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ARTICLE

Prajateerpu, power and knowledge

The politics of participatory action research in development
Part 1. Context, process and safeguards

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ABSTRACT

Prajateerpu (translation: 'people's verdict') has been devised as an exercise for allowing those people most affected by the 'Vision 2020' for food and farming in Andhra Pradesh (AP, India) to shape a vision of their own. We explore *Prajateerpu* as a case study in participatory action research that took place against a background of social, political and scientific controversy in which we were active participants. Having examined different methods in combination, including the citizens' jury, scenario workshop and public hearings involved in the *Prajateerpu* process, we assess the safeguards that were put in place to ensure a balanced and credible deliberative process. We suggest that the exchanges between the five organizations that formed the core team, the facilitators, oversight panel, witnesses, and jurors in *Prajateerpu*, along with the use of a set of carefully designed safeguards, may contain valuable lessons for those who wish to engage in collaborative inquiries where the political stakes in the outcome of this way of knowing are high.

KEY WORDS

- citizens' jury
- democracy
- participation
- process validity
- sustainable livelihoods

Introduction

Prajateerpu, which is literally translated from Telegu as 'the people's verdict',[3] was a six-day exercise in deliberative democracy that focused on the future of farming and food security in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh (AP). Involving marginal-livelihood citizens from all three sub-regions of the state, it took place at the Government of India's Farmer Liaison Centre (Krishi Vigyan Kendra – KVK) in Algole Village, Zaheerabad Taluk, Medak District, AP from 25 June to 1 July 2001. Although touching on the highly politically-charged background to the *Prajateerpu* process, this paper will concentrate on the hearings themselves and the safeguards that were put in place.

Prajateerpu was devised as a means of allowing those people most affected by the government's 'Vision 2020' for food and farming in AP to shape a vision of their own. Grounded in the diverse traditions that are often collectively described as participatory action research, this deliberative process aimed to link local voices and visions of food and farming futures with national and international policy making (Pimbert & Wakeford, 2001; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). It also combined elements from established techniques such as citizens' juries and scenario workshops with safeguards such as an oversight panel, video scenario presentations and witnesses. Given the political sensitivity of many of these issues both in India and internationally, these safeguards were aimed at ensuring a demonstrably balanced and competent process of deliberation.

As the first of two papers dealing with *Prajateerpu* as an experiment in participatory action research, the following account has two objectives. First, it seeks to explain the sequence of events and exchanges, together with the political and social contexts that surrounded *Prajateerpu*. Second, it highlights the insights of those India-based individuals and groups that are actively engaged in giving agency to marginalized communities, whose perspectives otherwise risk becoming sidelined by debates over research methodologies.[4] After describing the methodologies used, we offer a participant-observer's perspective on the safeguards used in *Prajateerpu* that also draws on the statements of the participants involved at different levels.

Our second paper (Wakeford & Pimbert, forthcoming) will explore the outcomes of the *Prajateerpu* process, focusing in particular on aspects that have generated strong reactions from those with political power. After situating the interventions of different individuals and institutions we critically reflect on the politics of knowledge embedded in the approaches used to evaluate the *Prajateerpu* process and its outcomes.

Box 1 The *Prajateerpu* action-research cycle in chronological sequence

Reflection (1) Origins of process: May–June 2000

- Meeting with a large network of Indian academics, community and human rights groups to explore the possibility of a participatory action research process in Andhra Pradesh.
- Reflection on recent experience of similar initiatives both locally, nationally and internationally.

Action (1) Foundations: October 2000–April 2001

- Establishment of collaboration between five partner organizations: the Andhra Pradesh Coalition in Defence of Diversity (APCDD), University of Hyderabad, the All-India National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), and the UK based International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS).
- Search for oversight panel members and agreements on roles and responsibilities.
- Identification of witnesses and the design of a rigorous methodology for recruiting jurors.

Reflection (2) Review and final stage planning: May–June 2001

Reflecting with our co-researchers, particularly concerning:

- the method we had by then piloted for recruiting jurors, and
- the non-acceptance by two key stakeholders – DfID and the World Bank – of an invitation to take part in the oversight or observation of the process.

Action (2) *Prajateerpu* hearings: June–July 2001

- University of Hyderabad team oversees jury selection in Andhra Pradesh.
- Video script checked by oversight panel members and production of 3 videos.
- Specialist witnesses screened, invited and briefed.
- Media professionals (India and international) briefed on planned *Prajateerpu* .
- Agreement with the University of Hyderabad to video record entire process.
- Hearings take place over five days.
- Process of reflection with the oversight panel at the end of each day - informed by the Telegu-speaking facilitators, who by then had undertaken their own reflection session about the day with the members of the jury.

Reflection (3) Further reflection with oversight panel, witnesses and Indian partners: July 2001–February 2002

Reflections between partners continued as we brought together our report on the *Prajateerpu* process. Having finished the draft report in early February, MP toured India, talking to the various Indian partners and soliciting their input on the changes that should be made. We both also consulted our colleagues in IDS/IIED, drawing on their suggestions.

The origins of *Prajateerpu* and the core team of participatory action researchers

Released on India's Republic Day 1999, Vision 2020 sets out the future of AP as envisioned by the Government of AP (GoAP), a future in which poverty is eradicated. Vision 2020 seeks to transform all areas of social and economic life in AP. It aims to build human resources, to focus on high-potential sectors as the engines of growth, and to transform governance throughout the state (GoAP, 1999). The government's poverty-reduction strategy is intimately linked with the delivery of this comprehensive vision.

Fundamental and profound transformations of the food system are proposed in Vision 2020, yet there has been little or no involvement of small farmers and rural people in shaping this policy scenario (GoAP, 2000a, 2000b, 2001a). Local and state-level partners expressed considerable concerns about the possible impacts of Vision 2020 on agricultural biodiversity, the security of rural people's livelihoods and the very fabric of local food systems and economies. About three-quarters of the state's recorded population of 70 million work in agriculture, and 80 percent of the farming population is made up of small and marginal farmers.[5] It was in this context that a range of concerned individuals in AP, together with the authors of this paper, Michel Pimbert (MP) and Tom Wakeford (TW), began to explore mechanisms of encouraging an informed public debate on the choice of policy futures for food and farming in AP.

Like our Indian co-inquirers, the two of us brought different – but we hoped complementary – experience to the process. MP had long experience of facilitating participatory action research in the context of natural resource management and people-centred biodiversity conservation. TW's background was centred on action research relating to deliberative democratic processes, particularly those related to science and technology policy in general and biotechnology in particular. Both of us had spent a considerable time in India. MP had spent four years in AP experimenting with what are now commonly known as 'Farmer First' approaches to agricultural research and innovation.[6] We had been introduced to each other during a workshop in Hyderabad in the late 1990s and had first worked together in 2000 during a citizens' jury on genetically modified (GM) crops that had been carried out by ActionAid in the Indian state of Karnataka, in which TW was the co-ordinator and MP acted as an external evaluator.[7]

In early 2000, MP was approached by grassroots organizations in AP who wanted collaborators to join in an exercise in participatory visioning with rural people who had been politically marginalized by the government's Vision 2020 planning process. Together we decided that the evolving forms of emancipatory and accountable co-inquiry, generally grouped under the label 'participatory action research', offered a meaningful framework for collaboration between what was to become the core *Prajateerpu* team.

Extensive discussions between this group of potential collaborators brought the following organizations together in what subsequently became known as the *Prajateerpu* process: the Andhra Pradesh Coalition in Defence of Diversity (APCDD), the University of Hyderabad, the All-India National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), and the UK-based International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). Despite their geographical distance and cultural differences, this core group of co-operative inquirers shared three sets of values and goals. First, we shared a commitment to holistic, inclusive and democratic ways of knowing and acting in the world, recognizing the possibility of transformative action through critical research. Second, we felt that the acquisition of knowledge – and the process of coming to know – should also serve democracy and the practical goals of social and ecological justice. Third, we agreed that the participatory processes used should allow the democratic scrutiny of both 'facts' and values, bringing together critical analysis with an empathy for the insights and wisdom that can come from lived experience.

We were conscious that our initiative was being undertaken as a rapid and somewhat top-down response to a vision that was already being implemented by the government of AP. However, we believed that the *Prajateerpu* process could potentially create a safe space for people directly affected by Vision 2020, enabling participants from marginalized communities to further develop their own agency, and to mobilize themselves and others to bring about change independently of the *Prajateerpu* organizers.

The citizens' jury/scenario workshop methodology

The citizens' jury

The citizens' jury has the potential to be an action research tool that can make a powerful contribution to highlighting issues of social justice and the legitimization of non-specialist knowledge (Jefferson Center, 2001; Wakeford, 2002). Like a legal jury, the cornerstone of a citizens' jury is the belief that once a small sample of a population has heard the evidence, their subsequent deliberations can fairly represent the conscience and perspectives of the wider community. This age-old reasoning contrasts with today's most common quantitative and qualitative methods for representing the public's views, the opinion poll and focus group.

In most citizens' juries a panel of non-specialists meets for a total of 20–50 hours to examine carefully an issue of public significance. The jury, made up of 12–20 people, serves as a microcosm of the public. Under the citizens' jury model most commonly used in the UK and US, jurors are often recruited via a more or less randomized selection of people taken from the electoral roll.

In preparation for the *Prajateerpu* hearings, a team of participatory development and communication researchers from the Department of Communication at the University of Hyderabad were chosen to conduct the recruitment of the jurors. The team interviewed a range of rural people who they contacted using a snowballing technique (Atkinson & Flint, 2001), beginning with names of people that were suggested by workers in a wide range of community groups across the state, based on selection criteria that they should be:

- small or marginal farmers living near or below the poverty line;
- open-minded, with no close connection to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or political parties; and
- likely to be articulate in discussions.

Researchers were careful not to pick community workers themselves, but rather use the workers as informants in the snowballing process. Working through these groups gave the researchers a means of accurately identifying small and marginal farmers, which would not have been possible using available official information sources, such as electoral rolls.

Having collected a list of names and addresses, the team then travelled to the villages where these farmers lived and conducted detailed interviews.[8] In selecting the jurors, the researchers laid particular emphasis on recruiting *dalit*, *adivasi* and women farmers.[9] In addition, one urban juror was recruited to give the perspective of someone who was a consumer of farm produce but not earning a living from the land. While she could obviously not be expected to represent the full range of views of citizens with non-agriculturally related livelihoods, it was clear that the deliberations would be enriched by participants being able to take on board her concerns and knowledge.

Unlike processes in which organizers can undertake extended interactions with participants that often lead to longer-term mobilizations,[10] *Prajateerpu* only asked for a relatively short-term commitment from jurors. We therefore wished to respect the privacy of the jurors and the confidentiality of the information we made public, and identified them only by their first name and AP District.

The scenario workshop

The jurors were presented with three different scenarios or visions of the future. Each was presented using a 30-minute video and by a number of key opinion-formers who acted as witnesses and explained the logic behind the scenario.

1) Vision 1: Vision 2020. This scenario has been put forward by AP's Chief Minister and has been backed by a loan from the World Bank. It proposes to consolidate small farms and rapidly increase mechanization and modernization. Production-enhancing technologies such as genetic engineering and information technology will be introduced into farming and food processing

(GoAP, 2001b). A significant reduction in the number of people on the land is anticipated by 2020, from 70 percent to 40 percent (a potential displacement of 25–30 million people). The UK's Department for International Development (DfID) provides direct budgetary support to the GoAP for reforms needed to implement Vision 2020 (DfID, 2001).

2) Vision 2: An export-based cash crop model of organic production. This vision of the future is based on proposals from the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) and the International Trade Centre (United Nations Conference on Trade & Development/World Trade Organisation) for environmentally friendly farming linked to national and international markets. This vision is also increasingly driven by the demand of supermarkets in the North which want a cheap supply of organic produce and to comply with new eco-labelling standards.
3) Vision 3: Localized food systems. A future scenario based on increased self-reliance for rural communities, low external-input agriculture, the relocalization of food production, markets and local economies, and with long-distance trade only in goods that are surplus to production or not produced locally.

A crucial part of the scenario workshop/citizens' jury depended on identifying individuals willing and able to defend a particular vision of food and farming futures in AP. The invited specialist witnesses all had a proven track record of engagement with the issues to be discussed and were broadly representative of government, industry and civil society (Box 2). Each specialist witness agreed to address the jurors directly and also be open to cross-examination. This element of the process has been compared with the widespread Indian process of Jan Sunwai ('people's hearings') or the indigenous community forums known as *goti* that are practised in the Eastern Ghats region of AP.[11]

Role of the jurors

The jurors considered all three visions, assessing the specialist witnesses' contributions and the pros and cons of each policy future on the basis of their own knowledge, priorities and aspirations. The jurors were not asked to simply choose between vision 1, 2 or 3, but were encouraged to assess critically the viability and relevance of all the elements of each scenario for the future. They could choose one particular vision or combine elements of all three futures and derive their own unique vision(s). An important task of the jury was to devise an action proposal which could be implemented to achieve their chosen vision. The resulting action proposals were considered in both small groups and in plenary. The full details of the jury's deliberations and resulting set of policy recommendations for the future of food and farming are described in Pimbert & Wakeford (2002). A summary of the main points of the jury's verdict is given in Box 3.

Box 2 The specialist witnesses at *Prajateerpu*

The names and affiliations of individuals who gave specialist evidence at the citizens' jury on food and farming futures for AP are:

1. **K. Akbal Rao**
   Deputy Commissioner and Deputy Director of Agriculture, GoAP
2. **Professor M. V. Rao**
   Former Vice-Chancellor of Andhra Pradesh Agricultural University, Hyderabad, India. Senior Advisor to the GoAP on biotechnology and agricultural policy
3. **P. Chengal Reddy**
   President AP Federation of Farmers Associations, Andhra Pradesh, India
4. **Dr K. P. C. Rao**
   Principal scientist, Economic Planning, National Academy of Agricultural Research Management, Hyderabad, India
5. **Dr Alexander Daniels**
   General Secretary of International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), Asia
6. **Dr. Shivram Krishna**
   Cultural anthropologist working with tribal peoples in AP
7. **Dr Sagari Ramdas**
   Specialist in livestock issues, Director, Anthra, Hyderabad, India
8. **Dr Partha Dasgupta**
   SYNGENTA Seeds Asia-Pacific
9. **Dr Debashis Banerji**
   Former Head and Professor Botany and Molecular Biology CCS University, Meerut, India
10. **Michael Hart**
    President of the Small and Family Farm Alliance, UK
11. **Colin Hines**
    Associate, International Forum on Globalisation, UK
12. **Dr T. N. Prakash**
    Professor of Agriculture and Coordinator, Agro Biodiversity Group of National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), India
13. **K. Srinivas**
    Political economist and journalist, Andhra Pradesh, India

The oversight panel

The jury/scenario workshop process was overseen by a group of external observers or stakeholders, who formed the oversight panel. The role of the panel, which had been approached by different co-inquirers over the preceding months, was to monitor and evaluate the fairness and credibility of the entire process. The inclusion of observers with a diverse range of interests was an important way of

Box 3 The jury's verdict and vision of the future

There was a significant diversity of perspectives and opinions among the jurors. However there was a widespread agreement on the statements in their verdict, which included the following:

We oppose:

- the proposed reduction of those making their livelihood from the land from 70 percent to 40 percent in Andhra Pradesh
- land consolidation and displacement of rural people
- contract farming
- labour-displacing mechanization
- Genetically modified (GM) crops, including Vitamin-A rice and Bacillus thuringiensis (BT)-cotton
- loss of control over medicinal plants including their export

We desire:

- food and farming for self reliance and community control over resources
- to maintain healthy soils, diverse crops, trees and livestock, and to build on our indigenous knowledge, practical skills and local institutions.

ensuring that the methodology was trustworthy and not captured by a group with a particular perspective or vested interest. In this context, the concept of stakeholder was widened to include those who are 'stake-less', having been marginalized by prevailing socio-economic forces. This was based on the co-ordinating team's belief that only if there was a balance on the panel between those whose human rights were at risk and those with power, would the process be both fair and seen to be fair.

Two members of the oversight panel critically reviewed the scripts of the videos to ensure that each food and farming future was presented in a fair and unprejudiced way. All panel members were involved in the critical evaluation of the jury process and its deliberations. As a stakeholder/observer panel the composition was carefully balanced using guidelines from previous exercises to include a broad range of interests and perspectives without any one of them dominating (Coote & Lenaghan, 1997). The panel was not pushed artificially into being so broad-based as to include, and potentially be disrupted by, individuals opposed to democratic accountability of governments and corporations (Box 4).

Facilitators

The selection criteria for the facilitators particularly stressed good local language and communication skills. Participants came from all over the state, but they all had the Telegu language in common. Other important criteria included a working knowledge of rural conditions and livelihoods throughout AP, an ability to help people with contrasting backgrounds and life experiences to work together,

Box 4 The oversight panel and *Prajateerpu*

The oversight panel assessed the degree of fairness, competence and credibility of the citizens' jury process. The panel members were:

Justice P.B. Sawant
Chairman of the Press Council of India (former Chief Justice at the Supreme Court of India)
Faridkot House
New Delhi
India

Paul ter Weel, First Secretary
Advisor Development & Environment,
DGIS
The Netherlands Embassy
New Delhi
India

Ms Savitri
Girijan Deepika (NGO)
East Godavari District
Andhra Pradesh
India

Y. Divanjulu Naidu
Coordinator of AME (Agriculture Man and Ecology)
Andhra Pradesh
India

Sandeep Chachra
Regional Director
ActionAid India
Hyderabad
India

experience in village-level facilitation and conflict resolution, and representation of key sectors (government, academia and civil society). One male and two female facilitators were sought in order to reflect the gender composition of the citizens' jury, which was biased in favour of women. The facilitators were:

- Sudha Goparaju, Programme Support Team, Rural Livelihoods Programme, Government of AP, India
- Kavitha Kuruganti, Programmes Division, ActionAid India
- Dr Vinod Pavarala, Communication Programme, University of Hyderabad, AP, India

Media

News and media professionals were invited to the *Prajateerpu* event to relay information about the jury deliberations and outcomes to a wider audience, both nationally and internationally.

Prajateerpu as an experiment in democracy – experimenting with safeguards

Ensuring the quality and validity of the knowledge and actions generated by *Prajateerpu* have been central concerns for the *Prajateerpu* action-research team. From the outset we recognized that our subjectivity and worldview could potentially influence our actions as researchers and our interpretations of events. We tried to build safeguards into the *Prajateerpu* process to ensure it was broadly credible, trustworthy, fair and not captured by any interest group or perspective. While aiming for methodological rigour, we did not plan to satisfy naïve notions of 'objective truth'. Instead our prime concern was meeting broader criteria of process validity, including quality and inclusivity of deliberation, diverse control, practical outcomes, empowerment and enduring consequences.

Diverse oversight and transparency

Vision 2020 contains proposals for a dramatic transformation in the way food is produced, distributed and marketed 20 years from now. Many elements are controversial – particularly the promotion of GM crops and the displacement of rural people. The two counter-visions communicated at the outset of this citizens' jury/scenario workshop also contained controversial elements. It was therefore critical that this deliberative process was transparent and under the control of representatives of organizations with different vested interests and social aims.

Four primary safeguard mechanisms were built into the *Prajateerpu* process with the explicit aim of promoting diverse control and transparency.

1) The oversight panel. The panel had an explicit mandate to assess the fairness, plural perspectives and credibility of *Prajateerpu* (see above). Attempts were made to include a representative from the corporate sector and DfID-India on the panel. Unfortunately neither DfID nor the India Tobacco Group were able to accept the invitations sent to them. Nevertheless, the oversight panel's composition was sufficiently diverse to represent a broad spectrum of interests (Box 4). Chaired by a retired Chief Justice from the Supreme Court of India, the panel critically oversaw the entire process, checking for possible bias and inconsistencies. It included representatives of

the international donor community, civil society organizations and indigenous peoples. The members of the oversight panel shared their observations with the co-ordinating team at the end of each day of the jury's deliberations, ensuring that all parts of the process were continually evaluated by individuals with a diverse range of perspectives. The panel also made an overall evaluation of *Prajateerpu* after the formal closure of the event.

2) The media observers and reporters. Members of the press were invited to document the hearings and outcomes of *Prajateerpu*. The following national newspapers sent their correspondents to observe and report on different moments of the deliberative process: *The Indian Express*, *The Times of India*, *The Hindu* and *The Deccan Chronicle*. A variety of state newspapers written in Telegu also sent their correspondents. Reporters and camera crews from two national Indian television news channels, *Star News* and *Doordashan*, were present, with *Doordashan* returning three times to film and interview participants at the beginning, middle and end of the event. The semi-continuous presence of the press thus ensured another level of control and vetting of the jury process. The wide reporting of the event in the national media highlighted the credibility and impartiality of the deliberations that led to the jury's verdict. Interestingly, a small minority of journalists were eager to elicit from the jurors whether they had been briefed or tutored in particular ideological positions by the organizers prior to the hearings. In interviews with these journalists, however, jurors strongly dismissed these doubts and implicit accusations of bias in the process. In the words of one juror, 'These are life and death matters to us. We will not let anyone tell us what we should say.'[12]

3) Multi-stakeholder observers. Several other observers were invited to witness the jury process on the understanding that they should remain silent during the specialist presentations and the deliberations of the jury. These observers included other farmers from AP, NGO representatives, agricultural researchers and planners, trade union representatives and corporate sector representatives. These observers were from both India and Europe. Most of them stayed only two or three days but some witnessed the whole event. All formed opinions on the strengths and weaknesses of the process and were able to communicate their views to members of the oversight panel, the co-ordinating team and the press. The presence of the silent observers further enhanced the transparency of *Prajateerpu*.

4) The video archives. The entire citizens' jury/scenario workshop with interviews of various participants were recorded on digital video by a team from the Sarojini Naidu School of Performing Arts, Fine Arts and Communication of the University of Hyderabad. These comprehensive video archives were compiled to:

- provide a clear and accurate record of the event, including the location, the jury setting, the participants, the nature and quality of the debates, the process and its outcomes; and
- allow any party or external agency to learn from this experience or check for shortfalls in balance, fairness or deliberative competence of the process.

Two duplicate sets of 26 videotapes were prepared along with a detailed index of the video archives and English/Telegu transcripts for *Prajateerpu*. The first set of duplicate tapes was left in the custody of the International Institute for Environment and Development, London (UK) and the second with the University of Hyderabad, AP (India).

Diverse control and transparency were thus embedded in the very design of *Prajateerpu*. Moreover, control and scrutiny over the dynamics of *Prajateerpu* took place in real time and *in situ*, allowing many different participants to validate their own knowledge, and contest the validity of that of others in an open deliberative arena. For example, the panel of independent observers acted as an extended peer community that was able to directly witness the dynamics of knowledge production, action and empowerment. The oversight panel had absolute power to decide which methods and processes (representativeness of jury, video scenarios, balance of witnesses, quality of facilitation) were appropriate and what constituted valid knowledge in that context. Through this innovation we sought to decentralize and democratize the knowledge validation process as well as ensure that *Prajateerpu's* outputs were as legitimate and representative as possible.

Diverse control and funding

The safeguard of diverse control was also ensured in *Prajateerpu* by relying on several sources of funding. Funding sources with vested interests in conflicting visions and technology choices should be involved for the sake of pluralism (Pimbert & Wakeford, 2001). Based on this rationale, funding for *Prajateerpu* came from:

- the government of The Netherlands' overseas development agency (DGIS), via the International Institute for Environment and Development's Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods Programme;
- the Rockefeller Foundation via IDS's Environment Group;
- the Andhra Pradesh Coalition in Defence of Diversity; and
- the All-India National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP).

The bulk of the funding was ultimately provided by DGIS (65 percent) and by the Rockefeller Foundation (30 percent). Although the financial contributions

of national Indian partners were relatively small (5 percent), their contributions in human and other assets were decisive in ensuring strong control over *Prajateerpu* by locally and nationally accountable organizations.

Formation of a safe space

Prajateerpu provided a safe communicative space in which people who might otherwise feel threatened by sharing their knowledge and experience with others were placed in carefully thought-out environments of mutual support and empathy. Within these spaces, perspectives from the social and natural sciences as well as the knowledge of farmers and local resource users could be confronted, negotiated and combined to develop visions of the future. Like many previous action research processes, *Prajateerpu* recognized that there are differently situated forms of knowledge about food systems, livelihoods and environment, and each is partial and incomplete. Participatory learning, inclusion, dialogues and careful deliberation brought these multiple and separate realities together, combining the strengths of outsiders' and local people's knowledge.

Yet the possibility that hierarchy and self-censorship might constrain deliberation and inclusion was a real concern for the organizers of *Prajateerpu*. A common observation in participatory processes, especially those undertaken where there are pronounced social hierarchies, is that those of high social rank feel far less inhibited about contributing to discussions than those from low castes. The composition of the jury was important. Only one juror was urban-based and from a more privileged caste. The jury also comprised more women than men. Facilitators and Telegu-speaking observers both reported that social hierarchy was not a significant factor in the way different members of the jury contributed to the *Prajateerpu* process.

The jury's group dynamics were relatively egalitarian and seemed to be characterized by mutual respect and co-operation. The three Telegu-speaking facilitators did not find the more literate men or women dominating or parading knowledge which would have re-inforced any caste superiority. On the contrary, one of the facilitators remarked on how the jurors evolved enabling and mutually supportive relationships throughout the week of *Prajateerpu* hearings:

- After the first two days the jurors realized that some among them were talking a lot, while the others were keeping silent. A few of them who were very articulate noticed this and decided to draw the others out the next day. They formed a rule for the day which said that the silent ones would get a chance first that day. The following day saw all the jurors speaking, with better mutual support and encouragement.
- The jurors built up enough rapport among themselves that they were teasing each other with nicknames and were cracking jokes, about each other,

> the witnesses and the organizers. They were found to be taking care of each other whenever someone fell sick. This was very impressive, given that their backgrounds were very different.[13]

A further indication of the quality of interactions and safe communicative action was the extent to which citizens were allowed to interrogate their sources of information, rather than being merely the passive recipients of briefings and specialist testimonies. An easy measure of this is the proportion of time in a process that is devoted to the presentation of witness evidence versus the amount of time allowed for the interrogation of witnesses by the jurors. In *Prajateerpu* the ratio was roughly 1:1, and appeared to jurors and observers to be enough for the jurors to become as informed as possible about the issues on which the witnesses had given evidence. This compares favourably with other processes of this kind (Pimbert & Wakeford, 2001). The interrogation period also allowed jurors to draw on their own experience to challenge the 'facts', rhetorical devices and analogies used by witnesses.

Compared with the jurors, specialist witnesses were wealthier, better educated and often represented powerful organizations or castes. Despite these asymmetrical relationships, most interactions between specialist witnesses and the jurors were balanced and mutually respectful. Disparity in social rank strongly surfaced in a few instances, however. At times the jury members reported feeling undermined by what some specialist witnesses said or implied. Power relationships between technocratic witnesses and illiterate yet highly knowledgeable farmers were played out repeatedly during some of the hearings.

However, on the whole the relationships were sufficiently enabling and non-hierarchical for jurors to participate meaningfully in debates on the future of food and farming in AP. The oversight panel members were interviewed at the end of the hearings and the following quotes were extracted from these.

> Y. D. Naidu: The jury's participation has been very encouraging and spontaneous.
>
> Ms Savitri: Women participants have shown more determination, and they have the confidence to conduct meetings and share information with others.
>
> Justice Sawant: I was happy to see that these farmers were so vocal – particularly the women – and that they had cornered government policymakers. Some of these experts just have a one-dimensional, one-directional approach; they had no answers to the social issues which the jurors were raising.

When asked if it was confident that the jurors were not just reiterating catchphrases they had heard, the oversight panel emphatically stated that the jury had not been subject to outside manipulation or pressure:

> Paul Ter Weel: No, no. In the way they react, it's genuine feeling, it's their deep feeling. They know what they are dealing with.

The facilitators' attitude of respect toward the participants as citizens was a crucial component in the formation of a safe communicative space. A key part of this is allowing participants to define the issues to be discussed in the way they want. The facilitators' approach had to strike a balance between providing perspectives useful to policymakers and giving control to the participants by providing opportunities for them to frame issues in their own way, using experiences and perspectives that they felt were most relevant. Because of the limited length of the hearings, the jury's discussions in *Prajateerpu* were comparatively brief, given the complexity and breadth of the topic. It was therefore important to use a number of participatory tools through which people could articulate their concerns and suggestions.

As well as being on hand as a resource during the formal hearings, the facilitators also assisted the jury in plenary sessions and small group discussions. These safe communicative spaces enabled jurors not only to consider what they had heard and seen from witnesses, but also to formulate questions for these subject-matter specialists and to debate the answers they received with other jurors. The facilitators also assisted the jury's understanding of the terminology of arguments presented to them in translations from English (which, as one would expect, none of the jury spoke) or in the different Telegu dialects spoken in specific areas of AP, with which not all the jurors were familiar. They also allowed jurors to explore collectively their feelings, doubts, views and preliminary conclusions at the end of each day's hearings. The facilitators had deliberative tools designed to make constructive use of different viewpoints and opinions among the jurors, without enforcing consensus at the expense of detail in the recommendations. This included the development of a range of indicators on well-being and on 'good' farming, food and governance and then outlining desired futures for food and farming on the basis of agreed indicators. Finally the facilitators helped the formulation of policy directions and recommendations for the implementation of desired visions for food and farming, while simultaneously structuring the jury's verdict and agreeing on who would read out which parts of the verdict to observers, media representatives and government on the final day of the hearings. Following this event, the facilitators also helped review and assess the strengths and limitations of the entire jury process based on their interactions with the jurors.

The facilitators' positive and enabling behaviour did much to build the trust and spirit of constructive engagement shown by the jurors. In this respect the quality of facilitation was vital. When working with marginalized and long-oppressed groups such as *dalit*, *adivasi* (see key for Table 1) and small farmers it is crucially important to rely on facilitators who can act out of genuine respect, with attitudes, behaviours and beliefs which reverse much of normal professional practice (Chambers, 1993, 1997). We believe that part of the success of the participatory methodology we used arose from the way in which the facilitators and coordinating team all recognized that participants had a fundamental right to have their views heard and that these citizens wished their conclusions to be acted

on by those in power. Because it was clear to the jurors that the facilitators' attitude was one of wanting to help them influence policy changes that would benefit poor and marginal farmers, a level of trust was established between them that certainly contributed to the rich insights that emerged from the *Prajateerpu* process.

A remarkable degree of consensus emerged among the jurors about a wide range of issues. There were some differences in priorities, which were particularly marked between those farming in different agro-ecological zones such as dry land plains and irrigated coastal agriculture. Had more time been available it would have been possible to try to tease out these differences, but given the tight time constraints the facilitators encouraged jurors to suggest recommendations on which most of them could agree.

Opportunities for agency

An attempt was made to closely reflect the realities of rural AP in the choice of jurors (see above). This citizens' jury was thus made up of small and marginal farmers, food processors and one urban office-worker. The jury included a large proportion of *dalit* and *adivasi* people. The consumer representative was an educated woman from a medium-sized town. Over two-thirds of the jurors were women, which reflects the proportion of agricultural work undertaken by them. All the main regions (Coastal Andhra, Rayalseema and Telengana) and the seven distinct agro-ecological zones of AP were represented on the jury (See Table 1 and Box 5).

In assembling the jury, the organizing team and facilitators were clear that their approach should not be merely to obtain accurate insights into the knowledge and vision of the jurors, but to allow the jurors to create their own political space that they could potentially use independently of the *Prajateerpu* organizers. The fact that all participants had some involvement with, or membership of, some kind of community group, meant that participants were not plucked off the street as most opinion poll and focus group participants are, but that they had some baseline knowledge from which they could both participate and become more effective agents for change in their own political settings (Clarke, 2002, p. 48).

Although the group was chosen to be as representative as possible of rural people likely to be affected by Vision 2020, the process that we were initiating was not one of market research or even of conventional social science, but of policy-focused action research. Working through existing groups and identifying participants who were in contact with those groups meant that if people wanted to take forward the issues raised in the jury, they would be more likely to have the opportunity to do so than if we had picked people without any regard for their ability to become advocates in their own right.

Table 1 The Social and Farming Background of the Jurors

Region	District	Name	Sex	Land Holding (acres) Wet	Dry	Lease	Total	Family Mem	Caste	Livestock	Other Income	Crops
Rayalaseema	Kurnool	Mariamma	F	2.5	2		4.5	9	Mala	2 BU + 1 BU CL + 10 H	–	PP, JO, P, CU, CHILLI
	Kurnool	Deevenamma	F	0.5	1		1.5	9	Mala	1 BU + 1 BU CL + 10 H	–	P, PP, JO
	Chittoor	Danamma	F	0.5	2		2.5	7	Mala	1 H	–	GN, PP, PM, FB, UDDALU, GG, P, CHILLI, VEGS
	Chittoor	Baby	F		2		2	5	Mala	0	WL	CP, COW P, FB, PP, GG, UDDALU
	Chittoor	Anandamma	F		6.5		6.5	8	Madiga	5 G	–	HG, JO
	Cuddapah	Laxmamma	F				0	8	Mala	3 C + 3 C CL	WL	CP, P
	Cuddapah	Ramayya	M		2		2	14	Mala	6 BU	MS	TU, CP, P
Coast	E Godavari	Mangayamma	F	2	2		4	7	Konda Reddy	4 B + 4 C + 4 C CL	WL	PM, JO, P, COW P, PP, BOBBARLU, BODUMA
	E Godavari	Narsamma	F		5		5	8	Doralu	2 B + 2 C + 1 B CL	–	PM, CO, FOX M, JO, COW P, HG, BOBBRLU, P, PP, VEGS
	Guntur	Kotaratnamma	F		0.5		0.5	6	Mala	1 BU	MS	P, BG, VEGS
	Guntur	Philip	M		1.5		1.5	5	Mala	0	–	BL, P, BG, TU, VEGS, MAMADI ALLAM
	Visa Khapatnam	Ammaji	F	2	2		4	5	Gavarlu	1BU + 2 B	WL	P, SC, CHOLLU, BOBBARLU
	Vizianagaram	Santamma	F	1	1		2	2	Jathab	2 B + 4 G + 4 H	WL	P, PM, JO, UDDALU, FM, FOX M, JUDUMULU
	W Godavari	Ganesh Rao	M	2	3		5	6	Mala	0	–	TO, CO, P, GN
Telangana	Medak	Anjamma	F	2	2		4	17	Gowds	2 BU + 2 B + 2 BU CL	WL	CO, CHILLI, VEGS, JO, PP, COW P, TU, P, BG, ONIONS
	Warangal	Baayakka	F	2	1		3	8	Doralu	0	–	P
	Warangal	Paparao	M	4	3		7	8	Koya	4 B + 3 CCL	–	P, CO
	Warangal	Sammayya	M	2	1		3	8	Doralu	0	WL	P
	Medak	Geetha Murthy	F				0	3	Brahmin	0	WL	CHILLI, FM, SEASME, SAMA

Key: PP-Pigeon Pea, JO-Jowar, CU-Cucumber, PM-Pearl Millet, FB-Field Beans, GG-Green Gram, CP-Chick Pea, COW P-Cow Pea, HG-Horse Gram, BG-Black Gram, BL-Betel Leaf, FM-Finger Millet, FOX M-Foxmillet, VEGS-Vegetable, TU-Turmeric, B-Bull; BU-Buffalo; C-Cow; CL-Calf LF; H-Hen; G-Goat, WL-Wage Labour, MS-Milk Seller
Geographical Origin: Kurnool: 2, Chittoor: 3, Cuddapah: 2, E Godavari: 2, Guntur: 2, Vizag: 1, V-Nagaram: 1, W-Godavari: 1, Medak: 1, Warangal: 3, Consumer: 1
Rayalaseema: 7 Farmers from 3 Districts; Coastal AP: 7 Farmers from 5 districts; Telangana: 4 Farmers from 2 Districts
Gender: Male Farmers: 5, Women Farmers: 13, Women Consumer: 1
Note on Jury Members: Malas and Madigas are Scheduled castes, who are above the scavenging community within the hierarchy amongst the dalits. They are usually agricultural labourers. In earlier times, when the Jajmani patron-client relationships between landlords and dalit families still existed, most of them would have been bonded or attached labourers. Some of these community members are also carcass cleaners, leather workers, cobblers and drum-beaters to this day.
The Gavarlu and the Doralu are classified as Scheduled Tribes, and are forest dwellers or forest-dependent communities. In this case though, the jury members are cultivators as well as agricultural labourers. Doralu, Konda Reddys, Gavarlu, Jathapu, and Koyas are all tribals who live in fringe villages around forests, and also practice agriculture. Gowds are traditionally toddy-tappers, but are also cultivators.

Questioned on the extent of small farmer representation on the jury, oversight panel members said:

> Justice Sawant: The farmers' jury is drawn from different sections of society. And I am very happy to find that all of them are small and marginal landholders, I don't think there is anyone representing big landholders on the one hand or government policy advisers on the other.
>
> Y. D. Naidu: The jury selection process has been sound and the result is representative of small farming communities in AP. I highly appreciate this.

It was also important to make sure that the jury understood that they were there to deliberate on what was best for everyone and not just represent themselves. Although they had been chosen from a wide variety of agricultural backgrounds, and their numbers even included one person from an urban area who could provide a consumer perspective, jurors were told to focus on discussing what would be best for all those in rural AP rather than representing, say, rice growers, the landless, *dalits* or *adivasis*. This is an important difference which we believe was vital in producing a broad vision for food and farming rather than a series of demands that might easily have contradicted each other. The source of legitimacy for the jury was the process by which their collective will was formed – the deliberation itself. *Prajateerpu* therefore allowed the jury to scrutinize the evidence, but also provided them with opportunities to challenge the manner in which witnesses had framed the issues.

A diversity of witnesses

The diverse composition of the panel of witnesses (or subject-matter specialists) ensured that key sectors of society (industry, government, civil-society organizations, farmer trade unions and academic institutions) contributed their views to the hearings of those who commented on it. Oversight panel members seemed broadly satisfied that the specialist witness presentations adequately reflected the views of their different constituencies.

> Sandeep Chachra: The presentations of the expert witnesses are balanced and fair. With one or two notable exceptions, the expert witnesses rely on logic and evidence to make their points rather than slick propaganda and manipulation.

On balance, the three visions were relatively well represented by the witnesses who gave evidence to the jury. Nevertheless, the absence of key witnesses meant that some arguments in favour of particular futures may not have been presented as well as they could otherwise have been. The absence of three organizations that were invited to participate is particularly noteworthy in this connection:

- The World Bank, a major supporter of the rationale and implementation of

Box 5 Farmers in AP

AP is the fifth largest state of India in terms of both surface area and population. About 70 percent of the state's population is engaged in agriculture. Over 80 percent of those involved in agriculture are small and marginal farmers and landless labourers who own a mere 35 percent (3.5 million ha) of the total 10 million ha of cultivated land. About 20 million bovines (cattle and buffaloes), 15 million sheep and goats, 750,000 pigs and 65 million poultry are spread across some 10 million households engaged in agriculture. The landless, marginal and small farmers own about 70 percent of the livestock. Small ruminants and backyard poultry are reared primarily by the landless adivasi, the traditional small-ruminant-eating castes such as the kurma and the galla, and the dalits (the 'untouchable' caste, a very marginalized social group). The size of a bovine herd is closely linked to private land ownership, with the number of bovines increasing with landholding size. In all agricultural settings across AP, women play a greater role than men in agricultural work and food preparation, looking after almost 80 percent of the day-to-day livestock management.

Vision 2020. The World Bank is the largest external development agency supporting GoAP, with an annual disbursement of US$266.23 million in 1999–2000.

- The Indian branch of the UK Department for International Development (DfID-India), which works with the government in four states of India: AP, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal. The State of AP alone receives over 60 percent of DFID's total aid allocation to India, the largest recipient of UK development assistance. DFID plans to more than double its aid to India during 2001–2003 (up to £300 million).
- The International Trade Centre (a WTO/UNCTAD initiative), a global institution emphasizing the export potential of organic farming and trade for developing countries.

Despite repeated invitations sent to national representatives or/and the headquarters of these organizations over a period of several months, the World Bank, DfID and the International Trade Centre were unable, and in some cases we suspect rather unwilling, to become involved in such a process.

Open framing and facilitation

Deliberative processes can provide ordinary people with the political space that they can use to bring about change. But they can also be used merely to legitimize established power structures and their chosen technological trajectories or policy programmes. To extend the scope of discussions such that citizens have the opportunity to develop their own visions for the future beyond individual issues to examine wider aspects, such as alternative development options or social justice perspectives, the way discussions are framed by information, witnesses and

their interrogation is fundamental. *Prajateerpu* contrasted with many efforts at using deliberative and participatory methods in the way in which it attempted to allow jurors to analyse the proposed introduction of new agricultural technologies in the context of broader social, economic and political processes. Rather than concentrating merely on specific issues such as land consolidation, GM crops and forest produce, the witnesses' evidence and the resulting discussions ranged across aspects of rural livelihoods that jurors, rather than the organizers or witnesses, thought were important.

Confirming findings from previous exercises of this kind, the concerns raised by non-specialists were more diverse than those of specialists or policymakers. Discussion by these non-specialists involved looser commitments to subject boundaries and a more insightful and open-minded approach to the tensions these boundaries can mask (Kerr, Cunningham-Burley & Amos, 1998). Although the three scenarios did present three self-reinforcing visions of the future of agriculture, the facilitators were careful to use these as prompts to a wider discussion, rather than directing the jurors to merely choose which of the scenarios they preferred. The verdict (Box 3) reflects this open framing and facilitation process.

In the case of a controversial technology such as genetically modified organisms (GMOs), a wider understanding of the interlinkages between biotechnology, corporate control and local power structures is more likely to be achieved by taking a scenario approach than by merely asking a jury to say yes or no to a particular technology. In the *Prajateerpu* example the jury was able to compare and evaluate three contrasting whole scenarios, each being the logical product of a series of interdependent values, assumptions and predictions. GMOs were thus not judged in isolation – they were evaluated as an integral part of a wider system or development model. One example of the way in which the jurors used their experience of high-yielding varieties to critique GM crops arose when they were told that GM technology allows farmers to do away with pesticides. 'If that really is the case, why would the pesticide companies allow GM to come in?', one juror responded disbelievingly.

The visions are a way of looking forward and getting an impression of what lies in the future. Each vision offered a comprehensive view of the overall political, social, ecological and economic organization of a food and farming future. In each case evocative images were used to help answer the question 'What does this policy decision imply for the longer term, for the generation that will come after us?'

A combination of video and specialist witness evidence was chosen to develop expressive and plausible visions of food and farming futures for AP. As a communication medium, video has the potential to create clear images of possible futures that are meaningful to both literate and non-literate audiences. The videos were designed to stimulate the imagination of the viewers through the use of colourful, appropriate and meaningful images of farming, landscapes and the lives of people in each vision.

The videos were inevitably simplified versions of potential scenarios. In his evidence to the jury, Dr Daniel commented that the video for the second scenario implied that supermarkets would dominate export-orientated organic agricultural systems, yet it was possible to suggest an alternative where only surplus produce was exported, in which case control over markets could remain in local hands. Reactions to the videos thus served to broaden the framing and scope of the deliberations. By offering divergent images of the future of food and farming, the videos enriched debate by eliciting associations, stimulating thoughts and a rethinking of starting points, ideas and normative positions. Asked about the use of the video, one of the oversight panel members remarked:

> The three videos on food and farming futures exaggerate some of the possible consequences of policy decisions. It's a bit of a caricature at times but it works! It really helps the jury members think through the issues and look at the bigger picture. Y. D. Naidu.

In the safe space created by the *Prajateerpu*, jurors had the freedom and capacity 'to participate effectively in shaping the boundaries that define for them the field of what is possible' (Hayward, 1998, p. 12).

Conclusion

The *Prajateerpu* research partners decided to undertake this project in the full knowledge that the controversy and conflicting interests surrounding the issues involved would lead to unprecedented scrutiny. The safeguards described above were a measured response to the frequently hostile political climate that surrounded in many aspects the core of the research. But our intention here is not to suggest that we have designed something that is either flawless or that should be adopted wholesale. Rather, we describe a participatory action research process of which some elements may be useful in other contexts.

The second paper of this series (Wakeford & Pimbert, forthcoming) considers some of the fundamental issues for participatory action research that are highlighted by *Prajateerpu*. Here, we merely wish to suggest that the *Prajateerpu* process may contain valuable lessons for those who wish to engage in collaborative inquiries. The heated controversy that arose from the *Prajateerpu* process confirmed a division that others have reported (Greenwood & Levin, 1998), namely the fundamental difference between those who see themselves as objective and value-free researchers, and others who consciously bring their understanding of political economy, social structure and ideology into their research and invite others involved in the process to do the same. We conclude that the effectiveness of participatory action research relies on it consciously adopting the second of these strategies.

Notes

1 Michel Pimbert and Tom Wakeford are joint and equal co-authors of this article. We would also like to acknowledge the vital contribution of our fellow research partners from the three Indian organizations detailed in the text.
2 This project was carried out while at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RE.
3 Telegu is the official language of the state of Andhra Pradesh.
4 A sidelining of such voices was particularly evident in the E-forum that will be critiqued in Part 2 (Wakeford & Pimbert, forthcoming).
5 www.andhrapradesh.com, accessed at 3 March 2003.
6 Pimbert, 1994; R. Chambers, Pacey, & Thrupp, 1989. *Farmer first: farmer innovation and agricultural research*. London: ITDG.
7 See: www.actionaid.org/resources/pdfs/jury_india.pdf
8 Organizations contacted included: DGIS, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS supports several major rural development projects in AP); Agriculture, Man & Environment (an NGO working in AP); APCDD, a coalition of 140 NGOs working on sustainable/equitable agriculture; Yakshi, an NGO working with adivasis in AP; Girijan Deepika, an adivasi-run empowerment coalition working in AP; the AP Dalit Farm Workers' Union.
9 Dalits are the lowest social group in the Indian caste system. Traditionally referred to as 'untouchables' or 'outcastes', dalits are also known today as schedules castes (SCs) or harijans. Adivasis are indigenous peoples living in forested areas. Like Dalits, adivasis are also marginalized communities in India.
10 Such as in Reflect (see www.reflect-action.org) or DIY citizens' juries (see www.diyjury.org).
11 Pers. comm. Kavitha Kuruganti and Sagari Ramdas respectively.
12 This juror was called Baby, following a common local custom of using English nouns as names.
13 These comments are taken from observations by Kavitha Kuruganti in a cover article in Changes, ActionAid India, Autumn 2001 (Mimeograph available at ActionAid India).

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