SARAR is a participatory approach to community empowerment and training that builds on local knowledge and strengthens people’s ability to assess, prioritise, plan, create, organise, and evaluate. It builds local knowledge and self-esteem.

Summary table

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<th>Goal</th>
<th>Empowering communities with knowledge.</th>
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<td>In more than one region</td>
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Description

SARAR is an education/training methodology for working with people at different levels to engage their creative capacities in planning, problem solving and evaluation. The objective of the SARAR approach is not to teach a specific message or subject matter, but to stimulate the learners to think through problems for themselves and to help them to develop their own analytic, creative and planning abilities. The acronym SARAR stands for the five attributes and capacities that are considered the minimum essentials for participation to be a dynamic and self-sustaining process:

- **Self-esteem:** a sense of self-worth as a person as well as being a valuable resource for development.
- **Associative strengths:** the capacity to define and work toward a common vision through mutual respect, trust, and collaborative effort.
- **Resourcefulness:** the capacity to visualise new solutions to problems even against the odds, and the willingness to be challenged and take risks.
- **Action planning:** combining critical thinking and creativity to come up with new, effective, and reality-based plans in which each participant has a useful and fulfilling role.
- **Responsibility:** for follow-through until the commitments made are fully discharged and the hoped-for benefits achieved.

SARAR is based on the principle of fostering and strengthening these five attributes among people at all levels but particularly among community members. Such a process will enable the development of those people’s own capacities for self-direction and management and will enhance the quality of participation among all of the stakeholders.

SARAR can be applied at all levels of what it describes as the Resistance to Change Continuum, but it is particularly valuable where the barriers are strongest and people need to be involved to overcome them – and when people need to be motivated to choose more sustainable options.
**History of approach**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year started</th>
<th>Year ended (if applicable)</th>
<th>Origins (who by and where was it invented)</th>
<th>Funding from (name of donor agencies, if applicable)</th>
<th>Countries used in to date</th>
<th>Experience to date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Early 1970s</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Lyra Srinivasan began designing the core tools of SARAR in pioneering work with national and international NGOs (e.g., Save the Children, World Education) in the early 1970s. It was adapted for use in water and sanitation by the PROWWESS/UNDP programme in the mid 1980s. First used in water and sanitation programmes in East and West Africa, Philippines, Indonesia (World Education), Nepal, India (ACDIL), Mexico (Sarar Transformación), Guatemala and Bolivia (Project Concern).</td>
<td>SARAR was adopted and funded by UNDP/PROWWESS in the early 1980s and later transferred to the UNDP/World Bank’s Water and Sanitation Program (WSP) in the early 1990s.</td>
<td>Worldwide</td>
<td>After the transfer of the PROWWESS programme to the UNDP/World Bank WSP, SARAR became a core methodology of its programmes throughout Africa (including the International Training Network Centres), the flagship Yakupaj programme in Bolivia, as well as programmes in Asia (e.g., Pakistan, Vietnam and Mongolia). Then in the mid-1990s the WSP, WHO and UNICEF collaborated in the design of the focused application of SARAR to hygiene and sanitation promotion (see PHAST section H1.1); and, in response to emerging needs and experience, the methodology was broadened to include participatory monitoring and evaluation approaches and to facilitate institutional development processes as well. SARAR has been successfully institutionalised in the Indonesian Government’s Ministry of Health’s education programme on sanitation and hygiene (Rietbergen-McCracken and Narayan, 1998); and in 1999 the SARAR (and PHAST tools) became the core approach for the El Salvador Ministry of Health health workers programme which was subsequently adapted by other countries in Latin America. It has also been used extensively in promoting ecological sustainable sanitation (in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, as well as in Central, South and East Asia). For instance, it uses an exercise known as the ‘resistance to change continuum’ in order to help participants become aware of their own resistance to building and using ecological toilets, overcome that resistance and effectively promote them within their communities (Sawyer, 2003).</td>
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Perceived strengths and weaknesses

Strengths

Although it was originally designed for rural use, SARAR has proved flexible in adapting to urban settings, and it has been applied across sectors, such as rural development, health, HIV/AIDS (Breslin and Sawyer 1999), forestry, as well as water, sanitation and hygiene education.

SARAR is directed toward whole communities, but it has proved to be especially useful in giving special attention to population groups, such as women, whose input and needs are hard to assess with traditional development approaches.

SARAR training helps to liberate extension workers from many of the unconscious assumptions inherited from paternalistic societies and government structures, frequently releasing creative energy and insight that can have broad reaching effects within the individual, group and community.

Although for the uninitiated, the process-oriented, interactive tools can seem juvenile, participants quickly realise the rewards of greater enjoyment, immediate feedback and collective learning, stimulating increased commitment and time commitment to the collective learning process.

Weaknesses

Along with all participatory techniques care is needed to avoid manipulation and to ensure respect for the opportunity cost of communities’ time.

Effectiveness can also be limited by a general resistance – usually by higher level managers and decision makers rather than by the community themselves – to the use of qualitative, informal and visual-based techniques.

The training of skilled SARAR facilitators requires a commitment to human development and an investment upfront which government planners and politicians looking for the quick fix are frequently unwilling to make.

Evidence of effectiveness

Published internal evaluations

None

Published external evaluations


What are impacts, outcomes and sustainability issues?

Varies from project to project. Whereas there is insufficient data to evaluate the overall impact of SARAR, the PROWWESS assessment report (Harnmeijer 1994) found that trainees were often deeply affected by the methodology and frequently carried it with them into other roles and sectors: “There is a group of SARAR converted who ‘live the methodology’ and who have taken the methodology further than what was taught. For these people SARAR has endless applications”.

In terms of sustainability, the case of Bolivia is noteworthy in that, from an initial PROWWESS sponsored workshop in 1986, there are now numerous NGOs and government agencies that are using some form of SARAR (or its derivative PHAST) frequently combined with other tools and approaches (Sawyer, 2009).

How much does it cost?

Specific costs will vary from country to country and programme to programme, but as with any effective community-based empowerment and behaviour change approach there needs to be a commitment and resources to invest in training-of-trainers, materials development and production and community based workshops and follow-up (Sawyer, 2009).

Human resource requirement?

On average a SARAR workshop comprises one or two facilitators, preferably two to five experienced national trainers, and about 25 participants, or trainees – ideally accompanied by one or two local artists (Rietbergen-McCracken and Narayan, 1998).
Evidence of effectiveness

How long does it take?

Ideally a full field-based training programme should allow time for:

- Two to three day “pre-planning workshop” with core trainers and artists;
- Training workshop of 10 to 12 days;
- Production of visual materials by an artist(s);
- Field testing of techniques and materials;
- Several field visit sessions with the community; and
- A review workshop and follow-up activities.

SARAR community processes are relatively time-intensive. The actual time required is not specified.

Sources of information, toolkits, guidebooks and further reading

Source(s) of information


Toolkits or guidebooks


Further reading


Additional information for SARAR was provided by Ron Sawyer, Sarar Transformación, Mexico.