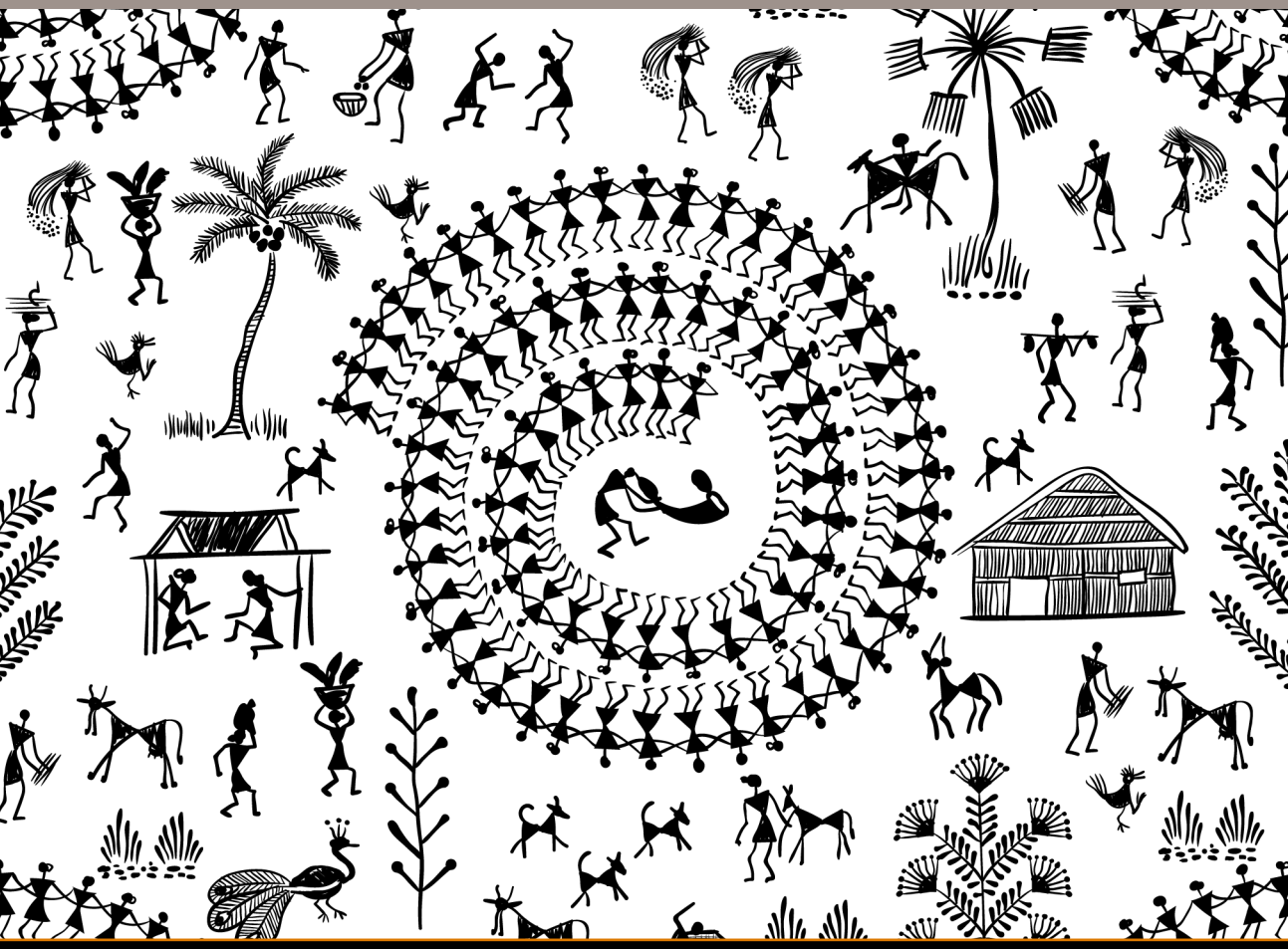
POWER, POVERTY, AND KNOWLEDGE – REFLECTING ON 50 YEARS OF LEARNING WITH ROBERT CHAMBERS



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Cover photo Warli painting – a style of traditional and ancient, hand-drawn Indian tribal art. Pictorial language is matched by a rudimentary technique depicting rural life of the inhabitants of India.

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Note

* Biographies for contributors to the archive articles are not available.

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POWER, POVERTY, AND KNOWLEDGE – REFLECTING ON 50 YEARS OF LEARNING WITH ROBERT CHAMBERS

Issue Editors **Stephen Thompson and Mariah Cannon**

Contents

Introduction: Power, Poverty, and Knowledge – Reflecting on 50 Years of Learning with Robert Chambers*

Stephen Thompson[1] and Mariah Cannon[2]

Abstract Robert Chambers is one of the most influential and prolific scholars to write about participation, poverty, and knowledge in development studies. His books, chapters, and papers have revolutionised the discipline, inspiring both participatory processes and more inclusive practice. Perhaps not as well known are the articles he authored for the *IDS Bulletin*. This Archive Collection explores Robert's contributions to the journal across five decades with a view to resurfacing buried gems of development studies theory and reinvigorating debates about how the sector can improve: it collates his most important articles and presents a new introduction reflecting on key ideas and offering a critical analysis of the common themes throughout Robert's work. New perspectives discuss how theories have changed over time, and the continued relevance of key ideas. The articles reproduced here show not only how Robert's thinking evolved but also hint at broader changes in strategic focus for the Institute of Development Studies itself, as well as development theory in general.

Keywords participatory methods, poverty, rural development, power, bias, Robert Chambers.

1 Introduction

Robert Chambers is recognised as a development studies champion, with his writings and his thinking continuing to inspire and provoke debate and discussion among development practitioners, activists, and academics from around the world. Since 1972, his intellectual home has been the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), based at University of Sussex, where he is a Research Associate and Emeritus Professor. We, the authors, are lucky enough to be able to call Robert our colleague as he continues to contribute to the Participation, Inclusion, and Social Change research cluster, but also our friend. As with so many IDS colleagues, co-workers from partner organisations,

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and friends over the years, our approaches have been shaped by casual conversations over a cup of tea with Robert, as well as by his written work. His many contributions to the field of development studies began not only years before we started working in the discipline, but also decades before we were born.[3] In wider development studies circles, he is perhaps best known for his books, which include *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (Chambers 1983), *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last* (Chambers 1997a) and, more recently, *Can We Know Better? Reflections for Development* (Chambers 2017). He has also published a magnitude of journal articles, academic papers, and chapters on a range of development-related topics including rural development, participatory methodologies, and poverty.

Another prominent feature of the development studies landscape (albeit in a different way) is the *IDS Bulletin*, which has been in continuous publication since 1968. Moving beyond similarities of longevity (with both having contributed to furthering development studies for over half a century), there are many other parallels between Robert's work and the *IDS Bulletin*. Both champion critical thinking on how transformations can reduce inequalities. Both remain firmly focused on those who are the most marginalised. Both have a legacy of working to ensure the voices of those often silenced or ignored can be heard. Both remain consistent in their focus and commitment to learning and doing better. Over the decades there have been moments in time where Robert and the *IDS Bulletin* have come together. Robert's first contribution to the *IDS Bulletin* came nearly 50 years ago in 1974, six years after the journal's launch in 1968. Since then, Robert has published a further 13 articles in the *IDS Bulletin*. Robert's last *IDS Bulletin* article was published in 2012 (see Chambers 2012, this *IDS Bulletin*), but he has continued in the last decade to make significant contributions to the field, publishing both books and articles in other journals.

The premise of this *IDS Bulletin* Archive Collection is to delve into Robert's contribution to the journal, to resurface buried gems of development studies scholarship and to reinvigorate debates about how we can do better – a question described by Robert as the eternal challenge of development (Chambers 1997b), and explored in more depth in his book *Can We Know Better? Reflections for Development* (Chambers 2017). As we reflected on both Robert's work and the work of others inspired by it, it became clear that this editorial introduction to the Archive Collection could not draw on the original articles alone. Therefore, where possible we have highlighted how Robert's articles have gone on to inform further thinking or debates in the field of development. We have also highlighted where Robert has expanded or consolidated his thinking himself with subsequently published work elsewhere.

We recognise that many of Robert's most prestigious contributions to the field of development have been published

elsewhere, but we believe that his *IDS Bulletin* articles represent an often-overlooked cache of his writing, from which through revisiting much can be learned. It is important to note that we did not set out to deliver a comprehensive review of all of Robert's work – a gargantuan task far beyond the scope of the current undertaking. Rather, our intention was to draw together this collection to provoke reflection on what might successful development – or 'good change' (Chambers 1997b: 1744) – look like and how it might be achieved. For those seeking broader critical reviews of Robert's influential theoretical contributions, we recommend reading *Revolutionizing Development: Reflections on the Work of Robert Chambers*, which is edited by Cornwall and Scoones (2011) and contains contributions from a range of authors including collaborators, critics, and colleagues of Robert. In addition, we urge readers to go back to the source material and explore the 'Robert Chambers Archive', available through the IDS OpenDocs repository.[4] This treasure trove is estimated to contain Open Access to over 70 per cent of Robert's publications on participatory development.

The eight articles included in this *IDS Bulletin* Archive Collection were written over a period spanning five decades. As such, their focus shows change over time – change in Robert's evolving interests, change in the strategic focus of IDS as a research institute, change in the wider development studies field, as well as change in the world at large. One of Robert's greatest strengths is to be ruthlessly self-critical and reflective, to move beyond past beliefs when given new information. This ability to adapt his thinking to new understandings and perspectives perhaps explains how his work has remained relevant to the field for so long.

Broadly speaking, Robert's earlier *IDS Bulletin* articles have a particular strong focus on local knowledge and rural development. Over time, this shifts first to a concern with professional development management, and second to a focus on power and participatory methods. While each article stands alone, these themes re-occur and re-emerge. Through contemporary critical analysis of this historic collection, this editorial introduction seeks to present new reflections on Robert's *IDS Bulletin* articles, organised around these enduring themes. As time marches on, it is inevitable that how these themes are conceptualised and framed will evolve. For example, if a development studies paper titled 'Managing Rural Development' (as per Chambers 1974, this *IDS Bulletin*) were to be written about Africa or Asia by a scholar from the UK in 2023, it would undoubtably raise eyebrows. Language has of course evolved too. For example, some of the language used in relation to Indigenous Technical Knowledge (e.g. in Howes and Chambers 1979, this *IDS Bulletin*) may now make for uncomfortable reading. We have deliberately not shied away from including these articles in this Archive Collection, as they form an important part in

the development of the discourse. Our purpose in this editorial introduction is not to use a contemporary lens to expose the faults of this collection of articles, but rather to critically explore the content, with a view to highlighting where challenges persist and where progress has been made. In terms of language and concepts, we will explore what has remained constant and what has evolved. We will use Robert's articles to show how far down the road we have come as a discipline, while also offering our thoughts on the epistemological mountains we are yet to climb.

Our intention is for this Archive Collection to be a celebration of Robert's contribution in the hope that this drives further critical analysis of some of the key themes.

In the spirit of participation, learning, and reflection which have been such prominent features of Robert's scholarship, we spent some time speaking to Robert about his contribution to the *IDS Bulletin* over the years and some of the key themes that are covered in his articles. We also requested a comment from Melissa Leach and Peter Taylor on behalf of the *IDS Bulletin* Editorial Steering Group to share their reflections. The resulting articles follow this introduction. We hope you enjoy this Archive Collection as much as we enjoyed editing it.

2 Key themes

2.1 Rural development

Rural development has always been a central focus of Robert's work, and the *IDS Bulletin* articles included in this collection are no different. In his article 'In Search of Professionalism, Bureaucracy and Sustainable Livelihoods for the 21st Century' (this *IDS Bulletin*), a quintessential development dilemma is articulated by Robert in trying to establish ways to learn from and empower rural people, with a view to provide the conditions for more sustainable rural livelihoods (Chambers 1991). Many people who inhabit rural areas in low-income settings are resource poor and spend most of their time involved in subsistence-based work. Yet rural lives are complex and diverse – a reality that is often underperceived and underestimated by outsiders looking in. Too often, what is known about these communities is based on assessments from professional development practitioners who visit briefly. Such approaches only offer a snapshot of the lived realities of rural populations and often perpetuate preconceived notions of existence. Robert terms such fleeting visits as 'rural development tourism' (*ibid.*). In a self-validating cycle, the behaviour of those involved in such an approach pressures rural people to present themselves as ignorant and incapable, rather than show their true capacity and capability. The outsiders' normal behaviour is characterised by their confidence in the superiority of their own knowledge, which by default establishes that they have nothing to learn from rural people themselves. This error becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The strengths of including rural dwellers in development research have been explored in detail in the extensive literature to emerge on Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) in the 1970s and 1980s, and the literature on Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) which has evolved since. Such approaches aim to enable participants to share, enhance, and analyse their own knowledge, with a view to plan and to act (Chambers 1992b, 1994a, 1994b, 2012) (see the Participatory Methods website for more examples).[5] Participatory appraisal methods offer direct and engaged interaction with rural participants overcoming the constraints of rural development tourism (Chambers 1992a). Such approaches are found to surface information on complex and diverse realities in a way that more traditional 'extractive' methods of investigation simply cannot (Chambers 1991). Cornwall and Pratt (2011) built on earlier work exploring PRA, arguing that the boom associated with this approach is over, but that new debates relating to representation and voice have evolved from these antecedent debates about consultation of rural people. The 'abuse and misuse' of PRA by mainstream development institutions should be reflected upon critically as it is still relevant to understand how knowledge is generated and who participates in these processes, and importantly, who does not. Care is needed to ensure that participatory approaches to development do not result in the unjust and illegitimate exercise of power as explored in Cooke and Kothari's (2001) book *Participation: The New Tyranny?*.

In much of his writing, Robert uses ideas of contrast to draw attention to who is being left behind and why. For example, rurality is juxtaposed to urbanity (Chambers 1992a). Robert laments normal professionalism which includes dominant ideas, thinking, methods, and behaviours that favour what is urban over what is rural. He argues that such professionalism 'Values things more than people, numbers more than judgements, high technology more than low, and whatever is urban, industrial, clean and hard more than whatever is rural, agricultural, dirty and soft' (*ibid.*: 31). Robert frequently uses such dichotomies in his scholarship to draw attention to who is being left behind. For example, Robert advocates for championing bottom-up, diverse, and process-led approaches to participation, as opposed to those that are top-down, standardised, and target driven (Chambers 2006). Another example is the difference between urbanity and its professional values and rural realities which are revisited in *Can We Know Better? Reflections for Development* (Chambers 2017). Here, a number of contrasting perceptions are presented, including modern versus traditional, quantified versus unquantified, predictable versus unpredictable, rich versus poor, and influential versus powerless, among others (*ibid.*). These dichotomous characteristics map on to 'uppers' and 'lowers' – terminology developed by Robert and explained in more detail in section 2.3 below (Chambers 2006).

In the article 'Managing Rural Development' (this *IDS Bulletin*), Robert cautions against importing external development management systems into rural areas, questioning their appropriateness, their usefulness, and their potential to introduce bias (a theme which is discussed in more detail in section 2.4) (Chambers 1974). Robert regarded such systems as rigid, unwieldy, and exclusive. They were often delivered by management consultants from the urban centres who tended to come to rural areas and go again quickly, leaving behind them 'mindless rituals' of data collection which does not paint an accurate picture of reality. In typical reflective fashion, Robert questions if his own involvement in the design and testing of management procedures for use by the Government of Kenya in the 1970s was an example of the coming and going of management consultants who import inappropriate modes of operation, asking 'did we?' (*ibid.*: 10). To counter the negative impact of such an imposition, Robert urges for the 'cross-fertilisation' of appropriate social sciences with local knowledge (*ibid.*). Robert's early ideas about how appropriate knowledge must be used by rural development policymakers and planners if realistic policies and plans for rural development are to be made, are further developed by Singh (1999), who expanded on Robert's ideas to explore how a lack of knowledge about rural realities on the part of development policymakers and administrators can result in development programmes failing.

There are aspects of rural life that have changed as the world has changed. For example, the explosion in technology has brought big changes to people living in rural areas. It was only 30 years ago that Robert commented that, 'The revolution in communications is increasingly touching rural people: in some parts of the South, not just radios, but television and videos are to be found in villages' (Chambers 1992a: 31). In the early 1990s, the internet and mobile technology were in their infancy. Hernandez and Roberts (2018) describe how Robert's ideas about prioritising the poorest precede debates about access to digital technology, but the theory behind his ideas remains highly relevant. The explosive growth of digital technologies in the last three decades has enabled exciting new possibilities for social and economic development for rural populations, offering potential to increase income and employment opportunities, improved civic participation and governance, as well as enhanced provision of health care and education. However, distribution of technology is not equal, with many people in rural areas being left behind. As with so many innovations, people living outside of the urban centres are the last to benefit: 'In rural populations where cellular and broadband connectivity are not available, there is no possibility of digital dividends' (*ibid.*: 3). While aspects of rural living have changed and progressed since Robert wrote his early *IDS Bulletin* articles, the disadvantage and marginalisation many people face when living outside of urban centres persists.

2.2 Local knowledge and participation

Robert's early work on the importance and potential of local knowledge includes a specific focus on Indigenous Technical Knowledge (ITK) as a concept.[6] In an early *IDS Bulletin* article titled 'Indigenous Technical Knowledge: Analysis, Implications and Issues', ITK is classified in opposition to modern scientific knowledge (Howes and Chambers 1979, this *IDS Bulletin*):

> The scientific mode of thought is characterised by a greater ability to break down data presented to the senses and to reassemble it in different ways. The mode of ITK, on the other hand, is 'concrete' and relies almost exclusively on intuition and evidence directly available to the senses.
> (*ibid.*: 5)

With both scientific knowledge and ITK, process (or how what is known is arrived at) is important. Robert made significant contributions to early discussions on how the processual nature of knowledge production must be considered in its analysis, in the same way that the situational nature must also be considered (*ibid.*).

Robert's ideas about the importance of local knowledge were developed in detail in his book *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (Chambers 1983). Here, he discusses the various terminology used to explore local knowledge and related terms, including ITK, rural people's knowledge, and ethnoscience. All have challenges associated with them in terms of taxonomy, but are united in referring to grass-roots understandings, which are regularly discounted in comparison to modern scientific knowledge, often due to the attitudes and behaviour of outsiders. Power, professionalism, prestige, lack of contact, language difference, and prejudice are all barriers that may prevent outsiders from learning from local knowledge.

By the 1990s, Robert reported a shift in how local knowledge and ITK was accepted and increasingly used by development professionals. This shift was manifested by a noted increase in literature that focused on (or at least valued) local knowledge (Chambers 1992a). Change was recognised as slow, but progress was being made. The theoretical argument about the essentiality of considering local knowledge in development programmes and processes had largely been won, and its usage is now a key part of the rhetoric and practice of development practice and research (Smith 2011). For example, expanding on Robert's *IDS Bulletin* article on ITK (Howes and Chambers 1979) as well as a book on the same topic by Brokensha, Warren and Werner (1980), Agrawal (1995) states that development which does not consider people's knowledge is bound to fail. However, it is argued that the 'sterile dichotomy' between indigenous and Western, or traditional and scientific knowledge, can be harmful to addressing the needs of the most marginalised (*ibid.*).

While progress has been made, we have yet to reach the promised land characterised by development informed and influenced by local knowledge, as challenges to operationalisation and engagement remain. Smith states that 'The overwhelmingly positive reception of "local knowledge" into development practice has unhelpfully romanticised such knowledges, and in some cases "hidden" behind the rhetoric a lack of engagement in practice' (2011: 605). Debate relating to how the knowledge generated by those on the fringes can be included and operationalised in development processes continues. Central to these debates was the premise that while local knowledge was now accepted as a keystone for successful development interventions, caution was needed to avoid regarding it as a resource to be mined or extracted. Local knowledge is at risk of being colonised, resulting in it being un/under-represented or ignored in research outputs (Igwe, Madichie and Rugara 2022). For development work to be meaningful and inclusive, local understandings must form an indispensable feature of how knowledge is co-constructed to progress beyond one-sided extractive research. Ways of knowing must be developed based on partnership and collaboration in research (Chambers 2012, this *IDS Bulletin*). Focusing on developing methodologies, mindsets, and the multidimensionality of poverty research, Robert commented:

> The question to ask, then, and repeatedly, is whose research is it? Conducted by whom? For whom? And if the answer is 'our' research, for 'us' to benefit 'them', it can always be asked – are there ways 'they' could conduct the research or more of it, learn from and own the outcomes, and be empowered to act on them?
> (Chambers 2007a: 32)

The importance of local knowledge continues to interest Robert, and this theme was central to his recent book *Can We Know Better? Reflections for Development*, where he commented, 'Only people themselves have expert knowledge of the complexities they experience' (Chambers 2017: 191). He goes on to assert that to learn about these realities in an inclusive way, participatory approaches are fundamental. These ideas have been influential across a range of development-related fields. By way of an example, Mohamed and Ventura (2000) drew on Robert's ideas to use participatory geomatics to document indigenous tenure systems.

While some of the language has progressed, the provocations regarding the importance of local knowledge remain as relevant as ever (Howes and Chambers 1979). For example, with the continued strengthening of university systems in low-income countries, there has been a resurgence in interest in local knowledge, with increased recognition that interactions between university students and staff with local communities

can result in highly beneficial multidirectional flows of knowledge, further developing what we know about the world (Mbah 2019; Thompson *et al.* 2022). If we want to develop an honest and meaningful understanding of the world and how people live in it, we must be prepared to recognise imbalances in how knowledge is valued and think of ways we can address them so we can continue to learn.

In his early exploration of participatory methods written nearly 40 years ago, Robert hinted that local knowledge would be essential for gaining a deeper understanding of climate and the environments we live in (Chambers 1983). In the 1980s, the significance of the damage that humans were inflicting on the earth was scarcely discussed in the mainstream, yet today these reflections on the usefulness of local knowledge may assist us to address the greatest challenge humanity has ever faced. Inspired in part by Robert's work, ideas relating to the relevance of participatory methods and local knowledge to address climate change have been progressed by Reid *et al.* (2009), Loo (2014), as well as van Aalst, Cannon and Burton (2008), among others.

2.3 Power

Power is a concept that has been central to Robert's work from the early days up until the present. In his influential *IDS Bulletin* article 'Transforming Power: From Zero-Sum to Win-Win?' (this *IDS Bulletin*), Robert explored power dynamics through the development of the terminology of 'uppers' and 'lowers' – a nomenclature he credits to discussions with his wife, Jenny (Chambers 2006).

> Upper can refer to a person who in a context is dominant or superior to a lower in that context. Lower can refer to a person who in a context is subordinate or inferior to an upper in that same context.
> (*ibid.*: 99)

This use of simple and accessible language to make sense of a phenomenon riddled with complexity and nuance exemplifies what Robert does best and goes a long way to explain why his work has remained consistently popular and relevant with development practitioners for over half a century.

In the *IDS Bulletin* article 'All Power Deceives' (this *IDS Bulletin*), Robert argues that inequities in power can be found throughout the world: 'Human society can be seen as patterned by hierarchies of power and weakness, of dominance and subordination' (Chambers 1994a: 18). Much of Robert's writing on power has served to illuminate how the realities of the powerful dominate development discourse (Chambers 1997b). Developing this line of thought further, in his 2005 book *Ideas for Development*, Robert argues that power and relationships are at the core of development, yet these concepts are often

overlooked. The following analogy presents a simplicity to the debate: 'Considering development without power and relationships is like analysing irrigation without considering water and its distribution' (Chambers 2005: 485).

Unequal power relations in development can be redressed through affirmative action on the part of the powerful. Robert urged those who are in positions of power to take action to empower others who are not (Chambers 1994a). This can be done by stepping down, keeping their ego in check, and working to decentralise decision-making. In addition, spending time/sharing space with people who are disempowered may also provide clarity and fresh perspectives. According to Robert, the result is that 'New and more practical realities can be expressed and shared; and it is through empowering the poor, vulnerable and weak, that their reality will count more, and equity will be better served' (*ibid.*: 26). By transforming power relations and reversing what is regarded as common and normal, good change can be achieved (Chambers 2006).

Such transitions are often easier said than done. Robert recognises that powerful people do not readily relinquish power (Chambers 1988). Examples of this can be found at every level of hierarchy, with those who have control being reluctant to give it up. Resistance to transformative change that addresses power dilemmas is in part caused by ego. Robert argues that 'It is not (yet) the norm for powerful people to willingly admit and parade their mistakes. Instead, to protect their egos and their jobs, they persist through habit, obstinacy and pride, in mistaken beliefs and practices' (Chambers 1994a: 18). These ideas were expanded upon in a paper focused on knowledge and power by Davies (1994), who wrote that 'The powerful (be they countries, institutions or individuals) are always better able to use knowledge to reinforce their position of dominance over the weak, albeit via a self-sustaining system of self-deception and misinformation' (*ibid.*: 9).

Robert's ideas on power and development have contributed to robust debates in development studies over the years, which have grown in prominence in recent decades. The influence and impact of Robert's propositions on power are clear to see. Directly this impact is evident through his contribution (Chambers 2006) to the special issue of the *IDS Bulletin* on power, edited by Eyben, Harris and Pettit (2006). Indirectly, his influence has been acknowledged by a host of authors theorising about power. For example, Cornwall (2016) acknowledges Robert's ideas on a 'pedagogy of the non-oppressed' (which were inspired by Freire's (1972) 'pedagogy of the oppressed') as a source of inspiration for her call for a pedagogy for the powerful. Robert's call to shift away from a 'zero-sum logic' (Chambers 2006) also inspired Pantazidou (2012) to explore positions of power and articulate the necessity to think about where power lies in different contexts and settings. Robert's exploration of the necessity to

use 'power to empower' also progressed debates around how transformative change might be achieved (Chambers 2006). For example, the idea of uppers and lowers was found by Green (2008) to be applicable to numerous aspects of poverty based on power dynamics relating to gender, ethnicity, and class. Despite his work having contributed significantly to the scholarship on power and development studies, missed opportunities to bring power into the development conversation have also been highlighted. For example, in an *IDS Bulletin* issue edited by Robert on indigenous knowledge and development (see Chambers (1979) for the editorial article), the analysis of knowledge through a power lens was missing (Pantazidou and Gaventa 2016). Given Robert's increasing interest in power in his later articles, it could be argued that had the issue been written at a later time, power may have been a central feature.

2.4 Bias

Bias or unfairness in the development sphere is another major concern which is found to emerge throughout Robert's *IDS Bulletin* articles. This concern is found to stem from injustice relating to how marginalised people are represented in research due to inaccurate findings that often result from flawed approaches to gathering evidence. For example, in the article 'Bureaucratic Reversals and Local Diversity' (this *IDS Bulletin*), Robert argues that management systems involved in development are often predisposed to serving management, rather than to serve the people (Chambers 1988). These ideas inspired the work of Fitzgerald (1990), who went on to explain that 'normal bureaucracy' in the development sector fails to acknowledge the diverse and complex lives that people have and that this can result in the 'normal professionalism' neglecting priorities of the poor.

In another *IDS Bulletin* article titled 'The Self-Deceiving State' (this *IDS Bulletin*), Robert bemoans how 'Normal government development bureaucracy appears resiliently static, robustly buffered against change', despite the growing interest at the time in adaptive and iterative rather than linear processes (Chambers 1992a: 31). Such approaches to development tend to be overly bureaucratic, top-down, standardised, and driven by supply. Realities can be distorted by false positive feedback, due to misperceptions and misinformation. Robert argues that such false positive feedback is mediated in five main ways: misreporting, selected perception, methods which mislead, diplomacy and prudence, and defences against dissonance (*ibid.*). All of these development challenges can contribute to creating and perpetuating bias. These ideas have since inspired a range of enquiries into how biases may play out in reality. For example, Zwarteveen (2008) builds on Robert's proposition of normal professionalism to investigate how the concept could be associated with masculinity when considering water resources (Chambers 1992a). Biases may become normalised, and are viewed as unchangeable, and even neutral.

Bureaucratic systems involved with development tend to be hierarchical, centralised, standardised, and regulated. Associated time horizons are equally as restrictive, usually being short and often informed by arbitrary targets. Those responsible for making policy decisions are frequently ageing men, based in large urban centres, whose knowledge and experience of rural areas are often non-existent, biased, and out-of-date (Chambers 1991). This paints the picture of a top-down development system, which if left unchecked will result in the production of evidence that fails to represent the experiences of many marginalised people, including those living in rural areas. To overcome the challenges that the attitudes and behaviours linked to development professionalism and bureaucracy bring, Robert called for a paradigm shift to ensure methods selected to deliver decentralisation, diversity, and democracy (*ibid.*). This approach is needed not just to address research bias, but also in development professionals' personal values and behaviour.

In the *IDS Bulletin* article 'All Power Deceives' (this *IDS Bulletin*), Robert discusses the challenges of systems of power and misinformation (Chambers 1994a). Feedback channels can mislead with information which exaggerates good performance, resulting in self-sustaining development myths. Rural development tourism can introduce bias as 'better' areas are preferred and 'model' projects selected. Rigid questionnaire surveys designed to reinforce preconceived notions of what is needed can massage and manufacture realities. Development professionals here are part of the challenge as they have allowed themselves to be deceived by unrepresentative or flawed evidence. These ideas on bias in the development industry are expanded further by Crocker (2007), who explores participation in local, grass-roots, or micro-development initiatives.

Being optimistic (which Robert frequently is in his writing), he argues that the same professionals have the potential to be part of the solution (Chambers 1994a). To achieve this, those other than development professionals must be empowered, enabling more practical realities to be expressed and shared. Approaches that empower the most marginalised will result in greater recognition and appreciation of their reality, through which equity will be better served. The role of the development professional in shaping development agendas was something that Robert went on to explore in depth. The lack of enquiry about how personal influence could determine development is something that puzzled Robert. Writing about this potential source of bias, Robert explained,

> What happens and does not happen in development practice so manifestly depends on development actors and what they do and how they do it and what they do not do, what they say and how they say it and what they do not say, and on their behaviours, attitudes, mindsets and relationships, that it

> is nothing short of bizarre that these personal aspects have received so little attention.
> (Chambers 2007b: 127)

As already noted above, scientific knowledge is prioritised at the expense of the local knowledge which is 'ignored and squeezed out as inferior' (Howes and Chambers 1979: 6). This can result in bias and the irreversible loss of knowledge. However, despite his strong views on bias, Robert's musings present him as a realist. There is a recognition that as humans, we all have predispositions. He is open and transparent about his own biases towards participatory methods (Chambers 2012). Reflexivity about the existence of biases and what these might mean for how we approach development dilemmas is a first step towards rectifying imbalances. To ensure that preconceptions and biases do not result in the perpetuation of misinformation, a diversity of views should be sought, enabling collective progress towards identifying different solutions to vexing problems (Chambers 2006).

3 Conclusion

This editorial introduction has given a brief overview to Robert's contributions to the *IDS Bulletin*, which span over half a century. Central themes of rural development, local knowledge and participatory methods, power, and bias are explored. This collection of articles illustrates Robert's evolving interests at different points in his career, but also how fashions in development studies more generally have ebbed and flowed over time. As editors, we have thoroughly enjoyed exploring this collection of articles, and comparing and contrasting the themes within them to current debates within development studies.

We must finish with a caveat that this collection of articles is only really the tip of a scholarly iceberg – we strongly recommend reading further and deeper into the literature on all the key themes covered within this issue. For those already familiar with Robert's research, we hope this Archive Collection provides fresh insight into his theories and thinking. We hope to energise a rallying call for participatory development which remains pertinent as many development challenges of the last five decades persist. For those who are less familiar with Robert's work, we hope that this issue offers a springboard allowing you to dive into some of most influential development studies material of our time and immerse yourself in a participatory way of thinking. Come on in, the water is lovely.

Notes

* We would like to acknowledge Alison Norwood, Beth Richard, and Gary Edwards for assistance with the production of this *IDS Bulletin* Archive Collection. Our thanks go to Mieke Snijder and Becky Carter for their insightful comments provided as part of the peer review process, and to Jo Howard for her support and guidance. We would also like to acknowledge the

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1 Stephen Thompson, Research Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, UK.
2 Mariah Cannon, Research Officer, Institute of Development Studies, UK.

3 As per McKay (2004: 47) 'The genesis of modern development thought in the West is usually dated to the end of the Second World War'.
4 The Robert Chambers Archive is available Open Access through the **IDS OpenDocs repository**.
5 **Participatory Methods website**.
6 For a deeper dive into this term 'Indigenous Technical Knowledge' and how it compares and contrasts to other forms of knowledge, we recommend reading *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*, where Chambers (1983) highlights the importance of the 'indigenous' and 'technical' aspects of the term, with the former implying originating or being naturally produced from a particular area, and the latter emphasising its practical nature.

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POWER, POVERTY, AND KNOWLEDGE – REFLECTING ON 50 YEARS OF LEARNING WITH ROBERT CHAMBERS

Issue Editors **Stephen Thompson and Mariah Cannon**

Contents

Robert Chambers and the *IDS Bulletin* – Some Reflections for Now and the Future

Melissa Leach[1] and Peter Taylor[2]

1 Introduction

From our leadership positions in the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and in the Editorial Steering Group of the *IDS Bulletin*, it is a pleasure and a privilege to add a note of introduction to this Archive Collection focusing on one of the *IDS Bulletin*'s most influential and prolific contributors. We have also been fortunate to call ourselves friends and colleagues of Robert, having known him for many years. Probably in common with many of those he has worked and spent time with across the world, we could fill pages with personal stories of what we have learned with and from him, not least from Robert's insistence on being prepared to up-end one's preconceptions, to be open to thinking and doing differently, to attend seriously to the voices and perspectives of people marginalised by dominant forms of knowledge and power, and to challenge power relations in all their variety. In the context of IDS, we could fill many further pages with Robert's foundational contributions to the Institute's research, teaching, learning, and influence over the five decades since he joined in 1972. Robert and his work have been absolutely central to the unfolding story of development and development studies during this period, and to IDS' place in it. This was captured beautifully and with the enthusiasm, dynamism, and humour one associates with all things involving Robert during the Revolutionising Development week we hosted at IDS in April 2022 to celebrate his contributions, and in the responses to the re-launch of the book edited by Cornwall and Scoones (2011), reflecting on his work, and in the testimonials that followed.[3]

Just as Robert's work has been part of IDS' evolving story, so has the *IDS Bulletin*, and it seems fitting to publish an Archive Collection that showcases and celebrates this intertwining. The Issue Editors highlight parallels between Robert's work and the

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IDS Bulletin, in that both share values and legacies in championing critical thinking, bringing lesser-heard voices to the fore, and fostering ongoing learning and reflection. One might add to these parallels a commitment to 'engaged' research and evidence – both Robert's work and the *IDS Bulletin* remain resolutely focused on mobilising knowledge to make a difference and transforming lives. We see a consistent commitment to co-constructing knowledge with people in wider society – found in Robert's participatory methods, and in the *IDS Bulletin's* inclusion of contributions from practitioners, policymakers, and activists as well as 'established' researchers; and a commitment to communicate well to multiple audiences. Just as Robert has consistently challenged 'normal' professionalism, science, and academia, so the *IDS Bulletin* has – as the *IDS Bulletin* website puts it – sought to publish 'intellectually rigorous articles developed through learning partnerships on emerging and evolving development challenges presented in an accessible manner in themed issues that bridge academic, practice, and policy discourse'.[4] Robert's contributions to the *IDS Bulletin* have truly been central in shaping it, forging its values, style and reputation; one might even say that the *IDS Bulletin* and Robert's work have co-developed, and have helped shape development studies.

2 Looking back as a means to look forward

The articles selected for this Archive Collection are just a small number amongst Robert's vast plethora of work and publications, but still form a hugely important contribution to the wide array of *IDS Bulletin* articles published since its launch in 1968 and its impact on development studies. Individually and collectively, Robert's *IDS Bulletin* articles selected for this Archive Collection – grouped under the themes of rural development, local knowledge and participation, power, and bias – speak of course to only some of the themes and stories that have been significant in the dynamics of development discourses over this period. Yet they are an important set of topics in their own right, with several of these articles having been foundational, launching whole fields. The article on Indigenous Technical Knowledge (ITK) (Howes and Chambers 1979, this *IDS Bulletin*), for instance, was the first publication on this topic, launching a concept and setting in train decades of work applying, critiquing, and further developing it in ways that have influenced thought and practice far beyond development studies – from the sociology of science to many natural science and technical fields.

Similarly, this Archive Collection includes some of Robert's most significant contributions on participatory methods, power, and bias. They demonstrate a potent characteristic of Robert's often passionate writing and personal philosophy that self-reflection is a crucial dimension of learning, and that the processes and outcomes of development are shaped and underpinned by relationships. As the Issue Editors observe, in some cases the concepts and languages used in these articles might seem outdated, as debates

and the politics of knowledge have moved on. But this can be seen as an opportunity more than a problem. Part of the value of an archive collection is that it is able to trace a history of ideas, concepts, and languages, and here we have a set of pieces that help track the unfolding thoughts of one of development's key thinkers over half a century, that can be read productively in engagement with the work of others at the time. Although this history is inevitably partial, it is still valuable in providing fuel for further reflection and critique. Such a process of engaged learning involving reflective practice is very much in the spirit of Robert's own work, and in the spirit of how we see the *IDS Bulletin* as a whole within the wider field of development studies.

The most recent article in this collection was published over ten years ago (Chambers 2012, this *IDS Bulletin*). Yet in the decade since, Robert has continued to write and publish prolifically in other outlets, whilst the *IDS Bulletin* has continued to reflect his legacy in both substance and style. But what about the future? When we celebrated Robert's work in April 2022, Robert himself was insistent that 'looking back' should be a means to look forward. The same can be said of this *IDS Bulletin* issue.

3 Conclusion and looking forwards

It is certainly a turbulent time for development. People and places are facing multiple crises that are intersecting in their drivers and impacts. There are intensifying complexities as climate, environmental, health, and economic shocks and stresses unfold across the world, as well as heightened inequities and forms of marginalisation in fractured societies and fragile democracies.

There are shifts in the politics of knowledge, truth, and trust in a world of deep uncertainties and digitalised information. Many of these dynamics are undoing 'development' in its broadest and simplest sense, as put so aptly by Robert, of 'good change' (Chambers 1997: 1744). They also reveal a world of disruption, contradiction, and uncertainty. Many of the tenets of 'normal' Development with a big D – the discourses and practices of the aid industry – no longer hold – if indeed they ever did. Long-dominant approaches, such as those promoting economic growth, market liberalisation, globalisation, carbon-intensive industries, and command-and-control planning regimes, are now under challenge as never before. The idea that development programmes can be designed in some places, usually by people and organisations with immense power and privilege, and then rolled out to other places – always distasteful – now seems anathema indeed. In this context at IDS, and with key partner organisations, it is becoming clear that a 'recasting' of development and development studies is needed, underpinned by the centrality of universality (development as progressive change for all), plurality, justice, equity, and resilience. Rather than small adjustments and tweaks to concepts and practices, we are calling for a radical reimagining of what is possible.

In this context, Robert's work remains as relevant as ever, and indeed offers vital insights into intersecting challenges – climate and environmental change, poverty and inequalities, and the relationships between science and policy, knowledge and decision-making, and truth and trust – that have become even more significant in recent years. Many of the themes and topics addressed in these *IDS Bulletin* articles offer direct value in catalysing and contributing to this recasting of development and development studies for now and the future. In sum, this note, and the *IDS Bulletin* Archive Collection itself, are a vote of thanks, and a celebration.

Thank you Robert for an extraordinary legacy, and an ongoing set of ideas and commitments that are both personal and unique, yet also of such broad relevance. As we think forwards to recasting development, may the insights charted here and the spirit they embody continue to catalyse thinking, reflection, and learning amongst us all, into the future.

Notes

1 Melissa Leach, Director, Institute of Development Studies, UK.
2 Peter Taylor, Director of Research, Institute of Development Studies, UK.
3 See **Reflecting on Robert Chambers' Work: Testimonials**.
4 See ***IDS Bulletin* – About the Journal**.

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Looking Back to Move Development Forward – A Fireside Chat with Robert Chambers

Stephen Thompson[1] and Mariah Cannon[2] with Robert Chambers[3]

This Archive Collection focuses on the articles contributed by Robert Chambers to the *IDS Bulletin* over the years, which explore various development dilemmas. In the spirit of participation, learning, and reflection (which have been such prominent features of Robert's scholarship), it felt only right to speak to Robert himself to hear his views on some of the enduring development challenges; therefore, in December 2022 we visited our colleague and our friend. This article details an extract from our conversation.

Firstly, Robert, how are you?
I'm fine and I'm lucky to be enjoying life still.

What's keeping you busy these days? What's exciting?
At my age, you tend to become autobiographical. I'm digging into some past things, particularly time that I spent in Kenya between 1958 and 1966, when [Kenyan] independence came in the middle and I was a District Officer. It was a thrilling time.

What do you use to help you remember what it was like back then?
Some of my old diaries and things I look at a bit, but a lot of it is just remembering. I must not start on this, or we won't get on to our subject today, but it is absolutely fascinating to explore the interaction of people and animals over time. In northern Kenya on the plains, when I was there, there were 1,500 zebra and 1,000 oryx. When I went back last time, which was about three or four years ago, none – and almost no cattle, where there had been maybe 1,000. Only ostrich. So, what had happened? I could go on momentously, but this is the wrong subject. Come again another day.

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Did you have any kind of immediate thoughts or reflections when you saw the list of your contributions to the *IDS Bulletin*?
I was surprised. Then I recognised that they've been going at it for really a long time, and so one shouldn't be so surprised. Part of my feeling about it is just sheer gratitude that I've been amazingly fortunate in my life. I've had privileges. [My wife] Jenny has been just extraordinarily intellectually stimulating and supportive all the way through this. And I've had a series of bosses who have just said 'Oh get on with your thing' and haven't breathed down my neck, and most people never had that; or people with money who said 'Get on with it. Do your thing'.

In fact, just before you came, I had a phone call from Rosalind Eyben.[4] She funded me in India. She may not admit it, but she did. Well, she was only part of the funding, but time after time I've been in a situation in which I'm funded. Nobody quite knows what I'm meant to be doing. Hurray – that is absolute freedom. I was at the administrative Staff College in Hyderabad in India and they didn't know what to do with me, and that was the time when Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) was developing and there were these wonderful non-governmental organisations (NGOs). So, I spent my time with them, and nobody had to ask [about me] or even minded. That was sort of the freedom. Incredible privilege. When you see all this, you need to go back to those people who provided the funds [that brought flexibility and the freedom to do what I was doing]. It was astonishing.

One reflection about the breadth of time for which you've been involved in this field, and the contributions you've made to it, is that your work is still relevant. It was relevant then, and you've continued to be relevant, and we think sometimes certain ideas come about and they fade away and the person who contributed that idea gets stuck in the past as well. In your opinion, what has allowed you to stay relevant?
I don't know what the answer to that is. A test which you can do (it's not a test really, but it's an activity and exercise) is where you draw a circle, and then you draw lots of circles around the circle and in the circles around the circle you put 'Who am I?'. You can say, father, researcher, man, woman and you put these all the way round. That gives you your identity. Then you look at it all and you say what word or words go into the circle in the middle? What is the core of what you are? Well, when I did that, the word I wrote in the middle was explorer. It doesn't explain exactly, but it captures everything. I think that is important to me. Exploring is just great, great fun. Whatever you're exploring, it can be exploring your relationship, it can be exploring a book and it can be exploring by writing. Any number of things it can be, but exploring. You do that when you go back and see what you are.

This archive issue of the *IDS Bulletin* is all about your articles, but can you remember your first interaction with the *IDS Bulletin*?
The simple straightforward answer to that is 'no'. I must have

interacted with it, but I don't remember anything particularly. But it was always there. The whole time that I've been associated with IDS, there's always been an *IDS Bulletin*.

What do you think makes the *IDS Bulletin* unique or different from other development-oriented publications?
Speed of publication is a lot of the comparative advantage of the *IDS Bulletin*. You would submit something, or it would come out of some workshop, and then it's out quite quickly. Whereas other journals can take three to four years, and you can have endless refereeing. One of the things that is really not recognised adequately in our field is the cost in terms of demotivation, all this business of having referees and then having to change. The pathology of this which I've come across, is that you have to change everything. You change it, they send it back to the same referees, and then they make a whole other pile of suggestions, or they raise new questions. If you are a referee, you feel obliged to make comments and make suggestions of changes and improvements. Otherwise, you're not doing your job. So, you're obliged to be a nuisance.

You do feel an obligation to at least prove that you've read it, and sometimes the way you prove that you've read it is by making those types of comments. Maybe we should be more positive in our reviewing – encourage reviewers more to point out where someone has done things well, rather than just trying to point out where they have made mistakes. What is the most annoying comment you have ever received from a reviewer?
Well, that's a good question. I think I can't put a finger on a particular event, but I have been extremely irritated by comments which suggest to me that the person commenting either hasn't read the article or hasn't understood it and is maybe just justifying his or her misunderstanding. I don't know what the solution is.

You spoke previously about the advantage of how quickly the *IDS Bulletin* came out, and perhaps we can ask a follow-up question. We think it may be fairly obvious why having rapid outputs is advantageous, but could you say in your words why it is an advantage to prevent those two-to-three-year delays?
Yes, it's really frustrating, particularly if you've got something that you feel is important and worth saying. It's very, very frustrating to be held up and as far as I'm concerned, I would look around and see where there's a journal that will publish quickly. The best place to publish is *World Development*, in my view, but there are other ones; *Development and Change* I think is very professional. Being slow to publish is a disadvantage, and that would weigh in my decision about where to send something. Of course, they might say no, we don't want that anyway, but that's another story.

We think this reflects very strongly on what we've always thought has been a great focus of your work – the idea of practise. There are differences between development practitioners and development academics. For practitioners it's essential that what we learn is shared quickly because you want it to be actionable, but if it's shared three years later, it may no longer be relevant because contexts change so quickly.

I absolutely agree with that. It is what you can call ground truthing. It is pretty vital in our field. This means having had or somebody having had direct face-to-face on-site experience of what it is that they're writing about. If there isn't ground truth in there, then it belongs perhaps somewhere else. It would be strong for the *IDS Bulletin* to have that among its criteria – 'Anything will be welcomed for consideration, if it's based on recent grounded experience'. And then it is published fast, because this delay in learning is built into our knowledge system and our knowledge politics. You want stuff which is really, really up to date. The best stuff nowadays circulates on email or podcasts or in other ways which bypass the *IDS Bulletin* because there are more immediate ways of communicating and that maybe is something that the *IDS Bulletin* should consider.

Something that this archive issue has done beyond just reprinting old *IDS Bulletin* articles has been to think about how those topics and themes are still relevant today and in new ways and in different contexts. So maybe we could move on to questions that touch on why older knowledge is still relevant? One of the themes that we felt emerged from this collection of articles was around the importance of local knowledge. Today, the argument about whether local knowledge is useful or not has largely been won – local knowledge is accepted as important, but what isn't quite as clear is how the local knowledge influences how decisions around development processes are made. There seems to be a disconnect here which continues. We feel like this is perhaps due to the academic model and some of the issues of delay around publishing, but also, academia is largely dominated by the West. Knowing how important local knowledge is, how can we ensure that it's used effectively in development processes?

It's a big challenge, isn't it? And it also relates to how relevant to practise the knowledge is. In that connection I think one misleading idea is that if everything is decentralised (if it's not dominated by the West or Western countries, donors and all the rest of it), it will somehow be better grounded. That may or may not be the case because to be grounded and well-grounded most of the time requires funding. It's the funders who need to have a change of mindset and change of priorities and a change of their search processes, or their bidding processes, or whatever it is which lead to them devoting funds to research. So, it's a question of change of mindset of the funders and those who support them.

In your article 'Bureaucratic Reversals and Local Diversity' (Chambers 1988 [this *IDS Bulletin*]) you argue that powerful people (it could be funders, but it could be other powerful people) do not readily relinquish power. If this problem is common across humanity – and we think it's a problem that we could argue very easily still exists today, as much as it existed when you wrote this article – is change through development processes and interventions possible and if so, how?

The personal dimension is central to answering this question. There may be people who want power. But what sort of power is it? There are four types of power – power to, power over, power with, power within [see VeneKlasen and Miller (2002)]. But you see, there's a fifth one. And this is a roundabout way of getting to answering your question, and that's power to empower (or convening power).

When you think of it, many people who are uppers in situations have a lot of power to empower. This affects all of us in many ways and IDS is in a very strong position. Here it has power to empower. Convening power, which means you can bring people together who collectively will empower themselves and decide on things which should happen and maybe change their own understandings, their own actions, and so on. A lot of this, though, comes back to individuals and how they behave. Power is not necessarily a nice thing to have. It depends on the situation. With power comes responsibility. Many people might perhaps prefer not to have responsibility in particular situations.

One question for individuals and also for training, for education, and all the rest of it is: can you individually as a person take pleasure in empowering other people rather than exercising power yourself? If we had more people who are in that space and actually took satisfaction in empowering other people we'd be doing better. Teachers do this. They empower their pupils, and their pupils go off, and then their teachers can take a lot of pleasure in what those pupils do later in life. So, we've already got it on a massive scale in our societies. It is not something new, but it is something which could be spread and adopted more widely by development professionals.

We appreciate what you're saying in terms of the importance of individuals and their influence, but as well, within the development infrastructure you have the systems or the departments and so on. In your article 'The Self-Deceiving State' (Chambers 1992 [this *IDS Bulletin*]) you talk about how normal government development bureaucracy is resiliently static and robustly buffered against change. Has your view on that changed over time? If so, is it less so or more so now?

Yes, I think robustly buffered is a bit stark for the reality. I think there is quite a good flexibility now. I don't know why my view has changed on this, but I would hope it's because the reality has changed.

In your writing you are in general quite optimistic. For example, in your article 'All Power Deceives' (Chambers 1994 [this *IDS Bulletin*]), you talk about development professionals having the potential to empower people, and that if that happens then development interventions might better match practical realities. How do you balance staying optimistic while at the same time being critical of development?

Without much difficulty. Perhaps I'm being overly complacent. I think optimism can be to some degree, some of the time (but more often than we recognise), self-fulfilling. If you're optimistic and you go into a difficult situation with your optimism, it may rub off on other people. It may influence the way things go, say in a discussion. I think the way we behave in situations, it's not something that we talk about, it's one of those subjects, it's the elephant in the room, it's everywhere. How we interact and how we influence one another and where our discussions go, and so on. These are all things which really, really matter. Almost more than anything else. Yet, my impression is that they're not as central to discussion as they ought to be. I suppose that it's a bit threatening to go back to square one and say what are we doing here? What is this all about? What's the justification? We need to ask those questions. You know that you're going to come out of it saying, yes, we've got to do this. We've got to do that. You're optimistic that there will be a good outcome, and if you're optimistic that there will be a good outcome, there probably will be. But if you're pessimistic and 'Oh, isn't it terrible, blah blah blah', well, then things do become a bit more terrible. I believe in self-fulfilling fantasies.

In your writing you regularly question yourself and your approach. Reflexivity is at the heart of your writing. How important do you think reflexivity is today to someone working in development studies?

I think it's fundamental. I think it's important for everybody, but it's easy to say that when you're in the position that I'm in now. But for someone who's starting out on their career, if they're very reflective, reflexive, and self-critical, this may actually harm them. You can be self-critical without self-harming. But you must not self-harm – you can keep your self-criticism even to yourself, to a diary, for instance. Without necessarily exposing yourself and your view of your own failings to everybody else. Enjoy it – enjoy reflexivity, enjoy catching yourself out, and saying, 'Oh my goodness, look how I was behaving'.

You can get caught in the trap of questioning absolutely everything you do, and in some cases, it leads to immobility or stasis because you just question and question and question. So, it's helpful to hear from someone who's come through the other side, perhaps that there is a way to do it, while still moving forward, but being reflexive.

I think you need a dialogue between positive practitioners; I used to characterise it. Practitioners tend to be positive, and

academics tend to be negative. OK, they've both got their strengths, but they need to interact in a way which comes out energised rather than just dispirited.

Maybe that's something that the *IDS Bulletin* helps us do because we think as a practitioner/academic journal, it does create spaces for that kind of interchange of information.
Yes, that's a good point.

One of the other features we noticed not just in your *IDS Bulletin* articles, but also in your books and other articles,[5] is the focus on people living in rural areas which has been fairly consistent over time. For example, in your article 'In Search of Professionalism, Bureaucracy and Sustainable Livelihoods for the 21st Century' (Chambers 1991 [this *IDS Bulletin*]), you make it very clear that the focus has to be on rural people and rural lives. Do you think development should still focus on rural dwelling, and why?
I think it's shifted, and the reality has shifted. If you go back 40 years and you say what proportion of people live in rural areas and what in urban and you look at those proportions, and then you look now you'll find a very different picture. And so, I would downplay the role. One of the very valid criticisms that can be made of my work is that it has neglected urban poverty – I don't know anything about urban poverty. I am even more ignorant about urban poverty than I have been about rural poverty, I think. For future generations urban poverty is very much something to look at.

In our experience, many of those who are most marginalised in urban settings are recent migrants from rural settings. Unable to secure livelihoods in rural areas, they have migrated to the urban settings looking for economic opportunities and the ability to support their family. So, we wonder if a continued focus on the rural might actually prevent some of the urban poverty as well?
Part of the justification for the focus on rural poverty was to reduce migration to urban centres for exactly the reasons that you've given, and I think that may well still be the case. But I am a bit out of touch and out-of-date on these things now and I do recognise that they change quite rapidly.

Perhaps one of the biggest changes has been around technology. Not everyone would necessarily have access to or benefit from the technology available, but do you have any reflections on how technology might influence people living in rural areas and some of the development challenges that they face?
I think it's been transformative. I should imagine that most rural households in the world have got a mobile phone. That is an absolutely phenomenal change in terms of connection, being in touch and up-to-date. The impact of the changes in technology have been massive and probably still underappreciated. Maybe this is a subject for an *IDS Bulletin* – the impact of technological developments on rural life. I remember about ten years ago going

back to Samburu district [Kenya] where I worked in the 1960s and being astonished that there were telephone charging points all over the place. People were just very connected. It's a different world, it really is, and it was not foreseen I think, at least not by me. I don't know where it goes next.

You regularly acknowledge others in your work as a source of inspiration or creativeness. For example, you acknowledge the idea of uppers and lowers which was developed from a conversation with Jenny, your wife. How important is this for your writing process?
It is important – being able to have conversations about what you're working on is a wonderful opener of doors and opportunities to see things with a different perspective when you're talking. You're thinking in a different sort of way. I can't explain it, but I know that if I'm having a conversation with someone, then things can come out. It's a process. A conversation is a process, and you don't know exactly where it's going, but you do know that people are participating, and that can be very creative in the sense of uncovering insights which otherwise would not have been in the light.

Another feature we found interesting about your writing is that quite often you acknowledge people who have read an early draft, or even perhaps that you've had conversations with while you're writing. Is that something that you'd encourage other people to do?
Yes, and also encourage them to acknowledge if they can (you can't always). You don't know where the ideas came from. Just suddenly you've got them. They may not originate with you, and they may originate with somebody else, and they might feel annoyed, although no one's ever come up to me that I can recollect and said 'You pinched my idea'. I am a bit of a magpie, hopping around and picking up bits here and there as a scavenger. You can be an intellectual scavenger. I think that's quite a good thing to do. An explorer and the scavenger. Just look at how a crow behaves. Maybe it's not the most favourite bird, they're quite clever though. I think also they've got a sense of humour, haven't they? They play games sometimes. Now there's a subject for another *IDS Bulletin*. What can we learn from a crow? It would sell like hot cakes.

We've talked quite a lot about the past, drawing on some of your ideas from your *IDS Bulletin* articles and elsewhere. What do you think the next 50 years of the *IDS Bulletin* should focus on? What are the enduring questions that development needs to address?
The first thing is to say that just because an earlier *IDS Bulletin* has dealt with a subject, it is not a reason for abstaining from taking that subject further – this is really important. We should never say 'Done this – tick – move on'. I think you can put a tick and say 'Yes, we've got so far', but these learning processes tend to be circular and we need to be prepared to go round in circles, and to revisit, and go beyond where we were in the past.

So, part of my answer to your question about where things should go is they should look at the past. They should look for gaps. They should look for biases and blind spots. I think biases and blind spots are a sort of springboard. I don't think we do enough of this. Am I asking what are my biases? What do I prefer to see or prefer to learn about? What do I choose to study and choose not to study and why? That sort of reflexivity we need much more of. It's exciting because if you find a blind spot then you get excited, and you may genuinely be exploring new territory with all the excitement and the unexpected errors which go with that. If you don't have errors in your research life something must be wrong.

Perhaps we could turn it around and ask if you would like to ask any questions? We've been relentless with ours. Maybe you'll be a bit kinder with yours.

Well, I'm always interested in where things are going and where they could go – what do you feel about that? If you were in ten years' time or even five years' time looking back on now and asking yourself what's changed since then and what did we miss then that we now see as really, really important? I wonder whether in our fields we spend enough time reflecting on what we're missing. Why don't we have a workshop and brainstorm about all this? We used to do a fair amount [of brainstorming workshops] and they tended to be very, very fruitful. There are whole books which have come out of brainstorming workshops that we've had in the past. Do they happen now? Is funding sufficiently flexible that you can ask for funding for a brainstorming workshop? I rather doubt it. And it's very sad if that is the case. Maybe one needs to work on the mindsets and understandings about knowledges on the part of the funders? It comes back again to the funders, but it's difficult for them, isn't it?

I've been a funder with the Ford Foundation in India. You have this sense that you want to make sure that the money is well spent and that you have something to show for it at the end. The question then is, does that inhibit you so that you don't do adventurous things or take risks? You can ask, if we haven't had any failures, what's wrong? Are we just following on in the old ruts? Because if we get out of the ruts, we'll have to fall over into another one or something. We'll go wrong, but maybe we need more of that? Maybe an annual report should say, 'Here are the things that we have failed on this year, and this is what we're doing as a result'. It would be fun, wouldn't it? Would you like to have a go? List all your failures, and then share them with your colleagues, and if you haven't got any failures, then you are a failure. Come on, let's start!

Human connection is perhaps undervalued by funders. It is a challenge in a world where every penny needs to be accounted for. That, and of course, not every coming together is going to be successful, but in other cases it could be incredibly successful. It could be game-changing. How do we reach the point where more

human interaction can be funded and what that might look like going forward?
I think the word workshop is a useful umbrella for hiding all sorts of things, and many workshops have been fairly open-ended, and have led to books – a number of the participation books have come out of workshops.

Like the *Myth of Community*?
Absolutely, you've got it. The *Myth of Community* [see Guijt and Shah 1998], which is about gender, about women. That came out of an open-ended workshop – a situation in which people get to know one another in new ways and to understand one another in new ways. I think that's very important. I would say dress it up as a workshop.

You know about self-organising systems on the edge of chaos (SOSOTEC)? [See Cannon and Lewin with Chambers (2021) for a brief introduction.] It is a very creative zone. If you look at this as a spectrum – you've got a spectrum between rigid mechanistic formality and predictability here, and you've got utter chaos and unpredictability over here. But in the middle, where these two are overlapping – that's the zone of creativity. We need more of that zone of creativity where you're not sure where you're going. You're not sure about anything really, but you've got a sense of purpose and a sense that you're searching and that there's a collegiality in it as well. And it's fun – a lot of learning comes from fun.

I don't think we enjoy ourselves nearly enough in development. You need to be self-confident. To have the edge of chaos, you need to be confident that it's worth going along this route. Or optimism more than confidence. And the form that SOSOTEC takes is something which is unknowable, but there are dimensions of it like seating arrangements, how a room is organised, you know it should be organised so that all sorts of different things happen. Or **can** happen if people wanted them to happen. So that if you really want to discuss something, let's go and discuss it. There's somewhere where you can sit down, and you can do that. And then it moves around and people come and go. I love that – it's very, very creative and we don't do nearly enough of it. In fact, we don't train people in it. It's not really training, is it? There's no socialising into this way of being and interacting which can then be so very creative. I fear that that's been largely lost. I don't know. Planning is a dangerous word.

Have you come across optimal unpreparedness? If you prepare too much for something, then you get stuck with what you've prepared, and you feel 'I've got to cover that bit', when actually the conversation and the really exciting stuff has moved off in another direction. That's what happens if you over-plan. I've never heard anybody talk about optimal unpreparedness except myself. If you have a sense of insecurity, then you want to do the planning exactly and it's a self-fulfilling negative element.

[Over-planned workshops are] rigid and unable really to move forward with new topics or new ways of seeing things emerging. Leaving things open and leaving enough time – that is fun, exciting, and exploratory. It almost always leads to something good. Is there enough of that? If not, why not? Is it to do with funding, to do with conditionality, to do with targets? To do with mindsets, habits?

Any final thoughts for the future?
Let's do more of this. I really thoroughly enjoyed our conversation today and I wish we did more of it.

Robert, thank you very much for your time today and we'll look forward to speaking to you again.

Notes

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3 Robert Chambers, Research Associate and Emeritus Professor, Institute of Development Studies, UK.
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5 See the **IDS OpenDocs Robert Chambers Archive**.

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POWER, POVERTY, AND KNOWLEDGE – REFLECTING ON 50 YEARS OF LEARNING WITH ROBERT CHAMBERS

Issue Editors **Stephen Thompson and Mariah Cannon**

Contents

This article has been reissued as part of *IDS Bulletin* Archive Collection Vol. 54 No. 1A March 2023: **'Power, Poverty, and Knowledge – Reflecting on 50 Years of Learning with Robert Chambers'**; the Introduction is also recommended reading.

MANAGING RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Robert Chambers*

This research, which was mainly concerned with the design and testing of management procedures for use by government servants in rural areas in Kenya, was carried out during 1971–73 in collaboration with Deryke Belshaw of the Overseas Development Group of the University of Norwich. It was linked with the Kenya government's Special Rural Development Programme (SRDP), an experimental programme undertaken in six parts of Kenya with objectives which included raising rural incomes and employment opportunities and sharpening the effectiveness of the government machine in rural areas.

At a late stage in the research, its rationale was summarised as follows:

"It is a commonplace that executive capacity is a constraint on rural development in developing countries. Traditional prescriptions for increasing such capacity have been quantitative (more manpower, more technical assistance, more finance) and usually qualitative only through an emphasis on the importance of training. Where administrative reform has been undertaken, attention has tended to focus on organisation and procedures in headquarters and on the reduction of corruption. Valuable though these approaches may be, the working hypothesis of the research . . . is that a key point of leverage in improving the effectiveness of rural development programmes in general and of agricultural extension in particular is the devising and introduction of planning and management techniques and procedures for the lower levels of administration".

There is a good deal of *ex post* rationalisation in this statement. The

* Robert Chambers was funded first by the Rockefeller Foundation, then by himself, and finally by ODA through IDS at the University of Sussex for a six months finishing off period. Local institutional support in Kenya was provided by the IDS University of Nairobi, and the East African Staff College. The author is grateful to these institutions for their support and to Deryke Belshaw, other colleagues and many Kenya government servants for their collaboration.

research had come about from a flow of pressures, interests and commitments. Had there been a rigid formal requirement at an early stage for a conventional research proposal it might not have been possible to follow the leads which presented themselves. Not much research has or perhaps should have this degree of freedom; but in this case, involving relationships with a rapidly developing and changing development programme and exploring a field which was the province of no discipline, it was a great help not to be constrained by precise statements of what we were aiming to do, or how we were going to try to do it.

What happened was that the Institute for Development Studies of the University of Nairobi agreed to provide evaluation for the SRDP. The SRDP headquarters officials were very heavily engaged in getting the programme off the ground and sought advice from the IDS Nairobi in the design of reporting procedures for local-level staff who were working on the programme. As soon as we became involved and began to prepare a reporting system we realised the need for this to fit into a wider framework. We were drawn backwards from reporting into implementation, programming, budgeting and plan formulation and we found ourselves designing and testing a series of management procedures for government staff at the local rural levels which covered much more than just reporting.

At the same time we began to see more clearly what now looks more obvious: that there was a misallocation of administrative and planning resources in East Africa, with too much attention paid to plan formulation and budgeting and too little to programming and implementation (the many mimeographed volumes of unimplemented district plans gathering dust on the shelves of government offices were evidence enough of this); that capital projects and the capital budget received disproportionate attention from planners and administrators to the neglect of the often much larger resources committed more or less automatically to recurrent operations and programmes; and that government field staff were a major and expensive but underestimated and underutilised national resource, operating at levels far below their potential. To correct these imbalances and exploit this potential, management procedures appeared to offer a powerful point of entry. But no social scientists

in East Africa were, as far as we knew, concerned with the study and improvement of government procedures, an extraordinary research gap. Further, what literature there was on the subject was either at the level of departmental instructions, circulars and rule books, or derived from and couched in the slightly esoteric concepts and language of engineering systems analysis (for example Kulp, 1971. See also Chege, 1973 for a lively critique). Even within governments, the design of procedures and the introduction of management techniques were not usually recognised subjects of major concern (this was before the Tanzanian decentralisation). Indeed, government procedures, far from being pilot tested, evaluated, modified, and then replicated gradually, as were some other approaches to rural development, tended to the contrary to be thought up in a hurry by busy civil servants, incorporated in authoritative circulars, and issued universally and adopted at once. These various insights, if that is not too pretentious a word for what now seems so obvious, encouraged us to pursue the leads which opened up, and to adopt an experimental approach to designing and testing procedures with government staff at the local rural level, concentrating on those activities, particularly programming and implementation, which had previously been relatively neglected.

In designing procedures we drew on several sources of ideas including Management by objectives, the Malaysian red book system, critical path method, and procedures which were already in use in the government. For various reasons we rejected many elements in these sources, adopting and adapting only those which seemed relevant. We found a simple form of systems analysis helpful as a device for sorting out and classifying procedures. Using this, Belshaw was responsible for the useful step of organising discussion and experiment around six clusters of procedures, described as:

Programming and Implementation
Field Staff Management
Local Participation
Evaluation
Rural Research and Development
Plan Formulation

Placing these in boxes and linking them with lines made it easier to identify and discuss the points at which the benefits from procedural

innovation might give the best returns to effort. We came to place plan formulation *last* because of the common experience of plan formulation without implementation, and even of pathological data collection without plan formulation. Although work was done on evaluation, on rural research and development, and on plan formulation, we concentrated at first on the neglected areas of programming and implementation, and field staff management.

Programming and Implementation

The Programming and Implementation Manager (PIM) system was developed in collaboration with the government staff who were to use it. It was modified and simplified several times. It had three main components.

The first was an annual programming exercise at which the staff involved in a programme (such as dips, crop extension, road construction, credit, family planning, land consolidation, or ranch development) met and jointly followed a procedure in which they identified and agreed on the objectives of the programme, the operations to be carried out, who was responsible for what, the resources required, timings and deadlines, and what constituted completion of each operation. The discussion often made use of a blackboard which all participants could see, and the agreement reached was recorded on forms and charts which could be referred to later in the course of implementation. The meeting required staff of different departments, and sometimes of different levels in the same department, to come together. The first year's experience showed dramatically that the biggest bottleneck in rural development was fund releases in Nairobi, and in subsequent years the headquarters ministry officer responsible for funds attended the meetings and accepted commitments to deadlines in the presence of his field colleagues.

The second component was a monthly meeting at which progress was reviewed against the programme as drawn up at the annual programming exercise. Problems were identified, co-operation encouraged, and remedial action sought.

The third component was a monthly report which was prepared after

the meeting and sent simultaneously to government staff at different levels and in different departments. The layout of the report was unconventional, focusing on timeliness of operations, action required, and who was to take it.

There were several evaluations of the PIM system (including Chabala *et al,* 1973 and IDS Nairobi, 1973). Opinions differed about the desirable frequency and content of meetings and reports. At one stage in one area the reporting burden was excessive because of the experimental treatment of incorporating every rural development project into the system; the lesson was that only priority projects and those which involved several departments should be included. Like any system PIM had its shortcomings and its costs. But it was generally agreed that it did have some substantial advantages. Among others, departmentalism was reduced, needs and problems were identified in advance, meetings were tied down to discussions of practical detail, those responsible for bottlenecks and delays were shown up, and field staff were provided with a legitimate means of communicating their problems to those high up in the hierarchy. An annual implementation review, based on the monthly reports and the experience of a year of implementation, also meant that lessons were systematically learned and that senior officers in headquarters were made more aware of problems in the field.

While modifications would be needed for each administrative environment, some of the principles and elements in these procedures (described in much more detail in Chambers and Belshaw, 1973, chapter 2) might well be applied with good results in other countries.

Field Staff Management

Management procedures for field staff were developed in collaboration with the agricultural staff (both crops and livestock staff) of one of the SRDP Divisions, Mbere. Devising effective systems proved much harder than we expected and over a period of about 18 months many changes were introduced. The main thrust was an attempt to improve performance through work planning and closer supervision. Two systems were evolved – one based on work planning by partially self-set targets and used by the better-educated

crops staff whose tasks were more complicated and less routine; and the other based on work planning on a daily diary basis, used by livestock staff who were less well educated and whose work was simpler and more routine.

Both relied on a monthly meeting of the supervisor with his staff. At this meeting, each staff member was first debriefed about his previous month's work, comparing what he had done with what he had agreed to do at the previous month's meeting. Then the next month's programme was discussed. Finally a work programme was drawn up with participation by the staff in suggesting what they should do and what targets they should aim to achieve. (The two systems are described and discussed in more detail in Chambers and Belshaw, 1973, chapter 3. Other parts of that paper discuss local participation, rural research and development, evaluation, and plan formation).

Principles in the Design of Procedures

The details of some of the procedures which were developed may provide ideas which can be used by others elsewhere. But perhaps more important are the principles which underlie them and the lessons of the more obvious of the mistakes which we made. In terse summary some of these are:

- seeking sophistication in simplicity
- adopting a pilot approach at first
- treating field staff as a finite and scarce resource
- appreciating the field-staff-eye view of the world
- involving participating staff in the design and evaluation of procedures
- keeping meetings and reports short and functional
- using joint programming and joint target-setting
- subsuming or abolishing old procedures
- restraining demands for information.

Perhaps surprisingly, this last may well be the most important, apart from the first which has an overarching nature. The biggest danger in designing procedures is intellectual perfectionism and the demand for excessive amounts of data that goes with it. One of the most terrible fates is for field staff to become linked to a voracious computer with a ravenous appetite for information. It is far, far easier to make a

case for more information than to make a case for less; and far easier to introduce a new reporting requirement than to abolish one. The principle of optimal ignorance, firmly grounded in the realisation that information has costs, is extraordinarily difficult to apply. But if it is not applied, then the result is liable to be the submergence of field staff under a sea of paper, tying them to their offices, and making them clerks, accountants, and eventually perforce writers of fiction, instead of field workers.[1]

The Future

The experience of this research seems to strengthen the case for more attention to management procedures in rural development, but whether or not they become a focus must depend upon the interest which is shown in them in the countries concerned. There are obvious dangers – of excessive use of systems language, of the computerisation of programme and project monitoring, of management consultants who come and go and leave behind them (did we?) unwieldy or inappropriate modes of operation, of the creation of routines which quickly rigidify into mindless rituals, of subversion of reporting through the invention or distortion of data. There may well be a case for the selective use of some imported expertise but rural development may be *par excellence* a field in which the details (not necessarily the basic principles) of management cannot be imported without bad effects. It is sometimes difficult to avoid the temptations of systems language, or the attractions of the latest management gimmicks. But what is most needed is the building up and diffusion of a body of local experience among local practitioners in rural development, cross-fertilised with the critical insights of the appropriate social sciences. The danger has been that social scientists will regard management and procedures as dull and outside their proper fields. Yet sociologists and students of public administration in particular are well placed to contribute through the collection and organisation of experience, through building up repertoires of techniques, through their awareness and

[1] A colleague in a South Asian country was recently told by an agricultural extension worker that he had to submit 29 reports and returns a month. The number had increased recently because of a food crisis and a food production drive.

identification of unintended effects, and through their capacity for research and development work and for independent evaluation. One implication is that management procedures should receive attention in university courses and that the evaluation of procedures should be a regular part of student fieldwork, as has already happened in the University of Nairobi (for an example see Chabala *et al,* 1973). In the longer term this would mean that the graduates who become civil servants would be better equipped to design procedures themselves, more aware of the unintended effects which are so common, and better able to contribute to a national and international body of experience.

An immediate application to be explored is the potential of specially designed procedures for directing programmes more accurately to new target groups. The notorious tendency for agricultural extension staff to visit and favour the larger and wealthier farmers is the most obvious case in point. In trying to reach poorer and less influential farmers, appropriate procedures may have a crucial part to play. At this time, too, when land reform programmes are so often regarded with despair and cynicism, it may be worth asking to what extent new management procedures could make them more effective. But whether these opportunities are explored, and whether, if explored, the results are applied, depend largely on national policy and above all on political will. Perhaps it is no coincidence that among East African countries it has been Tanzania, with its concern for equity, which has shown most interest in the design and implementation of management procedures.

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POWER, POVERTY, AND KNOWLEDGE – REFLECTING ON 50 YEARS OF LEARNING WITH ROBERT CHAMBERS

Issue Editors **Stephen Thompson and Mariah Cannon**

Contents

This article has been reissued as part of *IDS Bulletin* Archive Collection Vol. 54 No. 1A March 2023: **'Power, Poverty, and Knowledge – Reflecting on 50 Years of Learning with Robert Chambers'**; the Introduction is also recommended reading.

Bureaucratic Reversals and Local Diversity[1]

Robert Chambers

My concerns are the fit and misfit between local diversity and what we can call normal bureaucracy. The issues are relevant to the field organisation and operation of field bureaucracies in rural areas in Third World countries, both government ministries such as agriculture, health and forestry, and parastatals in the agricultural sector. Most attention will be given to the case of agricultural research.

The word 'bureaucracy' is a problem. However hard I try, I often end up using it pejoratively. This problem is shared by the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary which gives, in its 1955 edition, only one illustrative quotation, from Carlyle — 'The Continental nuisance called "Bureaucracy"'. Here I shall strive to use it neutrally and to use 'normal' to refer to both good and bad aspects which are commonly found.

The word 'reversal' I shall use to mean acting in a way that is opposite or contrary to what is usual. The fact that something is a reversal does not necessarily mean that it is good or for that matter bad.

Field bureaucracies present three normal tendencies which are well known and not in dispute. The first is centralisation in a hierarchy; the second is standardisation of rules and activities; and the third is simplification. For the analysis which follows, these are the three key elements. Linked with these, we find centralisation of programme planning, of financial allocations and audits, of personnel policy, and of control of transfers of middle level staff. Salaries and promotion prospects are higher in the centre than in the periphery, and most staff aspire to rise by moving inwards and upwards towards the centre.

In the other direction, outwards and downwards, flow programmes and instructions. These may or may not achieve their intentions. Targets are often set centrally and then apportioned to regions or provinces, then to districts and subdistricts, and finally handed out to the lower levels of staff. These staff, who typically are not transferred out of their areas and cannot rise towards the centre, are usually either underloaded or overloaded with work. Quite often, they are burdened with a succession of tasks. Programme succeeds programme, like a succession of lava flows from the centre, each overlaying its predecessor, burying the earlier ones under geological layers so that you have to dig to find them. Reporting requirements for these centrally determined programmes are often onerous and quite frequently impossible to complete. And often, standard actions decided in the centre do not fit local conditions.

What Normal Bureaucracy does Well

Against these somewhat negative aspects, normal field bureaucracy has a record of successes which is easily overlooked.

Many of these are what can be called 'zipper' programmes. These move geographically and make standard changes which zip up entities, often the components of physical infrastructure with social organisation, or people with resources, in forms and patterns which are stable and require little or no maintenance. In health, two good examples are smallpox and yaws vaccinations, where a simple universal intervention including the poorest people, and having to include them, had good effects for all. To differing degrees, the four parts of UNICEF's GOBI programme — growth charts, oral rehydration, breast-feeding, and immunisation — have this simple standard character, but the once-for-all zip effect is clearest with immunisation. In agriculture, examples can be found where extension has been able to propagate standard recommendations to many farmers in fairly uniform physical and social conditions in classical green revolution environments. Sometimes, too, infrastructure programmes with low or decentralised maintenance requirements fit this pattern, as with some roads, electricity and water supplies. Once zipped up, they stay in place or are easy to hold in place.

Other successes of normal bureaucracy are organisations to deal with a single agricultural commodity, especially where there are strict technical imperatives. Let me explain this. In *Development Projects Observed* published in 1967, Albert Hirschman argued the advantages to a developing country in those days of having an international airline because it would be 'trait-making', requiring exacting technical standards which allowed little latitude, and which were inescapable imperatives which would force and sustain high standards of performance. It is interesting and significant that some of the most acclaimed

[1] I am grateful to Teddy Brett for help in thinking through and preparing this article. Responsibility for the views expressed is mine.

successes in agricultural organisation present similar patterns, combined with simplicity and standardisation.

The Kenya Tea Development Authority is one case. It provides production services, processing and marketing for tea smallholders, some of them with as little as half an acre of tea. It operates in areas of steep terrain, heavy rainfall, and difficult road conditions. The tea must be picked carefully — two leaves and a bud —and collected and transported to a factory within six hours of picking. This is so difficult to organise that it was thought to be impossible, until it was initiated in Kenya during the totalitarian and closely administered conditions of the Mau Mau Emergency and its aftermath, when the necessary discipline was possible. Once started and made to work, it was kept going and spread. Another case is the National Dairy Development Board in India. There, the exacting requirements were presented by the dispersed sources of supply and points of retail, and the perishability of milk. Yet another is the Kenya Seed Company, where the hybridisation of maize each season and its subsequent annual retailing demanded exacting standards. All three of these examples are timebounded and depend on tight quality control. Once started, they can remain stably above a threshold for survival by diligently repeating what has been found to work.

These examples from health and agriculture share two features. First, all are centralised, standardised and simple. The vaccinations against smallpox or yaws, the recommended packages of practices for classical green revolution innovations, the procedures for picking, collecting and transporting tea or for collecting, measuring and marketing milk — these were all reduced to simple disciplines to be followed regardless of local conditions.

Second, local conditions were uniform to start with, or were made uniform. With smallpox and yaws vaccinations, the programmes were dealing each with only a single pathogen in the highly controlled, standardised and predictable conditions of the inside of the human body, itself homeostatically controlled within narrow tolerances. Similarly, with the green revolution packages of high-yielding varieties, fertiliser and irrigation, it was precisely in the flat irrigated plains and deltas where water, soil and other cultural conditions were predictable and controlled within narrow limits that success occurred. Again, with tea and milk, uniformities were encouraged, created and supported in the form of strictly managed fields of tea and carefully husbanded milch buffaloes and cattle.

These examples suggest, as personal experiences confirm, that field staff, so often maligned, are capable of working hard and well, given the right conditions. There is no inherent incapacity or venality which impels them to behave like some of the engineers described in Geof Wood's article in this *Bulletin*. I think there is a repeated tendency for senior staff and even social scientists to undervalue the capabilities of low-level field staff. They behave as rationally as do small farmers, given their environments. The key is to provide them with conditions, similar to those achieved by zipper programmes, or single-crop tight-imperative organisations, which provide them with the incentives to perform well.

The main practical conclusion is, other things being equal, to exploit the normal bureaucratic tendencies to centralise, standardise and simplify, by giving staff standard simple tasks and findings or creating uniform environments in which they can carry them out. In sum, to accept normal bureaucracy for what it is, and to give it to do the sorts of things it is good at.

Normal Bureaucracy versus Diversity

Two defects of normal bureaucracy raise almost universal problems for governments seeking to serve all areas and all people.

The first is the notorious tendency for officials to neglect poor areas and poor people. Poor, remote and peripheral areas are unpopular postings, often used to punish officials who have fallen from favour or otherwise blotted their copy books. Turnover of staff is either high, or those who stay for long periods are demoralised. Then within areas, of whatever wealth or poverty, there is the well known, natural and obvious tendency of officials to mix with and support those who are less poor, who give them cups of tea and reward them in other more substantial ways. And often the very design of programmes is ill-fitted to the poorer people who lack the knowledge, access or resources to benefit.

The second defect of normal bureaucracy, also serious, but less recognised, is the contradiction between its centralisation, standardisation and simplification and local diversity of needs and conditions.

Local diversity has many social and ecological dimensions, both within and between areas. Social diversity has many aspects — ethnic, cultural, economic (concerning wealth, poverty and access to and control over resources), educational, occupational, gender, and age, among others. Many of the poorer rural people derive their livelihoods not just from one activity but from many: they are 'foxes' with many ideas, who do different things in different places at different times of the year in order to survive. Then there are many forms of ecological diversity, especially marked outside the relatively uniform green revolution areas. There is physical and biological diversity even in arid areas, but it is most marked in semi-arid, subhumid and equatorial climatic conditions. On undulating land, the physical variation within the same field can require several different treatments and crops or crop combinations. Differences of soil, slope,

vegetation, multiple canopies of plants, multiple tree-crop-livestock interactions, and the numbers of species exploited, can be mind-blowing. And finally, there is diversity which is regularly seasonal and irregular in interannual variation. Nor is this all. Social and ecological diversities interlock and multiply variance. It is easy, once one starts seeing and thinking this way, to regard each place and social group as unique, requiring its own path for development.

Set against this diversity and local uniqueness, the successes of centralised, standardised and simplified bureaucratic interventions look exceptional. All too often, centrally planned actions do not fit local conditions and priorities. There are many examples. A typical case is where a recommendation for a specific crop, as once with maize in Zambia, is promulgated centrally to be implemented by luckless extension staff throughout a country, regardless of local conditions. Another was the official recommendation for 180-day hybrid maize in Kakamega District in Kenya, when a 140-day hybrid would have fitted farming systems better, entailing only a slight (20 per cent) loss of yield potential, supplying maize earlier, in the hungry period and when local maize prices were high, and allowing another crop to follow on the same land (personal communication, M. Collinson). Similar standard errors and failures to meet local needs are found in many parts of the world. They have produced what can be called the Henry Ford approach to agriculture or forestry. In place of the Model T, which could be any colour as long as it was black, we find the paddy which could be any variety so long as it was IR8, or the tree which can be any shape, size or species so long as it was eucalyptus. Biological Fordism has been endemic in much agricultural extension. To use the pejorative term of avant garde rural development, blueprints have been designed centrally and then transferred to and imposed on environments.

It has long been recognised that many local needs and opportunities cannot be met or exploited by such standard imprints from above. A vast literature generated over the past 30 years has grappled with the problems. The language has changed with a succession of labels — community development, decentralisation, devolution, deconcentration, local organisation, bottom-up approaches, and participation. The fashionable mode of operation has also changed, starting with programmes pushed from the centre, leading now more and more to the idea that NGOs and local people should organise to make demands on government bureaucracies. The emphasis is on local learning processes rather than blueprints from the centre.

All these approaches require reversals of the normal — of central control to allow for local initiative, of standardisation to allow for diversity, and of simplification to allow for complexity. The question is whether normal field organisations, given their nature and tendencies, can achieve and accommodate these reversals.

The conclusions we can draw from the history of decentralisation over the past 20 years are not encouraging. Country after country has announced a major decentralisation — to provinces or regions, to districts, to elected bodies at various levels — to be greeted with enthusiasm and studies by political scientists. But rarely does much seem to have changed. The missing reversal to enable such decentralisation to work has often been financial control and allocations. Accountants and officials do not readily give up power, and at every level of hierarchy those who control funds hang on to their authority. The imperatives of accountability are used to justify central authority, and in turn impede local initiative and adaptation to diversity.

Agricultural Research and Diversity

Agricultural research poses the dilemma of diversity more acutely than most other activities, and does so more now as we approach the 1990s than it did in earlier decades.

This can be understood by separating agriculture into three types: industrial agriculture, green revolution agriculture, and the third agriculture, that of poor farmers and resource-poor areas. Like any simple classification, this misses much, and many exceptions can be found. But it is useful as a means of highlighting key characteristics. Industrial and green revolution agriculture are 'modern'. Both are fairly simple, and found in relatively uniform and predictable environments. In contrast, the third agriculture, of poor farmers and resource-poor areas, is found especially in undulating, rainfed hinterlands. Those dependent on it directly for their livelihoods may number as many as 1.4 bn (see e.g. Wolf 1986:6-8). This third agriculture also has much more complex farming systems, with greater local environmental diversity, and higher risks.

With this third agriculture, normal research fits less well. In industrial and green revolution agriculture, conditions on research stations and on farms tend to be similar; but this is less so with poor farmers and with resource-poor conditions. Again, in industrial and green revolution agriculture, farmers are to some extent consulted about research priorities and so have some leverage on the research system. In the third agriculture, this is rare. For the third agriculture, also, there are far fewer scientists per farming system, both because of the scarcity of scientists and because of the many farming systems.

Normal bureaucratic approaches to technology

generation and transfer in agriculture do fit the uniform, simple and reliable conditions of industrial and green revolution agriculture quite well. Research methods are reductionist — that is, instead of dealing with the complexities of a farming system they extract one element from it, often just one crop, and conduct statistically controlled experiments which handle only a few variables. These may be, for example, spacing, time of planting, or fertiliser applications. Diagnosis of problems or opportunities, and design of experiments, are done by scientists. The outcome is a fixed package, like a seed variety combined with cultural practices. The relationship of extension to farmers is then that of teacher, transferring technology which is to be adopted as a whole, while in practice many farmers adapt it to their own circumstances.

But this transfer of technology approach does not work very well with the third agriculture's complex, diverse and risky farming systems. Instead many pioneering workers have now shown that a holistic approach is better, allowing everything in a farming system to be potentially relevant. For this, diagnosis is best done by farmers themselves, with scientists or extensionists in a support role. This is a major reversal. The menu which comes out is not fixed, table d'hôte, but à la carte, not a package of practices but a basket of choices. Farmers can select from a wider range of technology, enhancing their adaptability. The role of outsiders is to learn from and with farmers, and to give them choices, while farmers choose from the basket and conduct their own trials and experiments.

This is a paradigm of reversals. It has been called 'complementary', because the dominant paradigm of normal agricultural research will always be needed. The complementary paradigm does the opposite, or nearly the opposite of what in the past was regarded as normal, and which fitted the centralised, standardised, simple topdown pattern inherent in normal bureaucracy. It allows for, encourages and supports local diversity and autonomy.

These contrasts of paradigm, and how they relate to local trends and needs, show up most clearly in areas of intense pressure of population on resources. Let me take examples from some recent (1988) field visits.

In a Peasant Association area in South Wollo in Ethiopia, collectivised agriculture represents the imposition and imprint of normal bureaucratic standardisation and simplification, with monocropping on the flatter lands and very few trees. In contrast, higher up in the catchment with individual family farming and more undulating topography, one finds a more productive and less risk-prone complexity and diversity. Crops are grown in more complex intercropping patterns and farmers have deliberately created conditions for further complexity, diversity and risk reduction. This is through building stone barriers in gullies to catch silt and make fields. These form protected micro-environments with better soil, water and shelter from the wind and sun, where a range of valuable tree crops can be grown, including coffee, papaya, and chat (a high-priced narcotic) [ERC 1988:37].

In Kisii and Kakamega Districts in Western Kenya, small farmers have intensified and stabilised production in two ways. The first corresponds with simple standardisation in the normal bureaucratic and green revolution mode: growing either tea or sugar on smallholdings. In bio-economic terms these are highly productive, and compared with annual crops are better buffered against the risk of shortfalls of rainfall. Moreover, the income from tea is normally ten or more times the value of food crops such as maize grown on the same land, and the income comes in monthly instalments. The second form of intensification is through diversification. Farmers plant and grow a great variety of species. One family of six, with only half an acre of land, was found with at least 58 different useful species of plant, and 10 sorts of weeds. Some of the useful species had been made available to them through the Kenya Woodfuel Development Programme, indicating how diversity, in this case of perennial multi-purpose trees, can be enhanced through the 'basket of choices' approach.

Reversals in Agricultural Research

For normal bureaucracies to support diversification requires reversals: from centralisation to decentralisation; from standardisation to diversification; and from simplifying to making more complex. None of these comes easily, but four domains show promise.

i. Farmer-first Approaches

As the complexity of farming systems became more evident over the past two decades, one major response was farming systems research. In its fullest development this entailed detailed surveys by multidisciplinary teams, analysis of much resulting data, and the generation from the analysis of recommendations to be fed back and tested on farmers' fields. The contribution of FSR to understanding has been enormous, but it has often remained within the normal framework in which knowledge is obtained for the official system, which then designs innovations to be transferred back to farmers. It has progressed now into fuller reversals, in which farmers or farm families are encouraged and enabled to do their own analysis and identify their own priorities [see e.g. Lightfoot *et al.* 1988, Repulda *et al.* 1987], in which they conduct their own experiments, and in which the objective is to enhance their own experimental and adaptive capacity. Through these forms of decentralisation, demands on scarce staff may be more sparing, and farmers' and farm families' own knowledge of their complex systems is brought to bear. Whatever label is

used for these approaches — farmer-back-to-farmer [Rhoades and Booth 1982], farmer-first-and-last [Chambers and Ghildyal 1985], farmer participatory research [Farrington and Martin 1987], or Approach Development [Scheuermeier 1988] — they share reversals of the normal in analysis, in the identification of priorities, in the location of experiments, and by implication in the roles of scientists and extensionists, who become convenors, catalysts, consultants and colleagues instead of generators and transferers of technology.

ii. Intercropping Research

Simple monocropping experiments have been encouraged and sustained by several factors: their relative simplicity; the ease with which research papers on monocropping can be written; the practice of promotions based on numbers of papers published; the organisation of agricultural research according to single commodities, with a research station for each; and the influence of larger and more prosperous farmers who tend to monocrop. In practice, though, many resource-poor farmers reduce risks, weeds and labour requirements, and raise total yields, by intercropping. While research on intercropping is more complicated and difficult in design and in statistical analysis, here too, there has been change. Methods have been developed [see e.g. Willey 1979, 1985] and intercropping research is now more common, introducing complexity into a domain where professional incentives had discouraged it.

iii. Seed-breeding

More recent have been reversals in seed-breeding. In rice-breeding in India, for example, the normal approach of centralisation screens out diversity and standardises and simplifies in a classical bureaucratic manner. In brief, breeders make crosses which by the seventh and eighth generations produce many, perhaps hundreds, of different lines. From these they select a very few to submit to a central committee which in turn selects those which can go for multi-locational testing. Those lines judged to have performed well in the tests are then certified, named, and released as official varieties. The procedure eliminates much genetic diversity. But at the Faizabad Agricultural University in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, D. M. Maurya has made some of the material which would otherwise be rejected, directly available to farmers whom he visits on his way commuting to and from work. The farmers are usually delighted to try out new lines. The condition is that if other farmers subsequently ask them for seed — an indication by farmers that the seed is valued — Maurya asks for some seed back. The paradigm is different: instead of a package, Maurya offers a widening of choice, making available some of the diversity which would otherwise be lost. This practice 'reverses conventional aspirations to supply a single variety to as wide a "recommendation domain" as possible. The approach also represents a cost-effective use of scientists' time: their role is that of building up a portfolio of varietal material broadly compatible with what farmers are known to prefer under rainfed conditions, matching it up with the characteristics of farmers' varieties, and then allowing farmers to make the selections under their own conditions' [Maurya *et al.* 1988].

iv. Management Information Systems

In the normal, centralised, top-down mode, management information systems serve the management needs of the centre, not the information needs of the periphery. In contrast, farmer-first approaches generate demands from below for data and for genetic material. When a group of farmers in an Ethiopian Peasant Association were asked what trees they would like to see growing in their area, they named mango and lemon, and then said: 'But you must know other trees that would grow here, that we do not know to ask about. Bring them, and let us see whether they are good'. The role requested of the outsider, whether researcher or extension agent, is to search and bring in species and varieties which can be tried out, the approach which Diane Rocheleau has called 'Wait and see, and pick and choose.'

The reversal of information systems indicated here can be illustrated from the Philippines. Farmer-first approaches that generate requests for information, species and varieties to fit local needs. A research agenda geared towards meeting farmers' needs in some areas included a search for alternative live mulch, alternative leguminous trees, and alternative sources of leguminous cover crops [FARMIIS 1987:4]. But an article on 'Research Information Systems for Agriculture and Natural Resources in the Philippines' [Valmayor and Mamon 1987] lists seven management information systems of which six — for research management information; equipment and infrastructure management; manpower management; financial management; publications mailing; and administrative support information — appear designed to serve central management, not farmers' information. The exception is the Research Information Storage and Retrieval System, but the future tense used for its operation, and the statement that financial support was needed to extend it into the regions, suggested that it was not yet able to serve locally generated requests for information. The bias was evident. Management Information Systems were far more geared to serving management, than to meeting the diverse needs and demands of farm families.

On the other hand, some data bases to serve local needs have been developed and used. One example is for multipurpose trees, managed by ICRAF (the International Council for Research on Agroforestry)

which provides a service to those who request information about trees suitable for specific conditions and needs. But the existence of such services is not the same as local-level staff having the knowledge and freedom to make use of them. For that, more comprehensive reversals of the normal will often be needed.

These four illustrations indicate how reversals have developed and some of their forms. Taken together and linked with other changes, they fit together as parts of a complementary paradigm for agricultural research, and by implication for its bureaucracy. With industrial and green revolution agriculture, the approach has been to try to make the environment fit the genotype, through the use of fertilisers, irrigation and so on, reproducing conditions similar to the research station. With the reversals of this complementary paradigm, it is a question of searching for, presenting and trying out genotypes to fit local needs and to enhance diversification, finding genotypes to fit the environment.

Reversals of Normal Bureaucracy

The example of agricultural research and local diversity raises general questions for normal bureaucracy and the role of the state. The case for decentralisation, bottom-up approaches, participation, and learning processes instead of blueprints, has been made many times. Implementation through field bureaucracies has often been difficult. Whatever political or administrative reasons there may be for this, the example of agricultural research suggests three thrusts to consider, each of which also raises a more general question.

The first thrust is to *perceive* diversity. This has been a key preliminary for many of those who have pioneered with farmer-first, farmer-participatory approaches. Much of it comes under the more general rubric of rapid rural appraisal (RRA) [AA 1981; Longhurst 1981; KKU 1987; Conway *et al.* 1987]. Many techniques have been developed and used — farmer groups, analysis by farmers, diagramming with farmers, identifying farmers' own experimental frontiers — all these involving learning from farmers and their families. At a 1988 workshop on participative technology development in sustainable agriculture, a list of over 60 such methods was presented [Jiggins 1988]. Some were similar, but the number shows the scale of activity. The more general question is whether bureaucratic reversals can be supported through learning from rural people, as in agriculture, using methods of RRA.

The second thrust is a reversal of control to *permit* diversity. Centralisation and standardisation can simplify and inhibit local adaptation. In the health field an example is standard drug issues to all health centres, instead of allowing them to order according to local and seasonal needs. In agricultural and forestry, rigid rules can impede diversification. Coffee in Kenya is one case. Government rules prohibit interplanting other crops with coffee. This is a colonial hangover from the days when Africans were not trusted to grow coffee well, and were required to follow the same practices as the large estates, which monocropped. But other countries permit intercropping with coffee, and no research on intercropping with coffee has been carried out in Kenya to test the validity of the rule. Farmers near roads who interplant food crops with coffee are vulnerable to prosecution, but those out of sight are more likely to get away with it. The effect, though, is bad for the poorer who need food supplies and who have difficulty putting land out of production during the years it takes coffee to mature. Permitting intercropping would thus both diversify and benefit the poorer.

A similar example concerns trees. Governments often prohibit the cutting of trees on private land, in the hope of preserving them. This has occurred in increasing numbers of states in India, most recently in Kerala. The effect is to discourage planting and the diversification which goes with it, since farmers are less inclined to plant and care for trees if they cannot use them as they wish.

The more general question is to what extent in other fields also, diversification would be promoted by the removal of official restrictions. One example is regulating the informal sector in towns through controls which inhibit enterprise and discourage the exploitation of new economic riches.

The third thrust is to *promote* diversity, reversing the tendency to standardise. Agriculture may here have an example to set other sectors. To present people with choices is not too difficult to do even within a normal bureaucratic framework, and can even be quite simple. Forest nurseries in Kenya, as in other parts of the world, are now planting a wider variety of species, including indigenous trees, than in the past, and making these available to farmers. In Sri Lanka and elsewhere some 15 years ago, minikits were issued to farmers, giving them a selection of paddy seed varieties and fertilisers to try out. In that case, a standard package itself incorporated choice.

At least as important is the role of searcher. As we have seen for the Philippines, farmers often need options to try to fit into their farming systems, and new varieties and species to try. To reduce risk and enhance adaptability, they need a wider repertoire, a larger menu from which to choose. The role of extensionist and researcher then expands to include searching, finding and making aavailable that wider range of choice.

The more general question for normal bureaucracy is whether it can incorporate and service local needs and

demands through search. Often senior staff will not welcome or support demands from below, but incentive and reward systems might be reoriented to recognise and reward such upward requests. One difficulty would be the extra work involved. The prestige and effectiveness of new information systems could help here. For lower level staff, the change of role from being the presenter of a package which might not fit to being a consultant and seeker of information and technology requested and needed by local farmers and communities should be congenial.

Reversals of the normal bureaucratic tendencies to centralisation, standardisation and simplification do not come easily, but changes in agricultural research are occurring on a sufficient scale to suggest that local diversity may be increasingly accommodated, served and enhanced. There is no one pattern of change. But a final thought is that the successes now being won in agricultural research and extension, with their reversals of learning and role, may set an example and a style which will make similar changes easier for other organisations. If so, then future efforts to decentralise, permit diversity, and to promote diversification should not fare as badly as in the past.

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In Search of Professionalism, Bureaucracy and Sustainable Livelihoods for the 21st Century

Robert Chambers

Overview

This article argues that in the 21st century livelihoods will be needed for vastly more people, many of them in marginal and fragile rural environments. To enable more of these livelihoods to be sustainable requires outsiders to reverse much that is normal in professionalism, bureaucracy, careers, and learning; to recognise that livelihoods are often complex and diverse; to decentralise; to deregulate and free poor people from hassle and rents; to make their rights more secure; to provide better access to services; and through all these to help poor rural people to take the long view. Normal prescriptions are for changes in structures, laws and procedures rather than in behaviour or methods. But recent experience has indicated that when outsiders behave differently and use new participatory methods, poor rural people show an unexpected creativity and capacity to present and analyse information, to diagnose and to plan. They know the complexity and diversity of their conditions and livelihoods, on which they are up-to-date experts. To provide conditions for more sustainable rural livelihoods for the 21st century, one frontier for the 1990s is methodological R & D. This is to find better ways of enabling professionals and officials to change their behaviour and attitudes, and to learn from and to empower rural people.

Sustainable Livelihoods for the 21st Century

The context is stark. Population projections for the 21st century have risen. Over the 37 year period 1988 to 2025, both the populations of low income countries, and those of middle income countries, are projected to rise by 80 per cent (for these and other estimates, see WDR 1990: 228-9 and 338-9). Taking only the low income countries, the increase has been estimated at 2.3 billion, from 2.9 billion to 5.2 billion. In most if not all of these countries, it seems inescapable that rural as well as urban areas will have to support many more people.

Considering sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) alone, population is estimated to treble in the next 40 years. In round figures for the period 1988 to 2025, even if the current urban population of 130 million were to grow fivefold to 650 million by 2025, the rural population would still have to double, from 330 also to 650 million. In SSA, as elsewhere, the larger the number of people who can find their living in rural areas, the less will be the pressure on the towns and cities.

At the same time, in low and middle income countries, the exploitation of rural resources is already often unsustainable, and least sustainable in those regions, countries and zones with the lowest urbanisation, the highest population growth rates, and the most vulnerable rural environments. Any strategy for environment and development for the 21st century which is concerned with people, equity and sustainability has, then, to confront the question of how a vastly larger number of people can gain at least basically decent rural livelihoods in a manner which can be sustained, many of them in environments which are fragile and marginal.

This has two linked dimensions. Some unsustainability results from the greed and shortsight of the rich and powerful, including professionals and bureaucrats. The solution here is a battery of measures and of countervailing forces to change the behaviour of the rich and powerful. Some unsustainability also results from the survival strategies of the poor. The solution here is empowering the poor in a manner which encourages and enables them to take the long view, to enhance and not degrade resources and to resist the rich and powerful. This paper explores some ways in which these conditions can be achieved, including some recent developments in South Asia, and concludes that methodological R & D provides one key to change.

The Normal as Problem

A prudent start is to examine ourselves, as observers and developers of 'them', and some of the normal errors associated with our professionalism, bureaucracy, (successful) careers, and styles of learning. These are usually regarded as part of the solution. The argument here is that they are much of the problem.

Normal professionalism, meaning the concepts, values, methods and behaviour dominant in professions, tends to put things before people, men before women, the rich before the poor, and the urban and industrial before the rural and agricultural. It values and uses measurement more than judgement, and

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methods which are often reductionist, simplifying the view of complex reality.

Bureaucracy as normally found is hierarchical and tends to centralise, standardise and regulate. Field bureaucracies in the South often extract rents from the poor by exploiting rules and regulations, and demanding payments for services rendered or penalties not inflicted. Bureaucrats' time horizons are usually short, bounded by targets for the financial year.

Normal (successful) careers related to rural life often start in the periphery and then move upwards in hierarchies and inwards to larger and larger urban centres. Those who end up in powerful policy positions tend to be ageing men whose direct personal experience of rural conditions is variously non-existent, biased, and out-of-date.

Finally, normal learning is from 'above', from teachers, books, and urban centres of knowledge, and not from 'below', from rural people, let alone in a shared manner with them.

These four forms of normality interlock and reinforce each other. They tend to centralise, standardise, simplify, and regulate, to seek to transfer standard technology from controlled to uncontrolled conditions, to have short time horizons, and to be out-of-date. They fit the much discredited but widely practised blueprint model for human development, planned from the top down.

Most of these points are now accepted among enlightened development academics and practitioners, but some reasons for their misfit with the conditions and needs of poor people and vulnerable environments, and some implications of those reasons, are less fully appreciated.

Complexity and Diversity Underperceived

Complexity and diversity are dimensions of the livelihood strategies of many of the poor. Some do adopt specialised strategies which rely on a single activity or source of support, but most are versatile and opportunist. Different members of households do different things at different times of the year. They cultivate, herd, undertake casual labour, make things to sell, hawk and trade, hunt and gather a multiplicity of common property resources, and migrate for seasonal work. They bond their labour, beg, borrow and sometimes steal. Moreover, it is often by diversifying their livelihoods, especially in slack seasons [Agarwal 1989], that poor people try to do better, reducing risk with fallback activities.

In agriculture, where topography is uneven and rainfall irregular, farming systems are made more stable and sustainable not by standardising through adopting uniform packages of practices generated by normal research, but by diversifying, complicating, and intensifying activities.

Diversity and complication take many forms. Seeds are stored not of one crop variety, but the several; and what is planted depends on how each season unfolds, the form and fertility of each field and part of a field, and the household's members' evolving needs and priorities. In 1991, a rainfed village in South Bihar in India was found to be growing 28 varieties of paddy [R. Jayakaran pers. comm.]. Mixed cropping, and multiple canopies, in their many forms, spread production and reduce risk. A household seeks to rear not one type of animal but a portfolio of different domestic livestock species. As common property resources diminish, with a loss of diversity, so farmers re-establish sources of their products on their own land, as with planting trees for timber, fuelwood, fodder and other needs on private farmland in Kenya [Bradley, Chavangi and Van Gelder 1985] and Nepal [Carter and Gilmour 1989]. Further complications are introduced through adding to internal linkages. Nutrient flows are multiplied to provide redundancy: if one source of fodder fails, others are there as fallback [Chambers 1990b].

Intensification is found in microenvironments. These provide a pertinent illustration for the 21st century. As population to land ratios rise, so farmers intensify their systems. In many ways, depending on local conditions, they variously create, protect and exploit microenvironments. These include strips and pockets of fertility, ponds, hedges, groves, agroforestry in its many forms, flood recession zones, small flood plains, patches of irrigation, home gardens, terraces, valley bottoms, wet and dry watercourses, springs and zones of seepage.

An example in semiarid conditions is deposition fields, found widely in India and Central America [Wilken 1987:70-71] and also Ethiopia [ECRS 1988:36-37]. These are formed of silt trapped by barriers of large stones. Farmers invest their labour in building these up progressively over the years. Deposition fields harvest and concentrate soil, water and nutrients, and are often protected from wind and sun by the gully walls, providing conditions in which higher value crops (such as coffee, chat and papaya in Ethiopia, and rice in India) are grown than in the drier and less fertile conditions of surrounding fields.

An example more common in subhumid conditions is aquaculture, where a fish pond establishes many nutrient linkages with other elements in a farming system, with fish consuming crop residues, animal manure, and leaves and with fish manure in turn contributing to field fertility.

Most deposition fields and fish ponds alike are human made, created partly in response to population pressures. By concentrating resources, stabilising environmental conditions, and multiplying enterprises,

linkages and outputs, they support more substantial and sustainable livelihoods; and they do this not by simplifying and standardising as in industrial and green revolution agriculture, but by complicating and diversifying.

The complexity and diversity of many rural livelihoods and of much resource-poor farming are, however, systemically underperceived and underestimated by outsider professionals. Rural development tourism — the brief rural visit by the urban-based professional — gives a single snapshot view at one point in time (and one time of the day), and is too rushed to see or learn more than the obvious. Survey questionnaires perpetuate reductionist ignorance, with their categories preset and confined to what the compiler knew to ask about, and with their incentives to investigators and respondents to keep answers simple and short so as to finish sooner. Normal professionals focus on large livestock, cash crops, and major food crops to the neglect of multiple sources of subsistence. Many practices of the poor fall outside the normal purview of specialists, for example as Beck [1989] has shown, the share-rearing of livestock and the use of common property resources, both of which are widespread sources of livelihood for the poor across countries, regions and continents. Many of the activities of women are unseen by outsiders who work on rural development, most of whom are men. Microenvironments are often unobserved, either tucked away in valley bottoms, or like homegardens unnoticed because they are small, untidily diverse, and the concern of women [Chambers 1990a].

Finally, there is a normal bureaucratic and professional preference for standard programmes which are the same everywhere. These can be described as 'Model Ts' after Henry Ford's famous remark that people could have their Model T Ford automobile any colour they liked as long as it was black. Model T programmes focus attention on a single externally introduced element in livelihoods, at the cost of recognition of the many others on which people also rely. Subject to so many distortions of view, it is difficult for planners and policymakers to appreciate and support the complexity and diversity of the livelihood strategies of many of the rural poor.

For the Poor to Take the Long View

A common belief is that while professionals take a long-term view of sustainability, poor rural people live 'hand-to-mouth' and take a short-term view. Often, the opposite is true.

Many of those who take a short-term view, unconcerned with sustainability, are powerful outsiders — politicians, contractors and businessmen, bureaucrats, and economists. Politicians in democracies focus their foresight as far as the next election. Contractors and businessmen mine minerals, quarry rocks, cut out timber concessions, and overgraze pasture, all for immediate profit. Bureaucrats bound by targets for the financial year or the project period, and subject to transfers at short notice, focus on a future of months rather than years, still less decades. For their part, economists, despite the revolution of environmental economics, still discount the future as they practice conventional cost-benefit analysis. Future historians of human folly may well look back with wonder at the resilient inertia of discounting in the late 20th century. For in an age when the environment and sustainability are part of the regular rhetoric, discounting undervalues the future, contradicting common sense and common responsibility for a sustainable development for future generations. So it is outsiders — their politics, their profits and their sometimes purblind professionalism — who, once again, are much of the problem.

In contrast, and contrary to common professional prejudice, poor rural people often want to take the long view. When desperate, they do indeed have to live 'hand-to-mouth'. But to take a long-term view, and to invest for sustainable livelihoods, they need secure rights to resources, and secure access to services.

When poor people have secure rights to resources, they often behave in ways which manifest a long view: they create, protect and develop microenvironments, like terraces and structures to capture and concentrate soil, water and nutrients; they plant and protect trees which they will never live to harvest. In adversity it is with formidable tenacity that they cling onto their land and other productive assets [Corbett 1988; Agarwal 1989:51]. Where conditions permit, the means for sustainable livelihoods are evidently a priority for them. And where communities have secure control of common resources, they often manage them responsibly and equitably. It is rural people, again, who are much of the solution.

In practice, incentives to take the long view are diminished by restrictions, hassle and consequent insecurity. Hassling the poor and extracting rents are widespread. An analysis [Davies, David and Leach 1991:34-5] of six environmental scenarios posited restricted access, and fines for malpractice, as almost universal aspects of policy options which would adversely affect food security. Draconian bureaucratic rules to protect the environment regularly ruin it and penalise the poor by making their rights insecure, by inhibiting investment, and by inducing short-term exploitation as people take what they can while they can.

Access to services, such as health and credit, are other dimensions of sustainable livelihoods: health to maintain the ability to work, and credit for investment or to tide over bad times. Here rents and rudeness impede access. One of the findings of the United

Nations University programme on Rapid Assessment Procedures for primary health care in some 18 countries was that 'rudeness on the part of government health services staff was a deterrent to the use of services in most of the communities studied' [Scrimshaw and Hurtado 1987:2]. Obtaining services which are meant to be free or easily available regularly requires payment of rents — whether the services are medical, legal, credit, permits, licences, passes or the like. Access for the poor is all too often restricted, and insecure, risky, and costly in time and cash.

Reversals as Solutions

The question is how to diminish and overcome these misfits between what normal professionals and bureaucrats perceive and do, and what poor rural people need for sustainable livelihoods: between top down, standardised, simplified, regulated, rigid and short-term blueprinting, and local-level diversified, complicating, unregulated, flexible, and long-term processes.

Solutions can be sought through reversals, through turning the normal on its head. Professionally, this means putting people before things, the poor before the rich, and women and children before men and adults, with the girl child first of all. It means permitting and promoting the complexity and diversity that poor people often want, presenting them with a basket of choices rather than a package of practices. Bureaucratically, it means decentralising power, destandardising, and removing restrictions. In careers, it means not just moving with promotions inwards to larger urban centres, but also moving with sabbaticals outwards to revisit and reappraise rapidly changing rural realities. In learning, it means gaining insight less from 'our' often out-of-date knowledge in books and lectures, and more from 'their' knowledge of their livelihoods and conditions which is always up-to-date; less from rural development tourism, and more from relaxed and participatory appraisal; and less from questionnaire surveys, measurement and statistics, and more from participatory learning methods, ranking and scoring. In behaviour, it means the most important reversal of all, not standing, lecturing and motivating, but sitting, listening and learning. And with all these reversals, the argument is not for an absolute or 'slot-rattling' change, from one extreme to another; rather it is that only with a big shift of weight can an optimal balance be achieved.

Such reversals may appear the fantasy wish list of an unreconstructed idealist. In practice, however, many changes in the direction of these reversals have occurred and are gaining momentum. In India, for example, decentralisation, destandardisation, and deregulation have been taking place across a range of departmental activities. In canal irrigation, standard programmes for all projects have gradually been supplemented by individual operational plans for each system. In social forestry, many more species are now available in forest nurseries, providing a choice to farmers, than five years ago, and there are moves to reduce restrictions on harvesting trees on private land. In watershed development, universal solutions through the same technology everywhere have been widely questioned; and in agricultural research, the concept of the basket of choices rather than the package of practices for rainfed farmers is gaining ground.

With any shift of balance between paradigms, as with such reversals, there are several dimensions and several levels for action and pressure. The normal reflexes of reformers are activist, organisational, legal and procedural: activist reformers seek to mobilise pressure groups, in this case rural groups and communities, to protect and demand their rights to resources and to access to services; organisational reformers seek to create new organisations or departments, or to change their internal shape; legal reformers seek to change the law, as with land reforms; and procedural reformers seek to change the way things are done within organisations. All these are valid, useful and needed.

But all these neglect two aspects: the knowledge, creativity and competence of rural people in appraisal and analysis, and in gaining and sustaining their livelihoods; and the primacy of outsiders' behaviour and attitudes in enabling that creativity and competence to be expressed.

The Knowledge, Creativity and Competence of Rural People

The potential for reversals is indicated by experiences in SSA and most recently in South Asia (India and Nepal) with the evolution of rapid rural appraisal (RRA) [KKU 1987] and agroecosystem analysis [Conway 1985] into relaxed and participatory rural appraisal (PRA). This has shown that rural people have capabilities which few outsiders, apart from a handful of social anthropologists, can have suspected [IIED 1988-; PRA/PALM 1990-]. These are capabilities for mapping and modelling [Mascarenhas and Kumar 1991], transects and observation, ranking, scoring, quantifying, seasonal analysis, casual and linkage diagramming [Lightfoot 1990], interviewing others, analysis, and planning. A mass of experience has been gained, but developments have been so rapid that only a small fraction has been reported in an accessible form. One major finding has been that participatory appraisal methods in a sharing mode present more complex and diverse information and insight than do traditional 'extractive' methods of investigation, and do so in much less time.

For the expression of people's knowledge and creativity in these ways, conditions have to be favourable. In the past, this has been rare. Four conditions are predisposing, if not essential: rapport where the outsider shows humility, respect and interest in learning from rural people; restraint in not interrupting or over-interviewing; the use of participatory methods; and appropriate often local materials for mapping, modelling, ranking, scoring, diagramming and analysis.

When these conditions have been achieved, people have shown themselves capable of presenting, checking, analysing and enhancing their knowledge in ways which have exceeded expectations and sometimes astonished. Rural people often have extensive and detailed knowledge. In contrast with the reductionism of some standard science, they can show a mastery of complex detail and an ability to identify multiple criteria and then to score, rank and weigh them. The puzzle is how we and they have failed to realise and express all this earlier. Part of the explanation may lie in the arcane, esoteric and inbred communications of some anthropologists, who have had hints of this and known parts of it but not realised or shared its significance and potential. In part, too, explanations can be sought in outsiders' normal behaviour which is lecturing and not listening, confident in the superiority of their knowledge and technologies for transfer. Outsiders' attitudes and behaviour have induced rural people to present themselves deferentially as ignorant and incapable. Their supposed ignorance and incapability have then been as artifact of our self-validating attitudes and behaviour.

The Primacy of Personal Behaviour

Regarded historically, the neglect of personal attitudes and behaviour has been a stunning oversight in rural development practice. Training, attitudinal change, skill acquisition, 'motivation' — all these have been for 'them', for rural people, more than for 'us', the professional elites. Yet since we are so often the dominant actors, our attitudes and behaviour are primary: what we do largely determines what a new organisational structure achieves, whether and how laws are enforced, whether and how procedures are implemented, and now above all, how fully and freely poor people participate in appraisal, analysis and action. This being so, it is curious that, outside of education, psychologists are still such a rare profession in development; and that only occasionally does professional training confront questions of personal perceptions, orientation and behaviour. Such past neglect makes methods and behaviour even stronger points of entry for change.

One quick approach is to confront professionals' attitudes and behaviour head-on through role plays, videos, games and mutual observation and checking. Another is to teach them methods which give experiences which in turn change their perceptions and values. Whatever combination is followed, practical approaches and methods include: correcting behaviour such as lecturing to villagers e.g. by tapping outsiders' shoulders when they err [Anil C. Shah pers. comm.]; outsiders undertaking village tasks as students, with villagers as teachers; matrix ranking and scoring in which the procedure forces the outsider to elicit the criteria and judgements of the villager; and temporary total immersion in village conditions, as stressed in training in India pioneered by NGOs such as MYRADA, Action Aid, and others.

Powerful and popular as PRA methods are, they have spread spontaneously, and in India and Nepal have led to many demands from government organisations for training. Obvious dangers loom — of over-rapid adoption, of the label spreading without the essence, of discrediting and disillusion through misuse. One hope is that critical self-awareness, embracing error, and the one sentence manual of Nordstrom 'Use your own best judgement at all times' [Peters 1987:378], will build quality assurance and improvement into the very genes of PRA. It is too early to know how well this will work, or what is the full potential of these approaches and methods, but much experience has been positive. And beyond applications of PRA itself, the spin-offs of attitude and behavioural change should strengthen other reforms, whether structural, legal or procedural.

R & D for a Methodological Revolution

In the search for professionalism, bureaucracy, and sustainable livelihoods for the 21st century, the needed revolution is, then, more 'ours' than 'theirs'. It entails reversals in professionalism, bureaucracy, careers and learning. It fits and supports a paradigm for future society and development which values the three Ds — decentralisation, diversity, and democracy — a pattern discussed and sought increasingly in the North as well as in the South. Potential paths towards such conditions are many. In rural development new ones are being opened up. To explore them rapidly requires new approaches and methods and therefore R & D which is consciously methodological.

Surprisingly, though, methodological R & D has been a Cinderella in the professionalism of rural development. To be sure, the better writing on participation has been concerned with approach and methods [e.g. Korten 1981]; and there have been sustained sequences of innovation, such as the evolution of agroecosystem analysis at the University of Chiang Mai in Thailand and elsewhere [Gypmantasimi et al 1980; Conway 1985], and the pioneering and institutionalisation of RRA at the University of Khon Kaen, also in Thailand [KKU

1987]. But generally, research has been thought of as finding out about things (a university activity), development as doing (a government and NGO field agency activity), and R & D as developing physical or biological technology (a laboratory, workshop or research station activity) rather than developing the software technology of methods for personal face-to-face interactions between outsiders and rural people.

The pioneers who have recently stepped into this gap and begun to overcome this neglect have been NGOs. Given the stifling intellectual conservatism in many universities, and the stolid procedural conservatism in many field bureaucracies, the principal centres of innovation may well remain for the time being in the NGO sector. An example is the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) which has played a major part in developing and legitimating agroecosystem analysis, RRA and PRA. The IIED is an institution in the North, but increasingly, as in India, it will be Southern NGOs that take the lead. The model of R & D that serves best may well itself be decentralised, diverse and democratic, encouraging many flowers to bloom. There will then be key roles in assessing, recording and communicating experience, in exchanges of persons between NGOs, and in training. While Northern NGOs will have a support role, the biggest opportunity and challenge will be changes in the South, and especially in government field bureaucracies such as agriculture, forestry, and health.

For sustainable rural livelihoods in the 21st century, such participatory approaches and methods, whatever their labels, seem essential. Faced with the enormity of the human and environmental challenge, vision is vital. PRA, it has to be said again and again, is no panacea, and is only one label for one part of a pervasive tide of change. But, however modestly, it does open up one path to a better life for poor rural people, by encouraging them to express their knowledge and creativity and to conduct their own analysis; by giving them the ownership of more of the plans and action; by enhancing their confidence and competence; and through all these contributing to sustainable livelihoods by adding to local complexity, diversity, and intensification.

For enabling future sustainable livelihoods, though, ways of changing the attitudes and behaviour of professionals and bureaucrats remain the crux. At a time of questioning professional values, and of accelerating personal and professional change, methodological R & D still attracts only a minuscule proportion of development professionals; but that itself may change, as more and more realise the potential and excitement of the field. Indeed, change may soon be so fast that methodologically, the 1990s will be a seminal period which sets patterns for much of the 21st century. Robert Rhoades [1990] has written about the coming revolution in rural development research. But what is needed and may be coming is more than that: a revolution not just in research, but in ways of changing professionals' personal values and behaviour.

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POWER, POVERTY, AND KNOWLEDGE – REFLECTING ON 50 YEARS OF LEARNING WITH ROBERT CHAMBERS

Issue Editors **Stephen Thompson and Mariah Cannon**

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THE SELF-DECEIVING STATE

Robert Chambers

'Oh what a goodly outside falsehood hath' Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

THE CONTEXT

Accelerating Change

In all history there has never been a period as dramatic for the scale and scope of unexpected changes in the human condition as the late 1980s and early 1990s. Among the less obvious of these changes have been those in the realities of rural life and conditions in the South. But changes there also appear to be accelerating. The revolution in communications is increasingly touching rural people: in some parts of the South, not just radios, but television and videos are to be found in villages. In some economies, urban-style consumer goods are more and more demanded and available. In others, war, civil disorder, drought and famine have driven people dramatically down into destitution. Almost everywhere, in different ways, and in different directions, change — often rapid, often unpredictable — seems increasingly the norm.

At the same time, though slower, less striking and less obvious, there have been steady shifts of view of the ends and means of development and of the role of the State. Three clusters of view can be distinguished (Chambers 1991): neo-Fabian, neo-Liberal, and third, an ideology of reversals of the normal. The neo-Fabian ideology, which gave the State a major direct role in development, is a survival from the 1970s and earlier; the neo-Liberal is a creature of the 1980s; and the third ideology has been evolving and coalescing over a long period, but gaining support and coherence in the 1980s. The normative thrusts and themes of this third ideology or paradigm include:

- putting people before things, and poor people first;
- development through learning process rather than blueprint;
- decentralization, democracy, and diversity (to value local knowledge, participation and small group and community action);
- open and effective communications and access.

What is especially new is the value placed on adaptive and iterative rather than linear processes, on learning and changing rather than implementing a set plan, on differentness, on empowering local groups, and on demand from below.

Normal Professionalism and Bureaucracy

While these ideas gain currency especially among intellectuals and non-government organizations (NGOs), two inert masses maintain the status quo, and insulate decision-making elites from the changing rural realities.

The first is normal professionalism — the ideas, thinking, methods and behaviour dominant in professions. Normal professionalism reproduces itself through hierarchical learning, university curricula and examinations, textbooks written by middle-aged academics, mostly men, professional societies, journal editors, and the traditions and rewards of government departments into which graduates pass after university and college. It values things more than people, numbers more than judgements, high technology more than low, and whatever is urban, industrial, clean and hard more than whatever is rural, agricultural, dirty and soft.

The second is normal bureaucracy, meaning the characteristics of large, especially government, organizations. Normal bureaucracy reproduces itself in the Weberian idiom as professionals climb the ladders of hierarchy by conforming to convention, avoiding error and abjuring innovation. Normal bureaucracy values central authority, control, standardization, regularity, conformity, and quantitative targets.

Normal professionalism and normal bureaucracy are antithetical to the new views of development. In the State, they combine to resist the new paradigm. Among rural development professionals, though, some changes are slowly occurring. These are reflected in the burgeoning literature on local knowledge (also described as indigenous technical knowledge, indigenous agricultural knowledge, rural people's knowledge . . .), on development alternatives, on the NGO sector, on gender, on the environment, and on people's participation.

In contrast, normal government development bureaucracy appears resiliently static, robustly buffered against change. Yet major changes are implied by and required for the new approaches to development. The challenge with such bureaucracy is to find points of

leverage for change. The search for means of bureaucratic reorientation is not a new enterprise (see e.g. Korten and Alfonso 1981). But two aspects of bureaucracy have been relatively neglected: standardization, and false feedback. In search of explanation and prescription, this paper analyses these in some of their manifestations, drawing examples from Indian field bureaucracy.

Administrative Stasis

Indian field bureaucracy does change in the programmes which it carries out. The steady flow of books by retired administrators about rural development in India during their lifetimes makes this clear. In devising and promulgating programmes there has been imagination and inventiveness. Special programme has followed special programme — for different types of disadvantaged district, for different types of disadvantaged person, for the development of water and wastelands, for social forestry, seasonal employment, credit, productive assets for the poor, midday meals for school children, housing for vulnerable groups, adult literacy, and much else.

At the same time Indian field bureaucracy changes little in its structure and norms. These reproduce themselves. Innovations are absorbed and transformed with reversion to type. The same District Administration headed by a Collector or Magistrate, and with a hierarchy of Block Development Officers and lower staff, implements many of the programmes. Planning is top-down. Ideas are conceived in Delhi or in the State capitals and promulgated as instructions with funds to be disbursed and targets to be achieved. Districts and Blocks are told what to do. Whatever the programme, the style is the same, or becomes the same. One programme, DWCRA, for women's employment, was initiated in the early 1980s with a planning workshop in Delhi. It was agreed unanimously that no targets should be set; but within a year targets were there. It is as though there is a top-down magnetic field in which individual magnets cannot be turned around. The central conception is standardized and transmitted through the field for peripheral implementation, with targets set at each level. What is to be done can change; but how it is to be done is determined by a dutiful homeostasis.

The stable continuity of Indian administration, can be partly understood in terms of three pervasive aspects: culture, conservatism and corruption. Cultural dimensions appear significant. Hierarchy is a deep structure in Indian culture, thought and behaviour. Linked with this, the Hindu concept of dharma, or 'duty', is a strong force. Stanley Heginbotham's observations 15 years ago still apply, notably at the lower levels of administration:

> ... the dharmic tradition provides its adherents with a set of norms relating to work that differ in many important ways from the norms of a growth-and change-oriented society. It does not prepare an individual for situations of work overload. The concept of setting priorities is a foreign one, as is the notion of calculating costs and benefits in order to determine optimal work strategies. One does not strive to achieve results, nor does one feel concern if the performance of one's duty produces what appear to be undesired consequences. One keeps to established procedures and standards — neither seeking innovations nor quality of work that exceeds the traditional system-maintaining norms.
>
> (Heginbotham 1975: 34)

Hierarchy and the dharmic tradition reinforce the second aspect, the conservatism found at the lower levels of most bureaucracies. A preference is shown for behaviour which is correct and approved. Rules and procedures may be bent or used in ways not intended, but the outward form is respected, giving a sort of liturgical pleasure to those who master its sequences and observances, even when it is exploited for private rents. Procedures tend to be additive: new ones are superimposed upon old. Rules and lists tend to be for ever, reproduced more or less faithfully, unless there is strong reason to change them; and when there is reason to change, adding and patching are preferred to abolition or restructuring.

The third factor is corruption. This includes informal fees, division of spoils, and the transfer trade. Informal fees for services rendered vary by region but are sometimes almost formal — with a well known and well understood fee for obtaining a form, registering a land title, and so on. Division of spoils from kickbacks reportedly follows well established 'bureaucratic' norms, with set percentages from contracts and other illicit monies which are distributed as rents to different officers, especially at the lower levels. At higher levels, as analysed by Wade (1984) and corroborated by articles in the press, the transfer trade is widespread. Officials buy posts from the politicians who control them. Partly in consequence, the frequency of transfer from post to post 'is typically so high as to make difficult any engagement between the official and his particular responsibilities' (*ibid*). There are officers who courageously stand out against this system. But generally, in these circumstances, there is little incentive or opportunity for an official to institute reforms. Indeed, where they do so, a penal posting can be the prompt reward: Arun Bhatia, the Collector of Dhule District in Maharashtra who exposed corruption in the Employment Guarantee Scheme was quickly given the opportunity to exercise his talents as officer in charge of the Maharashtra Government's filing system. The transfer trade is a slipping clutch in development, oiled by money and preventing engagement and effective drive.

The effects are conservative. Lower-level staff have a strong financial stake in the status quo. An analysis of who would gain and who lose from reforms in groundwater exploitation and in forestry has suggested that almost any reform would reduce their incomes (Chambers, Saxena and Shah 1989: 232). For their part, middle-level and senior officers involved in the transfer trade need to recover the outlays and redeem the commitments made to obtain their posts, and to make a profit. If they threaten vested interests, or stay outside the system, they are vulnerable to transfer to penal postings or backwaters. The incentives and disincentives of the system make it a model of sustainability.

Fordism: the 'Model T' Mode

Culture, conservatism and corruption reinforce the top-down tendencies found also in other field bureaucracies. Hierarchical culture resonates with normal bureaucratic culture. Conservatism maintains central authority. Corruption presents incentives for rules which inconvenience the public and create leverage for rent-seeking officials. There are then cultural, procedural and personal reasons for centralized insensitivity.

This permits another phenomenon, the promotion of standardized development packages. This has been described as 'Fordist'. The term 'Fordist' refers to mass batch production as an industrial process associated with Henry Ford the First, and epitomized in his supposed remark that Americans could have their Model T Ford any colour they liked as long as it was black. Bureaucratic, top-down development is similarly standardized and driven by supply. A Fordist or 'Model T' approach has been common in Indian rural development: in the early green revolution in Northwest India you could, as it were, plant any wheat you liked as long as it was the new HYV Sonora; in social forestry, at one time, you could plant any tree you liked as long as it was eucalyptus; in parts of the Gangetic plains you could have any public tubewell you liked as long as it was a World Bank tubewell.

To understand this 'Model T' phenomenon better, let us examine four other examples of Indian rural development programmes: the Training and Visit (T and V) system of agricultural extension; the **warabandi** system of water distribution on canal irrigation; watershed development; and the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP).

First, the Training and Visit system represented an attempt at bold and radical change. Earlier, agricultural extension was undertaken by Village Level Workers (VLWs) responsible not only to the Department or Ministry of Agriculture, but also to other departments. VLWs were often expected to implement an impossible number and variety of programmes. They were overwhelmed and buried under geological layers of instructions from different masters. Reporting requirements alone took much of their time. T and V was a management system (Benor and Harrison 1977; Benor et al 1984) which sought to make them responsible only for agriculture and only to one department, to programme their work so that their supervisors would know each day where they were and what they were doing, and to institute regular meetings and training. They were to propagate and popularize appropriate packages of practices through contact farmers, who would be in touch with other non-contact farmers.

T and V was introduced in most Indian states. Much evidence suggested that the reality was far from the theory (see e.g. Moore 1984, 1986; Howell 1988). Common weaknesses were that extension staff in practice often continued to have many responsibilities; that good extension recommendations were often not available from research; and that standard packages were not sensible for the diverse and difficult conditions of much Indian farming. By the late 1980s promotion had given way to post-mortem as the dominant style of discussions of T and V, which was more and more spoken of in the past tense.

The second example is the **warabandi** system of canal irrigation water distribution. This entails timed turns for farmers to take water (for a fuller account see Chambers 1988a: 92-99). **Warabandi** is successfully practised in Northwest India where four conditions are met: water is scarce and rainfall low; landholdings are consolidated with clear ownership; channels lead to individual fields; and a constant flow can physically be assured through the outlet which supplies a group of farmers. In these conditions, farmers will accept timed turns proportional to their land, and will irrigate at night. These conditions are, however, rare in India outside the Northwest. But this did not deter the Seventh Five Year Plan from setting a target of 8 million hectares to be brought under new warabandi during the plan period (GOI 1985: 96).

Attempts were dutifully made to introduce the **warabandi** blueprint rapidly into widely differing environments. But since the necessary preconditions rarely existed, the outcome was almost universal failure. Boards giving names and times for taking water were erected on canals; but they were a facade. Almost everywhere, farmers ignored them. They can be found standing there still, relics for future bureaucratic archeologists, with rust and fading paint giving the lie to official fantasy.

Watershed management provides a third case of top-down standardization. Mounting concerns about deforestation, erosion, siltation, the drying up of springs, and other forms of environmental degradation led in the 1980s to a strong drive for watershed development and management. In at least 40 pilot watersheds, treatments were undertaken, leading to scaling up and a momentum for much larger programmes, some with World Bank support. In the scaled up programmes, if not in the pilot projects, treatments were standardized. Professionally, the approach was that of engineers. Works were of set designs, and often constructed in the field without regard for local topography, let alone farmers' knowledge, technology or wishes. Physical and disbursement targets were set, and despite a rhetoric of participation, implementation was top-down.

An example is the Maheshwaram watershed near Hyderabad. There the uniform treatments changed over the years, but not the style. Contour earth bunds were standard at first, but then varied and replaced by vegetative bunds of khus grass (**Vetiveria zizanioides**), a technology promoted with enthusiastic World Bank support over large and diverse areas of India, and indeed of the world. A special study of the Maheshwaram programme (Sitapathi Rao et al 1989) found many shortcomings, and stated that:

> . . . what is being done as part of soil and water conservation activity . . . appears to be execution of these measures as per a set pattern, to achieve the target coverage. The anxiety of the field staff could be seen in their efforts to achieve the targets, as this is the only point of discussion in the monthly and quarterly review. The scope for any initiative at the field level to observe and modify the activities is very much restricted because of the regimented approach.
>
> (*ibid*: 59)

The study also found lack of consultation and participation, ploughing in of bunds by dissatisfied farmers who never wanted them in the first place, erosion actually resulting from anti-erosion bunds, and cause for doubt about the universal efficacy of khus grass. Nevertheless, the Government proceeded with plans for massive expansion of watershed programmes during the following (Eighth) Plan period.

The fourth example is the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP). This vast programme seeks through subsidized credit to provide families who are below the poverty line with income-earning assets which will enable them to move above the poverty line. Each administrative Block has had an annual target of 600 households to receive loans and assets. This target presents a considerable administrative strain. Lists are meant to be drawn up of households below the poverty line, and enterprises identified for them to undertake. These, one might expect, would have to be quite varied in any environment, in order to exploit different economic niches. But in practice, the programme has tended to standardize, which makes it less demanding administratively and easier to routinize corruption. In consequence, certain enterprises have been over-subscribed. Milch buffaloes have been the most common, although in several respects (lumpiness, risk, fodder requirements, dry periods with no income) they are unsuitable for very poor people. In a village of 143 households in Uttar Pradesh, the pattern was different: of 26 IRDP loans, 12 were issued for 'shop-keeping', and another eight were issued by the same bank for the same purpose over the same period. Only four of the IRDP recipients had a 'shop' of any sort, and there was no scope for 20 shops in such a small village (pers comm Jean Dreze).

Detailed village-level studies in a social anthropological mode (summarized in Dreze 1990) have shown the IRDP to have been, in most parts of India (the exception being West Bengal), an unusually bad programme. Corruption has been almost universal; the beneficiaries have often been the better off; and poor people have quite often become poorer as a result of loans and loss of assets or failure of enterprises. Yet the IDRP remains the major thrust of the Government's anti-poverty programme.

In these four domains — agricultural extension, the distribution of canal irrigation water, watershed development, and the IRDP — the analogy between 'Model T' batch production and rural development packages holds quite well on the supply side, of what the factory or the bureaucracy provide. But the analogy breaks down on the side of the customer, client or beneficiary. To survive, a factory must produce what people will buy: the market is the discipline. There is no comparable discipline with the State. When rural programmes do not fit what people need and want, it might be thought that those responsible for planning would learn and change. But this has happened only slowly. In the four cases I have discussed standardized rules of behaviour standard outputs continued to be the norm even when they worked badly or did not work at all. When there was feedback and change did occur, as with watershed programmes, the tendency was to switch from one standard prescription to another, rather than to add to the options. In psychologists' jargon, this is 'slot-rattling', keeping the same slots but putting different items in them, rather than changing the slots themselves. So some rural development remains stuck in the Fordist era of mass production.

There is then a question to be answered. When field level realities suggest widespread misfit and failure, how is it that 'Model T' programmes continue to be planned and implemented? There is something to explain.

PSYCHOSIS: THE SELF-DECEIVING STATE

By anthropomorphic analogy, part of the explanation can be sought in how the State perceives reality. Human psychosis can be defined as 'any form of severe mental disorder in which the individual's contact with reality becomes highly distorted'. In this sense, in the illustrations presented above the State can be described as psychotic: its contact with reality is distorted; it does not respond to the misfit between intention and effect.

The thesis of this article is that much of the explanation is to be found in false positive feedback, in misperceptions and misinformation. There are dangers here of exaggeration. In India, the Programme Evaluation Organization of the Planning Commission has a good track record with its investigations and reporting which some Northern countries could do well to emulate. The National Sample Survey has a well deserved international reputation for the quality of its work. But most of the time, for most field organizations and programmes, misinformation cloaks the truth: the misfit of 'Model T' programmes is not seen. The Emperor, though naked, is reported by sources close to him to have clothes.

How does this come about?

False Positive Feedback

False positive feedback is mediated in five main ways. These are misreporting; selected perception; methods which mislead; diplomatic prudence; and defences against dissonance.

1 Misreporting

Perhaps the most pervasive source of misleading positive feedback is misreporting. This is a syndrome of interactions between:

- time-bound target-setting imposed top-down;
- performance judged on the reported achievement of targets;
- a punitive style of management;
- an overload of reporting (making exact reporting impossible anyway);
- corruption (so that there are facts to conceal or figures to change);
- tacit connivance between levels in hierarchies;
- knowledge that the 'Model T' does not fit or does not work (leading to demoralization).

When these combine, as they often do, targets tend to be reported as achieved when they have not been, or at least performance is exaggerated. The remarks of a District Agricultural Officer to his subordinates in the early 1970s reflect conditions which still persist: 'We have achieved all our targets. Do you understand? Make the necessary arrangements in your blocks'. In these circumstances, the achievement of targets becomes 'a largely book-keeping affair' (Mook 1974: 143).

When, in this style of management, targets are raised annually, misreporting builds up misinformation cumulatively. This occurred in India with annually raised targets for areas under High-Yielding Varieties of rice. For 1972/3, officially reported figures for the area under paddy HYVs in two **taluks** (administrative areas) in North Arcot District in Tamil Nadu were 39 and 48 per cent respectively, but a survey in 12 representative villages in the two areas gave a figure of only 13 per cent (Chambers and Wickremanayake 1977). In one of the villages, the survey showed less than 50 per cent adoption, but the reports of the hapless Village Level Worker had risen to 95 per cent, leaving him nowhere to go, and a problem with how to conceal the truth from visiting senior officers. A growing divergence between report and reality stresses the reporter, who is then driven to make up the appearances of reality in the cosmetic as well as numerical sense.

Especially where corruption is involved, misreporting takes the form of lies. Subsidies play a part here too. In practice subsidies support corruption, providing a surplus which can be extracted as rents. Subsidized inputs (as in some agricultural extension) or assets (as in the IRDP) are also patronage for staff who can share them with some of those for whom they were not intended. Reporting cannot, however, reveal this. It has to be falsified to conceal it. So when corruption is endemic, so is false reporting. Work is reported done which has not been done, and workers paid who have not been paid. Costs are inflated. In one case in 1989 this was by a factor of four: a Forest Department was accounting a cost of Rs40 per running metre of protective stone walling, when an NGO working on the ground found the cost to be only Rs10. Or again, administrators receive figures which they know are already false, and are then ordered by politicians to falsify them further. In one technical department, the annual meeting of some 500 senior staff is said to have been confronted by their Chief Statistical Officer who asked: 'Why do you all lie?' There was no reply. The question was repeated. There was still no reply.

2 Selected perception

A second origin of misleading positive feedback is special and unrepresentative sources of information. Two phenomena interlink here: islands of salvation; and rural development tourism.

Islands of salvation are villages, areas or projects which have received special treatment. To an astonishing degree, a single village or project can be quoted and requoted back and forth at conferences and in papers without any analysis of its atypicality. One village, Ralegaon Shindi, in Maharashtra, has been repeatedly cited as a model for sustainable environmental management, although accounts agree that it has most exceptional and unusual leadership; and it would seem that it has never been replicated. One canal irrigation cooperative, the Mohini Water Cooperative Society, the recipient of extraordinarily privileged treatment from Government, has been the source of a myth accepted both by the Planning Commission in India (GOI 1985: II: 82) and by authorities outside India. This is that, to quote one, 'In Gujarat State in India, the irrigation agency sells water volumetrically in bulk to cooperatives, which distribute it and collect fees from their members' (Repetto 1986: 33); in fact, Mohini was probably almost or entirely alone in this respect, and the myth of water cooperatives in Gujarat had a capacity to spread not shared by the institution itself (Chambers 1988: 59-62). Or take T and V. When T and V was pioneered in India in the Chambal Command Area, it achieved 'apparently astonishing success', but this could be attributed to the 'pilot project effect' — because the World Bank was intensively involved, staff were therefore motivated, and irrigation and input supplies arrived on time (Moore 1984: 306-7). Specially nurtured and protected, islands of salvation like these systematically mislead.

Rural development tourism — the brief rural visit by the urban-based senior officer — reinforces the island of salvation effect, being often directed to special places and people. Visits by senior officers are usually planned and orchestrated by local-level staff to ensure carefully selected perception. Nationally renowned islands of salvation are favourites for visits by VVIPs. At a more humble level, Block development staff often have a special village, and special 'tame' people in that village, to solve the problem of how to mislead visitors. Rural development tourism has other built-in biases against perception of poverty and meeting poor people (Chambers 1983: 10-25). In agricultural extension, farmers are rehearsed in the answers they are to give; and the resource-rich farmer (known variously as a master, model, demonstration, progressive, or contact, farmer) who is visited can show the package of practices in the field before presenting the visitor's book to be signed. In canal irrigation, a **warabandi** committee is mustered, though it only exists when visitors come. In watershed development, the area visited in the watershed follows the road along the top of a ridge where erosion created by bad conservation works are not to be seen. Experienced staff package their tours for visitors, and in one case had a 'two hour treatment', and a 'four hour treatment'. In the IRDP, the same poor person with the milch buffalo is shown off to a succession of visitors to the village, and has been carefully coached and supported by staff to ensure an impression of dutiful success. Only the best is shown and seen. Worse, the more senior and influential the visitor, the more elaborate the preparations, and the more biased the impressions. The glowing words of the VIP in the visitor's book then reflect not the wider reality, but the skill and care with which the visit was managed.

3 Methods which mislead

A third source of positive bias can be found in the methods used for monitoring, evaluation, research and other investigation. Of these, the most common is the questionnaire survey.

Questionnaire surveys are vulnerable to a host of distortions, and especially to overfavourable impressions of the achievements of government programmes. Three examples — from agricultural extension, watershed development, and the IRDP — can serve as illustrations.

For agricultural extension, one survey conducted in Hambantota District, Sri Lanka, found that 62 per cent of farmers said they had been visited by extension workers in a single season, while a more careful survey found only 16 per cent and that over two seasons (Chambers and Wickremanayake 1977: 158-9). The first figure was absurd, and the second still most improbably high.

For watershed development, a questionnaire survey reported that only one farmer out of 272 (or 0.4 per cent of farmers) interviewed was cross ploughing (a practice frowned on by agricultural extension) while questions posed after group discussions yielded 28 per cent (a figure suggested by field observation to be closer to reality) (pers. comm. C. Sitapathi Rao).

For the IRDP, Dreze's (1990) persuasive analysis has shown that a greatly inflated impression of success was given by the methods used in evaluations. Among these, one was a question to beneficiaries (who were all meant to be initially below the poverty line, but who often were not) as to whether they had been below the poverty line three years earlier when they joined the programme. Not surprisingly, positive responses were high, over 85 per cent, a figure suggested by other evidence to be far wide of the mark.

In these three examples, there was overfavourable distortion of the reality. The strongest explanations are that informants knew what the 'right' answer was, and gave it, for reasons of prudence or deference; and that enumerators knew what responses were hoped for, and recorded them. When such distortions operate, positive responses to more general questions about the value of a programme have little credibility.

When such biases can occur, monitoring, evaluation and research data from questionnaire surveys about government programmes are open to challenge. One can ask, for example, what credence can be placed in the reported negative replies of farmers when asked if they have been visited by extension agents. A study of T and V extension impact in Northern India (Feder et al 1988: 82) examined T and V evaluation reports from seven states. The average percentages of 'no visits' from extension were 15 per cent for contact farmers, and 34.5 per cent for non-contact farmers (i.e. those meant to meet the contact farmers). The study concludes that 'The demand for T and V extension services as measured by non-contact farmers' interaction with extension agents thus appears significant.' But since farmer respondents must have known that contact was meant to take place, a similar distortion could be expected to that with reported cross-ploughing; it would seem likely that actual 'no visits' would be much larger than reported. On similar lines, other monitoring and evaluation data from questionnaires are open to queston for overfavourable methodological bias.

4 Diplomacy and prudence

The fourth source of positive bias is diplomatic prudence on the part of those engaged in research, monitoring, evaluation and consultancy. To put it bluntly, consultants and researchers do not want to bite the hand that feeds them.

The World Bank in India commissioned research by a large consultancy organization to assess the impact of a policy the Bank was known to be keen to promote. This was the subdivision of **chaks** — the areas below outlets on canal irrigation systems — into 8 ha **subchaks**, and then the rotation of water between the **subchaks**. The consultants conducted the research and concluded that this preferred interventon led to benefits in higher yields, more uniform yields, and less time taken to irrigate. The World Bank and the Indian Government adopted the policy. But a tiresome analysis (Chambers 1988: 54-59) of the evidence in the report indicated that none of these conclusions was supported, and that another factor, a good water supply, was the key variable. It was difficult to avoid confirming the hypothesis that the consultants had produced the answer they knew was wanted.

More widespread than such misinterpretation of data, is the more insidious self-censorship by those (and who is without guilt?) who conduct commissioned research. The conflicts will be familiar to some who read this. Do honest consultants who write the truth find it easier or harder to get further work?

5 Defences against dissonance

Even if bad news is reported, it may be avoided or rejected. In Ralph Waldo Emerson's words 'People only see what they are prepared to see.'

On avoidance, independent researchers were once invited to a workshop at the World Bank to present their findings from field research on a World Bank supported project. These were negative compared with a mid-term review. One staff member, who had taken part in the mid-term review, came to the session, listened, was convinced, and said he regretted the errors. But other staff members who were also involved did not come to the meeting. Whatever the reasons, an obvious conjecture is that they did not want to know. By not being present, they did not have to know. Avoidance worked.

On rejection, in the case of the consultant's report cited above on subdivision of **chaks** and rotation of water supplies, a meeting was called to discuss interpretation of the data. The critic's points were half accepted but then finessed into a sort of limbo. The misleading conclusions drawn by the consultants were then, far from being rejected or modified, actually published unchanged, and without reference to the criticisms (Chadha 1981).

As defences, these five sources of self-deception interlink. Those who deceive know that those they are deceiving know they are being deceived but also that they want to be deceived in a way that does not show that they know. So there is implicit connivance, captured in the following personal communication (April 1992):

IAS Officer: 'I said to my BDOs — you must each have a VIP circuit. It is part of the game.'

Question: 'Do the VIPs know that they are being given this treatment? Do they know they are not getting the truth?'

IAS Officer: 'They don't want to know. For them, it would only make trouble.'

These five sources of misinformation are mutually reinforcing. The flows of misleading positive feedback to which they give rise are homeostatic — conservative at the centre through misperception of the periphery. They reinforce top-down reflexes. The single universal solution when inspected on rural visits is seen to do well; routine reports rarely damn; independent evaluations confirm the impression; prudent respondents, researchers, evaluators and consultants refrain from brutal honesty; and when bad news does get through, it may be rejected. So though local conditions differ, evidence of misfits is filtered out. Positive misinformation props up standard programmes. Psychotic, the State deceives itself.

The Costs of Self-Deception and Error

In India, the costs of self-deception are enormous. First, there are the direct financial costs in vast programmes of misdirected and unproductive agricultural research and extension, of erroneous irrigation development, of blueprinted watershed development, and of the misjudged priorities of the IRDP. Second, there is the demoralization of field staff who find themselves required to extend advice, or negotiate and impose programmes, which people do not want and which do not make sense. Third, there is the alienation of the public, whose cynical realism about the State is reinforced. And for all these, there are the opportunity costs of foregoing the alternatives. Similar costs are likely in other countries, but cases will differ.

Worldwide, the costs of past and present error are beyond any calculation. Large-scale investment for research and programmes to reduce post-harvest losses of grain at the village level can now be seen to have been based on a largely false premise. Nutrition programmes which heavily stressed protein rather than calories missed the mark. In environmental matters, misdiagnosis may be a special risk because of dogmatic convictions about the unknowable and the next decade may reveal gross error in some current conventional wisdom and prescriptions. For development policy and action generally, the question now is how to enable the State, and the development professions, to be closer in touch with reality.

IN SEARCH OF THERAPY

Reversals for Local Diversity

With accelerating change, with declining resources for development, and with widespread and often increasing deprivation, it matters more than ever for policy makers and professionals to be right about what is happening. The evidence and argument above suggest that the more top-down, supply-driven and standardized a programme package is, the more likely misleading positive feedback becomes. The converse is that the more bottom-up, demand drawn and diverse a programme is, the closer will be the fit between data and reality. The key is reversals of the normal, as in each of the four domains of rural development discussed above.

In **agriculture**, the change is from the T and V approach of transfer of technology (TOT), to what has been described as farmer participatory research (Farrington and Martin 1988) or 'farmer-first' (Chambers, Pacey and Thrupp 1989). In the TOT mode, research priorities are decided by scientists; technology is developed by them on research stations and in laboratories; and recommended packages of practices are then passed to extension organizations for transfer to farmers. TOT has had successes with some green revolution agriculture where environments could be controlled for a uniform fit, but a poor record with rainfed agriculture which is more complex, diverse, and risk-prone. In the reversed, contrasting, farmer-first mode, analysis is carried out more by farmers themselves; technology is developed and adapted more on farm and by farmers; baskets of choices for farmers replace packages of practices; and farmers' own capabilities are enhanced and experiments supported.

Innovations in seed-breeding illustrate the shift from a top-down 'Model T' approach. In the normal professional mode in India, breeders make crosses, screen lines for good characteristics such as disease resistance and yield, and then select only a very few, perhaps two or three, out of as many as two hundred lines for assessment by a central committee. The committee chooses material for multi-locational testing, following which those lines judged best are chosen, certified, and passed on for seed multiplication as a stable, standard output, and then for Extension to transfer to farmers. Before 'adoption', farmers play no part, and much promising genetic material is lost. In contrast, D. M. Maurya (Maurya *et al* 1988; Maurya 1989) of the Narendra Deva University of Agriculture and Technology in Uttar Pradesh has been making a wider range of lines available directly to farmers for them to try out, on condition that if other farmers ask for seed, they will also give some back to him. Farmers thus have a wider choice, and themselves test, evaluate and disseminate, for their diverse and particular conditions. The package with a single seed has been replaced by a basket with choices.

In **canal irrigation**, two forms of reversal can be noted. The first is the participation of farmers in determining how they wish to distribute water among themselves. This has been the focus of much research and writing. The second is appraisal and analysis of each irrigation project separately leading to operational plans which are tailor-made. In India this approach has been central to the National Water Management Project, and contrasts with the longer-standing Command Area Development Programme which has sought to implement **warabandi** and other standard measures over most large projects.

In **watershed development**, the major reversal is to involve farmers themselves in appraisal, mapping, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation for the development of their watersheds (Mascarenhas 1991; Shah **et al** 1991). Participatory evaluation has been the most recent development (SDC 1991). In late 1991, in a participatory evaluation involving farmers, MYRADA (an NGO), the Drylands Development Board of Karnataka, and the Swiss Development Corporation, farmers were empowered to demonstrate and argue the merits of their own soil and water conservation works. Participatory appraisals in the field were followed by farmers' presentations backed

up through showing and explaining slides of their fields and of alternative technologies, to senior officials in Bangalore. This led to Government agreement to modify its standard ('Model T') soil conservation structures to benefit from farmers' technology and to conform closer to farmers' priorities (pers. comm. Martin Sommer).

In **anti-poverty programmes,** the major reversal is to allow poor people to choose **when** they need support, by providing them with optional safety nets. The classic example is the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme, where the policy was that groups could demand as of right to be given work when they needed it, and to be paid a daily wage if work could not be provided.

All four sets of reversals share common features. All allow for local diversity. All empower local people with choice. There is a shift from standardization to differentiation, from a package of practices to basket of choices, from the black 'Model T' to the Toyota with its colour chosen by each client. Decision-making is decentralized to people with local knowledge and reasons to want it accurate. All sets of reversals make lateral links between people and knowledge and short-circuit the vertical channels of communication which so often distort. All are thus therapeutic for the psychotic State.

Rights, Communications and Empowerment

Therapy often meets resistance in the patient. With the psychotic State, much of the resistance originates in the vested interests of politicians, officials and contractors. They often have personal and pecuniary interests in maintaining and exploiting the system through hiding or distorting information.

Corruption and the extraction of rents are hidden by falsifying or withholding information. Reports passed upwards conceal the pickings from construction and maintenance in canal irrigation and watershed development, or the routinized rents extracted from IRDP subsidized loans and purchases. Reports falsify statements of work completed, of prices paid, of people employed, of benefits disbursed, and of services rendered.

Rents are levered from the public by withholding information, wilfully misleading, and spreading lies. In canal irrigation, this takes the form of not informing farmers about water supplies, even when they are known, and of pretending that water is scarcer than it is. When farmers are uncertain how much water is available, believe it is short, and do not know how much they will receive or when, they pay up in the hope of assuring themselves a supply. In social forestry, this can take the form of pretending to farmers that the cutting and transit of trees are prohibited when they are not. In ways such as these, officials manage and manipulate information to gain power and profit for themselves and for their patrons and allies.

Therapy can take many forms. Among the more obvious is clear definition of people's rights together with multiple channel dissemination of information about those rights. The rights can concern, for instance, access to supplies of new seeds, supplies of irrigation water, physical on-farm conservation works according to farmers' plans and priorities, subsidized loans, or freedom to cut and transit trees, all of these without having to pay for them. The multiple channels can include village meetings, handbills, notices, broadcasts, videos and television broadcasts. The communications revolution of the 1990s will present new opportunities to inform people of their rights, and could be used to encourage them to organize, to resist extortion, and to make demands for their entitlements.

Free communication about rights requires open government. It requires that Government circulars be made public. In India this has begun to happen, for example with a Government Order of 1 June 1990 concerning involvement of village communities and voluntary agencies for regeneration of degraded forest lands, which was published in *Wastelands News*, the widely circulated bulletin of the Society for the Promotion of Wastelands Development.

Effective therapy can also occur through citizens themselves making information public. Sometimes corruption at the grassroots appears an ecological condition as unalterable as climate, a fact of life to be accepted. But at Ahmadpur in Latur District in India, a voluntary agency brought out a handbill which said:

> 'Report a case of corruption and get the bribe-money back.'

Villagers met on an appointed day and testified to payments made. Officials were told that prosecution was not sought, only return of the money. The results reported were dramatic. Some officials asked for time to pay, but in all cases bribes were returned, the sums being designated as money that had been 'lent' (Joshi 1989).

In various ways, then, rights, information and communications can empower and enable individuals and organizations to make demands for good and honest service. The reversals implied will be resisted by those — mainly lower-level officials — who stand to lose. But the determination of policy and information resides higher up in the hierarchy; and there, in central administrative places, are to be found officials and political leaders whose behaviour is not fully determined, who do have room for manoeuvre, and

who do have power to modify and reform the system, especially through their use of communications, if they wish.

Personal Reversals and Realism: Truth, Trust and Diversity

'If they wish' is the crux. Therapy through reversals for diversity, and through rights, information and empowerment, can only occur through the behaviour of people. In the reform of any administrative culture, there are questions of who starts and where. The key people are those in a position to take and implement decisions. For those who work in large bureaucracies there are many obstacles to change on which much has been written. But the personal, psychological dimensions of these obstacles, and of the reversals to overcome them, have tended to be neglected.

The first reversal concerns knowledge, and attitudes to information and error. The normal pathology of the self-deceiving state is mirrored by the normal pathology of self-deceiving individuals and professions. Even psychotherapists themselves lack feedback on the effectiveness of their work and are said not to seem interested in it (Howarth 1989). 'I would rather not know' captures a common attitude of prudent self-defence among those with responsibility for actions and programmes who know or suspect that appearances are false. To turn the blind eye, to avoid facing awkward facts, to bury error, and to believe against the evidence that what one is doing is good, these are common failings in the human condition. The challenge is to abandon concealment, to be open about error, and to want to face factual reality. The reversal is to seek, and be honest about, the truth.

The second reversal concerns the common administrative reflex of control, and the drive to control more rather than less. In March 1992, a group of Indian administrators were asked what would be the basic minimum to be standardized and regulated in setting up village-level savings and credit societies. Their collective list included rates of saving, application forms, eligibility, purposes of loans, rates of interest, repayments, penalties for default, and credit ratios. In contrast, the programme of over 1,600 savings and credit societies spread and supervised by MYRADA, an NGO in South India, entrusted all these aspects to individual societies to decide, and limited control and supervision to accounts, records and bookkeeping. The members of the societies and their committees had discretion to meet their diverse needs in their own way, and each society made its own rules for loans, interest rates, penalties for defaulters, and so on. The challenge posed by this example is to see the minimum that does need to be controlled — the bookkeeping, and the wisdom and courage to control no more than that, for all else trusting people to make their own decisions. The reversal, in short, is to replace control with trust.

The third reversal concerns standardization. To fit the diversity of social, economic and ecological conditions requires a decentralized plurality of organizations, services, activities and choices. But control centralizes and standardizes. Caution calls for care to guard against all imaginable error or deviation, and for uniform and universal regulations to prevent these. Local discretion is limited. The credit and savings societies need more choice of what to do and how to do it. The reversal here is to replace uniformity with diversity.

These three reversals — concerning truth, trust and diversity — combine against the self-deceiving state. But officials trapped in hierarchy and a web of corruption and misinformation, can seem to have little incentive for change and little room for manoeuvre. And there are costs for them: truth embarrasses; trust weakens authority; diversity undermines control. And introduced together in a corrupt system, truth, trust and diversity reduce the incomes of officials and politicians.

Practical Theory

It is at this point that most academic analysts give up. But the same is not true of courageous officials who struggle to act as therapists from within. For them, there are no easy solutions, but two approaches can be proposed: working with allies; and direct personal field experience.

Allies for those who want to change can be found both within and outside government organizations. Within government organizations, informal networks of the like-minded can support each other. Outside government organizations, support can be found in NGOs, aid agencies and foundations, and among academics. NGOs can have several roles as allies, empowering local groups to make demands, training government staff, setting examples by implementing programmes for government, raising questions about corruption and low standards, exposing the misfit of government 'Model Ts', and developing participatory approaches and methods and training and socializing government staff to use them. For their part, aid agencies and foundations can use the leverage of funding to back participatory programmes, innovations, training and the like. The Ford Foundation has shown the potential from professional interaction in support of bureaucratic reorientation, as in the now classic case of the National Irrigation Administration in the Philippines (Korten and Siy 1989; Bagadion and Korten 1991). There, the changes introduced and evolved touched many aspects of participation and management; and the key element, modestly underacknowledged in the literature, was the commitment, continuity and alliance over almost a decade of two professionals, one in the NIA, and one in

the Ford Foundation. As so often, the history of a success points to the primacy of the personal.

The question then becomes how to multiply and strengthen personal commitment. One promising answer is direct field experience for senior decision-makers. Normally, the more senior a person becomes, the more removed he or she is from rural realities (though this is less true in East Africa, where so many are farmers in their own right, than in most other regions). New opportunities for direct interaction, without the constraints of rural development tourism, are now accessible with the approach and methods of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) (see e.g. Mascarenhas **et al** 1991). In India, the 320-odd probationers for the Indian Administrative Service each year now use PRA methods in their village fieldwork. Elsewhere, a few senior officers have been on field camps organized by NGOs and have found it a revealing and rewarding experience. A wide repertoire of means for learning from rural people and about rural conditions is now available. Besides requiring relatively brief periods in the field, using these techniques is also interesting and enjoyable. The questions now are how well they can be used; how many can use them; and how well they can effect reversals, through learning from below, keeping up-to-date with change, and being sensitive to diverse priorities, especially of those who are poorer.

Neither working with allies, nor using and spreading PRA, is an easy, quick or universal means to realism. Nor are these more than two out of many interventions which could be put forward, case by case, to reduce misleading positive feedback, to limit corruption, and to diversify away from 'Model T' approaches. But they have the merit of being strategies which more and more senior officials could adopt if they wished. Almost all have some scope for finding allies. Almost all have some opportunities for less rushed and more relaxed and participatory interactions in rural areas and with poor people. To turn around whole bureaucracies, though, is a massive task requiring sustained commitment, repeated reinforcement, and many actions. The best approach is to start and learn by doing. It can be hoped that the next decade will present more and more examples of progress from which others can learn and draw encouragement.

Finally, the most effective and lasting change will come from combinations of pressures and people. To phase out Fordism and self-deception in Government administration is more difficult than in the private sector. The sanction of the market is missing. One surrogate is political demand from below. This can provide direct negative feedback and force more realism and diversity into government programmes. In India, West Bengal stands out as an example where political ideology committed to the poor, backed by political organization at the grassroots, has led to reforms which have largely eluded the rest of India. These have been based not just on a democratic environment, freedom of speech, the free flow of information, but also on the commitment and continuity of key officials and politicians. The discipline which market forces exercise for the private sector can be provided for the State both from outside by popular organization and pressure, and from inside by the personal commitment of powerful people. There are then two therapies for the psychotic State as patient: from outside and below, and form inside and above.

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POWER, POVERTY, AND KNOWLEDGE – REFLECTING ON 50 YEARS OF LEARNING WITH ROBERT CHAMBERS

Issue Editors **Stephen Thompson and Mariah Cannon**

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ALL POWER DECEIVES

Robert Chambers

1 ERROR[1]

The achievements in human well-being in the past 40 years have been remarkable (see, for example, Adamson 1993), and much is to be learnt from successes. But also remarkable have been dogmatic errors in development theory and practice. This article focuses on learning from and correcting negative experience. Throughout the development decades, most professionals have been confident in imposing on others their own beliefs, and the policies and programmes which follow from them. This includes academics, bankers, bureaucrats, consultants, planners, scientists and technical assistance personnel, and the staff of national ministries, field bureaucracies, donor agencies, and institutes for research and training, both in the North and in the South. Later, many of these beliefs and actions have proved astonishingly erroneous. Exceptions include basic physics and engineering, and some biology and health, fields in which at the practical applied level there is some stable certainty. In most other fields, however, much of what was believed and done earlier has been superseded: the old beliefs are now seen as misleading and the old practices as misguided. To put it bluntly, 'we' - development professionals - have been wrong, but at the same time, confident we were right.

Examples are many. In development strategy, there was belief in the unilinear stages of economic growth, the primacy of industrialization, the protection of infant industries, and the key role of direct government action and of parastatals, contrasting with today's stress on agriculture, the free market, and dismantling and privatizing many state activities; in human nutrition, the belief that hungry people needed proteins rather than calories, leading to feeding milk powder instead of cereals; in agriculture, the belief that post-harvest losses of cereals at the village level were of the order of 30 to 40 per cent, not as we now believe, almost always less than 10 per cent, leading to investment in institutes and programmes to tackle a problem that had been greatly exaggerated; in health, the belief that malaria could be eliminated through massive programmes of spraying, which we now know not only pollutes but provokes the evolution of resistant strains; in energy, the belief that fuelwood would run out in many countries and environments, whereas farmers have often planted and protected trees to provide it; in canal irrigation, the belief that hardware and control were the key, not, as today, software and participation; and generally, the belief that modern scientific knowledge and technology were superior, and should be transferred to a rural populace that was ignorant and conservative, contrasting with today's growing consensus that on many subjects poor farmers know much, and that far from being conservative, they continually improvise and innovate in order to survive.

The new beliefs which are today's orthodoxies are held by some with no less conviction than those of the past. But any historical view would suggest that, if we have been wrong on much before, we are likely still to be wrong. It would suggest that error is endemic and cannot completely be avoided. If so, what matters is to minimize it. To try to see how to be less wrong, this article examines some major sources of error, and then analyses one - power relations - in more detail.

2 ERROR ANALYSED

Neglect of the reasons for error has itself been an error. Many monographs and books have sought to correct wrong beliefs, policies and practices, and have replaced old approximations or myths with new. But that is not the same as trying to understand, let alone tackling, causes. The tendency has been to bustle on busily to the next fashions and vocabulary without pausing to unearth the roots of earlier mistakes, and so without learning how to do better.

Four kinds of explanation of past errors can be suggested, with standard solutions to the first three.

First, the development reality changes. Development professionals are then always working in new territory. When much is new and unknown, blind alleys and false trails abound and errors are to be

[1] I thank Jenny Chambers for many discussions and ideas on the theme of uppers and lowers, and both her and Susanna Davies for comments on drafts. Responsibility for opinions and errors is mine alone.

expected. The realities of earlier decades were also different, requiring and supporting different beliefs and actions; in consequence, much of what was done in the past was less wrong in its contemporary context than it now seems or would be if done now. Change in economic, social and political conditions is also so fast that we cannot help being behind the times; error is a function of failing to keep up-to-date with a rapidly moving target. The solution seen is faster and better feedback, monitoring and evaluation, information systems and the like.

The second explanation is professional norms. Prevailing professional values, beliefs, methods and technology have evolved in and for the cores of the rich, urban, temperate, industrial North. They interlink with capital-intensive technology, controlled conditions, and reductionist science. They include ideology - neo-Fabian in the 1960s and 1970s, neo-liberal in the 1980s and 1990s. Error is explained, in these terms, because core values, beliefs, methods, technologies and ideologies, formed in the conditions of the North, quite often misfit when transferred to the peripheries of the poor, rural, tropical, and agricultural South. The solution seen is changes in professional training and rewards, and for values, beliefs, methods, technology and ideology to be formed, driven and determined much more by the people and contexts of the peripheries than of the cores.

The third explanation is modes of learning. Notably in rural development, outsider professionals have learnt in two modes: rural development tourism, the brief and biased rural visit, in which the visitor is presented with a rehearsed reality to give a good impression; and through large-scale questionnaire surveys which crudely collect and box the reality of respondents according to the categories and interests of the researcher. Both rural development tourism, and large-scale questionnaire surveys frequently mislead. The solution seen is the adoption of participatory modes of analysis and sharing knowledge, as with Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA).

These three explanations have force. But they also leave much unexplained. We are still faced with phenomenal errors which fly in the face of facts which seem to have been known or knowable.

The thesis of this article is that a fourth explanation intertwines with and overrides the first three, and presents the central challenge. This is power relations - the effects of power, dominance and ego. Those who are powerful and dominant - the uppers, gain and interpret information in ways which fit their preconceptions and fulfil their needs; while those who are subordinate - the lowers, behave and communicate in ways which generate, select, distort and present information to fit what they believe uppers want, approve and will reward. The self-esteem and interests of both uppers and lowers are served: uppers are flattered by deference and supported by positive feedback; and lowers present themselves in a favourable light, avoid penalties and gain benefits. Systems of misinformation are then self-sustaining.

To throw light on this phenomenon, let us examine three widely different cases of what is now generally seen as manifest professional error.

3 FREUD, TOOLCARRIERS AND TREES

3.1 Freud's fantasy

Freud and his followers present a case of extreme and sustained error.

When his female patients told him about being abused sexually by their fathers and others, Freud at first believed them. Later he conceived the idea that the accounts were fantasies reflecting their repressed sexual desires. The young girls had really been in love with their fathers. The terrible treatment they said they had received was a fiction of their perverted imaginations. Three generations of psychoanalysts believed and perpetuated Freud's fallacy, imposing their fantasy on the reality of the patient." In the words of Janet Radcliffe Richards (1992): 'If the therapists had actually conspired with the abusers to drive the victims to madness and despair, it is hard to see how they could have done better'.

The evidence is now overwhelming (see e.g. Masson 1992; Sanderson 1990; Karle 1992) that child sex abuse is a widespread and deeply damaging phenomenon.[2]

[2] The existence of false memory syndrome, where patients during prolonged analysis invent a history of having been sexually abused in childhood, does not challenge the widespread existence of child sex abuse. Rather it reinforces the point that realities can be mythical constructs resulting from upper-lower interactions.

The costs of error by the powerful were cruel and needless suffering and long delay, until the 1980s, in bringing to light the prevalence of child sex abuse. The lay person may well find it an astonishing mystery that professionals could be so wrong for so long, and yet so sure they were right.

How and why did they fail to listen and learn?

3.2 Multi-purpose wheeled toolcarriers: perfected yet rejected

(The main source for this section is Paul Starkey's study **Animal-Drawn Wheeled Toolcarriers: Perfected yet Rejected** (1988)).

Animal-drawn wheeled toolcarriers are multipurpose implements that can be used for ploughing, seeding, weeding and transport. In the three decades to 1987 about 10,000 wheeled toolcarriers of over 45 designs were made, mainly in and for Africa and Asia. The toolcarriers were designed by agricultural engineers, tested and developed in engineering workshops and on research stations, and then passed on to farmers for trials and to manufacturers to produce. The International Crops Research Institute for the Semiarid Tropics (ICRISAT) developed toolcarriers which received much publicity. Up to 1200 were distributed to farmers through credit and subsidies of up to 80 per cent. Worldwide, more than one hundred senior person years, and several hundred person years of less senior staff, were devoted to the development of these toolbars, and the cost at 1987 prices was estimated to be over $40 million (*ibid.*: 142).

Wheeled toolcarriers were rejected by farmers. The reasons were high cost, heavy weight, lack of manoeuvrability, inconvenience, complication of adjustment, difficulty in changing between modes, and higher risk and less flexibility than with a range of single purpose implements. Their design was a compromise between the many different requirements. By their criteria, farmers did better with single purpose implements.

Farmer rejection was apparent from the early 1960s but toolcarrier development continued. At a conference at ICRISAT in 1979, an economic analysis (Binswanger, Ghodake and Thierstein 1979) cautiously supported further development, but on a field visit farmers who had been trying out the toolcarrier rejected it. This was on three grounds - lack of the strong bullocks needed to draw it, its cost, and the large area required for it to be economical. Nevertheless, work on the toolcarrier went on. After his careful comparative research, Starkey concluded that 'No wheeled toolcarrier has yet been proven by sustained farmer adoption in any developing country'. Yet as late as 1987 'Research, development and promotional activities (were) continuing in at least twenty countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America' (*ibid.*: 131). When Starkey corresponded with those who were developing and testing wheeled toolcarriers, a common reply was that they were facing difficulties, but that they knew toolcarriers had been successful elsewhere. Starkey's carefully researched reality is that wheeled toolcarriers failed everywhere. They were 'perfected yet rejected'.

The puzzle remains. How could so many able agricultural engineers, scientists and researchers, and so many donor agencies, go on being so wrong for so long?

3.3 Trees and the woodfuel gap

Central planners can be brutally wrong, as is only too clear from the histories of command economies, and the terrible policy-induced famines and tens of millions of famine deaths in the USSR under Stalin and in China under Mao Ze Dong. However, in the developing world, rather few of planners' errors have been well studied and documented. An exception is forecasts of a woodfuel crisis in African countries, analysed and documented by Gerald Leach and Robin Mearns in **Beyond the Fuelwood Crisis: people, land and trees in Africa** (1988).

The woodfuel 'crisis' in the South was 'discovered' in the mid-1970s after the oil-price rises of 1973/4. Evidence had been accumulating of deforestation and of increasing shortages of fuelwood. The problem was analysed according to 'woodfuel gap theory'. This estimated current and projected consumption of woodfuels set against current stocks and a projected growth of trees. This type of demand and supply analysis was conducted in all of the 60-odd UNDP/World Bank energy sector assessments for African and other countries in the South which considered woodfuels in the first half of the 1980s (*ibid.*: 6). Typically, consumption was found greatly to exceed the annual growth of trees. This led to predictions that the last tree in Tanzania would disappear in 1990 and in Sudan in 2005. But, to repeat in 1993 what Leach and Mearns wrote in in 1988 (*ibid.*: 7), 'There are still many trees in Tanzania'.

These gap calculations were multifariously flawed:

- woodfuel consumption figures were unreliable (and conclusions were sensitive to small differences in assumptions)

- conditions varied locally, making averages of aggregates misleading

- consumption was assumed to rise in proportion to population (but people have many coping strategies for substitutions and economizing in face of scarcity)

- total tree stocks were usually grossly underestimated by forest departments since they knew little about trees outside forests, for example on farm, fallow and village common lands

- natural regeneration was usually omitted, although 'tree regrowth can soften dramatically the dire predictions of gap forecasts' (*ibid.*: 8).

- much tree-based fuel in practice is dead branches, twigs and leaves, and does not entail depletion of living stock

- surpluses were not accounted for arising from land-clearing, often the largest source of fuelwood

- seasonal variation in stocks, sources and use of fuels is significant

- farmers plant and protect trees to provide for their needs and also to meet market opportunities

Among these numerous errors and oversights, the last was probably the most massive. To an extraordinary extent, 'under our eyes', visible even from main roads but often unremarked by speeding professionals, trees have been planted by small farmers in many parts of the world. In countries and conditions as diverse as those of Kakamega, Kisii (Bradley, Chavangi and van Gelder 1985), Murang'a and Machakos (Tiffen, Mortimore and Gichuki 1993) in Kenya, of parts of the hills of Nepal (Carter and Gilmour 1989; Gilmour 1989) and of Haiti (Murray 1986), farmers have confounded the prophets of doom by planting and protecting trees to increase their density.

Few would deny that rural energy is often a problem or that it bears heavily on women. But the problem was grossly exaggerated in planners' projections. Prescriptions flowing from these analyses were for urgent large-scale afforestation in Africa when the need was for actions which were small-scale and local. The more critical gap was not in woodfuel but in the grasp of the planners.

How could highly trained professionals have been so ignorant and so stupid?

4 EXPLANATIONS OF ERROR

The first three clusters of explanation - concerned with changing reality, with professional norms, and with modes of learning - go some way towards understanding how these errors occurred and persisted. But much remains to be explained. In search of explanation, the fourth cluster, power and power relations, can be examined in terms of three dimensions: dominance; distance; and ego.

4.1 Dominance

Deception through interpersonal dominance is illustrated by the psychoanalysts. They were exceptionally powerful face-to-face with their patients. Personally, most of the psychoanalysts were men, and most of their patients who had been abused were women. Psychologically, they were trained to distance themselves from their patients, to be aloof and unemotional, and even to avoid eye contact. Physically, they made their patients lie horizontally on couches, while they sat upright in chairs. Professionally, they had had long training in medicine and psychology including a personal analysis, and believed in their superior knowledge. Conversely, their patients were exceptionally weak. They were women, and defined as not in their right mind; their behaviour was considered abnormal; and socially they were regarded as sick, mentally ill, subject to fantasies, hallucinations and hysteria, and needing 'treatment'. The exceptional power of the psychoanalysts was then an exceptional disadvantage. They had been so brainwashed by their own analysis and training that they could not accept their patients' reality. Instead, they blamed the victims. Extreme interpersonal power trapped them in projecting their professional fantasy and prevented them from learning. It was the psychoanalysts who first needed therapy.

4.2 Distance

Distance is illustrated by the wheeled tool-carriers. These were designed and developed not

with village blacksmiths and farmers, not in villages and fields, but in engineering workshops and on research stations. Only as they were 'perfected' in those environments were they then transferred. There was distance, too, between the professionals themselves, who believed that toolcarriers had been successful elsewhere, and who through their selective communications with each other maintained a collective delusion.

Distance was even more extreme with those who calculated the woodfuel gap. They sat one presumes in rooms with calculators and did sums. From the analysis by Leach and Mearns one can only conclude that they neglected to investigate the validity of their statistics, were abysmally ignorant of rural life and conditions, and hardly knew one end of a tree from the other. Insulated by distance, they too, like the psychoanalysts, created for themselves a world of professional fantasy.

4.3 Ego

Ego is involved with the personal respect, recognition and reputation which follow from the performance of a professional task. To acknowledge that the Electra complex was a delusion, that the toolcarrier was a fiasco, that the fuelwood statistics were a fantasy, might have been both personally distressing and professionally damning. It is not (yet) the norm for powerful people willingly admit and parade their mistakes. Instead, to protect their egos and their jobs, they persist through habit, obstinacy and pride, in mistaken beliefs and practices.

Ego is also associated with income and employment. The incomes of psychoanalysts, agricultural engineers, and central planners depend on their professional credibility. Paradoxically, the livelihoods of the psychoanalysts, agricultural engineers and planners were, in the short term, assured by their errors and lack of success, since this justified additional investments of time and money - by patients for further therapy by psychoanalysts, by donors in further toolcarrier research by agricultural engineers, and by donors and governments in large-scale tree-planting projects requiring the services of economists and planners. Being wrong makes more work.

5 NORTH AND SOUTH, UPPERS AND LOWERS

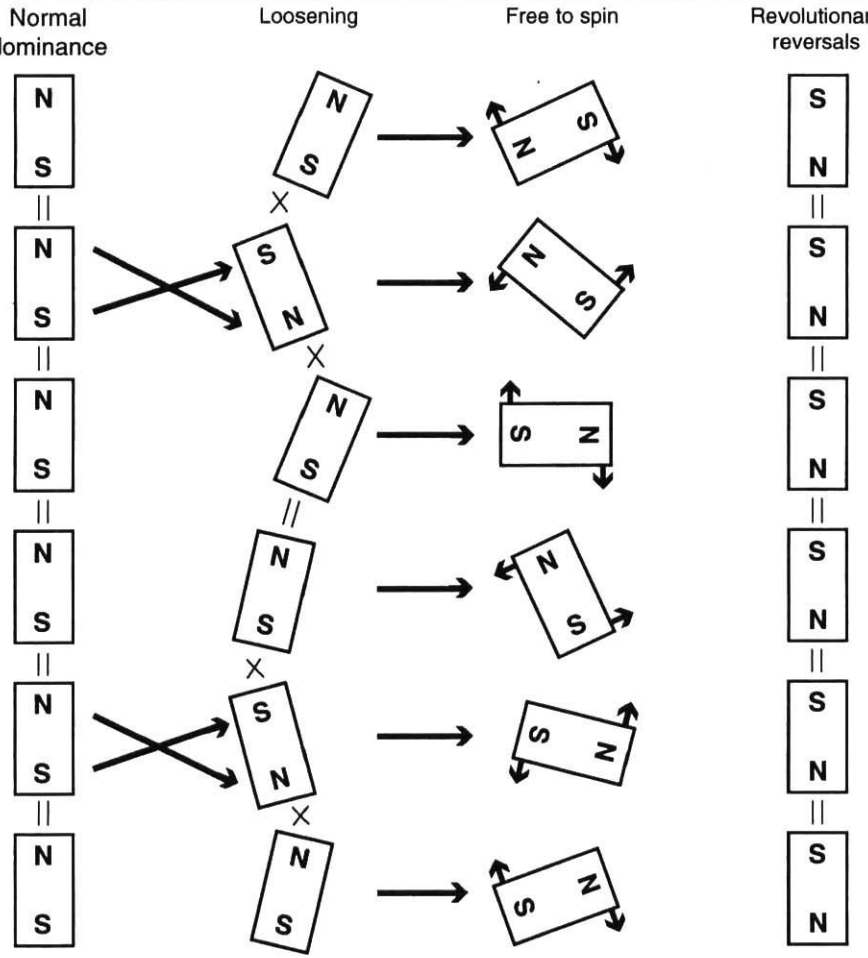
These examples and interpretations are not isolated. Dominance, distance, self-interest and self-esteem are part of a wider social context. Human society can be seen as patterned by hierarchies of power and weakness, of dominance and subordination. Many relationships can then be thought of as North-South, with magnets generating their own mutually reinforcing fields (Figure 1). The Norths, or uppers, dominate the Souths, or lowers. Each magnet, or person, reinforces the field through dominance and instruction, North to South, and through submission and compliance, South to North. It is then difficult for any one magnet, or person, to flip and become S-N instead of N-S, because the whole magnetic field or hierarchy and culture will force her or him to flip back again.

Figure 1 illustrates different conditions. The first is the normal N-S top-down condition, widespread throughout the world. The last is revolutionary, with the magnetic field reversed, but, as in revolutions, with authority at least as strong as before. The middle is partly demagnetized, with each magnet or person freer to spin, and to have varied and changing relationships not just up and down but sideways. To move from 'normal dominance' to 'free to spin' requires that many magnets (people) make personal reversals to turn around and neutralize the prevailing top-down field, freeing others to do the same.

These N-S, upper-lower patterns are found in many relationships (Figure 2). Any one person can be a multiple upper, a multiple lower, or some combination.

North-South fields of power support each other. Ideologies which justify one source of authority, whether that of politician, priest, parent or other upper, generate a field which permeates others. Authoritarian and patriarchal regimes, organizations, education and family relations resonate and are mutually reinforcing. Chain reactions of dominance move downwards. IMF officials dominate the politicians and civil servants of a weak government, who then pass on policies to their people; or a male senior bureaucrat criticizes his subordinate, who in turn criticizes his male subordinate, who then returns home in the evening and abuses his wife, who shouts at the children who kick the cat. Except quite often for the children, and more so, the cat, such chain reactions are a commonplace of negative North-South experience.

Figure 1: Dominance, reversals and freedom



Who holds the stick?	Uppers →	All	Lowers (who become uppers)
Teaching/ learning	From above →	Lateral, below, above	From above (= old below)
Whose reality counts?	Uppers →	All, multiple diverse	New uppers (=old lowers)

6 THE CONSTRUCTION AND TRANSFER OF REALITY

Less well recognized is the manner in which these top-down, upper-lower relationships distort the information which passes vertically both downwards and upwards, and affect the perceptions of those in power; the manner, in short, in which power deceives the powerful.

In practice, uppers define much of reality for lowers. To paraphrase Dorothy Rowe (1989: 16), power is to have your definition of reality prevail over other people's definition of reality. Professionals, teachers, parents and priests variously instruct, teach, disci-

pline and preach, imparting to the lay public, pupils, children and sinners their own uppers' beliefs, values, knowledge, categories, and ways of construing the world. In part, this is essential for the continuity of human society, cultures, skills and knowledge. In part, too, this overrides and moulds the perceptions and realities of lowers.

The construction, transfer and imposition of their reality by uppers takes several forms. Some of the more significant are:

- **Teaching, training and indoctrination**

Professors, lecturers and schoolteachers are believed to have a monopoly of knowledge, and pupils to be ignorant. In the verse celebrating Jowett, the erudite Master of Balliol College, Oxford:

> I come first, my name is Jowett
> There's no knowledge but I know it
> I am the Master of this college
> What I don't know isn't knowledge

Figure 2: North-south, upper-lower relationships

Dimension/context	North Uppers	South Lowers
Spatial	Core (urban, industrial)	Periphery (rural, agricultural)
International and development	The North IMF, World Bank Donors Creditors	The South Poor countries Recipients Debtors
Personal ascriptive	Male White High ethnic or caste group	Female Black Low ethnic or caste group
Life cycle	Old person Parent Mother-in-law	Young person Child Daughter-in-law
Bureaucratic organization	Senior Manager Official Patron Officer Warden, Guard	Junior Worker Supplicant Client 'Other rank' Inmate, Prisoner
Social, spiritual	Patron Priest Guru Doctor,Psychiatrist	Client Lay person Disciple Patient
Teaching and learning	Master Lecturer Teacher	Apprentice Student Pupil

Much teaching and training are a one-way flow. In the Dickensian terms of **Hard Times** (Dickens 1854), they seek to fill empty vessels with facts. Faithful reproduction of those facts and that reality are rewarded with high marks. The facts are, though, constructions or reconstructions of reality by uppers.

Teaching and training are part of a continuum with indoctrination which seeks with varying degrees of psychological and physical duress to convert a lower's view of reality to that of an upper, or that which the upper wishes the lower to have.

- **Induction and socialization**

Rites of passage, codes of conduct, rules, and approval, acceptance or rejection by those already 'in', whether for professional associations, clubs, cohorts, communities, fraternities, gangs, schools, societies, sororities or total institutions of any sort - all these induce lowers (apprentices, aspirants, initiates, new girls and new boys, novices, probationers, recruits...) to adopt and embrace values, mindsets and behaviours of receiving groups or hierarchies.

- **Transfer of technology**

Technology generated in central places by uppers is considered superior and transferred to peripheries. So agricultural researchers develop packages of practices and seek to transfer these to farmers. In doing so they seek out farmers who are willing, often those whose conditions are most similar to those of the research station, or they seek through subsidies (as with the wheeled toolcarriers) to induce adoption, recreating the package.

- **Projection through media**

Books, newspapers, journals, films, television, videos and now computer games embody and transfer the values, categories, and modes of thought and analysis of those who create them, and who are usually uppers in several dimensions. So now through television the values and aspirations of the consumerism of prosperous urban uppers are increasingly projected visibly to poor, remote and rural lowers.

In these processes of training, socialization, transfer and projection, there are positive and negative inducements. The positive inducements include personal gains and development (knowledge, skills, interest, pleasure...), approval (of a teacher, a psychiatrist, a parent), acceptance (into a group or hierarchy), recognition (through good marks, praise, awards...), credit and subsidies (to purchasers of new technology, users of fertilisers...), and rewards (presents, prizes in school, best farmer awards, membership of the club or of the Party...). Negative inducements include physical violence (spanking, beating up, torture...), physical constraint (movement restrictions, confinement...), denial or withdrawal of privileges (food, visits, entertainment...), public humiliation (standing in the corner, forced confessions, parading...), threats to others (relatives, friends, peer group...), and fear associated with all of these.

Strongly top-down conditions present both positive and negative inducements; both carrots and sticks orient people, like donkeys nose to tail, North to South.

7 UPPERS' DEFENCES AGAINST DISSONANCE

Often, though, there is a dissonance between the dominant reality of uppers, and the perceptions and information to which they are exposed. To avoid or diminish such dissonance, uppers have a battery of defences:

- **Dogmatic domination**

Commonly, uppers simply use their power to assert and insist on their reality. Drawing on moral or factual dogmatism, they do this with conviction and authority. In **Hard Times** (Dickens 1854, Chapter 2), Mr Gradgrind is a multiple upper - adult, male, middle class, wealthy, philanthropist, and patron of a school for the poor, and Sissy is a multiple lower - child, female, lower class, poor, beneficiary, and pupil:

> 'Sissy is not a name', said Mr Gradgrind. 'Don't call yourself Sissy. Call yourself Cecilia.'
> 'It's father as calls me Sissy, sir,' returned the young girl in a trembling voice and with another curtsy.
> 'Then he has no business to do it,' said Mr Gradgrind. 'Tell him he mustn't.'

- **Refusal to accept: denial, avoidance and concealment**

Discordant reality can be denied: denial is the first, immediate reaction to bereavement. Or reality can be avoided: the simplest defence is to avoid

exposure to people or experiences which will conflict with beliefs and attitudes. This is so common that both to 'turn a blind eye to' and 'to turn a deaf ear to' feature in **The Methuen Book of Cliches** (Ammer 1992). Or discordant reality can simply be buried.

- **Selective perception and interpretation**

Uppers can be adroit in seeing what they want to see. Bad news can be rationalized and interpreted in the uppers' frame of reference. Believing is seeing.

- **Devaluing the lower**

Blaming the victim is widely acceptable to uppers, since it validates their superiority, and the inferiority of the lower. While psychoanalysts' female victims of child sex abuse present an extreme case, this has been a widespread impediment to learning by uppers. The use of put-down adjectives applied to the poor and weak - conservative, ignorant, illiterate, lazy, obstinate, stubborn, stupid - devalues and even rejects their reality.

8 LOWERS' RESPONSES

These defences are not always needed, since lowers often present what uppers want to see or hear.

Lowers often accept the imprint of the dominant reality of uppers. Some do this with hope of advancement. Pupils and students learn from and repeat back what they have learnt to their teachers and lecturers. They believe more what they are taught in school than what they experience outside it. Part of the reason is their hope later themselves to become uppers. Other lowers internalize the ideologies of uppers, and accept their lower status, as when 'low' ethnic groups such as Harijans in India or Blacks in the Old South of the United States, have accepted and believed the myth of their inferiority.

Some lowers construct or reflect back realities to be acceptable to uppers. When enumerators in questionnaire surveys avoid the inconvenience of actually asking questions, but instead make up the responses, they are concerned above all that their concoctions be credible. They, as lowers, therefore go to pains to ensure that their entries will correspond with what they believe to be their superiors', uppers', expectations. Not only does this eliminate deviants and outliers, but it confirms and validates uppers' conventional views, and pleases them with convenient correlations. Again, in (lower) development consultants' reports to their (upper) sponsors, there is a gradation from cautious choice of language ('toned down') through self-censorship to exaggeration, being economical with the truth, and outright fabrication and lies.

Lowers also protect themselves by withholding information which if presented would be damaging for them. So children do not own up to misdemeanours. Women who had been sexually abused in childhood tended not to reveal this before the mid-1980s, perhaps fearing that psychoanalysts would deny and hurtfully reinterpret their reality.

The behaviour of lowers in reflecting back the reality of uppers or in distorting or filtering information passed upwards can be described variously as reverent, respectful, courteous, polite, prudent, self-seeking, dissembling, deceiving and lying.

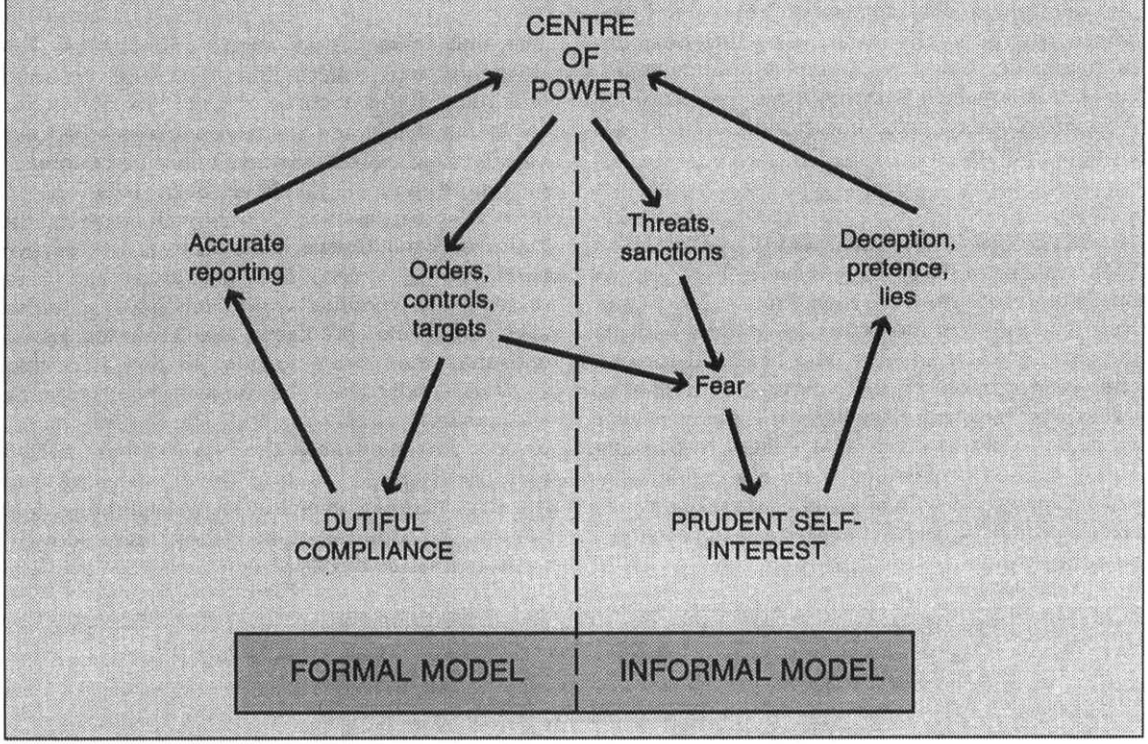
For bureaucratic organizations in development, Figure 3 presents the theory and practice of feedback. The motives are varied, and often combine fear of penalties, hope of rewards, and a desire to present the self favourably. Whatever the motives, the powerful uppers are deceived.

9 SELF-SUSTAINING MYTH

The outcome of uppers' dominance and defences, and lowers' responses, can be stable systems of power and misinformation. In the case of powerful organizations like the World Bank, or of the nation state, multiple feedback channels mislead, usually with information which exaggerates good performance (Figure 4) (Chambers 1992). Rural development tourism is biased to better areas, model projects, and specially primed informants who know what to say. Questionnaire surveys massage and manufacture realities, biased by deference and prudence of both investigator and respondent. Targeted, top down standardized programmes analogous to the Model T Ford (mass-produced any colour you like as long as it is black) often do not fit, but implementers in their own interests exaggerate performance, even at times with figures further inflated at each level of a hierarchy as they pass upwards. High expenditures on hardware provide opportunities for rents, which are concealed by reporting more done, and done better, than in fact.

Subsidies and rewards are especially misleading. They induce behaviour in lowers which inhibits

Figure 3: Power and information in field bureaucracies



learning by uppers: some multi-purpose wheeled toolcarriers appeared to be a success because farmers accepted them when they came free or with large subsidies; bad programmes in agriculture are buffered by subsidies which extension staff dispense to one or two farmers who then present evidence of adoption to visitors. Presents, promotions, prizes can be orchestrated to create an apparent success. So multiple sources of feedback to those in power often mislead, tending to show things better than they are, and so justifying further funds to complete the feedback loop of a self-sustaining myth.

Myths are also sustained by many shades and subtleties of interaction. The simple polarization of actors into dominant uppers and subordinate lowers obscures their many forms of coexistence and the overlays of their multiple shifting realities.

One is the willingness of lowers to say or do anything to please, placate, or pacify an upper. Indian tribals asked by Baljit Malik why they kept being polite to officials who visited them, always agreeing to everything, replied with the saying 'If the circumstances so demand, keep saying YES; if someone asks whether you saw a cat carrying a camel in its mouth, say YES!'. It has been a sobering experience to observe a charismatic outsider interrogate farmers who strain their minds and imaginations to say what they think he wants. Again and again they found the right words. The intelligent prudence of the lowers confirmed the conviction of the upper, unaware of his inadvertent ventriloquism.

Another nuance is tacit connivance. Known misreporting of overfavourable performance is accepted, even welcomed. A conversation with an Officer of the Indian Administrative Service went as follows:

> IAS Officer: 'I said to my BDOs - you must each have a VIP circuit. It is part of the game.'
> Question: 'Do the VIPs know that they are being given this treatment? Do they know they are not getting the truth?'
> IAS Officer: 'They don't want to know. For them, it would only make trouble.'

So uppers accept deception, lowers know it, and uppers know lowers know; but none remark on it. There is an understanding that lowers will show and tell uppers what uppers want to see and hear. There can be many nuances, subtleties, and rationalizations: over time, uppers and lowers can come to share beliefs through mutual deception. And projects and programmes take off into self-sustaining myth.

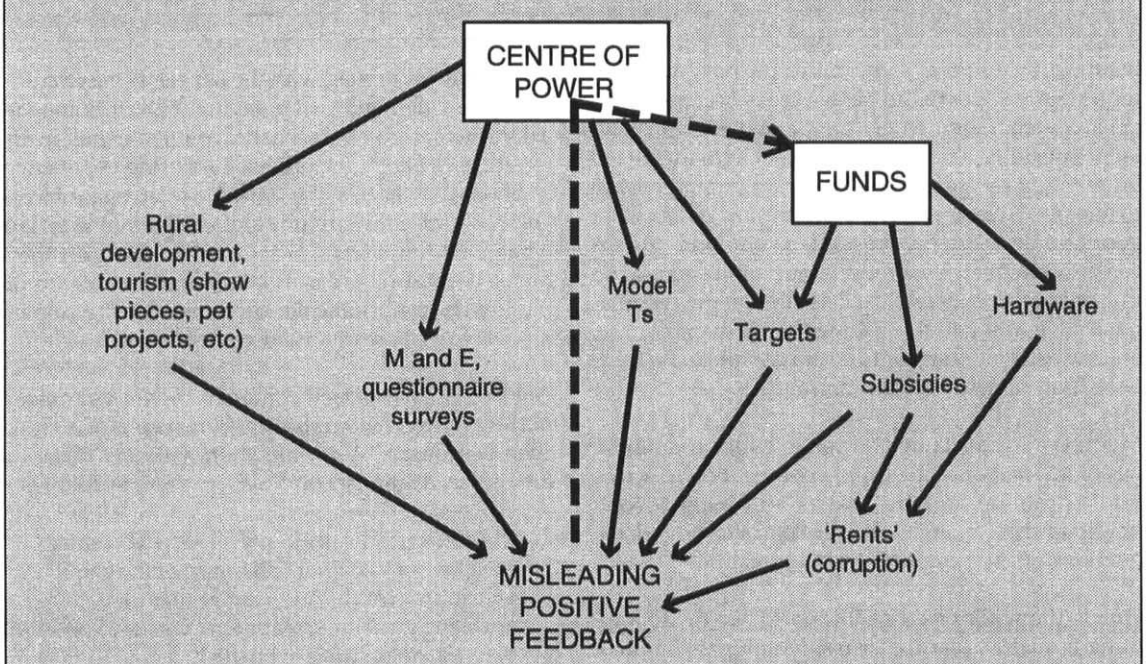
10 REVERSALS: WHOSE REALITY COUNTS?

Such systems of deception can be resilient, and robustly buffered. The three generations of psychoanalysts who imposed their fantasies on their patients; the agricultural engineers who persisted for year after year in believing that animal-drawn wheeled toolcarriers worked elsewhere; the planners who predicted a treeless Tanzania - these respectable, highly trained professionals, are a warning. The practical question, with hindsight, is to ask how their errors could have been avoided, and so what should be done now.

Three lessons stand out. Each entails an upending or reversal of the normal condition which generated and sustained the error.

The first lesson is to replace dominance with deference and respect, and to reverse positions and roles. If the victims of child sex abuse had sat in the chairs, and the psychoanalysts had lain on the couches, the victims might have spoken out more and might have been believed. If farmers' priorities had determined research, the toolcarriers might never have been started. If poor rural people's needs and incentives had been understood, woodfuel would not have appeared such an acute problem. The solution is to encourage and enable lowers, so that it is they as lowers, not others as uppers, who appraise and analyse their reality. The lesson is to reverse power relations through changing behaviour, as in PRA - sitting down, listening and learning, handing over the stick, facilitating, and having confidence that 'they can do it' (Mascarenhas *et al.* 1991).

Figure 4: Self-deceiving centres of power



Centres of power include multilateral and bilateral donors, governments and professional establishments

The second lesson is to reduce social and physical distance. If the psychoanalysts had been warm and sympathetic instead of aloof, and met their clients more on their home ground, they might have been told and believed the reality of incest. If the agricultural engineers had used their R&D expertise to support and work with village blacksmiths and farmers in villages, any technology developed should have been more fitting and more adoptable. If the planners had facilitated and experienced topic PRA investigations by villagers into issues of fuel, they could never have forecast a treeless Tanzania or misled themselves into advocating large-scale 'solutions'. The lesson is to spend time close to people and in the field.

The third lesson is to redefine professional ego. If the ego of psychoanalysts had not been welded to a single theoretical and therapeutic framework, they might have been freer to learn from their clients. If the ego and reputation of the agricultural engineers had been less committed to one professional diagnosis and prescription, it would have been easier for them to stop banging their heads on a brick wall at the end of a blind alley. If the professional ego of the planners had been less concerned with reductionist calculations, and more with empirical field reality, they would not have been so misled. The redefinition of professional ego implies change, to eclectic pluralism, embracing error, acknowledging complexity and diversity, and learning through successive approximation. The lesson is to link professional prestige and ego with doubt, critical self-awareness, and enabling others.

These reversals fit the analogy of a top-down magnetic field (Figure 1), where reversals by some actors (magnets) can create a freedom in others to reverse or to spin, by offsetting or neutralizing the field. But, as in institutions, changes are needed at several levels to sustain this freedom or empowerment. The aim is a recurrent pattern, in which uppers and lowers flip and change positions. This can move the culture of an organization towards participation (Pretty and Chambers 1993). The ideal, then, is not the full revolution of what physicists call a 'spin-flip', from one powerful orientation to another which is equal but opposite, but rather a weakening of the top-down field, freeing and enabling lowers to assert their priorities, to interact and learn laterally from colleagues and peers, and to make demands upwards.

Reversals of power relations - through changed behaviour, through uppers spending time close to lowers, and through redefining professional ego - these combine as the synergy of a new professionalism. This resonates with and complements the now familiar rhetoric of participation, decentralization, democracy, diversity, sustainability, accountability, transparency, and empowerment of the poor, vulnerable and weak - the politically correct development vocabulary of the 1990s. To these can now be added the old-fashioned values of honesty and trust. The cynical amorality of our times seems to demand a half-apology for advocating such Victorian virtues. But such advocacy is clinically correct: accountability and transparency require honesty and generate the mutual trust needed for the empowerment of lowers. Moreover, honesty and trust combine to keep down costs and make life better to live.

The deceptions of power will, though, persist. But we now have approaches and methods, such as those of PRA, which confront the problems of uppers' behaviour and attitudes, their distance, and their egos, and which provide the tools for lowers to conduct their own analyses, and to define and express their own realities. So the answers to the questions:

> whose categories and criteria count?
> whose values and preferences?
> whose analysis and planning?
> whose action?
> whose monitoring and evaluation?
> whose reality? whose truth?

can now, in practical terms, be more 'theirs', those of lowers and local people, and less 'ours', those of uppers and of outsider professionals.

These reversals bring new professional rewards. When uppers step down and divest themselves of their self-importance, they are free to move into new roles and relationships. There is new professional fulfilment, even exhilaration, in enabling lowers to express their realities. Uninhibited by power relations, and like the small child in Hans Andersen's story, lowers can then feel free to shout: 'He's no clothes on.' Nor must the Emperors of the IMF, World Bank, aid agencies, Government Departments of the South and North, NGOs and universities be like the Emperor in the story, as the dreadful truth of nakedness dawned upon him. For he

thought to himself: 'I must carry on, or I shall ruin the procession'. Recognizing that many of the clothes of the powerful are deceptions will not ruin the procession of development. To the contrary, development professionals have for too long being ruining it by allowing themselves to be deceived. If all power deceives, then it is in stepping down and empowering others that new and more practical realities can be expressed and shared; and it is through empowering the poor, vulnerable and weak, that their reality will count more, and equity will be better served.

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POWER, POVERTY, AND KNOWLEDGE – REFLECTING ON 50 YEARS OF LEARNING WITH ROBERT CHAMBERS

Issue Editors **Stephen Thompson and Mariah Cannon**

Contents

This article has been reissued as part of *IDS Bulletin* Archive Collection Vol. 54 No. 1A March 2023: **'Power, Poverty, and Knowledge – Reflecting on 50 Years of Learning with Robert Chambers'**; the Introduction is also recommended reading.

Transforming Power: From Zero-Sum to Win-Win?

Robert Chambers*

1 Personal journey and predispositions

Being asked by the editors to describe my personal journey to a current focus on issues of power, and striving to do this in a spirit of critical reflection, has startled me with what I have found and how it has influenced the argument of this article. At some level, I already knew this but never before have I seen so clearly how it coheres. Four influences and tendencies appear to have intermingled.

The first is the exercise of authority at several stages during my schooling, again during my National Service in the British Army, and then as a District Officer and trainer of administrators in Kenya. As a researcher later, this led me many times to see situations from the point of view of the powerful rather than the powerless. Despite a long convalescence traces of this orientation remain.

The second is the fascination with how we learn and mislearn in development, and especially why development professionals are so often wrong: this has led repeatedly to the idea of power as disability, summarised, with apologies, to Lord Acton, as 'All power deceives'.

The third is the experience of the innovations and practices which were part of the flows and transitions from RRA (rapid rural appraisal) to PRA (participatory rural appraisal) and then to PLA (participatory learning and action). The attitudes, behaviours, roles and mindsets of researchers and then of facilitators emerged as key dimensions, shifting as they did from extracting information from local people to empowering them to do their own appraisal, analysis, planning, action, monitoring and evaluation.

Fourth, I tend to see the world through rose-coloured spectacles, and to search for and argue for win-win solutions to problems. These are, I happily believe, more common than many suppose. This means that I may underestimate the degree to which conflicts of interest are truly zero-sum.

If we take 'mindset' to refer to the ensemble of a person's ideas, attitudes, values, beliefs, mental categories and predispositions, then these four influences and tendencies are part of mine. They show in the arguments I present and the conclusions I believe these lead to. In writing and reflection, I have questioned them and the conclusions they lead to, but they are still there. We all have predispositions. I believe that it is good that a diversity of views, whatever their origins, enables us to come to problems from different angles and to identify different solutions. So I ask readers not to dismiss what follows because I have shown where some of it comes from, but to treat the points and arguments on their own merits.

2 Words, meanings and usage

These life experiences and mindset, and discussions with Jenny Chambers, led to the concept of 'uppers' and 'lowers', common words of deceptive simplicity because of the complex, shifting, subtle and nuanced relationships they represent, at the same time diverse, intangible and elusive. *Upper* can refer to a person who in a context is dominant or superior to a lower in that context. *Lower* can refer to a person who in a context is subordinate or inferior to an upper in that same context. Being an upper or a lower is, to use current language, situational and positional, summarised by 'in a context'. It is common experience, especially in gender relations,[1] that a person can be an upper to another in one context, and a lower to the same person in another, and that many reflexes and habits, tacit agreements, mirrorings of views, concealments, evasions, lies and unspoken understandings can be at play, sometimes known only to the actors and not always even consciously to them. There are resonances with the

insights and theoretical frameworks of various writers, both post-modern and others, but they are not needed for the analysis and discussion which follow.

'Power' has been given many meanings and interpretations. In this article, I take power to be, as described by Vermeulen (2005: 12) '… generally understood as an ability to achieve a wanted end in a social context, with or without the consent of others' and '… one reason why 'power' is a useful term is because it has a commonsense meaning rather than a difficult academic definition' (ibid.: 11). I take its sister word 'empowerment' to mean 'enhancing an individual's or group's capacity to make purposive choices and transform that choice into desired actions and outcomes' (Alsop 2005: 1).

In distinguishing types of power, the most useful framework I have found for this article is that of VeneKlasen and Miller (2002: 45) who have four categories which can be described as follows:

1 Power *over*, meaning the power of an upper over a lower, usually with negative connotations such as restrictive control, penalising and denial of access.

2 Power *to*, also agency, meaning effective choice, the capability to decide on actions and do them.

3 Power *with*, meaning collective power where people, typically lowers, together exercise power through organisation, solidarity and acting together.

4 Power *within*, meaning personal self-confidence.

Concerning common usage, three tendencies can be noted in how discussions of power are framed.

First, usage and mindsets often support meanings in which power sounds like a commodity, so that having more is better. People are empowered (good) or disempowered (bad). We talk of gaining, acquiring, seizing and enjoying power and negatively of losing, surrendering, abandoning, relinquishing and abdicating it. People are driven from power, are deprived of it, excluded from it and stripped[2] of it. Less negatively, power can be handed over or shared. Even then, as with the earlier usages, the mindset tends to be zero-sum: one's gain sounds like another's loss.

Second, power is often spoken of as bad. It is associated with a Hobbesian pessimism about human nature. Power goes with authoritarianism, bossing, control, discipline, domination – and that only reaches 'd' in an alphabetical listing. In these negative usages, power is abused and exploited. All power corrupts. All power deceives. Bad people are power-hungry, intoxicated with power, obsessed with it, and use it for their own ends.

Third, the discourse about power in development has been and remains predominantly about transformations which are bottom-up. The view taken by activists, advocates and radical academics starts with the realities and interests of the powerless. It may stay there, or it may extend upwards to seek to influence the powerful. Typical strategies for change involve those who are marginalised and powerless gaining power *with* and power *within* and then applying these against power *over*. Power *with* is achieved through activities like group meetings and discussions, protests, collective resistance, collective action through marches and demonstrations, and lobbying. The power *within* comes from awareness and self-confidence. These combine as power *to* influence and change the power *over*, through which people are oppressed and kept down.

In this article, I question and qualify all three of these usages and mindsets. I argue that for the powerful, power *over* does not need to be like a zero-sum commodity; that there is nothing inherently bad about power *over* – it all depends on how it is used; and that the importance of bottom-up power *with* and power *within* strategies, vital and often primary though they are, should not distract from the potentials of top-down transformations using power *over* in ways which are win-win, with gains for the powerful as well as for those who are empowered.

3 Reversing pathologies of power

The pathologies of power are so manifest and commonplace that they scarcely bear enumerating. They include most of the bad conditions and experiences of social life – expressing domination, greed, exploitation, violence and intimidation by the powerful, and with the experience of subordination, deprivation, expropriation, fear, pain and insecurity for the powerless. A host of bad relations have dimensions of social power through patriarchy and age, of physical power through strength, weapons

and violence, of legal power through laws and conventions, and of links with and between economic and political power. The pathologies of power also include syndromes of deception, delusion and myth.

Normatively, against this background, good change entails transformations of many power relations. Often these can be seen as reversals, turning what is common and normal on its head. These have been extensively treated in organisational and political theory and practice, and in work on gender, but less at a more general level of the behaviour, attitudes and mindsets of uppers. Pervasively then, good change means changing interpersonal power relations and the processes which mediate them. This is so embarrassingly obvious, it is strange that until recently its generality and relevance has been largely overlooked in development thinking and practice.[3]

For many years, binary lists have been made and published for top-down and bottom-up, and the term reversal is not new. But except with gender, patriarchy, and local elites, the word 'power' referring to interpersonal relations has scarcely been there at all. We have had, for instance, oppositions like these:

Normal	**New**
Top-down	Bottom-up
Centralised	Decentralised
Blueprint	Process
Closed	Open
Time-bound	Open-ended
Target-driven	Process-led
Pre-planned	Participatory
Preset	Emergent
Standardised	Diverse

Advocates of participation tend to hold that good change has to come much more from the 'new' bottom-up column than from the 'normal' top-down, especially when the change concerns people rather than things. To the extent that the top-down mode is normally found in bureaucracies, the case is made for reversals, that is, for countervailing and balancing shifts from top-down towards bottom-up.

Reversals have also been implicit in the rhetorical 'Who?' and 'Whose?' questions referring to uppers and lowers, and concerning power and ownership. Some of the most common are:

Whose reality?
Whose knowledge?
Whose appraisal?
Whose analysis?
Whose planning?
Whose action?
Whose M and E?
Whose indicators? *and*
Who participates in whose project?

There are many others. In *Critical Webs of Power and Change*, Chapman and Mancini (2005: 5) said: 'We need to give a lot more attention to who is involved, who assesses, who learns, whose opinion counts and who has access to information'. For the new field of Participatory Geographic Information Systems (PLA 2006), a total of 42 'who?' and 'whose?' questions have been listed (Rambaldi *et al.* 2006) including, for example:

Who decides on who should participate?
Who participates in whose mapping?
And who is left out?
Who has visual and tactile access?
Whose map legend?
Who gains?
Who loses?
Who is empowered and who is disempowered?

A further step is to ask: Who determines the 'Who' questions?

The normative implication of these rhetorical questions is that the answers should be lowers – those who are poor, excluded, marginalised, subordinate and powerless. And this leads to asking how power can be transformed, how they can empower themselves or be empowered. Two main modes or fields can be identified: those which start from below, more with organisation, and those which start from above, more with the personal, in each case moving into and overlapping with the other mode or field.

4 Starting with the powerless: a zero-sum?

Many of the better-known successful initiatives in development have been initiated working from below and then spreading laterally and vertically, for example the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India; Integrated Pest Management in Indonesia and now in many countries; the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, spreading similarly; and the Reflect movement, now with at least 300 organisations in over 40 countries. To varying degrees, these have

sought to empower through *power within* and *power with*. These are widely characteristic of social movements and of women's groups. Starting and organising from below is also the orientation of recent writings and source books on power, rights, advocacy and action like the four cited below. These are rich in their reviews of ways in which power has been and can be transformed bottom-up. The examples are many and inspiring, where oppressive and abusive power has been overcome by countervailing and ultimately stronger power from below.

This orientation has been reinforced as rights-based approaches have come to complement and to varying degrees, replace service-delivery approaches, notably among international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). Thus, for example, ActionAid International in its mission statement 'Rights to End Poverty' point out:

> We believe that poor and excluded people are the primary agents of change. Poverty and injustice can be eradicated only when they are able to take charge of their lives and act to claim their rights. (ActionAid International 2005: 17)

The means and modalities are many (see for example VeneKlasen and Miller 2002: 50). Typical examples are education for confidence, citizenship and collaboration; affirming resistance; speaking out and connecting with others; participatory research and dissemination; building active constituencies around common concerns; mobilising around shared agendas; litigation; voting; and running for office. Confrontation and conflict are recognised as often integral to success. Power has to be contested. The mindset and orientation are that those with power have to be induced to lose, implying a zero-sum situation.

Nothing in what follows should be taken as an alternative to these approaches from below. In my view, they are primary and should remain so. At the same time, a complementary discourse and strategy can start with closer engagement with and understanding of powerful people and organisations themselves.

5 Starting with the powerful: the limits of 'normal' approaches

In a search for sources of methods and approaches for transforming power relations that are contemporary and authoritative, four stand out:

1 *A New Weave of Power, People and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation* (VeneKlasen and Miller 2002)

2 *Critical Webs of Power and Change* (Chapman and Mancini 2005)

3 *Tools for Influencing Power and Policy* (PLA 2005)

4 *Policy Powertools*, www.policy-powertools.org, a website of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), London.

These have enough in common in their approaches to decision-makers and policymakers to be described as normal. All four sources go some way towards including the powerful, especially decision-makers and policymakers in organisations, in their analysis and prescriptions. The issue is how far they go, and whether as practical guides they could and should go further.

Let us start with how far they do go. Identifying power-holders and their interests and engaging with them are recurrent themes.

VeneKlasen and Miller devote thought and space to identifying forces, friends and foes (2002: 211–27), including detailed mapping of power. They mention the importance of knowing about government or economic and international decision-making structures and officials. In forcefield analysis, the short-term and long-term interests of each actor in relation to the issue are to be charted. The viewpoints of identified players with respect to the issue are to be noted. Questions to be asked include why opponents oppose. But while they go a long way in their comprehensive analysis, there is scope for more when it comes to incentives, mindsets, and institutional cultures. The text teeters tantalisingly on the edge of the further step of standing in the shoes of decision-makers, or sitting on their chairs, and seeing things their way round from their stance or seat, and weighing gains and losses from their point of view.

Similarly *Critical Webs of Power and Change* states that 'Strengthening … collective action, critical consciousness and leadership should always be a crucial strategy within people-centred advocacy, but will rarely be the only strategy' (8). It has a section (18) on analysing context and power. This includes

identifying and mapping the major players and their real and expressed interests. It also asks: 'Who do you consider your allies and opponents?' (18) and, 'Who in power can make the decisions that will help bring about these changes?'(41). On its CD ROM there is a section on 'Naming the powerful' and sections such as 'Mapping the Policy System and Mapping Power', and a whole chapter on 'Manoeuvring on the Inside: Lobbying and Negotiating'. Primary targets are the decision-makers with the most power to address an issue, and secondary targets are individuals who do not have the power to solve the problem but who are close to the primary target.

Similarly, in *Tools for Influencing Power and Policy*, the editor wrote:

> Many of the policy tools in this special issue aim at engaging with rather than resisting powerful bodies such as companies and government agencies, albeit engaging tactically rather than playing along with the naïve idea that if stakeholders just sit down and talk, it will be all right. (Vermeulen 2005: 14)

The tools in that issue are grouped under three headings: build power to act; claim the tools of the powerful; take hold of participatory processes. The authors are careful to recognise and warn against the armoury of the powerful that can be deployed, including cooptation, deception, reneging on agreements and resorting to force.

Finally, a similar orientation and emphases are also found on the IIED website (2006). This lists 26 tools for influencing decisions and decision making about natural resource management. Four groups of tools are identified – for understanding, for organising, for engaging and for ensuring. Understanding the motives and language of the powerful, and building alliances with sympathetic partners and possible champions are mentioned, but the orientation of the tools, as with the other three sources, is mainly bottom-up with 'well informed and well organised groups of marginalised people'.

In all these sources, the dominant strategy is to build countervailing power and to penetrate and influence upwards. All recognise the need for allies and friends. But more so, all see opponents who have to be confronted and tackled. As *The New Weave* ... (VeneKlasen and Miller 2002: 225) has it, 'Rarely does anyone give up power without a fight'. Accepting and embracing conflict, the model and mindset are framed into a game which is predominantly zero-sum. Practical and realistic while this often is, it sees things only one way round. The question is whether it tends to obscure and undervalue opportunities which start with the realities and contexts of the powerful.

6 A complementary agenda

Seeing things from the decision-maker's point of view, and analysing how they can be influenced and helped, needs a leap of the imagination. This can generate a complementary agenda. While this is not absent from the four sources, it can go further than they do.

One approach is 'practical political economy'. For different measures or courses of action, key players are analysed for degree of gain, loss or neutrality. For 22 measures concerning water and trees in India, this was done in a matrix for the rural rich and less poor, field-level officials, and poorer rural people, enabling judgements about relative feasibility and degrees of win-win or win-lose (Chambers *et al.* 1989: 231–3).

Another approach is to support those of the powerful who are either allies or opponents and potential allies, for example providing them with information and arguments they can use. Treating those who are undecided, sitting on the fence, or even hostile, as allies can be self-fulfilling. People who are assumed to be going to act well are sometimes induced to do so by the expectation. It may be harsh to describe naïve optimism as Machiavellian but it can be worth trying: face-to-face confidence and assumptions that those with power will behave well gives them an opportunity to change and do so without loss of face.

These are elements of approaches to complement or even substitute for confrontation. To further illustrate, three more specific activities as part of what can become a much fuller repertoire are:[4]

- Search official statements of policy, mission statements and the like, and arm and reinforce policymakers with the rhetoric of their own organisations, agencies or governments to strengthen their power to argue within their bureaucracies

- Provide them with information in forms which they can use, in the language suiting the style of their organisations. This may best be done by an ally who has worked in the organisation or in a similar one

- Consult them informally about the most effective ways to proceed, and what pressures from outside could strengthen their hands internally.

On this last point, some NGO representatives for a large meeting on participation in a multilateral organisation were, over a decade ago, asked to come half a day early. The purposes included an informal request that they would not give too much praise to the progress made in the organisation. Those who had invited them wanted their colleagues to hear forceful criticism to strengthen their hands.

7 Power to empower: a win-win

Underpinning these points, and going further than them, is the argument that there is extensive unrealised potential for win-win solutions through uppers using their power *over* to empower. For those with power *over* in organisations, three main gains stand out. Although each deserves careful qualification, the main elements stated baldly are:

1 *Realism and knowledge.* All power *over* deceives (Chambers 1997: 76–101). Such power exercised as punitive control feeds fear, provokes prudent concealment and dissembling, and leads to error, myth and mutual deception. Conversely, democratic empowerment in a non-punitive learning mode allows and encourages realism.

2 *Efficiency and effectiveness.* This is a commonplace of management theory and practice. Power over with detailed top-down controls is inefficient and ineffective. Centralisation overloads uppers and the capacity of the centre, demotivates lowers, misses opportunities for lowers and peripheries to realise their potentials, and imposes standardisation which often misfits local diversity. Conversely, decentralised decision making decreases pressures on uppers and the centre, motivates lowers, and allows lowers and peripheries to realise more of their potentials, fitting local diversity.

3 *Responsible well-being.* Uppers and centres of authority often suffer overwork, anxiety and stress from their responsibilities, their roles, and tense and conflictual relationships. Conversely, when lowers are empowered, stress for uppers is often replaced by satisfaction and the experiences of well-being, which flow from fair and good actions and relationships.

A wealth of common experience and evidence from cases could be adduced to support these points. A recent cameo is the research project *Children Decide: Power, Participation and Purpose in the Primary Classroom* (Cox *et al.* 2006). Children were facilitated to use PRA visual methods to analyse school and classroom decision making, and given space to make more decisions themselves. Typically, one teacher wrote:

> One of the first things I realised … was that the children had very little opportunity to make meaningful decisions in my class … I reflected on the possibility that I was too used to making decisions for the children so I, as their teacher, could feel in control of my class and their behaviour. I became much more aware of the power structure within my class and started to think of more ways of distributing it throughout the class. I began to consider how many decisions I was needlessly making for the children … My role as educator became more focused on enabling children to make informed decisions about how and what they wanted to learn. The relationship between the children and myself became much more of a partnership with the feeling that education was not done to my students but with them. (Cox *et al.* 2006: 195)

The teachers reported that they '… saw the changing relationship between teacher and children in terms of leading, guiding, coaching, rather than directive teaching' (Cox *et al.* 2006: 49).

There are indeed many ways in which those with power over can use it as power to empower. What follows draws especially on the personal experiences of facilitators, and appears widely applicable. The many actions which can empower include to:

- *Change behaviour and relationships.* This covers a huge range of personal behaviour and interaction, and includes many forms of encouragement and support

- *Convene and catalyse.* Uppers or others[5] bring lowers together. In practice, this is often done so that the upper exercises power over, in order to dominate, exploit, direct, organise or teach those who are convened. But convening can also be to empower. If the other behaviours are followed, the meeting which is convened can lead to sharing, analysis, learning, solidarity and both power within and power with for those who are, or were, lowers in the situation. Convening provides opportunities to catalyse. This entails initiating or accelerating processes, sometimes described as igniting. (In chemical catalysis the catalyst does not change, so the metaphor is not wholly apposite because catalysts (facilitators) in this mode themselves are changed by the process.)

- *Facilitate.* Uppers do not impose their ideas, or even agendas, but encourage lowers to do their own appraisals, analysis and planning, and come to their own conclusions. The slogans used in PRA apply here – hand over the stick, sit down, listen and learn, and shut up!, as do the many do's and don'ts for good facilitation (see for example Kumar 1996; Kaner *et al.* 1996)

- *Coach and inspire.* A team leader, a committee chair, a teacher, a trainer or other upper sees herself less in the image of a military officer who commands and controls, and more as a football coach who trains, encourages, supports and inspires

- *Ask questions.* Asking questions and leaving people to answer them can be an empowering way of opening up issues. For example, in transforming gender perceptions and relations (Harris, this *IDS Bulletin*) 'Ask them' in a PRA mode has been at times dramatically effective: asking lowers for their ideas and more so for their advice

- *Broker.* This entails acting as an intermediary, connecting people and organisations, supporting negotiations, and making minimum interventions to assure fair outcomes

- *Make enabling rules.* As in computer theory and practice, so in human organisation, minimum rules can enable complex and diverse emergent behaviour. On a computer and in human organisation the resulting behaviour can be in practice unpredictable: three simple rules for random blobs on a screen lead them to form a flock and fly around; two rules – accurate and open accounting, and rotating leadership – lead to women's savings groups deciding their own norms, procedures and actions (Aloysius Fernandez 1996, pers. comm.).

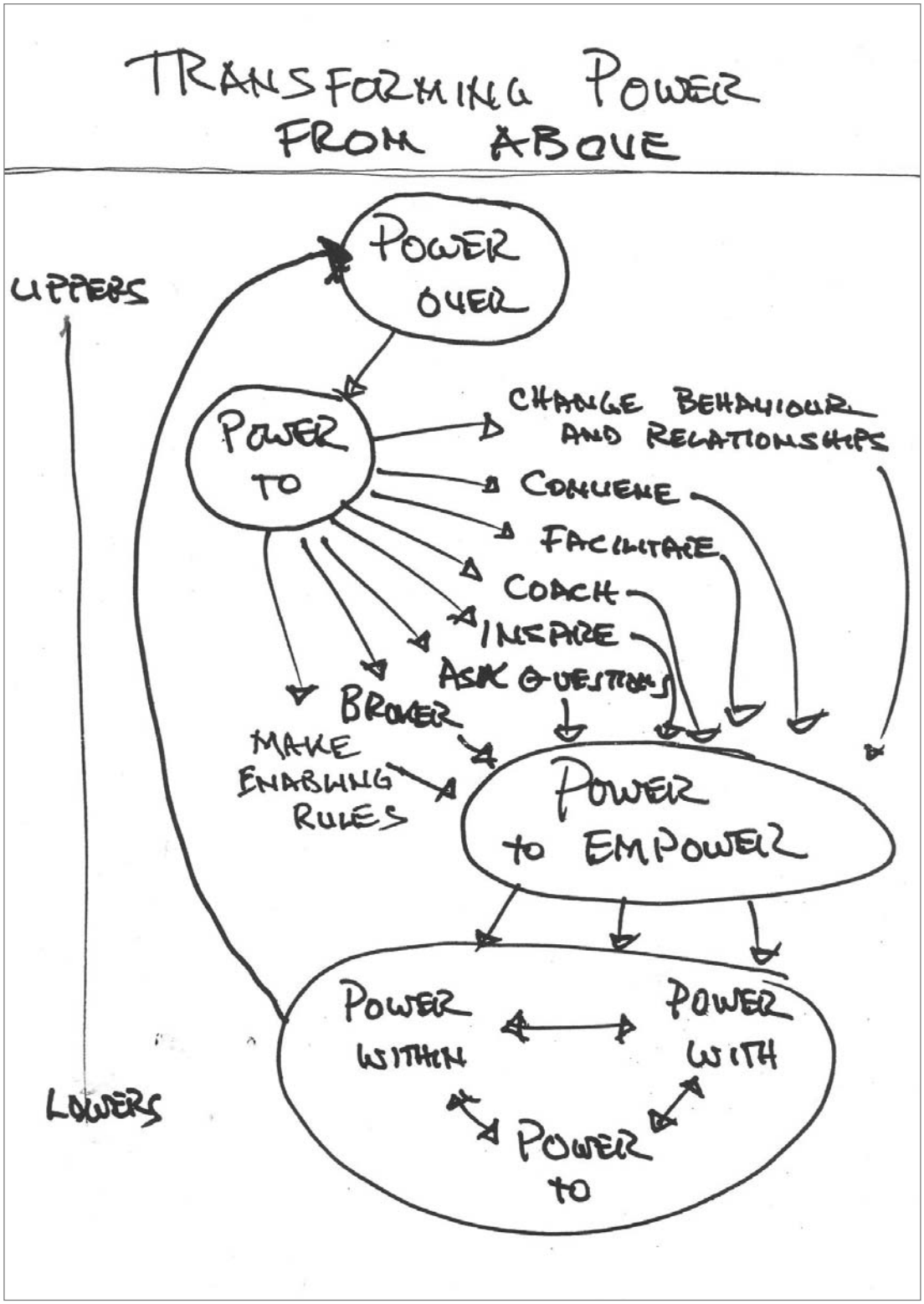
Facilitation that empowers in modes such as these can transform the three disabilities of power *over*, turning an upper's power *over* from a problem into an opportunity: the deceptions of power may diminish or disappear, replaced by openness and realism, with scope for learning and keeping more up to date and in touch with a changing world; efficiency and effectiveness may be enhanced as lowers realise more of their potentials, and act more creatively and diversely with better local ownership and fit; and in place of overload, stress, anxiety and hostility, there may be better relationships, fulfilment and even fun.

Beyond this, there is a realm of paradox. Aneurin Bevan said: 'The purpose of getting power is to be able to give it away', not a dictum many politicians have acted out. Going even further, one of the principles from the ActionAid workshop on Transforming Power was deliberate self-disempowerment expressed as:

> We will help coalitions and networks of partners to develop the strength to challenge us. (ActionAid 2001: 22)

But even with that, there is a further paradox, expressed as: 'We are powerful when we question ourselves … when we are self-critical. It is strange, but when we can really list and face our problems we have a new source of power' (ActionAid 2001: 10).

However, such reflections and actions by power-holders are scarcely on the development agenda. Yet if power is to be transformed, those actors who are powerful would seem to be crucial. In gender relations, this is recognised, with more attention paid now to working with men (Cornwall and White 2000; Harris, this *IDS Bulletin*). We have source books for those who work with the powerless. We do not have similar source books[6] for working with the powerful, to help them act and change. Has their time come? Are such source books overdue?


TRANSFORMING POWER
FROM ABOVE
UPPERS
LOWERS
POWER OVER
POWER TO
CHANGE BEHAVIOUR AND RELATIONSHIPS
CONVENE
FACILITATE
COACH
INSPIRE
ASK QUESTIONS
BROKER
MAKE ENABLING RULES
POWER to EMPOWER
POWER WITHIN
POWER WITH
POWER TO

8 A pedagogy for the powerful'

All this points towards what appears a largely overlooked frontier in development thinking and practice. This is to evolve and apply a pedagogy for the powerful. This can include all who are upper in a context, but especially multiple uppers – the staff of aid agencies and NGOs, government officials, political leaders, priests, teachers, professionals of many sorts, and pervasively men. The methodological challenge is to find ways to enable powerful people like these to reflect and change. Any such pedagogy may be in its infancy, but there are promising practices. As a start, five areas of activity and innovation can be suggested below.

8.1 Workshops, retreats and reflection

Reflective practice, as Pettit points out (this *IDS Bulletin*) has been increasingly accepted as a professional norm. Yet for people in powerful positions in development organisations, times and spaces for personal and joint reflection and learning, in quiet places far from offices, are astonishingly rare. If they do go to retreats or workshops, it is often only for part of the time, and 'Blackberries', mobile phones and the internet will not give them peace. Yet the irony is that such experience may matter more for them than for others.

A pioneering attempt to do this was as an eight-day ActionAid workshop for 40 people convened in Dhaka in 2001 (ActionAid 2001). We thought we had gone to share our experiences with participatory approaches and methods. Had we known it was going to be about power and relationships, we might have been less willing to take part. Some who were more powerful might have felt this would be a waste of their time, or a challenge to their authority. The experience was both traumatic and transformative. Those of us who were usually multiple uppers were repeatedly induced to acknowledge and offset our power. While there can be no substitute for the personal experience of such a workshop, the record and review of this one is an eloquent and challenging source of insight (ActionAid 2001).

8.2 Training to facilitate

Arguably, all development professionals should be facilitators, and all should be trained in facilitation. The three days of training in facilitation for staff from International Agricultural Research Centres were inspiring and seminal, and reportedly led to changes of behaviour, the way meetings were held and relationships.[8] Training may, indeed, be an inappropriate word, for it can carry associations with didactic teaching and even Pavlov's dogs, while processes of learning and changing are more personal, experiential and evolutionary. Neither should this be limited to one or a few categories of people. It is in the spirit of participatory and non-dominating relationships that in some sense, everyone is a facilitator, everyone including, and especially but not only, the powerful.

8.3 Face-to-face direct experience

Approaches have been evolving to enable senior and other development professionals to listen and learn from poor and marginalised people, and to experience and understand something of their lives, realities and priorities. Participatory action research (Jupp 2005) and week-long periods in the field listening to and learning from 'people of concern' (Groves 2005; UNHCR 2006) are two examples. The most common and spreading are immersions and facilitated immersion workshops, typically with a few days and nights in a community (ActionAid International 2006; Irvine *et al*. 2006 cited in Eyben 2006). These have already proved valuable for general exposure, and have also been tailored for specific contexts and purposes. There is a potential here for empathy and insight, for feeling as well as thinking, and for direct experiential learning.

8.4 Peer influence between the powerful

To gain the attention of the very powerful and influence them can demand prestige, credibility and courage. These have been characteristics of Bono and Geldof. Bono has been remarkably successful with some of the world's leaders. In 2002, he took the US Treasury Secretary, Paul O'Neill, on a four-country tour of Africa (Vallely 2006). Geldof remains prominent in trying to hold the G8 nations to their 2005 Gleneagles commitments. Both continue to challenge governments, not just on debt and aid, but especially on trade. It is now for other individuals, and for more organisations, to 'do a Bono' and 'do a Geldof' and affirm ideals with actions.

The same applies to philanthropy with the examples of George Soros, Bill Gates and now Warren Buffett, and many others on a lesser scale, some of whom seek to remain unknown. Whatever reservations and criticisms there may be of the origins of the money or its uses, even a cynic accomplished in casuistry

would find it difficult to argue that the world would be a better place without, for example, the Gates Foundation. And the best people to encourage others among the wealthy to do likewise are precisely those who are philanthropists already.

8.5 Well-being

Acknowledging and transforming personal power as an upper can be difficult and painful, but also liberating. The resulting changes in behaviour and relationships can bring long-term gains to well-being and fulfilment for uppers as well as lowers. The opportunity is then for win-win solutions with better relationships for all, reducing their disabilities and realising more of their potentials. For uppers, with the exercise of less controlling power *over* can come a better experience of life.

If the bottom line in development is equity and the good life, a key power-related question to ask is what is a good life for a powerful person. A 54-year-old man from the town of Kok Yangak, Jalal Abad Region was reported to have said:

> If somebody's well-being is based on the illbeing of someone else it is not a true well-being. (World Bank 1999)

Arguably, this can be applied to all exploitative upper–lower relationships. Much of the material well-being of those who are 'better off' is based on the ill-being of others. But the other side of the coin is the scope for offsetting that ill-being when those who are better off use their resources and power to work on the side of the poor, marginalised and weak. They then gain the well-being that comes with responsible action. A man who beats his wife is not a happy man. If he changes, he stands to gain, as does the woman he beats, in many social and psychological ways.

On these lines, for Jung (1916) there was a dialectic of power and love. At the personal level:

> Where love rules, there is no will to power, and where power predominates, love is lacking. The one is the shadow of the other.
>
> Is Jung's opposition of power and love a profound aspiration and challenge? In gender relations, between parents and children and also more widely in family, community, society, organisations and politics? And can a will to power be transformed, in a spirit of love, into a will to empower?

Answers to these questions may usually be affirmative but they have to be conditional to context. In organisations, in politics and in conditions of danger and insecurity, the will to power cannot be so clearly opposed to love: for some, exercise of power and control are needed. The key distinction is between the will to power and the responsible exercise of power. We need organisations with structures of power, political leadership, which exercises power on behalf of citizens, and power and control as one means of providing protection in danger and insecurity, but in each case exercised with humane responsibility.

The theme of this article endorses and flows from making power and relationships central to development, as argued in *Relationships for Aid* (Eyben 2006). Power and relationships are pervasively implied by concerns with gender, empowerment, participation, ownership, accountability, transparency and partnership. All these words have been mainstreamed in the development lexicon but without realising their implications for mindsets, behaviour and attitudes. The Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness (OECD 2005) uses the words partner and partnership 96 times,[9] but neither power nor relationship once. What is going on? Are power and relationships, and what these two words represent, an elephant in the room, so large, occupying so much space, that it is not seen? Is one of the biggest challenges for the twenty-first century to recognise, tame and transform that elephant? And if so, is the place to start with a pedagogy for the powerful, enabling them to understand how they are disabled by power, and how in many ways they can gain if they use their power to empower those weaker than themselves?

Notes

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1 Power relations are often gendered, for example by space and activity, with men 'uppers' to women in some (and often most) but women 'uppers' to men in others, even in strongly patriarchal cultures.

2 Being stripped of power evokes an image of sudden, humiliating nakedness of a priest who is unfrocked.

3 See for example, Groves and Hinton (2004), Gaventa, Eyben and the other articles (2006) in this *IDS Bulletin*.

4 See for example Holland and Blackburn (1998) *passim* for other actions.

5 The others besides 'uppers' who can bring people together can include peers, strangers, even 'lowers' themselves. In this discussion we are concerned mainly with 'uppers'.

6 I shall be grateful to anyone who can provide examples to show this statement to be false.

7 For an earlier and fuller treatment, under the rubric 'A pedagogy for the non-oppressed' (with apologies to Paulo Freire), see Chambers (1995).

8 The training was conducted by Sam Kaner, the author with others of *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making*.

9 I have not checked every noun, but I think that with their 96 mentions, 'partner' and 'partnership', counted together, are the most frequently used nouns in the Paris Declaration, the next two being 'donor' with 70 and 'aid' with 61. The adjective 'effective' has 38 mentions, but 'efficient' and 'efficiency' are strikingly absent. Rosalind Eyben has pointed out that this will be because efficiency is so fundamental that it does not need to be named. Power and relationships, I would argue, are even more fundamental but are not named for the opposite reason, that they are not recognised, and if they were, it would embarrass and threaten the powerful.

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POWER, POVERTY, AND KNOWLEDGE – REFLECTING ON 50 YEARS OF LEARNING WITH ROBERT CHAMBERS

Issue Editors **Stephen Thompson and Mariah Cannon**

Contents

This article has been reissued as part of *IDS Bulletin* Archive Collection Vol. 54 No. 1A March 2023: **'Power, Poverty, and Knowledge – Reflecting on 50 Years of Learning with Robert Chambers'**; the Introduction is also recommended reading.

Sharing and Co-generating Knowledges: Reflections on Experiences with PRA[1] and CLTS[2]

Robert Chambers[3]

Abstract The evolution and spread of **PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal or Participatory Reflection and Action)** and **CLTS (Community-Led Total Sanitation)** have involved activities of sharing and co-generating knowledge which can loosely be considered a form of Action Learning. Key activities for this have been sequences of participatory workshops which have evolved as creative collective experiences fed by and feeding into wider networking and dissemination. These workshops have been occasions for sharing practice and collating experiences, and going beyond these to generate ideas and evolve and agree principles and good practices. Critical reflections concern power, planning and process, theory of change and impact, lessons learnt, and an ongoing learning process.

1 Introduction and purpose

The purpose of this article is to examine and draw lessons from experiences with two participatory methodologies – PRA and CLTS. While they have earlier roots, PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal or Participatory Reflection and Action) has evolved since 1989 and CLTS (Community-Led Total Sanitation) since 2000. Many actors and organisations have been involved in many countries, with much diversity and creativity. Both PRA and CLTS have been, and remain, continuously evolving and spreading. The approach and methods of PRA have diffused into many other methodologies and practices. CLTS is a more specialised movement that has drawn on the PRA tradition and practices.

What follows are my critical reflections as a participant in the evolution and spread of these methodologies. I have been exceptionally lucky to have had the freedom to be able to accompany PRA and CLTS and to be present at, and take part in, the activities described below. As an enthusiast for these approaches and methods, I am vulnerable to positive biases. While I try to offset these through critical reflection, there is no way I can fully succeed. In my view PRA and CLTS are enthralling in the potentials which they have opened up and continue to open up. At the same time, much practice in their names has been and remains deeply flawed and must continuously be learnt from and improved upon.

In what follows I shall focus on those activities in the evolution of PRA and CLTS which concern combinations of sharing and co-generating knowledge and ideas about principles and practices. Co-generation has taken place most clearly in two contexts: in communities, and in workshops.

First, both PRA and CLTS have entailed participatory processes for innovation and the co-generation of knowledge with people in communities. Both were evolved interactively in real-life hands-on situations in communities and with community participants. They could not have come about otherwise. It is in the nature of a grounded participatory methodology that it is co-evolved in practice with participants. Those who made the first PRA social maps on the ground in India in 1989, after light facilitation to get things going, did it themselves and showed and found out for themselves what they could do, and which neither they nor the facilitators knew they could do. They demonstrated a striking and widespread phenomenon with PRA. This is how processes take off and facilitation is not only

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then not needed, but can be a distraction. An outsider facilitator can observe and assess but usually does best by keeping quiet and being inconspicuous during group visual activities in which knowledge is being expressed, made visible and co-generated by those who are participating. For more on this and its rigour see *Whose Reality Counts?* (Chambers 1997: 117–61).

This article focuses on the second context. This involves practitioners, activists, engaged academics and others who are outsiders to communities. While networking and dissemination have been major activities in PRA and CLTS, the events that are most identifiable, creative and productive for these actors have been participatory workshops.

I am writing from my personal experience and fallible recollection, in part triangulated with recorded evidence. I am acutely aware of the fallibility of memory generally (see e.g. Schulz 2010) and my own in particular. I have several times found myself recounting a story only to find it contradicted by written or visual evidence from the occasion I am recollecting. It is also easy and tempting to forget or ignore negative cases where approaches and methods have not worked. I urge readers to reflect critically on my mindset and likely biases, to check with the written evidence, and other sources, and to assess for themselves the relevance of what follows for contemporary and future development practice.

2 Words, labels and action learning

Words and labels matter, so let me try to be clear about them at the outset. 'Co-' words are now much applied to knowledge. 'Co-construction' is perhaps the most common, and as a succession of IDS Annual Reports show, has for some years been part of IDS rhetoric and philosophy. It moves us forward from concepts of one-sided extractive research to the language of partnership and collaboration in research and in creating knowledge. As a term, though, co-construction invites deconstruction. Co-construction implies building. It evokes an image of people coming with their building blocks of knowledge, their bricks, or bits of Lego, and putting them together to make a solid structure. But knowledge is not like that: it is dynamic, provisional and changing, organic rather than mechanical.

Moreover, knowledge is not singular but plural. There is not one but a multiplicity of epistemologies and knowledges, with varied personal, methodological and contextual origins and situations. With participatory processes, we can find interpersonal and creative sharing of knowledges which in turn generates new insights and ideas. What emerges may be given temporary singularity when expressed in writing, diagrams or other records. But every participant carries away a separate personal knowledge, making plural *knowledges*.

The difference between the start and end of knowledge-generating activities can, in fact, be seen as threefold: multiple situated personal learnings and knowledges; a singular knowledge whenever there is a written or visual record; and, implicit and occasionally explicit, learning about process and learning itself. The written or visual record is fixed, though open to many interpretations. The situated and personal knowledges and learnings continue to develop and change. So what we are concerned with is not really *co-constructing knowledge* but better expressed as *sharing and co-generating knowledges*.

A question has been how to label these activities. In the research project on CLTS which led to the book *Shit Matters* (Mehta and Movik 2011) we were opportunistic in adopting *Action Learning and Networking* to describe activities in the project which were not what informally we called *classic research*. This was because we needed a label, and what we were doing was neither classic research, nor really the research of Action Research or Participatory (aka Participative) Action Research. It was more learning from experiences of action, of what worked and what did not, of approaches, methods and innovations. Also Action Research and Participatory Action Research had a formidable and daunting literature while Action Learning appeared to have less. The classic and authoritative collection *The Sage Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice* (Reason and Bradbury 2008) has 49 chapters, only one of which (Pedler and Burgoyne 2008), is explicitly devoted to action learning.

Action Learning (AL) does indeed provide a broad umbrella under which participatory learning methodologies can shelter and from which they can gain some legitimacy. A light scan of the literature shows that the AL label has been used

quite loosely and inclusively. Reginald Revans, regarded as the father of AL, and credited with having first used the term, wrote 'There can be no learning without action; and no (sober and deliberate) action without learning' (cited in Pedler and Burgoyne 2008: 320), an observation with a comfortably wide generality. At the same time those who write about AL practice can be very specific about how to do things in particular contexts. Pedler (1997) for example, giving an organisational example, specifies down to the detail of involving a set of six or so colleagues who meet regularly to support and challenge each other.[4] Or for James Taylor and his co-authors (1997) the action-reflection-learning-planning cycle is at the core of action learning. For them, it is a facilitated process that can be applied at personal, organisational and community levels. They too present specifics such as a do-it-yourself guide to improving your organisation. What follows here in this article is different again but bears family resemblances. It too is specific on details of practice in participatory workshops. This is consonant with Pedler and Burgoyne's (2008) observation that Revans

> eschews any single definition of action learning… This lack of precise definition may hinder transmission, but it also contributes to the generation of new practices and the renewal and re-vivification of the idea.

PRA and CLTS activities of sharing and co-generating knowledge and knowledges in workshops and other contexts have sought knowledges about principles, methods, activities in PRA and CLTS grounded in field and action realities and experiences. I hope it is reasonable to describe these as action learning.

3 Evidence and experience

Brief historical overviews of PRA and CLTS can set the context from which the evidence is drawn.

3.1 PRA

PRA is often described as an approach and methods. The approach critically includes behaviour, attitudes and facilitating participatory analysis and action. The methods typically involve, but are not limited to, small groups doing their own analysis with visuals such as maps and diagrams on the ground or on paper. PRA was pioneered in India and East Africa mainly in the very early 1990s, largely by Indians and Kenyans. The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED, specifically Jules Pretty, Irene Guijt, Ian Scoones and John Thompson) were major actors and made a huge contribution, not least through training and innovating methods in many countries. PRA spread in the 1990s to over 100 countries, in at least 20 of which PRA networks were established. IDS was generously and flexibly funded to support the sharing and spread of PRA, without the constraint of logframes and the like.

Applications of the methods have been innumerable. Participatory mapping – social mapping, resource mapping, mobility mapping, vulnerability mapping, and so on – has been facilitated now in millions of cases. Other methods like pairwise ranking, matrix scoring, seasonal diagramming, wealth ranking (in practice better described as wellbeing grouping), Venn or *chapati* diagramming, and spider diagrams – have been very widely used, and are a standard part of the repertoire of many government and non-governmental organisation (NGO) fieldworkers.

Applications of the participatory approach with its behaviour, attitudes and facilitation, combined with the methods, have been myriad. They can be found extensively in many domains such as natural resource management, social protection, poverty appraisals, agriculture, health, women's empowerment, HIV/AIDS and other sectors.

3.2 CLTS

CLTS is a more specialised participatory methodology. It springs from the PRA tradition. Rural community members are facilitated to face the facts of open defecation, often leading to their immediate decision to stop it. It was pioneered by Kamal Kar, a leading PRA trainer and practitioner, in Bangladesh in early 2000. Through his efforts and initiatives of WSP (the Water and Sanitation Program of the World Bank), it was spread to India and then later with support from WSP, Plan International, WaterAid, UNICEF and other organisations, to other countries, now numbering over 40 (Kar 2003; Kar and Pasteur 2005; Bongartz and Chambers 2009; www.communityledtotalsanitation.org). Fifteen countries are reported to have adopted CLTS as part of their national strategy for rural sanitation.

CLTS requires radical and difficult changes in policy and behaviour. Former policies of hardware subsidy are abandoned: people dig their own latrines. Standard designs are abolished: local designs take over. Achievement is no longer mainly latrines constructed: it is communities credibly declared and verified as being open defecation-free. The idea that poor and weak people need help from outside gives way to the idea that primary responsibility lies with, and can be fulfilled by, others in the community.

3.3 Challenges shared by both

Both PRA and CLTS are radical. Both challenge power. PRA was revolutionary when it started, and still is in many places and for many people, presenting alternatives to established approaches and methods; CLTS is revolutionary, confronting embedded policies and budgets, and like PRA before it has proved hard for many to accept. Both PRA and CLTS have faced, and still have to confront, many personal, institutional and professional obstacles: personal mindsets conditioned by education and training; entrenched conservatism and vested interests in international agencies, governments, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and national NGOs; universities and training institutes and their curricula and faculty who are set in their ways and for whom change would be unsettling and entail extra work; embedded practices which favour questionnaire surveys over group visualisation and participatory statistics; top-down planning over bottom-up emergence; and attitudes and practices of teaching and instructing rather than facilitating. This last is crucial. Both PRA and CLTS require sensitive facilitation: lack of this has contributed to serious problems of quality when going to scale.

4 Sharing and Co-generating Knowledges (SHACK) in practice

Sharing and Co-generating Knowledges (SHACK) describes much of how PRA and CLTS have evolved and spread. When combined with innovation, PRA and CLTS have been grounded in interactions with people in communities as active agents, and have spread and developed through communications and workshops. The forms taken could be considered an extended epistemology in that they have combined at least three of the four ways of knowing posited by Heron and Reason (2008). Using their terms, both PRA and CLTS have been based on: *experiential knowing* through face-to-face encounters – they have come about through interactions in communities; *presentational knowing*, being expressed through enactment – they are performative; and *practical knowing* through skills and competence – they are continuously tested by practice, 'rooted in and continually refreshed through experiential encounter' (*ibid*.: 378). *Propositional knowing*, which Heron and Reason describe as 'intellectual knowing of ideas and theories' with its product 'the informative spoken or written statement' (*ibid*.: 367) has been less significant. With both PRA and CLTS propositional knowledge in this sense has been secondary and inferred from the other ways of knowing (see Chambers 2008). In its place, as we shall see below, informative spoken and written statements have come less, if at all, from explicit theories, but instead from sharing and discussing experiences and insights and then going beyond them through brainstorming and debate to emergent consensus concerning new knowledge and to personal knowledges.

Reflection has also been significant in the sense that it is involved in much if not all experiential learning as a continuous process. The circularity of experience – reflection – planning – action, though traditionally presented sequentially in a circle, has not been how things have happened.[5] All these activities have occurred concurrently as part of experiential learning and innovation.

5 Enabling conditions and activities

Significant conditions and preconditions have enabled PRA and CLTS to come about. Bearing these in mind will help in assessing the applicability of SHACK approaches and methods in other contexts. Seven enabling conditions and activities stand out.

5.1 Grounded innovations that work

Both PRA and CLTS grew from and were evolved out of innovations with communities in real time. The methods and approach were co-generated interactively with people. PRA exploded because visuals and group analysis worked. People in communities enjoyed making maps and representing their realities in diagrams. They showed and discovered for themselves that they were capable of far more complex representations and analysis than they or others

had supposed. And these visuals proved versatile and useful in many contexts for many people for many purposes. CLTS has been similarly grounded. It too showed that people are capable of analysis and action that neither they nor outsiders had any idea of. It has simultaneously turned on their heads the conventional ideas that poor rural people could not build their own latrines, had to be subsidised, and required a standard structure. Instead it relies on triggering awareness and action through facilitation: people are facilitated through CLTS exercises – they map their defecation areas, go and stand in them, calculate the volume of shit they produce, analyse for themselves the pathways of shit to the mouth, and so on – and are usually so disgusted when they conclude that they are 'eating one another's shit' that they decide to stop open defecation and often start digging pits at once.

5.2 *Training, facilitation, scale and quality*

From the very beginning it was evident with both PRA and CLTS that facilitation, and the attitudes, behaviours and relationships, of facilitators were central to success and to spread. The same has been found with other participatory methodologies (see Brock and Pettit 2007 especially Nandago 2007). Two very widespread international movements – Reflect (*Education Action* 1994 – continuing; Archer 2007), which draws on both Freirian and PRA approaches, methods and traditions, and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) (Pontius *et al.* 2002; Fakih *et al.* 2003) – both stress the critical importance of facilitators, their skills and behaviours. In Reflect, the facilitator is said to be the one in the group who talks least; in IPM it is said that you can tell the facilitator for he or she will be the first into the mud of the paddy field. In PRA and CLTS, training and mentoring have similarly been recognised as critical. Because they work so well when done well, both PRA and CLTS have been subject to pressures to go fast to scale, and trainers and training organisations have popped up who lack the vital orientations and abilities. In both cases, hands-on training in communities in real time has proved crucial. In both cases, donors and governments eager to go to scale either have not known this or have ignored it, and much training has been not hands-on and experiential, but classroom-based. The mislearning, passed on from trainer to trainer, has then been counterproductive, sometimes tragically so on a vast scale.[6]

5.3 *Flexible funding, institutions and trust*

To a gradually diminishing degree, both PRA and CLTS have been able to spread so dramatically because of donor understanding and flexibility. Funding for PRA reconnaissance and accompaniment in India in 1989–91 came from ODA (DFID/UKAid), the Ford Foundation and the Aga Khan Foundation. Originally work on participation in agricultural research was to have been a major part of the work I was funded for, but the donors gave me almost total freedom to follow the action where it led, which was to PRA. Throughout the 1990s, both IIED and IDS had flexibility in their funding. In the case of IDS, Sida (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) and SDC (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation) allowed a substantial budget item for 'unanticipated opportunities' and were flexible about budget reallocations in the rapidly developing situation. There were no logframes. In the early 2000s this flexible funding was used to invite Kamal Kar to IDS to write his seminal Working Paper (Kar 2003) which did so much to launch CLTS on the international scene. Between donors and IDS there was free and frank interchange, open communication, an advisory group chaired and facilitated by colleagues from developing countries, and an atmosphere of trust. Without that, CLTS would not have taken off as it did.

5.4 *Champions, energy and action*

Because they were grounded in interactive experience and disciplined by what worked in real time, both PRA and CLTS fired the enthusiasm of champions who then spread them. For SHACK a fundamental has been that the sharing and co-generation have been driven not by academic analysis but by what works and does not work in the real world of practice. Enthusiasm and energy have been central drivers of innovation and change. Both PRA and CLTS opened up potentials that had not been dreamt of. This fired the imagination of champions who could sense that they were riding a new wave. They saw and knew from their experience that these approaches worked and could be empowering and transformative. The problems of scale, speed and quality have been immensely challenging, bringing dire threats as well as pointing to huge potentials, but many who engaged saw that by tackling the problems they could realise more of the potentials. Through their conviction, energy and commitment, champions have been crucial in making a difference.

5.5 *Communities of commitment*

Much has been written about Communities of Practice (COPs). What these may or may not have is commitment. It is almost a ritual now to set up a COP at the end of a successful workshop or conference. But on return to their offices, participants are faced by many other priorities. Good intentions drown and die in a flood of emails. There is nothing to my knowledge that calls itself a Community of Practice with PRA and CLTS. But they have had, and still have, communities of colleagues, or co-workers, of co-conspirators almost, who sense themselves to be outsiders sharing a common vision and passion, and united by the resolve to push over the walls of convention, vested interests and conservatism which block their path. These are more than Communities of Practice. They are communities of collaboration, of mutual support, of solidarity, of shared inspiration, communities of commitment.

5.6 *Face-to-face meetings*

Throughout their histories, meetings and workshops have been a vital part of PRA and CLTS and convening them a major activity both in time involved and in results. Activists have come together face-to-face from time to time. The significance of face-to-face meetings and interactions cannot be overstated. The PRA workshop held in Bangalore in February 1991 (Mascarenhas *et al.* 1991) was a key moment, a tipping point, when practitioner innovators who had been scattered in different organisations and parts of India and elsewhere came together and realised that they were not alone but a community with a common momentum and enthusiasm and many innovations to share. Through meeting face-to-face people got to know one another. The downside was the emergence of what others saw as a PRA in-group. The upside was continuity of learning, ease of communication, and frank sharing between colleagues and friends. And this has been true too of CLTS.

5.7 *Networking, communicating, writing and disseminating*

Complementing and articulating all the above and circulating energy, experience, innovations and insights, have been networking, communicating, writing and disseminating. These activities have been continuous and pervasive. Early PRA involved networking and helping networks to start, with encouragement and some small funds: this was notably led by John Thompson at IIED, and some of the networks such as NEPAN (Nepal Participatory Action Network) in Nepal and PAMFORK (Participatory Methodologies Forum of Kenya) in Kenya survive to this day. IIED began as the global hub for the networks, but this then moved to PRAXIS (Institute for Participatory Practices) in India, and then to the Centre for Development Services in Egypt.

More recently, networking and communication have speeded up and intensified with internet and email. Simply putting people in touch with one another can have high payoffs, like finding CLTS trainers from Pakistan to go to Afghanistan. Writing to synthesise or provide guidance is another key activity. In 1996 Carolyn Jones put together guides on individual PRA methods and on the use of PRA in specialised fields like health, and these have stood the test of time and are still used. The *CLTS Handbook* (Kar with Chambers 2008) is another example, with at least 20,000 copies printed in eight languages. Petra Bongartz as Coordination, Communication and Dissemination Officer manages the CLTS Knowledge Hub in IDS with many parallel activities which feed into and support each other, most conspicuously the website, but also a bimonthly newsletter updating with hyperlinks to recent sources, sent to over 3,000 recipients. Then there are writing, synthesising, publication, translation, videos, blogs, workshops, country visits, email exchanges, and providing links with others' research and publications. These sharing activities also collaboratively generate new knowledges though trawls for information, requesting one-pagers from people with special experience, correspondence on hot topics as they surface, and proactively putting people in touch with one another.

6 Types and contexts of co-generating workshops

The co-generating workshops that have been significant with PRA and CLTS can be seen as seven types.

1 *Immersion workshops*. Immersions are a form of experiential learning in which the learner stays and lives for some days and nights in a community, living with them as a person, working with them, wandering around, and experiencing their life (PLA 2007; Birch and Catani 2007). In the early 1990s, three

South–South sharing workshops in India included participants from other continents for immersions and PRA practice in Indian villages, a tradition continued by Jimmy Mascarenhas and his organisation Outreach. Immersions tend to be intense and memorable. It is standard good practice to process the experiences of immersions individually and collectively, with facilitated critical reflection and learning shared mutually with host families and other participants.

2 *Training and innovating workshops and learning through training*. The PRA workshops of the early and mid 1990s, convened and facilitated by IIED and to a lesser extent IDS, held in many different countries, were thought of as hands-on training to spread PRA approaches and methods. The hands-on CLTS training workshops of Kamal Kar and others, from the early and mid 2000s onwards, have been the same (Kar 2010). These have also been occasions for innovation. IIED trainers were continuously experimenting and trying out new ideas, improvising on the run, experimenting, finding what worked, and pushing the limits to see what local people were capable of, as were many others in India and elsewhere. Learning through training is a phrase sometimes used. Innovating through training goes further, not just in how trainings are done, but substantive innovation in the hands-on activities themselves.

3 *Critical issue and topic workshops*. With PRA, three international workshops broke new ground by confronting urgent issues facing PRA: one in IDS in 1994 (Kumar 1997b), and two in India – in Bangalore (Kumar 1996) and Kolkata (Kumar 1997a). Then an international group was convened in 2000 to reflect critically on PRA, leading to the book *Pathways to Participation* (Cornwall and Pratt 2003). Other workshops also led to other books (see below). With CLTS topic workshops have begun to tackle and consolidate experience as needs and priorities have emerged, including School-Led Total Sanitation, and Going to Scale with Quality (Lukenya Notes 2011).

4 *Regular collegial meetings*. In the UK, throughout the first half of the 1990s, numerous, often monthly, workshops took place in IDS with colleagues from IIED and others, with sharing and brainstorming, with the build-up of a powerful collegiality. With CLTS, the IDS hub initiated and convenes meetings of a UK CLTS Action and Learning Group of colleagues in other organisations involved with CLTS for very informal sharing of information and ideas on CLTS, hosted at different times by IDS, Plan, WaterAid and DFID.

5 *Research project workshops*. For the CLTS research and action learning research project led by Lyla Mehta there was a workshop in India for partners to meet and plan, and a final workshop in IDS for the presentation of findings, later published as *Shit Matters* (Mehta and Movik 2011).

6 *Regional workshops*. CLTS regional workshops have been co-convened in Southeast Asia with Plan, UNICEF, WSP and others, Eastern and Southern Africa (Mombasa with Plan), anglophone Africa (Lusaka with Plan and UNICEF), francophone West Africa (Bamako with UNICEF), and India (Nainital, Shimla – twice), and Gurgaon with variously the CLTS Foundation, the Key Resource Centre Nainital, and the Governments of Himachal Pradesh and Haryana. Other regional workshops have been one-day affairs on the day before the main continental biennial sanitation conferences – AfricaSans, SacoSans (South Asia) and LatinoSan. Many contacts and links have resulted, and much South–South meeting and collaboration.

7 *Writeshops for practitioners*. In writeshops, practitioners and others bring drafts and work together with editors to critique and redraft each others' work. One CLTS writeshop has been held so far, in Kenya, co-convened and facilitated jointly by IDS, IIED and Plan Kenya, and leading to Bongartz, Milligan and Musyoki (eds) 'Tales of Shit: Community-Led Total Sanitation in Africa' (2010).

7 Reflections on sharing and co-generating in the practice of workshops

Critical reflection on the practice and processes of SHACK workshops in PRA and CLTS raises issues of power, of tensions between planning and emergence, and of process – both preliminary and during the workshops.

7.1 *Power*

Power is exercised before, during and after workshops. Before workshops there is convening power: the power to determine and articulate the topic, to decide who to invite (with powers of inclusion and exclusion), to choose the venue and to plan the programme. During a workshop there is the power exercised by facilitators and others, not least influencing the process and the sorts of knowledges that are shared and generated and how this may be done. And then after a workshop there is dispersed power to disseminate, influence and follow up. Inclusive participatory attitudes, behaviours and practices can inform all of these. The various powers can be used well or otherwise.

The extent to which power is exercised centrally is a significant variable. A scales-from-the-eyes moment about power relations came in the mid 1990s. In IDS we saw ourselves as quite central to the dissemination of PRA and to supporting it; but we felt some discomfort with this. So when Kamal Singh and Heidi Attwood went from IDS to Nepal for an international meeting of the PRA networks they took with them the question: 'What should we do to hand over the stick?'. They came back with the salutary and memorable reply: 'Who are you to say that you have a stick to hand over?' We realised that our heads had been too big, we had overestimated our importance, and then that the reply indicated success.

7.2 *Tensions and paradoxes: planning versus emergence*

A prime tension with workshops is over pre-planning. Beforehand and at the start there is often pressure from participants or co-convenors for a fixed programme. This has to be resisted. To be sure, field trips must be arranged in advance, and excursions for shopping and the like. Also, if there are outside visitors (though it may be best to avoid the disruption to process they can cause), the times for their visits may have to be fixed. Beyond that it is best to leave the agenda open. Quite often though, the pressures are such that a programme has to be filled in to give participants a sense of order and predictability. One partial solution is to label a section 'Open Space'.

A significant paradox is that planning to have an output – a consensus statement, for instance, may reduce the chances of it happening. Too much preparation and planning can constrain, conflicting with the principle of optimal unpreparedness. Some of the best outputs have flowed unpredictably from process and a coalescing sense that a statement of some sort is both right and feasible. A factor contributing to this is how participants come to know and respect one another, and how they find interactions and exchanges enjoyable and informative. This is part of an emergent workshop atmosphere or culture which cannot be assumed or assured in advance. Indeed, the chemistry may be such that it does not come about. The Lusaka Declaration (2010) was not planned. There was a participatory process that preceded it, with card writing and clustering leading to group discussions on the emergent topics. Then on the long bus journey of the field trip we held multiple discussions leading to agreement that a statement should be attempted. Had the trip not been so long, and had we not been on a bus with the freedom of movement and discussion it allowed, the Lusaka Declaration would probably never have happened. Once drafted it was displayed with participatory PowerPoint, amendments made, and agreement achieved. All participants then went back to their countries with a seven-page statement which they were able to use and distribute to influence policy and practice. Similarly, the Bamako Consensus (2010) was not announced upfront but emerged from the participatory process of the workshop, and was amended and agreed through facilitated debate of a draft which was displayed and amended on PowerPoint, a process of about three hours leading to a degree of consensus that took some of us by surprise.

In one workshop where an intention to have an agreed statement at the end was announced upfront, it proved out of the question. In both Lusaka and Bamako, had we announced at the outset that we were aiming for a declaration or statement of consensus, I think they would have been less likely; or if they had come about they would have taken longer and been less comprehensive and forceful.

7.3 *Preliminary process*

It has been precisely where the programme has evolved flexibly, adapting to energy, interest and flow, that workshops have been most creative and productive. While there are and should be many

variants, and each workshop process is unique, certain activities have been common, with four as fairly basic.

1 Preliminaries to establish mutual understanding, including so-called icebreakers and informality. This and other good workshop practices will not be laboured here, but are fundamental in setting the tone and nurturing a friendly and open culture and practices.

2 Facilitation and confirmation of a collective overall purpose.

3 Individual or small group writing on cards of issues or topics to be tackled. Sorting of the cards (usually on the floor) into emergent categories. Debate and discussion of these.

4 Either in plenary or groups, sharing, debating and brainstorming on the issues or topics. If groups are formed, and if the card clusters are roughly equal in size, groups of participants tend to self-select where they have written cards that they[7] care and know about. The numbers in the groups then tend to be reasonably even.

This process has several advantages. All participants are able to contribute their ideas. It does not take long. It establishes a consensus agenda at the start. In a South Asia PRA three-day workshop retreat at Thakani in Nepal, this whole process took half an hour and established an agenda which worked well for the three days.

7.4 *Sosotec (Self-Organising Systems On The Edge of Chaos)*

Sosotec can follow on quite naturally from the preliminary process or can be introduced later. It can be thought of as a proactive variant on Open Space (Owen 2008). It worked well, for example, in the workshop which led to *Pathways to Participation* (Cornwall and Pratt 2003) when adopted unplanned on the run. While to a Neo-Newtonian mindset this will appear disorganised and messy, it belongs in a paradigm of complexity and adaptive pluralism (Chambers 2010). Simple rules, in this case facilitated activities, driven by the energy of adaptive agents, in this case participants, gives rise creatively to unforeseeable results and can be very productive.

A Sosotec process can be designed to collect and co-generate knowledges, leading to a written output. The first full example I know of was the international ABC (attitude and behaviour change) workshop held in Bangalore and Madurai in 1996 (Kumar 1996). Partly based on card writing and sorting, seven categories emerged, and participants volunteered as pairs to be recorders and hunter-gatherers for those which were highest priority. Each pair set up a station with a laptop in a different part of the room. Anyone could contribute anywhere at any time. Some went off and had intense discussions. Others were pulled in to make contributions. Remarkably, 18 participants in the heat of the moment wrote down their personal experiences of attitude and behaviour change (a riveting and revealing read). One went off for three hours and drafted 'Sharing our Experience: An Appeal to Donors and Governments' which was then discussed, amended and signed up to by all participants. In 36 hours in which the energy was such that some had little sleep, a small book was written (Kumar 1996) which remains in wide circulation.

Sosotec for a written output has since been used several times including the workshop that led to *Springs of Participation* (Brock and Pettit 2007) and the Lukenya Workshop that led to Lukenya Notes (2011). It can be vulnerable to participants who question the process (though they usually come to accept and appreciate it), or who would prefer everything in plenary, or who lack relevant knowledge, experience or commitment. Participants may also take on writing without the necessary aptitude or competence. Failure to complete drafting once meant that a key chapter of a book had to be abandoned: the would-be author who had collected and been given excellent material simply failed to deliver. Importantly, a capable editor who takes part in the workshop is needed with time free immediately after a Sosotec. Without that there can be a long delay. In sum, Sosotec is not a magic wand. When it works well, it can be brilliant. But success is not a foregone conclusion. It is sensitive to energy, commitment, capabilities and a sense of common purpose.

8 Knowledges, theory of change and impacts

A common theory of change is that written or other recorded outputs from workshops are read and used and influence policy and practice.

Written outputs are one form in which knowledge co-generated in workshops has been captured and expressed. Books following PRA and CLTS workshops include *The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development* (Guijt and Shah 1998); *Whose Voice?* (Holland with Blackburn 1998); *Who Changes?* (Blackburn with Holland 1998); *Stepping Forward: Children and Young People's Paticipation in the Development Process* (Johnson *et al.* 1998); *Pathways to Participation* (Cornwall and Pratt 2003); *Springs of Participation* (Brock and Pettit 2007); and *Shit Matters* (Mehta and Movik 2011) (an output of a research project at the end of which there was a workshop). Others have led to agreed documents as outputs. PRA examples were the 1994 statement about PRA (Absalom *et al.* 1994), which came out of an IDS workshop. Later examples of consensus statements from CLTS workshops have been:

- Nainital (2009) – a one-pager and subsequent four-pager
- The Lusaka Declaration (2010)
- The Bamako Consensus (2010)
- The Lukenya Notes on Going to Scale with Quality (2011).

These and some of their predecessors may be of interest for process and methodology (for '21 Tips' see Appendix).

We – convenors, facilitators and participants in these workshops – have shared the common aim of wanting to make a difference, most of all in going to scale with quality with PRA and with CLTS. Our implicit theory of change has been that if we bring together our experience and ideas and converge on a practical consensus, this can be influential. Reviewing the written outputs it is striking how practical and policy-oriented they are. Unsurprisingly this shows more in the statements than the books. With the books there are time lags, often two or more years, the content tends to be more descriptive and analytical than prescriptive and the writing is discursive with paragraphs and chapters. If they have impacts, they are long-term. The reports of PRA workshops – *ABC of PRA* (Kumar 1996) and *PRA – Going to Scale: Challenges for Training* (Kumar 1997a) – are intermediate between statements and books but were produced in a matter of weeks and have many recommendations. The statements and shorter outputs of CLTS differ even more sharply from the books. They have been written and agreed during the workshops or very soon afterwards, and they have been heavily prescriptive. They contain introductory texts but are often organised and presented as a series of bullet points. To take the most recent examples from CLTS, the Lusaka Declaration has an introduction to each of its 11 sections, and 35 bulleted recommendations; the Bamako Consensus also has 11 sections, and a total of 94 bullets for 'What works', and 28 for 'Traps to avoid'; the Executive Summary of Lukenya Notes has 64 bulleted points for action, and the main text contains much empirical evidence which elaborates on and supports these.

What impact have these had? As ever it is hard to know. The statements have been immediately put on the first page of the CLTS website. Their hyperlinks have been in the bimonthly newsletter which is received by over 3,000 people. Inquirers are referred to them. But in our world of over-communication there has to be a nagging question about how much they are read, referred to, accepted, internalised and acted upon.

One set of impacts has, however, been clearer. It is on and through participants. Those of us who experienced these workshops learnt and internalised a lot. We could feel we owned the outcomes, and the consensual process generated commitment to them and enthusiasm. The issues which were most contentious and most difficult to agree on were revealing: in Lusaka they concerned field allowances for both NGO and government staff, and rewards to communities, leaders and Natural Leaders; in Bamako it was the timing and extent of training masons, which if too early could slow implementation and block villagers' creativity. With these and many other issues, the negotiated and agreed outcomes could be used by participants at once to confront the problems they faced. More generally, a number of participants, probably a majority, used the statements immediately in meetings and workshops on their return to their countries.

Attributing policy impacts is problematic for well-known reasons. With the Nainital workshop there was a Government of India request for a short statement. There were two: a one-pager agreed in plenary, and a four-pager written the next day. These were immediately used for a policy workshop in Delhi. The Lukenya Notes

cite three cases where African governments had faced down donors and lenders who were pushing the policy of individual household subsidy which impedes and even prevents CLTS. Ghana with the World Bank, Chad with the EU, and Nigeria over a period of months with the African Development Bank, had all managed to do this. Through the Lukenya process and Notes this was known in Mauritania when it renegotiated successfully the terms of a subsidy-based project funded by the African Development Bank. It would be gratifying to attribute this to the Notes but reportedly the main factor was the Minister's convictions about CLTS based on his field visits.

9 Lessons learnt for participatory methodologies

We can ask, now, what have we learnt about sharing and co-generating knowledges, based on the experiences with PRA and CLTS, which might apply to participatory methodologies (PMs) more widely?

From the point of view of a base or hub, wherever it is situated, that seeks to support the development of a PM, and its spread with quality, this can be answered at two levels. The first is about general principles and practices. The second is 21 more specific do and don't type lessons for Participatory Sharing and Co-Generating Workshops which are in the Appendix.

The principles and practices that follow are suggestions not imperatives and not set in stone: in the spirit of action learning, everything is open to questioning and improvement.

- Use *action learning* and *networking* as umbrella terms to describe the synergistic activities of evolving and sharing participatory methodologies. Action learning includes giving space, opportunity and occasion for practitioners and trainers to brainstorm, to record and exchange their experiences, and through interactions to go further in generating new knowledges and ideas. Networking includes a multiplicity of activities of linking, communicating and dissemination.
- Do many different things in parallel and try to optimise synergies between them, each feeding into and informing the other. Examples from CLTS are a website, a newsletter, writing, synthesising, publication, translations, videos, blogs, workshops, country visits, email exchanges, others' research and publications.
- Develop personal face-to-face relationships with champions and back them and put them in touch with one another.
- Listen to and learn from critics but do not spend too much time and energy in replying to them. Time and energy have opportunity costs. Examples and learning from practice that works can be more effective than academic debate.
- Encourage and support leading trainers and practitioners to go freelance and become full-time, while warning them of the dangers.
- Share without boundaries while trying to ensure quality in going to scale.
- Accept blame where justified, but aim and hope that others will take ownership and credit. When they do so, consider this success. With ownership goes commitment, energy, resources, innovation, local fit and much more potential learning.
- Encourage and support other networks, as feasible and appropriate, with a view to phasing out your own activities.
- Try to ensure flexibility in your budget. Unexpected opportunities can be expected. They have always occurred. Kamal Kar's initial visit to IDS to write his seminal 2003 Working Paper on CLTS was only possible because of the flexible funding we had then in IDS. Without that launching pad, CLTS could not have taken off as fast or as well as it did. Imprisoned by their frameworks, donors no longer allow that flexibility. It would be heavy-handed to underline the irony.
- Convene and especially co-convene workshops. Persuade co-convenors to leave much of the agenda open.[8] As we have seen, such workshops have been key occasions for sharing experiences, co-learning and brainstorming to co-evolve insights and practical lessons.

10 Final reflections

In articulating and sharing in workshops, we have found that practices, experiences, ideas and principles become clearer to those who express them. At the same time they cross-fertilise and grow. The acts of articulation and the interactions of sharing, learning from and with each other, brainstorming and reflecting combine to generate new knowledge. Expressing knowledges, experiences or ideas becomes a creative process that gives them form. But it matters what sort of form it takes and how it is treated. If the form is bounded and fixed like a

physical thing, and more so if it is defended like a territory, subsequent learning is liable to be limited. If the form is more tentative and open-ended, and subject to continuing critical reflection and change, learning can be ongoing and evolutionary. When at their best, this is what workshops provide conditions for and facilitate.

This conclusion has then itself to be open-ended, pluralist and tentative. Adding activities to the repertoire that development professionals are comfortable to use, and affirming good ones already known, is more important than trying to define a cohesive new approach with a sharp identity. Let this then end with quotations from the consensus statement (Absalom *et al.* 1994) of one of the earliest PRA workshops:

> PRA practitioners have come to stress personal behaviour and attitudes, role reversals, facilitating participation through group processes and visualisation, critical self-awareness, embracing error and sharing without boundaries.
>
> We offer this statement of principles in the hope that others will share their experience, views and values in the same spirit so that we can all continue to learn from each other.

That is the spirit in which I have written this, hoping that it will encourage others to share, criticise and contribute so that together we can continue to find ways to do better.

Appendix: 21 Tips for participatory workshops for sharing and co-generating knowledges

There are tips specific to different types of sharing, learning and co-generating workshops. Most of what follows is generic and applies to all or most of them. See also *Participatory Workshops: A Sourcebook of 21 Sets of Ideas and Activities* (Chambers 2002) referred to below as PW. In the tradition of those 21s, here are 21 sets of tips, based on lessons I think we have learnt about how to do these workshops. There is much, much, still to learn. The tips are organised as (A) Planning and preparation; (B) The workshop; (C) Follow-up and actions.

A Planning and preparation

1 *Reflect on the 'why' of the workshop and the 'so what?' at the end.* What sort of workshop is it? What sorts of knowledges are you hoping will be shared, learnt about and co-generated? Who might co-convene and co-facilitate? Who has what (including creativity) to share? Who can contribute to the content of the workshop and to its process and culture? Who needs to meet whom? How will participants benefit? What outputs, follow-up and impact might the workshop have? Who will any outputs be for? Who will be able and willing to follow up at once in preparing, disseminating and further developing outputs?

2 *Write or co-create a concise concept note*. This need not be long and should not be too detailed, lest it constrain flexibility and scope to seize emerging opportunities. Send the note out with invitations. For the more creative workshops say that the process may evolve and may modify the concept and purpose.

3 *Use workshops to get to know key players face-to-face*. There really is no full alternative to meeting face-to-face. Skype, teleconferences and group telephone conversations are not a substitute though they are more effective when you have already met face-to-face. The group immersions in villages of the first PRA South–Souths combined with the early PRA workshops gave many of us a sense of common identity, and we liked and respected one another. The numerous joint IIED–IDS workshops of early PRA helped us share and reinforce excitement and solidarity. They were occasions to look forward to. With CLTS, the WSSCC (Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council) Global Forum in Mumbai in September 2011, had for some of us a sense of reunion, almost of family, as we met again people we already knew from the regional sanitation conferences or in other contexts. The sense of common purpose and relationships that can result is precious.

4 *Co-convene*. Some workshops cannot and should not be co-convened, but co-convening has much to be said for it: it means co-commitment and co-ownership, brings in wider experience to decision-making, can share costs, and improves chances of follow-up. One, two or at most three, partners may be optimal. With more partners, transaction costs rise if they engage with the preparatory process. This happened when we had 5–6 partners for the South East Asia regional CLTS workshop in Pnom Penh, with a flood or storm of widely copied emails.

5 *Choose a fitting venue*. The venue should match the occasion, the participants and the purpose. This is easier said than done. For a participatory workshop, the usual conditions of space, furniture, wall space and equipment apply. Relative isolation, peace and good amenities matter for writeshops, and for sharing and brainstorming workshops which have the character of retreats (an ideal is the Lukenya Getaway near Nairobi where the Lukenya Notes were hatched and the *Tales of Shit* writeshop was held). One reason why NEPAN has survived for almost 20 years is that the founders had two or three quiet retreats staying outside Kathmandu to reflect, evolve and agree basic principles, plan, and decide how to establish it. At the other extreme, where ministers and senior officials are involved, it may be (but not necessarily is) advisable to move upmarket for the venue. Proximity to field visits matters, though (see below) longish journeys can be turned to good uses. The Gurgaon workshop in India was exceptionally difficult to locate, three earlier choices having had to be abandoned.

6 *Plan but do not overplan*. Distinguish fixed points from open time. Fixed points may be start, an opening if there has to be one, end and closing if there has to be one, field visits, and shopping or tourist time off. Then plan backwards with cards on the floor. List topics and activities on cards. Start with how you intend to end. Then add fixed points. Then continue planning backwards inserting and moving the cards around. Recognise rhythm and anticipate low points – usually around half time – Wednesday afternoon in a five-weekday workshop. Wednesday is a good day for a field trip, or an afternoon off or doing something different.

7 *Be prepared and optimally unprepared with the programme*. Government people and some others often want a detailed programme. When there has to be a formal opening or closing this will be a little more needed than when there is not. The degree of pre-programming depends on the nature of the workshop. It is quite often politic to have a programme even though you know it will in the event not be followed. Be careful though if there are people coming for only one or a few sessions, or they may turn up to find you doing something else. One device is to label sessions, or half a day, or a whole day, or even more, as Open Space. This has the advantage of a meaning which is both specific (PW 125-6) giving legitimacy, and general, giving flexibility. Optimal unpreparedness means being open to an unfolding process that cannot be fully foreseen. Where possible avoid giving a closing time for the day – a good participatory process can stimulate energy, excitement and commitment which often should run its course.

8 *Be careful and thorough with invitations*. Some of those I invited to the first PRA South–South lacked relevant experience or were unable to follow up. It was a sadly wasted opportunity. The 'wrong' people can also be a distraction. On the other hand, and more important, failure to invite key people who should be invited, or who feel they should, can cause lasting resentment which can be deeply damaging if those slighted harbour their grudge. Be especially careful to inform and invite people in the host country, city or area. Check carefully and issue invitations well in advance if you can. This can matter a great deal with governments and government people.

9 *Be aware of government protocol*. When inviting specific government people, getting procedure and process right can be time-consuming and frustrating. To assure good government participation can require a lot of care and patience. Sometimes a person you want to invite can give informed advice on how to proceed.

10 *Act early for visas*. It is sad how often late applications for visas prevent participation in international workshops. Ease of obtaining visas may even be a necessary factor in choice of country for the venue. Some countries have few embassies in other countries, which can delay, complicate and add to the financial and transaction costs of getting visas.

11 *Identify key documents, encourage participants to study them in advance and have them available*. There may be research reports or summaries, websites, or other documents. Do not overload people but ensure that they have the opportunity to be informed and up-to-date. Where government policy is involved make sure that key policy statements and other documents are identified and available.

B *The workshop*

12 *Encourage multiple ownership and credit*. Do not seek a high-profile or institutional or personal recognition. Let ownership and credit be collective. Any impression that a workshop is a public relations exercise for an organisation is damaging and self-defeating. Do not allow yourself big ideas about yourself or your importance. (See above for an example).

13 *Set an informal atmosphere, and err on the side of informality*. There are several ways of setting the atmosphere at the beginning (PW 5–30). For CLTS, Kamal Kar's 'Greet others and tell them when you last did a shit in the open' works well. Standing on a map and then making brief self-introductions is another good way. We used it in Nainital with mainly government people when waiting for the arrival of the VIP for the formal opening, and in Gurgaon after the opening with about 60 people. It is acceptable to senior people – Principal Secretaries in Tanzania were delighted and found it fun and interesting. 'Busses' is another – at AfricaSan in Kigali clustering by type of organisation provoked an instant animated buzz which ran on for almost ten minutes as government people met government people from other countries, and the same for separate clusters of people from international agencies, INGOs, and NGOs, and one group for freelancers.

14 *Make good use of car and bus journeys!* Car and bus journeys are opportunities. In Zambia we had a 3–4 hour bus journey from Lusaka to visit Chief Macha's ODF (Open Defecation Free) Chiefdom. During the trip back we could move around and discuss. Out of those conversations came the idea of the Lusaka Declaration. Without the consensus and commitment that developed during the bus trip it would not have happened. With the Gurgaon workshop we went in smaller vehicles, but there were still opportunities to change seats and have long conversations. An advantage of vehicles is the lack of eye contact much of the time, and the lack of pressure to keep talking, giving time for reflection.

15 *Brainstorm to create the agenda*. This applies mainly with smaller workshops, with numbers of, say 10–50. A concept note, or a sense of common purpose, and a framework of timings may already exist. The agenda can be emergent through all participants brainstorming and/or individually writing on cards which are then sorted on the ground into emergent categories. These can then be discussed and agreed. The clustered cards can then provide the basis for plenary or group activities. In several cases they have provided the structure for a final output – *ABC of PRA* (Kumar 1996), the Lusaka Declaration (2010), the Bamako Consensus (2010), and Lukenya Notes (2011). Brainstorming to decide how to handle the emergent topics can lead to a variety of solutions – some in plenary, some in groups with feedback to plenary, some deferred. In a PRA sharing workshop in Pakistan seven topics coalesced. Three were cross-cutting. So four groups were formed, and each included in their agenda each of the three that cross-cut.

16 *Sosotec*. In the case of Sosotec (PW 93,103,105,116,123–8) it is best, if not vital, not to be pre-programmed. Brainstorming onto cards and sorting them sets a starting agenda (as in 15 above). Volunteers come forward to be champions (often for clusters of cards to which they have contributed). Ideally there will be two or three champions for each subject. Between them they combine and take turns as writers, interviewers, recorders, searchers and hunter-gatherers for their topic. Each topic group sets up shop with table(s), chairs and laptop(s), together with their cards. They plan their activities, and then work as a team to tap into their own knowledges, experience and ideas, and to seek and solicit contributions from others. The process then runs itself. Variants of Sosotec contributed to the *ABC of PRA* (Kumar 1996), *Springs of Participation* (Brock and Pettit 2007), the Lusaka Declaration and the Bamako Consensus, and were key to the Lukenya Notes.

17 *Declare a PowerPoint-free zone*. PowerPoint did not seriously raise its head until the 2000s. Now, unless warned in advance, participants are liable to go to pains to prepare presentations and feel hurt if they cannot deliver them. But (mercifully) 'death by PowerPoint' has become a cliché. PowerPoint can slow and stop a participatory process: it is preset and rather inflexible, interrupts flow, takes time (often more than allocated), induces passivity and cannot easily respond to

emergence. Very selectively and sparingly used it can be positive, especially with visuals – in presenting one or a very few photographs or key diagrams. To avoid its damaging distractions, some workshops have with good effect been declared PowerPoint-free zones (e.g. Nainital, Lusaka, Bamako, Kigali, Lukenya). Wherever possible, plan and announce this in advance.

18 *Use Participatory PowerPoint (PPP)*. Paradoxically, PPP is a brilliant, powerful and quick way of achieving agreement and consensus on a text. A fast and accurate typist familiar with the topic sits and writes, with the text appearing on a screen for all to see. The text can be composed jointly, or usually better and faster, as a draft which is then modified. Proposed changes can be entered in italics, and then changed to normal when there is agreement. If there is a serious debate or a deep disagreement, text can be abandoned, or a small group can be delegated to go off and hammer out a revision and bring it back. Without PPP we could never have achieved the Lusaka Declaration or the Bamako Consensus.

C *Follow-up and actions*

19 *Think in advance about follow-up and seek agreement on actions*. Follow-up needs to be planned for but announcing it upfront may be undermining. Ideally ideas and commitments emerge from the participatory process and come individually and collectively from participants. Far too often follow-up is lacking. Either it is promised and does not happen, or in the conditions of the end of a workshop (particularly if there is a formal closing) simply squeezed out of by lack of time. There was good follow-up from the first Nainital workshop with a one-page statement agreed by the workshop, a four-page summary written the day after the workshop, and a large follow-up meeting of about 70 people in Delhi about three weeks later. Follow-up on text, as with the Lukenya workshop on going to scale with quality, can involve time-consuming editing and iterations with the draft notes. Plan ahead and agree that someone will have the time.

20 *Ensure short prompt summaries of workshops*. It is widely considered good practice to have a detailed record of a workshop. If this is succinct, out in a matter of days, and widely distributed, it can be useful and multiply impact. But far too often laborious notes are taken, for example by a student who is not familiar with the subject, and then written up none too well, and much too long – a lead balloon that sinks without trace, read by no-one except those who want to be sure they are mentioned. A short, punchy summary of main points has more impact. Pre-plan for this. Have time after a workshop ring-fenced for this. The Nainital summary has already been mentioned. We did not plan for an executive summary of Lukenya Notes, but two people volunteered to produce one, and it is that summary that will receive the most attention, while at the same time pointing to the topics in the main text which can be consulted.

21 *Convene or co-convene in your own way, and share what you do and learn*.

Notes

1 PRA stands for Participatory Rural Appraisal (Chambers 1994, 1997 and Cornwall and Pratt 2003), sometimes renamed Participatory Reflection and Action. See also www.pnet.ids.ac.uk/prc. Participatory Action and Reflection would have been better but Participatory Action Research was already PAR.

2 CLTS stands for Community-Led Total Sanitation (Kar 2003; Kar and Pasteur 2005; Kar with Chambers 2008; Bongartz and Chambers 2009; Kar 2010) with rural applications. Now when applied in urban areas it takes a new form and has become Citizen-Led Total Sanitation. See www.communityledtotalsanitation.org.

3 Constructive comments on drafts of this article have provoked major revisions. For these I am grateful to Petra Bongartz, Danny Burns, Naomi Hossein, Rosie McGee, Jethro Pettit, Patta Scott-Villiers, Stephen Wood and others. Special thanks go to Alfredo Ortiz Aragón for both his comments and the sources to which he referred me. The usual disclaimers apply.

4 In the chapter (Pedler and Burgoyne 2008) which cites this, the authors then make the point that AL has applications much more generally than just in organisations.

5 I owe this insight to discussion with colleagues who are authors of other articles in this *IDS Bulletin*.
6 With PRA an example was the Indian Watershed Programme of the mid 1990s with its cascade training of hundreds of trainers in a few months. With CLTS examples have been earlier cascade training in Nigeria and Tanzania.
7 For more on Sosotec see *Participatory Workshops* (Chambers 2002)
8 Unfortunately this is easier said than done. Co-convenors have repeatedly demanded a timetable which we well know will have to be abandoned.

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POWER, POVERTY, AND KNOWLEDGE – REFLECTING ON 50 YEARS OF LEARNING WITH ROBERT CHAMBERS

Issue Editors **Stephen Thompson and Mariah Cannon**

Contents

This article has been reissued as part of *IDS Bulletin* Archive Collection Vol. 54 No. 1A March 2023: **'Power, Poverty, and Knowledge – Reflecting on 50 Years of Learning with Robert Chambers'**; the Introduction is also recommended reading.

Indigenous Technical Knowledge: Analysis, Implications and Issues

Michael Howes and Robert Chambers

This paper is a selective review and summary of arguments put and points made at the workshop on indigenous technical knowledge[1] for which some of the other papers in this *Bulletin* were originally written. As such, it draws together some of the points made elsewhere in this issue. In attempting to report the gist of the workshop discussions we are not necessarily presenting our views.

What is indigenous technical knowledge (ITK)?

To define the field, it is useful to start by asking in what respects indigenous technical knowledge (ITK) corresponds to and contrasts with institutionally organised science and technology.

Those who have looked at the world from the viewpoint of organised science or of the culture of which it is a part, have conventionally regarded the knowledge of other cultures as 'pre-logical' or 'irrational', and in so doing have either dismissed or greatly played down its validity. In seeking to redress the balance, many proponents of ITK have argued that it is eminently practical and utilitarian. Whilst in some senses true, this statement could also imply that ITK differed from science in that it *only* encompassed areas of direct practical value.

Levi-Strauss (1966) argued forcefully against such a distinction on the grounds that human societies could not, for example, possibly have acquired the skills to make water-tight pots without a genuinely scientific attitude and a desire for knowledge for its own sake. ITK, like scientific knowledge should, therefore, be regarded in the first instance as something which became possible as a result of a more general intellectual process of creating order out of disorder, and not simply as a response to 'practical' human needs such as sustenance and health. Some of the knowledge arising in this way would of course have direct practical applications, and equally new knowledge about the way in which the world worked might arise as the result of a process of inquiry triggered initially by the wish to solve a problem of a 'practical' kind. An appreciation of this underlying similarity between ITK and science is important if the full potential of ITK is to be realised.

An important difference between science and ITK lies in the way in which phenomena are observed and ordered. The scientific mode of thought is characterised by a greater ability to break down data presented to the senses and to reassemble it in different ways. The mode of ITK, on the other hand, is 'concrete' and relies almost exclusively on intuition and evidence directly available to the senses.

A second distinction derives from the way practitioners of the two modes of thought represent to themselves the nature of the enterprise in which they are engaged. Science is an open system whose adherents are always aware of the possibility of alternative perspectives to those adopted at any particular point of time. ITK, on the other hand, as a closed system, is characterised by a lack of awareness that there may be other ways of regarding the world. This is not to say that ITK does not change, but rather that those changes which occur are in nearly all instances comparable to the achievements of what Kuhn (1962) termed 'normal science', or to the detailed working out of relatively minor 'puzzles' within an established 'paradigm' of thought. Science, in contrast, constantly carries with it the possibility of 'revolutionary change' in which one paradigm would be destroyed and replaced by another.

Put slightly differently, science and ITK can be contrasted and evaluated according to three criteria:

—as systems of classification;

—as systems of explanation and prediction;

—in terms of speed of accumulation.

[1] Workshop on the Use of Indigenous Technical Knowledge held at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK, 13–14 April 1978. Acknowledgment is due to the members of the workshop for contributions to the discussion and conclusions. They were Mahmadul Alam, Enrique Bautista, Martin Bell, Deryke Belshaw, Ian Carruthers, Robert Chambers, Donald Curtis, Michael Howes, Richard Longhurst, Paul Richards, Sumit Roy, N. Somasekhara, Jeremy Swift and Tony Zahlan.

While ITK and science are comparable on the first criterion, science is generally superior on the second and markedly superior on the third.

ITK can itself be classified in various ways, including:

—in terms of the idioms and conceptual tools through which ITK becomes possible. This can be separated into two clusters—the propensity to classify and the propensity to quantify;

—in terms of the objects towards which thought is directed. Possible subdivisions here include: physical/inanimate (e.g. soils, water, climate); biological (e.g. crops, weeds, pests, domestic and other animals, insects); medical; and energy related;

—in terms of knowledge about fabrication and use of artifacts;

—in terms of knowledge of the operation of the social and economic structures within which production is embedded.

This final category is arguably only admissible under a broad definition of ITK. It includes readily articulate knowledge about such things as markets and co-operatives. It may also include mechanisms of ecological adaptation bound up in rituals such as the intermittent slaughtering of pigs in parts of New Guinea. This raises the question whether people themselves conceive of production activities as separable from social and economic relations.

Regarding the concept of ITK, there are reservations on two grounds. First, it can imply an old/new distinction which is not helpful, since at any time the knowledge available to people is the outcome of processes of transmission and generation which have occurred both within and beyond the local environment. Assimilation of 'outside' knowledge, and synthesis and hybridisation with existing knowledge, are continuing processes. Second, it may over-emphasise the static notion of a stock of knowledge available to be tapped to the neglect of knowledge-generation as a dynamic process.

Changes in ITK

The idea of knowledge as process is useful in showing that ITK cannot be understood independently of the ways in which it changes. Apart from assimilation and synthesis or hybridisation, the basic process of accumulation is, as with scientific knowledge, through experiment. In addition to the examples given in Howes' paper, two further instances of indigenous experimentation can be cited. In one case, in Nigeria, people experimented with cassava when it was first introduced. As cassava can be poisonous, it was important to establish the conditions in which it could safely be eaten. The procedure adopted was to feed it first to goats and dogs. In another case, also in Nigeria, a scientist believed he had made a breakthrough when he found a way of breeding yams from seed, propagation normally being vegetative. A farmer was casually encountered, however, who had not only himself succeeded in doing this, but had also discovered that whereas the first generation of tubers were abnormally small, the second and subsequent generations were of normal size. The scientist reportedly exclaimed "Thank God these farmers don't write scientific papers". It was also noted, in support of the prevalence of experimentation by farmers, that there is a Yoruba word for 'experiment'.

The rate at which new knowledge can be acquired through such forms of experiment is, however, slow compared with science. Stress can trigger innovation; and the development of the bamboo tubewell in India is a recent example of this. But this process can work in reverse, as in the case of the Dogon who abandoned their elaborate system of water use when moving from densely populated upland areas on to the plains. It should also be noted that in general ITK lacks means for systematic and rapid R and D.

The most significant changes in ITK come with the assimilation of small-scale societies to national and international systems. Some of these changes involve uncontroversial adoption of new knowledge. In Botswana, for example, farmers are said to have abandoned traditional categories for classifying cattle in favour of those used in marketing meat. Elsewhere, especially in medicine, there have been cases of synthesis between ITK and science-based knowledge.

But generally, it seems that when ITK and scientific stocks of knowledge come together, synthesis does not occur. One of two things tends to happen: either the two sets of knowledge are isolated from each other (as with the head of an agricultural research station who tried to persuade farmers to adopt monocropping while still intercropping on his own land); or ITK is ignored and squeezed out as inferior. This squeezing out is more common and can lead to loss of

confidence among the possessors of ITK as well as to irreversible loss of knowledge.

At the root of the problem lies the fact that officials—agricultural extension staff, planners, research workers, 'experts' and others—depend on scientific knowledge to legitimise their superior status. They thus have a vested interest in devaluing ITK and in imposing a sense of dependence on the part of their rural clients. This suggests that change may only be brought about through an assault at the level of ideology, and through a reorientation of reward systems.

The problem, however, is not just one of stocks of ITK, but of undermining the foundations for indigenous participation in the process of generating new technical knowledge. Thus Mali pastoralists are said to have accepted the dependent status which has been thrust upon them, and now believe that their major hope for salvation lies with the World Bank; and more generally, rural people tend to lack the confidence or inclination to engage in self-help activities in spheres where they have past experience of external assistance. In principle, there is no reason why this process should not be made to operate in reverse—with people gaining confidence and acquiring knowledge as a result of being drawn into the processes of generating technology—but in practice, there is little evidence that this happens.

How to elicit ITK

Some conventional approaches to research have serious limitations for eliciting ITK and finding out how it is organised. Questionnaires impose the compiler's categories upon the respondent and do violence to the latter's meaning system. This may not always be immediately apparent since respondents often adapt to the logical framework implied by their questioner. Difficulties arise where, for example, an extension agent asks for information on yields per acre from a farmer who is more concerned with yields per unit of labour. Problems are compounded when the questioner has a different native tongue from the respondent. The boundaries delineating colours, for example, vary between languages, but these variations may not be recognised; and culturally specific concepts are often hard to translate. Full-scale anthropological methods of observer-participation can overcome these difficulties but they are time-consuming and probably rarely cost-effective. Methods of investigation are needed which are open-ended, quick, and reliable.

One such approach is to take part with informants in their work. While this may not enable the observer fully to see the world through the informants' eyes, a high degree of empathy can be achieved by working together, and information and insights may be provided which informants would not otherwise have thought to mention. Another approach is to observe and learn the games people play since these are often how important skills are acquired and practised. It is also often particularly useful to find out about indigenous systems of quantification and to calibrate these against formal scientific measures.

Other ways of eliciting ITK can simultaneously stimulate the creativity of informants. These approaches include the use and adaptation of games as described by Barker and Richards (*infra*).

Uses of the stock of ITK

Can the stock of ITK be used either to economise on the use of scarce trained scientific manpower or to extend the range of observations upon which science can draw?

Instances where this has happened are few, but suggest a considerable potential. Pastoralists, for example, have detailed genealogical knowledge of their animals which can quickly be translated to give a picture of fertility and age-specific mortality. Similarly, work on the variegated grasshopper (*Zonocerus Variegatus*) in Nigeria, which drew on indigenous perceptions, provides a useful basis for determining the seriousness of the problems which they generated, and hence the priority to be attached to remedial action (Barker *et al.* 1977 and *infra*).

Other ways can be suggested in which indigenous observers might—in theory at least—act as 'the eyes and ears of science'. Knowledge of micro-environmental conditions could be used in the preparation of soil maps; local people could be consulted to determine the milk yields of animals under 'real' conditions where scientific testing had not been carried out; indigenous observers might be encouraged to report back on changes in the species composition of pasture as an early warning system for environmental deterioration; farmers could be used in crop reporting systems instead of extension personnel; and so on.

Many such possibilities might be opened up with little technical difficulty: often all that is required

is standardisation of systems of measurement. However, one should not simply think in terms of how ITK can be used in isolation, but rather consider ways in which it can be brought into creative synthesis with science. In the environmental sphere, for example, the ideal form of monitoring might well involve a combination of sophisticated satellite technology with observers operating at the local level.

In attempting to mount such an exercise it is also important to recognise that ITK is not distributed evenly among the members of a society. It is likely to be controlled and manipulated by certain groups and classes in the pursuit of their own interests. Sometimes particular types of knowledge are the preserve of 'caste-like' groups such as Twareg smiths; in other cases religious groups like the Marabuts in West Africa are paid and respected as repositories of knowledge. Such interest groups may provide a basis for collaboration, but equally they may stand in the way of change. Elsewhere, variable access to knowledge can arise out of the differentiation of a society into economic classes. In all societies systematic variations in knowledge are likely to be associated with sex and age. In addition, individuals always differ in ability and aptitude.

There are further important practical questions about the way in which knowledge is transmitted between individuals and generations. An understanding of established learning processes might provide a useful starting point for seeing how people could 'draw-down' on scientific knowledge more effectively.

Implications for R and D

How can ITK contribute to the generation and exploitation of technology to benefit rural populations? This can be seen as a question of finding an optimum mix and balance between indigenous participation and scientific participation in R and D processes rather than a choice of either one or the other. What mix is optimal will vary.

It can be argued that formal R and D systems are efficient for generating new knowledge quickly. Whatever the merits of ITK and of R and D activities which involve rural people themselves, the means and methods of scientific research can, in many fields, achieve far more far faster than would ever be possible through reliance on indigenous experimentation. In this view, the urgency of rural development is such that rapid advance to major breakthroughs is essential, and some at least of these have to come primarily through the formal R and D system.

On the other hand, rural people already take the final and crucial decision whether to adopt a new technique. In addition, they often adapt the standard packages with which they are presented to fit their particular needs and conditions. However, it may be only certain people, notably the relatively powerful and wealthy, who normally take part in such decisions.

Certain aspects of knowledge-generation will always have to be centralised and formally organised. Opinions differ, however, about the extent to which this is desirable. Much formal R and D has three phases: problems; a period of development and testing removed from that environment —on a research station or in a laboratory; and a period of re-entry and testing, during which the innovation is brought into the rural environment. For any technology, the question is what balance is optimal between these three. For mechanical and engineering technology, the case appears strong for much more work in the rural environment and with rural people. With seed-breeding programmes, in contrast, a phase in the controlled conditions of a research station is desirable for efficiency. Similarly, in developing a vaccine for cattle, some work in a well-equipped laboratory may be essential. Although opinions differ, it may be generally more efficient, in terms of ultimate benefits to rural people, for much more R and D to be conducted in rural environments and with rural people than is current practice.

Substantial efforts have been made in this direction. Before any radical proposals are put forward, attention should be paid to the experience gained by the International Agricultural Research Centres and by national research institutions. At the same time, there is scope for making these formal systems more responsive to the views and needs of those whom they are supposed to serve. Formal R and D is still struggling to get to grips with the variability of tropical environments, and with the accordant need to decentralise research to involve local people more actively in it. A further general failing is the tendency to see the end product of a research programme as a report or an article rather than a proper evaluation of adoption, benefits and lessons. Also, research activities still tend to carve up reality in a manner which hinders a holistic view of local-level conditions.

To overcome or reduce these problems, six proposals seem worth considering:

(1) *Rural exposure for extension and research staff*

Extension and research staff could be confronted more directly than is usual with the realities to which their work relates. This could be done both during initial training and at intervals thereafter. The repertory grid method (see Richards, *infra*) might serve as a starting point for enabling professional personnel to appreciate the difference between their way of looking at the world and that of the people who were supposed to benefit from their work.

(2) *Checklists*

Checklists could be used to draw attention to factors which might otherwise not be considered in determining research priorities or extension advice. Some examples of factors that may be overlooked with an innovation are implications for women, profitability, effectiveness and efficiency, availability and access to inputs and complementary items, whether a farmer can afford an innovation, risk, social significance and acceptability, lightness for carrying and 'mendability', labour requirements, and effects on diet and on the variety and timeliness of food supply. Checklists have their uses but can be criticised for the implicit assumption that decisions will be made by a small group of people who will determine what is good for others.

(3) *Local-level influence on research priorities*

To improve the criteria chosen in research and then to see they are acted on, producers could sit on the boards of agricultural research stations, following the model of the Kenyan commodity boards. Further, priorities could be set by national research committees which consulted at the local level, although there would be a danger that this would merely reinforce elite preconceptions.

(4) *A cafeteria system*

Farmers could be offered different packages and left to decide for themselves which they would adopt. In Sri Lanka, for example, farmers were provided with 'mini-kits' of different seed varieties, with which they could experiment on their own farms.

(5) *Starting with indigenous practice*

A more radical proposal is that research should take existing indigenous practice as its starting point, seeking to refine this in various ways and then to feed results back into the system. This would go hand in hand with the actual and metaphorical removal of the 'fences' surrounding research institutions so that no aspect of the process of knowledge-generation fell beyond the purview of those whose livelihoods would ultimately be affected. An objection here, however, is that indigenous practice, as with intercropping, growing two or more types of crops together, may be so complex as to be laborious and difficult to test under controlled research conditions.

(6) *Experimental work in rural conditions*

The process might be taken a stage further, perhaps through full-blown experimental work on farmers' fields and with farmers' collaboration. In general, people are more likely to operate and exploit a new technology successfully if they have themselves taken part in its creation.

The validity of this sixth proposal is supported by the extent to which important technical change has taken place and can take place outside formal R and D systems. It turns part of the earlier discussion on its head; instead of asking how experts and scientists can better understand the potential of ITK, the question now is how rural people themselves can assess and utilise the potential of science. To pursue this approach, more has to be known about the way in which knowledge is generated and hybridised and about the potential for different modes of participation. A further need is to see whether ITK can in some way help to stimulate demand which will make R and D respond to the needs of neglected groups and classes.

One objection to this sixth proposal is the earlier arguments in favour of formal science with its implied centralisation. Another is that people can and often do use and benefit from techniques without understanding the technology underlying them. Opinions differ on these points, suggesting a need for research to identify optimal and feasible degrees of decentralisation and modes of participation according to type of technology and social conditions.

Values and rewards

Proposals for using the stock of ITK and for local involvement in R and D can only be adopted easily when lack of awareness is the only constraint. In practice this is rarely the case. In situations where change seems desirable, deep-rooted structural impediments will frequently be encountered. Junior field extension staff, for example,

being low in the government service, have a vested interest in exaggerating differences between themselves and local people; and the distinction between 'superior' scientific and 'inferior' indigenous knowledge protects and legitimates their status. In addition most of the proposals presuppose flexibility and initiative at the lower levels in the bureaucracy, but this conflicts with bureaucratic norms. There are also likely to be problems among more senior staff engaged in R and D. Established professional values dictate that rewards should be given to those who make original contributions to knowledge, achieve breakthroughs at the level of theory, and publish their findings in internationally reputable journals; but offer relatively little incentive to individuals to go out on a limb with approaches involving ITK. Changes in values and reward systems are necessary preconditions of progress.

Such changes can be sought directly and indirectly. Possible direct approaches include the award of Nobel prizes and of other international and national medals and distinctions for outstanding work with ITK and for exceptional local-level breakthroughs. For their part, academics can encourage research related to ITK and publish the results in international and national journals. A system of rewards for villages, perhaps along the lines of the former 'village of the year' competition in Uganda, might promote self-confidence and creativity and be linked with ITK. Finally, R and D staff might be rewarded according to the practical result of their work, possibly through an assessment by local people themselves; but in the case of agricultural research, at least, this would prove difficult in practice.

Less direct approaches might involve an attack on prevailing ideology. Initiatives through education can be suggested. Primary school teachers with extensive ITK could be accorded high status and encouraged to communicate their knowledge through the formal educational process. Knowledgable local people could also teach in schools. Third world universities could be encouraged to extend fieldwork for students, on the lines of the useful studies already carried out by Makerere University, the University of Dar es Salaam, and the University of Nairobi. Such exercises need only small research budgets.

Research workers in the richer countries also have an important role to play. By studying and recording ITK and making it academically respectable, they can counteract the ideologies in the name of which it is being destroyed. By encouraging students—particularly those from third world countries—also to adopt this perspective, the effect can be multiplied.

Some outstanding questions

Questions which remain unresolved and questions which may deserve further research include the following:

ITK

1. Do rural people conceive production systems separately from the social and economic structures in which they are embedded? In other words, to what extent, or in what senses, are they aware of their technical knowledge as technical knowledge?

2. How is established knowledge transmitted between generations and individuals? What implications, if any, do such processes have for the appraisal and acquisition of scientific and other knowledge?

3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of different categories of the stock of ITK and what are their potential contributions to rural development?

4. Why does the meeting of ITK and science sometimes lead to constructive synthesis (as sometimes in medicine) but more frequently to the subjugation of ITK by science? How are ITK and scientific knowledge synthesised, and how might that synthesis be improved?

R and D and the generation of knowledge

1. How is ITK generated?

2. In developing scientific R and D programmes how useful is it to start with ITK and with current rural practices?

3. How useful are checklists?

4. What degree of decentralisation and of work with rural people in rural environments is optimal, by type of technology, by phase of R and D, and by social conditions? In particular, how important and feasible is active participation in R and D by the ultimate users of the technology?

5. What demands are exerted or might be exerted by rural people upon formal knowledge-creation systems, and through what modes of participation?

6. To what extent and how successfully have the International Agricultural Research Centres and national research organisations adapted their programmes to take account of ITK, of local environmental conditions, and of particular social groups, and what can be learnt from their experiences?

Professional training and values

In modifying professional values and behaviour, what is the potential of:

1. New reward systems?

2. Games played with farmers and others as part of the training of staff?

3. Research on ITK required to be carried out by extension and research workers, and by their trainers?

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Glossary

FCDO Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
IDS Institute of Development Studies
IIED International Institute for Environment and Development
ITK Indigenous Technical Knowledge
NGO non-governmental organisation
PRA Participatory Rural Appraisal
RRA Rapid Rural Appraisal
SOSOTEC self-organising systems on the edge of chaos

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