

Editorial

We owe all our readers an apology for the long delay between the production of RRA Notes 16 and this issue. Technology failed us (or did we fail technology?!) last summer when our entire mailing list was lost in the computer and from the back-up. We have put a lot of effort in producing a new list, using all the subscription renewals that have come in. But there will undoubtedly be some people wondering what happened to the RRA Notes. Should you know of others who should be receiving the Notes and are not, please ask them to write to us requesting another subscription.

More specifically we owe the authors of articles in both this issue and *RRA Notes 18* an apology for the delay in publishing their contributions. As you know we had two focus issues in 1992. This meant that other articles not necessarily relevant for the issues on wealth ranking or applications in health kept piling up, the disadvantage of producing focus issues. This and the next issue will once again be a rich mix of reflections and case studies. *RRA Notes 19* will be a focus issue on anything and everything to do with *training of participatory methods*. So please do send us your training experiences! This year we will be producing the RRA Notes as follows:

- RRA Notes 18 May 1993
- RRA Notes 19 August 1993 *Training Focus*
- RRA Notes 20 November 1993

RRA Notes 17 starts with a new *Correspondence Corner*. We receive many interesting letters and would like to include them as shorter pieces in the Notes. Nonthokozo Nabane and Louise Fortmann write us from Zimbabwe with a brief account of how they set about mapping resources “with no instructions other than to have plenty of leaves for trees”. No sooner said than done! For more words of encouragement from the field, Meena Bilgi and the late Selina Adjabeng-Asem write about their excitement

with the sensitization process and the research potential of the PRA methods they used in India and Nigeria. Chris Roche adds a swinging start with a musical reflection on the crucial elements of PRA (or is it RAP??). And Louise Fortmann continues to challenge our thinking with keen comments on the down side of professionalism. She invites us to acknowledge villagers as co-authors. After all, they have invested their time to the process and shared generously with their knowledge. Let’s share the title page with them!

In the first of five articles describing the potential of ranking, Raymond Auerbach describes the use of visual techniques to determine development priorities in South Africa. It had proved very difficult to understand what people wanted from the future but after drawing their surroundings, it sparked debate on everything from agriculture to family planning.

The next two contributions are from India, describing how ranking methods formed the basis to probe farmers’ processes of decision-making and sustainability analysis. Rama Gounder, a farmer from Tamil Nadu, used a wide array of symbols to describe his resources, flows and transformations in different plots, resource allocation decisions and institutions that influence his decisions. The experiences with Mrs. and Mr. Marappan are described by researchers from a range of universities in Tamil Nadu. They used a variation of matrix scoring to discuss the preferred tree-crop species combinations, inter-year and inter-plot comparisons, and even made a comparison of a relatively well-endowed and poorer farmer. This led to a sustainability analysis of the Marappan’s very diverse farm, which had enabled them to withstand many ecological changes.

Still talking of matrix scoring but this time back in Africa, Michael Drinkwater writes about the effectiveness of using a matrix to evaluate finger millet varieties in Zambia.

During the discussion that followed, it became clear that the farmers used a range of largely untested, different criteria to judge the value of different millet varieties, and had specific notions of what was considered as acceptable 'evidence' of the quality of different varieties. Another application of ranking was written by Marie-Noel Vieu who explores the potential for identifying priority areas of emergency relief supply. While there is no dearth of micro-level experiences, few examples such as this of the macro-level use of PRA are known.

Sharif provides us with some thorough insights into the steps needed for good focus-group interviewing. We so often take for granted that the group we are speaking to is 'adequately focused' or even 'appropriately random' without taking the time to thoroughly prepare ourselves.

We have an insightful account of a comparative study from Marit Plateau, Nigeria. It is one of the rare case studies which provides a comparison between the results of a long-term study and a short study using a participatory approach. It highlights, for example, that while the RRA was generally successful in identifying 'key issues' in the village, certain issues of particular concern to women were overlooked.

PRA in Hindupur is a brief account which highlights the experience of working only with women, a rare occurrence for the organisations involved, as it undoubtedly would be for many of us. The outside resource people noted that the women they worked with did not need as many tea and smoke breaks, and they seemed to embrace the new ideas easily with fewer intellectual hang-ups!

A second case study discusses wetland development in Guinea Bissau. Koos Neefjes describes how mapping and ranking were used in the rice polders. Mapping proved effective to encourage discussion on land rights and on possible management improvements in the complex system of rice cultivation. Pair-wise ranking was helpful to identify the extent to which 'weeds' are considered damaging or not. The presence of weeds in certain rice fields is one indication of the potential land use options available. Is it an alternative for

more expensive and time-consuming soil-sampling?

Uwe Kievelitz and Rolf-Dieter Reineke throw us a theoretical challenge from Germany. They discuss how PRA can be used to understand organisational cultures. With triangulation, observation, interviews and, possibly, questionnaires, they describe how organisations can be studied much as field research in cultural anthropology studies other cultures. We tend to use PRA to understand and communicate with other cultures and organisations but have we ever looked at the organisations within which we work? We welcome follow-up articles of concrete experiences on this theme.

A final methodological innovation from Burkina Faso is described by Irene Guijt on the use of village network diagramming to understand the extent and nature of contact between villages. This proved particularly helpful in Burkina Faso to appreciate the degree of dialogue that is necessary in one village to ensure the successful management of a closure area. It also led to an assessment of the quality of contacts with different villages.

We round off the issue with the now regular Tips for Trainers and Endnotes. Keep the information coming! We depend on your contributions.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irene Guijt, IIED, 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H ODD, UK.
--