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Culturas

&

A: Behaviour and attitudes
IDS Participation Reading Room:
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Desarrollo

Quid Pro Quo



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NGO's v. academics :

WHAT RESEARCH AND FOR WHOM ?

Board Members of Network Cultures had a lively discussion the other day on research among grass-roots people. Siddharta, one of our Network's coordinators and head of an NGO in India which works among tribal people, expressed the point of view of a development and conscientization worker. Dominique Perrot, a Swiss anthropologist, and Hassan Zaoual, a Moroccan economist, expressed the views of academicians concerned about the relationship between scientific knowledge and action (they are also authors of two important articles in the former issue of Cultures and Development - Quid Pro Quo). The issue was the scientific value of participatory action-research.

Q : How can you claim to really understand what people wish, what their deepest aspirations are? Are you not projecting on to them your own ideas, that is the ideas of a modern, westernized, committed development worker? How much "research" is there really in action-research?

Siddharta : We are first concerned about action, about practice, not about theory. When we work with tribals, it is their life, not our own theory that matters. Our research must put them in the middle of our concerns. And they participate to that research.

Q : Surely, you would like them to be the beneficiaries of your action, but in fact, how do you know this is really the case? Your participatory approach to research-action is interesting, yet how do you make sure that your method is fair to what people really want and think?

S : In our opinion, solidarity is more important than "pure" knowledge. Needs are enormous and urgent : tribals are being expelled from their forests and taken advantage of by all kinds of people belonging to mainstream (caste) society. This requires action now.

Q : But how do you avoid making errors? Solidarity does not give you knowledge.

S : Perhaps, but that does not bother me so much. I am not concerned about the quality of a paper for some scholarly journal. I am concerned about the quality of my intervention. Much will depend from the spirit with which we work. Of course we may have erroneous assumptions and do something wrong. Action is always exposed to ambiguity, isn't it?

Q : Is your research-action only geared towards knowing "them" (i.e. the tribals) or does it offer you some knowledge about yourself as well? I mean, is it only these tribals who have to change? Or yourselves as well?

S : We were forced to change! Our own NGO culture was challenged because the interaction with the tribals is very dense, very intensive.

Q : So you might say that your participatory action-research method is "interactive self-discovery" : every partner is discovering something about him or herself in the process?

S : Sure. Persons are at stake. Not just tools. And to us personal mindfulness and awakening through some spiritual journey is necessary if social commitment and knowledge are to be valid. We lost our old ideological illusions. But we must still act. Therefore, we need to have a good understanding of the sense of it all.

Q : This could lead to accepting a good balance between methods (for a relatively "objective", scientific approach) and personal openness, human qualities. Both are necessary and complementary. We must exercise this kind of pluralism in our approaches.

S : Participatory action-research is offering another advantage, aside from the obvious knowledge it produces. It is breaking shame and inferiority complex among despised and marginalized people. Reflecting about themselves, with others, offers them that chance. Again you will notice that in our mind solidarity comes first, and that "pure knowledge" is not our primary concern.

Readers who wish to know more about Siddharta and his approach will consult "Cultures and Development - Quid Pro Quo" n° 0/9, p. 47-48. Siddharta and the research NGO he founded (ICRA) stress the importance of spirituality and personal realization in their own social commitment to liberation and justice. Jnana (awakening) is to them a key ingredient in their conscientization efforts, their training programmes and their own lives.

METHOD N° 6

THE RAPID RURAL APPRAISAL

Our presentation of R.R.A. and how it developed includes extracts of three different rather informal papers produced by Prof. Robert Chambers (author of a beautiful book called "Rural Development : Putting the Last First", Longman, London) and Parmesh Shah, both related to the Institute of Development Studies (Sussex, UK). We are grateful to our friend Parmesh Shah to allow us to quote from them as they show how RRA evolved from "rapid" to "relaxed" appraisal, adding to it the key-term "participatory". Prof. Fabrizio Sabelli's severe criticism of RRA, which was one of his contributions to the Network's 1992 Methodology Workshop, is interesting in its own right but does not do justice to the above-mentioned evolution of

RRA into PRA. As Network Cultures is open to all opinions, we welcome the violent criticism formulated by Prof. Sabelli even if many of us would not fully share his opinion and are indeed welcoming Chambers' efforts to be of practical assistance to "experts" whose arrogance and mechanistic approach is rightly condemned by both Chambers and Sabelli. Some feel that Chambers and Shah are more effective in correcting the biases of these experts. Others welcome Sabelli's cautionary words about RRA being too pragmatic, too empirical, and too subjective and agree with Sabelli's call for more classical anthropological work.

FROM RAPID RURAL APPRAISAL TO RELAX AND PARTICIPATORY APPRAISAL

Robert Chambers and Parmesh Shah (IDS, Sussex)

The term Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) was first used in the late 1970s, probably in 1978, to describe methods, and combinations of methods, for outsiders to learn about rural life and conditions which avoided two traps : first, the biases of rural development tourism - the phenomenon of the brief rural visit by the urban-based professional; and second, the untimely, costly, and often unusable outputs of traditional respectable investigations through large questionnaire surveys and through prolonged and detailed social anthropological fieldwork. RRA sought to be quicker and more cost-effective than these.

FROM THAILAND, HONDURAS AND KENYA ... (1)

RRA as it began to be described had many antecedents. The term came to be applied to things people were already doing. And many people anticipated and contributed to its development. In parallel with various forms of RRA, agroecosystem analysis was invented and developed from 1980 onwards, especially at the University of Chiang Mai in Thailand (Gypmantasiri et al and Conway 1980). RRA and Agroecosystem Analysis quickly exchanged methods. The fullest expression of classical RRA with agroecosystem analysis is to be found in the proceedings of the international conference on RRA held at the University of Khon Kaen, Thailand, in 1985

(1) Our subtitle

(KKU 1987). In this form, drawing on earlier RRA and other sources such as Farming Systems Analysis, it stressed the following aspects and methods :

- * analysis of secondary data;
- * semi-structured interviewing, especially with key informants;
- * direct observation;
- * multi-disciplinary team dynamics and management.

Mainly from agroecosystem analysis it also derived :

- * sketch mapping;
- * transects;
- * analytical diagramming.

Other methods were also used, but these were the main ones. RRA in this general mode was extractive : "we" went to rural areas, learned from rural people and from what "we" could observe, and then did the analysis and writing up ourselves for our own purposes. RRA in this and similar modes has been and continues to be practised in many different countries, and has been found especially strong for the rapid investigation of defined topics.

Rapid Assessment Procedures (RAP) was a parallel development in the health and nutrition field. Its origins have been traced back to the work of Susan Scrimshaw and Cloe O'Gara in Honduras in 1981, and its approach and methods are fully described in the manual "Rapid Assessment Procedures" (Scrimshaw and Hurtado 1987). RAP draws on the traditions and methods of social anthropology. Its major methods have been :

- * formal interview;
- * informal interview;
- * conversation;
- * observation;
- * participant observation;
- * focus groups

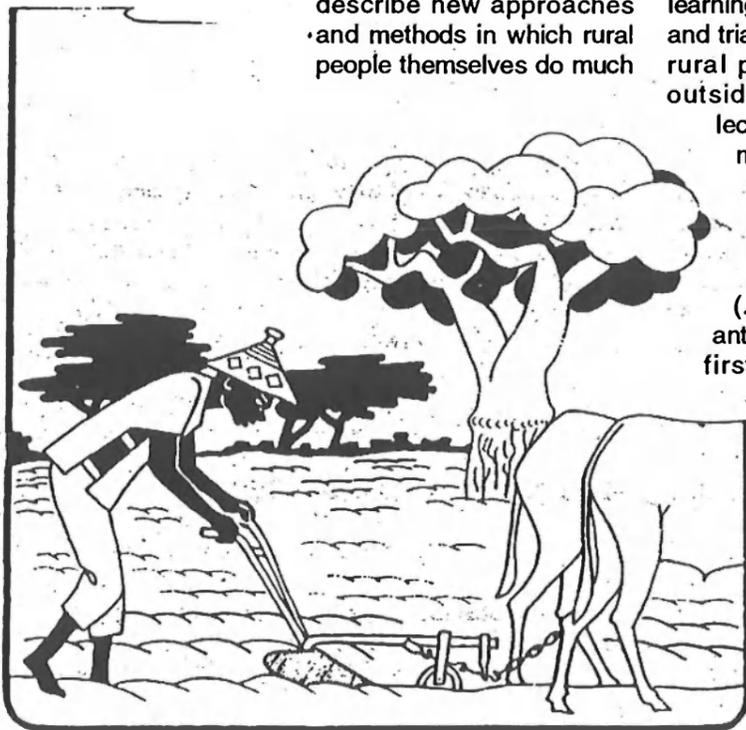
PARTICIPATORY RURAL APPRAISAL

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) began to be used as a term only in the late 1980s. Conway and McCracken (1988) identified four types of RRA, of which participatory was one (the others being exploratory, topical and monitoring). The term PRA was probably first used in Kenya to describe an exercise undertaken in Mbusyani Sublocation in Machakos District in July/August 1988 (Kabutha et al 1990). In India, Participatory Rapid Rural Appraisal was used to describe a similar exercise undertaken with and by the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (India) in September/October 1988 (McCracken 1988). Subsequently the use of the term PRA has spread, especially in Kenya, India, and Nepal, where it has tended to replace RRA in common usage.

PRA is distinguished from earlier RRA by the extent to which activities previously conducted by "us" are now carried out either by "them" or with "them" and the extent to which the resulting information is owned by and retained by them. Participatory methods include the following, all in a participatory mode :

- * mapping and modelling;
 - * transects;
 - * preference ranking and scoring;
 - * quantification;
 - * trend analysis;
 - * seasonal diagramming
 - * causal and analytical diagramming;
 - * "interviewing" maps, diagrams, animals, artefacts, etc.;
 - * villagers interviewing villagers;
 - * planning, implementing and monitoring
- (...)

Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) is a term used to describe new approaches and methods in which rural people themselves do much



more of the investigation, presentation, analysis, planning, and dissemination than has been normal in the past.

PRA has three pillars : behaviour; methods; and sharing. Behaviour refers to changes in the behaviour and attitudes of outsiders, with self-critical awareness, embracing and learning from error, and reversals of roles, with outsiders respecting and learning from and with rural people.

Methods refer to a continually expanding repertoire of methods of learning from, with and by rural people.

Sharing refers to a spirit of non-possessive openness, sharing knowledge, training, methods and approaches between practitioners, between organisations, and between rural people and each other and outsiders.

PRA requires that outsiders "hand over the stick" - passing the authority and initiative to rural people so that they are encouraged, enabled and empowered to do many of the things we thought we had to do, and only we could do. In the participatory mode, it is now much more they who map, make models, conduct transects, observe, make analytical diagrams, estimate, rank, score, present information, analyse, plan, monitor, evaluate, and disseminate. Information which we used to extract and take away for our analysis now remains much more with them, often for them to update and refine as they learn more and conditions change.

PRA derives some of its principles and precepts from its parent and contemporary, rapid rural appraisal (RRA). These include rapid, flexible and progressive learning, learning from rural people, optimal ignorance, and triangulation. To these PRA has added learning by rural people through their own analysis, and for outsiders - critical self-awareness, listening not lecturing, embracing error, and the one-sentence manual "Use your own best judgement at all times". (...)

RELAXED RURAL APPRAISAL

(...) Some of the methods come from social anthropology. Some, especially diagramming, were first developed and practised on any scale in Southeast Asia (...). Other methods seem to be new, but may well be rediscoveries. What is new is the way they have all come together, and the way RRA/PRA knows no boundaries whether of discipline or of geography. Interestingly, RRA/PRA technology is now being transferred from South to North, with these methods being used in Switzerland and Australia in agriculture and in the UK in health.

(...) Demand for training exceeds the supply of competent trainers. There is a danger of trying to go too far too fast. PRA could become a fashionable label, with "expert" consultants saying they can provide it when they cannot. **Already a case has been reported where a group in Europe claimed to be PRA trainers, were invited to a West African country, went, and wasted everyone's time because they were neither experienced nor competent.** Another danger is that people will try methods without having first established rapport, and will then say that the methods do not work, when in the circumstances they could not have been expected to work.

On the other hand, some people whose attitudes are truly participatory can, with a minimum of exposure, simply go ahead and learn as they go. The key is personal behaviour and attitudes. This includes critical self awareness and embracing error; sitting down, listening and learning; not lecturing but "handling over the stick" to villagers, who become the main teachers and analysts; having confidence that "they can do it"; and an open-ended inventiveness.

In the meantime, the methods have been spreading on their own. For example, a voluntary agency has adopted and adapted participatory mapping and the principle of "handling over the stick" as part of the process of forming new cooperatives. More and more people are trying out the methods and inventing their own variations. Part of the reason seems to be that when done well, with good rapport, these methods work, involving villagers in their own analysis and planning, and giving outsiders good insights. The experience is also often enjoyable for all concerned. Some observers are talking of a coming revolution in rural research methods. I do not think too much should be claimed too soon. We can wait and see how things develop and each of us can make a personal judgement.

Whatever that judgement is, you may agree that professional change is in the wind. Some of the more obvious changes are offsetting the biases of rural development tourism and liberation from survey slavery (meaning heavy and long questionnaire surveys). Less obvious, and more of a frontier, is developing better ways of enabling rural people themselves to be investigators, plan, and implement, and own the process.

Much PRA is enjoyed, both by rural participants and by outsiders who initiate it. The word "fun" is entering the vocabulary and describes some of the experience. "Relaxed" rural appraisal is a better description than "rapid". And the word "appraisal" is a bit out of date now. Participatory learning is closer. "We" learn from "them". They also learn something by presenting information and teaching us. Much of our knowledge is still useful, but

unless we start by unlearning and putting our knowledge, ideas and categories in second place, we cannot effectively learn from and with them.

Some people with a strong disciplinary training find this reversal of teaching and learning difficult. It is not their fault. (...)

SOME CORE PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF PRA

- * **Rapid progressive learning** - flexible, exploratory, interactive, inventive;
- * **reversals** - learning from, with and by rural people, eliciting and using their criteria and categories, and finding, understanding and appreciating ITK (indigenous technical knowledge);
- * **optimal ignorance, and appropriate imprecision** - not finding out more than is needed; not measuring more accurately than needed, and not trying to measure what does not need to be measured. We are trained to make absolute measurements, but often trends, scores or ranking are all that are required;
- * **triangulation** - using different methods, sources and disciplines, and a range of informants in a range of places, and cross-checking to get closer to the truth through successive approximations;
- * **investigators' direct contact**, face to face, in the field.

THE CORE OF PRA

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

- * empowering and enabling villagers to do more or all of the investigation, mapping, modelling, diagramming, ranking, scoring, quantification, analysis, presentation, planning ... themselves, and to share and own the outcome;
- * for this, the primacy of rapport, and our behaviour and attitudes - asking villagers to teach us, respect for them, confidence that they can do it, handling over the stick ..;
- * a culture of sharing - of information, of methods, of food, of field experiences (between NGOs, Government and villagers);
- * critical self-awareness about our attitudes and behaviour; doubt; embracing and learning from error; continuously trying to do better; building learning and improvement into every experience.

SOME PROBLEMS AND DANGERS

- * how to find the poorer, and learn from and with them;
- * lecturing instead of listening and learning (...);
- * senior people (and also younger ones) who do not want to spend time in the field let alone camp or nighthalt in a village;



Source NOV.B Netherland

- * rushing (rapid and wrong again);
- * imposing "our" ideas, categories, values, without realising we are doing it, making it difficult to learn from "them", and making "them" appear ignorant when they are not;
- * normal professional pressures, including the tyranny of (bad, not good) statisticians, the desire for formal statistical respectability, and the compulsion to measure things rather than just compare, rank, score, identify trends ...;
- * wanting to be snug and safe in the warm womb of a preset programme and method;
- * finding the questions to ask ! (We assume to know what to ask. The beginning of wisdom is to realize how often we do not know, and to recognise that we need "their" help);
- * male teams and neglect of women (again and again and again and again ...) (...).

APPROACHES AND METHODS

"Approach" is basic. If our attitudes are wrong, many of these methods will not work or not work as well as they should. Where attitudes are right and rapport is good,

we can be surprised by what villagers show they know, and what they can do. (...)

Here are some of the approaches and methods :

- * offset the anti-poverty biases of rural development tourism (...);
- * observe directly (see for yourself) (It has been striking for me to begin to realize how much I do not see, or do not think to ask about. Does University education deskill us ? Am I alone, or do many of us have this problem ?);
- * do-it-yourself, supervised and taught by them (levelling a field, transplanting, weeding, lopping tree fodder, collecting common property resources, herding, fishing, cutting and carrying fodder grass, milking animals, fetching water, fetching firewood, digging compost, sweeping and clearing, washing clothes, lifting water, plastering a house, thatching ...). Roles are reserved. They are the experts. We are the novices. They teach us. We learn from the (...);
- * semi-structured interviewing. The Khon Kaen school regards this as the "core" of good RRA. Have a mental or written checklist, but be open to new aspects and to following up on the new and unexpected;
- * groups (casual/encounter; focus/specialist;

deliberately structured; community/neighbourhood); **Group interviews are often powerful and efficient**, but we have neglected them, perhaps because of our obsession with counting through individual questionnaire-based interviews (...);

* **villagers and village residents as investigators and researchers** - women, school teachers, volunteers, students, farmers, village specialists, poor people. They do transects, observe, interview other villagers. This is now a major frontier, with villagers often showing greater abilities than outsiders commonly expect;

* **participatory mapping and modelling** - aerial photographs and overlays; people's mapping, drawing and colouring on the ground or on paper to make social, health or demographic maps (of the residential village), resource maps of village lands or of forests, maps of fields, farms, home gardens, or topic maps (for water, soils, trees etc etc) : making 3-D models of watersheds, etc. These methods have been one of the most popular "discoveries" of the past two years, and can be combined with or lead into wealth or wellbeing ranking, watershed planning, health action planning, etc;

* **participatory transects** - systematically walking with key informants through an area, observing, asking, listening, discussing, identifying different zones, local technologies, seeking problems, solutions, opportunities, and mapping and/or diagramming resources and findings. Transects now take many forms - vertical, loop, watercourse, combing (...);

* **local histories** : people's accounts of the past, of how things close to them have changed, ecological histories, histories of cropping patterns, changes in customs and practices, changes and trends in population, migration, fuels used, education, health ... and causes of these (...);

* **key probes** : questions which can lead direct to key issues such as - "What do you talk about when you are together ?" "What new practices have you or others in this village experimented with in recent years ?" "What happens when someone's hut burns down ?" "What (vegetable, tree, crop, crop variety, type of animal, tool, equipment ...) would you like to obtain to try out ?";

* **case studies and stories** - a household history and profile, a farm, coming with a crisis, how a conflict was or was not resolved ...;

* **rural people's own analysis, priorities, futures desired, choices, etc.** A frontier on which many outsiders have experience, but where much remains to be learned and shared about approaches and methods (...);

* **questionnaires.** If at all, let them be late, light and tight, tied to dummy tables. NOT long questionnaires,

and NOT early in the process, unless for a sharp and narrow purpose (...).

PRACTICAL TIPS

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

So listen, learn, facilitate. Don't dominate ! Don't interrupt !

"Quand je parcours les champs avec les paysans, ma principale intervention consiste à dire: "Ah! c'est comme cela que vous faites! Montrez-moi donc" When I'm in the fields with the farmers, my major comment is simply: Ah! that's how you do it! Show me".

Pierre Jacolin, ENDA, Senegal.

* spend nights in villages;

* embrace error. We all make mistakes, and do things badly sometimes. Never mind. Don't hide it. Share it. When things go wrong, treat it as an opportunity to learn. Say "Ahha. That was a mess. Good. Now what can we learn from it ?";

* ask yourself - who is being met and heard, and what is being seen, where and why; and who is not being met and

heard, and what is not being seen, and where and why?;

* relax (RRA = relaxed rural appraisal). Don't rush;

* meet people when it suits them, and when they can be at ease, not when it suits us. (Well, compromises are often necessary, but it is a good discipline, and good for rapport, to try to meet at their best times rather than ours); and don't force discussions to go on for too long. Stop before people are tired;

* be around in the evening, at night and in the early morning. Stay the night in villages if you can;

* allow unplanned time, walk and wander around;

* ask about what is seen;

* probe (sounds easy, but is one of the most neglected skills, often driven out by actual or supposed lack of time). All too often we accept the first reply to a question as being all that is needed, when there is much, much more, than we supposed);

* notice, seize on, investigate, the unexpected;

* use the six helpers - who, what, where, when, why and how;

* ask open-ended questions;

* show interest and enthusiasm in learning from people;

* have second and third meetings and interviews with the same people;

* allow more time than expected for team interaction (I have never yet go this right) and for changing the agenda;

* enjoy it ! It is often very interesting, and often fun(...).

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