

RELAXED AND PARTICIPATORY APPRAISAL NOTES ON PRACTICAL APPROACHES AND METHODS

Notes for participants in PRA familiarisation workshops in the second half of 1999

*These notes are an updated foundation. Most of the stuff on the wall charts is additional to (and may be more useful than) what is in these notes. Headings later in this note indicate some of the range of the subject, including some of the many methods now known. These are a menu, not a syllabus! I hope these notes are of some use, if only for occasional reference. **You won't want to read all of this.** Some of the more important points are repeated.*

I think we are lucky, and this is a brilliantly exciting time to be alive and working as a development professional. Much is changing, and changing rapidly, and new potentials are continually opening up.

Participatory methodologies - approaches, methods and behaviours - are one part of this. With those known as PRA (originally participatory rural appraisal) things are moving fast. We have to get used to that. For some it is unsettling; for others, a wonderful stimulation. It is not easy to keep up-to-date. I have had to revise these notes at least twice a year. If you see them and they are more than six months old, please remember that. Much may have changed.

What is PRA?

Perhaps each of us should give our own answer to this question. "Use your own best judgement at all times" is one part of the core of what PRA has become. It continues to evolve and spread so fast that any solid definition would mislead. One description has been that it is

"a growing family of approaches, methods *and behaviours* to enable people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan, act, and monitor and evaluate". (My italics)

Many make a distinction between RRA and PRA. For them, RRA, or rapid rural appraisal, is about finding out. It is data collecting, with the analysis done mainly by "us". Good PRA, which evolved out of RRA, is in contrast empowering, a process of appraisal, analysis and action by local people themselves. There are methods which are typically RRA methods (observation, semi-structured interviews, transects etc) and others which are typically PRA methods (participatory mapping, diagramming, using the ground in various ways, making comparisons etc, often in small groups). PRA methods can be used in an RRA (data collecting) mode, and vice versa. I can see nothing wrong with RRA in the right context if done responsibly and well.

Labels are a problem but we are stuck with them. For RRA:

"relaxed" is a better word than rapid: rushing is a terrible problem
"rural" misleads since many applications are urban etc
"appraisal" is OK.

But for PRA "appraisal" is too limited. *Good PRA is a process*, involving much more than just appraisal. The main publication RRA Notes (numbers 1-21) was renamed (numbers 22-32) PLA (Participatory Learning and Action) Notes. "Participatory learning and action" is a more accurate title for what many practitioners of PRA believe in and are doing, but PRA remains the usual label. Some are beginning to use PRA to stand for Participatory Reflection and Action, because at the core of what good PRA has become are self-critical awareness, personal behaviour and attitudes, and engagement with action.

So PRA is about empowering. It is linked with distinctive behaviours, attitudes and approaches. "We" are not teachers or transferors of technology, but instead convenors, catalysts, and facilitators. We have to unlearn, and put our knowledge, ideas and categories in second place. Our role is to enable local people to do their own investigations, analysis, presentations, planning and action, to own the outcome, and to teach us, sharing their knowledge. We "hand over the stick" and facilitate "their" appraisal, presentation, analysis, planning, action, and monitoring and evaluation. They do many of the things we thought only we could do - mapping, diagramming, counting, listing, sorting, ranking, scoring, sequencing, linking, analysing, planning, monitoring and evaluating. "A PRA" is a term which many PRA practitioners and trainers consider should be reserved for a process which empowers local people.

Three common elements found in a PRA approach are:

* **responsibility**. Individual responsibility and judgement exercised by facilitators, with self-critical awareness, embracing error.

* **equity and empowerment**. A commitment to equity. empowering those who are marginalised, excluded, and deprived, often especially women.

* **diversity**. Recognition and celebration of diversity

You can add to this list, using your own best judgement. PRA is not a fixed thing. Many of those who have been practising it for some time see and experience it as a self-critical philosophy, a way of life, a way of being and of relating to others.

But this is getting a bit heavy. Enough.

Invent, evolve and experience this thing for yourself. But only if you wish.

Origins

Some of the methods come from social anthropology. Some, especially diagramming, were developed and spread in Southeast Asia, as part of agroecosystem analysis, originating in the University of Chiang Mai in 1978 with the work of Gordon Conway and his colleagues. For RRA, the University of Khon Kaen in Thailand was a major source of innovation and inspiration in the 1980s. Other methods, like matrix scoring, seem to be new. What is also new is the way they have all come together, and the way both RRA and PRA seem to know no boundaries of discipline or of geography. Interestingly, RRA and PRA, developed in the "South", have been transferred to and adopted in the "North".

The term PRA was used early on in Kenya and India around 1988 and 1989. Some of the early PRA in Kenya was linked with the production of Village Resource Management Plans, and some with Rapid Catchment Analysis. In India and Nepal from 1989 onwards there was an accelerated development and spread of PRA with many innovations and applications (see especially [RRA Notes](#) 13). Parallel developments took place in other countries around the world, with lateral sharing and an explosion of creativity and diversity.

Spread

PRA has spread:

- from appraisal to process, including M and E
- from rural to urban
- from field applications to applications in organisations
- from a few sectors to many
- from NGOs to Government Departments and Universities
- from a few countries to many
- from South to North
- from methods to professional and institutional change
- from methods to behaviour and attitudes, and sharing
- from behaviour and attitudes to personal change
- from action to policy influence
- from practice to theory (asking - why does it work?)

Learning experience workshops for PRA have been convened in many places and countries now. International South-South PRA Exchange Workshops have been held in Guinea-Bissau, India (numerous), Jordan, Kenya, Mexico, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Zimbabwe. There have been probably at least 100 cases of sharing where trainers have gone South-South from one country or continent to another to conduct PRA training (In April Grace Mukasa from Uganda and Shashidharan from India went to Nigeria, for example, and Kamal Kar from India to Mongolia....)

The spirit of inventiveness and improvisation (linked with optimal unpreparedness) which is part of PRA is spreading, and helping people in different parts of the world to feel liberated and able to develop their own varieties of approach and method. People (both local and outsiders), once they have unfrozen and established rapport, enjoy improvising, varying and inventing methods and applying them as part of participatory processes. Creativity has been shown by fieldworkers, and by local people with whom they have been interacting. PRA activities are often engrossing, and both popular and powerful.

In some countries and regions, the use of PRA has become almost normal. This is said to be the case in parts of Nepal, and also in Andhra Pradesh in India. National networks have been established in all continents. The countries and regions where PRA training has been conducted, and where there is activity or where we (Participation Group in IDS) can put you in touch with useful contacts (those underlined are known to have active PRA-related networks) include

Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Bangladesh, Belize, Bhutan, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cap Verde, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Finland, Fiji/South Pacific, the Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Lebanon, Lesotho, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, New Zealand, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Palestine, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somaliland, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Tadjikistan, Tanzania, Thailand, Tibet, Turkey, Uganda, United States, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, UK, Venezuela, Vietnam, Yemen, Zambia and Zimbabwe .

Much else has surely been taking place, but which we do not know about.

The approaches and methods have proved applicable in many types of institutions. NGOs were the first main pioneers of PRA but many Government field organisations, training institutes, and universities are now using and evolving variants of PRA. Most major donor organisations and Northern-based NGOs are promoting, supporting, and/or being challenged by, PRA. Widespread applications include village-level planning, watershed development and management, social forestry, tank rehabilitation, women's programmes, client ("stakeholder") selection and deselection, health programmes, adult empowerment and literacy (REFLECT), animal husbandry, agricultural research, agricultural extension, and increasingly policy (with PPAs = participatory poverty assessments). Training institutes are interested in adopting and adapting the approach and methods for the fieldwork and field experience of their probationers and students. In countries worldwide, usually (but not always) University faculty have been slow off the mark, but students have often been keen.

Concerns

There is a mass of bad practice. Quality assurance is now a huge concern among practitioners and trainers. Dangers and abuses include:

- using the label without the substance
- demanding instant PRA on a large scale
- failing to put behaviour and attitudes before methods
- rushing and dominating in the field
- community meetings dominated by you-know-who, without sensitive follow up processes
- bad training based on lecturing without field experience, and neglecting behaviour and attitudes
- rigid, routinised applications
- taking local people's time without recompense, and raising expectations

The labels "RRA" and "PRA" have been used to justify and legitimate sloppy, biased, rushed and unself-critical work. Any approach or methods can be used badly, and RRA and PRA provide some outstanding examples of bad practice.

Part of the problem is that donors and Governments tend to want to go instantly to scale, in hundreds, even thousands, of communities. So far no way has been found to do this both quickly and well. Demand for training exceeds supply, although PRA trainers who have really "got it" must now number several hundreds worldwide. PRA has become a fashionable label, with "expert" consultants saying they can provide it when they cannot. The initial prejudice encountered among donors that somehow trainers have to be recruited in the North persists but is weaker than it was. *PRA was developed in the South and most of the good trainers are in and from the South*, and, dare I say it? not outstandingly in or near Washington D.C.

Donors and Government Departments, and even NGOs, rarely recognise that institutional changes - of cultures, procedures and rewards - are required to sustain good PRA. We are in the process of learning what those necessary changes are. We know that it is no good preaching participation at the grass roots while maintaining an authoritarian hierarchy "above", with donor or department-driven targets, punitive management and the like.

Starting, and going where?

Some people whose attitudes are truly participatory can, with a minimum of exposure, simply go ahead and learn as they go. The short paper "Start, stumble, self-correct, share" which I will hand out at the end encourages such people to start, recognising that much depends on our personal behaviour and attitudes, and that we all make mistakes. The behaviour and attitudes required of us as "uppers" (outsiders, professionals, people who tend to dominate) include critical self-awareness and embracing error; sitting down, listening and learning; not lecturing but "handing over the stick" to "lowers" (people who are local, less educated, younger, usually dominated) who become the main teachers and analysts; having confidence that "they can do it"; and a relaxed and open-ended inventiveness.

Much PRA is enjoyed, both by local participants and by outsiders who initiate it. The word "fun" has entered the vocabulary and describes some of the experience. But some people with a strong disciplinary training find the reversal of teaching and learning difficult. It is not their fault. We can help one another firmly but sympathetically. And we can amiably tease one another when we slip into "holding the stick"; as of course I shall do!

Where does all this lead? How crucial is it that "lowers" should conduct their own investigations and analysis? Does PRA provide a strategy for local empowerment and sustainable development? What happens when it goes to scale? Can self-critical awareness be part of the genes of PRA, so that it is self-improving as it spreads? These are questions you may wish to answer for yourself. For many now they are being answered by sharing experience. To present background, and in search of understanding and answers, here are some headings and notes. But write your own.....

Why did Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) evolve for data collection (in the late 1970s and 1980s)?

Accelerating rural change, and the need for good and timely information and insights

Recognising "us" and our confidence in our knowledge as much of the problem, and "them" and their knowledge as much of the solution

The anti-poverty biases (spatial, project, person, seasonal...) of rural development tourism. Being rapid and wrong

The insulation, isolation and out-of-date experience of senior and powerful people, most of them men

Survey slavery - questionnaire surveys which took long, misled, were wasteful, and were reported on, if at all, late

The search for cost-effectiveness, recognising trade-offs between depth, breadth, accuracy, and timeliness, assessing actual beneficial use of information against costs of obtaining it

What happened, leading to PRA for empowerment?

A confluence of approaches and methods - applied social anthropology, agroecosystem analysis, farming systems research, participatory action research, and RRA itself all coming together and evolving...

A repertoire of new methods especially with visuals (mapping, matrices, diagramming.....) and of sequences of methods

The discovery that "they can do it" (that "lowers" have far greater capabilities than most "uppers" recognise)

The relative power and popularity of the open against the closed, the visual against the verbal, group against individual analysis, and comparing against measuring

The search for practical approaches and methods for decentralisation, democracy, diversity, sustainability, community participation, empowerment....

Principles shared by RRA and PRA

- * offsetting biases (spatial, project, person - gender, elite etc, seasonal, professional, courtesy..)
- * rapid progressive learning - flexible, exploratory, interactive, inventive
 - reversals - learning from, with and by local people, eliciting and using their criteria and categories
- * optimal ignorance, and appropriate imprecision - not finding out more than is needed, not measuring more accurately than needed, and not trying to measure what does not need to be measured. We are trained to make absolute measurements, but often trends, scores or ranking are all that are required
- * triangulation - using different methods, sources and disciplines, and a range of informants in a range of places, and cross-checking to get closer to the truth through successive approximations
- * direct contact, face to face, in the field
- * seeking diversity and differences

Additional Principles of PRA (but develop and discover your own)

PRA, as it has evolved, is all this and more. Some of the "more" is:

- * critical self-awareness about attitudes and behaviour; doubt; embracing and learning from error; continuously trying to do better; building learning and improvement into every experience; and taking personal responsibility.
- changing behaviour and attitudes, from dominating to facilitating, gaining rapport, asking local people to teach us, respecting them, having confidence that they can do it, handing over the stick, empowering and enabling them to map, model, diagram, list, count, estimate, rank, score, analyse, present, plan, act, monitor and evaluate themselves, and to own the outcome.
- * a culture of sharing - of information, of methods, of food, of field experiences (between NGOs, Government and local people)....
- commitment to equity, empowering those who are marginalized, deprived, excluded, often especially women.

The Primacy of Behaviour and Attitudes

Behaviour and attitudes are more important than the methods.

In facilitating PRA there are many traps:

- * rushing (rapid and wrong again)
- * lecturing instead of listening, watching and learning. Is this problem worse with men than women, worse with older men than younger, and worst of all with those who have retired? Who holds the stick? Who wags the finger? Who teaches? Who listens? Who learns?

(The ERR, which I will explain, is relevant here)

- * interrupting and interviewing people, and suggesting things to them, when they are trying to concentrate on mapping, ranking, scoring, diagramming...Learning not to interview is not easy
- * imposing "our" ideas, categories, values, without realising we are doing it, making it difficult to learn from "them", and making "them" appear ignorant when they are not
- * gender biases with male teams and neglect of women (again and again and again and again and again and...). What are the proportions of women and men among us here?
- * rushing, lecturing and interrupting instead of listening, watching and learning. Forgive me, but it needs repeating. This can be a personal problem which we do not recognise in ourselves. (It is a problem for me, as you will discover). It is best treated as a joke, and pointed out to each other when we err. Which we all do.

Other recurrent problems are:

- * people reluctant to spend time in the field or to nighthalt in villages
- * consultants who claim expertise but do not give primacy to behaviour and attitudes

* large-scale implementation of "PRA" in a blueprint mode, demanded by donors and Governments, routinised, top-down, with no changes in behaviour and attitudes. Instructions to all in an organisation that they will immediately "use PRA". Rapid unselfcritical adoption leading to poor outcomes, and discrediting PRA.

(See also "Participatory Methods and Approaches: sharing our concerns and looking to the future" in PLA Notes 22; the Bangalore Statement - "Sharing Our Experience: An appeal to governments and donors" (July 1996); and the Calcutta Statement "Going to Scale with PRA: Reflections and Recommendations" (May 1997). The best source on behaviour and attitudes is: Somesh Kumar ed. ABC (Attitude and Behaviour Change of PRA), available on request from Jas Vaghadia, IDS Sussex or from PRAXIS, 12 Patliputra Colony, Patna 800 013, Bihar, India)

Approaches and Methods

"Approach" is basic. If attitudes are wrong, many of these methods will not work as well as they should. Where attitudes are right and rapport is good, it is often surprising what local people show they know, and what they can do.

PRA entails shifts of emphasis from:

dominating	to	empowering
closed	to	open
individual	to	group
verbal	to	visual
measuring	to	comparing, ranking and scoring

and of experience (when things go well) from

reserve	to	rapport
frustration	to	fun

Don't be put off by the length of the list of approaches and methods that follows. The purpose is to show that the menu is varied. There is much to try out and explore, and much to invent for yourself and to encourage local people to invent.

You may already have used some of these approaches and methods. Some are plain commonsense and common practice. Others are ingenious and not obvious. Some are quite simple to do. Others less so. You can anyway invent your own variants, interacting with local people. The first nine come especially from the RRA tradition:

Some Approaches and Methods more Typical of RRA

- * offset the anti-poverty biases of rural development tourism (spatial, project, person, seasonal, courtesy...)
- * find and review secondary data. They can mislead. They can also help a lot. At present, for the sake of a new balance, and of "our" reorientation and "their" participation, secondary data are not heavily stressed in PRA; but they can be very useful, especially in the earlier stages of e.g. deciding where to go
- * observe directly (see for yourself) (It has been striking for me to begin to realise how much I do not see, or do not think to ask about. Does education deskill us? Am I alone, or do many of us have this problem?) Combine observation with self-critical awareness of personal biases that result from our specialised education and background, and consciously try to compensate for these.
- * seek out the experts. Ask: who are the experts? So obvious, and so often overlooked. Who knows most about changes in types of fuels used for cooking? Medicinal plants? Seasonal rainfall? Who is pregnant? Goats? Treatments for diseases? Edible berries? Water supplies? Ecological history? Fodder grasses? Markets and prices? Factionalism and conflict? Changing values and customs? Resolving conflicts? The priorities of poor people?....
- * semi-structured interviewing. The Khon Kaen school of RRA has regarded this as the "core" of good RRA. Have a mental or written checklist, but be open to new aspects and to following up on the new and unexpected
- * transect walks - systematically walking with key informants through an area, observing, asking, listening, discussing, identifying different zones, local technologies, introduced technologies, seeking problems, solutions, opportunities, and mapping and/or diagramming resources and findings. Transects can take many forms - vertical, loop, along a watercourse, combing, sometimes even (in the Philippines) the sea-bottom.
- * sequences of analysis - from group to key informant, to other informants; or with a series of key informants, each expert on a different stage of a process (e.g. men on ploughing, women on weeding... etc)
- * key probes: questions which can lead direct to key issues such as - "What do you talk about when you are together?" "What new practices have you or others here experimented with in recent years?" "What happens when someone's hut burns down?"
- * case studies and stories - a household history and profile, a farm, coping with a crisis, how a conflict was resolved...

Some Approaches and Methods more typical of PRA

- * groups (casual or random encounter; focus or specialist; representative or structured for diversity; community/neighbourhood; or formal). Group interviews are often powerful and efficient, but used to be relatively neglected in favour of individual questionnaire-based interviews
- * they do it, as in all PRA: local people (and lowers generally) as investigators and researchers - women, children, school teachers, volunteers, students, farmers, village specialists, poor people. They do transects, observe, interview other local people. Beyond this, their own analysis, presentations, planning, action, monitoring and evaluation....
- * do-it-yourself, supervised and taught by them (levelling a field, transplanting, weeding, lopping tree fodder, collecting common property resources, herding, fishing, cutting and carrying fodder grass, milking animals, fetching water, fetching firewood, cooking, digging compost, sweeping and cleaning, washing clothes, lifting water, plastering a house, thatching, collecting refuse...). Roles are reversed. They are the experts. We are the clumsy novices. They teach us. We learn from them. And learn their problems.
- * time lines and trend and change analysis: chronologies of events, listing major remembered local events with approximate dates; people's accounts of the past, of how customs, practices and things close to them have changed; ethno-biographies - local histories of a crop, an animal, a tree, a pest, a weed...; diagrams, maps as matrices showing ecological histories, changes in land use and cropping patterns, population, migration, fuels used, education, health, credit, the roles of women and men...; and the causes of changes and trends, in a participatory mode often with estimation of relative magnitudes
- * participatory mapping and modelling: people's mapping, drawing and colouring on the ground with sticks, seeds, powders etc etc or on paper, to make social, health or demographic maps (of the residential village), resource maps or 3-D models of village lands or of forests, maps of fields, farms, home gardens, topic maps (for water, soils, trees etc etc), mobility, service and opportunity maps, etc.. These methods are often popular. They can be combined with or lead into wealth or wellbeing ranking, watershed planning, health action planning etc. Census mapping can use seeds for people, cards for households...
- * local analysis of secondary sources: For example, participatory analysis of aerial photographs (often best at 1:5000) to identify, share knowledge of, and analyse soil types, land conditions, land tenure etc; also satellite imagery.
- * estimates, comparisons and counting: often using local measures, judgements and/or pile sorting materials such as seeds, pellets, fruits, stones or sticks as counters or measures, sometimes combined with participatory maps and models
- * seasonal calendars - distribution of days of rain, amount of rain or soil moisture, crops, agricultural labour, non-agricultural labour, diet, food consumption, sickness, prices, animal fodder, fuel, migration, income, expenditure, debt etc etc

- * daily time use analysis: indicating relative amounts of time, degrees of drudgery etc of activities, sometimes indicating seasonal variations
- * institutional or "chapati"/Venn diagramming: identifying individuals and institutions important in and for a community or group, or within an organisation, and their relationships
- * linkage diagrams: of flows, connections and causality. This has been used for marketing, nutrient flows on farms, migration, social contacts, impacts of interventions and trends, causes of hunger, causes of violence etc
- * wellbeing grouping (or wealth ranking) - grouping or ranking households according to wellbeing, including those considered poorest or worst off. A good lead into discussions of the livelihoods of the poor and how they cope, and widely used for the selection of poor and deprived households with whom to work
- * matrix scoring and ranking, especially using matrices and seeds to compare through scoring, for example different trees, or soils, or methods of soil and water conservation, varieties of a crop or animal, fields on a farm, fish, weeds, conditions at different times, and to express preferences
- * local indicators, e.g. what are poor people's criteria of wellbeing and illbeing, and how do they differ from those we assume for them? Local indicators can be a start or baseline for participatory M and E.
- * team contracts and interactions - contracts drawn up by teams with agreed norms of behaviour; modes of interaction within teams, including changing pairs, evening discussions, mutual criticism and help; how to behave in the field, etc. (The team may be outsiders only, local people only, or local people and outsiders together)
- * shared presentations and analysis, where maps, models, diagrams, and findings are presented by local people especially to village or community meetings, and checked, corrected and discussed. Brainstorming, especially joint sessions with villagers. But who talks? Who talks how much? Who interrupts whom? Whose ideas dominate? Who lectures?
- * contrast comparisons - asking group A to analyse group B, and vice versa. This has been used for gender awareness, asking men to analyse how women spend their time.
- * role plays, theatre and participatory video on key issues, to express realities and problems, and to explore solutions. Powerful and popular approaches.
- * alternatives to questionnaires. A new repertoire of participatory alternatives to the use of questionnaires, which generate shared information which can be added up in tables. This is developing in an extraordinary way, but is not yet widespread.

- * listing and card-sorting. A super way of enabling many people to express their knowledge, views and preferences, and then sort them into categories or priorities, often using "the democracy of the ground".

PRA visualisations often combine some of the following:

- mapping
- sequencing
- listing
- comparing
- counting, estimating and scoring
- linking

When any three of these are combined, complex analysis tends to result, often with cross checking accuracy through analysis and presentation by groups.

Practical Personal Tips

(These are tips, not a code of ethics)

- * Look, listen and learn. Facilitate. Don't dominate. Don't interrupt. When people are mapping, modelling or diagramming, let them get on with it. When people are thinking or discussing before replying, give them time to think or discuss.

(This sounds easy. It is not. We tend to be habitual interrupters. Is it precisely those who are most clever, important and articulate who are also most disabled, finding it hardest to keep their mouths shut?)

So Listen, Learn, Facilitate. Don't Dominate! Don't Interrupt!

- * spend nights in villages and slums. Be around in the evening, at night and in the early morning.
- * embrace error. We all make mistakes, and do things badly sometimes. Never mind. Don't hide it. Share it. When things go wrong, it is a chance to learn. Say "Aha. That was a mess. *Good*. Now what can we learn from it?".
- * ask yourself - who is being met and heard, and what is being seen, and where and why; and who is *not* being met and heard, and what is *not* being seen, and where and why?
- * relax (RRA = relaxed rural appraisal). Don't rush. Allow unplanned time to walk and wander around.
- * meet people when it suits them, and when they can be at ease, not when it suits us. This applies even more strongly to women than to men. PRA methods often take time, and women tend to have many obligations demanding their attention. Sometimes the best times for them are the worse times for us - a couple of hours after dark, or sometimes early in the morning. Compromises are often needed, but it is a good discipline, and good for rapport, to try to meet at their best times rather

than ours; and don't force discussions to go on for too long. Stop before people are too tired.

- * probe. Interview the map or the diagram.
- * ask about what you see. Notice, seize on and investigate diversity, whatever is different, the unexpected.
- * use the six helpers - who, what, where, when, why and how?
- * ask open-ended questions
- * show interest and enthusiasm in learning from people
- * allow more time than expected for team interaction (I have never yet got this right) and for changing the agenda
- * enjoy it! It is often interesting, and often fun
- * be nice to people

Applications and Uses of RRA and PRA

These are now innumerable. You will have your own needs and ideas. Some of the main types of RRA and PRA process have been:

- * empowering, for local people (and lowers generally) to undertake their own appraisal, analysis, action and monitoring and evaluation, and identification and investigation of problems and solutions (typically PRA)
- * exploratory, for outsiders to learn about conditions (typically RRA)
- * training, orientation and attitude and behaviour change for outsiders

Some of the more important and common applications include:

natural resources and agriculture

- * watersheds, and soil and water conservation
- * forestry (especially joint forest management) and agroforestry
- * fisheries and aquaculture
- * biodiversity and wildlife reserve management
- * village plans
- * integrated pest management
- * crops and animal husbandry, including farmer participatory research/ farming systems research and problem identification by farmers
- * irrigation
- * marketing

programmes for equity

- * women's empowerment, gender awareness etc
- * children
- * micro-finance
- * selection: finding, selecting and deselecting people for poverty-oriented programmes
- * income-earning: identification and analysis of non-agricultural income-earning opportunities.
- * analysis by poor people of livelihoods and coping, leading to household plans

health and nutrition

- * health assessments and monitoring
- * food security and nutrition assessment and monitoring
- * water and sanitation assessment, planning and location
- * emergency assessment and management
- * sexual and reproductive health, including HIV/AIDS awareness and action

urban

- * community planning and action
- * slum improvement
- * urban violence

policy

- impact on poor people of structural adjustment and other policies
- PPAs (participatory poverty assessments) (spreading fast)
- Consultations with the Poor, in 23 countries, as a preliminary for WDR 2000 on poverty and development
- land policy
etc etc etc

and now critically

institutional and attitude and behaviour change (dubbed the ABC of PRA)

- * organisational analysis
- * field experiential learning (e.g. the World Bank's immersions for senior managers)
- * reflection and developing self-critical awareness

The many other applications include adult empowerment and literacy (the REFLECT approach), education (girls', boys' and teachers' behaviour in school, appraisal and planning by parents, etc), conflict management and resolution, selection of job applicants, and use with and by refugees and displaced persons, children, drug probationers, and people in prisons. A new frontier is the introduction of PRA visual methods of presentation and analysis of complexity into primary education, both non-formal and formal. (Please be in touch if you are interested in this).

So RRA/PRA approaches and methods can be and have been applied to a vast range of topics, for example:

the use and deterioration of common property resources; women's time use; women's and men's different priorities; why poor farmers do and don't take loans; why they do and don't plant trees; how poor people spend lump sums of money; the spread of animal diseases; traditional herding, fishing or tree management skills; sequences and preferences in using different treatments for diseases; local practices of soil, water and nutrient conservation and concentration; historical changes in child-rearing practices; the non-adoption of an innovation; why some children do not go to school, or drop out; historical changes in diet; seasonal debt and deprivation; migration; impact of a road; the reality of what happens in a Government programme; urban violence; children's realities; pre-teen and teenage sexual behaviour....

Some of the benefits can be and have been:

- * empowering the poor and weak - enabling a group (e.g. labourers, women, poor women, small farmers, street children etc) or a community themselves to analyse conditions, giving them confidence to state and assert their priorities, to present proposals, to make demands and to take action, leading to sustainable and effective participatory programmes
- * the project process including identification, appraisal, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, all in a participatory mode
- * direct learning and updating for senior professionals and officials, especially those trapped in headquarters
- * orientation of students, NGO workers, Government staff, and university and training institute staff towards a culture of open learning in organisations
- * diversification: encouraging and enabling the expression and exploitation of local diversity in otherwise standardised programmes
- * policy review- changing and adapting policies through relatively timely, accurate and relevant insights
- * research: identifying research priorities and participatory research itself
- * learning: developing and spreading participatory modes and methods, with training and teaching becoming helping people learn, and you may have others to add.

Some Frontiers and Challenges for PRA (see also postscript)

These are many. Some which stand out are:

- * **behaviour and attitudes**: the development and dissemination of more and better approaches and methods for enabling outsiders to change

- * **quality:** how to prevent rapid spread bringing low quality - how to make self-critical awareness and improvement part of the genes of PRA
- * **institutional:** how to establish and maintain participation in and through large organisations (government departments, large NGOs, universities.....) with the flexibility, diversity and behaviour and attitudes required by good PRA.
- * **donors , central Governments and some INGOs:** how to help donors,governments and INGO staff exercise restraint, and change their norms, rewards and procedures to permit and promote PRA, not demanding too much too fast, not setting targets for disbursements, and assuring good training
- * **participatory poverty assessments:** how to evolve and spread PPAs, and ensure that they lead to good changes in policy and practice
- * **governance:** how to link PRA with governance, especially introducing it in local level government administration
- * **sharing and networking:** how to sustain and enhance sharing, between outsiders and villagers, between different organisations - NGOs, government departments, universities and training institutes. Sharing and learning laterally, as when local people themselves become facilitators of PRA. And how to develop and spread networks for sharing and mutual support between practitioners.
- * **participatory Monitoring and Evaluation:** how to further develop and spread M and E in which poorer people and communities do their own M and E.
- * **empowerment and conflict resolution:** how to enable women, and the poorer, to take part more and more, and to gain more and more, and how to identify, help the resolution of conflicts between groups and between communities
- * **inventiveness, creativity and pluralism:** how to sustain and enhance inventiveness and creativity, learning from and with other participatory traditions, and evolving new approaches, methods, combinations and sequences, and restraining routine repetition
- * **trainer/facilitators:** how to help more people become good trainer/facilitators, and to have the freedom to provide PRA learning experiences for others.

And you will have your own list.

Use your own best judgement

This heading has the final word. One can ask:

Have PRA-type approaches, methods and behaviours come to stay, part of a participatory paradigm? Do they present points of entry for lasting change or a passing fad ? Are they part of an agenda for the 21st century?

I hope our workshop will help you to make your own judgement about these and other questions and to decide for yourself whether PRA approaches, methods and behaviours, if they are new to you, can help you and others in your work.

Lightly revised 10 May 1999

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Postscript. Here is a May 1999 note trying to review aspects of the status and future of PRA, for a possible joint article on “PRA Ten Years Later”

“ First cut list of developments and issues

1. remaining critical

- quality with spread (routinisation, manuals etc etc)
- ethics (expectations, endangering e.g. children etc etc)
- donors’ and government’s behaviour in demanding PRA
- experiential learning to replace conventional top-down “training”
- attitudes and behaviours
- institutional change (x targets, top-down etc)
- professional change

2. what has changed in the five years

- Scale. PRA-labelled activities in 1999 will probably be at least ten-fold those of 1994?
- World Bank has mainstreamed participation with so far poor results. Participatory language has become obligatory donor-speak
- Boundaries between participatory methodologies have increasingly dissolved (“sharing without boundaries”). PRA-type mapping is all over the place (I reckon well over a million maps have been made by local people now)
- PRA has become *de rigueur* for many donors and projects. The issue increasingly is not whether it will be used, but how badly or well it will be used. Lots of bad practice (UNICEF, World Bank.....)
- PRA fatigue in some communities (e.g. Malawi which someone told me had been “carpet-bombed” with PRA)
- Applications have multiplied and diversified. REFLECT has spread and gone in different directions, as one example. Also drug probationers, HIV/AIDS, prisons, institutional analysis....
- PRA and related approaches have spread extensively in the North (especially in the UK)
- Networks have multiplied (easy to document) and on the whole strengthened
- Relationships have changed between N and S, to become more equal?
- Gender and participation opened up (Myth of Community book)
- PPAs have evolved and spread
- PM and E has exploded all over the place with huge potentials
- Children have come into their own (Stepping Forward book)
- Universities and university staff have begun to take seriously and adopt (including some enthusiastic and creative social anthropologists)
- Academic critics without PRA field experience miss some weaknesses which practitioners are quite widely aware of (e.g. inherent bias against busy women) but also tend not to understand some strengths (e.g. democracy of the ground, representations and analysis of complexity, ABC impacts of facilitation etc)

3. frontiers now for the next five years

- donor agencies procedures, incentives, cultures
- field learning experiences for top people (donors, government...)
- empowerment through local people making and showing videos
- visuals by children, including presentation and analysis of complex realities by children in NFE and mainstream primary
- diagramming of verbal analysis more generally
- participation in complex political emergencies
- changing the cultures and practices of training institutes and their trainers, including basics like seating arrangements, not lecturing etc, so that they stop reproducing top-down relationships.
- University "teaching" and teachers similarly
- PM and E as a clincher for participation, transforming the project cycle, and modifying the dreaded logical framework
- Linking PPAs effectively with policy and practice – lots of process and ownership issues (watch Uganda)
- The spread of PRA in countries with few NGOs (Iran, China, Russia...)
- Recognition, opportunities, empowerment for second-generation PRA trainers and practitioners, reducing the prominence of oldgirl/boy networks (*mea culpa*)
- ABC, by whatever name, especially in Governments, donor agencies, large NGOs, and universities and training institutions, including modules, exercises, field experiences etc, and learning what is feasible and what is not, and what works and what does not. Much more self-critical reflection in training and practice.
- Alternatives to questionnaires (remains almost a non-subject despite Neela Mukherjee's book and extraordinary SCF work in Southern Africa)
- Cost-effective networking using electronic wizardry
- Internalising relationships of partnership (N-S, NGO-local people, NGO-Government, donor-"recipient" etc) including exchanges
- Diversity of concepts of illbeing and wellbeing
- Reformulating the whole PRA thing, in a participatory way, perhaps defining it as having evolved into participation, reflection, and action, or going for PLA and defining that, with a consensual statement of basic values which would include diversity. (So many call it PRA that relabelling as PLA would need a good deal of participation and agreement if it were to be legitimate? What to do? Not to initiate action is itself an action.
- Putting personal, professional and institutional change in the centre of development policy and action. Isn't it obvious? To the point of embarrassment.

Further Information

For sources of information on PRA/PLA, and for network contacts in many countries, see "Sources and Contacts", available updated periodically from Jas Vaghadia at IDS - fax (44) 1273 621202, telephone (44) 1273 877263), and email j.vaghadia@ids.ac.uk Information is available on quite a wide range of aspects and topics, at <http://www.ids.ac.uk/pr/main.html>

For books, Intermediate Technology Publications, 103 Southampton Row, London WC1B 4HH (Tel: 0171 436 9761, Fax: 0171 436 2013, Email: orders@itpubs.org.uk) have published a series of reasonably priced books on participation. They can be ordered by mail or through bookshops. I apologise for including a book by me, but it is one of the series. If you find any of these books useful, do please persuade a suitable bookshop in your country or town where you live to get an IT catalogue and to order some of their books. Some of the participation series are:

* Niki Nelson and Susan Wright eds Power and Participatory Development: Theory and Practice, 1995 (£6.95)

* Robert Chambers Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last, 1997 (£3.95)

* Jeremy Holland with James Blackburn eds Whose Voice? Participatory Research and Policy Change, 1998 (£5.75)

* James Blackburn with Jeremy Holland eds Who Changes? Institutionalizing Participation in Development, 1998 (£5.25)

* Irene Guijt and Meera Shah eds The Myth of Community: Gender issues in Participatory Development 1998 (£8.95)

* Victoria Johnson, Edda Ivan-Smith, Gill Gordon, Pat Pridmore and Patta Scott eds Stepping Forward: Children and Young People's Participation in the Development Process 1998 (December)

Forthcoming: Marisol Estrella and John Gaventa eds Learning from Change: Issues and experiences in participatory monitoring and evaluation, also IT Publications, due mid 1999.

* The first 5 books are available from IT Publications as a mini-library at the reduced price of £26.00 plus £3.90 postage and packing = £29.90.