrupayee and his eldest married son who lives in another house in Maniyampatti. All four members of the household expressed that men are inherently better at decision-making and finances. Chinnakarupayee explained;

Men only can do the decisions and the purchases. How can we [women] manage, we don't know about such things. I have never been to the shop, I do not know how to purchase. It should be a man, not even a husband, a son could do it. If you were my son, and you make a decision, I would agree.

Selvam also expressed that 'only men can do it. The money comes to them, they make the decisions and spend the money. Women cannot go outside, how can they make the decisions?' These statements highlight the maintenance of the family members' understandings around gender, and further that the practice of such gendered constructions actualise and legitimise finances and purchasing as 'male domains'. Whilst Selvam made reference to the increasing number of women in Nanayam groups making decisions and handling money, he dismissed this as indicative of the capabilities of females, and thus of relevance to his family, in stating 'this may happen in other families, but women in my family are not good at such things. Men are better at these things. If others want to let the women do it, that is their business?.'

6 Analysis and conclusions

Our analysis has shown that SPEECH's particular approaches to participatory development and PRA are shaped by their understanding of development as a long-term process of conscientisation, building capacity, unity and sustainable institutional linkages. Moreover, it has highlighted that whilst there are commonalities in their approaches to different communities, that there were differences in the processes which actually developed in Kottam and Maniyampatti. These differences were shaped partly by the complexities of the pre-existing community contexts, but also by the dynamisms of the processes; such as who actively participated at different stages, how this participation was understood, and the ways in which different people used their agency to extend the impacts of their work with SPEECH into dimensions of their everyday lives. The particularities of these examples raises questions about the generalised representations of participation and PRA in development literature.

SPEECH emphasise the importance of not only incorporating local knowledges but also handing over the creativity of participatory analyses to participants, and encouraging community members to facilitate analysis. In Kottam, this has engendered a sense of ownership over both participatory processes and PRA tools, which has given community members the skills and confidence to use PRA after SPEECH withdraws. Whilst this lives up to many of the ideals in participatory rhetoric, we cannot understand this as a reflection of the possibilities of PRA practice *per se*. SPEECH's understanding and practice of PRA is a blend of strands of popularised PRA discourse with Freirean ideas around conscientisation, and their particular practice in different communities has developed through the interaction of these ideas with the needs and creativities of particular community partners. Further, PRA plays a relatively small role in the ongoing relationships between SPEECH staff and their community-partners. It is likely that PRA would have a very different meaning if it were the only interface between

organisational staff and community members, or if PRA were used as a medium through which staff first introduced themselves to communities rather than situated within deeper, ongoing relationships.

Kottam was one of the first communities into which SPEECH introduced PRA, and in many ways they developed their particular approach through work with such communities. This is likely to have influenced the ownership that people in Kottam feel over PRA tools and processes. Whilst we have not documented how people in Maniyampatti understand and feel about PRA, it appeared that they feel less ownership over PRA tools, and less creative and confident in using them than people in Kottam. Shaped partly by SPEECH's intentions in Maniyampatti, PRA has played a lesser role in community development processes than in Kottam, and whilst community-members in Kottam and other SPEECH partner-communities take facilitation roles in PRA analysis, this has not been the case in Maniyampatti. The differences in the way PRA processes have developed in Kottam and Maniyampatti, and the way the people of the two communities understand and feel about PRA, highlights that PRA tools, even when introduced by the same NGO staff, can take different forms and have different meanings and impacts for the people involved.

We have very little knowledge of what community members think when they are invited to participate or of how people come to understand PRA and other participatory processes. Some of the community members' understandings highlighted in this paper contrast with perceptions more commonly found in development literature. In Kottam, for example, community partners highlighted that, contrary to the notion that participation requires that everyone must participate actively on their own behalf, some people, such as older people, feel they are better represented by their family members.

We have argued that participatory arenas should be understood as unusual time-spaces in which social relations are shaped by a particular set of 'rules' different to those which shape people's lives in everyday places. And, since power relations are relational and heterogeneous, that the empowerment seen in participatory arenas is not indicative of empowerment in people's everyday lives. In Maniyampatti, the institutionalisation of the SPEECH school as the place in which community members undertake participatory analyses has produced a sense that this building is an 'Other place', in which unusual social interactions are understood and accepted. This understanding has been shaped partly by SPEECH staff's understandings, performance and facilitation of what they see as good attitude and behaviour, but also by community members' situated ideas around participation, unity and effective decision making environments.

In Maniyampatti, some women, men and children have reflected upon the social relations they perform in this School and have actively sought to re-perform them in dimensions of their everyday lives. This re-performance has engendered social change in some aspects of people's lives, yet certain dimensions of gendered relations remain largely unchanged. Further, shaped partly by the differences in who has participated in development work with SPEECH in the two communities, the transformations of peoples' everyday lives have taken different forms. For example, in Kottam the central role of women in participatory analysis has encouraged women to become representatives of the community in wider public

spaces, whilst in Maniyampatti the larger interaction of males and females within participatory analysis has engendered greater change in gendered social relations in the household.

These contrasts again highlight how participatory processes are not 'pre-designed packages' which simply 'empower' those they involve, rather, they are situated social processes which develop through the interactions of the particular understandings, needs, intentions and agencies of different community members and practitioners. Our analysis has presented a relatively positive picture of SPEECH's work with two situated communities, and some aspects of their work perhaps places questions on more commonly found use of participation as short term processes of simply finding out and planning. Yet, we have also highlighted some of the difficulties SPEECH has encountered in working with the dynamics of power and building rapport and understanding with different people, and how these have affected processes and outcomes at different stages.

Through documenting two situated examples of participatory processes we have highlighted the problems inherent in promoting a generalised picture of how participation works and the social changes it can engender. It is only through such detailed, contextualised analysis of what approaches work and don't work, and for whom, that understandings of the realities of participation will develop, and its impacts for marginalised individuals and groups improve.

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