

[Remarks to PAMFORK Workshop]

PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES AND THE FUTURE

It is an honour to have been invited to this workshop. It is so good that from different participatory traditions we are sharing our approaches and methods. But I am embarrassed to be here talking to you today. I have spent much of my life saying that people like me should not go globe-trotting around the world spending a few days in this country and that and telling other people what is what. However, if there is one area in which the English can claim to excel it is hypocrisy. If you are generous you will interpret my behaviour today as an attempt to maintain national standards.

The spirit of what I am going to say is neither teaching nor preaching. The last thing that I want to do is to try to sell anything to anyone. If anything PRA, which is the participatory approach I shall mainly deal with, has been oversold and too easily adopted. I am simply trying to share. You will form your own judgement about whether what I have to say is valid or useful, and to what extent what I say applies also to other approaches and methods.

There are three sections:

- 1 what has been happening;
- 2 what is this thing called PRA;
- 3 challenges for the future.

1 WHAT HAS BEEN HAPPENING

There has been an astonishing spread of PRA since it started in the late 1980s. As you know Kenya and India were its main birth places. So you can justifiably take pride in what has happened. Spread has taken seven main forms:

- 1 To New Countries:** Activities described as PRA are now being carried out in at least 100 countries. It has moved from the South to the North, sometimes introduced into Northern countries by trainers from the South.
- 2 Networks:** PAMFORK is one of the earliest networks to have formed. There are now perhaps 25 sister networks in other countries. The total number of networks and pre-network contact people in countries has risen over the past 15 months from 25 to over

60. And networks are increasingly becoming resource centres not only for documentation but also for advice and other information.

- 3 **Scope:** PRA is no longer, if it ever was, limited to an appraisal stage. The term is now used to describe a whole long process which includes appraisal, planning, implementation and increasingly participatory monitoring and evaluation.
- 4 **Methods:** There has been an astonishing proliferation of methods. Many of these have been visual in one way or another. There are innumerable combinations of mapping, trend and change analysis, ranking, scoring, listing, matrices, linkage diagramming, card sorting and so on. Great creativity has been shown. Probably no one in the world knows more than a fraction of the methods which have now been used.
- 5 **Applications:** Applications have proliferated to an astonishing degree. One of the more obvious spreads has been from rural to urban, with now very many cases of 'PRA' becoming 'PUA'. In India alone it has been part of a major slum improvement programme in seven large cities. Then there have been the better known applications: in natural resource management; community appraisal, planning and development; health and nutrition; poverty programmes especially identifying the poor; research not least in agriculture; adult literacy with the REFLECT - Regenerated Freirean Literacy Through Empowering Community Techniques - approach; emergency and refugee situations; water and sanitation; fisheries and coastal management; and especially policy in Africa and elsewhere through participatory poverty assessments, one of which as you know was conducted in Kenya.
- 6 **Institutions:** Having been first developed mainly by NGOs there has been a spread of PRA into government organisations and departments, training institutes, research organisations and universities.
- 7 **Behaviour and Attitudes:** PRA has impacted on, and PRA training increasingly concentrates on, personal behaviour and attitudes.
- 8 **Institutional Culture:** PRA processes at the local level have had implications for the procedures, reward systems and ways people interact, in large organisations. This has come to imply changes for those right at the top as well as those in intermediate and lower positions.

Overall then the power and popularity of PRA methods have had effects in many domains. And PRA continues to spread, it would seem exponentially.

2 WHAT IS IT?

Many identify PRA with methods of visualisation such as participatory mapping, matrix scoring, Venn diagramming, seasonal calendars, trend and change analysis, linkage diagramming, and the like. Others, including many of the more experienced trainers and practitioners, see PRA as much more than that - as an approach, a philosophy, almost a way of life. One of the PRA sayings is 'Use your own best judgement at all times'. This means that each practitioner or trainer defines the philosophy for herself or himself. It is not for me to say what it should be for others. Empirically, though, certain elements stand out. There is the basic set of questions summarised as

WHOSE REALITY COUNTS?

Whose knowledge counts?
Whose criteria?
Whose preferences and priorities?
Whose appraisal?
Whose analysis and planning?
Whose implementation?
Whose monitoring and evaluation?

"OURS" or "THEIRS"?

The PRA answer is that it should be 'Theirs' that counts much more than it has done in the past. Linked with this are the ideals of equity, a celebration of diversity, the aim of empowering those who are weak, vulnerable and poor and enabling them to control more of their lives.

To achieve this the major shifts entailed have been found to be

MAJOR SHIFTS WITH PRA

From Dominance to Facilitation
From Closed to Open
From Individual to Group
From Verbal to Visual
From Measuring to Comparing
From Frustration to Fun

Throughout our behaviour and attitudes are crucial.

There has been debate about the use of different labels. PRA is somehow being defined as better than RRA. Main practitioners now feel that there is nothing wrong with RRA in which the main objective is to obtain information, as long as the process is ethically sound, that is not exploitative and not arousing unrealistic expectations. RRA is fully justified for many purposes. PRA methods, especially those which involve visualisation, can be used in an RRA mode. The practitioners I am citing feel that the term PRA should be reserved for processes which are truly empowering. It is not for me to say how these words should be used but I do have an obligation to share these feelings of others with you.

There is also the term PLA - Participatory Learning in Action. **RRA Notes**, published by IIED, was renamed **PLA Notes**. Perhaps in the future there will be a philosophy and set of approaches and methods which deserve to be labelled PLA. For the time being, though, I am sticking to PRA. It is much more than rural and much more than appraisal, but it is the term in common use. We must all use our own best judgements about labels. I can see nothing wrong, indeed some advantages, in people combining various approaches and methods and using their own labels, as has occurred with PEP.

One point comparing RRA and PRA as I have described them is that the principles shared by RRA and PRA are epistemological, that is to do with how we learn about things while the principles to PRA are behavioural, about how we behave. Perhaps the most important one in PRA is self-critical awareness. This is sometimes spoken of hopefully as a benign virus. The idea is that if behaviour and attitudes are made central as PRA spreads, and self-critical awareness and learning are emphasised, even if it is done badly to start with, it will be self-improving. This may be a pious hope. But it does give us grounds for reflection about the priorities in the training which we conduct.

3 CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

With PRA and with participatory approaches more generally, six big challenges stand out. And no doubt there are others.

1 QUALITY AND ETHICS

As PRA has spread rapidly there have been many abuses and much bad performance. The Indonesian Government issued instructions that PRA (one social map, one seasonal calendar, and one Venn diagram) should be conducted in each of over 60,000 villages before the end of a financial year.¹ Other governments have also gone to scale quite fast. The quality of what happens is likely to be very low. Many bad effects may follow, including disillusion at community level. There is also exploitative research where PRA methods are used. Much time of local people is taken up, they become enthusiastic, and then they are left in the lurch

and there is no follow up. Every meeting of PRA practitioners I have been to has been preoccupied with these issues of quality and ethics and what to do about them. Not least there have been people who have set up as trainers and consultants who claim not know about PRA but have not absorbed its spirit. One fellow countryman of mine in another African country that an aid agency with a ten year programme wanted PRA to be part of a project's activities. 'So I put in my bid. But I do not believe in it'. One question is what networks can do to try to ensure good quality and ethical behaviour.

Some of the main problems and abuses have been:

- rushing in and out and not taking enough time;
- routinisation so that the processes become dead and wooden;
- failure to make behaviour and attitudes a key component of training;
- requirements by donors and governments that PRA should be used rapidly on a large scale, when this is impossible to do without very low quality.

2 FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY

A great challenge for all of us is to innovate and to adopt and adapt approach and methods which are parts of other traditions. PRA itself has many parents and origins: negatively, disillusion with rural development tourism and its biases, and with large scale questionnaire surveys; and positively, applied social anthropology, farming systems research, farming system research, and various traditions of participatory activist research, as well as RRA itself. Others have borrowed from PRA, and PRA continues to borrow from others. This is entirely desirable as long as we all use our own best judgement. Sharing and borrowing and adapting is one way in which the excitement and creativity of PRA and of other traditions can be maintained. There have been examples in this workshop so far - PEP, the activities reported for Oxfam, and TAA, to mention but three. There are areas where further borrowing in development seem most desirable - such as conflict resolution and popular theatre. Perhaps a good indicator would be that if any of us have not innovated or adopted some new approaches during the last year we may be becoming stale and unadventurous. It has usually been a part of the best PRA to accept uncertainty, to take risks, and continuously to improvise, borrow and adapt.

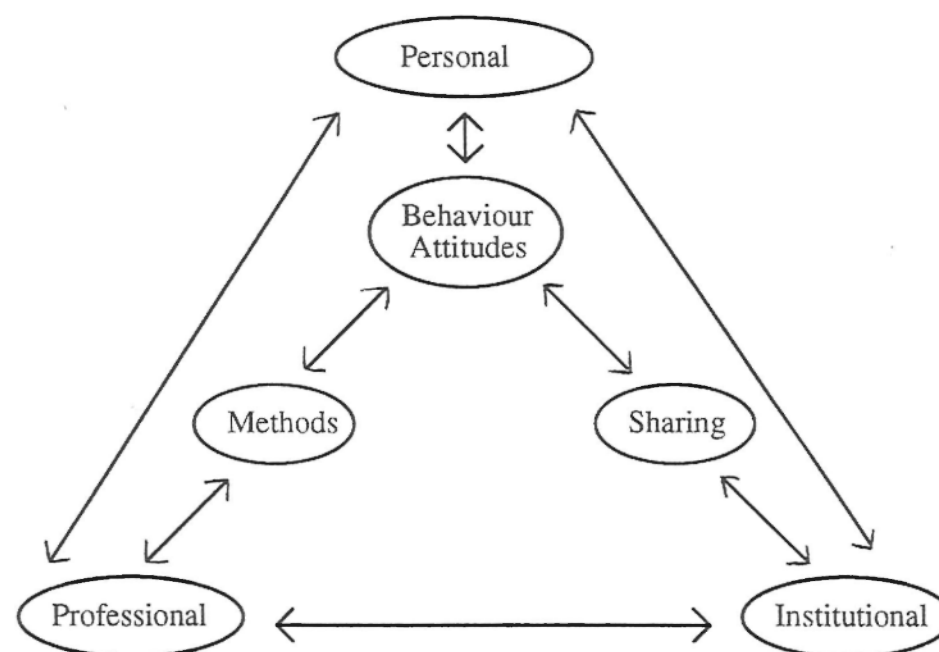
3 NEW APPLICATIONS

More and more there are applications in sensitive areas such as sexual and reproductive health, urban violence (as in Kingston, Jamaica), conflict resolution, and even psychotherapy. We can expect more applications, perhaps not least in our educational systems.

I know a number of people who now use PRA methods for their own decision making. In the Institute of Development Studies we have used matrix scoring in an appointments committee. It made the decision making much easier, less conflictual, and probably better.

4 BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDES

Figure: Dimensions and Linkages of Change



PRA is not a driving force which is going to transform the world! All the same the three pillars of PRA have impacted as the diagram shows - methods leading to professional change, behaviour and attitudes leading to personal change and sharing and partnership to institutional change. Of these, personal behaviour and attitudes is the most important. Often the changes are towards becoming more democratic, a better listener, less dominant, and a facilitator instead of a teacher.

5 INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

PRA processes have already challenged and changed procedures in organisations to accommodate greater diversity of demand from below, and to allow greater flexibility in implementation. But the implications go much deeper. If large organisations are to be truly effective in supporting participatory processes at the grassroots level then those organisations themselves have to evolve participatory procedures, rewards, ways of interacting and cultures.

6 SHARING AND NETWORKING WITH MUTUAL LEARNING AND SUPPORT

This is where this workshop is such a good initiative. We have been sharing our different approaches and methods freely, and inviting one another to try them out. This has potential for making all of us more effective in our work. At IDS and also IIED in the UK we are trying modestly to provide a service in support of sharing and networking. Some of this has been through South-South exchanges and workshops. Some has been through information, such as the 13 topic packs which are on display here and which will be left with PAMFORK. But the spirit of this sharing is one of wishing to avoid dominance. Initially we may have to select what goes into topic packs. More and more, it should be networks like PAMFORK which make their own decisions about what should be in topic packs, and indeed what topic packs there should be.

Finally, let me hope that this workshop will set an example to all of us in how freely we can exchange ideas between different traditions and help each other. At a workshop in IDS over two years ago, we talked about 'Sharing without boundaries'. This has been very much the spirit of this workshop convened here by PAMFORK. Long may that spirit prosper and spread.

BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDES

Robert Chambers

[Summary of Remarks on 26th September 1996]

The next hour and a half are about behaviour and attitudes. For many of us concerned with participatory methodologies these are now appearing more important than the methods. But why?

First, we live in a time of accelerating change, not least in the conditions, needs and aspirations of poor people. So it is more important even than before to keep up-to-date and to be sensitively aware of their circumstances and priorities.

Second, we also have to recognise that 'we' - development professionals - have often been grossly wrong in our perceptions, programmes and policies, and that we have mis-perceived the realities of those who are poor and marginalised.

Third, enabling and empowering those who are disadvantaged is more than ever a priority in development, but the 'dependency syndrome' as we have been calling it, is more prevalent than ever.

The key to being up-to-date, right about the realities of the poor, and able to empower, lies in changing the normal behaviour and attitudes of outsiders.

Dominance is much of a problem. We impose our realities on those weaker than us, and suppose that we know what is right and good for them in their conditions. But dominance in interpersonal relations misleads. All power deceives.

Take the case of psychoanalysts. Freud came to the conclusion that women who said they had been sexually abused in childhood were suffering a fantasy. Rather, he came to believe they were unconsciously in love with the abuser. So the psychoanalysts told the victims that the abuse had never happened. Someone has written that if the psychoanalysts and the abusers had conspired to drive the victims mad, they could not have devised a better strategy.

It was the psychoanalysts who had the fantasy. for some 90 years. We can ask how and why this was possible, and then whether we may not also be vulnerable to professional fantasies like theirs. Well,

- 1 They were brainwashed by an exceptionally long training, and had to have been psychoanalysed themselves on order to qualify. Are we also brainwashed by our long training?
- 2 They were trained to be unemotional and distant with their patients. Are we too, often distant?
- 3 They had a whole system of interpretation which showed their patients' behaviour in bad light. Have we had the same?

- 4 They were physically superior sitting on a chair while the patient lay on a couch. You cannot argue well when lying down. The other person is so much more powerfully placed. (Dentists have made us lie flatter and flatter as they become weaker and weaker professionally).

Do the IMF, the World Bank, other donors, governments, even NGOs and ourselves - do we too have fantasies and do we perpetuate them through our dominant behaviour?

And do people reflect back to us what they know us to believe, as villagers have done in Guinea: although they protect and expand the forest in the forest-savannah transition zone, they have told outsiders that, yes, indeed, they do destroy it - so hoping to be on good terms and derive benefits.

So we can ask whether we are ourselves victims of power, and whether those in the most powerful positions are the most disadvantaged, whether for them it is hardest of all to know the truth.

If this is so, it is to behaviour and attitudes that we have to turn for solutions. To empower others we have to behave in a quiet non-powerful way ourselves to - as is so often said nowadays - sit down, listen and learn. And but to encourage and facilitate not criticise and teach those 'below' us, freely to express and analyse their realities.

PRA and other participatory methodologies help use to do this. We have to be confident that 'they can do it'. We have to 'hand over the stick'. We have to learn not to interrupt, even not to interview when, in PRA, groups are diagramming and discussing. These changes in behaviour are often not easy. But if there is to be real participation and empowerment on a wide scale, they are vital.

These problems of dominance and deception are found in many 'upper-lower' relations. So let us brainstorm and make lists, and reflect on how dominance repeats and reinforces itself in hierarchies in organisations and in social life.

[include the magnets diagrams plus explanation]

Karen
October 1996