

## Editorial

This fourth issue of RRA Notes begins with a further exposition of measures and meanings of wealth. The author has used the quick technique of Wealth Ranking in a strongly caste village of Northern India, and then compared results with measures obtained over a much longer period. The study demonstrates that the technique is valid in caste society. This very simple technique helps in the stratification of households within a community, and also furthers understanding of local people's own criteria for wealth and economic status. In the second piece the use of popular theatre through video is explored. The author and team used role-playing to tackle difficult issues of tenure, and demonstrate that such participation helped both the people involved, the audience and the outside development workers. There must be many other examples of such participatory and gaming approaches: we would be delighted to hear of them. The final piece describes a recent participatory exercise, also in India. This is most interesting in the participation of villagers in the exploration, the analysis and the presentation stages.

We have also included with this issue the Distribution List of people who at present receive RRA Notes. This is as at 1 February 1989. Although this list is continuously updated we will only send out updates periodically. Many will not have received copies of issues 1-3: please write if you would like to receive particular issues. One reason for the publication of this list is that we hope to encourage those working with or interested in RRA-type approaches to send material directly to others on the list. However we do still look forward to receiving contributions to future issues of RRA Notes.

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Jules N Pretty</b>, IIED, 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1B ODD, UK.</li></ul> |
|---|

1

## Wealth ranking in a caste area of India

Ruth Grosvenor-Alsop

• **Abstract**

Collecting and analysing information in order to understand social behaviour requires a variety of methods and techniques. These techniques are developed from conceptual frameworks of social organisation. As the need for culturally appropriate frameworks becomes recognised it follows that the tools of the social analyst should also be culturally appropriate. Using a technique of data collection that has proved effective in one location could give inaccurate results in another, especially when it is based on a cultural definition by the society undergoing analysis. The testing of the technique discussed in this paper emerged from these considerations.

• **Introduction**

The following discussion concerns a technique of ranking communities by wealth. While it has been successfully tried and tested in parts of Africa and Mexico (de Walt, 1979; Grandin, 1980, 1983; Herren, 1988; Plattner, 1974; Young, 1987) its applicability to other societies remained unclear. Here I examine the use of the technique in one part of India.

For a variety of reasons, development projects and research work often require some knowledge of differences in wealth within a community. Such reasons include sample selection, identifying groups, finding out which project activities are relevant to particular groups, and understanding the dynamics of resource use and control within the community. Wealth Ranking is a technique which enables ranking of a community in a relatively short period of time compared to many other means of stratification. By using locally defined indicators of wealth it also

avoids elements of ethnocentricity on the part of those seeking the information influencing the outcome of the ranking exercise.

The type of Wealth Ranking carried out in the present study is that outlined by B E Grandin in her publication *Wealth Ranking in Smallholder Communities: A Field Manual* (Grandin, 1988). It is not the purpose of this paper to reiterate the details of how to carry out this type of wealth ranking, but to describe the results of the technique in a society spatially and culturally distant from the ones where it has been applied before. A brief description of the technique is, however, needed if the rationale for and findings of the testing are to be fully understood.

Before Wealth Ranking can be carried out it is necessary to select the community in which the information gathering is to be done. Selection of communities depends on the purpose of the data collection. The community to be ranked then has to be defined as does the local concept of household. A representative cross section of the defined community is then selected from a listing. As Grandin notes "100 households or less is desirable". Once the households to be ranked have been selected, the name of each household head is written on a separate card. Informants are then chosen, reflecting any different fractions or groups that may exist in the community. It is recommended that 3-5 informants are selected who are then approached individually. After a discussion with each informant of the local definition of wealth the informant is asked to sort the cards into piles representing the wealth of each household. Informants are advised that households they consider to be of roughly equal wealth should be grouped together in one pile. The piles are reviewed and verified at the end of this stage and notes made of the position of each household. From the responses of the various informants an average

score is computed. The scores are then grouped and ranked.

This means of information gathering is dependent on respondents' perceptions of members of their communities ability to have 'access to and control over important economic resources' (Grandin, 1988). Although the correlation between responses and the final average scores was high in Kenya and Nigeria (Grandin, 1980, 1983), it was unclear whether the same high degree of uniformity between the responses of informants would be found in a highly stratified society.

In the village in which this wealth ranking technique was tested, situated in North Bihar in India, caste plays a major role in the relative resource wealth of households. Caste is not simply an economic phenomenon. Bound up with the ascribed status and occupational position of the household is a strong ideology of social order which is shared by the majority of community members. It seemed reasonable to assume this ideology concerning the hierarchical nature of social organisation could influence the responses obtained from informants of different castes. For example, a house might be ranked as poor or wealthy according to its relative (low or high) caste position vis-a-vis the informant. It was this possibility that the testing of the technique in Bihar sought to address. In addition, the interesting possibility of comparing the 'Wealth Rank' of households with more conventional indicators of wealth was offered through previous and detailed research carried out in the village (Grosvenor-Alsop, 1988).

The first question this paper sought to answer was the degree of correlation between the responses of different social groups. The second was how well the wealth ranks corresponded to a previously drawn up stratification based on income. The final question concerned the relationship between wealth rank and other aspects of a household's resource position. The particular aspects, or assets, used for analysis were access to livestock (type, number and tenure), access to land (type, amount and tenure), and the number of household members in employment. These were recurrent and common to all respondents' definitions of

wealth. A further aspect considered by all informants was the source of income. Unfortunately data were not available in a suitable form to test the relationship of this with wealth rank.

### **The setting**

The village in which the field testing took place is situated about one and a half hours drive north of the State capital of Patna. Of the eighty-seven households in the village, seventy are involved in some way in agricultural production. The village is divided into ten social groups. Three are scheduled caste, four are backward caste, two are caste Hindu and one group is Muslim. These social groups have a tendency to live in separate hamlets.

The community is dominated economically, socially and politically by one of the caste Hindu groups. Strong patron-client relationships are found between this dominant group and other Hindu households. These relationships are important in determining poorer and lower caste households' access to factors of agricultural production. A strong degree of correlation was found between the per capita income of a household and its social group.

### **Wealth ranking by different social groups**

Five respondents were selected to wealth rank the 87 households resident in the village. Of these, 2 were from high caste households (one of which was the richest and most powerful in the village), 1 was from a lower caste household, 1 from a very low caste household and, 1 from a Muslim household. The correlations between the responses of the five different informants were found to be high with coefficients ranging between 0.86 and 0.94 where the critical values were 0.19 and 0.22 at a 5% significance level for 1 tail and 2 tail tests respectively.

The greatest difference in scores was noted between the two high caste households and the Muslim informant. Higher levels of correlation were evident between the lower caste groups and the informant. The powerful high caste respondent's scores showed the least degree of

correlation with the averaged scores. However, none of the differences in scores are statistically significant. Apparently intra household differences in social status did not affect the responses of different informants. Therefore Wealth Ranking is an appropriate tool to use for social analysis in a stratified society such as found in this village in Bihar.

### **Income and wealth rank**

Income data for a sample of 38 households in this village had been collected for the cropping year June 1985 to May 1986. Income was divided into four categories.

- (i) Agricultural production,
- (ii) Wages, salaries and remittances,
- (iii) Manufactured Goods and Processed Foods; and,
- (iv) Capital assets.

Income was assessed using a value added technique, taking into account all possible costs of production, including equipment wear, maintenance and replacement. Family and unremunerated labour were not accounted for. Agricultural production covered income and costs of both crops and livestock. Surveys were applied to all sample households at appropriate times during the year, for example post sowing for seed input information, post harvest for yield information etc.

Five income strata were drawn up based on the per capita annual income of households. using Spearman's Rho test to ascertain the correlation between income groups (based on per capita income) and wealth ranks a coefficient of 0.49 was obtained where the critical values were 0.28 and 0.33 at a 5% significance level for one tailed and two tailed tests respectively. There was thus a relationship between the two methods of stratifying the village, if not a particularly strong one.

To examine this further, income data was aggregated and the community stratified according to households' annual income. A Spearman's Rho test carried out on this new income stratification and the ranked responses of informants gave different results from those obtained using a per capita based income stratification. A coefficient of 0.80 was

obtained at the same significance levels and critical values as the above.

The closer correlation between how informants ranked households and a households' aggregate income, as opposed to a households per capita income, indicates that informants do not take the number of residents in a household into account when considering its relative wealth. Household wealth is perceived as a function of the unit, not of its contributory members.

### **Assets and wealth rank**

The assets for which wealth rank were tested for correlation included land (type, amount and tenure), animals (type, amount and tenure), and number of people engaged in paid employment.

### **Land**

The two types of tenure were considered - owned and sharecropped. In this village sharecropping terms were such that half the gross value of produce accrued to those owning the land. Five different land types were broadly recognised by cultivators. For the purposes of this paper it is not necessary to discuss the relative value of each land type, and I have examined those factors informants take into account when they rank households according to wealth. It is therefore enough to ascertain whether a relationship exists between the assets mentioned above, and whether the relationship is significant at an aggregated or disaggregated level. Table 1 records the correlation coefficients.

**Table 1. The relationship between wealth rank and land**

Land type	Wealth rank	
Owned		
1	-.38	
2	-.45	
3	-.58	
4	-.52	
5	-.50	
TOTAL	-.77	critical values
Sharecropped		(1 tail, 0.05) = .26
1	-.02	(2 tail, 0.05) = .31
2	.01	
3	.23	
4	.29	
5	No type 5 sharecropped	
TOTAL	.12	

Because of the way in which ranking is carried out by the particular computer package used in this instance a high Wealth Rank was accorded a low numerical value. A minus sign preceding the coefficient indicates that high values of one variable tested are associated with low values of another. A minus sign thus actually means a positive relationship between the two variables. For example when testing the correlation between Wealth Rank and Land Owned, a coefficient of -0.38 actually indicates that the wealthier a household (i.e. it has been given a low wealth rank score) the larger will be the area of land it owns.

The initial observation to be made is that there exists a positive relationship between the wealth rank attributed to households and the total amount of land that a household owned. The apparent negative relationship between total amount of sharecropped land and wealth rank cannot be considered significant. Neither is it possible to draw any significant conclusion from the positive relationship observed between wealth rank and ownership of type 1 sharecropped land. The fifth landtype was one on which fruit tree crops (mainly for domestic consumption) and rough grass for grazing or building purposes grew. Few households in the village owned such land. This factor would affect the figures shown above.

It is reasonable to suggest that informants took the total amount of land that a household owned into account when ranking households. Ownership of all land types is significantly, if not strongly, related to the wealth rank ascribed to households. The results above are not conclusive enough to state that individual landtype was considered by informants in their assessment of a household's wealth rank, although given the relatively equal figures for four of the landtypes a consideration of this factor is implied. The amount and type of land sharecropped did not appear to be a consideration for informants.

### Livestock

Similar to the above, livestock was divided into that owned and that which was held on a share basis. With livestock the share is in the final revenue obtained from the sale of the animal. The terms are 50:50 to the owner and person caring for the animal.

The correlation coefficients for animals owned taken on share (shown in Table 2) indicate that the higher the wealth rank the more animals they are likely to own, and the fewer they are likely to have on a revenue sharing basis. The coefficients for shared animals are, however, too low to be considered significant in this analysis. The relationship expressed in the table between animals owned and wealth rank

suggests that informants did take into account the number of animals owned by a household. The figures indicate that ownership of buffalo and oxen were related to the wealth rank of a household, but the association is not strong enough to imply a causal relationship in wealth ranking.

### Persons employed and wealth rank

The results of carrying out a test of correlation between the wealth rank ascribed to households and the number of people in waged employment was not significant. However, when the value of income accruing to

households from those persons in employment was tested a figure of  $-0.36$  was calculated. Although not a particularly strong relationship this was above the critical value for both one and two tailed tests at a 5% level of significance. Assuming that the value of income was related to the source of earned income this figure would indicate that informants took into account the type of employment household members were engaged in rather than the number of persons employed.

**Table 2. The relationship between wealth rank and livestock**

#### Livestock

Owned		
Cow	- .26	
Buffalo	- .55	
Goat	- .02	
Ox	- .41	
TOTAL	- .42	
Share		critical value
Cow	.31	(1 tail, 0.05) = .26
Buffalo	.07	(2 tail, 0.05) = .31
Goat	.06	
Ox	.02	
TOTAL	.26	

## • Summary and conclusions

A concern over the cultural appropriateness of the technique of Wealth Ranking gave rise to the need to test it in a setting both spatially and socially distant from that in which it had been applied before. The results were conclusive in that Wealth Ranking is a useful technique of stratification for the area of India in which it was tested. It is reasonable to assume from this that the technique could be used in other parts of India.

Statistical tests were carried out comparing the results of the Wealth Ranking exercise with household attributes identified by informants as relevant to their assessment of a households. wealth. Only one aspect of the household used as a wealth 'indicator' by respondents, namely the number of household members in paid employment, initially did not appear to bear any relationship to their ranking of households. However it became clear through further testing that respondents were implicitly applying additional criteria to the one that they explicitly identified.

It also became apparent that local definitions of wealth were dependent on many more aspects of a households' resource position than were discussed during the definition of wealth sessions. The consistency of informants' responses suggests that these 'other' variables were concepts and perceptions common to all informants. These elements are ones that field workers, as outsiders, cannot appreciate in the short period of time usually available for an exercise in community ranking.

Wealth Ranking is a technique that can be used with confidence in India. It provides a quick, accurate and non-intrusive means of ranking a community. If a cautionary note is to be sounded it is not to use those household attributes identified by informants, in their definitions of wealth, as discrete indicators of wealth. In this instance perceptions of wealth took into account variables other than those discussed by informants in their definition of wealth.

- **Ruth Grosvenor-Alsop**, Intermediate Technology Development Group, Rugby, UK.

## REFERENCES

- de Walt, B. 1979. *Modernisation in Mexican Eliido*. Cambridge University Press
- Grandin, B.E. 1980. 'Small Cows, Big Money: Wealth and Dwarf Cattle Production in south East Nigeria'. PhD Thesis, Stanford University
- Grandin, B.E. 1983. 'The importance of wealth in pastoral production. A rapid method for wealth ranking'. Proceedings of workshop on Pastoral Systems Research, ILCA, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- Grandin, B.E. 1988. *Wealth Ranking in Smallholder Communities*. IT Publication, London
- Grosvenor-Alsop, R. 'Inter and Intra Household Analysis in a Village in Systems Research'.
- Herren, U. 1988. 'Pastoral Peasants: household strategies in Mukogodo Division, Lakipia District'. IDS Working Paper No 458 University of Nairobi, Kenya
- Platner, S. 1974. 'Wealth and Growth Among Mayan Indian Peasants'. *Human Ecology*, 2, pp 75-87
- Young, J. 1987. *Livestock Production in Lower Meru: Implications for a Livestock Programme at Kemujine Farmers' Centre*. ITDG, Rugby

## 2

# Popular theatre through video in Costa Rica: an idea for non-formal appraisal

**Keith Anderson**

Development practitioners arriving in a new locality may use a variety of information gathering techniques that could be called RRAs. Most appraisal techniques, combined with the fact that they are employed by a new arrival, encounter barriers to learning how local people feel about sensitive cultural and social issues. An appraisal I did last year in Costa Rica suggests that by promoting or organising local theatre development workers foreign to an area can learn much about local attitudes that may be essential to the future of a project.

First, it should be clarified that theatre is not a particularly rapid technique. In this article I suggest that outsiders can either work through local contacts or slowly build up confidence with locals to organise popular theatre. I loosely define popular or folk theatre as informal public entertainment in which the performers have no script, very little rehearsal or costumes, but act roles which are familiar to them.

I stayed for three months in the small town of La Suiza, in the Cartago central region of Costa Rica. My project was to experiment with video as a means for farmers to share their knowledge and strategies of natural resources conservation with others farmers living in the area. Including theatre in the video occurred to me because video and television are for most people primarily an entertainment medium, and people tend to turn off very quickly from uninteresting programmes. In fact, in La Suiza many locals had previous exposure to 'boring' technical videos and 'manipulative' commercial videos.

I also know that popular theatre campaigns and workshops such as the 1983 African Workshop for Theatre for Development in Murewa, Zimbabwe, or Caesar Chavez's 'El Teatro Campesino' organising migrant labourers in California, have been engaged in creative and successful ways of addressing development issues.

My contact with local people was greatly facilitated and accelerated by the extension personnel of the Center for Tropical Agricultural Research and Training (CATIE) in Turrialba. The area's extension agent introduced me to many families and patiently explained what he saw as the area's problems and opportunities. He thought it was not a good idea to use theatre in the video, as there was no theatre tradition in the area. Through CATIE I was also able to arrange lodging in La Suiza. Living in the community was the key to meeting and interacting with people daily, and in so doing establishing a working relationship which led to organisation of the theatre.

Bolivar, Mario and Edwin were landless workers who worked on CATIE's land behind my house. I would often invite them in for a beer after work. Several times we discussed their future financial security and chances to acquire land. This was not a favourite subject, partly because it is depressing, and partly because they did not know what God had planned for them; so I usually ended up doing most of the talking.

One afternoon after work when the workers visited I suggested we videotape a drama on a theme which they could choose, though I wanted it to be related to their daily lives.

Since all their lives they had worked for different landlords, they decided to act out a situation in which a worker approached the landlord to suggest ways in which the farm could be better managed. They said they wanted the drama to illustrate that many farm workers know farming better than the landlord, who often lives off the farm for most of the year. Spontaneously, the worker who acted the role of landlord was polite but uncooperative, arguing that for economic reasons the existing farming system could not be much altered. After we watched the drama later on the television we discussed what feelings underlay the formal relationship between landlord and workers. They said that usually they were not treated badly, but that landlords for whom they had worked were not generally personable, required too much work and most paid only enough for them to live very simply and save very little.

The workers acted out a second drama in which one of them went to the bank to ask for a loan to buy land. Mario, who played the banker, was not certain, but thought that a worker must have land as collateral for the loan. The worker was emotionally involved in his role, and pleaded for the future security of his family. He spontaneously suggested a new idea: that the bank considers his work history and consult his present employer as witness to his industriousness. The banker shuffled papers and gave him a very definite 'maybe'.

The effect of the video theatre when shown to community groups was interesting when contrasted with the farmer interviews I showed first. Whereas people quietly watched the interviews, occasionally verbally agreeing or disagreeing, during the drama people talked, shouted jokes, and children laughed. The workers had said that perhaps people would not take their drama seriously. But the fact was that it stimulated people's interest and comments both during and after the showing.

This is a simple example of theatre, and was easy to carry out because it was for video and not directly in front of an audience. But whether one uses this particular video theatre method or organises public performances, the feasibility and lessons learned from theatre indicate a great potential for non-formal appraisal techniques. The main benefit I see in

this technique is that the appraisal is participatory and benefits all involved, because all involved are appraisers and learners. I found that the acting itself allowed people a much more graphic and creative exploration of issues and possible action than interviews and conversation. The process of selecting themes, acting, and later connecting what is acted to the real situation requires and generates group cooperation.

Popular theatre is 'people's theatre', by and for the community. By involving themselves in theatre, appraisers can begin to understand local culture and at the same time give people a forum in which to learn more about themselves.

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Keith Anderson</b>, Intercooperation, Berne, Switzerland.</li></ul> |
|--|

## 3

## Participatory RRA in Gujarat

**Jennifer McCracken**

### • Introduction

Are not all RRAs participatory? Well, they are to the extent that it is the local people who are interviewed and it is their needs which the RRAers seek to investigate/address. But just how much can these local people be involved in actually conducting the appraisal work? This was one of the questions which we set out to answer last September/October in Gujarat.

The principal objective of the RRA exercise was to develop a framework for participatory

village-level planning for use by the Aga Khan Rural Support programme (India). I joined staff from AKRSP(I) and together we designed and conducted a participatory type of RRA in two villages in the coastal district of Gujarat - Lathodra and Kambalia. We did not follow exactly the same procedure in each village, but the general schedule was along the lines of that shown in Table 1. Each of the two six-person teams which conducted each week-long RRA was made up of AKRSP(I) staff and myself, and included specialists in agriculture, forestry, watershed management, monitoring and community and cooperation work.

**Table 1. General schedule of the RRA model**

Day	Activity
1	Visible presence Review secondary data with villagers Space: Map, Transect
2	Time: seasonal patterns Historical information Trends and changes
3	Analysis of information More focused checklist Further work in village on these checklist issues
4	Further work in village
5	Further work in village – if appropriate Analysis and pooling of information
6	Production of diagrams Small group meeting (SGM) with community leaders and some women of the village
7	Village planning session (VPS)

Lathodra and Kambalia were both relatively 'new' villages for AKRSP(I). Each had been visited by some members of their field staff to assess the potential for a specific project (in one case the construction of a checkdam, in the other the introduction of biogas plants) but little contact had been made yet with the villagers. The AKRSP(I) team therefore knew very little about the villages and the villagers knew relatively little about the work of AKRSP(I).

Before starting either of the RRAs we (the RRA team) paid an informal visit to each village. We consulted the Sarpanch (village headman) and asked his permission to conduct the RRA. We also met with leaders of each of the main communities in the village to explain the purpose of the RRA and to gauge the level of receptiveness towards our involvement in the village and towards the subsequent possibility of AKRSP(I) working there. While in each of the two villages we met with a favourable response to justify going ahead with the RRA, we were prepared to withdraw from a village if this was not the case.

We then discussed among ourselves the issues to be investigated, and drew up a preliminary checklist of ten issues:

- Availability of water
- Land use and ownership
- Status of animal husbandry
- Social group dynamics
- Formal village institutions
- Informal credit: systems
- Marketing
- Role of women in household economy
- Impact of the drought
- Past development projects.

Each of these issues was further broken down into sub-topics.

On the first day of the actual RRA, we stayed together as a team and spent some time visiting each of the different communities, to make it clear that we wanted to work with all social groups in the village, and were not biased towards an one group in particular. Indeed we spent a considerable proportion of our time during the first visits to the village simply wandering around and introducing

ourselves to the villagers, to make our presence known and to try and avoid any misunderstandings or suspicions about our intentions in the village.

Also on day 1 we tried to study the secondary data (village census records, map etc.) with some villagers to verify the figures and check for any changes which had occurred since the data were produced (encroachment of village grazing land, expansion of the housing area etc). We used the map for discussions to find out more information such as the ownership, productivity and problems of the different areas within the village.

We also used the map to help choose a representative transect line through the village - that is, a route along which we would pass through all the main zones within the village. We then walked this general route during the next several days, and noted down the characteristics and conditions of each zone. Again, the villagers were actively involved at this stage of information gathering. A group of two or three villagers joined us as we walked the transect. Their knowledge of the different zones was an essential supplement: to our own observations, and during interviews with other villagers encountered along the transect this group could also join in the discussions. Where possible we tried to work with this same small core group of villagers for several days; as they became familiar with the kinds of issues we were interested in we benefited more and more from their contributions and they were able to learn more about our approach. Indeed as the mystique of our work was removed this group of farmers in turn could tell other villagers of what was going on. As well as these benefits of participation by some of the villagers, we obtained an extra bonus in one of the villages, where one of the villagers accompanying us, a member of an untouchable caste, turned out to have a postgraduate training in sociology -a discipline which our team had been lacking!

Day 2 of the RRA focussed on the temporal information. We began to look for seasonal patterns, year-to-year trends and major changes, and consulted older members of the village for historical information. At this stage we split up into groups of two or three for the interviews, to cover a wider spread of topics,

in a shorter time, and to allow for more triangulation. In addition to the time-related 'questions, we tried to collect other types of information, depending on who we were interviewing, and we also left some time for continuing the work on the transect.

By this time, we had accumulated a considerable amount of information so the morning of day 3 was spent sharing this information within the team and identifying the topics which still needed to be investigated and the group of people who still needed to be met. We then drew up a more focussed checklist of these topics to be worked on during the next two days as our interviews became more focussed. I

By day 4 or 5 we withdrew from the village as we reached our 'optimal ignorance' level. In doing a participatory RRA, we found that this level was determined **not** only the amount of time we felt should be reserved for our own discussions on the information being gathered and the amount of detail and accuracy which we felt necessary, but also by the general feeling among the villagers. For instance, towards the end of his information gathering stage in Kambalia, we became aware of a degree of uneasiness during our interviews, when respondents were asked the same questions as they knew had already been asked to others, or when they were asked to provide more detail on questions they themselves had already answered. In this case, in order to avoid further antagonism, we decided to withdraw from the village rather earlier than we might otherwise have done i.e. we revised our idea of our 'optimal' level of ignorance. This cutting short of the village visit (by about half a day) did leave more gaps in our information, compared to the Lathodra RRA, but we felt this a worthwhile trade-off, weighed against the importance of maintaining a good rapport with the villagers.

An important next stage in the procedure was for the whole team to pool all the information to allow a comprehensive village report to be written, for the staff of AKRSP(I) to use in their future work with the village. It was also at this stage that we began to firm up our ideas as to the key problems and opportunities of the village and possible projects to help alleviate

the problems and/or make use of the opportunities.

We then drew a set of diagrams to illustrate our findings. In each of the RRAs, in addition to the map and transect these diagrams were mainly seasonal calendars showing the availability of the village's main resources, Problem periods were highlighted and opportunities were also marked. We then drew these diagrams on large sheets of card and tried to make them as understandable as possible, for the presentations, by minimising the amount of text and using colour-coding wherever possible. After trying out the diagrams in the first village we realised that the seasonal calendars could be simplified, by replacing the axis of individual months with 3 blocks of different colours, each representing a season. We were still not sure of how easy it would be to communicate our findings and ideas with these diagrams to the villagers, so as a first step we invited the leaders of each of the main communities to a small group meeting, outside the village. The actual identification of these people was quite straight-forward. We simply asked members of each community for the name of their respected leader, and then visited that person, to invite him to the meeting. We also made it clear that it was very important for some women to attend, and tried to find those women who would be most comfortable in speaking out at such a meeting. It proved difficult to convince the men of the value of this, and to convince the women that they had something to contribute, but in each of the two RRAs, the women who attended did speak up, especially when issues such as fuelwood were being discussed. As we presented each of the diagrams to the group, they helped us to amend any incorrect diagrams (for example, by showing on the map where areas marked as village grazing land were in fact government revenue land) and to fill in information on incomplete diagram (for example, adding an extra crop to the cropping calendar, or adding another problem to one part of the transect). The group could also tell us which diagrams they felt would be understood by most of the villagers. We also began at this stage to discuss with the group the issues represented in the diagrams and to get their ideas of the key problems in the village and any opportunities which they saw.

After this meeting with the leaders, we felt ready to go to the rest of the villagers with our findings. But in each case the leaders suggested it would be better if they themselves showed the diagrams to the other villagers. We welcomed these suggestions wholeheartedly, as they added greatly to the participatory nature of the RRA. So we accompanied the leaders to a general meeting in the village, to watch them present our findings. In Lathodra, the first village in which we tried this approach, we expected about 60 or 70 villagers to attend, but in the event 500 or 600 turned up! We had to abandon the idea of holding the meeting in the schoolroom, and convened instead on the open ground outside. The leaders stood up on a platform and held up and described each diagram in turn, and the issues being represented. The first diagram shown was the sketch map and the team watched as the elderly Brahmin who was presenting it hesitated each time he was showing a feature on the map. Then, realising the problem, he turned the map, upside down and continued more confidently with the presentation. Obviously the team's north-oriented map was how he envisaged his village!

The village meeting went on for some two hours. After sorting out the map, the Brahmin leader held up a transect diagram -a pictorial cross-section through the different areas of village land with notes on the conditions found there and special emphasis on the specific problems in each area. As he read out the notes, the other villagers began to shout out mistakes in the diagram: "You have left out an important problem in the grazing land; many people are mining the soil and that is why there is so little grass left". And in the housing area; none of those hand pumps are working now" Other leaders held up calendars showing when the water scarcity limits crop production, when it is that many of the villagers must buy fuel and fodder from outside the village, around when the landless labourers have to borrow money to see them through the slack period.

As well as enabling the team to correct their findings, each of the diagrams also provided a focus for discussion of the particular issue which it represented. Indeed they turned out to be a valuable means of ensuring that each key

issue was discussed. At one point the leader in charge of the presentations tried to show the fuel calendar very fleetingly and without commenting on it and was ready to move on to the next diagram which he obviously considered more interesting or important. But one of the villagers shouted out "Just a moment, Chief! It's clear that getting enough fuel is not a problem for you. In fact neither is it a problem for me. But it is a problem for many of the people in our village. So put up that diagram again, and let's talk about it!"

The fuel calendar was one of the diagrams which gave the women a chance to join in the discussions, as it dealt with a topic very relevant to their daily work. They were quick to point out mistakes. "That calendar shows that we collect wood from around the village; that's not true. There are virtually no trees left here to cut and we have to buy all our fuel from outside at that time."

After all the diagrams had been presented the discussion turned to ideas for dealing with some of the problems. A checkdam was the most popular option for many of the wealthier farmers with large landholdings near the river. But their wives argued that a bridge was more important. At present they have to wade across the river or make a long detour to the nearest crossing point, to bring food from their homes to their families working in the fields. We began to respond to the ideas which were being shouted out, sometimes throwing back questions for the villagers to consider: "That checkdam site will bring most benefit to farmers on an area of disputed land; that will cause problems for getting government approval for funding". We also began to tell the villagers about some of our own ideas such as biogas plants to help the fuel problem and an animal husbandry program to provide income for both the land-owning and landless members of the village. The discussions continued and the meeting finally ended with the villagers: deciding to form a Village Organisation to look into these various ideas with AKRSP(I).

A similar meeting was held in the second village, Kambalia, although as the Sarpanch insisted it was held during the day, fewer villagers attended. The smaller attendance made it easier to discuss each suggestion in

detail and four specific projects were identified as priority ones for AKRSP(I) to start work on. The disadvantage of the small attendance was that relatively few of the villagers heard or contributed to these decisions, and so the priority projects identified may not represent the priorities of the many absent villagers .

Overall from the experience of these two RRAs, I feel that there is much to be gained from a more participatory approach, but that it does require extra time and sensitivity. Time does need to be set aside at the beginning of the RRA to explain the work and seek the involvement of an interested group of villagers in helping the team during the early stages of information gathering. And sensitivity is essential if the expectations of the villagers are not to be raised inappropriately. I feel there is more danger of this in the case where villagers themselves are involved in the RRA, as they have invested their own time in the work, yet such a participatory approach does entail the team talking frankly with the villagers about the possible follow-up (and possible non follow-up) of the RRA. This openness should hopefully eliminate many of the misconceptions and suspicions and allow for a genuine two-way flow of information and ideas.

• **Jennifer McCracken**