Foreword to Schonhuth/Kievelitz Sourcebook

The 1990s began and have continued as a time of rapid and radical innovation in approaches and methods for appraisal and learning in development. Earlier approaches such as rapid rural appraisal (RRA), participatory action research, agro-ecosystem analysis, and farming systems research continue to be practised and have cross-fertilised and evolved, often towards more participatory forms. With one of these, participatory rural appraisal (PRA), three major "discoveries" have taken place:

First, that "they can do it". Local people, including those who are poor and illiterate, have shown a greater ability to conduct their own appraisal and analysis than outsider professionals have known or believed;

Second, that participatory methods of "visualisation", such as mapping, modelling, scoring matrices, and linkage and causal diagramming, are powerful and popular, and valid and reliable when well facilitated and performed;

Third, that the key to participatory approaches is less the methods, and more the behaviour, attitudes, values and beliefs of outsiders. Enabling outsiders to facilitate, to sit down, listen and learn without interrupting, to observe, keep quiet, and not rush, is often not easy. It is hard for many professionals to recognise that in many respects "we" are the problem, and "they" (local people) are the solution. Help has been found through night halts in villages, through experiential learning not in the classroom but in the field, through being taught tasks by local people, and through the impact of seeing and learning what local people themselves know and can express and analyse.

Participatory approaches and their labels have spread fast. This brings huge opportunities: for reversals of relationships; for personal, professional and institutional change; and for the empowerment of communities and especially of poor people through their own analysis and action. There is a potential here for a whole new generation of development initiatives which are decentralised, democratic and diverse, and for the initiation of bottom-up pressures on organisations which in turn will make them more participatory in management procedures and culture.

The dangers, too, are formidable: that participation will be distorted and destroyed by traditional top-down project routines, by imperious donor-recipient relationships, by targets, and by standardisation; that participatory methods will be routinised; that the vital key of behaviour and attitudes will be overlooked; that detailed manuals will fix and fossilise practices and understanding which grow out of date, contrasting with the flexible one-sentence "Use your own best judgement at all times"; and that consultants, threatened by the demand for participatory approaches, will claim competence when they lack experience, commitment and conviction. At its worst, this could strengthen the dominance of people from the North over those from the South. Yet in PRA, the bulk of experienced trainers are from the South, and in the South. At a joint IDS/IIED workshop in May 1994, a statement was drawn up by practitioners from both South and North warning of such dangers, and suggesting standards and principles for good practice.

In this context, this sourcebook is welcome not only for its review of approaches and methods, but for going further and pointing to topics new in importance. These include conflict resolution, quality assurance, institutional reform, scaling up, and the ethics of relations with villagers. The sources of information and contacts listed will also enable readers to follow up and find out more in this rapidly evolving field.
How this volume is used depends on personal choice, professional values, and institutional culture. It could be misused to reinforce top-down, North-South patterns of dominance, which is the opposite of its thrust and intention. It can instead be seen as an invitation to those who are powerful at each level to disempower themselves, to "hand over the stick", and to empower those below. For participation to be more than a nice word, the direction of change has to be decentralising towards diversity, and facilitating, sharing, and learning laterally and from below. The test is in answers to the questions:

- Whose knowledge counts?
- Whose values?
- Whose criteria and preferences?
- Whose appraisal?
- Whose analysis?
- Whose planning?
- Whose action?
- Whose monitoring and evaluation?

In sum, whose reality counts? How much has it been "ours", and how much can it now instead be "theirs"?

This timely and useful sourcebook points in a practical manner towards answers. Let me hope that many people will find that it opens up a new range of experience and a new sense of good things that can be done; and that if they come to this for the first time, they will be inspired to learn from others, to start, stumble, self-correct and share, and so contribute further to our understanding and practice.

28 October 1994
Robert Chambers
The 1990s began and have continued as a time of rapid and radical innovation in approaches and methods for appraisal and learning in development. Earlier approaches such as rapid rural appraisal (RRA), participatory action research, agro-ecosystem analysis, participant observation, and farming systems research continue to be practised and have cross-fertilised and evolved, often towards more participatory forms. With participatory rural appraisal (PRA) three major "discoveries" have taken place:

First, that "they can do it". Local people, including those who are poor and illiterate, have shown a far greater ability to conduct their own appraisal and analysis than outsider professionals have known or believed;

Second, that participatory methods of "visualisation" - mapping, modelling, scoring matrices, linkage and causal diagramming... are powerful and popular, and valid and reliable when well facilitated;

Third, that the key to participatory approaches is not the methods, but the behaviour, attitudes, values and beliefs of outsiders. Enabling outsiders to facilitate, sit down, listen and learn without interrupting, observe, keep quiet, and not rush, is often not easy. It is hard for many professionals to recognise that in many respects "we" are the problem, and "they" (local people) are the solution. Help has been found through the shock, as it is for some, of night halts in villages, of experiential learning not in the classroom but in the field, of being taught tasks by local people, and then by the impact of seeing and learning what local people themselves know and can express and analyse.

Participatory approaches and their labels have spread fast. This brings huge opportunities: for reversals of relationships; for personal, professional and institutional change; and for the empowerment of communities and especially of poor people through their own analysis and action. There is a potential here for a whole new generation of development initiatives which are decentralised, democratic and diverse, and for the initiation of bottom-up pressures on organisations which in turn will make them more participatory in management procedures and culture.

But the dangers, too, are formidable: that top-down project routines (devised in and for an earlier phase), donor-recipient relationships, targets, and standardisation will distort and destroy participation; that participatory methods will be routinised; that the crucial importance of
behaviour and attitudes will be overlooked; that manuals will fix and fossilise practices and understanding which rapidly grow out of date; and that consultants, threatened by the demand for participatory approaches, will claim competence which they lack. At its worst, this could strengthen the dominance of people from the North over those from the South. Yet in PRA, the bulk of experienced trainers are from the South, and in the South. At a joint IDS/IIED workshop in May 1994, a statement was issued by practitioners from the South and North warning of these and other dangers, and setting out standards and principles.

In this context, this source book is timely. For those coming new to this field, it provides and introduction to approaches and methods. And it lists sources of information to enable the reader to find out more, and how to keep up to date.

The test now is how readers use it. It could be misused to reinforce top-down, North-South patterns of dominance, which is the opposite of its intention and thrust. Let it rather be seen as an invitation to those who are powerful at each level to disempower themselves, to "hand over the stick", and to empower those below. How it is used depends on personal choice, professional values, and institutional culture. If participation is to be more than a nice word, all of these have to move in the direction of facilitating, sharing, and learning laterally and from below. The test is in the answers the reader gives to the questions:

Whose knowledge counts?
Whose values?
Whose criteria and preferences?
Whose appraisal?
Whose analysis?
Whose planning?
Whose action?
Whose monitoring and evaluation?

In sum, WHOSE REALITY COUNTS? "Ours", or "Theirs"?

Most answers in the past have been "ours", including those of us who work as Northerners in the North on matters concerning the South. But if participation and sustainable development are to be achieved, the answers have to be, in the future, much more "theirs", referring to local people. This source book provides leads in that direction. How well it will be used depends now on the reader. Above all, in using it, and in experiential learning, the crux is personal behaviour, attitudes, values and beliefs: self critical awareness, unlearning, patience and not rushing, embracing error, failing forwards, handing over the stick, knowing and believing that "they can do it", being nice to people,
sitting down, listening and not interrupting, and the one sentence manual "Use your own best judgement at all times."

Let me hope that for many people this timely and useful source book will open up a new range of experience and a new sense of good things that can be done, and that they will be inspired to gain experience, and to enable others to do so, to start, stumble, self-correct, and share.

16 October 1994
Robert Chambers