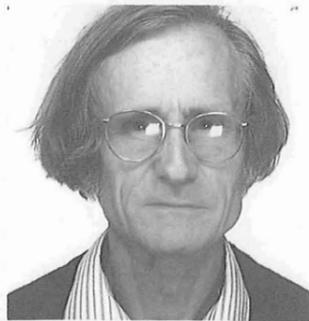


THE PRA REVOLUTION

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) - is central to FARM's work in Africa. Prof Robert Chambers, Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, who has played a key part in the development of PRA, attended in February, the first national PRA conference to be held in Ethiopia and organised by FARM. Below is a summary of his address

RAPID Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) originated in the South. They had both negative and positive sources.

On the negative side, RRA was partly a reaction against the biases of "rural development tourism" when big shots from development agencies were taken on pre-packaged tours of rural projects specially prepared for the occasion. Quite a number of us in this room will have arranged visits for senior, distinguished people, taking infinite care over what they visited, who they met and what was said. The more powerful and distinguished the visitor (and I would include especially old men from the North) the more carefully prepared is the visit and the more misleading the impressions gathered are likely to be. RRA sought to offset the biases arising from rural development tourism. It also aimed to combat the problems of large-scale questionnaire surveys - their high cost, laboriousness, and the misleading and often useless information they tended to generate. RRA sought to introduce less formal but still rigorous appraisal methods which could give outsiders valid insights at lower cost and with less delay.



Prof Robert Chambers

On the positive side, RRA and PRA owe much to the approaches of social anthropology (especially the distinction between the insiders' view and that of outsiders - from agroecosystem analysis - (especially mapping and diagramming of local conditions and changes), farming systems research (especially the insight that small poor farmers have complex and diverse farming systems, and try to complicate and diversify them, not simplify and standardise, in order to reduce risk and increase returns) and to participatory activist research (especially the idea that poor people should be enabled to conduct their own analysis of their conditions in the tradition of Paulo Freire).

RRA evolved in the 1980s and was highly developed in Thailand, particularly at the University of Khon Kaen. In its classical form, it emphasised multi-disciplinary

teams, careful observation, semi-structured interviewing, and focus groups. PRA began in the late 1980s and continues to evolve. Its methods involve groups rather than individuals, visual representations (maps, diagrams) rather than solely verbal communication, comparing rather than measuring and, above all, a shift from dominance by outsiders of local people to facilitation and empowerment.

RRA is often characterised as 'extractive' and PRA as 'empowering'. But RRA should not be downgraded as though it is a second best. It can be perfectly legitimate for outsiders to gather data for good purposes. As with all research there are ethical questions, and in this respect RRA is no different from other forms of research. Many PRA practitioners in the South feel that PRA is distinct from RRA simply because it is a process which is ongoing in which the outsider is a facilitator rather than a data collector. Both approaches may use the same methods. An RRA can be conducted using PRA methods, for example participatory mapping and diagramming; and RRA methods such as focus groups and observation can be used in a PRA process of empowerment.

PRA has been described as "a growing family of approaches and methods to enable local people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions to plan and to act".

PRA has not been deduced from a theory. In this respect it differs somewhat from the Freirian tradition. PRA has been induced from practice, from methods and approaches that have been found to work. It is only after they have been used that people have asked why they work.



PRA in action: first step in land-use planning - the women of Lemen-Warko make a map of their village depicting the different crops being grown

The Spread of PRA

PRA has spread widely in many directions

- **Geographical:** PRA started mainly in Kenya and India, but evolved in parallel in different places and rapidly spread to other countries. Trainers from the South played a significant part in this. It has also spread from South to North, notably to the UK, and especially in Scotland where it has contributed to a change in forestry policy. Strikingly, villagers in Scotland are trying to gain control over neighbouring Forest Commission land in order to improve and secure their

livelihoods. Trainers from the South have helped to introduce PRA to some parts of the North, for example Finland.

- **Applications:** The approach has spread into many applications and sectors beyond poverty related programmes, health, agriculture, and natural resource management, to organisational analysis and urban applications (including a recent investigation of urban violence in Jamaica).

- **Process:** PRA has grown from appraisal through action to implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

- **Personal:** PRA has shifted its emphasis from professional

change associated with new methods to personal change in behaviour and attitudes.

- **Institutional change:** PRA's impact has spread to institutions and changed project procedures, notably challenging and modifying LFA (Logical Framework Analysis) and ZOPP used by large development agencies such as x and y.

- **Organisational:** PRA has spread from the non-governmental organisations where it mainly originated, to organisations, including government departments, universities and now, perhaps increasingly, to democratic councils.

- **Policy:** PRA has proved a powerful instrument for policy assessment and change in the Participatory Poverty Assessments of Ghana, Zambia and South Africa. It has potential to bring senior policy makers into direct interaction with poor people.

- **Empowerment and negotiation:** PRA has been used to empower different groups within communities, especially women, the poor, and the marginalised, and to facilitate negotiation between groups and the resolution of conflict.

- **Scale:** With an apparently exponential spread, activities described as PRA have grown in scale with astonishing speed. To give examples: in India last year, between April and August, over 300 trainers were trained for a month, including one week on PRA, to become trainers of some 12,000 government staff engaged in a national watershed management programme. One PRA method - wealth or well-being ranking - has now been used by something between 100,000 and 200,000 households, in order to enable community members to identify which poorer households to involve in anti-poverty programmes. In countries as diverse as Bangladesh, Bolivia, Indonesia, Kenya, Nepal, South Africa and Vietnam, to mention but a few, PRA activities are now very widespread indeed.

The challenges for PRA

RRA and PRA are not a panacea. Like any other appraisal approaches and methods, they can be done badly. It is vitally important for us all to learn from the mistakes and errors which are now so widespread.

Six challenges for PRA stand out in other parts of the world. I wonder whether these apply also in Ethiopia.

- 1. Institutional adoption and change** The challenge here is to continue and extend the training of government and university staff in PRA approaches and methods.

Training raises many problems, especially where professionals have a fondness for hierarchy. The challenge is to continue the spread of PRA.

- 2. Quality and scaling-up** Using PRA methods and approaches on a large scale, as some government departments and some donor-funded projects have done, can lead to bad practice, especially where there are targets for expenditure and a drive to disburse money. Quality suffers seriously. The methods are applied in a wooden, routinised manner. The form of PRA may be observed, but the spirit and the empowerment are missing. The challenge here is to enable scaling-up to take place with improvement built in, so that practice continually improves with time.

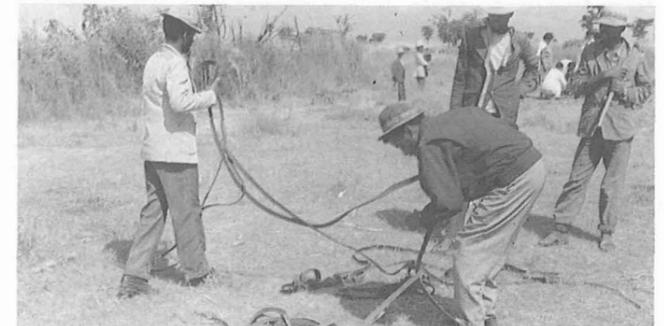
- 3. Training in behaviour and attitudes** It is now widely recognised that the behaviour and attitudes of facilitators are

much more important for successful appraisal than the appraisal methods they facilitate. The challenge here is to be innovative, to borrow from other fields, and to share rapidly and widely those techniques which can give us insight and help us to change rapidly and effectively.

- 4. Ethical** The values of outsiders are vital when it comes to empowerment. It matters what outsiders believe about gender, ethnic group, age or wealth, if the community they work with wants to move in the direction of equity between members. The challenge here is a personal one for all those concerned.

- 5. Policy influence** PRA methods are proving powerful means for influencing policy for the better. Participatory Poverty Assessments have already led to significant policy changes. There must be other opportunities to enable local people, including those who are poorer, to interact directly and freely with policy makers.

- 6. Sharing and networking** Finally there is a challenge for all of us to share our experiences and to learn from others. This conference will be considering networking in Ethiopia. At the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and International Institute for the Environment and Development (IIED) we are anxious to support national initiatives. If there are ways in which we can help you with your networking, with information, documents, videos, or in other ways, let us know. We will try to do what we can.



PRA in action: the men grapple with their map. Rubber strips are used for the boundaries and, unlike the women, it is boundaries rather than crops that interest them most

What is Participatory Rural Appraisal ?

PRA entails groups of local people analysing their own conditions and choosing their own means of improving them. They may use a variety of tools, such as maps and diagrams, and the support of a trained facilitator. It is fairly similar to Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), a technique developed earlier for analysing the needs of rural communities quickly, cost effectively and with little disruption to everyday life. But while RRA relies heavily on outsiders, PRA involves local people more in making decisions about what matters and what to do.