

Editorial

At the end of 1991 a series of IIED/IDS seminars identified several issues that merited extra attention in the RRA Notes. We plan to produce several theme issues, starting with this one on wealth and well-being ranking. The next issue will focus on applications in health and we plan one on training of PRA. Wealth ranking has sparked much interest recently as identifying the poor and 'poorest of the poor' continues to be necessary and prove difficult. The myth of relative well-being as a sensitive topic is being challenged and has led to innovations such as the visualisation of poverty on maps produced by large groups. The main ideas that arose during the seminar on well-being and wealth ranking are presented in *The Elusive Poor*.

The use of wealth ranking by card sorting is described in several articles. (A short description of the process can be found in 13. *A User's Note on Wealth Ranking by Cards*). Marie-Therese Sarch writes about her use of the cards to evaluate technology testing initiatives in The Gambia. It clearly shows how the impact of interventions can be monitored. She interviewed separate groups of women and men in two villages, and discusses how and why the process differed. In neither of the villages were the poorest compounds involved in the testing of agricultural technologies.

Neela Mukherjee discusses the problems of the use of official poverty line indicators to identify the poor. She describes her work in two villages in West Bengal where mapping was used to identify different strata of poor people. The villagers' perceptions of poverty include a much greater range of indicators, such as access to common property resources and quality of land which are not related to income levels. She cautions against the use of

a single, income-related indicator to target the poor in poverty alleviation programmes.

A variation of card-sorting using beans is written up by Stefanie Schaefer, who used it in Zaire. The project sought more detailed information about sub-groups within the target population better to adapt the projects' activities to different needs. She used a pile of beans that was divided into smaller heaps. This led into discussions about each group, and although not providing information about individuals, it was an easy and valuable method to understand sub-groups within a large community.

Privatisation of state co-operatives in Mongolia is having a major impact on the largely pastoral households, hitherto assumed to have a large degree of economic equality. Robin Mearns and his colleagues used wealth ranking by cards to investigate this alleged equality and whether slight 'wealth' differences now would lead to greater inequality later, due to new economic opportunities. Local people's definition of key production constraints were explored to identify potential policy options to ease such constraints. Wealth ranking also proved to help convince the research team of the value of participatory field research for informing policy.

It is not easy to identify the poor, let alone finding out who the poorest of the poor are. A team from Tamil Nadu University describes how during a PRA, the team needed two days and a sequence of exercises and interviews to finally discover the most marginalised group in the small town. The process took them through a number of mapping exercises, transects and wealth rankings to lead them eventually to the most vulnerable and downtrodden. The key lesson learnt was that PRA methods depend upon appropriate

probing and sensitive attitudes and practice for success.

Mauro Ghirotti describes using housing conditions in Ethiopia as a proxy for income. He compares the classification of households using housing conditions with estimated household incomes and shows they proved quite significant. He concludes by mentioning advantages and disadvantages of such proxy indicators.

Farmers of differing wealth will have different problems and needs and varying ability to adopt proposed technologies. FARMI/ViSCA in the Philippines used wealth ranking with cards to understand better what research priorities and innovations were needed for different groups. Banlina and Tung focus on their experience with the card sorting and highlight some important lessons.

Wealth ranking is often considered a sensitive topic and therefore would require extra sensitive behaviour. In Nepal, forestry is a difficult issue to discuss, wrought with confrontations between officials and villagers. Don Messerschmidt describes the preparations they made for a Forest User Group study to avoid the anticipated difficulties and to ease the way for open discussion.

As Kassaye Hadgu, Mohammed Yisehak and Girmay Tekle describe, not only wealth related information but accurate livestock details are also difficult to obtain. With a cartoon they show how by simply shifting to interviewing the animals rather than their owners, discussion becomes easier and information more detailed.

During a recent PRA in Gujarat, Ranjit Ambastha and Meera Shah of AKRSP in India discovered a local architect. Though never having worked with pen and paper before, one villager, Mansingh, provided valuable information of design alternatives. If agencies involved in constructing shelter for the poorer people, local designers like Mansingh could provide a local perspective and help to design more appropriate and useful structures.

Away from the tropical climate, we include an article about the use of RRA in Switzerland to explore changes in the farming community.

Scheuermeier and Ison recount their experiences with mapping, transects, key informants and community meetings. A number of analysis tools are presented, such as the 'mind maps' and cards on pinboards. Part of the work involved finding the forgotten farmers, those that do not milk the all important cows. Phone books, maps and the post office route were sources of information to find the 'minorities' and 'eccentrics'.

To end with a new feature, we introduce *Tips for Trainers*. We hope to have a focus issue of the RRA Notes on training soon and to start sharing experiences in training have added this new feature. Any ideas that have helped you to conduct successful training are welcome. We start with Fruit Salad, an excellent energising game that also helps form groups. It has never failed us! For those sending in articles, it would be of great help to receive your contributions on disk in WordPerfect. This speeds up production of the *RRA Notes* considerably. We still welcome experiences from those without access to computers.

Finally, as we are still reviewing the RRA Notes mailing list, we would like all readers who have not yet sent in a renewal notice to use the blue sheet at the back to do so. Those who have already sent in a Readership Survey and a previous renewal notice have already been put on the new list.

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