

Participation in Natural Resource Management: Research and Development

*Research project number SYN1 of the
Social and Institutional Research
Program of Land & Water Australia.*



BACKGROUND

Communities are comprised of individuals who share common goals, including managing their collective impact on natural resources. In this project, the researchers propose a framework for participation that can be used by researchers and policy makers to design programs, or by community groups and individuals to decide how and when they might like to participate.

In its simplest form, participation in research and development is the opportunity for involvement by members of the system for which the development is relevant. Involvement ranges from indirect consultation through to full research partnership.

Widespread use of participatory research approaches in natural resource management (NRM) without a shared understanding of their limitations can lead to frustration.

This project develops operational guidelines for participation in research and development that provide a useful basis for the assessment of participatory requirements by researchers.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this project was to develop guidelines for participation of stakeholders, particularly users, in research and development.

METHODOLOGY

- ◆ Database search using keywords such as 'research' in conjunction with 'action', 'participation', 'extension', 'community planning and development', 'rural development' and 'resource management'.

- ◆ Peer discussion group.
- ◆ Community consultation involving discussions with a number of community members and representatives of interest groups and government agencies, and a meeting conducted as an open discussion.

KEY FINDINGS

The project developed operational guidelines for participation in research and development within a conceptual framework that addresses the nature of NRM; the nature of research and development; and the purpose of participation.

The operational framework

The operational framework developed by the researchers for participation in research and development comprises:

- ◆ principles for participation;
- ◆ functions for NRM;
- ◆ processes for participation;
- ◆ dimensions of research and development; and
- ◆ entry points into research and development.

The operational framework caters for diversity in participatory requirements, provides flexibility in its use by researchers and participants. The framework can be adapted for use across a range of functional areas relevant to NRM.

The project identified advantages and disadvantages in participatory research.



The framework can be adapted for use across a range of functional areas relevant to natural resource management.

Advantages of participation in research and development

- ◆ Recognition of local ways of knowing.
- ◆ Tapping into accumulated knowledge and experience of the community.
- ◆ More likely to generate sustainable processes and practices by supporting local innovation and adaptation, and enhancing capability.
- ◆ Encourage community ownership of both problems and solutions.

Disadvantages of participation in research and development

- ◆ Often competing conceptions of community needs, depending on interest groups and individuals involved.

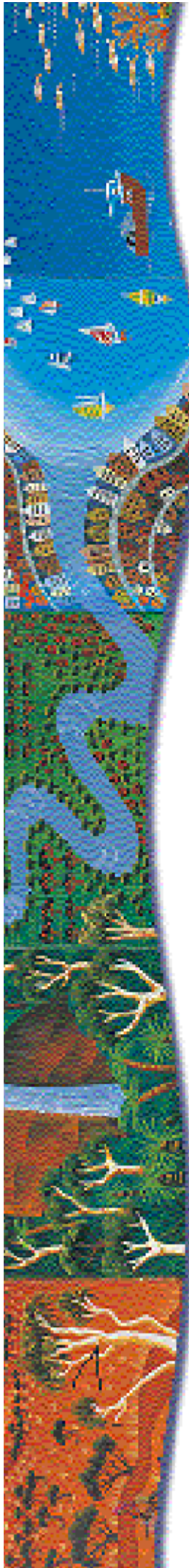
- ◆ Accumulation of local knowledge is impeded by lack of documentation and dissemination.
- ◆ Some research and action needs to be done at a larger-than-local scale. Policy making needs to be informed by research on an appropriate scale.
- ◆ Farmers may not wish to be involved.
- ◆ Scientists may be distracted from their primary role.
- ◆ Reduced quality of data when work is carried out by untrained personnel.

The research report recommends further testing and validation of this framework; the development of training in participatory practices; a workshop on participatory paradigms; and the need to monitor and evaluate participatory practices.

PRINCIPLES OF PARTICIPATION

Participation should:

1. Encompass the impacts and potential impacts (including the local and distant impacts, and the direct and indirect impacts).
2. Be broad and not limited to those with direct interests in the outcomes.
3. Incorporate the values and interests of participants.
4. Be encouraged across a variety of functions, not just research and development, such as:
 - ◆ regulatory restrictions - property rights, tenure, and access;
 - ◆ financial incentives and disincentives - subsidies, taxation, grants;
 - ◆ research and development - public funding;
 - ◆ education and training - lifelong, informal and formal;
 - ◆ physical infrastructure - transport, communications;
5. Be able to be initiated by any individual or group within the relevant community.
6. Be negotiated to fit with the purposes and processes of all potential participants, not just at the beginning but throughout the life of the project.
7. Engender intrinsic motivation and therefore creativity.
8. Enhance human and social capital.
9. Be aligned with the available resources.



IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

This project provides a framework that can be useful for:

- ◆ policy makers to check that they have included opportunities for participation in as many functional areas as possible;
- ◆ potential participants in research and development to assess the participatory requirements, if any, of a specific research and development situation and the desirable nature of such participation; and
- ◆ research leaders to use the framework as a checklist for participation in all aspects of research.

Researchers may be able to use the participatory research methods listed in the report to guide their practice and to understand that there is no single best way of carrying out participatory research.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ADVISORY & COMMUNITY GROUPS

The principles of participation can be adopted as is, or adapted as a set of values for a group. Research participants can use the framework to identify how and when they can become involved in participatory research projects and what the purposes and benefits may be.

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Other fact sheets available

The following project fact sheets in this series are available from Land & Water Australia:

- ◆ Community Participation in Australian Natural Resource Management (ANU21).
- ◆ 'It Can't Work Without People' Effective Relationships in Natural Resource Management (CAG2).
- ◆ Evaluating Integrated Catchment Management (CTC7).
- ◆ Using Citizens' Juries for Making Decisions in Natural Resource Management (ANU11).
- ◆ Social and Institutional Knowledge in Natural Resource Management (UTA11).
- ◆ Using Environmental Law for Effective Regulation (TPF1).
- ◆ The Potential for Private Sector Nature Conservation in Australia (ADF5).
- ◆ Supporting Decisions: Understanding Natural Resource Management Assessment Techniques (CLW24).
- ◆ Evaluating Natural Resource Management Policies and Programs (USQ3).
- ◆ Interdisciplinary Research in Natural Resource Management (UMU14).

There is also a booklet called *Natural Resource Management: People and Policies* that brings together the results of these 11 research projects.

For more information

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