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Notes on the RRA Workshop held at IDS, 19 May 1988

Robert Chambers

• Introduction

Seventeen people, mainly UK practitioners of RRA, met at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex on 19 May 1988 with three purposes:

- to take stock of the position with RRA;
- to share experiences and information ; and,
- to identify needs and plan action.

Taking stock

We noted that the sharp rise of interest in RRA, and much pioneering activity in Thailand and many other countries. With the Khon Kaen volume, RRA has come of age, and the case for it has been quite widely accepted. There are obvious dangers of the label of RRA being used to legitimise bad and biased work, but when it is well done, it often proves superior to earlier conventional methods.

We also recognised that demand for training from donor agencies, NGOs and governments is increasing and already exceeds the capacity to meet it. Training of trainers, and the efficient dissemination of methods, is now a priority. New methods are continually being invented and developed, but much of the experience is not properly recorded. Practitioners often do not realise how interesting and important their activities and methods are. Much of the literature is informal and scattered, but there are now several initiatives to write manuals.

Sharing experiences

Seven practitioners made presentations as follows:

1. Sheila Smith (University of Sussex) on the repeated and intractable problems faced in trying to find the poorest people during a study in rural Tanzania, and how they were eventually overcome.
2. Ian Scoones (Imperial College of Science and Technology, 48 Princes Gardens, London SW7 2PE) on methods of wealth ranking in rural Zimbabwe, gender differences in choice of indicators and participatory research by a community's 'barefoot researchers'.
3. Graham Clarke (IDS and Queen Elizabeth House, 21 St Giles, Oxford OX1 3LA) on team dynamics in a study in Pakistan with 6 researchers, three pairs of village case studies, the selection of contrasting households, and after the case studies, each researcher investigating a crosscutting theme by questioning his other five colleagues about their villages.
4. Jenny McCracken (IIED) on the use of diagrams in agroecosystem analysis as a quick means of finding out about an area and its people, learning farmers' conditions and constraints, and getting different disciplines to work together.
5. Robert Chambers (IDS) on ranking methods to enable individuals or groups to compare and evaluate different items in a class (such as sorts of vegetables or trees or rice varieties or fertiliser) according to their own criteria.
6. Mary Tiffen (Overseas Development Institute, Regent's College, Regent's Park, London NW1 4NS) on selecting villages for representativeness by ranking them by size and interviewing in each of the total population quartiles. Selection within each

quartile can be done so as to cover each agroecological zone and each administrative district.

7. David Potten (Hunting Technical Services, Elstree Way, Borehamwood, Herts WD6 1SB) on triangulation in an irrigation rehabilitation RRA in Zimbabwe. Biases were offset by each member of a team of three doing different things in different places, and comparing notes in the evenings.

Sources for these experiences are:

1 and 2: Forthcoming in RRA Notes Number Two.

3. Write to Graham Clarke at IDS or QEH.

4. Gordon R. Conway, Jennifer A. McCracken and Jules N. Pretty, 'Training Notes for Agroecosystem Analysis and Rapid Rural Appraisal', 2nd edition. Sustainable Agriculture Programme, IIED, 3 Endsleigh Street, London, WCIH ODD, November 1987.

5. Robert Chambers, pages 13-18 in these notes.

6. Write to Mary Tiffen, Overseas Development Institute.

7. J. Harvey, D.H. Fotten, 'Rapid Rural Appraisal of Small Irrigation Schemes in Zimbabwe.' Agricultural Administration and Extension, 27 (1987), pp 141-155.

Some points made in discussion were:

- ecological and social heterogeneity distinguish RRA from rapid urban appraisal, but they have much in common and can learn from each others' practices;
- finding the poorest can be a major problem and deserves more attention;
- maps and diagrams provide common languages, both between outsiders and rural people and between disciplines;
- traders are often neglected as key informants;
- rural people's own analysis and comparisons have been relatively neglected. Asking one group about a

contrasting group, and vice versa, can give quick and good insights; and,

- consultants and others need to use RRA methods more consciously and explicitly.

Identify needs and planning action

The major needs identified were:

- to capture, record and disseminate experience with current methods in different conditions, and with new methods as they are invented and developed;
- to prepare, test and revise handbooks or manuals on RRA methods, ensuring widespread distribution, feedback and revision;
- to develop training materials and expertise; and,
- to increase the cadre of experienced practitioners and trainers.

In summary, action in hand, known about proposed or agreed was as follows:

ITDG: (Intermediate Technology Development Group, Myson House, Railway Terrace, Rugby, CV21 3HT)

- Publication of Barbara Grandin's wealth ranking manual, due out in June;
- An internal ITDG workshop on RRA on 20 June; and,
- A bibliography on Applied Techniques in Social Science (not only RRA) being prepared for ODNRI, due in August More manuals on methods next year.

ILEIA: (Information Centre for Low External Input Agriculture c/o ETC, PO Box 64, 3830 AB Leusden, The Netherlands)

The next ILEIA Newsletter will report on the April 1988 ILEIA workshop on Participatory Technology Development.

In addition, and following the recommendations of that workshop, ILEIA will prepare manuals on:

- Getting Started: how to begin with a farming population;

- Finding and strengthening farmers' experiments;
- Outsiders and farm families: face-to-face communication;
- How NGOs can find out about agricultural research; and,
- How to learn farm families' agendas (including supporting their own analysis).

ODA: (Overseas Development Administration, Eland House, Stag Place, London SW1E 5DH)

(with Don Curtis, Institute of Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham, PO Box 363, Birmingham, B15 2TT). A guide to social analysis for development projects, following the ITDG/ODNRI literature search and review.

CDC: (Commonwealth Development Corporation, 33 Hill Street, London W1A 3AR)

A guide for planning and appraisal projects to be written by Antony Ellman.

NERAD : (NERAD, NEROA, Tha Phra, Khon Kaen 40260, Thailand) Following the April 1988 workshop at Khon Kaen, handbooks in Thai are to be produced on each of the following (see Pretty, Jules N. 1988. Simple and Innovative Tools for Agricultural Development Programmes, Sustainable Agriculture Programme, IIED, April)

IIED:

- A technique bulletin on transects, to be prepared by Jules Pretty, as the first of a possible series;
- A Guide to RRA for Agricultural Development, with a list of key workers and an annotated bibliography, being prepared for SIDA;
- Continuing training activities in several countries (Indonesia, USA, Switzerland etc.); and,
- RRA Notes, of which this is the first issue.

For the future, it may be useful to think of a loose leaf folder with sections for methods which can be removed and updated. A simple user-friendly layout is important. This will need liaison between those preparing manuals.

A further one-day workshop is planned for six months' time.

Participants in the RRA Workshop at IDS, 19 May 1988

Robert Chambers	IDS
Graham Clarke	IDS/QEH
Gordon Conway	IIED
Sander Essers	ILEIA
Rosalind Eyben	ODA
Mick Howes	IDS
Naila Kabeer	IDS
Priscilla Magrath	ODA
Jenny McCracken	IIED
David Potten	Hunting Technical Services Ltd.
Jules Pretty	IIED
Ian Scoones	Imperial College of Science and Technology
Andrew Scott	ITDG
Lawrence Smith	Wye College
Sheila Smith	University of Sussex
Mary Tiffen	ODI
Camilla Toulmin	IIED

What you can do

For the moment, the central point for information will best be IIED, with the RRA Notes as the focus. If you have ideas or information, please write to RRA Notes, Sustainable Agriculture Programme, International Institute for Environment and Development, 3 Endsleigh Street, London, WC1H 0DD

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