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Participation and U; A Case-Based Testing of Theory-U's Utility in Facilitating the Pivot towards Participatory Development Practice

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Abstract

This thesis will contribute to the transition the development sector presently sees itself confronted with. This transition involves the pivoting from project-based development endeavors, whereby frameworks and targets defined in the Global North play a dominant role in defining the overall development trajectory. It will engage with the question how development organizations can effectively structure their activities in a manner that prioritizes inclusive sustainable development rooted in systems thinking and local participation. It will also reflect on the history of development management, how the present state of affairs hinders participatory development from being practiced effectively, and what pitfalls need to be considered when pivoting towards participatory practice. These questions are approached by testing a method of enacting systems change called the Theory-U model. Its utility will be tested through a single-case study in which the proposed trajectory is contrasted with three instances of successful participatory practice as executed by CRHP in India. The Theory-U model does demonstrate significant levels of overlap with CRHP's trajectory of change, and could be instructive to the practice of participatory development for other aid agencies. Further research will have to test whether this overlap is found in other instances of successful participatory practice of development.

Key Words: Development, India, Participatory Development, Project Design, Systems Thinking, Localization, Innovation, Sustainability, Complexity, Theory-U, Transition Theory

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List of Abbreviations

CRHP – Comprehensive Rural Health Project

NGO – Non-governmental organization

MVM – Mahila Vikas Mandals, translated as Women's Development Associations

Table of Content

1. Introduction

Development is transition. By its very nature the enacting of development work, and the subsequent positive change sought to be achieved by it in any given context, implies a deliberate attempt to transition a population from an experience of deprivation into a state of better wellbeing. The significance of doing transitions well is therefore at the core of development practice, and its value is inherently understood by the institutions operating in this field. This does, however, not imply that all transition processes are created equal, nor that all of them result in positive and sustainable outcomes. The complexity of the transitions sought to be achieved by development actors frequently results in only partial success, and the occasional outright failing, of reaching appropriate and sustainable outcomes (Easterly, 2006). In a rapidly changing world development actors themselves are, therefore, also engaged with constant internal and external transitions in order to render their activities relevant, appropriate, and sustainable.

One of the contemporary transitions prevalent within development practice is arguably the increased interest given to participatory methods, local ownership of both an intervention and its subsequent outcomes, and its relationship to outcome sustainability (Ramalingam, 2013). This follows the increased emphasis on sustainability as a core metric of success in both the environmental and outcome durability sense, as well as the increased unease felt with past efforts characterized by externally defined targets and methods. This is most evidently demonstrated by its foundational presence in the Agenda 2030 (Halkos and Gkampoura, 2021). This internationally agreed upon agenda, compiled through a rigorous cooperative process between a wide variety of both governmental and non-governmental entities, departed from earlier global agreements (most notably the Millenium Development Goals) in its explicit emphasis on the complex and inter-related nature of the seventeen goals it seeks to achieve by the year 2030 (Fukuda-Parr, 2016). In other words, it is set up in the recognition that these goals cannot be reached by treating them in isolation from one another. Instead, development efforts need to design approaches that fully integrate the complex web of inter-related variables which presently sustain the status quo.

This transition is a complex one as the higher degree of stakeholder inclusion, associated with this type of development practice, adds new elements of complexity to the design, implementation, and evaluation of development interventions. It also requires more flexibility in programming and budgeting from development actors, as their technical expertise is now

only rendered part of the equation rather than the solution itself. Perhaps the most complicated aspect of this approach, however, is that its emphasis on treating problems in their full complexity warrants significant participation of recipient communities in order to ensure their needs and priorities are reflected in the project design and agenda. This brings forth its own set of complications, since local socio-cultural conditions could prevent equal participation in both the project design process and the subsequent agenda it seeks to pursue in its follow-up. Adequate and inclusive local platforms and institutions are therefore essential to warrant the equality of represented voices and interests across the communities. Various organizations around the world have already pioneered new ways of practice to adopt these techniques, with the Comprehensive Rural Health Project (CRHP) in Jamkhed, India, being a prominent one among them. Their efforts have rendered major successes towards better public health outcomes using local participation, and their journey will be analyzed in this thesis. If done well, these methods have the potential to greatly enhance the impact and sustainability of the development sector whilst rendering arguably harmful practices, such as discrimination based on gender, caste, sexual orientation, etc., less prevalent (Cleaver, 2001).

Study Aim and Research Questions

One could see this transition as a gradual paradigm shift from a planning-based project design to one rooted in systems thinking, and a lot of work has been published to highlight its potential and utility. Dissecting and testing some of the methodologies that emerged from this wave can render great value to development organizations in their efforts to reorganize their approaches. This research, therefore, aims to support the transition of the development sector towards approaches rooted in systems thinking, in order to render this transition successful and sustainable.

In this pursuit, the thesis will seek to answer the following main research question:

How can development organizations effectively structure their activities in a manner that prioritizes inclusive sustainable development rooted in systems thinking and local participation?

This main research question will be approached through several sub-questions, which are the following:

- How did the development sector reach its present state of organization?
- What constraints do its current approaches impose on locally-led development?
- What are some of the vulnerabilities that development agencies need to be mindful of when transitioning to participatory methods of development?

By unpacking the evolution of the development sector, how the present constrains the next chapter of its effort, and the risks this will entail, substantive insights will be generated that will inform the answer to the main research question. In order to make sure that its conclusions are broadly informed, however, this research will first conduct a review of existing academic literature. Following this, the methodological structure of this research will be presented. Given the complexity of pursuing systems change through participatory methods, identifying appropriate theories of change could greatly inform how aid agencies can pivot their projects. For this reason, it will utilize a management theory that is rooted in systems thinking as its theoretical framework, in order to test its utility for application in the development sector. Specifically, the following research will outline the Theory-U model of organizational change and test its competence by means of a single-case study of the Comprehensive Rural Health Project (CRHP) in Jamkhed, India. The outcomes of this will be presented in the findings section. This organization has been widely acknowledged as a pioneer in participatory methods, and modeling its interventions through a theoretical lens could give constructive insights into how to practically design and approach these strategies. Once these chapters have been presented, a discussion section will reflect on some of its findings and implications, after which some final conclusions will be drawn.

Through comparing and contrasting their project design strategies, as documented in the memoir of their founders, with the structure of the Theory-U model and its various components, this thesis hopes to draw some meaningful conclusions about its potential for the future of development methodological design. After all, for sustainable development to be successfully achieved, its methodologies need to be just as durable and context-appropriate as the results they seek to produce.

2. <u>Literature Review</u>

The sector of development is a rich and interdisciplinary one, and its practice has been influenced by a wide variety of actors. In order to comprehensively understand the present state of the development sector, and the transition it sees itself confronted with, it is important to reflect on some of the previous research done in this field. The following sections will therefore provide an overview of the history of the development sector and its practice, the challenges it has most recently seen itself confronted with, and reflect on various critiques and visions on how the subsequent transition should be approached by the field. It will also briefly touch on the context of development practice in South Asia in order to contextualize the data used in this thesis.

A Brief History of Development

The efforts of development have been framed in a wide variety of ways, ranging anywhere from an act of pure compassion to a neocolonial endeavor who's agenda and actions are largely defined by actors in the Global North. Research by Polanyi Levitt (2018) outlines the history of the development sector in some detail, which shows that its efforts have been widely shaped by global political and economical considerations. In its initial phase following the second world war it was at least in part, if not largely, inspired by the 'red scare' of communism, along with geo-political considerations in a gradually decolonizing world. With liberal capitalism as its ultimate goal, vast research endeavors were dedicated to create grand plans for the 'take-off' of the Global South. This was envisioned to be achieved through a predefined series of stages, irrespective of context, which were supposedly following the development trajectories of already industrialized societies (Gunaratna, 2018). While the field of development was still considered somewhat separate from regular economics in its initial phase, the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980's effectively ended this distinction with respect to the large development institutions (Polanyi Levitt, 2018). This caused a dramatic rift in the overall development effort, whereby on the one hand international monetary policy forced a lot of nationally-led developmental and social services to be drastically scaled back in many developing countries (often with harsh consequences for its recipients). Simultaneously though, the rise of both locally-rooted and international civil society actors started to play a more prominent role and started pioneering more participation-driven development models. This latter development inspired a gradual process whereby civil society actors increasingly embraced complexity in their programming,

signified among others by the rise of the livelihoods approach in rural development practice (Ellis and Biggs, 2001). At the time of writing their reflections on the evolution of rural development, however, Ellis and Biggs (2001) also note that many leaps still needed to be made with respect to embracing cross- or multi-sector views of rural poverty reduction.

Critiques on the Aid System

Between then and now the development sector has changed substantially, and much critique has been raised about both its structure as well as the outcomes it produces. In his book 'Aid on the Edge of Chaos', Ramalingam (2013) describes how contemporary aid has become dramatically complicated and decentralized, whereby "aid is uneven and disproportionate, politicized and undemocratic, less a global welfare system and more a global postcode lottery with few handpicked winners and many, many more losers" (Ramalingam, 2013, 5). This rather gloomy picture, he argues, is a consequence of the incentives and predominant ideas within the aid system itself, many of which can be traced back to earlier identified historical and economic developments. It is worth briefly highlighting some of the main incentives referenced here by revisiting some commonly cited critiques of foreign aid and development from the past four decades. Doing so will substantiate the motivation behind this research, and outline the challenges this sector sees itself confronted with.

The first common critique relates to the lack of feedback loops present in contemporary aid, and specifically those between aid recipients and aid agencies. Robert Chambers (1997), a well known scholar in development for his work on participatory methods, notes how local processes of all natures are often un(der)perceived by outsiders, and that many of the most important change dynamics are very hard to capture in the questionnaires and surveys common to the methods of aid agencies. Furthermore, many aid agencies across the world face away from beneficiaries for insights and feedback, due to a bias which favors centralized and academic knowledge over the knowledge held by those aid seeks to benefit (Chambers, 1983). However, it is argued that the local knowledge one fails to thereby consider has immense value to aid, since it is accumulated over sustained periods of time and rooted in the local realities of prospective beneficiaries. Chambers (1983) even argues that "it is the powerful who are ignorant. It is they who have to begin as learners, and rural people who can instruct them" (Chambers, 1983, 84). Often, he finds, the wants and needs of local poor people do not align with what is expected by professionals in development aid (Chambers, 1997). This is echoed by Easterly (2006), who argues that this state of affairs results in many

instances of irrelevant project achievements being pursued by development agencies, whilst the most dire needs are left unaddressed. He distinguishes between Planners (actors distant from the ground reality setting out plans without being responsible for the results) and Searchers (actors close to the ground that absorb local conditions and feedback to design custom solutions to experienced problems), and argues that the proximity to recipients makes Searchers far more effective and efficient at delivering appropriate results.

Easterly (2006) points out that Planners still dominate the development efforts and discourse. The consequences, he argues, are that poverty is still a fact of life for many on Earth despite sixty years and $2.3 trillion dollars in efforts. Whilst this might represent a slightly stark depiction of reality, Chambers (1997) raises similar concerns when he argues that the use of simplifications and theoretical models provides an artificial security for donors whilst often failing to deliver practical and needed solutions to those they seek to ultimately benefit. These simplifications and theoretical models, Easterly (2006) would no doubt proclaim, are the result of Planners running the development efforts from top to bottom. Furthermore, Ramalingam (2013) points out that the incentives in the aid industry are shaped in such a way that "there is far more policy-based evidence than evidence-based policy" (Ramalingam, 2013, 27). In other words, development policy is designed in such a way as to demonstrate measurable results to the donors, even if these results might not ultimately reflect the actual needs on the ground. By simplifying and reducing the complex reality of development down to whatever methodologies a development agency feels comfortable engaging with, the evident risk is a loss of effectiveness and sustainability of its efforts. At worst, Ramalingan (2013) argues, this tendency results in blueprint solutions that effectively turn the development equation on its head. Rather than designing a solution to a problem experienced by those in need, aid agencies would instead arrive with pre-designed solutions in search of a problem to solve it with, irrespective of whether this solution is actually appropriate. Given the highly important nature of a well-functioning development sector for many people across the world, these perspectives do serve as both alarming and instructive in setting the stage for some of the most recent programming evolutions within the field.

Agenda 2030 – A Change of Tune?

Whilst some of the raised critiques of the development aid sector do raise serious concerns, there are also signs that complexity is increasingly being embraced by its actors. Fox and Stoett (2016) for instance note how the unprecedented degree of civil society participation in

the formulation process of the Agenda 2030 does significantly uplift the democratic legitimacy of this global development agenda. Fukuda-Parr (2016) further notes how the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) encompass a broader and more inter-related agenda, which includes aspects of human development and human rights previously left unaddressed in the Millennium Goals that preceded them. And finally, Costanza et al (2016) find that the SDGs have a more integrated design wherein the inter-related nature of the various goals is explicitly set out in the formulation of the Agenda 2030, signifying the recognition of complexity in approaching these goals in the years ahead. In other words, complexity is gaining traction as an inevitable factor to work with in order for truly sustainable development to occur. The question then remains how development agencies can best integrate complexity in their programming endeavors, which is what the next sections will focus on.

The Rise of Participatory Methodologies

In an effort to more adequately incorporate local realities and complexity into their project design, methods of practice involving the participation of its beneficiaries have been steadily gaining traction since the 1980's. As one of the leading thinkers on these methodologies, Robert Chambers (1997) writes that "participation, empowerment and mutual respect enable lowers (in terms of power), and poor people in general, to express and analyze their individual and shared realities". His signature method in pursuit of this, called participatory rural appraisal, has been taken up widely within the sector. It consists of a variety of facilitated engagements, with and between beneficiaries, in order for them to voice their priorities and collectively develop solutions (Chambers, 1997). Whilst this approach, and subsequent participatory methodologies, did gain a lot of positive reception in development agencies, some common pitfalls in working through participatory means are worth highlighting. Although the range of debates around participatory methods certainly exceeds those arguments analyzed below, a selection has been made based on the relevance to the subsequent analysis of this research.

The first debate on participation revolves around its purpose as either means of, or ends to, accomplishing sustainable development, from the perspective of aid agencies. In his analysis of participatory projects in the 1980's, Oakley (1987) notes how participation as means has been the dominant approach. It often involved setting up temporary local institutions to assist in implementing goals that were still often conceived outside of the community itself. This,

he argued, has not resulted in participation that is meaningful for the rural poor, since its lack of addressing structural local power imbalances fails to sustainably empower the communities beyond the scope of the intervention (which also threatens the sustainability of its results. Parfitt (2004) also acknowledges the limitation of using participation as means rather than an end in this respect, but argues that aid agencies do have to strike a balance between these two options. He frames it as a balance between empowerment (participation as an end) and efficiency (participation as a means), and concludes that various factors will influence the balance that is struck between these ends, subject to an aid agency's philosophy and financial means among other considerations. There are, therefore, no straightforward answers pertaining to this balance, but staying clear of either extreme certainly seems to be a desirable standard by which to measure meaningful participatory practice.

Continuing on this line of thought, the second debate touches upon how participation is expected to be achieved. Mansuri and Rao (2013) note that induced participation is at the heart of most participatory project planning, meaning aid agency's staff members will proactively seek to seduce participation from the respective community beneficiaries. This is often initiated with the goal of having the initial outreach evolve into organic participation, whereby intrinsically motivated agents within the group of beneficiaries initiate efforts to change their conditions without external incentives to do so. These two manifestations of participation are by no means mutually exclusive, but given the often temporary nature of development interventions it is organic participation that is most likely to lead to long-term sustainability of outcomes (Mansuri and Rao, 2013). Organic participation also comes with its own set of problems for development agencies, primarily being that the process is much harder to predict or control. Oakley (1987) points out though that the alternative, induced participation without direct access to decision-making on the problems and practices that concerns the beneficiaries, renders it largely meaningless. If participation is sought to truly be leveraged to its potential, he argues, projects should commit to creating the groundwork for inclusive and genuine participation as a goal in itself. Going beyond mere economic and quantifiable targets, the delivery of a more inclusive and democratically-minded beneficiary group will render all subsequent development endeavors much more tangible and fruitful (Oakley, 1987).

The third debate pertains to the balance between outsider knowledge, usually brought in by aid agency staff members, and local knowledge owned and produced by aid beneficiaries. Leveraging local knowledge is at the core of reasons as to why participatory methods are

worth pursuing, since they will arguably render development projects more context-sensitive and locally supported. As Mosse (2001) points out though, the way local knowledge is constructed and presented is often influenced by local power dynamics. People of lower socio-economic standards might for instance be reluctant to publicly oppose those they are indebted to in some manner, even if their knowledge objectively is more beneficial to the project's overall outcomes. In addition to that, Mosse (2001) also emphasizes that the way local knowledge is constructed can be strongly influenced by the type of engagement aid agencies choose in order to engage with the beneficiaries (e.g. public gatherings or selective ones). Depending on what beneficiaries expect of the intervention, they can therefore tailor project structures by choosing what local knowledge to share, even if this steers the intervention in an unconstructive direction for long-term sustainable development. Chambers (1983) recognized this risk as well, and argued that finding the right balance between local and outsider knowledge is a critical component of facilitating constructive participatory development. Local knowledge, in other words, does not deserve uncritical acceptance in all circumstances, even whilst being a core component of participatory methods. Parfitt (2004) also notes that power dynamics will always be present in development, and that not adequately addressing this when engaging with participatory methods will only blind us from its more subtle, but no less pervasive and repressive expressions. Local knowledge therefore needs to be approached with mindfulness of the various processes that influence its construction, and adequate facilitation is critical to its content being as inclusive of all groups of society as possible.

Long story short, leveraging participation in development is complicated. It requires a very different set of skills from aid agencies, relinquishes some of their agency over the process, and could even require a fundamental restructuring of the sector if these methods are adopted as standard practice in their fullest potential. Chambers (1997) notes how "all are challenged to change at all levels", which is no easy task in an era of increased global instability. However, Mansuri and Rao's (2013) findings bring forth that effective civic engagement never develops along pre-planned and predicted lines, but instead is characterized by ups and downs, slow periods followed by rapid escalations of change, and always includes an element of risk. Rather than pre-planned blueprint solutions, Oakley (1987) therefore argues that participation is about learning and the production of knowledge. Learning by doing, both from the perspectives of project beneficiaries as well as aid agencies, can inspire both actors to invent and own solutions that are fully conducive to local needs and priorities. In addition

to this, Mansuri and Rao (2013) also note that "involving citizens in decision making may also have intrinsic value, because training them in the everyday business of democratic governance may enhance their dignity and promote their quest for freedom" (Mansuri and Rao, 2013, 283). Participation thus has a lot of potential if wielded well, and could address many of the controversies raised in earlier sections. It is evident though that a wholesale reform of the development sector on this scale is no short-term endeavor, as evidenced by its lack of completion since Oakley (1987) and Chambers (1983) produced their initial cases for this transition. How then, can we begin to take steps in this direction?

New Management Style

In his analysis of the evolving role of partnerships within the development sector, Alan Fowler (1999) finds that "the best practice in working with communities of poor and/ or marginalized people requires the creation of empowering relationships with them (Fowler, 1999, 144). This, among other things, implies giving them negotiating power to co-decide on key developments in the intervention designed to benefit their cause. Although this might seem like a fairly straightforward process, it implies a permanent presence of aid agency representatives that have sufficient decision-making power to adapt project approaches whenever the recipient community deems this necessary. In other words, aid agencies need to be as close to their beneficiaries as possible, both mentally and physically.

According to Fowler (1999), the logical next stage for the development sector is therefore to decentralize and hand over power to actors closer to the beneficiaries of aid interventions. This needs to be paired with a degree of organizational democracy in order to be truly successful, since this shift in power will imply a more direct voice of an aid agency's staff in its strategic direction and decision making. He outlines three types of decentralization, being:

1. Deconcentration, wherein authority remains based at the top while responsibilities and tasks are allocated downward.
2. Delegation, whereby responsibilities and authority are redirected to actors within the organization at lower levels, such as country directors or field workers.
3. Devolution, which is the most thorough form of decentralization whereby an organization's mandate, goals and functions are distributed to external and/ or autonomous organizations (Fowler, 1999, 144)

Aside from going through an element of decentralization though, true participation of participants on the ground also requires a more flexible and intuitive management style for those actors closest to the ground (Chambers, 1997). To expand on this in more detail, we will take a brief look at a recent work by Dan Honig (2018) wherein he outlines a management style called 'Navigating by Judgement'. He describes this as "an organizational strategy in which front-line employees are able to meaningfully guide their organization's work based upon their judgments (Honig, 2018, 14). Effectively this follows the delegation method of decentralization, since it places a high degree of procedural power in the hands of field staff, who, in cooperation with project beneficiaries, have high discretionary authority to design an intervention by judgement on the ground. Honig (2018) argues that the complexity of certain development challenges will never be fully captured by the frameworks and research models common to contemporary development practice, and that these often hinder local agents from acting on local information that he/ she has access to for the benefit of the respective intervention. The returns on this strategy are furthermore negatively correlated to a project's external verifiability and predictability of outcomes, meaning that its implementation will reach its ultimate potential in contexts where frequent adaption of strategy might be essential to its success.

The trade-off to this strategy is predictability of outcomes, as well as a higher potential for fraudulent behavior by field actors due to their high levels of discretion. Trust is therefore essential to make this strategy come to fruition, and navigation by judgement certainly might not be appropriate for every development intervention. The local discretion will however be very conducive to effective participation, and accommodates to many of the criteria set out in the works previously presented. It is therefore a notable management concept worthy of further scrutiny.

South Asian Participatory Development

It is now instructive to turn our attention towards the South Asian region, both as a context for investigation and as introduction to the region the data for this research originates from. This is because, while navigation by judgement along with the various other concepts discussed so far are still being advocated in academic literature in the Global North, its principles have already been implemented for decades in various locally-led South Asian Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). In an elaborate comparative research project on nine successful South Asian NGOs, Hailey and Smillie (2001) reflect on some of the core

factors that characterized the management and leadership of these organizations. Since this has particular relevance to the subject of this study, and touches upon many points previously raised, this research will be highlighted in quite some detail below.

They start by describing the evolution of the aid industry's landscape in the region, whereby organizations from the Global North initially dominated the effort in terms of scope and resources. This lasted until the mid-1970's, after which more cooperation was sought with organizations led by people from the respective South Asian countries themselves. The environment in which these organizations had to operate is described as highly unstable, due to a combination of political volatility and the various natural disasters the region is prone to experience (and some of the organizations did encounter during their work). This is a noteworthy condition, as it implies an alignment between the region and the conditions described as important for the practice of navigation by judgement.

When organizations first get established, Hailey and Smillie (2001) observe that they are "run almost as family units – highly personalized and highly informal. Relationships are usually strong and there is a warm atmosphere. Leadership is held in respect and generally, staff are content to follow" (Hailey and Smillie, 2001, 56). As organizations grow and mature however, the informal nature of interpersonal dynamics within the NGO is supplemented with procedures and structures. This is paired with yielding higher discretionary autonomy to staff members. Meanwhile a strong sense of organizational unity is retained through a continuing and unique set of rituals and practices among staff members, such as after-work chats or collective prayer ceremonies ahead of any work day. This suggests therefore that, while growing organizations inevitably lose some of the tight personal relationships characteristic of smaller organizations in this study, a profound effort is made to retain a sense of collectivity among staff in the organizations studied by Hailey and Smillie (2001).

A second key characteristic of the organizations studied by Hailey and Smillie (2001) is their deep commitment to the continuous learning and training of their organizational staff. All organizations reported some form of induction programs, and training and continuous learning on the job is strongly encouraged. It is also emphasized that this learning requires constant attention and investment from organizational leadership, as it is not a natural occurrence in NGOs nor organizations in general. Hailey and Smillie (2001) note though that human capital is often the defining asset of many NGOs in the face of unstable environments and resource availability, so channeling ample resources to this could strongly enhance an

organization's ability to weather the various storms it faces over its lifespan. Given the successful nature of the organizations covered, the evidence strongly points in that direction in this study.

Related to the organizational learning commitment, the third aspect worth highlighting is the participative leadership which characterizes the NGO's studied by Hailey and Smillie (2001). They confirm findings by Fowler (1999) that hierarchies are not mutually exclusive to participatory development practice, and that a right functioning of hierarchies with an appropriate designation of responsibilities and autonomy is perfectly conducive to these approaches. Leadership, then, becomes more about maintaining a vision and organizational culture within which the collective can function and work towards. Hailey and Smillie (2001) explicitly contrast this with the concept of managing, which they describe as "more concerned with implementing strategies and plans" (Hailey and Smillie, 2001, 155). It is in this description that we are also reminded of the critiques raised by Chambers (1997), Easterly (2006) and Ramalingam (2013), and the workings of these South Asian organizations therefore could be considered very instructive when considering new ways of doing development work.

Of course these organizations and their respective methods, and the similarities between them, did not occur in South Asia by matter of coincidence. In an earlier study on development organizations in this region, Fernandez (1987) already noted how self-help groups and local self-reliance were the traditional basis of Indian society. This finding suggests that working through NGO-community partnerships therefore capitalizes on an established cultural practice and leverages it accordingly. Of course this in itself does not guarantee inclusive participation, as Hossain et al (2004) note in their study on the impact of community development on health provisions and services in South Asia. Nonetheless, they also find that, with adequate facilitation, major gains can be made through leveraging equal partnerships with local communities. The biggest restricting factor in enacting this, they note, is often a constraint in timeline, resources, and flexibility, again echoing concerns raised by other major thinkers in development.

In summary, it can therefore be concluded that structural critiques have been expressed for decades on how development work is being conducted. In spite of some improvements in thinking, as arguably exemplified by the Agenda 2030, many major aid organizations still have difficulty pivoting to a method of working that is more locally-led and conducive to

integrating community priorities and complexity. A resolve could therefore come from a straightforward and practical theory of practice that is more inclusive of these aspects, and the remainder of this research will interrogate one such method in this pursuit.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework selected for this thesis project is known as the Theory-U model, which was published by C. Otto Scharmer (2007). This theory proposes a 5-step trajectory of broadly defined stages through which an organization or community can proceed in order to collectively design a new reality, whether that be a new business procedure or a new way of interacting with fellow citizens in a given community. The pursuit of collectively designed new realities is directly in line with the overall goal of participatory development, and additionally alludes to elements of navigating by judgement on a community level. Its selection as a core component does, therefore, fall well in line with some of the perspectives presented in the literature review. In his reasoning behind the model, Scharmer (2007) describes how established paradigms and socio-cultural institutions prevent individuals and communities from imagining and realizing more productive and progressive ways of pursuing their goals. The steps he subsequently introduces are broadly applicable to a wide variety of organizations, including the communities subject to further analysis later in this research piece. What makes the Theory-U model particularly interesting to utilize as a tool for analysis is its foundation in systems thinking and the conviction that a given community has the resources and knowledge to enact positive change if they manage to collectively adopt the right mindset. When relating this sentiment back to the notions raised earlier in the literature, a high degree of overlap can be observed. It alludes to the same philosophical foundations that participatory methodologies are founded upon, and is broad enough to be transmissible to various sections of the development sector. For this research, however, the Theory-U will be tested from the perspective of rural communities in India.

In order to respond to the research question in its pursuit for useful frameworks conducive to sustainable development planning rooted in systems thinking, this thesis will unpack three cases of community change invoked by the CRHP organization using the Theory-U framework designed by Otto Scharmer (2007). This theory will be closely compared to the

process developments identified in the data, and the degree of its overlap will render meaningful lessons pertaining to the research questions of this thesis. In its totality the Theory-U model proposes a trajectory for the change process itself, as well as criteria for the actor who facilitates the process and the interaction between this actor and the agent(s) partaking in the Theory-U transition process. However, not all of these will be comprehensively expanded upon due to the limited scope of this research. While it is found that the criteria pertaining to leadership qualities, as well as the listening strategies of said leadership, are met by CRHP in their change efforts in rural India, this will therefore not be further argued for within this research. If one wishes to conduct further study into these aspects of the framework as pertaining to CRHP's characteristics, we advise a separate study into this matter.

Figure 1: Illustration Theory U (Scharmer, 2007)

The transition process advocated by Scharmer (2007) is illustrated in Figure 1, as excerpted from his book. One should note however that the most common way a given community operates is not featured within this figure, as this behavior does not constitute a change process. This figure therefore omits two steps, in spite of them being mentioned in the description of Theory-U overall. To clarify the regular state of affairs according to this theory, these two steps will very briefly be detailed before contrasting this with a more elaborate description of the Theory-U change process itself.

If regular change (instead of systemic change) is pursued, a given community will take information from their context through a process Scharmer (2007) calls downloading. In Figure 1, this step would be found above the co-initiation stage. During downloading the gathered information is processed through its comparison to past experiences, after which a reaction will be enacted that takes the group to the 'performing' stage. In this stage, found above the co-evolving stage, a change is completed and enacted upon. This type of change is typical of human behavior and occurs across every day of one's life on all levels of society. It does not, however, question the paradigms underlying the decision-making process and therefore does not yield systemic change. To expand our horizon and consider options beyond those our existing experiences and information would allow us to imagine, we therefore have to go down the U.

Co-initiating, or seeing, is the start of each systemic change endeavor according to this theory, which is when an individual or group of people identify the need for meaningful change to take place. For this to take place, Scharmer (2007) says, one needs to "(1) clarify question and intent, (2) move into the context that matters, and (3) suspend judgement and connect to wonder" (Scharmer, 2007, 131). Effectively this signifies the initiation of a collective research process to re-define along which lines decisions are made, and it is often approached through engaging in dialogue. The respective community assembles and establishes a common intent, agrees to the goals, roughly defines the process through which this is set to be achieved, and the people who will be involved in seeing this change enacted.

The following step is co-sensing, which centers itself around observing with an open mind and heart. It is in this stage that one identifies the system that all are both beholding to and simultaneously sustaining, along with the constraints this system imposes on collective progress. It allows those engaging in the process to observe themselves taking part in this system, along with one's agency to change it. During this stage a deep and profound process of team building takes place wherein members collectively and empathetically voice and absorb each other's ideas and perspectives on this system, thereby taking the co-initiating stage to a deeper level.

At the deepest level of the U-journey one finds the stage of presencing, which Scharmer (2007) describes as connecting "with the Source of the highest possibility and to bring it into the now" (Scharmer, 2007, 163). It resembles sensing in that its collective awareness of the system plays a central role. What makes presencing more advanced is that, instead of

reflecting on the previous system, its non-essential aspects are collectively done away with and an openness to a new reality comes in its place. The critiques and awareness generated in the previous stages now are used to imagine a more desirable system from taking the place of the former. This is the most profound stage where the heart, mind and will of the group collectively are open to transform their present situation to the one they seek to develop.

After having formed the new vision of the desired future system in the presencing stage, the next step is called co-creating and is found on the way back up the U theory of change. It is at this point where the gathered vision and energy is turned into action through a 'learning by doing' process, which involves the creation and testing of prototypes of ideas. Scharmer (2007) notes that "prototyping allows fast-cycle feedback learning and adaptation", which suggests an intensive and rigorous collective learning process whereby direction is changed frequently whenever appropriate (Scharmer, 2007, 203).

This is followed by the final step, co-evolving, whereby the best features of the tried prototypes are selected. At this stage the wider institutional infrastructure needs to be generated in order to support and solidify the learned lessons into a fully-functioning new system of operating. If this step is completed successfully the U-transition is completed, and a sustainable new reality has been established. This reality comprehensively resolved the problems identified in the co-identifying stage, and the solutions are fully supported and integrated with the community who partook in its creation process.

These five steps constitute the Theory-U model, and resemble an interesting perspective through which we can study social transition processes in the context of participatory development. If Theory-U is found to align itself with these processes, its mechanisms could be instructive to future project design efforts which seek to pursue systems change in a given context (subject to additional study confirmation). This would greatly aid the pursuit of simplifying the understanding of inclusive and sustainable participatory development practice, which subsequently could benefit the transition towards these approaches by development organizations.

4. Methodology

The various dynamics within the development sector, and its evolving methodological practices described in the literature, signify the need for new ideas and approaches to resolve some of its systemic issues with sustainability and local ownership. It has been demonstrated that a fairly significant amount of literature argues that a stronger collaboration with the communities impacted by development efforts will yield its impact more sustainable and locally conducive. This notion is paired with the rise of systems thinking as an approach to project management in a variety of sectors, including development (Senge, 2006). In order to provide an answer to the research question, this thesis will therefore seek to test the Theory-U model of change management which is firmly rooted in systems thinking.

Type of research

In order to further explore this proposition and test the capacity of a broadly used management theory rooted in systems thinking, this thesis will employ a deductive single-case study into an organization whose program and methodological characteristics can be closely associated with participatory sustainable development. Yin (2014) outlines three characteristics that make a case study method particularly apt for the pursuit of study. These are the types of study wherein the research question starts with either 'why' or 'how', there is little to no control over the events being studied, and the study focuses on contemporary events. Although the data used for this thesis is arguably somewhat dated, the reason for which will be explained later, it is believed that the contemporary scope of this research is still warranted given the contextualization of these past events with contemporary developments. A single case study will also allow for a focused interrogation in the various success factors of the CRHP approach, which is deemed particularly appropriate in light of the research questions asked in this thesis. Furthermore, this methodological establishes a feasible scope for the pursuit of the research question within the framework of this thesis project. It is for this reason that a single case study was deemed most appropriate in pursuit of the research question for this thesis.

The method applied in this particular piece of research is qualitative document analysis, the content of which is subsequently compared and contrasted with a contemporary theory of management pertaining to systems change. Specifically, this research will take a closer look at three instances of systems change through the use of participatory methods of

development, executed by CRHP in Jamkhed, India. Its founders, Drs. Mabelle and Rajanikant Arole, have written an elaborate memoir detailing the gradual development of their efforts to enhance local health conditions through leveraging local people's talents and passions. Excerpts of this memoir pertaining to instances of systems change efforts will be used as data for this thesis.

Type of Data

The elaborate and detailed description of their participatory practice has inspired the selection of the efforts by CRHP in Jamkhed, India, as very instructive and suitable for further analysis. Its efforts have been widely acknowledged as beneficial and sustainable, which in part is signified by the numerous awards they've been awarded by both governmental and non-governmental entities in India over the course of their existence (Arole and Arole, 1994 and Isalkar, 2011). What specifically characterizes their method of practice is a strong philosophical commitment to the abilities of community members to take part in designing and enacting solutions for the problems they face themselves, which is facilitated through the creation of local councils and positions facilitated and run by community members themselves. The development of its program demonstrates an understanding of systems thinking closely resembling those elements described in the academic literature, and three of its major endeavors to enact systems change in local communities will be subjected to further analysis.

As George and Bennett (2005) describe in their *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, "process tracing is an indispensable tool for theory testing and theory development not only because it generates numerous observations within a case, but because these observations must be linked in particular ways to constitute an explanation of the case" (George and Bennet, 2005, 207). It is therefore important to describe in some detail the relationships between the in-case observations that will be analyzed, in order to effectively argue for the selection of these phenomena. All observations describe a process whereby a present socio-cultural institution needed to be changed through the creation of a new local council or profession, which would subsequently become a point of entry for CRHP's further development efforts. The socio-cultural institution in question was comprised of a combination of attitudes and social practices perceived to be harmful to the community's overall cohesion and foster discrimination, which hampered their ability to cooperate and generate common and sustainable collective progress. All the initiated council/ profession

creation efforts therefore had to break through these socio-cultural institutions, which made its implementation controversial and subject to local resistance. The process to establish the new council or profession was initiated with the direct involvement of the CRHP organization, but did not constitute the imposition of any particular agenda in the process. Rather, these institutions were envisioned to serve as platforms for cooperation, through which local capacities could be more beneficially utilized. These councils or professions were entirely comprised of members of the community themselves, though distinguished by sex to accommodate local cultural sensitivities. They included members from all castes, economic classes, and professions they sought to enhance the positions of (predominantly those of agricultural nature, given the rural location of the project). Although precise numbers of participants in the selected analysis samples are not presented in the text, Arole and Arole (1994) do report that by 1975 they reached a scale of thirty project villages with approximately 30,000 inhabitants total. The average of one thousand villagers per project village could therefore give an approximate estimation of impact whenever the coverage of project villages is mentioned in the data.

Based on these criteria, three observations as found in the data source employed for this study will be utilized for further analysis. It should be noted, however, that the strategies employed by Arole and Arole (1994), as described in their memoir on the development of their project, differed somewhat per village depending on the local socio-political dynamics. This thesis will therefore focus the analysis on the most elaborately described instances of their interventions at each of the three scenarios subjected to the analysis, since these will provide the most elaborate amount of data whilst arguably still amounting to a fairly representative impression of the overall process.

Data Analysis

In the effort to find causal patterns between how the various communities in the Jamkhed area are engaged with, and how these interactions shape the new institutions these interactions seek to establish, this thesis will conduct process tracing as a strategy to analyze the progression of systems change in the data. This method is deemed particularly suitable to address the research question, since it lends itself well for testing theory in realities characterized by complexity and multiple variables interacting with the subject of study (George and Bennett, 2005). More specifically, the Theory-U model proposed by Otto Scharmer (2007) suggests a particular process for how systemic change is collectively

achieved. His hypothesis will be tested by conducting process tracing on the historical data presented by Arole and Arole (1994), and comparing whether his theory of collective systems change holds validity within the development sector.

Three instances of collectively executed efforts of systems change were selected for further analysis, based on a thorough reading of the overall development of CRHP's efforts in the Jamkhed region as detailed by Arole and Arole (1994). Their account details how much of the overall impact was generated as a direct consequence of the institutions and paradigm shifts resulting from the three cases outlined in the findings section. These three instances are the founding and functioning of Farmers' Clubs, the introduction of village health workers, and the founding and functioning of women's groups. Of these three instances the most substantial elements were coded and included in Annex 1, and subsequently contrasted with the Theory-U model in search of alignment and contrasts. The outcomes of this process will inform to which extent the Theory-U model is useful for understanding participatory development efforts, which will inform the answering of the main research question.

This research was conducted using standard Microsoft Office software. It uses the data provided by Arole and Arole (1994), and draws from the work by Scharmer (2007) for its theoretical framework. Aside from these materials, no additional tools of extraordinary nature were used in the pursuit of this research.

Limitations

While extensive efforts have been made to make this research as rigorous and comprehensive as possible within the scope of this thesis project, there are a number of limitations that need to be acknowledged pertaining to the data, the scope of this inquiry, and the results it will ultimately produce.

This research was conducted amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, which produced numerous constraints on the availability of data for this project. In the first place, it prevented the author of this research from travelling to the respective context of research in order to collect primary in-person data for analysis. Furthermore, since CRHP provides hospital services to its respective community till this very day, its organizational staff was not able to provide interviews from afar given the intensity of the second Covid-19 wave in India at the time of writing. As a result of these unfortunate circumstances the research was largely confined to previously documented data by CRHP, which arguably has aged quite substantially since its

time of publication in the year 1994. It should therefore be acknowledged that the findings produced by this research are bound to the time frame the data was produced in, meaning that further research should confirm whether its conclusions are equally valid in the present day. For this reason some of the drawn upon literature sources are also arguably somewhat dated, since contrasting present-day research with data taken from a substantially different timeframe might have raised criticism of its approach that would have been unwarranted given the knowledge available. Wherever possible though, the older research is supplemented by contemporary texts wherever it was found that there was notable overlap, as to highlight the continuation of some of the issues it features.

It should also be noted that the nature of the data, written in memoir-form by the founders of CRHP, cannot be guaranteed as entirely unbiased given that the authors were effectively recounting their own performance in writing. This makes the inability to conduct elaborate cross-checks all the more unfortunate, as these biases are difficult to identify in its absence. Both authors have unfortunately also passed away since the production of this data took place. It should, therefore, be kept in mind that, although instances of failure are certainly not left unacknowledged in the data source, its content solely represents the perspectives of its directors and is subject to their biases.

The scope of this project is limited to the operations of CRHP in the timeframe and area specified in the data source, being in approximately 1970-1994 in the countryside of Maharashtra state, India. Since the theoretical framework set out specific benchmarks and criteria of performance, alternative secondary data sources considered for this research often insufficiently featured the required variables for effective comparative analysis. A single-case study was therefore deemed the most feasible method of study, in spite of the limitations this imposes on the degree to which its findings can be generalized. This study, therefore, acknowledges that its findings in terms of development approaches cannot reasonably be generalized to the present day, nor to areas outside of the regions CRHP conducted its projects in. The degree to which the Theory-U model captures its efforts at systems change, however, could be considered as valid grounds for further research, as do some of the general critiques raised in the discussion.

Furthermore, it is acknowledged that part of the conclusions drawn based on this data are based on inference and interpretation. In order to provide full transparency on how the author came to his conclusion, it was therefore decided to include the full quotes used in the findings

section in Annex 1 based upon which conclusions were drawn so that alternative interpretations could be identified by the reader if deemed appropriate. Further research is recommended to find whether the findings of this research extend beyond these metrics, and the author welcomes alternative interpretations of the data as instructive to further enhance this research project.

The same applies to the choice of theoretical framework, which will be further detailed in the following section. The Theory-U model was chosen on a number of criteria that rendered its utility high within the context of this research process, but it should not be mistaken as the only theoretical framework suitable for usage in managing organizational change through systems thinking. Further research is recommended to test additional theoretical models that fell outside of the scope of this research.

Lastly, a couple of remarks need to be made on the position of the author in this research. It should be acknowledged that the author himself has spent a total period of six months interning at the organization of study, during the years 2017-2018. The research is conducted as closely to the literal text of Arole and Arole (1994) as possible in order to limit the impact of any bias resulting from these personal experiences, but the presence of any subconscious bias in the production of this thesis can not entirely be ruled out. Furthermore, it should be noticed that the author was born and raised in a Western European cultural context post-publication of this data. Although the author does believe to have acquired an understanding of rural South Asian cultural dynamics, in part through his placement at CRHP, it is possible that more subtle clues relevant to the analysis are left unidentified as a result of this background.

With that being said, we can now proceed to take a look at the findings of this study. In this following chapter the process-tracing technique will be applied to interrogate the utility of the Theory-U model in explaining the change process in participatory development led by CRHP. Its outcomes will yield insights into effective manners of approaching the design of participatory development interventions, and get us closer to answering the research questions.

5. <u>Findings</u>

Now that the Theory-U model has been outlined, we can start turning our attention towards its potential in framing and explaining successful community change processes. Specifically, this section will detail three instances wherein established socio-cultural practices in communities in rural India were sought to be changed in the pursuit of collective development. This was conducted using participatory methods, and saw the executing organization mostly taking a facilitative role rather than a leading one. The organization concerned is called the Comprehensive Rural Health Project, or CRHP, based in Jamkhed, India and formerly run by two Indian doctors who sought to enhance local health conditions. These three incidents reflect the general approach of development practice taken by CRHP, and a conscious effort has been made to feature these three instances as comprehensively as possible whilst refraining from cherry picking, in accordance with good academic practice. Reference will be made to its alignment with the Theory-U transition theory, although its implications will be more elaborately discussed in the discussion section of this thesis. The specific quotes referenced in this section can be found in Annex 1, as will the respective references to the source of the texts. This is done to most clearly demonstrate the analyzed transition processes as described by Arole and Arole (1994), and provide full transparency on the way this data was interpreted.

Farmer's Clubs

The introduction of the Farmers' Clubs was the first locally-run institution whose formation process was inspired by CRHP to the communities they work with. As CRHP sought more comprehensive local participation in their effort to enhance the conditions of health in the respective villages, various constraints had to be overcome in order to make inclusive community participation a reality. In other words, the social system needed to be overhauled in order to allow more health-conducive conditions to take shape. What will now follow is a summary of quotes from the memoir produced by the founders of CRHP, which will highlight the proceedings of their approach to this situation and how the Farmers' Clubs ultimately came to be.

In segment (1) the effort is described whereby CRHP executives proposed volleyball games in order to instill an opportunity for inhabitants of their project villagers to socialize. This socialization was uncommon due to the high degree of caste-based and economic segregation

present in the community, preventing effective partnership from taking place. Inclusive participation was facilitated by CRHP, and post-game interactions would take place focusing on commonly experienced problems. It is here that we can see the first stage of the Theory-U model, co-initiating, taking place in the form of cross-caste dialogue about a need for change. In segment (2) and (3) we can see how this process further develops, and that continued dialogue exposes the different needs experienced by different segments of the population. Although not enough data is available that explicitly expresses the villagers perceiving the system they are a part of, we can see an initial element of team building characteristic of co-sensing present within this segment. The formalizing of their gatherings, by assigning their assemblies the name Farmers' Clubs, signifies a common intent to continue the journey in search of solutions. The subsequent initiation of three-day seminars for farmers, organized and hosted by CRHP, is described in segment (4) and highlights a deepening of the co-sensing process. The elaborate information provided in these sessions provided alternative ways of working to the participating Farmers' Club members, and expanded their horizon on their own condition in the process. It is during these seminars that the stage of presencing is arguably reached, which is evidenced by the changes in inter-caste behavior noted in segment (5).

In part through the example of CRHP's staff members, the effects of caste and social barriers started to become less and less pervasive. The scope of these seminars is also increasingly expanded, as demonstrated in segment (6), which mentions that social issues such as child marriage and alcoholism were also brought up for debate. The outcomes of these seminars and inter-village exchanges were brought back to the Farmers' Clubs respective communities by the end of each seminar. This cooperation was continuously expanded, and gradually the seminars themselves would be organized and hosted by individual Farmers' Clubs as described in segment (7). This segment also notes programs undertaken by individual Clubs, although further specifics are given later on in the text. All these efforts signify a continuous effort by the Farmers' Clubs to map out the system they find themselves living in, and in the process various harmful cultural practices associated with the caste system and economic discrimination were abandoned. Whilst there is little data that specifically describes the stage of presencing taking place beyond this, the continued engagement and behavioral changes indicates that this stage was likely received at some point during this process.

In segment (8), we can see the Farmers' Clubs moving into the co-creation stage, whereby villages start purchasing equipment, land, and take various actions to enact upon the vision

they've created through their participation and engagement with the seminars. In the final segments (9), (10), (11), (12) and (13) we can see the various ways in which Farmers' Clubs put their lessons to practice in enhancing the conditions of their respective local villages. It should be noted here that the co-evolving step in the Theory-U model cannot be clearly identified, which arguably could be due to the fact that each village construed their own trajectory of change. This would make a generalization of a collective new system hard to identify, nor would this strictly be necessary given that these segments also demonstrate a continued development effort. It is therefore equally possible that the final step of the Theory-U model was still work in progress by the time Arole and Arole (1994) wrote their book.

As we reflect on the formation and subsequent functioning of the Farmers' Clubs, as instigated by CRHP through their social workers, we can therefore identify the trajectory as described by Schramer (2007) in his Theory-U model. It should be noted that some of the steps are identified by combining partial recognition of characteristics together with contextual information, as the data did not always explicitly highlight each of the characteristics outlined in the theoretical framework. It should also be acknowledged that not all villages CRHP engaged with ended up completing this cycle however, as local politics and persistent caste-based discrimination prevented a number of project villages from completing the transition process (Arole and Arole, 1994). Nonetheless though, the utility of the Theory-U model as instructive to approach social change in this particular instance does seem to hold.

Village Health Workers

The second instance of instituting systems change in the interest of public health within the communities came in the form of female village health workers. The context of this endeavor was the need for CRHP to have local agents present that could proactively resolve some of the most common preventable diseases, since this would ease pressure on the organization's other facilities (Arole and Arole, 1994). The particular system change required in this instance was the overhaul of various harmful practices related to health and gender. This needed to be preceded by deconstructing these very same practices on caste and gender among the women selected to be future village health workers, as illustrated by segment (14). In addition to the caste- and socio-economic hierarchies faced by CRHP and its social workers, the element of gender was now another societal constraint that needed to be

overcome in order for the subsequent institution to properly be able to function within its respective communities.

As noted in segment (15), the previously established connections with village leaders as well as Farmers' Club members aided the process of selecting suitable people for this particular position. One could argue that the participation of Farmers Club members is a continuation of their co-evolving stage, wherein their experience of gradually eliminating caste- and economic discrimination within their clubs inspired their willingness to support women in taking up these positions in their communities. Alternatively, or perhaps additionally, it could also be due to the credibility CRHP built with these Farmers Clubs over the course of working with them.

In segment (16), we start to observe the initiation of the village health workers training. In this passage it is elaborately described how the make-up of this particular group, being from a variety of castes, prevented teambuilding from taking place. Only after elaborate efforts to reduce these prejudices were taken did the opportunity arise to start sharing stories and experiences amongst each other. Although one could therefore start to identify co-initiating in the last line, the preparatory work required to arrive at this stage will be reflected on in the discussion section.

In section (17), the process of co-initiation becomes more evidently present, as the respective women started recognizing the similarities in their struggles and experience being respected and heard for the first time. This was reinforced through facilitation by CRHP. In section (18) we then see the co-initiation process taking off in its full form, wherein the women clearly express their energy and passion with respect to childbirth and related practices in their respective villages. What follows is a collection of testimonies by individual village health workers, as seen in segments (19) up to and including (22). Through these steps one can clearly identify the awareness the respective women have of the various health problems faced by their communities, and in the process of sharing these they arguably engage in the co-sensing process of change as defined by the Theory-U model.

From this point the data moves to segment (23) and, while acknowledging the potential of the women to change the health practices in their respective villages from the perspective of CRHP's directors, the step whereby the women themselves self-define the required changes in their village's health practices are not specifically detailed. This therefore means that the presencing step in the Theory-U model appears to be foregone in this change endeavor,

although its omission in the data of course does not definitively rule out its occurrence in the change process described. Nonetheless, the segment continues to describe the women receiving training on health matters and distributing this knowledge to their respective villagers. It also details how villagers requested additional training for the village health workers after being impressed with their initial efforts. CRHP responded by teaching their village health workers simple home remedies and how to responsibly distribute some forms of medicine, as detailed in segment (24). We could therefore characterize this stage as co-creating, since the rapid adjustment of course, along with the frequent re-assessment of approaches undertaken during the training sessions, signify a great deal of alignment with this stage of transition. The continuation of this process can also be identified in segments (25), (26), (27) and (28), detailing efforts by CRHP to expand the skills of village health workers and enhance their economic independence through income-generating activities and assistance. Finally, in segment (29) we can identify the impact of the village health workers' efforts coming to full fruition. In this segment, it is described how many of the prevailing preventable health conditions suffered by the local population were cut back substantially if they weren't eradicated entirely. These statistics demonstrate that many of the positive health practices taught to the village health workers were successfully transferred to the wider community through them, and therefore it could be concluded that the system sustaining cultural practices harmful to health were successfully challenged and ultimately overhauled by these women. This could therefore be characterized as co-evolving.

The role of the village health workers was arguably only beginning to grow to its full potential in this particular analysis, and subsequent training of additional village health workers as described by Arole and Arole (1994) highlighted additional systemic challenges that needed to be overcome. Within the scope of this research this will unfortunately not be subjected to analysis.

Women's Groups

The final observation highlighted in this research is the initiation of the women's groups, or Mahila Vikas Mandals, in the various communities CRHP was active in. This required a complex intervention which certainly would face social resistance in its initial phases, and was initiated by the village health workers. Nonetheless though, by letting the community members themselves discover the best way forward sustainable changes of attitudes were successfully achieved.

As illustrated by segment (30), the women in the Jamkhed region where CRHP operated were severely constrained in their wellbeing. Gender-based discrimination and violence resulted in a wide variety of negative health outcomes, both in physical and mental terms. Inter-generational hierarchies with elderly conservatives, along with general skepticism and fatalism made for much initial reluctance to partake in the initiative set up by the village health workers. Segments (31) and (32) further highlight the various degrees in which women in CRHP's project villages faced systemic subjugation and discrimination, conditions which most village health workers had experienced themselves as well. They set an example by sending their daughters to school, and were in a unique position to inspire systems change among the women in their respective communities given their experience of status transition when taking up their new role in their community. In segment (33), it is described how the village health workers conceived of this opportunity during one of their training sessions, and recognized the need for women to be empowered. In cooperation with farmers' club members, who encouraged their own wives and sisters to participate, the first couple of gatherings were initiated.

In segment (34), we can observe the initial resistance to these gatherings, primarily in the fact that only a number of women would turn up. It is described that all these sessions consisted of listening to each other's difficulties, and how this was a new experience for many of the participating women. Gradually the meetings gained in popularity, as described in segment (35), and the village health worker took a prominent role in facilitating dialogues and sharing relevant health information. She also invited the women to partake in health efforts for the benefit of themselves and the village, which could be considered an effort of co-initiation. Since the data suggests this step was initiated by the village health worker however, the collective element of co-initiation is arguably missing in this step. It is also described that women resist social pressure not to attend, and find support with fellow participating women in these gatherings. As more concrete health skills are taught to the participating women, the interest in its activities gradually grows.

In segment (36), we can see the increasing popularity of these gatherings gaining a more organized form, whereby the participating women decide to call their informal groups Mahila Vikas Mandals (MVMs), or Women's Development Associations. Here we can conclude with more confidence that the co-initiating step has been taken, as the purpose of these groups and its composition is more clearly defined by its members at this stage. When proceeding to segment (37), we can see that financial issues are quickly recognized as

priority matters to the participating women. The constant scramble for money, and the dependency relationship this situation instills with respect to their male family members, became the first point of action for the MVMs. In segment (38), it is described how collective saving groups are initiated in order to build up financial buffers for members in need. This system is described as generating trust and mutual understanding among the participants of MVMs. These sentiments strongly align with the description of co-sensing in Theory-U. Segment (39) builds on this stage by describing how the village health workers gradually started addressing social issues during the MVMs, and collective awareness was gradually generated of the system that sustains the various gender-based inequalities highlighted earlier. This represents a deeper stage of co-sensing, whereby participants collectively enter a position where they reflect upon the system they both sustain and suffer from. The success of this set-up is evidenced in segment (40), which highlights the growth in the amount of MVMs among CRHP's project villages. Effective empowerment and facilitation by the village health workers is demonstrated in segment (41), wherein it is described how women of the MVMs were taught several practical skills pertaining to the health and wellbeing of themselves and their children. Gradually they would conduct health-related practices whenever the village health worker was out of the village, signifying a broadening of opportunity for women to participate in the public life of their communities.

The presencing stage can clearly be witnessed in segment (42), starting from the description that the MVMs started demanding seminars of a similar nature as the ones organized for the Farmers' Clubs, albeit that they cater to their needs instead. When reflecting on the more docile characteristics earlier used to describe the participating women, their demands for equal treatment signifies a major shift in their collective thinking. The discussions and song compositions that took place in the subsequent MVM seminars highlight the various topics its members deemed in need of change, which demonstrates the presence of a new vision for the future. The various engagements that are subsequently described in section (43) and (44) have likely further deepened the women's understanding of the possibilities ahead, and how to take steps to turn their newly attained vision into action.

In segment (45) and (46) we can see the collective transition from presencing to co-creating, as various initiatives are described whereby the MVMs stood together to demand respect and services they were legally entitled to. This included access to financial credit, allowing for various small business ventures to be initiated, and more autonomy and authority in the households and villages of MVM members. Various other initiatives are described in the data

source, and segment (47) sums up some of the vast and positive changes that were achieved. Although problems were experienced at the start-up of this initiative, as is also acknowledged in segment (48), the MVMs ended up making substantial changes in the local socio-cultural systems with respect to the position and role of women in society. It is mentioned that every MVM had its own history and unique character, which again makes the distinction between co-creating and co-evolving hard to identify within the context of the Theory-U model. Regardless of this however, it is evident that systems change was successfully achieved through this endeavor.

As we have now demonstrated three instances in which CRHP successfully invoked socio-cultural systems changes within their respective project villages, with a high degree of discretion being given to community members to design this process in line with their preferences, we can now have a better understanding of Theory-U in development. The next section will discuss some of the conclusions that can be drawn with respect to these findings.

6. Discussion

The participatory methodologies leveraged by CRHP in their efforts to instill locally-led sustainable development, and the synergy (or lack thereof) these had with the Theory-U model, leaves us with much food for thought. This part of the thesis will briefly try to summarize some of the main take-aways from both their efforts, the (mis-)alignment with the Theory-U model of change, and what lessons can broadly be drawn towards the question of how development organizations can effectively structure their projects in a manner that prioritizes inclusive sustainable development rooted in systems thinking and local participation?

Research Recommendations on Complexity in Development

Firstly, some reflection is warranted on the overall progress of the development sector and its research efforts in pivoting towards a complexity-embracing structure and strategy. We can start by contrasting some of the literature cited in this piece, and contrast this with the methods of practice CRHP employed. The overall approach, and its yielded results, can arguably be considered an answer to many of the critiques raised by Chambers (1987), Easterly (2006) and Ramalingam (2013). By giving high levels of agency to the villagers

seeking to be assisted, feedback loops are short and accountability relationships are established between CRHP and those it assists. This closely aligns with Easterly's (2006) proposition to leave Searchers, rather than Planners, in charge of the development process. It is evident that no simplifications or theoretical models could have reasonably predicted the pathway the various initiatives elected, nor the outcomes these would eventually yield. Instead, and in line with Mansuri and Rao's (2013) findings, the road to success was characterized by various ups and downs along the way.

Another aspect to note is the high degree of similarity between CRHP's model of development and the one proposed by Honig (2018), called navigating by judgement. His description of having frontline employees in the field, who wield high discretionary authority to tailor the development process along lines they see fit within their given context, closely resembles CRHP's tactics. There is therefore a lot to be said for this concept, and based on this study its practice should arguably be encouraged more broadly.

There are, however, also more sinister conclusions that could be drawn from the various alignments noted here. If this method of practice was already tried and successfully tested in the 70's and 80's, it seems somewhat obscure that many of its lessons are still echoed, and occasionally re-discovered all together, fifty years down the line. This is of course not to say, as Honig (2018) also acknowledges, that these methods of practice are the golden ticket towards sustainable development. Having said that though, it does possibly allude to a lack of learning from successful practice in the Global South by the bigger development-related agencies. It could also suggest an overall inability of the larger development sector to pivot towards these more grassroots methods of development, which should raise alarm bells in the face of the complexity-embracing Sustainable Development Goals the world collectively agreed to. Further research is recommended to test whether this disconnect can be attributed to either of these factors, and a combination of them is certainly not ruled out either.

How, then, could individual agencies proceed to position themselves in such a way as to be more conducive to these methods of practice? Reflecting on CRHP's method of practice, as well as on common elements in the critiques echoed by Easterly (2006), Chambers (1987 & 1997), and Fowler (1999), a form of decentralization could be a reasonable avenue to consider. When thinking back of Fowler's (1999) three types of decentralization outlined in the literature review, we can arguably see a strong alignment between CRHP's overall organizational structure and the delegation model he proposes. Hailey and Smillie's (2001)

research furthermore suggests that strong inter-organizational relationships warrant a high degree of adaptability and sustainability, which is a characteristic clearly identifiable with CRHP as well. Ramalingam (2013) does note though that the present development sector has gotten relentlessly bureaucratic due to its decentralized nature (among other factors), so this proposition needs to be approached with thorough consideration. Further research is therefore recommended into decentralization efforts in development organizations, and how these can be rendered both effective and efficient for sustainable participatory development to be achieved.

Various other recommendations could be discussed in the follow-up of this section but, due to the limited scope of this research, these can unfortunately not all be addressed. In short form though, further research is recommended into whether the structuring of development into project cycles renders it effective and flexible enough for participatory development to be enacted. This research could be extended to alternative funding models of development, as the project-based structure is in part grounded in the financial structures that underlie this sector. For now though, a closer look at the conducted research itself will present some of the main reflections pertaining to the research question set out in this thesis.

Reflections on CRHP's Efforts

CRHP's initiation in the 1970's and 1980's aligns with the general rise in popularity of participatory and locally-led development, highlighted both by Ellis and Biggs (2001) and Chambers (1997). Their intervention clearly resembles many of the practices proposed by Chambers (1987, 1997) in his work on participatory development, and serves as a concrete and tangible example of what sustainable participatory development practice could look like.

It is interesting to compare CRHP's efforts with some of the possible pitfalls of participatory practice, as highlighted in the literature review. In this pursuit we can start with Oakley's (1987) weighing of participation as a means versus participation as an end goal of the overall development intervention. His illustration of using participation as a means through the set-up of temporary institutions is particularly apt, since CRHP arguably employed parts of this technique whilst yielding inclusive and sustainable outcomes. Of course the institutions set up by CRHP were not of a temporary nature, but they did initially experience the structural local power imbalances Oakley (1987) warns us about. The key difference worth noting in this proposition is that CRHP did in part consider participation as a vital means to reaching better local health outcomes (Arole and Arole, 1994), but the local power imbalances

themselves were considered an obstacle to reaching this objective. This arguably made inclusive participation a prerequisite to achieving the final objective, thereby blurring the distinction between participation as either means or end. Oakley' (1987) argument that sustainable outcomes cannot be achieved without addressing local power dynamics therefore does hold true, but framing participation as an end is not mutually exclusive with having additional higher goals to which inclusive participation could serve as means.

Mansuri and Rao's (2013) distinction between induced and organic participation also comes to mind, whereby the latter is deemed more sustainable yet also more unpredictable. CRHP creatively appears to have solved this by ensuring that the process facilitators were themselves members of the community sought to be aided. Simultaneously however, these facilitators did have ties to CRHP and presumably shared their commitment to inclusive health improvements. This therefore made the participatory process both organic and in part controlled by CRHP, which proposes an interesting blend of induced and organic participation. Enacting this practice clearly does require a long-term build-up of a network among those villages one seeks to work with, but could nonetheless provide inspiration in the pursuit to overcome the drawbacks of induced and organic participation as separate forms.

Lastly, it is worth reflecting on Mosse's (2001) expressed concerns with respect to the political nature of local knowledge leveraged through participatory methods of development. When reflecting further on this proposition in relation to the previous concerns raised, one can see that this is partially resolved through adequate locally-led facilitation. Community members affiliated with CRHP will have a solid understanding of the local power hierarchies, and appear to have managed to direct the overall process in an inclusive manner. Had this not been the case, we would most likely not have seen the comprehensive overhaul of many socio-cultural institutions that were oppressive to many, since certain members of the Farmers' Groups and MVM's would have likely benefited from sustaining these power relations. In addition to that, CRHP also left substantial authority with the respective village entities to design their own development process and let their needs be defined organically. The credibility this generated amongst villagers for the design of the process and the goals it sought to generate arguably did not play out in the scenarios described by Mosse (2001). The key difference between his scenario's, of short-term engagements aimed at leveraging local input for project design, and CRHP's approach, is time.

In trying to identify vulnerabilities to the participatory approaches of development, this is perhaps the most fundamental pitfall. A lack of time to invest in an organization's relationship with the community it seeks to serve, build local networks, and garner credibility and support for the vision it wishes to pursue, can render participation vulnerable to all the risks described above. Predictability of outcomes, the degree of inclusiveness, and the sustainability of outcomes can all be positively achieved if the organization has sufficient local credibility and agents present to gently guide the process in the right direction. This is therefore a key recommendation towards the future practice of inclusive and sustainable development interventions rooted in systems thinking. Whether the Theory-U model is helpful in this pursuit is a question that will be addressed next.

Reflections on Theory-U in Development

When reflecting on the alignment of the systems changes engaged with by CRHP, and the alignment of these processes with the Theory-U model of systemic change, a couple of remarks are worth highlighting.

The first remark is that Theory-U presumes the existence of a collective identity and aspiration prior to initiating the collective change effort. This makes some sense given the origin of the theory, being part of the management schools of academia, as one could expect this theory to cater to businesses and existing organizations in its outset. In the context of a highly segregated and politically loaded society however, such as the rural communities CRHP found themselves working within the Jamkhed block, this assumption does not hold. For the purpose of using Theory-U to frame participatory processes, an additional step is therefore suggested to be included in the model. This proposal is inspired by the substantial preparatory work that was required before systems change efforts could be engaged with, primarily in order to break down caste barriers and boost the confidence of local women. Adding this step could render Theory-U more useful in the context of development, and possibly also add value for its use in other sectors whenever the community wielding it is characterized by substantial disunity in its outset.

This step would precede the first step of co-initiating, and could be titled co-identifying. In this step, a given community is assembled through the exercise of strategic leadership and facilitation, and as this step progresses the members of this group will recognize a shared sense of identity between them. In the given context this could pertain to experiences of gender-based violence and discrimination, caste-based violence and discrimination, or any

other shared identity that was not previously recognized as one uniting the participants. Based on the findings, this step is deemed an appropriate addition to prepare a given community for co-initiating.

Another important remark on Theory U in the context of development is the fact that action can start before the co-creation step of the systems change process. Scharmer (2007) describes co-creation as the step whereby the collective thinking process is operationalized. This does however not rhyme with the steps taken by the women's groups in the co-sensing stage, whereby starting the collective saving groups facilitated an increase of trust and mutual compassion. Although in hindsight it could be argued that this financing scheme did cater to the larger needed systems change that was collectively identified later, this step does fall out of line with the theory's overall structure as originally proposed. In order to facilitate our thinking about participatory practice along the lines proposed by Theory U, it is therefore suggested to relax the rather stark distinction between thinking and practice on each side of the U-process.

In conclusion, then, we are left with the question to which extent Theory-U serves as a useful framework for informing our thinking about the design of participatory development strategies. In spite of the previous remarks, we can note an overall high degree of alignment between the theory and the process of systems change described by Arole and Arole (1994). It can therefore be argued that, as an analytical tool, Theory-U definitely offers an adequate framework to understand and structure successful systems change endeavors through participatory methods, in the case of CRHP. Given the limited scope of this research however, further research is recommended to observe whether the high degree of overall alignment can also be identified in similar development initiatives elsewhere. As this research piece is constructed with data written in retrospect, it would also be recommended to conduct research of the Theory-U model's alignment as participatory development projects are initiated, as this will give further insight into its overall utility for policy design. This research, therefore, could mark the start of adopting the Theory-U model as an effective tool in development planning, and has the potential to greatly aid the transition of development organization towards sustainable participatory development. In short, it is therefore a theoretical framework with potential for easing the analysis and design of participatory development efforts, but further research will have to demonstrate whether its propositions hold true on a more universal basis.

7. Conclusion

This research engaged with the question how development organizations can effectively structure their activities in a manner that prioritizes inclusive sustainable development rooted in systems thinking and local participation. In pursuing an answer to this question, information has also been presented on how the development sector reached its present structure of management, what constraints its approaches impose on locally-led development, and what vulnerabilities participatory approaches need to be mindful of when being implemented.

It has been shown that the development sector has gone through a number of transitions over the course of its history. The various economic and political interests paralleling these changes of character have brought us to the present day, wherein a lot has been achieved but where simultaneously old and new challenges still loom on the horizon. New challenges include the issue of climate change, an increased understanding of complexity in resolving global suffering, and an increasing controversy surrounding the development effort itself. The Agenda 2030 has successfully mustered a global commitment to take up some of these challenges, and acknowledges the complexity inherent in pursuing them to positive ends.

The old challenges, however, are a continuation of many problematic elements in the development sector that have been highlighted by critics for decades. The bureaucratic nature of the sector, its short-term orientation and insistence on quantifiable targets renders an unnecessary amount of its efforts inefficient and at times outright ineffective. These structural problems prevent aid beneficiaries from having a meaningful say in the development of their communities, and their lack of agency results in many missed opportunities to resolve urgent local needs.

Although participatory methods of development do certainly have their drawbacks, the biggest of which being the higher degree of complexity and time it entails from the perspective of aid agencies, their potential for appropriate, sustainable and democratic development should be leveraged on a bigger scale if the sector is to confront the issues of our time. The implications of embracing participation on a grand scale are vast, and will require big changes from development agencies across the world. With that being said though, the knowledge on how development organizations can render their activities more conducive to participatory development has been around for decades in organizations all

across the world. The question on how international development organizations can successfully pivot towards these approaches is therefore not just a matter of the availability of technical know-how, since this has arguably been in ample supply for some time now. Instead, it is high time that existing knowledge on successful practice in line with systems thinking and sustainable development get revisited, acknowledged, and acted upon. This research sought to contribute towards these ends, and hopes to see its implications taken up by the sector in the near-distant future. After all, if the goal of development is the genuine empowerment of people in vulnerable circumstances, it is high time we returned them the appropriate tools to do so.

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Annex 1: Text References for Findings Section

Farmers' Clubs

(1)*"Since different caste groups did not freely socialize, we devised some excuses to bring them together. One such attempt was a game of volleyball. In several villages, including Ghodegaon and Pimpalgaon, we initiated a game of volleyball and invited young men from different caste groups to play. (...) One of the CRHP social workers stayed in the village and ensured that the poor and low caste villagers participated in the game. The volleyball game was an innocuous pastime and met with no objection. Every evening, many men gathered to play or watch the game. After the game was over, they continued to sit around and chat. The discussions often centered around their problems with agriculture, poverty, credit from the banks and migration to the city in search of jobs"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 106).

(2)*"As both rich and poor came to play, they were drawn together in discussions. Some were genuinely interested in improving their agricultural livelihood but did not know how to proceed. They needed support and a forum to express themselves. Others talked about the need for cooperation among themselves to deal with their problems. Soon these informal meetings after the volleyball games became more organized. They decided to call these groups Farmers' Clubs, since many participants were involved in agriculture-related occupations"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 107).

(3)*"The Farmers' Clubs needed information on various methods of farming, credit through banks, and access to seeds and fertilizers from reliable sources"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 108).

(4)*"CHRP agreed to help the members by holding three-day seminars every three months at Jamkhed. Experts from the nearby agricultural university were invited to talk to the village people about appropriate methods of agriculture. They taught new methods of dry land farming especially suited to the needs of the poor farmer. New varieties of seeds were introduced. Landless farmers learned about poultry and other farm animals such as goats and cows. Government officials explained various agriculture and animal husbandry programmes meant for marginalized groups and made credit available to them. In addition to the experts, successful local farmers shared their experiences. These sessions were much*

appreciated by the members, because the experienced farmers gave practical hints and ideas not covered by the experts" (Arole and Arole, 1994, 108).

(5)*"The seminar setting was the first opportunity that poor village people from different caste and social backgrounds had to come together and live together. So these seminars broke down social barriers. Initially, the high caste men did not share food with others, but when they saw the hospital staff freely socializing with the poor, they changed their behavior"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 108-109).

(6)*"They also discussed social issues such as drunkenness, child marriage, the dowry system and unnecessary expenditure on weddings and death feasts. They discussed their own village problems and compared the progress they had made with that of other villages. These seminars extended far beyond agriculture. They became the platform for discussing various issues related to health and development. As they became more popular, they covered a wide variety of subjects. Farmers' club members shared what they learned in the seminars with people from their own and neighbouring villages"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 109).

(7)*"For four or five years the quarterly seminars were held in Jamkhed, attended by approximately three to four hundred farmers from sixty villages. As the numbers grew, these gatherings took place for a group of ten to fifteen villages in one village. The host village usually took care of the boarding and lodging of the participants. In their own villages the Farmers' Clubs members met once every couple of months, depending on village size and programmes the club undertook. The health team visited each farmers' club once a fortnight or once a month. Thus a continuous exchange of information went on among the farmers themselves and also with the health team"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 109).

(8)*"Several clubs bought form implements, such as ploughs, seeds, spray pumps and winnowing machines for use by their members. (...) Similarly, farmers' club members produced good seeds and fertilizers and distributed them to their members. Local merchants and banks extended credit to them for this purpose. (...) The Ghodegaon Farmers' Clubs helped develop 60 hectares of land belonging to Dalit farmers. Farmers' Clubs in Halgaon, Rajuri and Khandvi helped improve the lands of poor people. (...) The Farmers' Clubs developed grain banks. They collected food grains at harvest time and loaned them out to the poor farmers without interest. Food for Work couples with these grain banks abolished indebtedness for food in the area. (...) The farmers' club members put into practice what they*

learned at the seminars. Improved farming techniques helped them to increase farm income"
(Arole and Arole, 1994, 110).

(9) *"The Farmers' Clubs requested that we teach basic veterinary care to at least one member in each village. Veterinary courses were arranged. The young men selected by the Farmers' Clubs learned to give immunizations, treated simple common illnesses and improved the breed of animals, and were taught about different varieties of fodder. These veterinary workers became popular and they continue to improve their skills through refresher courses that are conducted from time to time. They have succeeded in preventing deaths of farm animals from epidemics and have helped improve the village economy. Increased milk supply and better incomes coupled with proper health education have improved the nutrition of mothers and children"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 112).

(10) *"Initial surveys in the area showed that 30% of the children under five were severely malnourished. Vitamin A deficiency and anemia were common among mothers and children. Since most of the malnutrition was related to chronic starvation, the farmers' clubs were organized to improve food production and distribution in the area. In the early stages, club members helped establish community kitchens to feed the women and children. (…) The Farmers' Clubs also collected food grains and other ingredients such as vegetables, oilseeds and coarse sugar. They cooked a nutritious porridge and distributed it every morning. The club members then identified lands in the village that they began to cultivate to provide food material. As they became better organized, they improved the land and added water resources. Gradually, over a period of eight to ten years, the community kitchens were phased out as nutritious food became available and village health workers provided nutrition education. The farmers' club members continued to weigh the children regularly and plot their weights on a 'Road to Health' card"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 112-3).

(11) *"Once the Farmers' Clubs were well established and functioning, they became active in health concerns, beginning with health surveys of their own villages. (…) Farmers' club members were a great help in collecting health information. They began by introducing the health team to the village people and assisted in collecting information. They were especially helpful in eliciting such sensitive information as attitudes to family planning, incidence of abortion, feeding practices, and attitudes to chronic diseases such as leprosy and tuberculosis. (…) Soon, with the help of one or two paramedical workers, club members surveyed their own villages and learned to analyze the survey results. In this way they gained*

understanding of the health status of the village and we could involve them in formulating health programmes" (Arole and Arole, 1994, 113-5).

(12) *"The Farmers' Clubs in Ghodegaon, Bavi and Khandvi decided to clean up their villages. The house drains opened into the streets. The waste water mixed with the rubbish heaps forming dirty puddles and fostering the breeding of flies and mosquitoes. The construction of simple soak pits in front of each house to drain the waste water underground was feasible. The members first constructed soak pits in front of their own houses. (...) The efficiency of pits like these was demonstrated to the rest of the village people and Farmers' Clubs encouraged them to build more. Villages like Bavi and Khandvi successfully kept the waste water off the streets by this method"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 115-6).

(13) *"The Farmers' Clubs often participated in health education activities. They wrote skits, songs and plays on various health and social issues. Clubs from Bavi, Khandvi, Ashta, Pimparkhed and other villages prepared dramas dealing with superstitions related to leprosy, tuberculosis and other common diseases and performed these plays in different villages. The club members also identified charlatans who were trying to mislead sick villagers and exposed their tricks"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 116).

Village Health Workers

(14) *"It was not easy for the farmers' club to find women willing to be village health workers in a setting with so many constraints, both cultural and social. Women generally did not attend public meetings. They did not come to the village square and were not allowed in the area where the elders were sitting. They were confined to their homes or walked to the fields on the outskirts of the village. Serving others was considered a demeaning job; nurses and other hospital workers were looked down on by the people, especially the high caste. A health worker had to be willing to go from house to house to promote health. But women who walked freely in the streets and talked to strangers were looked upon with contempt"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 147).

(15) *"We had to rely on the village leaders and the newly formed Farmers' Clubs to select the VHWs. It took several community meetings and weeks of searching before nine women were selected"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 147).

(16)*"All these women came from different caste backgrounds. Our first task was to integrate them as a team. Their prejudices were deep and they found it difficult even to eat together. (description of eating incident…) Realising that we would have to deal first with the caste issues, I talked about the irrationality of caste prejudice. I took the women to the X-ray room and showed them the heart shadows of men and women from different castes on the X-ray screen. The shadows all had the same shapes. I told them that everyone had the same kind of blood cells and that everyone's blood was red. During one group project, I had them stitch several blankets together into a single long one and all slept under it on the floor. As the caste feelings within the group gradually began to fade and they had opportunities to share their problems with each other, they realized that as women they had much in common"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 150).

(17)*"No matter what caste they belonged to, the women discovered, they were treated as inferior in their own homes and communities. They were made to feel that they were good for nothing. Their life was one of subservience and hard work on the farm and in the kitchen. When they first came, some of the women used to say, 'We are like the shoes on your feet'. These images had to be eliminated. The trainers also tried to do away with hierarchy by sitting down in a circle with them and spending time listening to them. The women soon found that they were respected. Whatever they said was taken seriously and they were not slighted. They were encouraged to express themselves freely. They had never experienced this kind of freedom before"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 150-1).

(18)*"Gradually the women became open and communicative. I asked them about practices related to childbirth and child rearing. Their eyes lit up, all wanted to tell us about the village practices"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 152).

(19) *"Salubai told me that mothers did not breastfeed newborns for the first three days. Instead, a cotton or cloth wick was dipped in diluted goats' or cows' milk and given to the baby to suck. Sometimes, she said, the grandmother watching the baby would fall asleep, let go of the wick, and the baby would choke on it"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 152).

(20) *"Bayadabai said that village women didn't give their infants solid food until they started eating of their own accord. Sometimes even infants of eighteen months did not get solids. Mothers continued breastfeeding until the next pregnancy. They believed that a pregnant mother's milk was harmful to the baby. Therefore if pregnancy occurred when a baby was*

only a few months old, the mother would abruptly stop the breast milk and feed the baby on diluted cows' or goats' milk" (Arole and Arole, 1994, 152).

(21) *"Anjanabai explained that villagers believed that chicken pox and measles were caused by the wrath of a goddess and that the illness worsened if medicine was given. Therefore, mothers often hid such children whenever the health team came to the village. She shared even more delicate information about village practices such as abortion and the neglect of female children"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 152).

(22) *"The harsh reality of village life and its impact on health were aptly described by Vaysalabai: 'You do not want children to die. But is there any use having too many girls or having a blind girl? There are times when such girl babies are not welcome. Mothers sometimes do not feed babies they do not want. It is not common, but it does happen. We have our own methods of family planning. The other day, Usha sister was enquiring about abortions in the village. The women just shook their heads as if they did not know about abortion. But I know that there is a woman who performs abortions. It is our method of family planning. We have to protect that abortionist so we say there are no abortions. Village people are not going to tell outsiders the truth, but they will tell me. I am from the village.'"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 152-3).

(23) *"From these discussions we recognized that these women would make good health educators. They would be able to preserve traditions that promote good health and remove the superstitions and practices that are detrimental to health. (…) The women came to the health centre for training at noon every Friday and left for their villages on Saturday afternoons. During the week they shared their newly acquired knowledge regarding pregnancy, child nutrition, family planning and other health concerns with the village people, travelling from house to house promoting health. Sometimes they came across sick children needing treatment, but had to wait till the team returned to the village to get medicine. Village people were impressed with their work and asked us to teach the women to treat minor illnesses. Their special request was to train them in conducting deliveries."* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 153)

(24) *"We responded and taught the VHWs some simple home remedies. The women also shared their experiences with home remedies and their knowledge about certain medicinal plants and herbs. We identified the beneficial remedies and encouraged the women to use them. (…) I wondered if the women were capable of dispensing some medications on their*

own, without a physician. We knew that all women have to store and handle different kinds of spices in routine cooking and that they correctly identify these spices and do not make mistakes about the ingredients. We decided to give each woman a few common medicines in tablet form. The tablets were easy to store and transport and could be simply identified by size, shape, colour, smell and taste. (...) We taught them to distinguish these tablets from one another. (...) The women were then taught how to use these drugs correctly. It was emphasized, however, that their main work was health education and changing many attitudes of the village people." (Arole and Arole, 1994, 153-4)

(25) *"The VHWs were not traditional birth attendants (Arole and Arole, 1994, 154) But in response to the village people's request, they were taught to conduct safe deliveries. They also learned to recognize abnormal pregnancy and labor and to refer the patient to a nurse or the hospital when necessary."* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 155)

(26) *"Most of the women were poor. They needed to be compensated for coming to the health centre and for their service in the villages. One alternative was to pay them from CRHP funds. This alternative could make them seem mere hirelings and would minimize the voluntary nature of their work. It would also change our relationships from equal partners to masters and servants. The second alternative was to make the village Panchayat pay them a salary. But most village Panchayats were so poor that they did not even have a few rupees to pay for electricity. Even if money for salaries was available, the VHWs could end up being domestic servants to the Sarpanch and the Panchayat members. We decided to cover their bus fare and their boarding while they were at the centre and to pay a symbolic honorarium of Rs:50 a month."* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 156)

(27) *"Social workers like Mr Arun Londhe talked with them and found ways to help them improve their income. We arranged bank credits for them to improve their land, to set up small businesses such as marketing vegetables, having a grocery store or raising goats and chickens. They were encouraged to charge fees for service and recover the cost of drugs. Traditionally villagers paid for deliveries by giving grains, cloth for a blouse and money for bangles. The VHWs used their discretion in giving free service to the poor. The farmers' club members were vigilant to see that they did not overcharge and resolved any conflicts that arose."* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 156)

(28) *"These village health workers became self-employed and often carried their vegetables and other wares as they made house calls. They could work without being slaves to anyone.*

This secure economic basis helped them to have a good standing in the village. They could afford to be involved in the health work without being worried about where the next meal was coming from." (Arole and Arole, 1994, 156)

(29)*"These village health workers became the interface between the health professionals and the community. Within a year, the backlog of immunizations was over. Pregnant mothers were coming in for prenatal care regularly. Whooping cough disappeared from these villages, the weights of children were increasing, and malnutrition in the under fives declined. The patients who came to the weekly village clinic and the centre also changed. Formerly, the outpatient clinic at the centre saw a large number of children. Now this was all changed. We saw very few children with diarrhea or pneumonia at the hospitals. Women with signs of toxemia or a history of difficult labour were brought to the centre by the VHWs, well ahead of their delivery time. More patients with suspected leprosy and tuberculosis came in for X-rays and laboratory confirmation."* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 156-57)

Women's Groups

(30)*"Health problems for women start even before birth. Advanced biomedical techniques allow in utero sex determination which could result termination of the female fetus. The birth of a girl is heralded as a bad omen. As a child she is poorly nourished because she, like her mother, is restricted to food left over from the men's meals. She is given fewer opportunities for schooling. Then comes early marriage, coupled with all the risks of teenage pregnancy. As the village health workers discussed the social causes of ill health, they saw the need to organize the women in the villages if major social changes were to occur. However, they encountered numerous difficulties in doing so. The women, in their isolation, were not open to change and seemed to be trapped in their own fatalism and superstition. Ironically, though the women had the most to gain, they were the ones who most opposed the health teachings. (…) The opposition came mainly from the older women. They did not like the idea of their daughters-in-law 'wasting their time', listening to new ideas about bringing up children or getting prenatal care instead of working either in the house or on the farm. These old women felt they knew enough to take care of their families' illnesses. Thus the daughters-in-law were powerless to take care of their own bodies or even talk about them. The village women did not socialize and were fragmented by caste. Many were unwilling to break caste prejudices. After all, women were also the keepers of tradition in their society. Centuries of subservience*

had made them accept their secondary role; they were trained to suffer in silence. That attitude had to be changed." (Arole and Arole, 1994, 184)

(31) *"Most village health workers faced these social evils in their own families. They took care of their daughters and sent them to school. (…) The health of women, the VHWs knew, is also affected by the violence within the family. Husbands beat up their wives for trivial reasons like not cooking food on time"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 183).

(32) *"The village women had many responsibilities, including bringing up their children. They were responsible for providing food and water and disposing of waste. They were the major workers in the field and took care of the farm animals. However, the men sold the milk and eggs in the market. They controlled the money and spent part of it on their own pleasures, like buying a watch or a radio or having a good time with their friends. A major cause of malnutrition was the seasonal migration of the young families to the sugar factories. Women had to work hard in the cane fields and leave the children to fend for themselves. The result was severe malnutrition among their children"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 183-4).

(33)*"The village health workers expressed their conviction that other women in the village should experience the kind of liberation that they themselves had experienced. The Farmers' Clubs helped them in their work but the village health workers needed the support of the women too. They felt that what was needed was a woman's group, a counterpart of the farmers' club to address issues specific to women. This idea germinated in one of VHW class sessions, and they decided to organize such groups. The Farmers' Clubs supported the idea and encouraged their wives and sisters or mothers to be part of these women's groups. They also persuaded other men to allow their wives to join the group."* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 184-5)

(34)*"The village health workers began to get together with women of their villages once every week or fortnight. (…) The village health worker would be able to convince just seven or eight women to get together. (…) In the beginning, just eight women would sit together and share each other's problems. All that we did was listen to their difficulties. This was a new experience for them."* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 185)

(35)*"We gathered together to socialize in one of the women's homes, to sing songs and to listen to each other. In between, I taught them childcare (VHW speaking) (…) As these gatherings became regular, more women joined the group. In spite of objections from their*

families, they gained courage as they found support in other women. Every week I shared with the women whatever I learned at the centre. I asked them to join me to improve the health of the village. I could not do it alone. Is it possible for a single bullock to plough a field? It takes six or more to do a good job. I told the women that we could do much to improve the health of our village. We only needed to work together. Each woman took responsibility for her own area. During the first week, they planned to teach every mother about how to treat diarrhea and fever in children. The mothers-in-law were curious. One by one they joined the group. Now the women's group had stature and the membership swelled to over fifty people." (Arole and Arole, 1994, 185-6)

(36)*"More and more women began to attend these informal meetings in different villages. They decided to call their informal groups Mahila Vikas Mandals"* (Women's Development Associations). (Arole and Arole, 1994, 186)

(37)*"Discussions on health and social conditions were not enough to hold the women's interest for long. The need for money was a constant preoccupation. Sometimes their children needed food or medicine. Older children needed books and uniforms. Every time, they had to request money from a husband or mother-in-law. What they really needed was their own income and control over the money. Therefore the MVMs began to think about income generating activities."* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 186)

(38)*"Traditionally, some village women participated in a self-financing credit plan called a Bhishi. In the Bhishi system, the women in the group each contribute a certain amount of money periodically. The contributions are pooled and the person whose name is drawn gets the total amount for that period. Ultimately everyone gets a turn. The MVM members decide to contribute an amount equivalent to one day's wage every week and make the pooled amount available to one or two members each week. Instead of drawing lots, they decided, the most needy would benefit first. (...) (186) The Bhishi system built a sense of trust and helped women to be sensitive to one another."* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 187)

(39)*"The MVM became a platform on which a village health worker built her health activities. As the members increased and attended meetings regularly, they began to realize that they had more power together as a group than as individuals. The VHWs gradually introduced social issues that had affected their health, especially that of women and girls. They began to ask questions about why they treated their daughters different from their sons, or why girls were not fed properly or sent to school like their brothers. They talked freely*

about alcoholism, wife beating and harsh treatment meted out to unwed mothers." (Arole and Arole, 1994, 187)

(40)*"By 1978, thirty one villages had MVMs. MVM members expressed a desire to attend the same training sessions as the village health workers."* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 187)

(41) *"The village health worker taught women in the MVM how to make oral rehydration solutions, how to track women's health during pregnancy, and how to conduct safe deliveries. In each village three or four members shared the VHW's health activities. They did health work when the village health worker was away in training or on other business. The idea of one lamp lighting another lamp spread from village to village in the entire area. No longer was there just one worker; now there was a team headed by the village health worker to take care of the village"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 187).

(42) *"The women's associations knew that the farmers' club members had seminars every three months. They too wanted to learn and participate in such activities. They wanted quarterly workshops to deal with issues related to women's lives. (...) The attendance increased from fifty women in the first seminar to over two thousand women later. The gathering was a great occasion for them to meet together and exchange ideas. They ate together and slept together under a huge canopy. They composed songs on social evils like alcoholism and exploitation and discussed issues such as the status of women, their poverty, dowry, atrocities inflicted on Dalits and corruption rampant in the society. Through these songs they exhorted women to unite to end untouchability, to control their own lives and to work constructively to improve village communities"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 187-8)

(43) *"Professionals interested in the betterment of women addressed these meetings. Most speakers were experts in their fields and had grassroots experience working with women in non-governmental organizations. Lawyers, social workers and other professionals explained, in simple terms, how the laws guaranteed women certain rights regarding property, marriage and wages. They explained how to find help to solve one's own problems.* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 188)

(44) *"Women used to be afraid of government workers in the villages. They feared the local village government functionaries like Talathi and the policemen, who would rather exercise their authority than serve. They were terrified at the thought of entering the court, police station or other government offices. (...) Various strategies were adopted to remove these*

fears. We arranged for the women to meet with high level police and revenue officers, local judges, jailor, bankers and others. Contrary to their expectation, they found that these well-educated officers were cordial and showed real interest in their work and welfare. They not only spoke to the women respectfully, but offered them chairs and shared tea and refreshments. Experiences of this kind helped the women to be bold and confident and to understand their own worth in a free democratic society" (Arole and Arole, 1994, 189)

(45) *"Bank officials in the villages treated women in a condescending and derogatory manner. (They were used to providing credit to rich businessmen and farmers and they did not want to bother even with the paperwork for small loans to scores of women. The Government had a special program of extending credit at low interest rates to women and marginalized people. The Mahila Vikas Mandal members in Rajuri were the first to apply for such credit. At first, the village bankers refused to give the loans. (...) They harassed the women through their bureaucratic procedures, but the women did not give up because they knew they were eligible for the loans according to government policy. They asked mr. Arun Londhe to accompany them to the bank for moral support. After reaching the bank this group of women firmly with one voice told the banker that he was unnecessarily harassing them. They would not leave the bank till he made a decision to either grant them the loan or give in writing his reasons for refusal. Sensing the determination of this organized group, the manager relented and granted the loan. These women triumphantly shared their story with women in other villages, as their regular gatherings. This success made other bank managers take these poor people seriously and not slight them. (...) Eventually the Mahila Vikas Mandals throughout the project areas had no trouble procuring loans from the bank"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 189-191)

(46) *"Programmes sponsored by the Mandals included learning social values. The importance of integrity, hard work and cooperative efforts were emphasized. As women became more and more aware of their status, their actions together kept building their self-confidence and self-esteem. New knowledge and income helped empower them. They began to take part in the decision-making process in their homes. (...) As the women gained self-confidence, they started participating In village affairs. They worked closely with the Farmers' Clubs. They were now in a position to tackle some of the real barriers to health in the social structure"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 194).

(47) *"Women who were once poor, marginalized and weak have been empowered to determine their own lives. Increased food production, safe drinking water and increased access to money and earning capacity were their primary needs. The MVMs had begun with a focus on income and health, which widened into the areas of social and ecological development that made healthy lives possible"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 197)

(48) *"The women's organizations have been successful though progress has been slow. In the beginning, problems were plentiful. Most village women had never been to school. They had never been involved in decision making. Someone else had always controlled their thinking and their time. Now, they are beginning to think for themselves. They also have learned to work together to share responsibilities and to trust each other. In the initial stages the MVMs had many problems. Many were due to the women having worked on a cooperative basis and never having been in decision-making positions. (...) This sharing of the failures and success was a learning process for the entire group/ In most villages, after the birth pangs and setbacks were over, the MVMs blossomed into effective village organizations supporting the village health workers as they sought to bring health for all. (...) Every Mahila Mandal has its own history. It has its own individuality, created by the uniqueness of each of the women who make up this vital vehicle for social change"* (Arole and Arole, 1994, 199-200).