

1997

Trip Report - Sixth South-South PRA Exchange Workshop, Zimbabwe

12 - 22 July 1997

I am writing two trip reports: a summary one for general distribution to the usual list, and a longer and more detailed one for the Participation Group, Ian Scoones, and the IIED Group. If you get the summary one and would like the fuller one, please ask Jenny Skepper.

Summary Report

This was the first South-South to be held in Africa, and described as the 6th to date. It was mainly regional for Southern Africa, with participants from South Africa, Zambia, Malawi, Swaziland, Lesotho, Botswana, Namibia, and Mozambique. It also included participants from Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Tanzania, and Nepal. It was excellent that Jimmy Mascarenhas, who has had so much to do with the introduction of PRA to Southern Africa, came from India, and contributed a great deal to the exchange. Apart from Dan Owen (an honorary Mozambiquan) I was the only Northerner.

The South-South was hosted by the PRA Network of Zimbabwe, which is currently mainly with SAFIRE (The Southern Alliance for Indigenous Resources), an NGO based in Harare. The programme started with 4 days in a small hotel about an hour from Harare, then a one day Share Fare in Harare, a day effectively for shopping and recreation, and then two days of preparation for fieldwork. The idea of the fieldwork was that the participants would be providing PRA consultancy services to NGOs in five areas, and that the NGOs would cover costs of accommodation (some in villages) and food. I was able to take part only for the first six days because of long-standing commitments in the UK.

Other activities for me included a one-day familiarisation workshop in Harare (intended partly for the Zimbabweans who could not be included in the S-S) to which 60 people came, bits to TV and radio, and a sort of book launch for Whose Reality Counts?

The first days of the South-South were wonderful and exhilarating. It was quite simply great that practitioners from so many different countries were able to meet and share. There is a great deal of PRA activity in Southern Africa, and especially in South Africa (including a lot in the land reform programme) and Namibia. In Namibia, for example, all agricultural extension agents have been trained, and all 125 PRA trainees phone in to the PRA Network with ACORD in Windhoek twice a month to report on progress.

There was a strong synergy among participants, and some inspiring contributions. There was perhaps a little less discussion of bad practice than I would have expected. That may come up more in the final sessions. The outcomes of this South-South should include an intensification of networking in Southern Africa both between and within countries.

A planning meeting took place for the forthcoming PRA South-South for Lusophone countries, to be held either in Guinea-Bissau or in Mozambique.

The whole process was participatory and intelligently arranged. We wrote cards, sorted them, and then scored them, to set up the programme for the first four days. There was repeated tribute to Kamal Singh's visit six months ago and the advice he gave. The logistical preparations and backup were superb, a model of thoughtful anticipation and efficiency. The Share Fare was a splendid occasion, and allowed participants to meet many interested Zimbabweans, and for all of us to learn what others were doing. Over 100 copies of each of several IDS materials were picked up.

This S-S would not have happened without the IDS-based funding support. I came away convinced that similar support (diminishing as other sources become available) for South-Souths will for the foreseeable future continue to be a VERY GOOD THING.

Endnotes

Chris Eldridge of SCF (UK) told me that the latest on El Nino gives a 70 per cent probability of there being a severe drought this coming season in Southern Africa, and quite likely a more severe one than in 1991/2. Commercial farmers already know this. He was concerned that the information get through to the many small farmers in time to allow them to adjust their decisions.

Chris also presented the outcome of a sustainable livelihoods study conducted in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe, which used PRA methods. Methodologically, this is something of a breakthrough, and some of the insights were surprising. Details will be in the longer report, and preliminary papers available from Jenny Skepper.

Alfred Mhone of Malawi can be added to the growing roll of honour of those who have been sacked from organisations because of their commitment to PRA.

Someone suggested a "heart-attack allowance" for PRA trainers who have to deal with difficult people.

"Buses" (?a Zimbabwean invention) is an excellent way to start a workshop with a lot of people. Participants are asked to get themselves into different "buses" (clusters) according to various classifications. We started with male and female. Strikingly, the women clustered in a round group, close together, and the men stood in a line, further apart from each other. What's new?