

## Rural Development in India: Reversals for Diversity

Robert Chambers, Visiting Faculty, ASCI, Hyderabad

*This paper (1) argues that in the search for more equitable and effective rural development, professionals and professionalism are part of the problem. Normal bureaucracy, normal professionalism, normal careers, and normal modes of learning interlock to sustain centralised, standardised and simple perceptions, prescriptions, and programmes. The environments and livelihood strategies of the poorer are often, in contrast, dispersed, diverse and complex. To enable the poor to gain more of what they want and need requires policies and programmes which decentralise, diversify, and encourage demand from below. Trends in these directions can be discerned in rural development in India over the past ten years. Examples are found in canal irrigation, lift irrigation, watershed development, social forestry, and agricultural research and extension. Recent developments in the approach and methods of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) show potential for carrying these processes further through personal, professional, and institutional change.*

The context of rural development in India, as in most countries, is not just of change, but of accelerating change. The changes are in all dimensions and domains, including the physical environment, social and economic conditions, farming systems, communications, and people's awareness and aspirations. What people think and want and see as possible now are not what they thought and wanted and saw as possible ten, or even five, or even two years ago. Businessmen have been quick to note and exploit the rapid spread and deepening of rural markets. But other non-rural professionals, in contrast, have tended to lag in understanding and action. They include many who are isolated and secure in the bastions of learning and privilege in universities and large bureaucracies. An underlying hypothesis of this paper is that ideas about rural deprivation and development articulated in universities and acted on in bureaucracies are liable to be out of touch and out of date; and that precisely because of these lags and lacunae, rural development policy and practice present opportunities for new analysis and practical action.

### Normal Professionalism, Bureaucracy, Behaviour and Learning

(Normal = usual; regular; common; typical: the normal way of doing it; the normal level. *the Collins English Dictionary*. 2nd ed 1986)

Four sets of conditions which are normally found can be seen to interlock to deter and delay change in perception and prescription in rural development.

The first is normal professionalism -- the concepts, values, methods, and behaviour dominant in a profession. These are taught in schools and universities, where they are sustained by conservative curricula and successive editions of hallowed textbooks written and rewritten by ageing men; and they are reinforced by professional associations, by promotions boards, by journal editors and their anonymous reviewers, and by the norms of specialised bureaucracies. In general, normal professionalism values things more than people, men more than women, measurement more than judgment, and the urban and industrial more than the rural and agricultural.

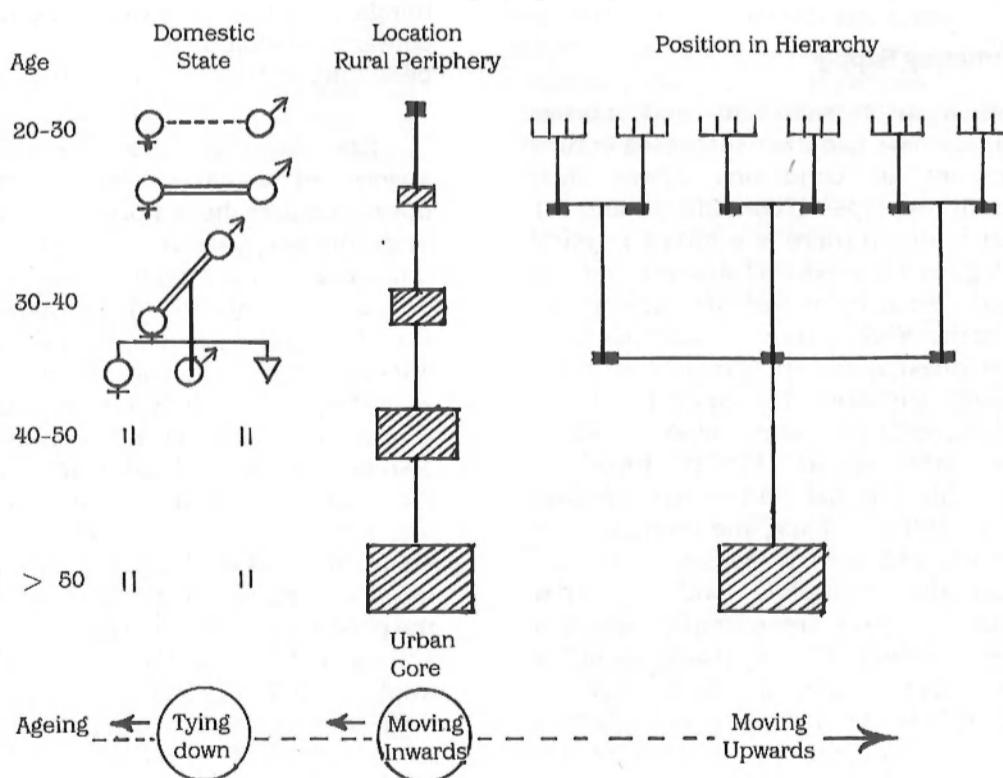
The second is normal bureaucracy — the values, methods, and behaviour dominant in large organisations, especially those of government. Its features typically include centralisation and standardisation: centralisation of authority, especially financial control; and standardisation of rules, recommendations, and actions.

The third is normal (successful) careers. Typical domestic and career cycles in rural development present three related trends: tying down; moving inwards; and moving upwards (Figure 1). As professionals gain in age and experience, they are progressively tied down, and women more than men, by marriage and the care and education of children; they move inwards into larger and larger urban centres; and they move upwards in hierarchies. These three processes interlock to distance those who become more senior and powerful more and more from rural contact and realities.

The fourth set of conditions is normal learning. Normal learning is dominated by urban-based professionals. It has two sides: learning by them about rural life and conditions; and learning from them by rural people.

Learning by urban-based professionals has two main modes, both liable to mislead: rural development tourism — the brief, urban-based rural visit; and large-scale questionnaire surveys with their many and notorious distortions and inaccuracies (for instance, how many survey analysts test for investigator bias?) The older, more senior and more important a person becomes, the more biased his (they are usually men) rural visits and perceptions, and the greater his reliance on statistics from surveys. Learning by rural people is assumed to be through the transfer of knowledge to them from professionals. In agriculture, the transfer-of-technology (TOT) mode, in which technology is generated on

**Figure 1: Normal Successful Domestic and Career Sequences  
(Mainly Male)**



research stations and in laboratories, and then passed to farmers for adoption, is a prominent example. "Our" knowledge is assumed to be superior to "theirs". "They" need to learn from "us".

These four forms of normality are mutually reinforcing. Normal professionalism, normal bureaucracy, normal careers, and normal learning mean that old men who have been removed from rural realities dominate decision-making or rural policy and programmes. The older, more senior and more important they are, and the more power and influence they have, so the harder it is for them to gain unconstrained access to rural conditions and to the poorer rural people. The danger then is that the decisions they take are out of date and out of touch. And the outcome of normal pressures and perceptions is often the top-down programme with a standard blueprint to be implemented everywhere. These are one-sided assertions. No one would wish to claim that they apply everywhere or to everyone. All the same, a few might wish to dispute that they have a degree of general validity.

#### Differentiating Supply

Normal professionalism and normal bureaucracy have had their successes in rural development in conditions where their strength fit. Two types of conditions stand out: The first is where there is a robust physical technology which works well almost anywhere. Railways, electricity power supplies, roads, dams, some water pumps, blackboards — these are physical examples where blueprints are needed and work. The second is where there is an extensive environment which is uniform and stable. Green revolution packages for the flat, fertile well watered plains of north-west India, and immunisation for human and animal bodies which are homostatically controlled within narrow tolerances — these are examples where a standard intervention — a "magic bullet" (a vaccine, a high-yielding variety package) — can sometimes be powerful and effective because of a large-scale regular or controllable receiving environment.

The error has been to suppose that the top-down approach of the standard package which worked for the green revolution, or of the vaccine which works in immunisation, will also work in other environments and conditions which are more diverse, complex, uncontrolled, and unpredictable. Compared with the uniform, simple and controlled farming systems of green revolution agriculture, most rainfed farming systems are complex, diverse and risk-prone. Compared with the predictable conditions in the human body, the physical, social, and economic conditions found in a canal irrigation system, in a watershed, in a natural forest, in a village, or in the livelihoods of most poor households, are more diverse, complex, and unpredictable. Further, whereas normal science is reductionist and normal packages and programmes are simple and simplifying, poor people often seek to complicate and diversify their farming systems and their livelihood strategies in order to reduce risk and improve their well-being. In consequence, for diverse, complex, and risk-prone environments and livelihoods, and for programmes concerning people (not just the insides of their bodies) as well as things, the experience with top-down, centre-outwards standardised blueprints has often been dim, and sometimes dismal.

Examples can be cited from five specialised domains where standard top-down packages have worked badly. In canal irrigation, examples are the national policy of 8-hectare chaks (irrigable areas below canal outlets), and the unimplementable Seventh Plan target of eight million hectares under warabandi (the north-west Indian system of water distribution to farmers based on timed allocation of waterflows). In lift irrigation, the standard design and command sizes of the World Bank tube-wells in Uttar Pradesh stand out, with the same 100 hectare design placed on top of varied local conditions. In watershed development, a similar pattern is shown by the prescriptions first for contour earth bunds, and later for *Khus* (*Vetiver*) grass, to be implemented in different environments on a large-scale. In social forestry, the obvious case is the big push of the late 70s and early 80s for eucalyptus in farm and community forestry.

Finally, in agriculture, the top-down mode has been embodied in the concept of the high-yielding green revolution package to be promoted over large areas in rainfed conditions. All these were, or are, standardised, top-down, centre-outwards prescriptions, some deriving from the relatively uniform and controlled conditions of north-west India and transferred to more diverse and less controllable conditions elsewhere. All were relatively simple. All were administratively convenient. All ran into problems because they did not fit or respond to diverse and complex conditions and needs.

In all five domains, recent years have seen a shift towards differentiation. In canal irrigation, the National Water Management Project promotes separate diagnosis for each irrigation system, leading to individually tailored operational plans. In lift irrigation, the importance of better management of electricity to ensure a more predictable supply is increasingly acknowledged, including the desirability of different supply regimes for water-abundant and water-scarce zones. Widespread markets for the sale of groundwater have been recognised (initially in the seminal work of Tushaar Shah) and their capacity to cater precisely to local needs. In watershed management, the rhetoric of participation has been given some substance by the Drylands Development Board in Karnataka and the Drought-Prone Areas Programme in Andhra Pradesh, with more openness to local needs and variation. In social forestry, nurseries which used to be dominated by eucalyptus, are now found with a wider variety of species. In agricultural research and extension, diversity has been categorised and described with the identification and continuing documentation of 127 agro-climatic or agro-ecological zones.

An industrial analogy of the direction of these shifts from Henry Ford's standard batch production of automobiles to Toyota's differentiated diversity. In his famous remark, Henry Ford said that the American public could have its Model T Ford any colour it liked as long as it was black. In contrast, the cars coming off the Toyota production line are all

different, each fitted to the demands of an individual client.

Except for groundwater markets, the changes listed above in these five domains do not, however, go the whole way to a "Toyota" mode which fits and meets individual demand. Rather, they are forms of top-down, centre-outwards, differentiation, a differentiation of bureaucratic categories and supply. They begin to distinguish different systems, zones and types of clients, and some of them present an a la carte instead of a fixed menu, an open basket of choices in place of a closed package. But they do not go the whole way. The menu is still chosen by the cook; the contents of the basket are still selected by the vendor. The further step is for the client to select the ingredients and even do the cooking; for the client to choose the contents of the basket and even fill it herself or himself. The next step is the articulation and differentiation of demand, as in the full Toyota analogy, with much fuller participation by the client. Demand, of course, has normally to be limited to what falls within the guidelines and competence of the organisation. The point is that within those limitations, a much wider range of choice and action can usually be made accessible. The implications for the five specialised programmes are suggested in table 1.

Parallels to these shifts to differentiated supply can be found in mainstream "generalist" anti-poverty programmes. The IRDP norms and targets have been standard for every block, but other programmes have been differentiated according to district-wise conditions: for example, the Drought-prone Areas Programme, the Tribal Area Development Programme, the Hill Areas Development Programme, the Desert Development Programme, and the September 1990 decision to implement a rural employment guarantee programme in at least 50 of the poorest districts (*Newstime* 26 September 1990). Yet other programmes have differentiated by person, as the IRDP itself does, and as with the earlier SFDA and with TRYSEM, DWCRA, and the RLEGP. Tendencies within such programmes to standardise are reportedly common, as a feature of normal bureaucracy,

	FROM	TOP-DOWN SUPPLY	TO	BOTTOM-UP DEMAND	
	STANDARDISED	→	DIFFERENTIATED	→ ←	DIVERSE
CANAL IRRIGATION	8 ha chaks warabandi (8 m.ha) pipe committees	→	National Water Management Project System-specific plans	↔	Farmers' rights to water Communications Organisation. Accountability of management
LIFT IRRIGATION	World Bank Tube-wells	→	Power supply management Zoning policy	↔	Buyers' markets for water Abolish spacing in water abundant areas
WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT	Earth bunds Khus grass	→	Technology options given to farmers	↔	Participatory appraisal and planning by farmers
SOCIAL FORESTRY	Plantations Eucalyptus Acacia nilotica on foreshores	→	Protection for natural regeneration Diversified nurseries	↔	Diversified livelihood forestry Farmers' rights to harvest and transit Community forest management
AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH AND EXTENSION	Green revolution Packages "IRB"	→	National Agricultural Research Project 120 agroecological Zones Minikits	↔	"Farmer first" approaches farmer participatory research. Search for baskets of choice for farmers
LONG-TERM TRENDS		→ 1970s, 1978s		↔ DESIRABLE 1990s, 21st CENTURY	
INDUSTRIAL PARALLEL		MODEL T any colour as long as it is black		Toyota each client chooses	
(Top-down supply applies equally to Standardised and Differentiated)					

but the intention is to differentiate and target top-down supply to benefit the more deprived areas and people. The question is whether these modifications of the normal go far enough, or whether for fit and sustainability they need also to be drawn down and differentiated by demand, from the bottom-up.

#### Diversity, Decentralisation and Demand

The various philosophies of "bottom-up" development, of empowerment of the poor, of participation, and of putting the poor first, all imply not just modifications, but reversals of the normal. For brevity some of these are

listed in table 2. The most crucial reversal concerns priorities. Professionals assume that they know what poor people want and need, and what their priorities are or should be. In practice, both priorities and programmes are influenced by what is administratively convenient and easy and normal to measure. The poverty line, and poverty line thinking, which underline and are used to assess the IRDP, express the normal professionalism which measures flows — of income or of consumption, rather than other dimensions of well-being. Jodha's (1988) longitudinal study of change in two villages in Rajasthan is here dramatically suggestive. He found that the 35 households which over 20 years had suffered

decline in real per capita incomes of more than 5 per cent were on average better off according to 37 out of 38 of their own criteria, many of which concerned reduced vulnerability, greater independence, and enhanced self-respect. Poor people's priorities cannot be assumed. They vary and they change. And the experts on them are not professionals, but poor people themselves.

Throughout there is a theme of reversals to achieve the three Ds—diversity, decentralisation, and demand. Diversity exists, and often needs to be enhanced to enable the poor to gain better livelihoods. Decentralisation is one mode of action, but unless matched by effective demand can lead to capture by local elites. Decentralisation is by definition top-down, even though its intention is bottom-up.

Table 2: Reversals For Diversity and Realism

	NORMAL TENDENCIES	NEW-NEEDED REVERSALS
PROFESSIONALISM	Things first Man before woman Professionals set priorities Transfer of technology	People first Woman before man Poor people set priorities Choice of technology
BUREAUCRACY	Centralise Standardise Simplify	Decentralise Diversify Complicate
CAREERS AND BEHAVIOUR	Tying down (family) Inwards (urban) Upwards (hierarchy)	Also releasing Also outwards (rural) Also downwards (field, village)
MODES OF LEARNING	From "above" Rural development tourism  Questionnaire surveys Measurement and statistics	From "below" Rapid and participatory rural appraisal  Participatory Learning Methods Ranking, scoring, and self-critical judgment

The reversals are to offset the bases of the normal. The argument is that they need much additional weight to achieve anything like an optional balance.

Another way of expressing the contrasts is through physical and human paradigms for development. Normal high status professionalism, dominated by engineers, economists, and natural scientists, deals with things, and with people as though they were things, leaving the complexities and diversities of real individual people to low status nurses, extension workers and social workers. Much experience and analysis, most notably that of David Korten (1980; 1984), has shown that effective rural development requires a shift of stress from things to people, from blueprints to process, and from planning to participation—all of these entailing reversals of the normal.

A key question, not to be answered here, is how it can be complemented by effective demand by the poorer, how they can be empowered to claim their rights and entitlements. With points such as these in mind, most of those committed to the reduction and elimination of rural deprivation would probably agree on the need to shift programmes and action more and more to the righthand side of tables 2 and 3, and to enable the poorer to organise, demand, and get more of what they want and need. Many programmes and projects in India seek to do this, not least the IRDP and Jawahar Rozgar Yojana. Although the discussion is relevant to

**Table 3: Physical and Human paradigms for Development**

	PHYSICAL	HUMAN
Point of departure	Things	People
Mode	Blueprint	Process
Goals	Predetermined	Evolutionary
Analytical assumptions (implicit)	Reductionist	Holistic
Key word	Planning	Participation
Focus of decision-making	Centralised	Decentralised
Relationship with clients	Controlling, motivating	Enabling, empowering
Methods	Standardised and universally applicable	Diverse and low evolved
Technology for clients	A fixed package of practices	A varied basket options
Project output	Infrastructure	Competence and choice

those programmes, the focus here will be on practical implications for the five specialised programmes mentioned above.

#### Practical Implications

##### Reversing Normal Professionalism and Bureaucracy

In canal irrigation, lift irrigation, watershed management, social forestry, and agricultural research and extension, reversals of normal bureaucracy and of normal professionalism can be seen to present scope for gains by those who are poorer and weaker. The shifts and reversals needed for them to gain more in these domains are from things to people, from blueprint to process, from hardware to software, and from the uniform to the diverse. They manifest the three Ds — diversity, decentralisation, and (effective) demand by the deprived.

Those who are deprived and who would gain differ in each context. In canal irrigation, they are tail-enders and others who receive unreliable water supplies. In lift irrigation, they

are the buyers, or would-be buyers, of water. In social forestry, they are the poorer, especially poor farm families who can plant trees, people who suffer shortages of fuelwood, fodder and other tree-based livelihoods. In watershed management, they are farm families, especially those with degraded land or who suffer from the negligence of neighbours. And in agricultural research and extension, they are the smaller poorer farmers, especially those in marginal and rainfed areas.

Detailed cases for reversals in these domains have been made elsewhere<sup>2</sup>. Some of the more important reversals are:

*Canal irrigation:* Shifting attention from physical works to focus much more on system management, with an operational plan for each irrigation system, establishing irrigators' rights to information and to water, and organisation and representation of irrigators groups, especially tail-enders.

*Lift irrigation:* In water abundant areas, in place of public tube-wells, providing for

competitive private markets for water through flat rate tariffs, through abolishing licensing and spacing regulations, and through intensive development, and in water scarce areas, by more differentiated programmes, including zoning and power supply management.

*Watershed management:* Appraisal, planning and implementation by farmers (as being pioneered by the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, MYRADA, the Karnataka Drylands Development Board, and the Andhra Pradesh Drought-Prone Areas Programmes), with officials in an advisory, supportive, and facilitating role.

*Social Forestry:* On public lands, shifting from single species production forestry to diverse livelihood forestry, planting and protecting a mix of "trees of the poor" and ensuring them rights of usufruct.

*Agricultural research and extension:* For rainfed agriculture, changing from "transfer-of-technology" (TOT) to "farmer first" approaches, from a package of practices to a basket of choices, with farmers participating in agricultural research and extension, determining priorities, making demands, requesting staff to search for what they want and need, and themselves experimenting (Farrington, Martin, 1988; Amanor, 1989); and improving the balance of research priorities between high status crops like wheat and rice, and relatively neglected crops like coarse grains and some tubers, and between the large livestock (cattle, buffaloes) of the less poor to the relatively neglected smallstock like goats, sheep, and poultry of the poorer.

All these implications entail reversals — from the lefthand side of tables to the righthand side, from the centralised and standardised to the decentralised and diverse. All run counter to normal bureaucracy and normal professionalism. All, therefore, entail not just institutional and procedural change, but also change which is personal and individual. The question is how such changes can be brought about, and accelerated so that rural development programmes can better fit local diversity and demand.

#### To Integrate Reversals: Participatory Rural Appraisal<sup>3</sup>

One new potential for both institutional and individual change is presented by the recent development of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). Developments have been rapid on both NGOs and government<sup>4</sup>.

PRA, a development of rapid (or now "relaxed") rural appraisal (Khon Kaen, 1987), is based on learning from, with, and by rural people, in their context. Normal approaches to learning about rural life and conditions are extractive. "We" go to rural areas for "data collection"; we obtain the data, bring them away, and process them elsewhere, often to help us decide what would be good for "them". Recent new approaches and methods make this more participatory. "We" still go to villages, but the data are shared, and the analysis is much more by rural people themselves.

Among the underlying theory and principles of PRA, six may be mentioned:

Rapid and progressive learning — iterative, inventive, flexible, and exploratory

Reversals — learning from, with, and by rural people, eliciting and using their criteria and categories

Optimal ignorance and appropriate imprecision, that is, not trying to find out more than is needed, and not measuring more or more accurately than required for practical purposes

Triangulation — using different methods, sources and disciplines, and a range of informants in a range of places, and cross-checking with successive approximation

Principal investigators, and senior people, in direct contact, face-to-face, with rural people in the field

Personal responsibility, including self-critical awareness, doubt, embracing error, and the one sentence manual "use your own best judgment at all times"

Two sets of innovations and insights characterise PRA as it has been developed in India.

The first is new participatory learning methods. These include participatory mapping and modelling, transects, analytical diagramming, ranking, scoring and estimating, wealth ranking, seasonal and livelihood analysis, and planning. In all these, the initiative in presenting and analysing information is passed to villagers. Frequently, the information is represented in visible, public, and correctable form. The methods are proving both powerful and popular, and are spreading. The word "fun" is entering the rural development vocabulary. In contrast with questionnaire surveys, villagers and outsiders usually enjoy the process and find it interesting. The astonishing and consistent finding here has been that when rapport and methods are right, rural people have a far greater capacity to map, model, rank, score, estimate, diagram, analyse, and plan than outsiders have supposed.

The second concerns reversals of attitude and behaviour on the part of outsiders and good rapport. The insight here is that rural people have often appeared ignorant and incapable because "we" have put them down, lecturing not listening, teaching not learning, interrupting not waiting, and rushing not relaxing. It is this, and the combined influence of normal professionalism, bureaucracy, careers, and learning, which have led us to underestimate their knowledge and analytical abilities. To enable them to express that knowledge and exercise that analytical ability, most outsiders need to behave differently, with modest personal demeanour, real interest in what people say, do and show, a keenness to learn, a willingness to listen and not interrupt, and a confidence in the analytical capabilities of rural people. Rapport can be sought and strengthened by outsiders doing village tasks, with villagers as teachers, by sharing food, and by spending nights in villages.

The ultimate potential of PRA is hard to assess. There are dangers of instant popularity, bad implementation, and disillusion.

The demand for training in PRA is heavy and the supply of trainers still slight. Although India is an epicentre of innovation in PRA, few organisations yet see providing PRA training for others as a major function. PRA is still practiced only on a tiny scale. It is not yet, to my knowledge, part of the curriculum or practice of any university, although the Gandhigram Rural Institute in Tamil Nadu has shown strong interest. This is scarcely surprising since PRA involves a methodological paradigm shift which many normal professionals, especially those wedded to questionnaire surveys, find threatening. Robert Rhoades (1990) has written about "The Coming Revolution in Rural Research", but the revolution at present is scarcely found in research at all. It is largely in the practices of a number of NGOs, a few training institutes (such as the National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie) and in a few government departments.

Two large-scale government programmes to seek PRA training have been the Drylands Development Board in Karnataka, and the Drought-prone Areas Programme in Andhra Pradesh. Both are concerned with watershed development. In each case, a key senior official experienced PRA personally, and arranged for MYRADA to undertake training. In each case, some officials have become enthusiastic and committed and have trained others. Procedures and practices have also been modified. The test, though, will be over time, whether such radical changes can be sustained in government organisations.

Whatever cautious qualifications one wishes to make, PRA does seem to have potential to integrate the themes of this paper. It puts first the knowledge, categories, and perceived needs and priorities of rural people, countering and reversing normal professionalism. It can enable the articulation of diverse local demand, countering and reversing normal bureaucracy. It can take senior people to the field, countering and reversing the progressive isolation and out-of-dateness of normal careers. And it is based on changes of roles of teachers and students, countering and reversing normal learning. It passes the initiative for teaching, presenting

information, analysing and planning to villagers. It is in harmony with proposals for ecologically sound and participatory rural development (Agarwal, Narain, 1989). Done well, it involves and empowers the poorer people. It should then lead to development which meets their priorities, and which is more sustainable, by them. Through its decentralised nature, it takes account of local diversity. Perhaps most important, it enables outsiders to learn to change. For outsiders, PRA's greatest potential may be personal reorientation and liberation from inappropriate professionalism. The question is raised whether it can be a feasible means for multiple simultaneous change, both personal and institutional.

The major issue is whether, with the accelerating changes taking place in the world, there is now a possibility of large-scale transformation of field bureaucracies, as well as of NGOs, with PRA as one spearhead of change.

#### Promoting Personal Change

Stereotypes of rent-seeking officials, wicked contractors, and corrupt politicians can depress and mislead. I will assert as a personal opinion that there are vast numbers of people, not just in the NGO sector, but also in government organisations, in politics, and in business, who wish to do good work and help the poor. Partly they are trapped in "the system". Partly, they are waiting for opportunities for change. The reversals here are personal. They are to offset the biases of careers which lead inwards and upwards, away from rural realities. They are to spend time regularly close to rural life. They are to learn from and with rural people. They are to get honest and accurate feedback on programmes. They are to keep up to date with rural change. And they are to work to empower the poor.

The experience of PRA indicates ways in which such personal change can be promoted. These include:

*Overnights in villages:* The personal testimony of an increasing number of NGO workers and officials indicates that for many the act of spending nights in villages, without

very special arrangements, sometimes including the conquest of anxieties about food, washing and toilet arrangements, can lead to new rapport, attitudes, confidence, and insights.

*Mini-sabbaticals:* Normal careers do not provide for mini-sabbaticals of one or a few weeks. But for many in mid-career, or late career, a matter of days or weeks spent living in villages, updating perceptions and understanding, and learning from rural people, can be a formative experience.

*Learning from rural people:* Methods for participatory learning, in which rural people express their knowledge, and indicate their categories, criteria and priorities, can be taught to and used by professionals. Examples are participatory mapping and modelling, matrix ranking and scoring, wealth and well-being ranking, time lines (ethnohistories), and analytical diagramming. The very use of these methods is often a revelation which leads to changes of attitude on the part of outsiders.

#### A Paradigm Shift?

We appear to be on the brink of rapid changes in the professions and organisations concerned with rural development. Many of these changes entail reversing normal values and behaviour, and seeing things from the point of view, not of urban-based outsider professionals, but of poor rural people. This implies a new paradigm, which may be partly complementary, and partly alternative, to the old. But with now bewildering rates of change in almost every domain, it is easier to see old paradigm under attack than new ones coalescing. In rural development, however, the new and complementary paradigm of reversals is gaining in coherence. In the rhetoric of participation, sustainability, democracy, decentralisation and diversity, this paradigm is already taken form. In the reality of institutional and personal commitment and action, it is still only scattered. Massive obstacles of vested interests (academic, bureaucratic, political) and of habits (professional, procedural, methodological) impede its adoption and development. To take two examples: university lecturers and

researchers have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo so that they do not have to change their lectures, textbooks, and research methods; and government officials who gain from rents from top-down non-participatory programmes have a vested interest in opposing participation which diminishes their incomes.

On the positive side, the popularity and power of PRA and similar innovations have already contributed to their spread and to institutional and personal change. Moreover, a worldwide convergence can be discerned. Tom Peters' book (1987) *Thriving on Chaos*, written as advice for North American business, stresses differentiation, finding and exploiting market niches, "becoming obsessed with

listening", giving priority to front-line workers, taking personal responsibility and initiatives, inventiveness, and learning from mistakes — all of which resonate with the evolving philosophy and approach of PRA. Movements parallel to Indian PRA are also under way in other countries, such as Kenya. Internationally, participatory methods are being shared and those pioneered in India have already begun to spread to other countries of the South. As the North now also follows with increasing emphasis on differentiation, decentralisation, the local, and the diverse, PRA may itself reverse the normal direction of the transfer of technology, as the approaches and methods developed in India and elsewhere in the South spread to countries in the North. □

#### NOTES:

- 1 This is a shortened, revised, and updated version of a working paper presented to the Administrative Staff College of India Workshop on New Directions for Rural Development held in New Delhi in December 1990. For useful comments, I am grateful to James Mascarenhas, K S Ramesh, Anil G Shah, and participants in the Workshop. The usual disclaimers apply.
- 2 For canal irrigation, see Robert Chambers. *Managing Canal Irrigation: Practical Analysis from South Asia*. New Delhi, Oxford and IBH, 1988, esp. pp 236-42; for lift irrigation and social forestry, Robert Chambers, N C Saxena, Tushaar Shah. *To the Hands of the Poor: Water and Trees*. New Delhi, Oxford and IBH, 1989, esp 210-26; for watershed management, Robert Chambers. Farmers' Practices, Professionals and Participation: Challenges for Soil and Water Management. Paper for the Winrock International Workshop on Farmers' Practices and Soil and Water Conservation Programmes, ICRISAT Centre, 19-21 June 1991; and for agricultural research and extension, Robert Chambers, Arnold Pacey, Lori Ann Thrupp. *Eds. Farmer First: Farmer Innovation and Agricultural Research*. London, Intermediate Technology Publications, 1989.
- 3 For participatory rural appraisal, see *RRA Notes*, available free from the Sustainable Agriculture Programme, International Institute for Environment and Development, 3 Endsleigh Street, London, WC1H ODD; and *The PRA/PALM Series*, available free from MYRADA, 2 Service Road, Domlur Layout, Bangalore 71, especially Aloysius Fernandez, James Mascarenhas, Vidyam Ramachandran. *Sharing Our Limited Experience (MYRADA) Participatory Rural Appraisal or Participatory Learning Methods*. PRA/PALM Series No 5, 1990; and Robert Chambers. Shortcut and Participatory Methods for Gaining Social Information for Projects. In Michael Cernea, Ed. *Putting People First*. (Second Edition), The Johns Hopkins Press, (forthcoming).
- 4 NGOs which have made methodological breakthroughs and provided training in participatory approaches to learning and to rural development include (in alphabetical order, with their headquarters location) Action Aid (Bangalore), Activist for Social Alternatives (Trichy), the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (Ahmedabad), Krishi Gram Vikas Kendra (Ranchi), MYRADA (Bangalore), and Seva Bharati (Midnapore District, West Bengal),

and Youth for Action (Hyderabad). Others, such as Bharatiya Agro-Industries Foundation (Pune) are exploring, adopting and adapting the approach. Training programmes have also been conducted at the Administrative Staff College of India, Hyderabad, the LBS National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie, the National Forest Academy, Dehra Dun, and elsewhere. A PRA network has been set up in Nepal, supported by Winrock International. By mid-1991, MYRADA alone had

conducted at least 50 field training experiences. To its credit, it has followed an open-door policy and has welcomed to these regular exercises over 350 people from government departments and other development institutions. Organisations in government which are adopting and spreading PRA include Drylands Development Board in Karnataka, and the Drought-prone Areas Programme in Andhra Pradesh.

#### REFERENCES

- Agarwal Anil, Sunita Narain (1989): *Towards Green Villages: A Strategy for Environmentally-sound and Participatory Rural Development*. New Delhi, Centre for Science and Environment.
- Amanor Kojo (1989): *340 Abstracts on Farmer Participatory Research*. Network Paper 5, Agricultural Administration (Research and Extension) Network, London, Overseas Development Institute.
- Farrington John, Adrienne Martin (1988): *Farmer Participation in Agricultural Research : A Review of Concepts and Practices*. Agricultural Administration Unit Occasional Paper 9, London Overseas Development Institute.
- Jodha N S (1988): Poverty debate in India : A minority view. *Economic and Political Weekly* Special number, November, 2421-8. Also published as Social Science Research on Rural Change: Some Gaps. In Bardhan (1989): *Ed. Conservations...* 174-99.
- Khon Kaen (1987): *Proceedings of the International Conference on Rapid Rural Appraisal*. Khon Kaen, Thailand, University of Khon Kaen.
- Korten, David (1980) Community organisation and rural development: A learning process approach. *Public Administration Review* 40, Sept-Oct, 480-510.
- Korten David C, Rudi Klauss (1984): *Eds. People-centered Development: Contributions Toward Theory and Planning Framework*. Connecticut, Kumarian Press, West Hartford.
- Peters Tom (1987): *Thriving on Chaos: Handbook for a Management Revolution*. London, Pan Books in association with Macmillan.
- Rhoades Robert (1990): *The Coming Revolution in Rural Research*. Manila, Philippines, User's Perspective Network (UPWARD), International Potato Center (CIP).