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## Portraits and stories

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- **Introduction**

The notion of using stories recounted by people met in the field as an important source of information described by Robin Mearns above was also explored in a recent zoning exercise conducted in North West Pakistan. The Malakand Fruit and Vegetable Development Project conducted a Rapid Agroecosystem Zoning (RAZ) of Alpuri Sub-Division, with the principal objective of producing strategies for the future development of the region. There were 4 major principles to the RAZ: local people helped to define the zones; the information was gathered by a multi-disciplinary team working in the field; the process involved several iterative phases of progressive filtering of information, joint workshop analysis and focussing on insights; and finally the zonal boundaries and strategies produced will always be subject to change in the light of information generated in the future.

Amongst the techniques used were portraits and stories, which are short, colourful descriptions of situations encountered by an RRA team in the field or stories recounted by people met there. They describe information that is difficult to incorporate into diagrams, help to bring to life the conditions of rural people, and in particular draw attention to how rural people perceive problems and opportunities.

- A farmer from Besham-Karora valley with 2 wives and 19 children. When asked, he himself had to ask a son the number of girls. Only the boys went to school: there is no local girls school. He owns 60 kanals (3 ha) of mostly irrigated land; producing mainly rice, but some maize and wheat.

Until 10 years ago his mother cultivated vegetables and worked in the field, but stopped due to old age. She complained that the young generation were not interested in working in the field and her skills were being wasted. Neither wife was interested - "why should they work in the fields if they can buy vegetables in the bazaar?" Since the forest were felled 15-20 years ago, the farmer believes that there is currently less rainfall and more soil erosion.

- A farmer and his elderly father by the Indus described the impact of the building of the Karakoram Highway, completed in 1974. The forests were rapidly depleted by local people, determined to maximise revenue. The hillsides are now almost empty, save for a few Acacia, and pine at higher elevations. The forests used to contain leopard, bears and jackals. But porcupine is still a serious pest, regularly damaging maize. These are located in their holes by trained dogs, and then shot on emergence. In the Shang area about 10 were shot last year.
- We met an orchard grower in Shahpur who felt that orchards were profitable, but there still remained an obligation to supply fruit to family, friends and neighbours free of charge. There was some evidence of pests and diseases, but as no extension officer has ever visited him, he does not take any precautionary plant protection measures.
- We visited one farmer close to the top of Kandaopass, at about 7000 ft, and asked about his major problems - they were stability of fruit production, pests on maize, and fuelwood. We asked about all

the nearby pine, did he not use this for wood? He said no, even though all those nearby belonged to him. He had first to receive written permission from the forest department before he could cut his own trees. So he walked long distances up into the hills, well away from the road, to chop pine. Unusually for the area, he was also growing poplar on field boundaries for fuelwood.

- A farmer with 2 acres in Martung, 1 under wheat followed by maize and the other under rice, had recently planted 6 fruit trees near his house, consisting of apple, apricot and plum. They were purchased as seedlings in Mingora and are flourishing. Over the past three years he has planted 20 trees. Some time back a commercial nursery brought about 500 fruit tree seedlings to Martung but they were too dry and died. So the farmer went to Mingora to buy his plants. He first began to appreciate fruits during his visit to Mingora when he saw them in the shops.

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