

Session Plan Seven

Developing Communication Skills for Participatory Upland Watershed Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

1. Objectives

- To develop the practical skills needed to invite participation of local communities, especially women's participation, in the planning process
- To make visible the gaps in communication between frontline managers and stakeholders
- To develop empathy in managers, enabling them to communicate with people throughout the process of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation

2. Session Outline

- Commonality of expression
- Project approach: Ways and means of communication
- Presentation and listening skills
- Role plays to enact empathy
- Principles of communication

3. Session Time: 2 hrs

4. Assumptions

- Frontline managers in various government departments may fail to communicate.
- When communities receiving projects are not consulted during planning, the programmes fail to deliver the desired results.
- When project managers do not talk directly to people during planning, some vital linkages are overlooked in the process.
- Frontline managers lack the basic practical knowledge and skills of communicating with community members.

5. Session Design

What is Communication ? (10 mins)

To explain how messages change during their transmission throughout several stages, a small exercise may be carried out. This begins with one participant seeing a message written on paper. The message is whispered to the next participant and so on until the last person announces what he/she has heard. The

original message is compared to the final one. The extent and manner of distortion reflects the changes in perception during various stages of transmission. Down the official hierarchy, the essence of the information is transformed to an even greater extent. The game highlights the need for simplicity in communication.

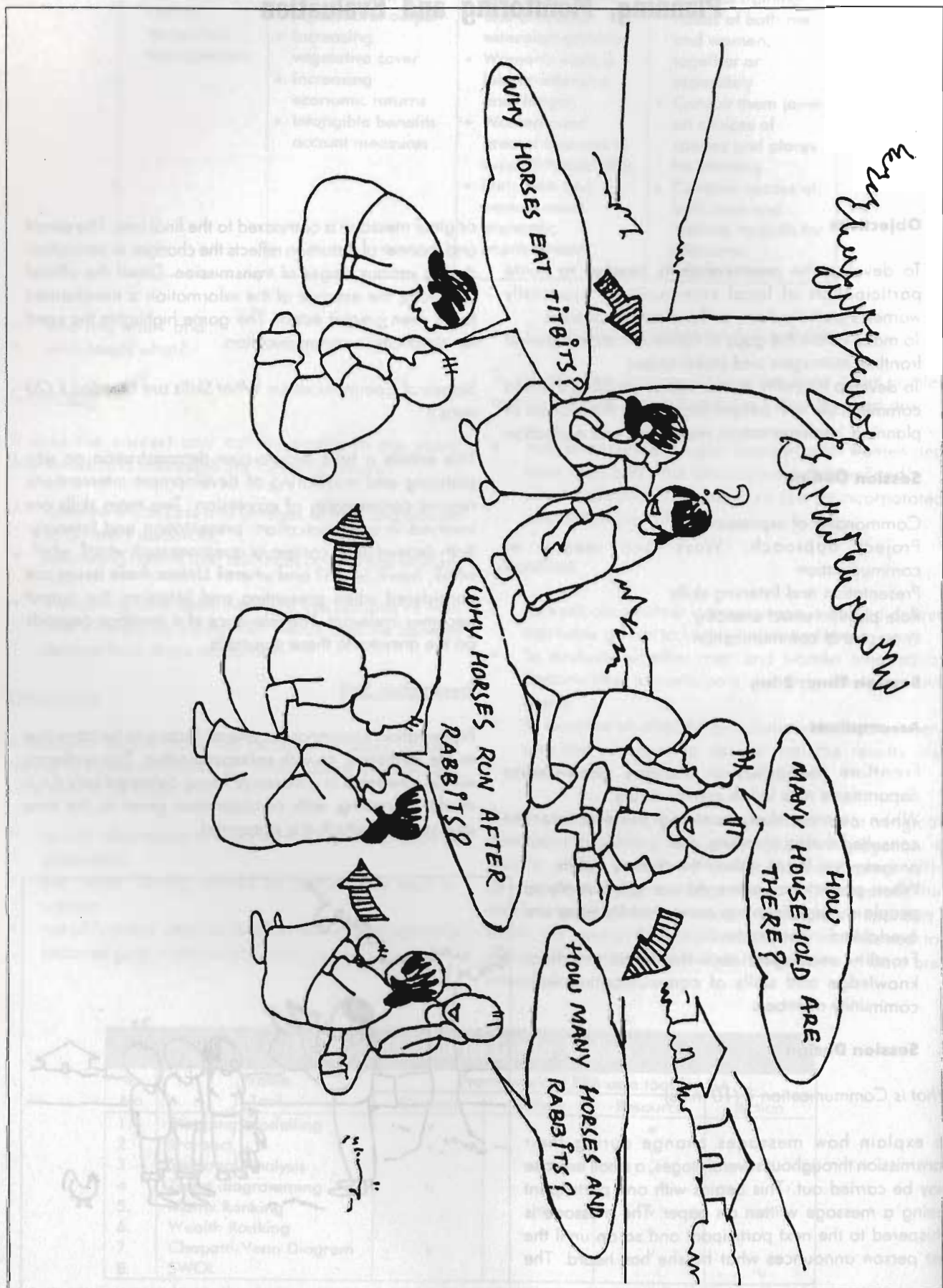
Stages of Communication: What Skills are Needed ? (20 mins.)

This entails a brief lecture-cum-demonstration on why planning and monitoring of development interventions require commonality of expression. Two main skills are involved in communication: presentation and listening. Both depend upon contextual questions such as what?, why?, who?, how?, when? and where? Unless these issues are considered when presenting and listening, the output becomes irrelevant. The relevance of a message depends on the answers to these questions.

Presentation Skill

Presentation encompasses several factors to be attractive to the audience, as with salespersonship. The audience will be interested in a message being delivered only if it is made interesting, with consideration given to the time and space in which it is presented.





Box 1

The art of presentation includes verbal communication and body language or non-verbal communication. The pitch and tone of the speaker when presenting affects the quality of verbal communication. Verbose, loaded and long communication styles, with interruptions in listening ("yes", "I see", "you know", "you see," etc.) are major distractions to the audience listening and registering the contents. A presentation should be structurally simple and articulate with short sentences and direct speech. In participatory approaches, the audience is different each time and the officials also change frequently. Therefore, it is essential to be slow, with pauses and clear pronunciation that gets across easily.

There are a number of simple aids for presentation which may be used to make the delivery interesting. These are listed in Table 1

Listening Skill

Hearing a message is different from the process of listening. While hearing is a mechanical reception, listening involves registering the essence in one's mind and simultaneously understanding it. During listening, nods, paraphrasing and sharing reflections (expression) of astonishment, agreeing to a point or grinning at appropriate instances, may provide positive feedback for the speaker.

The speed and style of presentation is often changed by the mood reflected in the audience. Eye contact with the audience has the inherent potential to modulate speech. When officials make eye contact with community members, they can arrest people's attention immediately, thereby causing conversations to be much more meaningful.

Art of inviting participation in planning, monitoring, and evaluation (20 mins.)

This will be conducted by listing probable indicators for use in planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes.



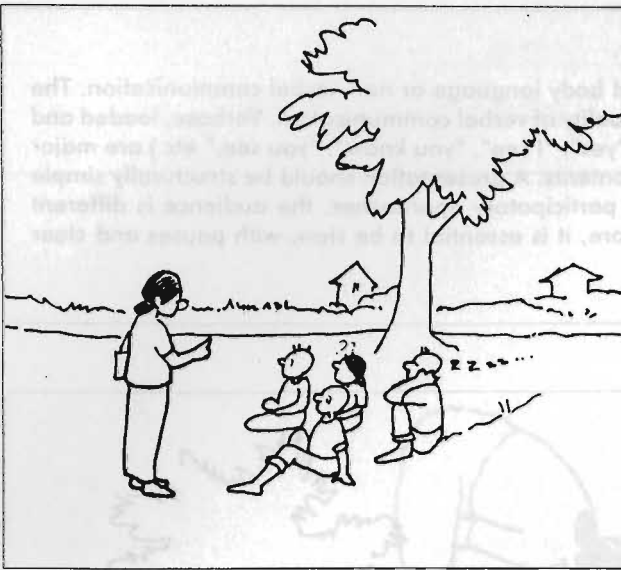
Role plays: What is reality ? (30 mins.)

Participants sit in groups of four or five. They will be playing the following roles.

- A Project Manager who is visiting people to deliver the available programme
- An Extension Worker who must mediate between people and the govt. official and who knows their language and resource limitations

Table 1: Uses of Aids

S. No.	Aids	Utility
1.	Flip - Charts	Most simple, speaking tool
2.	Boards	Portable, permanent, effectively conveying message
3.	Models	Simulation of real forms, effective
4.	Slides	Depiction of actual objects
5.	Transparencies	Can combine objects with messages
6.	Blackboards	Available in rural areas, can experimented with it
7.	Video tapes	Attracts crowds, very effective to catch live action
8.	Films	Big screen, strongly attractive to men, women and children immediately
9.	Audio tapes	Only after initial segregation has occurred
10.	Games	Full participation of audience, direct involvement and 'Do it Yourself'
11.	Wall Chart	Can stay and speak afterwards, too
12.	Extension kits	Can be handled later also
13.	Drama & Kits	Staging things that are and that could be



- A manager sitting and giving instructions, men listening with folded hands and women looking around
- A manager sitting on the floor and men and women sitting around with folded hands
- A manager working together with men and women, contributing in PRA on common ground and with gestures
- Men and women involved intensively, contributing, directing enthusiastically, and dominating the session

Often officials visit people as programme donors and people listen to them talk about their programmes without any apparent interest as the presentations are dry. Hands folded in front, chins raised, or arms pointing at objects and palms 'directing' activities, combined with a flavour of command in their voices, the process fails to invite participation in the conversation. The audiences immediately coil into their shells and become humble as acceptors, folding their hands behind and leaning their chins on their chests. To break away from these evident barriers, the officials will have to play new roles as facilitators. Spreading their arms to indicate a wider scope of conversation and with friendly expressions on their faces, they can build up a congenial environment for conversation. Slow, clear messages with pauses also allow the audience to interject and express themselves wherever they wish.

- Community Members who have to execute the plans (from the formulation stage) and work on indicators
- An Observer who will be recording the key points on the mode of conversation among the team members.

The observer will make analytical comments on the process.

The observers will present their notes analysing the role play which will be followed by a dialogue among the participants who will comment on:

- what went wrong and
- what went right ?

Each group observer may present the findings in five minutes.

The interpretation of gestures, postures and tone will be analysed to focus on what is most acceptable to the clients and what involves them actively so they contribute meaningfully in the planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes. The facilitator will moderate how communication can be made effective and conclude the session.

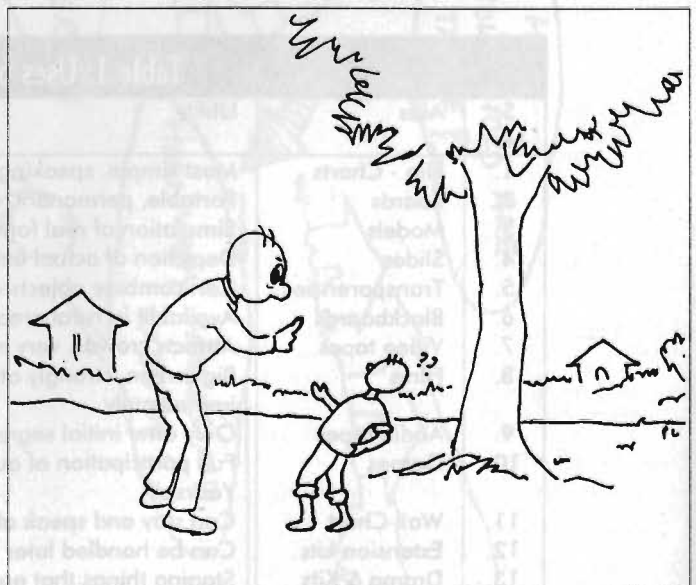
6. Aids Required

- Set of slides depicting how conversations usually take place with and without people participating in them.

The following combinations have been worked out.

- A manager with hands folded in the front, sitting on a chair, people sitting on the floor
- A manager sitting on a raised platform and people sitting in the front
- A manager standing and giving instructions and people watching and listening

- Set of slides on jokes, sketches of an upland watershed: a man with hair and another without hair and water is being poured on their heads to demonstrate the runoff extent when checked by plantation.
- Role play slips in four sets briefly stating the different roles
- Small clippings from video films depicting the basics of participatory expression



7. Notes for Trainers

The success of participatory methods greatly depends on how the ice-breaking has taken place. Voluntary contributions to the planning process by community members may indicate a successful entry point managed by the officials. The further impact on monitoring and evaluation may also be observed by the following tools given by Assifi and French (1991).

- Direct, personal communication
- Smaller group discussions
- Self-evaluation
- Informal walks to work spots
- Reports and feedback
- Measuring verifiable indicators

The power of communication is affected by the main processes of listening and presentation skills.

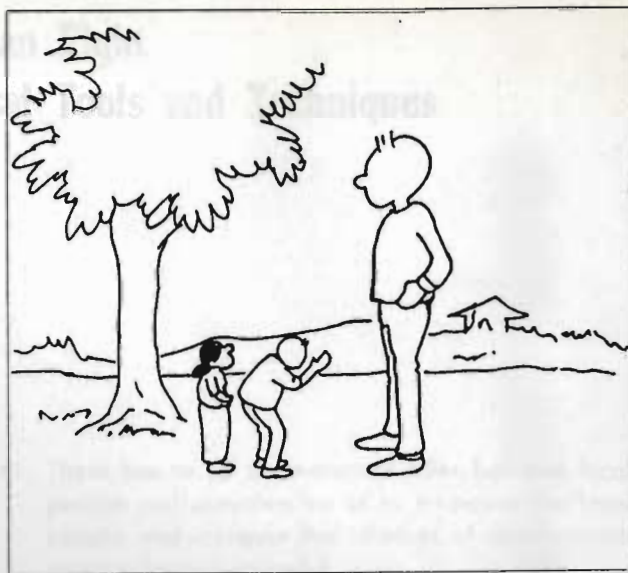
The approach to participatory watershed management usually used is based on PRA techniques. People's participation in PRA and planning, based on resource use efficiency, is directly proportional to the level of precision used in communication. The distance between the government officials and the client group is often wide as their visits to the actual sites of development are very formal.

Official staff who take a number of factors for granted and form their own opinions about the programme often begin with preconceived notions. Local people, for their part, do not feel comfortable in the presence of government officials and, being resigned to fate, do not ask questions. The art of communication required at the stages of planning, monitoring and evaluation is different. Much depends upon the channels of communication practised by officials and the response of community members.

The modes of communication between two groups may fall into the following categories.

Modes of Communication

- One-way communication - The process in which officials visit local people, deliver their ideas, and



expect the people to implement them. They fail to listen to the community's needs and constraints regarding acceptance and implementation.

- Two-way communication - The needs and limitations of the local communities are considered and joint planning outlining the strategies is carried out.
- Three-way communication - Additional information from other sources enters the system and reinforces the planning base with rich implementation strategies.

In one programme monitoring meeting of a watershed in Garhwal, India, when water recharge was being discussed as a product of vegetative measures adopted to check erosion on the slopes, the men sitting around responded by confirming an increase in the potential irrigation available downhill. The women pointed out immediately that the precious time they had been able to save by collecting water from a newly-charged hand pump, which had previously gone dry due to drought, was a dearer achievement to them. Such triangulation and cross-checking of information is extremely helpful in the monitoring and evaluation process.