PAR
GUIDE

Promoting the Participation,
Learning and Action of Young People

For every Child
Health, Education, Equality, Protection
ADVANCE HUMANITY
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This book is written for young people and anyone seeking to actively work with young people. This can include adult facilitators, project officers, community or youth organisation workers and others who are in a position to help and support, encourage and guide.

It is all about Participatory Action Research – what we call “PAR.” It gives some helpful tips and describes participatory activities that you can use to gather information and encourage action as a result of that research.

Most good organisations ask questions of themselves:
- What are the issues affecting young people?
- Are we really meeting our goals?
- What more should we be doing?
- Are we reaching the right young people?
- How can we grow?
- Why are we successful in some areas but not in others?
- What are our strengths and weaknesses?
PAR can help find answers to these questions.

PAR can also bring people from the community together to help themselves. It can deal with such questions as:
- How can we prevent violence in our schools?
- How can we cut down on teen pregnancy?
- How can our group help teenagers who are affected by HIV/AIDS?

PAR empowers people to think, see connections they never saw before, and reason. It does these things in ways that are fun and interesting. The best part is that PAR is pretty easy and simple, once you know the basic ideas. You do not need to be a college graduate to conduct this research, but you do need some tools and some understanding of how to do it.

Young people make great PAR researchers. They are curious, friendly, and ready to learn. If you see yourself in this description, you could be a PAR researcher.

The more you use PAR, the better you become at it. The better you become, the more fun it is and the more effective you will be. This book will get you started on your way to becoming a PAR “star.”
PAR is a short way of saying **Participatory Action Research**. It is a way to help people help themselves. In the process, it can make your organisation more interesting and exciting, and bring more people into your programmes – especially the people you are aiming to serve. PAR can be used within an organisation to strengthen its planning and programmes – particularly at the community level.

To really understand the ideas behind PAR, look at each word separately:

**Participatory** – This means that the people, who want or need changes made in their surroundings or situations, take part in making those changes. It also can mean that the people you want to learn about take an active role in helping you learn about them. They take part in the whole process.

**Action** – This is the part that really makes PAR different from other types of research.

**Research** – This is a way to find information or to answer questions. Part of the word is “search,” and that is what you are doing—searching for information or solutions to problems.

It means that at the end of the searching, something happens. The information is not just recorded, but it moves people to some sort of activity.

PAR is serious business, but that doesn’t mean it can’t be fun. Just as the work your organisation does is not a joking matter, yet you can have fun doing it, PAR is serious work done in ways that keep people from being bored or being afraid to tell what is inside their heads and hearts. In fact, it is because your work is serious that you need tools to make it reach more people, be more effective, and really result in action. PAR can do these things for you.
Why does PAR focus on young people?

Young people are not only tomorrow’s leaders, they are today’s leaders. It is not only their potential that is important, but what they have to offer NOW! Young people see what works and what does not work in their lives, the lives of their friends and families, in their communities, and in the nation. They have great ideas that may be more creative than many adults’, who have lost their passion and faith in the possibility of change. So, young people are perfect to lead this process.

Often, youth are ignored or not taken seriously. PAR can give youth tools to empower themselves to find real answers to real problems; to establish themselves as serious thinkers who like to have fun while they think and learn. In addition, PAR moves people up the next step – from talking to action, and most young people can’t be bothered with programmes that are not action-oriented.

UNICEF estimates there are 1.2 billion young people aged 10 to 19 in the world – the largest generation of adolescents in history. More than four-fifths of them live in developing countries, like Jamaica and what happens to these young people affects us all. As UNICEF claims in its booklet, “Adolescence, A Time That Matters” (2002):

“When encouraged to express their opinions and feelings, to be assertive and to stand up for what they believe, adolescents are more likely to have self-esteem and self-confidence and develop their skills and capabilities...

If given a voice, young people can provide important information about conditions at work or at school, about risks to their own health and their community. They can provide suggestions for change that adults may not have considered, and they can play a vital role in researching, monitoring, evaluation and planning.”

So, PAR can empower the participants as well as the researchers. It can help develop skills and thinking processes; and can get young people moving to improve their own situations and their future.
Many words take on special meanings, depending on who is using them. PAR has some words it uses in a special way. Here are some of them.

**Caregivers** - People assigned to ensure that participants feel comfortable, valued and secure. Caregivers have the right and obligation to do such things as calling for a break to restore energy; pointing out to the facilitator that there are participants who are being left out of discussions; keeping track of time and pointing out when the activity is running too long; etc. Caregivers are part of the PAR Support Team.

**Facilitator** – The person who makes something easy, who helps to accomplish something. He or she is the leader of the exercises and the one who makes it easy for the participants to give honest information about themselves, their beliefs, their knowledge and so forth. Facilitators are members of the PAR Research Team.

**Observers** – People who watch what happens during a PAR exercise. They do this to make sure everything is going the way it was intended or so changes can be made. They may write their observations or give them verbally to the scribe. Observers are members of the PAR Support Team.

**PAR** – Participatory Action Research (more on this throughout the book)

**PAR Research Team** – People who are the facilitators, information gatherers, and main planners of the PAR exercises.

**PAR Support Team** – People who give assistance to the PAR Research Team. These may or may not be members of the organisation conducting the PAR activity. They help make preparations for an exercise (like making cards, buying materials, securing funding, driving to the research venue, etc.). The scribes, observers and caregivers are also members of the Support Team.

These roles are not hard and fast. Support team members can move into the research team, and vice versa, depending upon interest, time, availability and comfort level.

**Participants** – Those who take part in a PAR activity, other than the research and support teams.

**PAR Tool (PAR exercise or activity)** – A set of actions designed to obtain information or encourage action from someone who is participating in Participatory Action Research. You can use just about any interaction with people if it is done in a way that gets people to tell what they know, how they feel, where they stand, what is important to them, how they can take action, and such. Once you start doing PAR activities, you may be surprised at how many new ideas come to you. Add them to this PAR Guide (see notes pages in Appendix) and make them work for you! This book is supposed to be a starting point, not the whole picture of PAR.

**Research** – Finding out new information, discovering or learning about something.

**Scribe** – The member of the PAR Support Team who takes the notes and makes written observations. A scribe may also be any participant in a PAR exercise who makes written notes for the group, for instance, during a brainstorming session, someone must write all the ideas on a piece of flip chart paper. The person doing the writing is the scribe.
PAR is very flexible. It can be used in several ways to accomplish many things. Knowing the three most common types of PAR helps in making decisions about what tools will work best.

Before starting a PAR project, it might be helpful to answer the questions along the side of the box (or “matrix”) below. That way, you will be sure you are clear about what you want to accomplish and can select tools that will give you the best results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of PAR</th>
<th>Action-PAR</th>
<th>Research-PAR</th>
<th>Education-PAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is the objective?</strong></td>
<td>The objective needs participants and PAR researchers to discuss and resolve some problem together</td>
<td>The objective calls for PAR researchers to gather information from participants</td>
<td>The objective helps PAR researchers do their job of education more effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who started the process?</strong></td>
<td>Participants are leading the way, with the help of the PAR researchers</td>
<td>PAR researchers want to improve what they do for the participants</td>
<td>PAR researchers are leading the way, helping participants make changes in their lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who does the research?</strong></td>
<td>Participants and PAR researchers together</td>
<td>PAR researchers</td>
<td>PAR researchers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is the role of the PAR researchers?</strong></td>
<td>To facilitate</td>
<td>To learn</td>
<td>To learn and educate others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is the role of the participants?</strong></td>
<td>To lead change</td>
<td>To give information</td>
<td>To give information and learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who takes action?</strong></td>
<td>Participants and PAR researchers together</td>
<td>PAR researchers</td>
<td>Participants and PAR researchers, but the action outcomes may be different for each</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One thing to be aware of, however, is that as the research gets going, many things can change. The positive word for this is “dynamic,” and it means that there is life and movement within the process. Even the type of PAR you are doing can change. Some things that seemed very clear-cut at the beginning may become fuzzy and change focus as participants discover more about themselves, the obstacles they face, the helps they can draw on, and such. What started out simply as a means to learn about a certain group of people, for instance (Research-PAR) can end up having those people wanting a change to take place (Action-PAR). This is a good thing, since it allows the participants to have a real say in what is taking place.
Following are some practical examples of how each type of PAR could work:

1) Some members of a church youth group come to your organisation, saying they have heard you are doing some great things with young people. They want to improve the unity and commitment of their members and ask for your help. Your group decides to use Action-PAR to let the church group see what their own strengths and weaknesses are and develop ways to build commitment in their membership.

This is Action-PAR:
The objective is to work together to solve a problem. The church group started the action; the two groups together will look for solutions; the PAR researchers will facilitate the participants’ discovery of their own strengths and weakness and potential ways to improve. The participants are the ones who are expected to lead and make the changes after the programme is completed. It fits all the Action-PAR boxes on the matrix.

2) Your organisation wants to help children of people who are living with AIDS. Many people have ideas on what help is needed, but no one is really sure what the major efforts should be in your community, who else is giving help, and where the obstacles to help lie. Your organisation decides to invite people living with AIDS and their children to a PAR workshop to give you better information and make your planning and action more effective.

This is Research-PAR:
The objective is to gather information from the participants. Your organisation is the one leading the activity and your organisation will do the research while the participants will give information. Your organisation will take or lead the action when the programme is completed. This fits all the Research-PAR boxes.

3) Your organisation has a strong programme of education on a certain topic. You want to bring this information to young people, 9 to 12 years old, but your group has always worked with older adolescents and adults. Your organisation decides to do a PAR activity to see what younger people know about the topic and to begin giving them information. You plan to give them information in the programme as you learn about their needs and their level of understanding on the topic.

This is Education-PAR:
The objective is to learn about the participants, give them information, and encourage behaviour change. Your organisation is the one leading the activity and doing the research. The PAR researchers are facilitators, learners and educators, while the participants are both leaders of change and learners. The PAR researchers make changes in their presentation to make it fit the participants better, but the major change is expected from the participants. This fits the Education-PAR boxes.

Some people use the PAR exercises as a way to more actively involve people in their educational programmes. In such cases, the young people doing the teaching are looking for ways to make their messages more meaningful and “real” for the participants. Usually, the facilitators are processing the information they learn almost immediately and making changes and adjustments to their presentations as they learn more about their audience. This mixes PAR with peer education, which can be a powerful combination. It does not fit neatly into any of the boxes of our matrix, but it is still a good use of PAR tools.
Many persons interested in doing PAR have been trained first as peer, community or youth educators. One major thing educators must learn in order to do PAR, is how to be a facilitator. A facilitator is someone who makes it easy for someone else to do something (see the definition section). In this case, the facilitators make it easy for other people to share their ideas, knowledge and experiences.

As peer educators, young people tend to do most of the talking when sharing information with others. As PAR researchers, they need to find ways of listening to others share information with them.

The facilitator’s opinion, judgement and knowledge are not important in PAR. The opinion, judgement and knowledge of the participants are the important things. This can be a big challenge for PAR facilitators, and may take practice; once achieved, however, the facilitator will get a true picture of where the participants stand, what they know, what action they feel needs to be taken, and how it should take place.

Being able to give important information is a valuable skill, but it is not what PAR is really about. Even in Education-PAR, the PAR researchers must step back and learn from the participants in order to be sure they are tailoring their education messages to the needs and understandings of the participants.
For PAR to work, there needs to be an environment of openness and comfort. This takes into account many things, from the temperature of the room, to the softness of the seats, to the attitude of the facilitators, and more. People will not share information and will not be ready to look into themselves for solutions to problems if they do not feel safe and comfortable.

Feeling safe means trusting that no one will become angry over what is said and that no one will be laughed at for sharing their thoughts. It even includes trusting that information given will not be “chatted” to other people or used to cause problems for someone. If participants feel they will be seen as “informants,” they are unlikely to share what they know or think. This hidden information could easily ruin any action plan that comes out of the PAR research.

A few ideas on how to ensure an open environment:

1. **Set ground rules** – Let the participants set rules for themselves. The PAR Team may suggest a few that they know will help to make the session work well, such as “Everyone participates,” and “Call people by the name they want to be called.” The group can decide if there are consequences for breaking any of the rules.

   These rules should be as positive as possible. If a suggestion begins with “Don’t…” or “No…”, try to rephrase it to be positive. “Don’t interrupt,” for instance, could become “Only one person speaks at a time.” “No making fun of people” could be “All ideas are smart ideas.”

2. **Get to know one another** – Exercises that help people learn one another’s names and some personal information that they may have in common will help to break down barriers and encourage a shared commitment to making the session work for the benefit of all. Name tags or place cards are important for an open environment. If your PAR session goes over more than one day, remember to have people wear name tags on the other days, since participants may not be able to remember everyone’s name overnight.

3. **Share the session’s objectives** – Help the participants feel a part of the process by sharing the objective of the session. Participants will usually feel responsible to see that objectives are met if they know what they are. This is especially important in Action-PAR, since the participants have really set the objective.

4. **Have a schedule** – When people are hungry and tired, they will lose interest in even the most important topic. Give participants an idea of when there will be breaks, when the session will end, what will be covered in the session, etc. The more information they have, the better they will be able to concentrate on the topic at hand and not become distracted.
by wondering if they will have a bathroom break, for instance.

5. **Try to stick to the schedule, but be flexible** – There are two opposing forces that will harm an open environment. One is boredom and the other is being over-loaded with activities or information. In preparing for a session, the PAR Research Team needs to try and balance the amount of work so there is neither too much nor too little. Once the activities begin, the Research Team needs to be able to make changes that will help accomplish the session’s goals, but not have other harmful effects, like making the session run extremely late.

Something that is interesting is not necessarily valuable to your session’s objectives. Check your objective before you allow a discussion or activity to pull you off track.

Understand what you want to accomplish and how you will know if you have achieved it. By doing this, you will be better able to judge how much flexibility you can allow in your session.

6. **Value and respect the participants** – If members of the PAR Research Team really believe they are smarter or better than the participants, there will be a problem. People can sense when they are not truly respected.

7. **Be prepared** – Nothing can ruin a good PAR session more quickly than lack of preparation. Practice really does make perfect.

Make sure you have all your equipment and materials; decide in advance the order of activities and how you will move from one topic to the next. The better you have planned, the more smoothly things will go. Even if unexpected things come up (and they usually will!), your preparation will allow you to make the best use of them.
What if you learn something at a PAR activity that seems to call for action by a parent, a school principal, the police or other people in authority? This could include information about someone being sexually or physically abused, considering suicide, using harmful drugs, or other such things. First, don’t panic. Chances are, if you have learned this information, someone else probably knows it as well.

Next, when the activity is finished, take the person aside to a private place if possible, and let him or her know you are concerned. Offer to get help. If the individual agrees, bring the matter to your adult leader and let him or her handle it from there. If the person refuses to let you help, explain that you are going to let your adult leader know of the situation without using names. Give assurance that your leader is very sensitive and able to help in ways that young people cannot. Encourage the young person to seek the help of an adult who can be trusted.

Do not keep the problem a secret, even if the person asks you to. You can keep the identity secret, but not the situation.

Do not try to solve the problem yourself, either. Use your Support Team, especially the adults, to help you help this young person. Without breaking the young person’s trust, give as much information to your adult leader as possible, including your idea of how serious the situation is. While it may be hard to deal with such serious matters, they may show you new areas in which your group might be able to help other young people in your community. Use the information in the most positive way you can.
Stop and Think
Before beginning a PAR activity, it is important to stop and think about why you are doing it. What questions will it answer for you? What activities will it help you develop? Are you willing to change your plans if the PAR activity gives you surprising or new information? Thinking is an important part of PAR. If you do not take time to think before, during and after your PAR activity, you will miss out on the best part of it.

When to Use PAR
The right time to do PAR is any time you need more information. This is usually at the planning stages of a project or activity, but it also may be after the project has started when you want to see if it is working the way you intended. You may want to do PAR activities at the end of an event or project to see if it has been successful in the ways you intended or in other ways you had not thought about.

Take Note
It also is not enough to plan and carry out the activity. Somebody (or several ‘somebodies’) must take notes, make observations, and keep track of what is going on. If you do not make this a part of the PAR activity, you may lose a lot of the important information. As the facilitator, it will be difficult for you to notice things like the one girl who has not said a word, or the boy who just repeats what someone else says, or that during one section everyone started losing attention, or that some people were confused by the directions, or…whatever. PAR really needs to be a team activity, with observers playing as important a role as the facilitators.

These observations need to be recorded in some way. They can be written, video taped, or taped on cassette. They can be in the form of photographs. However you record them, take the time to review them after the activity is finished so that all the information can be studied and put to good use. Whatever action takes place from PAR (changes in the community, better programme planning, improved education sessions, etc.) you will find it helpful to have this back-up material to refer to.

Since many of the charts, lists and drawings are on large sheets or in other forms that are difficult to keep, the observers can rewrite, redraw, or otherwise re-do the materials in a smaller form, like in a notebook. This way, the information can be reviewed over and over and can be compared to other groups, without needing a big warehouse to store everything.

The person who writes everything down is called a “scribe.” This is an old Latin word for “writer.” Today, a scribe can be a photographer or an artist, as well as a writer. The scribe does not need to be a trained journalist, but does need to pay very close attention to what is going on. Usually, different members of the team take turns being the scribe, the facili-
tator and holding other jobs during a PAR activity. In this way, everyone on the research and support teams can add skills for their own growth and can help the group become better at doing PAR. At the end of the event, all the scribes can put their notes and observations together to get a full picture of what happened, not only on the surface, but deep within the participatory process.

**Be Creative**
Keep your eyes and ears open to new ways of encouraging people to share their ideas, feelings, attitudes and beliefs with you; and look for ways that this information can help them make the changes they feel need to be made.

In this guide, if it says to use cards and markers for an activity, that is just a suggestion. It may work better for your participants to use leaves off a bush or stones in a pile or draw something in the sand. You might start with the ideas here, and then try new techniques.

Pay attention to your creative spirit. Borrow ideas from others. The more you talk with other PAR researchers and look for new ways to interact with people, the more creative you will become and the more tools you will have to work with. Radio and television programmes and even commercials can give you new ideas. Your little brother, your cousin, and even your parents may give you a good idea. Keep your mind tuned-in to new ways of doing PAR; you will find inspiration.

**Selecting Tools**
This guide will give you some help in choosing which tools to use to do certain things. If you want to set a comfortable feeling at the beginning of a PAR exercise, for instance, you would want to do something to get people talking to one another, to know one another’s names, to share little pieces of information about themselves, to laugh.

The guide also will help you determine if a tool works best with larger groups or smaller groups; with younger or older participants; with people who feel comfortable reading or those who do not; and so on. These are suggestions from people who are experienced in PAR, but you are free to make your own decisions on such things, since you know your participants and your Research Team better than this book can. Trust yourself and move ahead.

**Sequencing**
The term for having one exercise lead to another is “sequencing.” As a researcher, you can think of this as helping your participants climb a set of stairs or a ladder. One step leads to another, and you, as the researcher, learn more with each step. The participants may also learn more about themselves and about how to make changes they want to make as they climb.

So, sequencing means one thing following another in a planned way. In the section describing the PAR tools, there will be some suggestions on sequencing.
Several communication techniques are used commonly throughout PAR. They are not special to PAR, but are extremely important:

**Brainstorming** – This is a way to get ideas flowing. Every participant gives ideas. No one passes judgement on any of the ideas. Even ideas that may seem foolish are included and may prove to be valuable later.

It is called “brainstorming” because it is like ideas are just raining down from above, coming from left, right and centre. No one stops to consider if they are good or bad. They are just ideas that connect to the topic.

It is important to record all the ideas so everyone can see them. All ideas have equal value at this point. They can be written neatly on a page or scattered. It may be helpful to have more than one person writing, so ideas can be recorded as quickly as possible. If a participant has time to think about his or her idea, he or she may decide not to offer it, and an opportunity to hear from that person may be lost.

The facilitator decides when the storm is over. The end may be when the ideas stop coming, when the paper is filled, when a certain time limit is reached, or whenever the facilitator calls a halt.

Do not try to sort out the ideas during the brainstorming session. The logical sequence of things is that once all the ideas have been recorded, the group will review them, sort them, explain them, evaluate them, and decide which ones to keep and which ones to leave out. This is a separate exercise from brainstorming, however.

Sometimes it is enough to simply have the list of ideas, with no analysis. For instance, the list of ideas from a brainstorming session on how participants can show respect to one another could be posted as a silent reminder to be respectful. No further analysis is needed.

**Analysis** – This is a careful examination of something, breaking it down and looking at all its parts. Many of the tools will help you do analysis. The example of sorting, explaining, and evaluating ideas gathered through “brainstorming” is a type of analysis. For instance, if the brainstorming were on why people discriminate against someone with AIDS, the participants’ ideas might fall into categories, such as “ignorance,” “fear,” and “social pressure.” Once the participants have analysed the information or ideas, they can deal with each category separately, probably using another PAR tool, and, again, using the idea of sequencing tools to move the participants further along your objective.

**Gap analysis** – This is a special kind of examination of ideas. It is designed to see clearly when and where something is missing. An exercise, for example, may tell you things people
say about being safe when having sex, and things people actually do or do not do to be safe when having sex. If you look closely at the differences, you are doing a gap analysis. Your next step may be finding ways to narrow the gap and get people to do what they say they should do.

**Probing questions** – It is usually not enough to ask people what they think or why they believe something happens the way it does. Inexperienced or unskilled facilitators often try to answer the question themselves or give suggestions and hope the participants will agree with them.

Even if participants do not really agree with the facilitator, they often accept the facilitator’s answer, since it appears to be what the facilitator considers the “right” answer. This is unfortunate, since this blocks participants from sharing what they truly believe and prevents real research from taking place. It also may hurt the process of taking meaningful action, since the action may be based on incomplete or wrong information.

Expert facilitators, on the other hand, use “probing questions” to draw ideas from participants. These are questions that encourage participants to share what they truly believe or think.

Here are some examples of probing questions a facilitator might use in a PAR exercise:

- “Can you tell me a little more about why Michael couldn’t come to the meeting?”
  (Asking for more information)

- “What do you think about that?”
  (Asking for an opinion)

- “You said ‘big men’. What do you mean by that?”
  “Can you give me some examples of what you mean by ‘peer pressure’?”
  (Asking for a deeper meaning or to make something more clear)

Certain words are especially helpful in asking probing questions. They are: **who, what, where, when, why, how.** Start your question with one of these words, and you are likely to be effectively using a probing question. Check out these sample probing questions:

- **Who** else was there?” (A question like, “Was his mother there?” could be good, but it won’t give you as much information. The participant may also try to read whether or not you think the mother should have been there and give you the answer he or she thinks is the “right” answer, even if it is not true.)

- **Where** were they during that time?”

- **What** is your role in the group?”

- **How** did it happen?”

- **How** did it make you feel?”

- **Why?”

- **When** did your mother arrive?”
As a PAR facilitator, can you think of other questions that might help someone share their thoughts without putting your words or ideas into their mouth or into their head?

Other ways of probing

Sometimes the facilitator does not have to ask questions at all to help people share. He or she simply needs to encourage the person to continue talking, drawing, writing or whatever is working for the person to express himself or herself. This may happen through gestures, sounds, and facial expressions.

Once a person starts sharing, it may be enough for the facilitator to nod his head or look at the person in a truly interested way. The facilitator may make comments like:

“OK” “That’s interesting.” “Um-hm”
“Really!” “Tell me more.” “Oh.”
“Go on” “Good.” “I see.”

The facilitator may also repeat what the person said, as if the sentence were not finished: “OK, you went to the clinic yesterday, and ...”

In this case, you do not want to change or interpret the person’s words, just repeat them. The person usually will take this as a cue to tell more or to give an explanation the facilitator may have missed otherwise.

Silence is golden

In PAR, silence can be your friend. It is often the calm before a storm of sharing. Most people are shy about sharing personal information or offering solutions that may require work or new levels of commitment. Often, they will keep their idea or information in their head, weighing all the good and bad points before they speak. They try to imagine what will happen if they tell what they know or feel. They do not want to look foolish, to be thought of as strange or mad. If someone else will speak first, they may decide to join in, but if the facilitator speaks first, they may never overcome that barrier of shyness or fear.

You can use this silent time to encourage people to say what they are thinking. Assure them that no one will laugh at them (and don’t let anyone laugh at them) and that all ideas are good ideas. Do not offer ideas of your own. Trust the process and let the participants do the work.

Most people do not like silence. Someone will usually jump in to keep from letting the awkward silence remain. Be patient.
Par tools

Tool 1: Four Pictures of...

Purpose: 1. Discover knowledge, attitudes and beliefs
2. Identify problems
3. Suggest solutions

Age: Good for all age groups

Group size: Best for small to medium sized groups, no more than 20 persons. Participants are put into pairs or small groups for follow-up discussion. Individuals draw the pictures.

Materials: Paper • pencils (markers/pens/chalk) • tape/tacks for posting pictures • wall/flip chart/board for posting pictures

Alternatives: Paper can be large, like a flip chart page, or small, like letter size; drawing can be done in the sand; drawings can be done on separate cards

Time required: 90 minutes: 20 minutes for drawing; 3 minutes for each person to explain each picture; sharing and sorting could take an additional 45 minutes.

Facilitator preparation: Select topics for each of the four pictures that you would like the participants to draw

Instructions: Each participant is to draw four pictures that deal with a particular topic. For instance: draw a picture of 1) How people in your community treat someone with AIDS; 2) How you first learned about AIDS; 3) Where someone with AIDS should work; and 4) How someone gets AIDS. Participants have about 20 minutes to do all four drawings, so they need to work quickly.
Move participants into pairs or small groups (no more than four to a group) and have them explain their pictures, identifying similarities and differences.

Have the large group come together and choose a pair or group to start explaining the similarities and differences between partners or group members regarding the first picture. Any group that had something in their drawing not covered by this first one would then share the additional ideas from their drawings.

Sort the pictures according to similarities and differences. For instance, if several people drew pictures of people caring for people with AIDS, all those pictures could be displayed together. If several pictures showed people being cruel to those with AIDS, those could be displayed together.

Move in a similar way through the entire set of pictures.

**TOOL 2: FACT AND MYTH**

**Purpose:**
1. Discover knowledge, attitudes and beliefs
2. Identify misinformation
3. Correct misinformation

**Age:** Good for all age groups

**Group size:** Good for any group size

**Materials:** Cards, made up in advance by PAR team members • large sheet of paper /wall/board to post cards • tape/tacks for posting cards

**Alternatives:** None

**Time required:** 30-40 minutes, but this can depend on how strongly the myths are believed by participants, and how well the facilitator explains the facts.

**Facilitator preparation:** Make up cards (minimum of 10), some with correct information, and some with incorrect information (myths). Be prepared to explain the correct information regarding all the cards. Caution: Be careful not to confuse the participants by using ‘tricky’ wording in your statements. Try to determine what they know and do not know, rather than tricking them, simply for the fun of tricking them.

**Instructions:** In a large group setting, pass out cards to various participants. Call on them, one by one, to read their cards and decide if it is a true statement or a myth (mistaken information). Ask the group if they agree or disagree. If the group agrees, post the card under the correct heading, either “fact” or “myth.” If the group cannot agree, place it in a separate spot for “Unsure.”
When the cards are all posted, the facilitator can go through the cards and correct any information that was incorrect. Those items that were “unsure” should probably be given the most time by the facilitator.

Be sure to use probing questions to determine why participants believed the statements were either fact or myth, or what made them unsure of the truth of the statement.

**TOOL 3: FLOUR DOUGH MOULDING**

**Purpose:**
1. Identify issues, especially very sensitive issues, such as child abuse, sexual abuse or incest.
2. Discover knowledge, attitudes and beliefs
3. Help participants work as a team

**Note:** This exercise can be used to learn information on topics such as: “What do people in your community do after dinner,” “How do people in your community earn a living,” or “Show what you know about HIV/AIDS”. However, it can also be used to dig deep into problems, such as “problems for children in your community,” which could include incest, rape, child abuse, drug use and other serious problems. This can result in surprising and serious information that the facilitator and PAR Team members must be prepared to deal with. It is not recommended for inexperienced PAR Researchers.

**Age:** Good for all age groups, even the very young

**Group size:** Works best with small groups of no more than 6-7. Several small groups could be working at the same time if your group is large.

**Materials:** Clay/Play dough or Flour + water • paper/cardboard/board

**Time required:** 60 minutes – 40 minutes for creating the “picture”; 20 minutes for sharing with the large group.

**Facilitator preparation:** Determine the issue that you would like to have the participants illustrate, prepare dough.

**Instructions:** Give each group a large sheet of paper (board or cardboard) and a large lump of dough. Let each member of the group take some of the dough and tell them to create things out of the dough that show the topic you want to review. For instance, ask them to show problems for children in their community. The topic must be fairly open, but you are likely to have them create images of very specific things, such as a woman beating a child
or a man having sex with a child. Allow time for the group to include an image from each member of the group. Facilitator and Support Team members can help groups finish their “pictures” of the community problems. Have each small group choose a spokesperson to explain the entire picture to the large group.

When everyone has made an image, have the groups come together and have each group explain its picture.

Caution: Some participants may want to actually identify the people who are experiencing the problems they illustrate. Do not let this happen. Keep the information general, about things and people in the community.

Following this exercise, use another PAR tool, such as “Ideal/Actual,” “Dumpling Diagram” or “Priority Matrix,” to learn more or to move from identifying issues to doing something about them.
**TOOL 4: SPIDER DIAGRAM**

**Purpose:**
1. Identify how different issues/activities/people relate to one another
2. Discover information
3. Discover values/opinions

**Note:** This exercise works very well for gender issues, but can also work for other issues such as roles within an organisation or activities in a community. This is a good exercise for looking at positive behaviour/attitudes and negative behaviour/attitudes; for example, ways people pollute/protect the environment, or ways people stay healthy/get sick. In this type of exercise, the facilitator can give the negative side to one group and the positive side to another and let them find the connections together.

**Age:** Good for ages 10 and up

**Group size:** Works best with small groups of no more than 6. Several small groups could be working at the same time if your group is large.
**Materials:** Large sheets of paper • cards • pencils/pens/markers • paper/wall/board to post individual sheets • tape/tacks for posting cards and sheets

**Alternatives:** Drawing could be done in the sand/dirt or using chalk on pavement; use flour dough/clay could be used instead of paper and pencils; connecting lines could be done with yarn/string/vines, instead of drawing them.

**Time required:** 50 minutes: 10 for naming items, 10 for making connections; 30 minutes for discussion

**Facilitator preparation:** Determine the topic that you would like the participants to explore; prepare cards.

**Instructions:** Introduce the topic and give each small group a supply of cards and markers. Ask participants to draw or write things associated with the topic and place them on the large sheet of paper in no special order. For instance, if your topic is “gender roles,” ask the group to write/draw all the jobs that boys and men do around the house. Post these cards on the large sheet. Then, on different color cards, have them write/draw all the jobs that girls and women do around the house, and post these.

Next, ask the groups to draw a line between any two jobs that relate to one another. Have them continue drawing lines as they see how things relate to one another.

As they join one thing to another, have them explain the connections they make, especially between the jobs that belong to both males and females or jobs that tie males and females together. When all the connections are made, it will look like a large spider web (but not as well organized as most spiders make their webs).

As the participants make the connections, ask probing questions to understand (and help them understand) the deeper ideas they may not have seen before. For instance, in this example, the facilitator could ask probing questions about which job has more value and why? Whose work is more important? What happens if a boy does work that is usually done by a girl?
TOOL 5: DUMPLING DIAGRAM

Also called Venn Diagram, Roti Diagram (John Venn developed this tool and it was named for him, but it also takes on the name of things that are familiar to people and that are circular or round, like the shapes used most in this exercise. You can call it what you like.)

Purpose: 1. Discover information
2. Identify people who have an interest in an issue, who can help solve a problem, who can stop a project from going forward (these are called “stake holders”)

Age: Good for all age groups

Group size: Can work with large or small groups

Materials: Cards cut into circles of different sizes, preferably in several different colours
• other cards of various colours and shapes • large sheets of paper • pencils/pens/markers • paper/wall/board to post paper • tape/tacks/glue for attaching cards to the paper and for posting the paper

Alternatives: See alternative in “Instructions”

Time required: 60 minutes

Facilitator preparation: Prepare card shapes

Instructions: Explain to participants that the round cards represent all the people involved in your issue. Take a large circle and write on it the name of the organisation that wants to make a change, the group of people who will be at the centre of a change, or the project that is being planned. This card is placed at the centre of the large sheet of paper.

Participants use other circles to represent other people who can help achieve the desired outcome or who can keep it from happening. Write the name of the organisation or individual on the circle. Different size circles can stand for different types of power the person/agency/organisation has. For instance, if the agency is very powerful regarding the topic, it would be on a large circle. If it is not so powerful, it would be on a smaller circle. Different colours can represent different types of organisations: one colour for government,
another colour for private companies or people, another for religious groups, etc. The other shapes can be used to represent other things about the people, for example if there is some personal friendship with someone or if they belong to the same church or if they have some bad history with the centre group. Shapes or colours can indicate power to help or power to hurt a project.

As the people/organisations are put onto the cards, post the cards on the big sheet. Have the participants place them close to the centre circle or far away, depending on how closely they are involved. If the project has to do with starting a school-breakfast programme for poor students, the local health department nutritionist would be a big circle close to the project. The Ministry of Education, on the other hand, might be a big circle, since it can stop the programme from happening at your school, but it would be placed at a distance from the centre, since no one from the Ministry is in frequent, face-to-face contact with the people in the centre.

Some circles may be placed partially or totally on top of one another. For instance, the local nutritionist would probably be on top of the Health Department’s circle. Let the participants discuss and debate the choices of size and position. The discussion can tell the facilitator a great deal about what the group knows regarding the various stakeholders, how powerful they are, who can stop progress and who cannot, and more. Remember, you need probing questions to help the participants explore why they think one organisation is powerful and another is not. Every now and then ask, “Who is missing from this diagram?” “Who can stop this thing from happening?” and other such questions.

It is possible to do this diagram by simply drawing circles on a paper, but it works better to have the cards, since participants’ ideas may change regarding how much power a group or individual has, how close the linkages are, etc. With cards, it is easier for the diagram to change as the participants think and talk.

An alternative way to create the diagram is to have participants wear the circles – pin them onto their clothing – and place the people at various spots around the room to give the same type of relationship image.

Once you have the diagram, you may want to move into another PAR activity to determine if these relationships are what the participants want, what needs to change, and how they might go about making changes. This could be the “Actual” side of an “Ideal/Actual” activity. The next step would be to have the group discuss what the “Ideal” relationships would be. If you use the live diagram, you might ask the people who represent the various organisations or individuals how they feel about their position and how they might change it, if it is not “Ideal.”
TOOL 6: IDEAL/ACTUAL

Purpose: 1. Discover information
         2. Discover relationships
         3. Discover/identify gaps between what “is” and what the participants think “should be”

Age: Good for all age groups

Group size: Can work with large or small groups

Materials: • Large sheet of paper • markers • wall/board to post paper • tape/tacks for posting the paper

Alternatives: There are many ways to do this exercise. It is often combined with other PAR exercises to develop either or both, the “ideal” or the “actual” side of an issue. If the subject is very sensitive and participants might not want to be identified with what they want to express, cards can be used to let them write their ideas and put them in a box or otherwise give them without identifying who gave the idea. Participants can use drawings/comics or flour dough/clay, instead of writing the items.

Time required: 40 minutes, using the brainstorming process. More time will be needed if other methods are used.

Facilitator preparation: Prepare the large sheet of paper for brainstorming

Instructions: Introduce your topic. Using the ‘brainstorming” technique, have participants tell how things actually are regarding the topic. For instance, if the topic is How Children Learn About Sexual Matters, participants will list such things as reading adult sex magazines, talking to friends, and talks with mother. Then ask them to list what they consider the best way this same thing could happen. In our example, the participants might list talks with mother, classes in school, visits with nurse, and video or TV programmes.

It does not matter if you decide to start with the “Ideal” list or the “Actual” list first. The facilitator can decide this. Sometimes the exercises done before this one will determine which side should come first.

Have the participants review the two lists to see if any of the items appear on both. Discuss the gaps between the ideal and the actual. Have the group decide if there needs to be some action to bring more of the ideal items into the actual column. If there is a desire to take action of this sort, you can use other PAR tools to explore this more deeply and to develop a plan of action.
TOOL 7: LIFELINE

Purpose: 1. Discover information
          2. Highlight or compare life happenings of different people
          3. Uncover prejudices, biases, misinformation
          4. See life from another’s point of view
          5. Provide a possible look into the future

Note: Although this exercise can be used for many purposes, the one thing it is especially good for is identifying and dealing with gender issues.

Age: Good for all ages, but especially 10 and up

Group size: Works best with small groups, no more than 6. Several small groups can be working at the same time on the same or related lifelines. If you are doing an exercise that compares two groups of people, it helps to have at least one small group work on each group’s lifeline.

Materials: Large sheet of paper • pens/pencils/markers • wall/board to post paper • tape/tacks for posting the paper

Alternatives: Cards can be used instead of writing directly onto the large sheet of paper. Glue/paste/tape will be needed to attach the cards to the large sheet of paper. Pictures from magazines, photographs, comics or drawings can be used instead of writing. Scissors may be needed for some of these materials.

Time required: 40 minutes – 20 minutes for developing the lifelines and 20 minutes for discussing them. If this exercise is done to show how two groups compare with one another (parents/teenagers; boys/girls; men/women), the discussion could be much lengthier, especially if both types of groups are represented among your participants. For instance, if you have girls tell what boys’ lives are like, the boys may want to argue some of the points. The girls will want to do the same after the boys’ presentation.

Facilitator preparation: None

Instructions: Give the group of participants a large sheet of paper and tell them to write on the top of the paper whose lifeline they will be presenting. They will be showing, though words or pictures, the major things in that group’s life. For instance, if the group is “girls,” the lifeline would begin with “birth,” at the top of the page; and end with “21st birthday,” at
the bottom of the page. The participants draw or write happenings in the life of a girl between those two major events.

When all the lifelines are complete, bring the large group back together and have each small group explain what they included in the lifeline, why it was included, and what meaning it has for the life of that person.

Alternative: This exercise is often done comparing two groups. If there are enough participants or if you have sufficient time, it is useful to create your small groups to match the groups whose lifelines are being presented. For instance, if you are comparing parents and children, have the parents make up one small group and the children make up another. Let each group draw its own lifeline, as well as the other group’s life line. Discussions are usually very lively, as participants see their own life and another group’s life from different points of view. The facilitator may need to call an end to the discussion, due to time, arguments, etc.

When the discussion is over, you may want to use another PAR tool to find ways for the participants to understand each other better or to take other action, based on the discussion.

**TOOL 8: SEASONAL CALENDAR**

**Purpose:**
1. Discover information
2. Identify patterns of activity
3. Discover relationships

*Note:* This activity can be done so that one group’s seasonal activity is compared to another group’s. In such a case, other purposes may be to:

4. Understand another group’s point of view
5. Discover what is the same and what is different about different groups
6. Correct misunderstandings about another group

**Age:** Good for all ages

**Group size:** Can work with any group size

**Materials:** Large sheets of paper • pens/pencils/markers • wall/board to post paper • tape/tacks for posting the paper

*Alternative:* Cards can be used instead of writing directly on the large sheet of paper. If cards are used, other materials needed will include glue/paste/tape for posting the cards to the calendar.

**Time required:** 60 minutes (more time will be needed if comparisons are made)
Facilitator preparation: On a large sheet of paper, draw a large box and put a label on it to show what you are examining in this activity. Divide the box into smaller boxes. Along the top, divide it by the time of year or special time periods you wish to examine. This might be simply, “winter” and “summer,” or actual calendar months, or some other breakdown that makes sense for your purposes. It might look something like this:

**PRESSURES ON YOUTH GROUP MEMBERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Start of School Term</th>
<th>ChristmasHoliday</th>
<th>Exam Time</th>
<th>Summer Holiday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>January</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>February</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instructions: Post the large calendar and have participants fill in information in each of the boxes. Some calendars will work well using comics or drawings, instead of words. The information may be used to plan action.

This exercise is sometimes used to compare duties, activities, expectations or perceptions of two different groups. If this is how you wish to use it, divide the group into small groups that represent the two groups you wish to examine. When each small group has completed its calendar or calendars, have everyone come back together and explain the calendars they have developed. The discussions can become very lively as each group makes assumptions and judgements about the other. Usually the opposite group will want to correct information it feels is incorrect.
TOOL 9: FINISH THE STORY/SONG LYRICS/DRAMA

Purpose: 1. Discover information  
2. Uncover hidden talent  
3. Use popular cultural and entertainment in new ways

Note: The idea behind this activity is to use the creative spirit of the participants. Depending on your need, they may use this creative spirit to show you what they know about a topic, to encourage action in a certain way, to translate an official message into their own words.

Age: Good for all ages

Group size: Some forms work best with small groups, no more than 6; other forms can use larger groups

Materials: Pens/pencils • paper • costume materials • large sheets of paper • markers

Time required: 60 minutes: 30 minutes to create, and 30 minutes to share with the large group

Facilitator preparation: Find or write a story that gives some basic information about the topic you are examining.

Alternative: 1) Find or write a skit or several short dramas. For short dramas, you might write out a list of story lines for the groups to act out. 2) Find popular or cultural songs that either have a message you want to use or that participants are familiar with.
Instructions: Find or write a story that gives some basic information about the topic you are examining. Stop the story before the end and have the participants finish the story. You may want to suggest different alternatives as to how the story should end, or leave it to the participants. After the first ending, ask if anyone has a different ending they want to suggest. Continue with different endings until no one can think of an alternative.

After each ending, you can use your probing questions to explore why the story ended that way, what the characters could have done differently, who else could have come into the story, etc. Have them act out the drama again with these new characters or new happenings.

Alternatives: Instead of having the participants create the ending to the story, have different members act out the roles of various people in the story and have them change the story. You can leave it open for the participants to change it as they wish, or you can direct them to include certain things that you want them to respond to. If, for example, the story is about someone with AIDS, you could have one character instructed to be kind to the person and another to be cruel to her. One person could be a family member and another could be someone she works with.

Another alternative to this type of tool is to take a popular song and have the participants re-write the lyrics to tell something about your topic. If a song already has a message you can use, have the participants write the next verse of the same song. As they write their verses, you can have them write from the viewpoint of a mother, a teacher, a youth, a pastor, or other individuals.

Other alternatives: Participants can write poems, create dances, and use other forms of popular or cultural entertainment to tell about the topic.

After the participants have done their creative work, have them perform before the entire group. After this, have the entire group review the information that was presented. Write the ideas and messages that were presented on a large sheet of paper. Check for accuracy of information and correct any misinformation.

The review may lead to other PAR activities to determine further action.
Although the following tools can be used for learning or discovering information (Education–PAR or Research–PAR), they are also especially useful for planning or encouraging action (Action–PAR).

**ACTION TOOL 1: PROBLEM TREE**

**Purpose:**
1. Discover information
2. Discover relationships
3. Create a visual picture of a problem and its root causes
4. Help to decide actions to be taken

**Note:** This exercise usually comes after other activities have identified one or more problems the participants want to work out. This activity will help them determine if they are working on the part of the problem that will really make the change they desire. This exercise usually also leads into other tools that help identify action to be taken, relationships between root problems, and more.

**Age:** Good for age 12 and above

**Group size:** Works best with medium-sized groups, no more than 10. Several small groups can be working at the same time on the same or related problems.

**Materials:** Large sheet of paper • pens/pencils/markers • wall/board to post paper • tape/tacks for posting the paper

**Alternatives:** Cards can be used instead of writing directly onto the large sheet of paper. Cards give more flexibility for participants to make their ideas clearer as they discuss the problem and its causes. Glue/paste/tape will be needed to attach the cards to the large sheet of paper.

**Time required:** 60 minutes or more, depending on how detailed your problem is

**Facilitator preparation:** It usually is a good idea for the facilitator to make up a sample of what the Problem Tree looks like. It helps to give participants an idea of what they will be doing.
**Instructions:** In the middle of the top of a large sheet of paper, write a short statement, like a title, that states the problem the participants want to solve. Draw a box around this title. From that box, draw a straight line down, like this

![Diagram](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

Now, draw three boxes in a straight row and attach them to the line you have already drawn. It should look like this

```
TEEN VIOLENCE

POVERTY
NOTHING TO DO
NEED FOR POWER
```

In each of these boxes write what the participants believe to be causes of the main problem at the top of the page. Next, draw two boxes under each of the three boxes, giving the causes for these “root” problems. It will look like this.

```
TEEN VIOLENCE

POVERTY

NOTHING TO DO

NEED FOR POWER

NO JOB
PARENTS HAVE NO JOBS
DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL
NO EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
LOW SELF-ESTEEM
PEER PRESSURE
```
Keep adding boxes until the participants feel they have gotten to the bottom of the root causes for each problem. Remember to use your probing questions to find out why they feel one thing is at the root of another problem.

On the third line of boxes, you can have more than two causes for each problem, but it may become confusing to have too many boxes. Let the participants decide on the two or three major causes to include on this line.

When the drawing is completed, the very top problem will look like a tree and the rest of the drawing will be the roots of the tree. Explain that it is almost impossible to get rid of a tree without doing something about its root system. To take meaningful action, the participants may want to focus on one or more of the root causes, rather than the “tree” at the top.

From this exercise, you may want to move to another PAR tool to decide what action to take, who the stakeholders are (people who need to be involved in a project, as well as those who can help or hurt progress), which of several actions they want to do first and what resources they have available.
ACTION TOOL 2: MAPPING

Purpose:
1. Discover information
2. Discover relationships, especially relationships of places
3. Help decide actions to be taken
4. Create a visual representation of a community, especially around a specific issue

Age: Good for ages 12 and above

Group size: Can work with large or small groups

Materials: Large sheet of paper • markers • wall/board to post paper • tape/tacks for posting the paper

Alternatives: Participants can use coloured paper, ribbon, leaves, and any other material to represent items on a map. Scissors, glue may be needed.

Time required: 60 minutes or more, depending on how detailed you want your map to be

Facilitator preparation: If materials will be used to represent items on the map, the facilitator must gather these materials. It will help the process if the facilitator puts some identifying items on the map before the process begins. You can start with basic markers such as a compass showing north/south/east and west; principal landmarks, the sea, etc. This will save time and help the participants focus on the items you want them to identify. Leave the rest of the map blank, however, for the participants to draw.

Instructions: On a large piece of paper, have participants draw the things that identify the community, such as roads, landmarks, rivers and key buildings. Then, have them add items that deal with the topic you wish to discuss. This might be something like “places where young people hang out,” “places where dangerous things happen,” “places where people can buy condoms.” On this last one, you might use another symbol – maybe a star or a coloured dot on top of the first symbol – to mark those places that not only sell condoms, but sell them to young people without a problem.

As the mapping continues, use your probing questions to help the participants identify problems or issues that need to be explored further. If issues come up, you may want to use other PAR tools to determine what action needs to be taken and how to proceed.
ACTION TOOL 3: SPIDER WEB

Purpose: 1. Identify needs  
2. Discover information  
3. Discover values/opinions  
4. Choose actions to pursue

Age: Good for ages 10 and up

Group size: Works best with small groups of no more than 6. Several small groups could be working at the same time if your group is large.

Materials: Large sheet of paper  
• pencils /pens/markers  
• tape/tacks for posting

Alternatives: Drawing could be done in the sand/dirt or on pavement, if you have something like “sidewalk chalk”; connecting lines could be done with yarn/ string/vines, instead of drawing them; cards could be used instead of writing on the large sheets of paper.

Time required: 60 minutes

Facilitator preparation: None

Instructions: In the centre of a large sheet of paper write the issue or problem you wish to examine. Draw a circle around it. From the circle, draw lines extending out. Have each member of the group name something that is necessary to accomplish the goal. Fill these in the spaces between the lines. Then draw lines to close them in.

Now, have each person identify what needs to be done to accomplish the new goals that have been added. Have the web continue until no one can think of another action step that needs to be taken.

Use the information from the spider web in another PAR exercise to decide what to do first—to look for help, identify solutions or problems, etc.
ACTION TOOL 4: FISH & BOULDERS

**Purpose:**
1. Identify resources
2. Identify problems that may slow or stop a project
3. Identify stakeholders (those who can help or hurt a project)
4. Identify new actions or people that can help accomplish a goal

**Age:** Good for all ages

**Group size:** Can work with any group size

**Materials:**
- Large sheets of paper
- Pens/pencils/markers
- Wall/board to post paper
- Tape/tacks for posting the paper
- Cards cut into the shape of fish
- Cards cut into the shape of large stones
- Tape/paste/glue to attach the cards to the large paper

**Alternatives:**
Clay/flour dough can be used to make fish and stones. This exercise can also be done in the sand/dirt, using a stick to draw the outline, and items found at the site to take the place of the fish and the stones.

**Time required:** 60 minutes

**Facilitator preparation:** On the large sheet of paper, draw the outline of a river. At the top of the river write “Planning Begins for ____________,” and fill in the blank with what the group wants to accomplish. At the bottom of the river write, “Project accomplished.”

The facilitator also must prepare cards in the shape of fish and the shape of stones. Make them in various sizes.

**Instructions:** Place the sheets of paper on a board, wall, or on the floor. It should look like a long river. Have the participants name things or people that can help accomplish the goal shown at the top of the river. Have them write these on the fish. If the person or thing will be a great help, it should go on a big fish. If it will only be a little help, it should go on a small fish. Have them place these fish in the river at various spots.

Next, have them name things or people that could pose problems in accomplishing the goal. They should write these on the rock-shaped cards, again using the size of the card to show how big a problem they might create.

Use your probing questions to see “Who else should be in the river?” “Why is this person or thing such a big stone?” “What could change this person or thing from a stone to a fish?” Let them move the cards around if that will help to take away some of the rocks. Have them add new “fish” that will move a rock out of the way.

This exercise can be followed by other PAR activities that help plan action or help to get the “fish” involved.
ACTION TOOL 5: PRIORITY OR DO-ABILITY MATRIX

Purpose: 1. Choose actions to pursue
2. Choose groups to target with programmes or actions
3. Determine what order to follow in pursuing a number of actions
4. Build team co-operation (encourage teamwork)

Age: Good for all age groups

Group size: Works best with small groups of no more than 6. Several small groups could be working at the same time if your group is large.

Materials: Large sheets of paper, pencils/pens/markers • paper/wall/board to post individual sheets • tape/tacks for posting sheets

Alternatives: Bottle caps, stones, seeds, etc. could be used for showing a rating, rather than writing numbers in the boxes.

Time required: 90 minutes: 45 minutes to construct the matrix and 45 minutes for large group discussion. If the group is small, the process could possibly be completed in about 45 minutes.

Facilitator preparation: None.

Instructions: Have the group make a list of possible actions. For instance, the participants may be in a group that wants to give assistance to the poor. They might list “give cash ($2,000 monthly),” “provide lunches,” “buy school materials,” “teach money management,” and “teach a skill” as possible actions. These would be written on separate lines on the left side of the paper.

Next, have the group make a list of things that must be considered in making the decision about which action to choose. Put these along the top of the paper, and draw lines between to form a big box, made up of many small boxes. It should look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact on Budget</th>
<th>Instructor/Workers Available</th>
<th>Impact on Poor in our Community</th>
<th>Impact if Project Terminated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Give cash ($2,000 monthly)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide lunches</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy school materials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach money management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach a skill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The group will rate each activity based on the different considerations along the top, using a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being low or negative and 10 being high or positive. If, for example, if giving $2,000 out every month will empty your bank account in a few months, it has a large negative effect on the budget. This means the participants would put a 1 or 2 in that box. On the other hand, if a local bakery had offered to provide bread and cheese for a lunch programme you would not need to take much money from the budget for the “provide lunches” item. The participants would therefore put a 10 in the box that joins “provide lunches” with “impact on budget.”

Participants fill in each square, using the information they personally have, what they learn from one another, and their own beliefs and judgements. Use your probing questions to help the small groups decide how well each idea will work, relative to the considerations they have named on the matrix.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Impact on Budget</th>
<th>Instructor/Workers Available</th>
<th>Impact on Poor in our Community</th>
<th>Impact if Project Terminated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Give cash ($2,000 monthly)</td>
<td>Score: 21</td>
<td>2 (budget may not be able to sustain)</td>
<td>10 (people come to the bank, requires no workers)</td>
<td>6 (may help some, but it is still little money)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 (even though it is little, people will come to depend on it)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide lunches</td>
<td>Score: 23</td>
<td>5 (some donations available, but will still cost money)</td>
<td>8 (some workers have said they would help)</td>
<td>6 (it could help on a day-by-day basis, but not long-term)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 (we would feel like we are making people go hungry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy school materials</td>
<td>Score: 19</td>
<td>3 (could run into great expense)</td>
<td>2 (not sure who would get the materials)</td>
<td>8 (helps poor children get a better chance at life)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 (at least those who were helped are better off)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach money management</td>
<td>Score: 38</td>
<td>10 (no cash needed)</td>
<td>10 (treasurer has volunteered)</td>
<td>10 (when money is little every dollar counts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8 (at least those who were helped are better off)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach a skill</td>
<td>Score: 36</td>
<td>10 (no cash needed)</td>
<td>10 (volunteers will teach sewing, bee keeping and chicken raising)</td>
<td>8 (many people have given up hope of a better life)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8 (at least those who were helped are better off)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When all the boxes are filled in, there should be a fairly clear indication of which one or two activities will work best. Let the group members express their agreement or disagreement with the “winning” actions. Again, use probing questions to see if there are other things that need to be considered.

If participants were split into small groups, bring everyone together and compare the ratings to see if there is unity in the group. If different groups examined different aspects of the same issue, see what unifying elements exist.

From the Priority Matrix, you may want to use another PAR exercise to develop a plan of action.
When you are doing PAR, it is not enough to find out “who,” “why,” and “how.” Real action should come from the information you help people discover. The PAR process is not finished until there is a plan of action. In fact, PAR often starts with “Who” and “Why” exercises, and leads into “What can we do” exercises. Once those questions are explored, there needs to be a more formal decision-making exercise to say “Who will do what?” and “When will it happen?” If you do not take these steps, you have done participatory research, but there may be no action.

Here is an example of a simple action plan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>When will it start?</th>
<th>What is the objective?</th>
<th>How will we measure success?</th>
<th>Who will be in charge?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have a parents’ workshop</td>
<td>May 25</td>
<td>Encourage parental support for club activities; get more youth involved</td>
<td>Workshop takes place; at least 15 parents attend; parents sign pledge of support</td>
<td>Deanna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do a car wash</td>
<td>June 12</td>
<td>Raise money; make club more visible; attract new members</td>
<td>$6000 raised; two new members join in June; publicity distributed throughout the community</td>
<td>Jeremy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold movie night every Saturday</td>
<td>May 15</td>
<td>Fun; deepen fellowship and commitment to club; attract new members</td>
<td>Movies held each Saturday in May; at least 10 people come; at least three new people come</td>
<td>Tony and Kiesha</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To get the boxes filled in, you may need to go back to some of the earlier exercises. In fact, you may want to start the session with an action plan, then work to see what the root issues are, the obstacles or support in making improvements and the various paths someone might take to solve the problems. At the end, you will have participants look at the original work plan and see what needs to change, based on the information they have discovered. They can then revise the work plan, and add specific names and deadlines so that the action continues even after the session ends.

Setting deadlines and assigning names to activities is important.

**Deadlines** – If there is no time or date by which an action must take place, chances are it will get pushed back and back until it never gets done.

**Assigning names** – If something is everybody’s job, no one feels responsible for seeing that it is done. If no one’s name is next to an activity, most people will feel it is someone else’s job. Few people will take on tasks that are not specifically theirs. It works best if people volunteer for tasks, rather than having them assigned to them, but if volunteering does not work, assignments must be made. Someone must be made to feel responsible (“accountable”) to see that the work is completed, and that it is done within the time given.
Practice, practice, practice. Nothing can mould you into a great PAR researcher like practice. Use the activities that feel comfortable to you, but also look for opportunities to try new, more challenging ones. The more you use them, the easier they become and the more useful you will find them to be.

As you use the activities, you will probably adjust them to fit your needs and your style. Just remember the reason for doing PAR is to help others think things through, look for necessary changes, and make those changes happen. As long as your adjustments do these things, they are true PAR activities. Write down the adjustments you make, how they work, and if they have made a difference in the outcome of the activity. Keep a copy of what you write in this book, and also send a copy to:

PAR Guide
UNICEF Jamaica
60 Knutsford Boulevard
P.O. Box 305
Kingston 5, Jamaica

or email to unicefja@cwjamaica.com

When UNICEF updates this book, your creative adjustments can be included. UNICEF would like to hear more about your PAR programmes. Make it part of your regular follow-up process to write a short (1-2 page) report to UNICEF whenever you put PAR into action. Your information can help others become PAR specialists – just like you!