

Robert Chambers whose
Reality Counts? pp. 102-129.

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Learning to Learn

It's the best possible time to be alive, when almost everything you thought you knew is wrong.

Valentine, in Tom Stoppard's play *Arcadia*, quoted in John Carey, *The Faber Book of Science*, p. 503

As professionals have become more aware of errors and myths, and of the misfit between the reality they construct and the reality others experience, some have sought and developed new approaches and methods in their work. Insights and developments in action-reflection research, agro-ecosystem analysis, applied social anthropology, farming-systems research, and rapid rural appraisal (RRA) have contributed to the evolution of participatory approaches to learning and action, including participatory rural appraisal (PRA). PRA is a growing family of approaches and methods to enable local people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan, act, monitor and evaluate. Its extensive and growing menu of methods includes visuals such as mapping and diagramming. Practical applications have proliferated, especially in natural resources management, agriculture, health and nutrition, poverty and livelihood programmes, and urban contexts. PRA approaches and methods present alternatives to questionnaire surveys in appraisal and research, and generate insights of policy relevance. Past dominant behaviour by outsiders goes far to explain why it is only in the 1990s that these participatory approaches and methods have come together and spread.

The challenges

The challenges presented in the preceding chapters of this book are personal, professional and institutional. The evidence, arguments and conclusions may be modified or rejected. If they are substantially accepted, 'more of the same' will not do. Radical change is required on a wide front. The chapter themes and challenges are:

Chapter 1 Theme: accelerating change, polarization into overclass and underclass, and an emerging consensus of concepts and values – well-being, livelihood, capabilities, equity and sustainability.

Challenge: to be alert, nimble and in touch, reducing inequities, and adopting, developing and applying the concepts and values of the emerging consensus.

Chapter 2 Theme: potential huge gains from avoiding normal error.

Challenge: to learn continuously, embracing, correcting and avoiding error.

Chapter 3 Theme: professional realities present much of the problem, valuing things over people, measurement over judgement, reductionism

over holism, with a dominant cult and culture of economics, all combining to create a professional prison.

Challenge: to reverse values and break out of professional prisons.

Chapter 4 Theme: powerful professionals transfer their reality, through teaching, centralized bureaucracy and career patterns, with tendencies to simple, standardized packages transferred top-down, and misfitting local realities and needs.

Challenge: to reverse upper-lower dominance, and top-down, centre-outwards standardization and control.

Chapter 5 Theme: the powerful are systemically deceived through their upper-lower relationships in which they assert their reality and lowers sustain uppers' delusions.

Challenge: to enable the poor, weak and vulnerable to express their realities, to plan and to act.

In a spirit of pluralism, each person, profession and institution can find an individual pathway for meeting these challenges. This chapter introduces a family of approaches and methods which provides one starting point. Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) is not a panacea, and will not solve all the problems of the world; but it does open up some ways of trying to tackle these challenges. Its development and spread in the first half of the 1990s have been so rapid that it is timely to stand back, as this chapter tries to do, and review its origins, evolution, methods and applications, and to ask why it has taken so long to come about.

PRA has often astonished facilitators and surprised local people who have found themselves doing things they did not know they could. The essence of PRA is changes and reversals – of role, behaviour, relationship and learning. Outsiders do not dominate and lecture; they facilitate, sit down, listen and learn. Outsiders do not transfer technology; they share methods which local people can use for their own appraisal, analysis, planning, action, monitoring and evaluation. Outsiders do not impose their reality; they encourage and enable local people to express their own.

Readers who are not thrilled by history may wish to skip lightly, perhaps dipping into the methods and applications (pp. 116–22) to gain a sense of the range of PRA, and then move on to Chapter 7 for a sense of the excitement of the 'discoveries' of PRA, and attempts to understand its elements and principles.

This chapter also complements the final three chapters: Chapter 8 which explores the local, complex, diverse, dynamic and unpredictable (lceddu) realities of people, the poor, peripheries, farming systems and livelihood systems as they have been and can be revealed through PRA; Chapter 9 which explores its wider paradigmatic significance; and Chapter 10 which examines problems and bad practice, and the challenges – personal, professional and institutional – of reversals to put the first last.

Streams of change

Confronted with the formidable challenge of reversals necessary to empower lowers and to reveal local realities, professionals in the natural and

social sciences, and practitioners in the field, have evolved new approaches and combinations of methods. As an intermittent participant/observer in this process, I cannot avoid a partial view. However much I try to present a balanced and multiple perspective, I cannot escape from presenting a reality which is personal and fallible. At best, then, what follows can be taken as a personal interpretation of what has happened.

Participatory approaches are always half hidden. The ways of learning that are most visible to the world élite have been generated by the new hardware and software of the cores. It is computers and their programs which attract most attention, with their new magazines and their full-page advertisements in the newspapers of the North. It is these which have captivated many of a generation of affluent, mainly male, adolescents in the North with the new worlds of computer games. Computers, games and programs have been subject to frenetic competition and almost instant obsolescence. And it is these which have generated the new proxy realities of GIS (Geographic Information Systems) on their screens, and the new adventures of surfing in cyberspace on the Internet, for those uppers who have access.

Less conspicuous, quieter, more dispersed, but significant for human fulfilment and well-being, have been streams and confluences of development approaches and methods in the peripheries of the South, flowing out to cover new ground. These have been many. Some have made striking contributions to understanding and modes of learning. These, as its precursors and now cousins, have led on to and contributed to PRA and its siblings PALM (participatory learning methods), DRP (*diagnostico rurale partecipativo*) and MARP (*méthode accélérée de recherche participative*); and all are currently sharing and exchanging experiences and methods.

PRA has evolved so fast, and continues to evolve so differently, that no final description can serve. At one stage PRA was called 'an approach and methods for learning about rural life and conditions from, with and by rural people', with the emphasis on learning by outsiders. The propositions were then reversed to read 'by, with and from', as the analysis and learning shifted from 'us' to 'them'. Then the term PRA came to cover more than just learning. It extended into analysis, planning, action, monitoring and evaluation. It was also used to describe a variety of approaches as they evolved in different countries, contexts and organizations. To cover these, it was described in May 1994 as: 'a family of approaches and methods to enable rural people to share, enhance, and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act' (Absalom *et al.*, 1995). To this can now be added 'and to monitor and evaluate'. For some, too, it is now a philosophy and a way of life which stresses self-critical awareness and commitment to the poor, weak and vulnerable.

The essence of PRA has been induced from practice and what has been found to work, not deduced from a priori principles. It has three foundations or pillars (Mascarenhas *et al.*, 1991; and Figure 6.1):

- the behaviour and attitudes of outsiders, who facilitate, not dominate;
- the methods, which shift the normal balance from closed to open, from individual to group, from verbal to visual, and from measuring to comparing; and

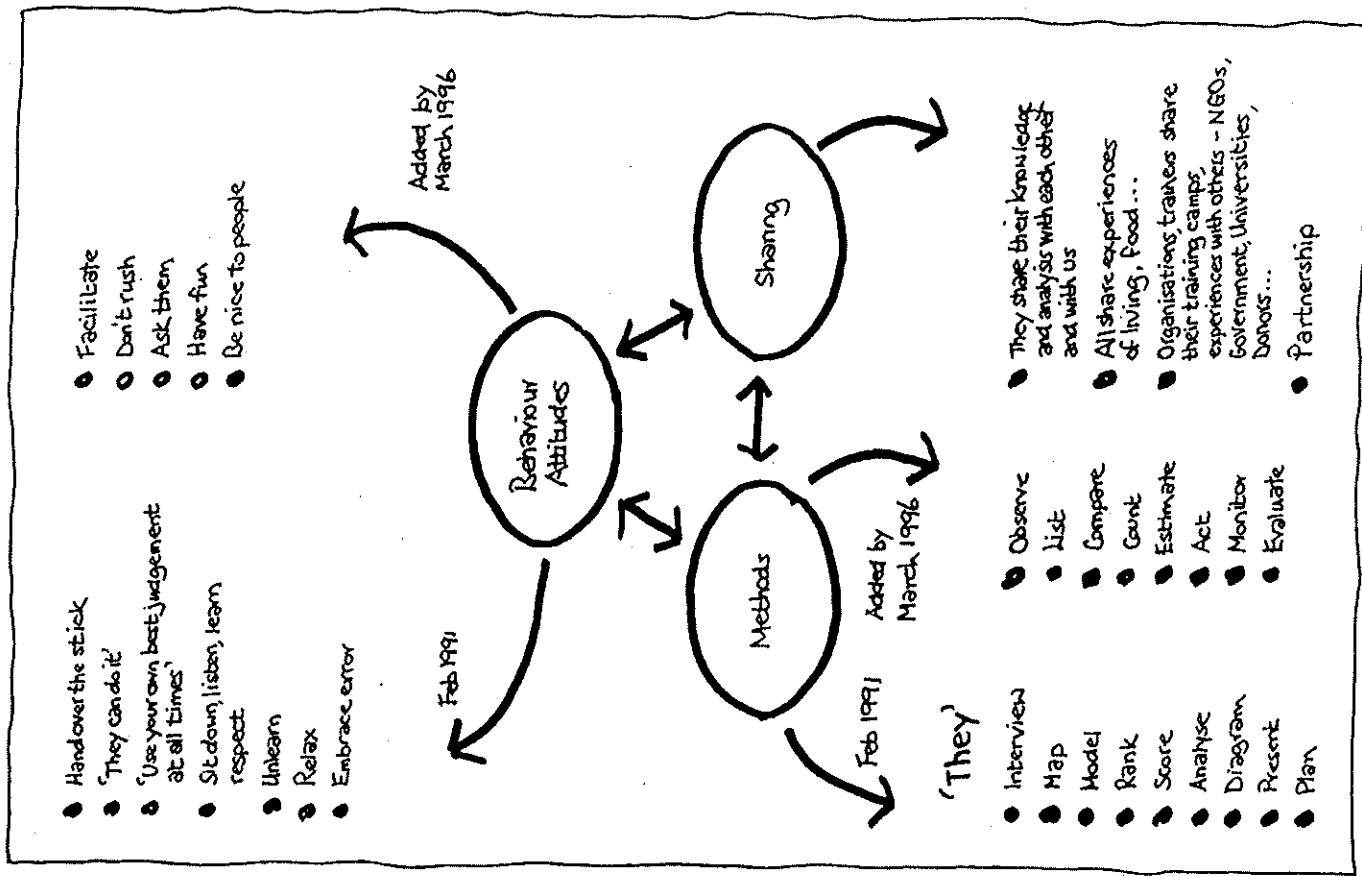


Figure 6.1: The three pillars of PRA

o partnership and sharing of information, experience, food and training, between insiders and outsiders, and between organizations.

For many, PRA seeks to empower lowers – women, minorities, the poor, the weak and the vulnerable – and to make power reversals real.

PRA has currently many historical roots. It has evolved from, draws on and resonates with several sources and traditions. Some of its methods appear new; and some have been adopted, adapted or rediscovered (see, for example, Whyte, 1977; Pelto and Pelto, 1978; and Rhoades, 1990). In understanding what has happened, it makes no sense to try to separate out causes, effects, innovations, influences and diffusion as though these follow straight lines. In a world of continuously quicker and closer communication, transfers and sharing have become more and more rapid and untraceable. So these sources and traditions have intermingled more and more over the past decade, and each also continues in several forms; but directly or indirectly all have contributed to a confluence in PRA; and as with other confluences, the flow has speeded up, and innovation and change have accelerated to cover new ground.

Five streams which stand out as sources and cousins of PRA, and between which insights, approaches and methods are continuously flowing, are shown in Figure 6.2 and can be listed and described, in alphabetical order, as:

- o action-reflection research;
- o agro-ecosystem analysis;
- o applied anthropology;
- o field research on farming systems; and
- o rapid rural appraisal (RRA).

Participatory action-reflection research

The term 'participatory action-reflection research' is used to encompass approaches and methods which have in various ways combined action, reflection, participation and research. These range from action science (Argyris *et al.*, 1985) and reflection-in-action (Schon, 1983, 1987) in which professionals act and reflect on what they do and how they learn, to approaches which use dialogue and participatory research to enhance local people's awareness and confidence, and to empower their action.

Participatory action-reflection research which seeks to empower owes much to the work and inspiration of Paulo Freire, to his books *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1974), and to the practice and experience of conscientization in Latin America. The Freirian theme, that poor and exploited people can and should be enabled to analyse their own reality, has been widely influential, though practiced by only a small minority of development professionals. Activities in this tradition have been variously known as participatory research (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995) and participatory action research (PAR) (Fals-Borda and Rahman, 1991; Whyte, 1991). Since these overlap, they can be considered together.

Participatory research and PAR have been strongest in Latin America. They have long been associated with the adult education movement

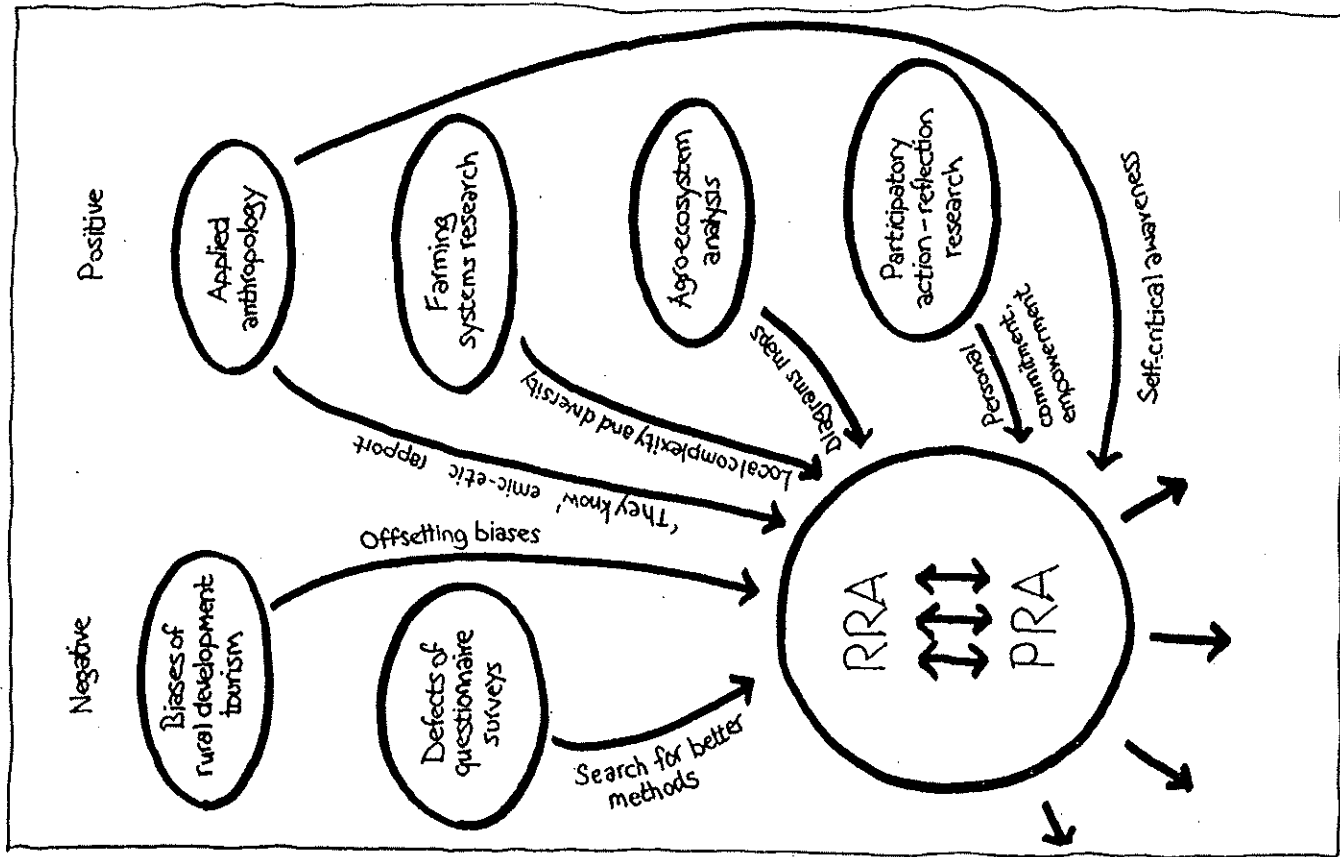


Figure 6.2: Some sources and relatives of RRA and PRA

(*Convergence*, 1975; 1981; 1988). An African regional Workshop on Participatory Research was held in Tanzania in 1979 (Kassam and Mustafa, 1982). In India, the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (SPR in Asia 1982) sought to spread the philosophy and practice of participatory research. Activities were conducted in widely differing conditions (Rahman, 1984). In Bangladesh, as recorded in *The Net* (BRAC, 1983), poor and powerless people took part in investigation and analysis of the power structure in 10 villages, and of how benefits directed towards them by the government were intercepted by the local élite. In the United States, the Highlander Research and Education Center in rural Appalachia worked to enable underprivileged communities to gain confidence in their own knowledge and abilities, and to take political action (Gaventa, 1980; Gaventa and Lewis, 1991).

PAR especially has sought actively to involve people in generating knowledge about their own condition and how it can be changed, to stimulate social and economic change based on the awakening of the common people, and to empower the oppressed.¹ The techniques used in PAR (summarized in Cornwall *et al.*, 1993: 25) include collective research through meetings and socio-dramas, critical recovery of history, valuing and applying folk culture, and the production and diffusion of new knowledge through written, oral and visual forms.

The varied forms of participatory action-reflection research have been practised by people with orientations ranging from scientific curiosity to radical zeal, and from critical self-doubt to confident crypto-paternalism. In common, though, its various forms have challenged established interests, whether professional (raising questions of values, knowledge and how we learn) or political (raising questions of exploitation, equity and how we change). Spread has been limited by the intense engagement and reflective self-criticism often demanded by these approaches, and by professional and political opposition.

Much PRA has also sought to be reflective and committed to equity, challenging established ideas and interests, but usually with less intensity and less direct confrontation. The significant contribution of the action-reflection research stream to PRA has been less through methods than through normative ideas, five of which stand out:

- (1) that professionals should reflect critically on their concepts, values, behaviour and methods;
- (2) that they should learn through engagement and committed action;
- (3) that they have roles as convenors, catalysts and facilitators;
- (4) that the weak and marginalized can and should be empowered; and
- (5) that poor people can and should do much of their own investigation, analysis and planning.

Agro-ecosystem analysis

Agro-ecosystem analysis (Conway, 1985, 1986, 1987) was developed in Thailand from 1978 onwards, initially at the University of Chiang Mai, by Gordon Conway and his colleagues (Gypmantasin *et al.*, 1980). It spread first through

Southeast Asia and later elsewhere. Drawing on systems and ecological thinking, it combines analysis of systems and system properties (productivity, stability, sustainability and equitability) with pattern analysis of space (maps and transects), time (seasonal calendars and long-term trends), flows and relationships (flow, causal, Venn and other diagrams), relative values (bar diagrams of relative sources of income etc.), and decisions (decision trees and other decision diagrams). The approach was further developed by Conway and others with the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (Pakistan) for application in villages in Northern Pakistan, where it took a form which led to identification and assessment of practical hypotheses for action.

Agro-ecosystem analysis was so powerful and practical that it quickly overlapped with and contributed to much rapid rural appraisal (RRA) (see below). In some cases, either or both labels could be used to describe what was done. Some of the major contributions of agro-ecosystem analysis to current RRA and PRA have been:

- o visual representations and analysis;
- o transects (systematic walks and observation);
- o informal mapping (sketch maps drawn on site);
- o diagramming (seasonal calendars, flow and causal diagrams, bar charts, Venn or *chapani* diagrams); and
- o innovation assessment (scoring and ranking different actions).

Applied anthropology

Social anthropology in its classical forms has been concerned more with understanding than with changing. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, applied anthropology and development anthropology gained professional legitimacy. In the USA, the Institute for Development Anthropology established a network and a regular bulletin. A very few social anthropologists found their way into the International Agricultural Research Centres, where they had an influence disproportionate to their tiny numbers, and the social anthropologists in aid agencies rose in numbers and status, though they were still few. Social anthropologists helped other development professionals to appreciate better the richness and validity of rural people's knowledge and to distinguish the *etic* (the outsider's mental frame, categories and world view) and the *emic* (those of the local insider).

So in agriculture, *The Art of the Informal Agricultural Survey* (1982), by Robert Rhoades, a social anthropologist at the International Potato Center in Peru, was an example, widely read and influential far beyond the informal form of its publication; and in health and nutrition, the approaches of social anthropology were adopted in rapid assessment procedures (RAP) (Scrimshaw and Hurtado, 1987; Scrimshaw and Gleason, 1992) and in rapid ethnographic assessment (REA) (Bentley *et al.*, 1988), which used conversations, observation, informal interviews and focus groups, and reduced the time required for fieldwork.

PRA represents an extension and application of social-anthropological insights, approaches and methods, cross-fertilized with others. Some of those coming from and shared with social anthropology have been:

- o the idea of field learning as flexible art rather than rigid science;
- o the value of field residence, unhurried participant observation, and conversations;
- o the importance of attitudes, behaviour and rapport;
- o the emic-etic distinction; and
- o the richness and validity of indigenous technical knowledge.

Field research on farming systems

Field research on farming systems, whether by social anthropologists, geographers, agricultural economists or biological scientists, has revealed the complexity, diversity and rationality of much apparently untidy and unsystematic farming practice. Among those who showed its good sense were, in the 1960s D.G.R. Belshaw at Makerere University in Uganda, and in the 1970s David Norman and his colleagues at Ahmadu Bello University in Northern Nigeria (see e.g. Norman (1975) for the value of mixed cropping), Michael Collinson in Tanzania, Richard Harwood in Thailand (Harwood, 1979) and Peter Hildebrand in Guatemala. Farming-systems research (Gilbert *et al.*, 1980; Shaner *et al.*, 1982; FSSP, 1987) systematized methods for investigating, understanding and prescribing for farming-system complexity, but these sometimes got bogged down in ponderous surveys and data overload.

A parallel stream of research drew attention to farmers' capabilities. Stephen Biggs, in describing 'informal R and D' (1980), Paul Richards in his classic *Indigenous Agricultural Revolution* (1985), and Roland Bunch in *Two Ears of Corn* (1985) were among those who showed and recognized that farmers were experimenters. Farmers' participation in agricultural research became a focus (e.g. Farrington, 1988; Farrington and Martun, 1988; Chambers, Pacey and Thrupp, 1989; Ashby, 1990). Clive Lightfoot and his colleagues pioneered analytical and flow diagramming by farmers (e.g. Lightfoot *et al.*, 1991; Lightfoot and Minnick, 1991; Lightfoot and Noble, 1993) and Jacqueline Ashby at CIAT in Colombia and Michel Pimbert at ICRISAT in India showed through widely influential videos how farmers (women and men) were capable of conducting their own trials, assessments and analysis. In the later 1980s and early 1990s it was increasingly recognized that farmers should and could play a much greater part in agricultural research.

Field research on farming systems contributed especially to the appreciation and understanding of:

- o the complexity, diversity and risk-proneness of many farming systems;
- o the knowledge, professionalism and rationality of small and poor farmers;
- o their experimental mindset and behaviour; and
- o their ability to conduct their own analyses.

Rapid rural appraisal

The philosophy, approaches and methods known as rapid rural appraisal (RRA)² began to emerge in the late 1970s. Workshops held at the Institute

of Development Studies at the University of Sussex in the UK on rural development tourism (1977), indigenous technical knowledge (1978), the RRA itself (1978, 1979) were only some among the parallel moves in different parts of the world in search of better ways for outsiders to learn about rural life and conditions. RRA had three main origins.

- (1) Dissatisfaction with the biases, especially the anti-poverty biases, of rural development tourism (Chambers, 1983: 13-23), the phenomenon of the brief rural visit by the urban-based professional. These biases were recognized as: spatial (visits near cities, on roadsides and to the centres of villages, to the neglect of peripheries); project (where projects were being undertaken, often with special official attention and support); person (meeting men more than women, élites more than the poor, the users more than the non-users of services, and so on); seasonal (going in the dry and cool rather than hot and wet seasons which are often worse for poor rural people); and diplomatic (where the outsider does not wish to cause offence by asking to meet poor people or see bad conditions). All these could combine to hide the worst poverty and deprivation.
- (2) Disillusion with the normal processes of questionnaire surveys and their results. Again and again, over many years and in many places (see e.g. Moris, 1970; Campbell *et al.*, 1979), the experience had been that questionnaire surveys tended to be long-winded, tedious, a headache to administer, a nightmare to process and write up, inaccurate and unreliable in data obtained, leading to reports, if any, which were long, late, boring, misleading, difficult to use, and ignored.
- (3) More cost-effective methods of learning were sought. This was helped by the growing recognition by development professionals of the painfully obvious fact that rural people were themselves knowledgeable on many subjects which touched their lives. What became known as indigenous technical knowledge (ITK) (IDS, 1979; Brokensha *et al.*, 1980) was then increasingly seen to have richness and value for practical purposes. One major question, as it seemed then, was how more effectively to tap ITK as a source of information for analysis and use by outsider professionals.

In the late 1970s, though, most of those professionals who were inventing and using methods which were quicker and more cost-effective than 'respectable' questionnaire surveys, were reluctant to write about what they did, fearing for their professional credibility. They felt compelled to conform to standard statistical norms, however costly and crude their applications, and obliged in their reports and publications to use conventional methods, categories and measures. In a classic statement, Michael Collinson (1981) described how he would take only a week to conduct an exploratory survey to identify agricultural research priorities, but would then feel obliged to follow this with a formal verification survey which represented the major commitment of professional time and funds. This more costly exercise had always confirmed the exploratory survey but 'the numbers which this formal survey provides are the only hard evidence produced by the diagnostic process. This is extremely important in convincing 'the

Establishment' . . . (ibid: 444). To be convincing, the researcher had to be conservative, but the process was costly, and decisions and actions were delayed.

During the 1980s, in some places this situation was transformed, and RRA gained increasing acceptance. It began to be seen that it had its own principles and rigour (Belshaw, 1981; Carruthers and Chambers, 1981; Chambers 1981). In the early years of the decade, RRA was argued to be cost-effective, especially for gaining timely information, but still with some sense that it might only be a second-best. By the mid-1980s, however, its approaches and methods, when properly conducted, were increasingly eliciting a range and quality of information and insights inaccessible through more traditional methods. Except when rushed and unself-critical, RRA came out better by criteria of cost-effectiveness, validity and reliability when it was compared with more conventional methods. In many contexts and for many purposes, RRA, when well done, showed itself to be not a second-best but a best.

Many people and institutions took part in establishing the methods and principles of RRA. No account can do justice to them, and with imperfect knowledge there is no avoiding significant omissions. An earlier attempt to list countries where RRA had been developed identified 12 in Africa, 8 in South and Southeast Asia, 3 in Latin America, 3 in Australasia and the Pacific, and one in Europe. Perhaps more than any other movement, agro-ecosystem analysis in Southeast Asia introduced new methods and established new credibility. In the mid-1980s, the University of Khon Kaen in Thailand was world leader in developing theory and methods, especially for multidisciplinary teams, and in institutionalizing RRA as a part of professional training. The International Conference on Rapid Rural Appraisal held at the University of Khon Kaen in 1985, and the published volume of papers which resulted (KKU, 1987), were landmarks. The practical value of RRA was confirmed, and its underlying theory outlined (Beebe, 1987; Gibbs, 1987; Grandstaff *et al.*, 1987a; Jamieson, 1987). In the latter 1980s, RRA continued to spread, and was adopted not only in tropical countries but also in Australia (Ampt and Ison, 1989; Dunn and McMillan, 1991). It was further developed and disseminated through extensive training by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) based in London, working with colleagues mainly in Africa and Asia, and through its publications, especially the informal periodical *RRA Notes* (1988-).

In specialized fields, too, there were parallel and overlapping developments. In health and nutrition, for example, RAP (Scrimshaw and Hurtado, 1987) was practised in at least 20 countries; in agriculture, some practitioners of farming-systems research and extension innovated with lighter, quicker methods in an RRA style; and in irrigation, a small literature was built up (e.g. Potten, 1985; Groenfeldt, 1989); and 'hard' journals began to publish papers.

RRA began and continues as a better way for outsiders to learn. In answering the question 'Whose knowledge counts?' it sought, and continues to seek, to enable outsiders to gain information and insight from rural people and about rural conditions, and to do this in a more cost-

effective and timely manner. It was, and remains, less exploitative than extractive questionnaire surveys where much is taken by the outsider, and little or nothing given back. All the same, like most past farming-systems research, its normal mode entails outsiders obtaining information, taking it away and analysing it. This is a valid and useful activity which has and will continue to have its place. Depending on one's point of view and the context, the normal practice of non-participatory RRA can be described as extractive, or, more neutrally, elicitive.

PRA: confluence and spread

In the mid-1980s, the words 'participation' and 'participatory' entered the RRA vocabulary. They had already a long history in rural development. To take but two examples, for some years in the 1970s and early 1980s, under the leadership of Normal Uphoff and others, Cornell University published the *Rural Development Participation Review*, until USAID, with curious crassness, terminated its support; and participation was a recurrent theme in the contributions to Michael Cernea's book, edited for the World Bank, *Putting People First* (1985) which drew on experience from earlier years. It was at the 1985 Khon Kaen International Conference that participation began to be used in connection with RRA. Discussions at the conference generated a typology of seven types of RRA (KKU, 1987: 17) of which 'participatory RRA' was one. For this, the dominant purpose was seen at that stage as stimulating community awareness, with the outsider's role as catalyst. Later, in 1988, participatory RRAs were listed by the IIED team as one of four classes of RRA methodologies, the others being exploratory RRAs, topical RRAs, and monitoring RRAs (McCracken *et al.*, 1988).

In 1988, there were parallel developments in Kenya and India. In Kenya, the National Environment Secretariat, in association with Clark University, conducted an RRA in Mbusanyi, a community in Machakos District, which led to the adoption in September of a Village Resource Management Plan (Kabutha and Ford, 1988). This was subsequently described as a participatory rural appraisal, and the method outlined in two Handbooks (PID and NES, 1989; NES, 1990). Around the same time in 1988, the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (India) was interested in developing participatory RRA, and invited IIED to help. In September and October 1988 Jennifer McCracken from IIED, and AKRSP staff including Meera Kaul Shah and Parmesh Shah, facilitated participatory rapid rural appraisals with villagers in Gujarat (McCracken, 1988). The Kenya and Indian experiences were seminal for the development of PRA.

Subsequently, there was an explosion of innovation in India (for which see *RRA Notes* 13) mainly in the NGO sector but also increasingly in government organizations.³ MYRADA, based in Bangalore, trained its senior staff in PRA in early 1990 (Ramachandran, 1990), and came to play a major role in training for other NGOs and for government. Those who pioneered and evolved new methods and applications were many, including John Devavaram, Sheelu Francis, Ravi Jayakaran, Sam Joseph, Kamal Kar, James Mascarenhas, Neela Mukherjee, P.D. Premkumar, Anil Shah, Meera Kaul Shah and Parmesh Shah, all of whom subsequently conducted

PRA training for others in other countries and continents, while Somesh Kumar was one of those who early trained government staff. AKRSP continued to innovate and broke new ground in showing how well village volunteers could themselves be facilitators of PRA, while ActionAid, Bangalore undertook a networking role.

At the same time, cross-fertilization and spread took place internationally.⁴ The small group in the Sustainable Agriculture Programme at IIED - Irene Guijt, Jules Pretty, Ian Scoones and John Thompson, with support from the Ford Foundation and SIDA - were decisively influential through their activities in Africa and Asia, and contributed to the spread and evolution of PRA and its methods through 30 substantial field-based training workshops in 15 countries and through publications and papers, especially *RRA Notes*. Source books, manuals and books also contributed to the dissemination of PRA (e.g. McCracken *et al.*, 1988; Gueye and Freudenberger, 1990, 1991; Theis and Grady, 1991; *RRA Notes* 13, 1991; Mukherjee, 1993).

Much of the spread was South-South, through sharing field experiences and training. PRA methods were introduced from India to Nepal on the initiative of Winrock International and to Sri Lanka on the initiative of Intercooperation. Trainers from India, and later from Kenya, Zimbabwe and other countries, conducted training in other countries and continents. James Mascarenhas in South Africa and Kamal Kar in Indonesia facilitated training workshops which were seminal, leading to rapid adoption and spread. The World Resources Institute was active in Latin America. A series of international field workshops was held, hosted in India by ActionAid, AKRSP, MYRADA and subsequently by OUTREACH (Bangalore), and in the Philippines by the International Institute for Rural Reconstruction and Helvetas. PRA approaches and methods also spread from South to North, to the industrialized world, with trainers from the South helping to initiate Northerners into PRA in Canada, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

By mid-1996, activities described as PRA were being practised in perhaps 100 countries and there were over 30, mainly national, PRA-related networks.⁵ Several countries had held national PRA conferences (see e.g. Assefa and Konde (1996) for Ethiopia). Applications had become legion, in almost every sector of field-level development. Not only NGOs and government departments but also training institutes and universities were increasingly using PRA methods and approaches.

PRA has also shifted and spread in other dimensions:

- in emphasis, from stressing methods to stressing behaviour and attitudes;
- in impact, from methods to professional change, from behaviour and attitudes to personal change, and from field applications to changes in organizational procedures and cultures;
- in focus, from appraisal to analysis, planning, action and monitoring and evaluation;
- in location, from rural to include urban; and
- in analysis, from practice to theory, finding what works, and then asking why.

The sudden popularity of PRA has generated huge problems and widespread bad practice (see pp. 211-14). Quality assurance has become a massive concern. Nevertheless, PRA or PRA-type activities continue to evolve and spread on an astonishing scale. In some countries and regions, such as Nepal and Andhra Pradesh, the question is reportedly less whether to use PRA processes or methods, and more how well or badly they will be used.

RRA and PRA compared

Many practitioners consider it important to distinguish PRA from RRA. A summary comparison is given in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: RRA and PRA compared

	RRA	PRA
Major development	late 1970s, 1980s	late 1980s, 1990s
Major innovators in	Universities	NGOs
Main users	Aid agencies, Universities	NGOs, Government field organizations
Key resource earlier overlooked	Local people's knowledge	Local people's capabilities
Main innovation	Methods	Behaviour
Outsiders' mode	Eliciting	Facilitating
Objectives	Data collection	Empowerment
Main actors	Outsiders	Local people
Longer-term outcomes	Plans, projects, publications	Sustainable local action and institutions

In practice RRA and PRA present a continuum, as in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: The RRA-PRA continuum

Nature of process	RRA	PRA
Mode	finding out-elicitive	facilitating-empowering
Outsiders' role	investigator	facilitator
Information owned, analysed and used by	outsiders	local people
Methods mainly used	'RRA methods'	'PRA methods'

RRA and PRA have been distinguished as approaches rather than methods. Many practitioners consider that the term RRA should be used for data-collecting activities, while PRA should be reserved for an on-going empowering process. RRA should not be considered a second-best, but simply a different activity with different objectives and justifications.

It helps to recognize that there is an overlap of methods: a participatory or PRA method can be used as part of an RRA (finding out-elicitive) approach, and an RRA method can be used as part of a PRA (facilitating-empowering) approach.

A menu for RRA and PRA

In its early days, RRA seemed to be largely organized commonsense. During the 1980s, though, creative ingenuity was applied and more methods were borrowed, adapted and invented, many with a more participatory mode. Some of these were codified and written up in guidelines and manuals.

One view is that manuals should be avoided; that the PRA principle of 'use your own best judgement at all times' permits and encourages creativity; that manuals encourage teaching and learning by rote, the ritual performance of methods for their own sake, the imposition of methods on local people, and a loss of creativity and flexibility. In this view, very basic descriptions of methods are enough. Others consider sourcebooks useful as introductions and for sharing experiences and ideas. A balance between these two views seems best.

RRA and PRA methods have been classified as visualized analyses; methods for interviewing and sampling; and methods for group and team dynamics (Cornwall *et al.*, 1993: 22). Here they will be separated into those which are more typical of an RRA mode and those more typical of a PRA mode, remembering that all can be used in either mode.

RRA has tended to stress the use of secondary sources, observation and verbal interaction. Semi-structured interviewing and focus groups have been stressed. These, then, can be described as typically 'RRA methods and approaches'. PRA, on the other hand, has been distinguished especially by shared visual representations and analysis by local people, such as: mapping or modelling on the ground or paper; listing, sequencing and card sorting; estimating, comparing, scoring and ranking with seeds, stones, sticks or shapes; Venn diagramming; linkage diagramming; and group and community presentations for checking and validation. These are often what are described as PRA methods and approaches. The list is indicative not comprehensive.⁵

Some originally RRA methods and approaches

- o *Secondary data*: such as files, reports, maps, aerial photographs, satellite imagery, articles and books. These can help a lot especially in the earlier stages, e.g. deciding where to go, and where gaps or contradictions in understanding exist.
- o *Offsetting biases*: being self-critically aware of biases in our behaviour and learning, and deliberately offsetting them. These include biases of place: where we go; person: whom we meet, especially élite and gender biases; and season and time of day: when we go.
- o *Observing directly* (see for yourself): this can be most effective if combined with self-critical awareness of what we tend to see and not see, resulting from our own specialized education and interests, and consciously trying to correct for these.

o *Semi-structured interviewing*: this has been regarded as the core of good RRA (Grandstaff and Grandstaff, 1987a). It can entail having a mental or written checklist, but being open-ended and following up on the unexpected. Increasingly it is using participatory visual as well as traditional verbal methods, and eliciting local people's checklists in place of those of outsiders.

o *Seeking out the experts*: asking who are the experts on specific topics. This is obvious, yet often overlooked, perhaps because outsiders assume that experts do not exist. Who, in a community, knows most about medicinal plants, water supplies, changes in sources and types of fuel, agro-ecological history, what goes on in school, changing values and customs, who is pregnant, fodder grasses, animal diseases, home gardens, markets and prices? Who in the community is experienced and accepted in conflict resolution? Sometimes the experts are identified through participatory social mapping.

o *Key probes*: questions that can lead directly into key issues, for example 'What new practices have you or others tried out in recent years?' or 'What happens when someone's house burns down?', followed by probing actual practice and experience.

o *Case studies and stories*: a household history and profile, a farm and farming system, how a crisis was coped with, how a conflict was resolved.

o *Transect walks*: systematically walking with local guides and analysts through an area, observing, asking, listening, discussing, learning about different zones, soils, land uses, vegetation, crops, livestock, local technologies, introduced technologies, seeking problems, solutions and opportunities; and mapping and diagramming the zones, resources and findings (Mascarenhas, 1990). Transects take many forms: vertical, loop, combing, along a watercourse, and even sea-bottom.

o *Groups* of various kinds (casual or random encounter; focus; representative or structured for diversity; community, neighbourhood or socially specific; or formal, such as a committee). Group interviews and activities can present problems especially if time is short (e.g. Pottier and Orone, 1995) but when well-managed are often powerful and efficient. They have been relatively neglected, perhaps because of the habit of individual questionnaires to generate statistics.

Some typical PRA methods and approaches

o '*Handing over the stick*' and *they do it*: basic to PRA is facilitating, handing over the stick, chalk or pen, enabling local people to be the analysts, mappers, diagrammers, observers, researchers, historians, planners and actors, presenters of their analysis, and then in turn facilitators: women, men, poor, non-poor, children, parents, schoolteachers, farmers, local specialists.

o *Do-it-yourself*: roles of expertise are reversed, with local people as experts and teachers, and outsiders as novices. Local people supervise and teach skills: to transplant, weed, plough, level a field, mud a hut, draw and carry water, fetch firewood, wash clothes, cook a meal, stitch, thatch.

- *Local analysis of secondary sources*: most commonly the analysis of aerial photographs (often best at 1:5000) to identify soil type, land conditions, land tenure etc. (Deweese, 1989a; Mearns, 1989; Sandford, 1989). Satellite imagery has also been used (pers. comm. Sam Joseph).
 - *Mapping and modelling*: people's mapping, drawing and colouring with chalks, sticks, seeds, powders, pens etc. on the ground, floor or (often later) paper to make social, health or demographic maps, resource maps of village lands and forests, maps of fields, farms and home gardens, thematic or topic maps (for water, soils, trees, the incidence of pests etc.) (P. Shah, 1995), service or opportunity maps, maps of the location of anti-personnel mines (pers. comm. Michele Barron for Mozambique), three-dimensional models of watersheds, etc. (Hahn, 1991; Mascarenhas and Kumar, 1991). These methods have been among the most widely used and can lead into household listing and well-being ranking, transects, and linkage diagrams.
 - *Time lines and trend and change analysis*: chronologies of events, listing major local events with approximate dates; people's accounts of the past, of how customs, practices and things close to them have changed; ethnobiography – a local history of a crop, an animal, a tree, a pest, a weed... diagrams, maps (see Sadomba, 1996 for retrospective community mapping) and matrices (Freudenberger, 1995) showing ecological histories, changes in land use and cropping patterns, population, migration, fuel uses, education, health, credit... and the causes of changes and trends, often with estimates of relative magnitudes.
 - *Seasonal calendars*: by major season or more usually by month to show: distribution of days of rain, amount of rain or soil moisture; crop cycles; women's, men's and children's work, including agricultural and non-agricultural labour; diet and food consumption; illnesses; prices; animal fodder; fuel; migration; sources of income; expenditure; debt etc.
 - *Daily time-use analysis*: indicating relative amounts of time, degrees of drudgery etc. of activities, and sometimes seasonal variations in these.
 - *Institutional or Venn diagramming*: identifying individuals and institutions important in and for a community or group, or within an organization, and their relationships (for examples, see Guijt and Pretty, 1992).
 - *Linkage diagrams*: of flows, connections and causality. These versatile diagrams have been used for the analysis of sequences, marketing, nutrient flows on farms, migration, social contact, and impacts of interventions and trends, and for income and expenditure trees (Archer and Cottingham, 1996b: 135).
 - *Well-being (or wealth) grouping (or ranking)*: card sorting into groups or rankings of households according to local criteria, including those considered poorest, worst off and most deprived, often expressing key local indicators of well-being and ill-being. A good lead into livelihoods of the poor and how they cope (Grandin, 1988; Swift and Umar, 1991; Mearns et al., 1992; RRA Notes 15: *passim*; Turk, 1995; Booth et al., 1995).
 - *Analysis of difference*: especially by gender, social group, wealth/poverty, occupation and age. Identifying differences between groups, including their problems and preferences (Welbourn, 1991). This includes contrast comparisons: asking one group why another is different or does something different, and vice versa (pers. comm. Meena Bilgi).
 - *Matrix scoring and ranking*: using matrices and counters (usually seeds or stones) to compare through scoring, for example different trees, or soils, or methods of soil and water conservation, or varieties of a crop or animal, fields on a farm, fish, weeds, conditions at different times, and to express preferences (see e.g. Drinkwater, 1993; Manoharan et al., 1993; Posadas, 1995; Maxwell and Duff, 1995).
 - *Team contracts and interactions*: contracts drawn up by teams with agreed norms of behaviour; modes of interaction within teams, including changing pairs, evening discussions, mutual criticism and help; how to behave in the field etc. (The team may consist of outsiders only, of local people and outsiders together, or of local people only).
 - *Shared presentations and analysis*: where maps, models, diagrams and findings are presented by local people, and/or by outsiders, especially at community meetings, and checked, corrected and discussed. But who talks? Who talks how much? Who interrupts whom? Whose ideas dominate?
 - *Participatory planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring*, in which local people prepare their own plans, budgets and schedules, take action, and monitor and evaluate progress.
 - *Drama and participatory video-making*: on key issues, to enable people to discover how they see things, and what matters to them, and to influence those in power.
 - *Short standard schedules or protocols* as alternatives to questionnaires to record data (e.g. census or similar information from social mapping) in a standard and commensurable manner.
 - *Immediate report writing*, either in the field before returning to office or headquarters, or by one or more people who are designated in advance to do this immediately on completion of fieldwork.
- Specific methods have also been improvised and invented. Some of these can be found in recent sourcebooks (e.g. Schonhuth and Kievelitz, 1994; Kane, 1995; Mikkelsen, 1995; Welbourn, 1996; Archer and Cottingham, 1996b), and more can be expected.

Practical applications

Applications of RRA and PRA approaches and methods have proliferated and continue to multiply. The inventory which follows will be quickly outdated,⁸ but it can indicate some of the range.

Most of the applications have one of three purposes: (i) topic investigations and research (mainly RRA);⁹ (ii) training and orientation for outsiders and local people (generating much of the literature e.g. RRA Notes 19 Special Issue on Training; Pretty et al., 1995); and (iii) PRA proper, as an empowering process of appraisal, analysis, planning, action, monitoring and evaluation (under-reported, especially the later stages of the process).

Applications have been initially in five main sectors:

1. Natural resources management

- *Watersheds, and soil and water conservation*: e.g. participatory watershed planning and management (Pretty, 1990; Kerr, 1991; Devavaram *et al.*, 1991; Neeffes *et al.*, 1993; Shah, P. 1993; GOI, 1994; Hinchcliffe *et al.*, 1995; Mascarenhas, 1996).
- *Land tenure and policy* (Johansson and Hoben, 1992; TriPARRD, 1993; Freudenberger, 1994, 1996; Denniston with Leake, 1995).
- *Forestry*, including: social and community forestry; degraded forest assessment, protection, nurseries and planting; identification of tree uses; and uses and marketing of forest and woodland products (Case, 1990; Inglis, 1991; Freudenthal and Narowe, 1991; SPWD, 1992; Freudenberger, 1994; HSWG, 1995; M.K. Shah, 1995a; Vochten and Mulyana, 1995; Inglis and Guy, 1996).
- *Coastal resources and fisheries* (McCracken, 1990; Mascarenhas and Hildalgo, 1992; Colaco and Bostock, 1993; Pido, 1995; IDS Coastal and Fisheries, 1996).
- *People, parks and biodiversity* (Kar, 1993; Wild, 1994; Mason and Danso, 1995; Pocknell and Annaly, 1995; BSCRM and WWF-International, 1995; Denniston with Leake, 1995; Pimbert *et al.*, 1996; Gujja *et al.*, 1996; IDS People and Parks, 1996).
- *Community plans*: preparing Village Resource Management Plans (PID and NES, 1989); Participatory Rural Appraisal and Planning, as developed by AKRSP (Shah *et al.*, 1991).

2. Agriculture

- *Farmer participatory research*, farming-systems research and problem identification and analysis by farmers (Ampt and Ison, 1989; Dunn and Macmillan, 1991; FSRU, 1991; Lightfoot *et al.*, 1991; Gujt and Pretty, 1992; Chambers, 1993b; Drinkwater, 1993; Lightfoot and Noble, 1993; Manoharan *et al.*, 1993; ODA, 1995; Posadas, 1995; IDS Agriculture, 1996).
- *Livestock and animal husbandry* (Leyland, 1993; Maranga, 1993; Sonaiya, 1993; Young, 1993; RRA Notes 20, 1994; Special Issue on Livestock; Waters-Bayer and Bayer, 1994).
- *Irrigation*, including rehabilitation of small-scale gravity-flow irrigation systems and irrigation management research (Porten, 1985; Groenfeldt, 1989; Kasivelu *et al.*, 1995; Gosselink and Strosser, 1995).
- *Integrated pest management* especially in Indonesia (Kingsley and Musante, 1996; see also Omolo *et al.*, 1995).

3. People, poverty and livelihood

- *Women and gender*: participatory appraisal of problems and opportunities, and research into the conditions and lives of women (Welbourn, 1991; Grady *et al.*, 1991; Women of Sangams, Pastapur *et al.* and Pimbert, 1991; Tolley and Bentley, 1992; pers. comm. Meena Bilgi; Robinson

(Eva), 1993; Welbourn, 1993; Gujt, 1994; M. Shah and Bourarach, 1995; Dent, 1996; IDS Gender, 1996; Gujt and Shah, forthcoming).

- *Selection*: finding and selecting poor people for a new programme, de-selecting the less poor from an old one (e.g. Chandramouli, 1991; RRA Notes 15: *passim*; Pretty *et al.*, 1995; Turk, 1995).
 - *Livelihood analysis*: means and economics of livelihoods, (e.g. Bishop and Scoones, 1994), the identification of non-agricultural income-earning opportunities, seasonality, credit etc. (Colaco and Gururaja, 1993: 18-26; Appleton, 1995; Murphy, 1995).
 - *Participatory poverty assessments* as part of the World Bank-supported Country Poverty Assessments in Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, South Africa and Mozambique (see below pp. 127-8).
- ### 4. Health and nutrition
- *Health (general)* For collections of papers, see RRA Notes 16; de Koning and Martin, 1996; IDS Health, 1996. For applications, see also e.g. Francis *et al.*, 1992; Joseph, 1992; Welbourn, 1992; Vigoda, 1994.
 - *Food security and nutrition assessment and monitoring* (Maxwell, 1990; Appleton, 1992; Buchanan-Smith *et al.*, 1993).
 - *Water and sanitation assessment, planning and location* (Narayan, 1993; Joseph, 1994; Okumu, 1994; RDWSSP, 1994).
 - *Sexual and reproductive health*: (Tolley and Bentley, 1992; Cornwall, 1992; IDS Sexual and Reproductive Health, 1996. For HIV/AIDS awareness and action see Welbourn (ed.), PLA Notes 23: 57-81, special section; Duangsa, 1995; Welbourn, 1996).
- ### 5. Urban (RRA Notes 21, special issue on Participatory Tools and Methods in Urban Areas, 1994)
- *Needs assessment* (Drinkwater, 1994; Ward *et al.*, 1995; Jayaratne and de Silva, 1995).
 - *Community participation* (Reusen and Johnson, 1994).
 - *Urban poverty and violence* (M.K. Shah, 1995b; Moser and Holland, 1995, 1996).
- Beyond these five sectors, other applications of PRA and PRA methods have multiplied. An illustrative but surely incomplete list is:
- *Adult literacy*, with the REFLECT (Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques) approach pioneered by ActionAid in Bangladesh, El Salvador and Uganda (EA, 1994; Archer, 1995; Archer and Cottingham, 1996a and b) and being spread to other countries.
 - *Children* (Johnson *et al.*, 1995; Teixeira and Chambers, 1995; Gujt, 1995; PLA Notes 25 which includes special issue on children's participation, 1996).
 - *Education* (Kane, 1995; Booth *et al.*, 1995; Kane *et al.*, 1996).

- o *Emergencies and refugees* (Slim and Mitchell, 1992; Hinton, 1995; Hudock, 1996; M.K. Shah, 1996; IDS Emergencies, 1996).
- o *Organizational analysis* (Kievelitz and Reineke, 1993; Howes and Roche, 1995).
- o *Participatory monitoring and evaluation* (P. Shah *et al.*, 1991; McPherson, 1995).

Crosscutting all these, PRA approaches and methods have had two other practical applications: as alternatives to questionnaire surveys; and for policy appraisal and insights.

Participatory alternatives to questionnaire surveys

One consequence of the evolution of participatory methods has been the discovery of alternatives to many of the normal applications of questionnaire surveys (Mukherjee, 1995). The reliability, validity and trustworthiness of these methods are assessed in Chapter 7 (pp. 141-5).

Possibly some questionnaire surveys will always be justified, notably some time-series and national-sample surveys. The evidence about many larger and one-off surveys is, though, so damning (see e.g. Mors, 1970; Campbell *et al.*, 1979; Hill, 1986; Bleek, 1987; Daane, 1987; Inglis, 1991, 1992; Gill, 1993a) that almost any alternative would be welcome - for their costs are high: in time and money; in delays in learning; in resources diverted from other means of learning; in information which is misleading or not used; in reconfirming the realities of uppers (pp. 93-7); and in discrediting the social sciences. Apart from providing employment for enumerators, evidence of benefits from such surveys is often slender.

Questionnaire surveys have, though, proven robustly sustainable as a rural and urban industry. For some professionals, rural research is questionnaire surveys. The fixation is illustrated by Poate and Daplyn's 1993 textbook *Data for Agrarian Development*, promoted as 'a comprehensive guide to collecting and managing agricultural data in developing countries'. The authors say that the surveyor must match the approach to the purpose, and that the reader should seek out accounts from as wide a range of studies as possible (1993: 3 and 207). But they themselves give just one paragraph each to aerial survey, case study, rapid methods and experimentation, and dedicate most of the other 365 pages of text to the planning, execution, analysis and writing up of questionnaire or measurement surveys.

A major source of sustainability has been the demand of donor agencies and governments for surveys for four purposes: to gain insights, including for project formulation; to identify social and economic differences; to provide baselines and means for monitoring and evaluation; and to generate statistics. For each of these there now exist participatory alternatives.

- (1) *Insights*. Questionnaire surveys used to gain insights, especially for project formulation, select and simplify reality, often mislead, and reconfirm the realities of uppers, missing local complexity and diversity. In contrast, PRA methods usually engage the commitment and

analysis of local people, enable the expression and sharing of their diverse and complex realities, give insights into their values, needs and priorities, and can also lead on into participatory action. PRA methods such as mapping, seasonal calendars, trend and change analysis, well-being ranking, matrix scoring, Venn diagramming, and linkage diagramming have enabled local people to express their knowledge, categories, criteria and preferences. Local analysts are also often committed to ensuring information is complete and accurate. No methods are foolproof, but these are a plurality, not just one, and permit triangulation, cross-checking and analysis from emic perspectives.

- (2) *Identifying social and economic differences*. Participatory methods have been used increasingly instead of questionnaires to identify so-called target groups: well-being ranking has been used for this purpose in Ethiopia, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Vietnam, and probably in many other countries; in India MYRADA and ActionAid have used it to identify the poorer with whom they seek to work; in Pakistan, ActionAid staff have facilitated the ranking of 38,000 people for the same purpose (pers. comm. Humera Malik); in Bangladesh, BRAC has tested participatory mapping as an alternative way to identify target groups for a non-formal education programme; and in Pakistan, listing and card sorting have been used to enable local people to categorize types of potato farmers (Guijt and Pretty, 1992).

- (3) *Monitoring and evaluation*. For project baselines and later impact assessments, questionnaire surveys pose horrendous problems: of comparability of sample; of assessing what would have happened anyway; of finding comparable control areas; and of disentangling multiple causality and knowing what caused what. In consequence, conventional baseline surveys are virtually useless for impact assessments.

The question now is how widely local people can be enabled to identify their own indicators, establish their own participatory baselines, monitor change, and evaluate causality, for example through causal linkage diagramming of observed phenomena which touch their personal experience over seasons and years.

These frontiers have begun to be explored. In Bangladesh, participatory mapping has been facilitated by CARE to enable women to present and assess changes resulting from a Women's Development Project (Vigoda, 1994). In Bolivia, a participatory baseline study (Vigoda *et al.*, 1994) for the Central Chuquisaca Renewable Natural Resources Project was facilitated in 23 communities. Among other activities, 55 maps were made by groups. Through participatory analysis, the study was more than a baseline; it helped local people to identify their problems and priority interests, and to define the project's interventions. In India, in some AKRSP villages in Gujarat, village volunteers retained the maps made by villagers and used them for monitoring soil and water-conservation measures and yields (Shah *et al.*, 1991). In Nepal, in September 1991, ActionAid staff facilitated participatory mapping as a basic method for a utilization survey for services. Participatory maps were made in about 130 villages, giving

information covering the total population of each. This presented a differentiated census, and a range of information, including utilization of services for education and health, the use of pit latrines, adoption of various agricultural practices, and participation in group activities. The information was collated by the ActionAid teams and presented in conventional tables (ActionAid-Nepal, 1992).

(4) *Statistics*. Participatory approaches have been equated, misleadingly, with only qualitative data. But whether literate or not, almost all people can count, and counting can be shared and cross-checked visually. As in the Nepal utilization survey, statistics can be generated by participatory methods, especially mapping followed by listing and counting.

Examples have been documented in countries as diverse as Bolivia (Vigoda *et al.*, 1994), India (NCAER, 1993), Nepal (ActionAid-Nepal, 1992) and Zimbabwe (Marindo-Ranganai, 1995), and personal communications supply other examples from Nigeria, Pakistan and the Philippines. From its research project to compare RRA/PRA methods with questionnaire sample surveys, the National Council of Applied Economic Research in India found that participatory methods could generate valid statistical data at the village level, as well as unexpected insights (NCAER, 1993). Participatory maps can be used to present demographic data (Marindo-Ranganai, 1995), with different seeds, colours, stones, vegetables or other symbols representing different sorts of people and conditions. In India, local people, non-literate as well as literate, have used marks and symbols on cards to record household information, including assets.

Two methodological aspects deserve comment: (i) participatory mapping and listing avoids laborious sampling and sampling errors, since all people are included; sampling focuses on the choice of communities, not choice within them; (ii) comparability can be sought through protocols or schedules. Parmesh Shah (1993) has developed this approach with a 'visual interactive questionnaire'. In India, IFPRI and ICRISAT developed and tested procedures, schedules and routines for facilitating and recording visual analyses by villagers, using mapping, charts for food and women's time and energy-use.

The potential of RRA and PRA methods can be sensed from an account by the late Selina Adjepong-Asem (pers. comm. July 1992) of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife-Ife, Nigeria, of monitoring a soyabean project in Nigeria:

I trained the . . . soyabean project group in the use of PRA for monitoring of the project impact in five states of the Federation i.e. Kaduna, Niger, Enugu, Anambra and Oyo States . . . The group of 16 researchers were amazed about how much easier it is to obtain indepth information through participatory mapping in addition to other RRA techniques they have already known. We were able through mapping to obtain all relevant socio-demographic information we required for the project; for example, the number of households in a village, households involved in

soyabean production, gender issues in soyabean production, utilization of soyabean, and preference rankings of various soyabean diets . . . We gathered an incredible amount of information within an hour and a half visit to the village . . . The researchers have been begging me to give more training in PRA . . .

In cases such as this, PRA methods, used well, can be not only more cost-effective than questionnaire surveys; they are also more popular with researchers and local people alike, all of whom learn from the process. After using PRA methods, a villager in Zimbabwe had this to say: 'We did not know we had all this information' (Marindo-Ranganai, 1995: 61); and an NGO worker in Sri Lanka said: 'I shall never go back to questionnaires'.

In the mid-1990s, the use of PRA methods in place of questionnaire surveys has already occurred on a large scale, but has passed largely unnoticed and unresearched. Issues now include the feasibility and cost of training fieldworkers in PRA methods, the trade-offs between participation and standardization, the ethics of people's time taken and expectations raised, and how far local people can own the data they generate and use it for their own censuses, appraisal, baseline indicators, monitoring and evaluation.

Insights for policy

RRA and PRA approaches and methods have generated policy-relevant understandings of local realities. Explorations have taken two forms: thematic and general.

Thematic explorations

These have been numerous, and have typically led to insights which modify or add to the beliefs and knowledge of policymakers:

- o In Chad in 1991, 13 survey facilitators worked in 55 representative villages with a checklist as guide for group interviews, to learn people's perceptions of food-security problems, and what solutions they proposed. The study found three categories of administrative area, each with a distinctive household food-security strategy. It challenged conventional policy thinking that promoting free-market systems was the key to raising production. The constraints, rather, were lack of credit for ploughs, oxen, improved seeds and more efficient irrigation (Buchanan-Smith, *et al.*, 1993).
- o In Zimbabwe in November 1991, RRA with PRA methods were used to investigate the effects on agriculture of structural adjustment policies. RRAs were conducted by a team of researchers over two weeks in two communal areas. The report (FSRU, 1991) was completed immediately after the fieldwork. Its findings and recommendations covered marketing, transport, input supply, prices, food security, and farmers' attitudes towards agricultural structural-adjustment policies.

- o In Tanzania (Mohamed Idris, pers. comm.; Johansson and Hoben, 1992), RRAs were conducted to find out about land tenure. Four teams of mid-level policymakers stayed five days in four villages, each chosen to represent different conditions. They found that communities and people were already doing land-use planning; that imposing a land-use map was misguided; that the government's top-down approach was wrong; and that new participatory approaches were needed.
- o In Honduras and Panama, mapping has been used by indigenous Indians to defend their land (Denniston with Leake, 1995). Indigenous 'surveyors' visited zones and hand-drew maps, showing land use. The maps showed an almost perfect overlap between the remaining forest, savannah and wetland with the Indian territories. A consolidated master map served as the basis for presentations to government ministers, other indigenous peoples, conservationists and NGO groups at two-day conferences in the two capitals, Tegucigalpa and Panama City. The maps provided a graphic and credible base for political campaigns to legalize communal homelands and stem incursions by settlers and development by multinational companies. The Panamanian Minister for Government and Justice gave public support for legal recognition of Indian homelands in Darien. Two Miskito Indians from Nicaragua asked the Indian co-ordinators to help them with a mapping effort of their own.
- o In the Gambia, Zambia, and the Philippines,¹⁰ participatory seasonal calendars revealed school fees and expenses falling due at bad times of the year. This is during the rains, when food and cash are shortest, disease at a peak, and the need to work intense, aggravated further in Zambia by the high costs of Christmas. In consequence, the Zambian Government was in 1995 considering changing the dates of payment. The Gambian Government, within a few months of the finding, re-scheduled school fees for a time of year better for parents. Subsequently, more girls were going to school (pers. comms Eiteen Kane (1994) and Haddy Sey (1995); Colletta and Perkins, 1995).
- o In Nepal in 1992 the Tarai Research Network was established to improve the timeliness, accuracy and relevance of information flows between lowland farmers and agricultural policymakers. Seventeen network members were recruited, including academics, agricultural researchers and extensionists, to be available when needed. They were trained in PRA philosophy, behaviour and attitudes, and techniques. Three rounds of disaster assessments following flood, drought and hail damage helped focus and target relief and rehabilitation. A study in 44 villages solved the mystery of aggregate statistics showing slowly-rising yields while detailed field reports showed them declining: agricultural productivity jumped when irrigation or high-yielding varieties were introduced, after which long-term decline followed (Winrock International, 1995; Gill, 1996a and b).

Other recent policy-relevant findings from RRA and PRA illustrate a range of applications and insights:

- o The position and lives of women in Morocco (Shah and Bourrarach, 1995): 'Women's problems and priorities vary sharply, between those

communities with access to basic services and infrastructure and those without, and between women of different social groups in the same community; and often differ from those of men.'

- o Urban violence in Jamaica (Moser and Holland, 1996): 'Area stigma, from living in an area with a bad reputation for violence, makes it difficult to get employment.'
- o Girls' education in The Gambia (Kane *et al.*, 1996): 'Girls denied access to primary education are bitter, and about a quarter of girls of school age have been "invisible", not considered eligible because they were about to be married.'
- o Conservation management of two parks, in India and Pakistan (Gujja *et al.*, 1996): 'Local people are able to define wise [land] use and conservation for themselves in a responsible manner.'
- o Land tenure in Guinea (Freudenberger, 1996): 'The belief of officials that customary tenure systems no longer existed was wrong: tenure systems persisted, were immensely diverse, and had to be taken into account in formulating policy.'
- o Forest policy in the UK (Inglis and Guy, 1996): 'Village people in Scotland are interested in forests as a means of generating local livelihoods.'

General explorations

To date, these have taken mainly the form of participatory poverty assessments (PPAs). These have been part of some of the country poverty assessments sponsored by the World Bank. PRA methods were first used for PPAs in Ghana, and then in Zambia, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa and Mozambique.¹¹ National teams were trained first in PRA. They then facilitated local people's own appraisal and analysis. The objectives were to explore local conceptions of poverty, vulnerability and relative well-being in poor urban and rural communities, to assess what poor people themselves saw as the most effective actions for poverty reduction, and to learn how their concerns and problems had changed and their perceptions of the effects of policy changes.

Approaches differed. In Ghana and Zambia, a trained team worked in more depth in fewer communities. In Kenya and Tanzania, multiple teams worked in more communities in a more standardized manner. In South Africa, 14 local organizations conducted thematic studies, 8 of them using PRA approaches and methods.

The Zambian PPA showed the policy potential. The rural part of the Zambian PPA was conducted in six representative villages, and the urban part in two communities. Two examples of specific insights were first, that rural women needed maize grinders, as until the urban subsidy on mealie meal was removed, they had been buying subsidized urban maize meal, not grinding their own as had been supposed; and second, how much remote rural people valued all-weather roads for access to markets and to medical treatment during the rains. More generally, the World Bank task manager found that the PPA provided 'extremely valuable insights when addressing issues of cross-sectoral balance . . . consistent messages were generated from these exercises which created a convincing composite picture of the

priorities of the rural and urban poor in relation to public policy' (in Norton and Stephens, 1995: 15).

The Zambia PPA led to thematic explorations. The PPA found that health services were generally given higher priority than education. Wealth and well-being ranking in a study of the impact of user fees in health in Zambia presented clearly to policymakers the realities of how sharply the introduction of user fees had deterred and debarred the very poor from access to health services and schools. There was a wide gap between policy-in-principle and policy-in-practice regarding exemptions from charges for the destitute and those with infectious or chronic diseases (Booth, 1995; Booth *et al.*, 1995; Milimo, 1996). The PPA also led to action. Its finding that hostile behaviour by health staff deterred poor people from seeking medical treatment was addressed by a programme of training launched by the Ministry of Health (Norton and Stephens, 1995: 14).

These thematic and general explorations indicate a potential. Well-trained and motivated teams can use mixes of participatory methods to generate up-to-date and valid policy-relevant insights. The realities of lowers – the poor, the marginalized, women, the remote – can then be presented credibly to uppers. Some policy changes, like the timing of school fees, can bring early gains to the poor for low cost. Others, like land-tenure and rights, are harder and need longer commitment. With this new repertoire of approaches and methods, the way is open for the state to be more up-to-date and more in touch (pp. 63–4), and for policy to fit and serve better the varied needs of the poor.

But credible knowledge does not ensure change. The crunch is whether, in both policy-in-theory and policy-in-practice, changes actually occur. Vested interests, inertia, transfers, the short-time horizons of politicians and bureaucrats all maintain the *status quo*. It is usually easier to delay and do nothing. Against such obstacles, many tactics can be used (Johnson, 1995; A. Shah, 1996). Experience points to the importance of patience and alertness, and to the personal understanding and commitment both of policymakers and of those who seek to change policy.

Why did it take us so long?

Faced with these many applications, experiences and potentials, the mystery is why we have not known about them earlier. If PRA approaches and methods are so powerful and popular, the puzzle is why it has taken until the 1990s for them to emerge: for different methodological streams to converge, coalesce and take off; for the menu of methods to be variously brought together, invented and evolved, leading to what appears to be self-sustaining cross-fertilization and growth; for so many applications to become evident. At a personal level, others like me in middle-age can wonder how for decades we have been working in rural development without knowing about all this. More generally, it is astonishing that it has taken so long, despite earlier pioneers, for the development community as a whole to discover not just the richness of the knowledge of local people, but more crucially their creative and analytical abilities.

Much of the mystery disappears if we look for explanation not in local people, but in ourselves, as outsider professionals. Our personal and professional concepts, values, methods and behaviour have prevented our learning. Our beliefs, behaviour and attitudes have been similar all over the world. Agricultural scientists, medical staff, teachers, officials, extension agents and others have believed their knowledge to be superior and that of farmers and rural people to be inferior; and even when the richness and validity of much local knowledge began to be recognized, we still believed that we had to be the ones who did the analysis.

So as outsiders most of us dominated. We lectured, holding sticks and wagging fingers; we interviewed impatiently, firing rapid questions; we interrupted, and did not listen; we 'put down' the poor and weak. Our reality blanketed that of local people. Our beliefs, demeanour, behaviour and attitudes were then self-validating. Treated as incapable, poor people behaved as incapable. They reflected the beliefs of the powerful. Their capabilities were hidden even from themselves. Nor did many outsider professionals know how to enable local people to express, share and extend their knowledge. The ignorance and inabilities of local people were then not just an illusion; they were an artefact of outsiders' behaviour and attitudes, of arrogant and ignorant manners of interacting.

For PRA to take off, different conditions had also to come together: recognition of past error and inadequacy; greater confidence, professionalism and inventiveness among NGOs; new approaches and methods, like those of agro-ecosystem analysis, still less than two decades old; an international community of communication; and a critical mass and momentum in which approaches and methods could be shared between disciplines, countries, and organizations.¹²

Most important of all has been learning that to facilitate PRA our behaviour and attitudes matter more than the methods. Perhaps then it is understandable that it has taken until now for new participatory approaches and methods, in their many forms and with their many labels, to cluster and coalesce, and to spread, as philosophy, repertoire and practice. Done well, they are still a small proportion of all rural and urban development activity. But they have spread and evolved, and continue to do so. We can ask ourselves whether, in the mid-1990s, their time has come; and whether they are one good reason for hope for the twenty-first century.