From PRA to PLA and Pluralism: Practice and Theory

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IDS Institute of Development Studies

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Summary

PRA (participatory rural appraisal) and the more inclusive PLA (participatory learning and action) are families of participatory methodologies which have evolved as behaviours and attitudes, methods, and practices of sharing. During the 1990s and 2000s PRA/PLA has spread and been applied in most countries in the world. Among the multifarious domains of application, some of the more common have been natural resource management and agriculture, programmes for equity, empowerment, rights and security, and community-level planning and action. Related participatory methodologies which have co-evolved and spread widely as movements include farmer participatory research, Integrated Pest Management, Reflect, Stepping Stones and Participatory Geographic Information Systems. Ideologically and epistemologically PRA/PLA seeks and embodies participatory ways to empower local and subordinate people, enabling them to express and enhance their knowledge and take action. It can be understood as having three main components: facilitators' behaviours, attitudes and mindsets linked with precepts for action; methods which combine visuals, tangibles and groups; and sharing without boundaries. The interplay of these resonates with theories of chaos, complexity, emergence and deep simplicity, especially self-organising systems on the edge of chaos. Good practice has moved towards an eclectic pluralism in which branding, labels, ownership and ego give way to sharing, borrowing, improvisation, creativity and diversity, all these complemented by mutual and critical reflective learning and personal responsibility.

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Acknowledgements

Acronyms

ABC	attitude and behaviour change
CLTS	Community-Led Total Sanitation
FPR	Farmer Participatory Research
GITS	Geographic Information Technology and Systems
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
GPS	Global Positioning Systems
ILS	Internal Learning System
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
IPM	integrated pest management
KRRC	Kabarole Research and Resource Centre
NESA	New Entity for Social Action
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PALS	Participatory Action Learning System
PAR	participatory action research
PGIS	Participatory Geographic Information Systems
PLA	participatory learning and action
PRA	participatory rural appraisal
PRADAN	Professional Assistance for Development Action
RRA	rapid rural appraisal
SOSOTEC	self-organising systems on the edge of chaos
SS	Stepping Stones

1 Introduction

Since the mid 1970s, there has been an accelerating evolution of participatory methodologies in development practice. One part of this has been a sequence known by its acronyms – rapid rural appraisal (RRA), participatory rural appraisal (PRA), and participatory learning and action (PLA). These are sets of approaches, methods, behaviours and relationships for finding out about local context and life. All three continue to be practised and are in various ways complementary. RRA began as a coalescence of methods devised and used to be faster and better for practical purposes than large questionnaire surveys or in-depth social anthropology. Its methods include semi-structured interviews, transect walks with observation, and mapping and diagramming, all these done by outside professionals.[1] In the late 1980s and early1990s participatory rural appraisal (PRA) evolved out of RRA. In PRA outsiders convene and facilitate. Local people, especially those who are poorer and marginalised, are the main actors. It is they, typically in small groups, who map, diagram, observe, analyse and act. The term Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) introduced in 1995 is sometimes used to describe PRA but is broader and includes other similar or related approaches and methods. Because of the continuities and overlaps this methodological cluster or family is sometimes referred to as PRA/PLA or even RRA/PRA/PLA. Some, as in Pakistan, have sought to accommodate the shifts in practice by taking PRA to mean participatory reflection and action.[2] But increasingly practitioners in this tradition have moved beyond these labels and created new and specialised adaptations, some of these with other names. While continuing to use and evolve PRA methods and principles, many have become eclectic methodological pluralists.

In the early 1990s, the main features of PRA emerged, with three principal components. These were shown as three connected circles: methods; behaviour and attitudes; and sharing (Mascarenhas *et al.* 1991: 35a). See Figure 1.1.

PRA methods, as they are often called, are visual and tangible and usually performed by small groups of people. These are the most visible and obviously distinctive feature of PRA. Maps and diagrams are made by local people, often on the ground using local materials but sometimes on paper. Many sorts of map are made – most commonly social or census maps showing people and their characteristics, resource maps showing land, trees, water and so on, and mobility maps showing where people travel for services. Using earth, sand, stones, seeds, twigs, chalk, charcoal, paper, pens and other materials, and objects as symbols, women, men and children make diagrams to represent many aspects of their communities, lives and

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1   The fullest introduction to RRA is the Proceedings of the International Conference held at Khon Kaen in Thailand in 1985 (KKU 1987). For purposes of research by outsiders, well-conducted RRA is powerful and effective. It is unfortunate that it has been overshadowed by PRA. It deserves rediscovery and a renaissance.

2   Participatory Reflection and Action has the sequence of words wrong. It would be better putting action first, as Participatory Action and Reflection, but the acronym PAR was already in use for Participatory Action Research. However, an advantage has been that more practitioners have abandoned their use of brand labels and become explicit about their pluralism (see e.g. Shah 2003).

Figure 1.1 Principal components of PRA
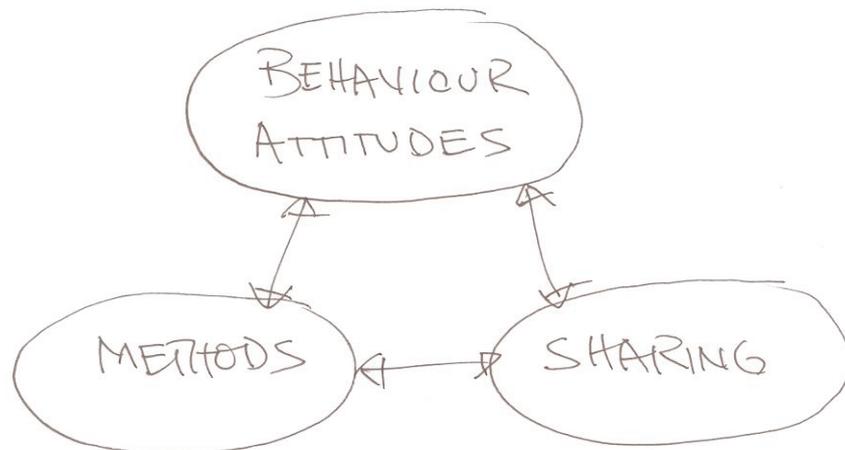
environments. The methods include time lines, trend and change diagrams, wealth and wellbeing ranking, seasonal diagramming, Venn diagrams, causal linkage diagrams, and proportional piling. Matrix ranking and scoring are used for complex and detailed comparisons. And there are many variants and combinations of these and other methods or tools.[3]

Behaviour and attitudes, later construed as mindsets, behaviour and attitudes, were from early on regarded by many of the pioneers as more important than the methods. They were the focus of a South-South international workshop which led to the publication of *The ABC of PRA* (Kumar 1996), where ABC stands for attitude and behaviour change. Some behaviours and attitudes were expressed as precepts (see Box 1.1) like 'Hand over the stick', 'Don't rush', 'Sit down, listen and learn' and 'Use your own best judgement at all times'.

Sharing initially referred to villagers sharing their knowledge, all sharing food, and the sharing of training, ideas, insights, methods and materials between organisations, mainly NGOs and government. By the mid 2000s, the sharing circle has come to include relationships. The key phrase 'sharing without boundaries' (Absalom *et al.* 1995) came out of an international workshop of PRA practitioners and sought to make doubly clear the principle of openness and sharing between methodologies. It was also a pre-emptive strike against the claims of branding and exclusive ownership which go with some methodologies.

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3   For what are known as PRA methods, typically including visuals and/or tangibles, see Jones (1996), Chambers (1997), Shah *et al.* (1999), Mukherjee (2001), Kumar (2002), Jayakaran (2003), and International HIV/AIDS Alliance (2006b). See also www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip (accessed 26 April 2007).

Box 1.1 Precepts of PRA

Precept…	indicating
Introduce yourself…..	be honest, transparent, relate as a person
They can do it…	have confidence in people's abilities
Unlearn…	critically reflect on how you see things
Ask them…	ask people their realities, priorities, advice
Don't rush…	be patient, take time
Sit down, listen and learn…	don't dominate
Facilitate…	don't lecture, criticise or teach
Embrace error…	learn from what goes wrong or does not work
Hand over the stick…	or chalk or pen, anything that empowers
Use your own best judgement at all times…	take responsibility for what you do
Shut up!…	Keep quiet. Welcome and tolerate silence

2 The evolution of PRA and PLA

In the evolution of PRA, there was much intermingling and innovation (Chambers 1994, 1997). Among other sources were the approaches and methods of action science (Argyris *et al.* 1985; see also Victor J. Friedman and Tim Rogers, chapter 17 of Reason and Bradbury, forthcoming 2008) reflection-in-action (Schön 1983, 1987), popular education (Freire 1970) and participatory research and participatory action research (BRAC 1983; Rahman 1984; Fals-Borda and Rahman 1991; Selener 1997; Reason and Bradbury forthcoming). From farming systems research came recognition of local diversity and complexity (Norman 1975), and from social anthro-pology the richness and detail of indigenous technical knowledge (e.g. Brokensha *et al.* 1980; Richards 1985). The work of the Highlander Research and Education Centre in Rural Appalachia (Gaventa 1981; see also Gaventa and Lewis 1991 and Gaventa 1993), contributed the seminal insight that local people with little education were much more capable of doing their own appraisal and analysis than professionals believed.

In the origins of PRA, the largest stream, though, was the confluence of agro-ecosystem analysis (Gypmantasiri *et al.* 1980; Conway 1985) with RRA (Khon Kaen 1987). RRA had semi-structured interviewing at its core (Grandstaff and Grandstaff 1987). Agro-ecosystem analysis crucially contributed sketch mapping, diagramming, transects and observation. The big breakthroughs were then the discoveries (or rediscoveries, for there are almost always antecedents) that with light and sensitive

facilitation local people could themselves make the maps and diagrams, and that, especially when they worked in small groups, what they presented demonstrated a complexity, diversity, accuracy and for many purposes relevance far superior to anything that could be elicited or expressed using earlier extractive or observational methodologies. This led to the practical principle that 'They can do it' applied to activity after activity, recognising that local people had far greater abilities for analysis, action, experimentation, research and monitoring and evaluation than had been supposed by outside professionals or by themselves.

The stream flowed from RRA to PRA to PLA. PRA was most clearly identifiable in the first half of the 1990s. In 1995 the core publication for PRA experiences, still known as *RRA Notes*, was renamed *Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) Notes*.[4]

For both RRA and the PRA/PLA which grew out of it there was a multiplicity of parallel and simultaneous innovations which co-evolved, spread and inspired. The Sustainable Agriculture Programme at the International Institute for Environment and Development, in London, played a key part in the RRA-PRA-PLA evolutions, transitions and spread. In what was labelled PRA, several traditions developed. An early form in Kenya was evolved by Clark University and the National Environment Secretariat, adopted by Egerton University, and embodied in handbooks (e.g. PID and NES c.1989) which supported standardised training for a sequence of activities leading to Community Action Plans. This approach was then applied in parts of East and West Africa, for example The Gambia (Holmes 2001; Brown *et al.* 2002). In India, a few staff in two NGOs – the AKRSP (India) and MYRADA – were major contributors to an epicentre of PRA innovation which generated the more open-ended approaches which then spread much more widely in India and the world. These approaches in turn took different forms (Pratt 2001): some stressed methods more; others were more reflective and more concerned with quality of facilitation, attitudes and behaviours. In the early 1990s, a proliferation of acronym labels marked an early stage of enthusiastic innovation and claims of ownership. Like the explosion of types of living creatures in the Cambrian period[5] or the many designs of steam engines of the early industrial revolution, many of these labels soon died out. What persisted were the practices and the acronyms PRA and PLA, the latter adopted, though sometimes used synonymously with PRA, in order to be more inclusive of other participatory methodologies in the spirit of sharing without boundaries.

In the 2000s, PRA and PLA have diffused, borrowed and interpenetrated with other approaches. They have evolved and merged into a new creative pluralism (Cornwall and Guijt 2004) in which earlier traditions survive but in which many

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4   *RRA Notes* Issues 1–21 (1988–94) was published by the International Institute for Environment and Development, whose Sustainable Agriculture Programme had much to do with the evolution and spread of PRA and which was documented in the Notes. Issue 22 in 1995 was renamed *PLA Notes* with the explanation: 'Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) has been adopted … as a collective term to describe the growing body of participatory approaches and methodologies'.

5   To what extent the Cambrian proliferation justifies the term explosion is, however, contested (see for example Fortey 2000).

methods have been evolved and adapted. Many of the early PRA practitioners have become more reflective and self-critical (Cornwall and Pratt 2003). Others continue in earlier, sometimes routinised, traditions. In the mid 2000s, it is not clear what the term PRA can or should now usefully describe. For many it remains associated with group-visual activities, and with behaviour, attitudes and relationships of facilitation which empower participants. In parallel with the persistence of traditional PRA, and of other established participatory method-ologies, more and more practitioner/facilitators have become creative pluralists, borrowing, improvising and inventing for particular contexts, sectors and needs.

Reflecting critically on the evolution of PRA, theory has been implicit in and has co-evolved with practice. As with RRA earlier (Jamieson 1987), theory has been induced from and fed back into practice. Practice itself was driven and drawn not by academic analysis, nor by a reflective analytical book like *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 1970), but by the excitement of innovation, discovery and informal networking. The main pioneers were not academic intellectuals but workers and staff in NGOs in the South, especially India, and a few from research institutes in the North, all of them learning through engagement in the field. And the detail of the methods came from the creativity and inventiveness of local people, once they had the idea of what they could do, as well as from the outside facilitators.

3 Spread and applications

From 1990, the spread of PRA was rapid throughout much of the world (Singh 2001; Holmes 2002; Cornwall and Pratt 2003). By 2000, practices described as PRA were probably to be found in well over 100 countries, of the North as well as of the South. They were being used by all or almost all prominent INGOs and many of their partners, by many donor and lender supported projects, and by a number of government departments, for example in India, Kenya and Vietnam.

With rapid spread, bad practice became rampant. The methods were so attractive, often photogenic, and so amenable to being taught in a normal didactic manner that they gained priority over behaviour, attitudes and relationships, especially in training institutes. Manuals proliferated and were mechanically taught and applied. Donors and lenders demanded PRA. Much training neglected or totally ignored behaviour and attitudes. PRA was routinised, people's time was taken and their expectations raised without any outcome, methods were used to extract information not to empower, and consultants claimed to be trainers who had no experience. Communities were 'PRA'd'. Some in Malawi were said to have been 'carpet-bombed with PRA'. Just as academics began to wake up to what had been happening, there was much to criticise. The looseness of the one sentence principle 'Use your own best judgement at all times' could be liberating, giving freedom to improvise and invent; and it supported much brilliant performance and innovation. But equally, it could combine with an exclusive fixation on methods to allow sloppy and abusive practice.

Academic critics of PRA were not always able to draw on personal experience, or sometimes drew on their own defective practice. In consequence, some of the criticisms, for example in *The Tyranny of Participation* (Cooke and Kothari 2001), were

not well informed. Much was made of the well-known shortcomings of community public meetings, overlooking the value and widespread use of smaller groups. And criticisms that should have been made were overlooked, for example, the common bias against women's participation inherent in PRA visual analysis since this tends to require undisturbed blocks of time, usually harder for women to find than for men. Many practitioners, keenly aware of this problem, took determined steps to offset it. And from the mid-90s, articulate practitioners were increasingly self-critical and reflective in a rich range of publications.[6]

In parallel, the applications of PRA approaches and methods, not alone but often combined and adapted with others, have been and continue to be astonishingly varied. They are constantly evolving and being invented. To at least some degree, all entail an element of participatory research. Most have never been recorded or published. An incomplete but illustrative list (see Box 3.1 and Box 3.2) can give a sense of the range.

In addition, there have been innumerable applications in other rural and urban domains, not least in community and local planning (*PLA Notes* 44, 2002 and 49, 2004; Swantz *et al.* 2001; Marja Liisa Swantz, Chapter 2, in Reason and Bradbury, forthcoming 2008), market analysis (*PLA Notes* 33, 1998), health (RRA Notes 16, 1992), food security assessment (e.g. Levy 2003), water, sanitation (Kar 2003, 2005 and with Pasteur 2005 and Bongartz 2006), organisational analysis, personal experiential learning and change, and policy analysis. In multifarious domains, there have been innumerable applications in participatory monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment (e.g. Guijt 1998; Estrella *et al.* 2000; Mayoux and Chambers 2005), with an increasing methodological pluralism and emphasis on learning and adaptation (Guijt, forthcoming).

Box 3.1 Natural resource management and agriculture

- (Probst and Hagmann *et al.* (2003); Borrini-Feyerabend *et al.* (2004); Pimbert 2004) including agriculture, crops and animal husbandry (PRGA c.2002; *PLA Notes* 45, 2002)
- Forestry, especially Joint Forest Management, and agroforestry (*Forests Trees and People Newsletter*)
- Participatory irrigation management (Gosselink and Strosser 1995)
- Participatory watershed management and soil and water conservation (Kolavalli and Kerr 2002a and b)
- Conservation and use of plant genetic resources (Friis-Hansen and Shtapit 2000)
- Biodiversity, conservation, and protected area management (Pimbert and Pretty 1997; Gujja *et al.* 1998; Roe *et al.* 2000)
- Integrated Pest Management (Dilts and Hate 1996; Dilts 2001; Fakih *et al.* 2003)

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6   For a selection of critical reflections by practitioners of PRA/PLA see *PRA Notes* 24 (1995); the 32 individual contributions to *Pathways to Participation: Reflections on PRA* (Cornwall and Pratt 2003); *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation* (Hickey and Mohan 2004); and the 50th issue of *Participation, Learning and Action* (2004) entitled *Critical Reflections, Future Directions.*

Box 3.2 Programmes for empowerment, equity, rights and security

- Participatory Poverty Assessments (Norton *et al.* 2001: Robb 2002) and understandings of poverty and wellbeing (White and Pettit 2004)
- Consultations with the Poor, in 23 countries (Narayan *et al.* 2000), as a preliminary for the World Development Report 2000/01 (World Bank 2000) on poverty and development
- Women's empowerment and gender awareness (Guijt and Shah 1998; Akerkar 2001; Cornwall 2003; Kanji 2004)
- Applications with and by children (*PLA Notes* 25 1996; Johnson *et al.* 1998; Cox and Robinson-Pant 2003; Chawla and Johnson 2004) including action research by primary schoolchildren on decision-making in their own class rooms (Cox *et al.* 2006)
- Work with those who are powerless and vulnerable, besides children including the homeless (AAA 2002), the disabled, older people (Heslop 2002), minorities, refugees, the mentally distressed, prisoners and others who are marginalised
- Identifying, selecting and deselecting people for poverty-oriented programmes
- Participatory analysis of livelihoods leading to livelihood action plans
- Emergency assessment and management, including participation by communities and their members in complex political emergencies
- Participatory human rights assessments and monitoring (Blackburn *et al.* 2004)
- Violence, abuses and physical insecurity (e.g. Moser and McIlwaine 2004)
- Sexual and reproductive behaviour and rights (Cornwall and Welbourn 2002; Gordon and Cornwall 2004) and HIV/AIDS (International HIV/AIDS Alliance 2006a and b)

4 Co-evolving streams of participatory methodologies

Beyond this bald illustrative listing, more of a sense of what has happened can be given through eight examples of parallel and intermingling participatory research and action which have gone or are going to scale. Approaches, methods, ideas and experiences have over the past two decades flowed freely in all directions between these and RRA, PRA and PLA. The first five – farmer participatory research, Integrated Pest Management, Reflect, Stepping Stones and Participatory GIS – are already widespread movements and are practiced in many countries. The last three – the Internal Learning System, Participatory Action and Learning System, and Community-Led Total Sanitation – are promising approaches which are to varying degrees going to scale, and which illustrate the potentials of sensitive and inventive pluralism.

4.1 Farmer Participatory Research

Farmer Participatory Research (Okali *et al.* 1994; Farrington and Martin 1988) and Participatory Technology Development (Haverkort *et al.* 1991) have been a strong trend gaining increasing and now widespread acceptance. Important distinctions were made by Biggs (1988) indicating degrees of farmer participation, from researcher design and control to farmer-design and control. From the late 1980s, there has been a progressive shift towards the latter, as indicated by the many activities and publications of the system-wide Participatory Research and Gender Analysis programme of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research.[7] As with streams of PRA and PLA, the capacities of local people, in this case farmers were found to exceed by far what professionals had thought they were capable of. One example was the successive involvement of farmers in seed-breeding with scientists: in 1987 it had been radical to involve them in selection of later generations in the breeding process; but pioneering scientists (Witcombe *et al.* 1996) found that farmers' involvement in the whole process, including selection of the original crosses, substantially improved outcomes. Worldwide, farmers' research and participation in research have been spread through the International Agricultural Research Centres, National Agricultural Research Institutes, and INGOs such as World Neighbors.

4.2 Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

IPM has been a parallel movement, sharing characteristics with PRA and PLA. IPM in Indonesia started in the late 1980s, with the first training of trainers in 1989. Behaviour and attitudes of facilitators are considered critical (Pontius *et al.* 2002). IPM enables farmers to control pests in rice with sharply reduced applications of pesticide. By the early 2000s, there were some one million farmer participants in Indonesia alone, and several millions worldwide. In IPM, farmers are brought together in Farmer Field Schools for *in situ* learning through their own action research. They observe, map, experiment and analyse, set up and study their own 'zoo' for insects and pests, and come to their own conclusions about how to manage and control them.

Even in a repressive and authoritarian social order, the farmer-centred approach of the farmer field schools provided 'a safe space for social learning and action' (Fakih *et al.* 2003: 95). In Indonesia, IPM groups came together and formed the IPM Farmers Association, in effect a national movement. The Association has engaged in advocacy to promote farmers' rights and discussed farmers' problems at local and district levels, and then nationally with a National Congress attended by the responsible Minister (*ibid.* 2003: 111).

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7   See www.prgaprogram.org (accessed 26 April 2007).

4.3 Reflect

Reflect [8] is a participatory methodology which combines Paulo Freire's theoretical framework on the politics of literacy with PRA approaches and user-generated materials from PRA visualisations (*Education Action* 1994 – continuing; *PLA Notes* 1998; Archer and Newman 2003; Archer and Goreth 2004). Piloted through action research projects in El Salvador, Uganda and Bangladesh between 1993 and 1995, it has spread through the work of at least 350 organisations including NGOs, community-based organisations, governments and social movements, in more than 60 countries (Archer and Goreth 2004). A standard manual was soon abandoned as too rigid (Phnuyal 1999). Local differentiation and ownership are now marked. Reflect has taken many different forms with 'immense diversity' (Archer and Goreth 2004: 40).

At the core of Reflect are facilitated groups known as Reflect circles. These meet regularly, usually for about two years, and sometimes continue indefinitely. The balance between literacy and empowerment has varied. Analysis by circles, combined with networking, has confronted power and abuses and asserted human rights. Reflect's core principles include these: starting from existing experience; using participatory tools; power analysis; creating democratic spaces; reflection-action-reflection; self-organisation; and recognition that Reflect is a political process for social change and greater social justice. These principles are manifest in *Communication and Power: Reflect Practical Resource Materials* (compilers David Archer and Kate Newman), the outcome of a widespread participatory process. First put together in 2003 in a loose leaf form, its sections include Written word, Numbers, Spoken word, Images, and Reflect in Action, with a strong emphasis on empowerment to enable people to do their own appraisal and analysis, leading to their own awareness and action.

4.4 Stepping Stones (SS)

Stepping Stones (Welbourn 1995, 2002 and forthcoming) is an approach and methods to facilitate experiential learning concerned with social awareness, communication and relationships. It was evolved by Alice Welbourn and first tried in Uganda in 1994. Groups of people in communities meet for a sequence of interactions and reflections especially on the inequalities that govern gender and other social relations in the context of HIV/AIDS. A review of evaluations by Tina Wallace (2006: 20) reported that SS had been adapted and used in over 100 countries. Most countries had no estimates of coverage but a World Bank estimate was that in Mozambique alone half a million people had been reached over four years.

Wallace's review found 'almost universal support for, and appreciation of, SS as a change process from those with first hand experience of using it or seeing it used' including 'better inter-generational communication, more openness about

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8   Reflect originally stood for Regenerated Freirian Literacy with Empowering Community
     Techniques, but this usage has been dropped and it is now referred to simply as Reflect.

discussing sex, less stigma and more care for those with HIV and AIDS, and a willingness of PLWHA [People Living With HIV/AIDS] to be open.' (*ibid.* 10). Another evaluation summarised as follows:

> The response of communities across the globe has been overwhelmingly positive and the results extremely encouraging. Reductions in gender violence, increased self-esteem and confidence among women and girls, improved sex lives between married couples, radical reconfiguration of gender relations and the gender division of labour in the household, relinquishing harmful cultural practices, such as wife sharing and widow inheritance … are but a few examples of the reported impact.
>
> (Hadjipateras *et al.* 2006: 8)

4.5 Participatory Geographic Information Systems (PGIS) [9]

The new spatial information technologies, including Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Global Positioning Systems (GPS), remote sensing software and open access to spatial data and imagery, empower those who command them. Differential access can lead to gains to powerful people and interests to the disadvantage of communities and local people, further marginalising those already marginalised. PGIS is a generic term for approaches which seek to reverse this. By combining PRA/PLA and spatial information technologies, it has empowered minority groups and those traditionally excluded from spatial decision-making processes (Fox *et al.* 2006; Rambaldi *et al.* 2006a; Mbile 2006). Local people have been trained to use the technologies to construct their own maps and 3-D models (see Rambaldi and Callosa-Tarr 2002 for modelling, and Corbett *et al.* 2006 and Rambaldi *et al.* 2006a for overviews) and use these for their own research. These maps and models differ from the ground and paper maps of PRA in their greater spatial accuracy, permanence, authority and credibility with officialdom, and have been used as 'interactive vehicles for spatial learning, information exchange, support in decision making, resource use planning and advocacy actions' (Rambaldi 2005).

Applications have been many. They have included (Rambaldi *et al.* 2006a: 3): protecting ancestral lands and resource rights; management and resolution of conflicts over natural resources; collaborative resource use planning and management; intangible cultural heritage preservation and identity building among indigenous peoples and rural communities; equity promotion with reference to ethnicity, culture, gender, and environmental justice; hazard mitigation for example, through community safety audits (Mans 2006); and peri-urban planning and research (Koti *et al.* 2006). PGIS applications have been documented (PLA 2006; Mbile 2006) for countries as diverse as Brazil (Amazon), Cameroon, Canada, Ethiopia, Fiji, Ghana,

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9   For more on Participatory GIS visit www.iapad.org (accessed 26 April 2007) and www.ppgis.net (accessed 26 April 2007). See also *Participatory Learning and Action 54 Mapping for Change: Practice, Technologies and Communication*, April 2006 and Peter Mbile (ed.) (2006) *Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries vol. 25: Special Issue on Participatory Geographical Information Systems and Participatory Mapping* www.ejisdc.org (accessed 26 April 2007).

Indonesia, Kenya, Nepal, Namibia, Nicaragua, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda. In addition, there are '… hundreds of non-documented cases where technology-intermediaries (mainly NGOs) support Community-based Organisations or Indigenous Peoples in using (Geographic Information Technology and Systems) to meet their spatial planning needs and/or achieve some leverage in their dealings with state bureaucracy' (Rambaldi *et al.* 2006a: 4). An indicator of the power of mapping has been its restriction through the Malaysian 2001 Land Surveyors Law, passed after a community map in Sarawak had been instrumental in the legal victory of an Iban village against a tree plantation corporation (Fox *et al.* 2006: 103).

By the mid 2000s, PGIS had become a widespread form of 'counter mapping' (Rocheleau 2005) enabling local people to make their own maps and models, and using these for their own research, analysis, assertion of rights and resolution of conflicts over land, and often reversing power relations with government organisations, politicians and corporations.

4.6 The Internal Learning System (ILS)

ILS was pioneered in India by Helzi Noponen and was conceived as a participatory impact assessment and planning system. The pictorial diaries and workbooks which are its most conspicuous feature were developed independently of PRA. Poor, often illiterate participants use them to keep their own records of changes over time. The intention is to reverse normal power relationships: poor participants 'are the first to learn about programme impact and performance, and alter plans as a result …(they) are not only data gatherers, but they are also analysts, planners and advocates for change' (Noponen, forthcoming). The ILS has evolved for different conditions including the work of the NESA (New Entity for Social Action) and its partners in South India for the empowerment of *Dalit* and *Adivasi* women and children (Nagasundari, forthcoming); and of PRADAN (Professional Assistance for Development Action) and its partners in North India with self-help groups for the generation of sustainable livelihoods for poor rural people (Narendranath, forthcoming). Among other outcomes have been action on social and gender issues previously too sensitive for discussion, and many micro-level manifestations of social change, especially awareness and empowerment of women and others who are marginalised.

4.7 Participatory Action Learning System (PALS)

PALS was pioneered by Linda Mayoux and is 'an eclectic and constantly evolving methodology which enables people to collect and analyse the information they themselves need on an ongoing basis to improve their lives in ways they decide' (Mayoux, forthcoming). Core features are the inventive use of diagram tools (Mayoux 2003a), their integration with participatory principles and processes, linking individual and group learning, and the adoption and adaptation of approaches and methods from many traditions. Typically, diagram tools are designed and piloted, and incorporated in a manual for each context (e.g. Mayoux 2003b). Applications and developments of PALS have included women's empowerment with ANANDI, an NGO in Gujarat (Mayoux and ANANDI 2005), participatory

monitoring and evaluation with KRRC (Kabarole Research and Resource Centre) in Uganda, and impact assessment of microfinance in several countries.

4.8 Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS)

CLTS (Kar 2003, 2005; Kar and Pasteur 2005; Kar and Bongartz 2006) was pioneered by Kamal Kar in Bangladesh and spread by him and others elsewhere, and is a remarkable initiative using PRA approaches and methods in which small communities are facilitated to conduct their own research and analysis into their practices of defecation and their consequences. This is done through mapping, transects, observation, calculations of quantities produced and ingested, and reflections on pathways from faeces to the mouth. This quite often leads to community decisions to dig holes and introduce total sanitation to become open defecation free. The approach has been introduced and is reported to have been adopted by thousands of communities spread over Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia and other countries in South and Southeast Asia, and early in 2007 has been introduced into South America and Africa.

These eight examples are original and distinct methodologies which to varying degrees draw on and share PRA/PLA approaches, methods, behaviours and mindsets and which have creatively invented and evolved their own diverse and varied practices. Like Reflect, IPM and PGIS, all can be seen as forms of, or closely related to, participatory action research. All frame and facilitate sequences of activities which empower participants to undertake their own appraisal or research and analysis, come to their own conclusions, and take action.

5 Theory: understandings from practice [10]

Good theory and practice intertwine and co-evolve. Theory can exist as an intellectual abstraction without practice, but practice cannot exist without implicit theory. When theory and practice co-evolve, one or the other may exercise more influence. If theory and reflective practice have led relatively more in Participatory Action Research (Reason and Bradbury, forthcoming) practice and experiential learning have led relatively more in the RRA-PRA-PLA sequence. At times, as in the 1989–91 explosion of PRA, not all the implicit theory was immediately made explicit. But critical reflection followed practice and principles were induced and articulated on the basis of experience. And this continues: among practitioners, researchers and activists engaged in the rapid spread of Participatory GIS, for example, there is a general consensus that PGIS practice is more advanced than the theory behind the applications (Rambaldi *et al.* 2006a).

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10   For an earlier and much fuller statement of PRA theory from practice see Chambers (1997, chapter 7, *What Works and Why*).

PRA/PLA practical theory appears robust.[11] It can be described at two levels. The first, as expressed by Jethro Pettit (pers. comm), is more overarching: that most practitioners would share an epistemological or ideological perspective, articulated in the PRA literature, that expert and professional knowledge and ways of knowing need to be humble and to appreciate people's own knowledge and ways of knowing. Professionals, and people who are dominant in contexts and relationships ('uppers'), habitually underestimate the capabilities and the value of the knowledge of those who are subordinate in contexts and relationships ('lowers').[12] A role of the professional is to transform these relations by facilitating, enabling people to express and enhance their own contextual and specific knowledge. PRA behaviours, methods and orientations are a means towards this. The core is that uppers facilitate, support and protect processes through which lowers and local people empower themselves and power relations are transformed.

The second level supports the first. It is more detailed and can be induced from practice, from what has been found to work. Methods, approaches and method-ologies have evolved through borrowing, inventing and experiential learning driven by the discipline, pressures and opportunities of engagement in the field. Innovation has taken place through improvisations forced by the challenge of immediate social situations. There will be, and should be, a range of views about this second level of theory. What is presented here is but one person's interpretation. Focusing on PRA experience and also drawing on the eight examples above, three clusters of principles can be distinguished. These are evolutions of the original three principal components of PRA (Figure 1.1) becoming: behaviours, attitudes and mindsets – precepts for action; methods – visuals, tangibles and groups; and sharing – pluralism and diversity.

5.1 Behaviours, attitudes and mindsets: precepts for action

Empowering processes require changes of behaviours, attitudes and mindsets, and typically changes of role from teacher to facilitator and from controller to coach. To promote and sustain the spread of good PRA, the practical theory has been expressed as short and simple precepts with the idea that these will embed and spread as expressions and behaviours; and that the experiences these bring will transform attitudes, predispositions and mindsets among uppers and transform relationships with lowers.

One basic reversal is through asking 'who?' and 'whose?' and answering with 'theirs', referring commonly to lowers, in practice often local people and most of all to those who are poor, weak and marginalised. The overarching question 'Whose reality counts?' forces reflection on how powerful outsiders tend to impose their

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11   The word 'robust' is a response to reactions of colleagues to an earlier more modest draft of this chapter. They have argued against an apologetic stance which might imply that the RRA/PRA/PLA sequence was somehow a theoretical second-best because of the degree to which it was driven by experiential learning.

12   For elaboration and qualification of the concepts of upper and lower see Chambers (1997: 58–60, 207–10 and 221–8).

realities on local people, especially when they are bringing 'superior' knowledge or technology. The wide span of 'who?' and 'whose?' questions can be illustrated by the listing generated by a group of GIS practitioners (see Box 5.1). While some of these questions are specific to mapping, many apply more generally. All have implications for the behaviour and relationships of outsiders, facilitators and uppers generally with insiders, local people and lowers. Some of the main behavioural precepts of PRA[13] which address these behaviours are shown in Box 1.1.

Box 5.1 Whose reality counts?

Stage 1. Planning	Stage 2. The mapping process
Who participates?	Whose voice counts? Who controls the process?
Who decides on who should participate?	Who decides on what is important?
Who participates in whose mapping?	Who decides, and who should decide, on what to visualise and make public?
... and who is left out?	Who has visual and tactile access?
Who identifies the problem?	Who controls the use of information?
Whose problems?	And who is marginalised?
Whose questions?	Whose reality? And who understands?
Whose perspective?	Whose reality is expressed?
... and whose problems, and perspectives are left out?	Whose knowledge, categories, questions perceptions?
	Whose truth and logic?
	Whose sense of space and boundary conception (if any)?
	Whose (visual) spatial language?
	Whose map legend?
	Who is informed what is on the map? (Transparency)
	Who understands the physical output?
	And who does not?
	And whose reality is left out?

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13   Fuller listings of PRA-related precepts and behaviours can be found in *Participatory Workshops* (Chambers 2002: 3 and 8).

Stage 3: resulting information control, disclosure and disposal	Ultimately…
Who owns the output?	What has changed?
Who owns the map(s)?	Who benefits from the changes?
Who owns the resulting data?	At whose costs?
What is left with those who generated the information and shared their knowledge?	Who gains and who loses?
	Who is empowered and who is disempowered?
Who keeps the physical output and organises its regular updating?	
Whose analysis and use?	
Who analyses the spatial information collated?	
Who has access to the information and why?	
Who will use it and for what?	
And who cannot access and use it?	

Source: Rambaldi *et al.* (2006b: 108). For ethical issues with PGIS see also Fox *et al.* (2005).[14]

5.2 Methods: visuals, tangibles and groups

Many PRA methods involve visual and tangible expression and analysis, for example mapping, modelling, diagramming, pile sorting, or scoring with seeds, stones or other counters. These are usually but not always small group activities. What is expressed can be seen, touched or moved and stays in place.[15] These visible, tangible, alterable and yet lasting aspects contrast with the invisible, unalterable and transient nature of verbal communication. Symbols, objects and diagrams can represent realities that are cumbersome or impossible to express verbally.

These visual and tangible approaches and methods reverse power relations and empower lowers in five ways.

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14   This list of questions was built up progressively both at the Mapping for Change International Conference on Participatory Spatial Information Management and Communication held at the Kenya College of Communication of Technology, Nairobi, Kenya, 7–10 September 2005 and in subsequent email exchanges between the authors of the paper and others.

15   Visuals and tangibles can though, be vulnerable – on the ground to wind, rain, dust storms, and trampling or eating by animals: hungry hens have been known to rapidly reduce matrix scores given by seeds). Paper is vulnerable to crumpling, smudging, fire, decay, and most of all retention or removal by NGO staff who take maps away from the communities who have made them.

The first is group-visual synergy. As in Figure 5.1, group motivation, cross-checking, adding detail, discussing and cumulative representation generate a positive sum synergy through which all can contribute and learn. A facilitator can observe and assess the process for its rigour of trustworthiness and relevance.[16] The outcomes are then empowering through collective analysis and learning, and because they are at once credible and an output created and owned by the group.

Figure 5.1 Group-visual synergy
(7.4 from *Whose Reality Counts?* 1997)
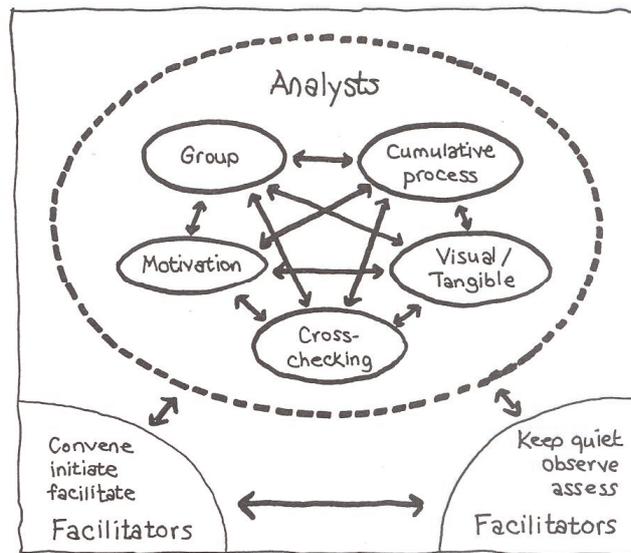
The second is democracy of the ground (Chambers 2002: 94–5, 186–7). Much PRA mapping and diagramming levels or reverses power relations by taking place on the ground. Those taking part have less eye contact, talk less, and can dominate less easily, than in normal upright positions face-to-face. Hands are freer to move tangibles than mouths are to speak words. Those who are more powerful, sometimes older men, may not get down on the ground at all, whereas those who are younger and women may.

The third is the representation of complex realities and relationships. Visual and tangible approaches and methods enable local people and lowers generally to express and analyse complex patterns of categories, comparisons, estimates, valuations, relationships and causality, across an astonishing range of topics, from social and census maps of communities to causal and linkage diagrams of causes and effects of poverty, from scored matrices for varieties of crops and domestic animals to different forms of violence, from characteristics of different sorts of sexual partners to seasonal analyses of work, income, debt, expenditures, sickness and other aspects of life, from on-farm nutrient flows to priorities for local development, and much, much else.

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16   The rigour of trustworthiness and relevance is expounded in more detail in Chambers (1997: 158–61).

The fourth is using visuals as instruments of empowerment. Over the past decade rapid developments have generated a new repertoire for subordinate and margin-alised people. The visual diaries of ILS in South India empower low-caste women, arming them with visual representations of their realities and experiences, enabling them to track and discuss changes in their lives over time, and to take action when patterns of marginalisation (such as caste or gender discrimination) persist. The geo-referenced maps of forest and other peripheral people give them credible and potent aids for asserting and securing their rights and boundaries. Making three-dimensional PGIS models have enabled local communities to express and display their knowledge and realities, and to plan, whether for land management, conservation, or cropping patterns. Large PGIS models can hardly fail to belong to communities and be retained by them. And they provide a natural and efficient locus for dialogue and decision-making (Rambaldi and Callosa-Tarr 2000 and 2002).

The fifth is participatory numbers. A diverse and versatile family of innovations has evolved to generate numbers and statistics from participatory appraisal and analysis (Barahona and Levy 2003; Chambers 2003; Levy 2003; Chambers forthcoming). Practical issues concerning standardisation and commensurability, and ethical issues concerning ownership and use have been recognised and tackled. To a striking degree, the numbers generated by lowers and local people through participatory methods and processes have been found to combine accuracy, authority and utility. In the Philippines, for example, when bottom-up statistics aggregated from village health workers replaced less accurate and less relevant top down statistics, insights led to a policy change that reduced deaths (Nierras 2002). In Malawi, when participatory methods were used to check the national census, the rural population was revised upwards from 8.5 to 11.5 million (Barahona and Levy 2003), with massive implications for the equity of national resource allocations.

These five ways in which visuals, tangibles and numbers empower often combine and reinforce each other. Their force is then more than their sum as parts. Together they have been found to be potent means for transforming power relations, strengthening the power of lowers and local people not just to understand their realities but to take action, and to negotiate with uppers and with outside powers-that-be.

5.3 Sharing, pluralism and diversity

Sharing without boundaries was a principle that emerged from a workshop of PRA practitioners in 1994 (Absalom *et al.* 1995). To be sure, there have been a few practitioners who might be described as PRA fundamentalists, who have sought or claimed some sort of exclusive expertise and ownership. But sharing was one of the three principal components of PRA enunciated in 1990, and a corollary of sharing and of 'use your own best judgement at all times' is to endorse and celebrate pluralism.

It is striking how PRA, PLA, IPM, Reflect, PGIS and most of the other participatory methods have been open and porous, and how they have diversified creatively as they have spread. Methodological diversity is an enabling condition for creativity (Van Mele and Braun 2005). Those with standard manuals and detailed instructions have been less successful or have run into problems: Reflect's Mother Manual was

quickly abandoned when found to inhibit more than help. A key to good spread, and to becoming a movement, has often been holding firm to minimum principles, and then allowing and encouraging practices and behaviours which empower, through local creativity and ownership. An indicator of this is in the labels used: Reflect in Nepal, for example, is not known by its English name but has 16 different Nepalese names and identities (pers comm. Bimal Phnuyal). Creativity, diversity and local ownership and responsibility have been at the core of the successful spread of these participatory methodologies.

This inclusiveness of sharing and borrowing raises questions about how the three components – of behaviours, attitudes and mindsets, of methods using visuals, tangibles and groups, and of sharing, pluralism and diversity, can relate to other theories and theoretical frameworks.

There are parallels with theories of chaos (Gleick 1988), complexity (Waldrop 1994) and emergence (Johnson 2002), and with ideas of deep simplicity underlying complexity, diversity, dynamism and unpredictability (Gribbin 2004). The most relevant commonality between participatory methodologies and these theories is self-organising systems on the edge of chaos (SOSOTEC). The edge of chaos is the zone of diverse, self-organising and emergent complexity lying between top-down rigidity and random chaos. In this zone systems manifest complex, and for all practical purposes unpredictable, behaviour driven by motivation and energy and guided by simple rules. Computer simulations have provided insights. For example, when random blobs on a screen are programmed with three rules – to get close to the centre of gravity of other blobs, to keep a minimum distance from any other blob, and to move similarly to its neighbours, they come together and fly round the screen like a flock of birds (Resnick 1994). This could not happen in the rigid world of top-down detailed instructions, nor in a state of random chaos. In the natural world there are many parallels. Two of the most iconic are slime moulds which come together and disperse without the central pacemakers for long thought to direct their behaviour (Johnson 2002), and ant colonies whose complex behaviour results from the drive and energy of the ants guided by the scent signals (pheromones) they secrete. In human life, games are the most obvious example.

So with participatory methodologies, and especially PRA/PLA, there are a few principles or precepts for behaviour and attitudes for all (see Box 1.1), and then typically minimum empowering conditions or guidelines from a facilitator. After that the commitment of participants provides the energy for creative diversity. The practical challenge is often not to over-prescribe, with the danger of entering an inhibiting top-down zone of too many rules.

On a personal level, a fascinating and similar discovery has been an inverse relation-ship between rules and instructions on the one hand, and commitment and creativity on the other. In PRA methods training, for years I used to take some 20 minutes to 'teach' how to do matrix scoring. Trainees would then practice and we would walk around and comment. I would point out who had done it 'right' and where they had got it 'wrong'. I gradually came to realise that this was freezing out creativity, diversity and discovery. I now take two or three minutes to show a rough example, give minimal guidelines, and tell groups to form themselves and get on with it, responding to most 'how should we …?' questions with 'you decide'. One result has been that I have come to learn a striking range of methods for matrix

scoring that I had never imagined. Another is that participants learn for themselves, from their own inventions, practice, mistakes and reflective critiques.

For those who want a bounded and labelled methodology this will look and feel too loose, both personally and because it can appear to open the door for bad practice. For others, it will turn responsibility back from an external authority or a predetermined process to experiential learning and personal reflective judgement, liberating through freedom to decide and choose what to learn from, borrow and adapt. It can then encourage eclectic opportunism and creativity to enhance local relevance and fit to contribute to the empowerment of others, especially lowers.

6 Looking forward

6.1 Beyond PRA, brands and boundaries

The PRA label has been a problem, spreading often without PRA principles and practices. In the 1990s, by claiming some sort of ownership of PRA, a few consultants negated its spirit of sharing but in the 2000s this has become less evident. Another problem has been how some have misunderstood PRA.[17] Sadly, too, some working in other traditions, have regarded PRA as competitor rather than colleague. This may have contributed to some other action research practitioners' surprising lack of interest in the added value of PRA approaches and methods, and to their seeing PRA as extractive research conducted on local and poor people, not research conducted by and with them as in the movements, methodologies and applications described above. In these movements, as amply documented, practice and theory have been oriented towards empowering those who are marginalised and weak, using new approaches and methods to enable them to do their own appraisals and analysis, and to gain voice and take their own action.

Much of the discourse and practice has now moved beyond PRA. It is less clear than it was what PRA can usefully be said to be. The use of some PRA methods is quite stable and practical: wealth ranking (also known as wellbeing grouping), for example, is extensively used by INGOs and their partners as a means of enabling people in communities to identify those who are worse off according to their own criteria. At the same time, the best practice is often improvised and invented performance in ever changing conditions, leading to continuously evolving diversity.

The inclusive meaning of the term PLA has helped here, as for example by the International HIV/AIDS Alliance (2006b) for whom PLA is:

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17   PRA has, for example, been taken to stand for Participatory Research Appraisal or Participatory Rapid Appraisal. In *The Tyranny of Participation* (Cooke and Kothari 2001: 88 and index) PLA is Participatory Learning Analysis not Participatory Learning and Action, despite the latter being the meaning of the periodical *PLA Notes* (now entitled *Participatory Learning and Action*).

A growing family of approaches, tools, attitudes and behaviours to enable and empower people to present, share, analyse and enhance their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan, act, monitor, evaluate, reflect and scale up community action

and:

a way to help people to participate together in learning, and then to act on that learning.

When the objectives are to achieve both quality and scale, the agenda changes and moves beyond branding and boundaries. These can inhibit and limit more than help. It is no longer, if it ever was, the spread of PRA but inclusively of participatory approaches, attitudes, behaviours, methods and mindsets that deserves priority; and that is something in which practitioners from all traditions can share.

Part of that is the capacity to adapt and innovate. There may always be trade-offs between standardisation and scale on the one hand and creativity and quality on the other. But in moving from practice which is fixed, wooden and branded to practice which is more flexible, pliant and unlabelled, the frontier agenda shifts from reproducing methods to:

● modifying behaviour

● enhancing repertoire – the range of things a person, a facilitator, knows to do, and

● fostering creativity to find new things to do and new ways to do them.

Paradigmatically, this is part of the shift from things to people, from top-down to bottom up, from standard to diverse, from control to empowerment. Brands, boundaries, ego, exclusiveness and claims of ownership dissolve to be replaced by openness, generosity, inclusiveness and sharing.

Central to these transformations are personal reflexivity and institutional change. Critical self-awareness is part of learning and developing, and one key to facilitation. Change in institutions, especially in organisational norms, values, procedures, rewards and relationships, is an important complement to personal change. Congruence between the personal and the institutional is a predisposing condition for participatory processes in groups and communities, and for the continuous dis-covery together of ways of doing things which fit local contexts.

6.2 A new eclectic pluralism

In their review 'Shifting Perceptions, Changing Practices in PRA: From Infinite Innovation to the Quest for Quality' Andrea Cornwall and Irene Guijt (2004), both early pioneers of PRA, review the excitement of the initial community of practice, the seeding of diversity, the poor practice that came with rapid spread in the latter 1990s, and how there came to be many PRAs and many pathways (see also Cornwall and Pratt 2003). They highlight the quest for quality. And they also see a 'new pluralism'.

> Across a spectrum of areas of development work now are people who have engaged in some way with PRA. Participatory learning and action approaches have come to be used in a myriad of settings, in ways that are so diverse that they have given rise to entirely new areas of work – whether in policy research, learning, participatory governance or rights-based development work ...

The creative diversity of this new pluralism is brought to light by a review by ActionAid International of its participatory practices (AAI 2006; Newman forthcoming). These are many and differ by country and within countries, and confront issues of participation, power and rights. While AAI may be exceptional among INGOs for encouraging and reporting on such diversity, the NGO sector in general has in the past decade been a major seedbed for the creative proliferation of methodologies.

This new pluralism is eclectic. The approaches, attitudes, behaviours and mindsets variously identified and named as PRA and PLA are just one part of this. PRA group-visual methods remain powerful and useful, but many practitioners have moved on from relying on them as heavily as they did and now improvise more, borrowing and bringing to bear a wider range. So there are many springs as sources, and many mingling streams, confluences and branching flows. Besides those described above – PRA, Farmer Participatory Research, Integrated Pest Management, Reflect, Stepping Stones, Participatory GIS, ILS, PALS, and Community-Led Total Sanitation – the many others include innovations in agricultural extension (Van Mele *et al.* 2005), Appreciative Inquiry (see James D. Ludema and Ronald E. Fry, Chapter 19 in Reason and Bradbury, forthcoming, 2008), theatre-based techniques (Abah 2004; McCarthy with Galvao 2004; Guhathakurta, Chapter 35 in Reason and Bradbury, forthcoming, 2008), participatory video (Lunch and Lunch 2006), Planning for Real (Gibson 1996), Participatory Poverty Assessments (Norton *et al.* 2001; Robb 2002), there are now many others, not least forms of participatory democracy (see Gaventa and Cornwall, Chapter 11 in Reason and Bradbury, forthcoming, 2008). Examples are citizens' juries (Wakeford, Chapter 22 in Reason and Bradbury, forthcoming, 2008), participatory budgeting, budget tracking, report cards, and social audits. And these and others can be adopted, adapted and improvised in a multitude of ways. The many manifestations of action research and participatory research (Reason and Bradbury, forthcoming, 2008) contribute to this inclusive diversity. A new world of practice opens up. To suggest that Participatory Learning and Action, as shown in the content and coverage of the journal of that title, might be an inclusive term for this borrowing, improvisation and creativity, could be to fall into precisely the trap of naming and branding that is to be avoided. Paradigmatically, eclectic pluralism means that branding, labels, ownership and ego give way to sharing, borrowing, improvisation and creativity, all these complemented by mutual and critical reflective learning and personal responsibility for good practice.

As Heraclitus said, you cannot step into the same river twice. We move on. It is a question now of continuously opening spaces and encouraging the expression and experience of excitement, energy and creativity. It is a question of doing this in innumerable contexts, ever fresh and ever new, as part of a way of life. With a spirit of eclectic pluralism and sharing without boundaries, the potential for

combinations and innovations is greater than it has ever been. From the PRA and PLA experiences, we learn that this is less a matter of methods and more of ways of living, being and relating. In participatory approaches and methods, there will always be a case for seeking common standards and principles. At the same time, by inventing and improvising each time anew for the uniqueness of each challenge and opportunity, the scope for adventure and discovery will never end.

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