

1997

To:

17 June 97

From: Robert Ch

The Label PRA

I am wondering whether the time has come for the bull to be taken by the horns (odd imagery - what do you do with the bull next?) and open up the option that the three letters PRA could stand for something else. Reasons are familiar:

1. *rural* is out of date, since PRA is used in urban and organisational settings
2. *appraisal* is misleading, and has a bad effect, because it allows, even encourages, people to neglect process
3. reflection, self-critical awareness, behaviour and attitudes, embracing error...these are increasingly regarded as central to good PRA but are not expressed in either *rural*, *appraisal* or even *participatory*. Recently, discussions about where PRA has got to, and what it should be, have more and more stressed reflection and personal change (for example, the Bangalore/Madurai South-South, and the recent Calcutta workshop).
4. *Appraisal* is in both RRA and PRA, tending to obscure the distinction between the data-collecting nature of RRA and the empowering nature of good PRA.
5. PLA (participatory learning and action) was introduced as the new title for RRA Notes not to relabel PRA but to open up to a wider range of methodologies. However, PLA has been used as a new term for PRA, especially by consultants in the USA, alert as they are to any new bandwagon to jump on. Now RRA activities are being described as PLA (for example staff of an international agency spent an afternoon in a slum, made the maps themselves, and called the activity PLA). However, "participatory learning and action" has been used quite sensibly without capitals in a descriptive manner.
6. "PRA" remains the term the vast majority of practitioners are using, and that is known internationally. I dithered in writing Whose Reality Counts? over whether to stick with PRA, and decided that it was not for me to try to change the letters. Not least, I thought it could lead to confusion and irritate and undermine people who had been struggling to establish PRA.

Would it now make sense, and be a good thing to do, to point out to practitioners that if they wished they could use the letters PRA to stand for something closer to what many are now saying should be good practice?

Three words that seem to fit are **Participation, Reflection, and Action**.

With these three basic words there are at least the following options:

Participation, Reflection, Action
Participation, Reflection and Action
Participatory and Reflective Action
Participatory Reflection and Action
Participation and Reflective Action

Some thoughts:

Participation the noun can include more than "participatory" the adjective, limited as it is by what it qualifies. Thus it could include anything which is done together - appraisal, analysis, planning, action, M and E....

Reflection can include self-critical awareness, behaviour and attitudes and embracing error, and impinges even a bit on planning, M and E, and learning

Action would include appraisal, as a form of action, but also introduce implementation and process.

People could go on using PRA in the old sense if they wished

We would no longer have to go through all the contortions of explaining that it is more than rural, and more than appraisal

Attention would be drawn to what good PRA has become as it has evolved

What do you think? A short, participatory, reflective, action-oriented note for PLA Notes? A consultation with networks? Both together?

There are lots of people to consult. This is just to test the water. Will you participate in reflection and suggest action?