

Editorial

This issue reflects again the rich diversity of both thoughtful and practical contributions from around the world. To start off, just a reminder that **RRA Notes 19 will focus on training issues**. We welcome any contributions, preferably short experiences or reflections. In the near future we hope to pull together two further focus issues:

- PRA and gender; and,
- PRA and livestock.

We also welcome any experiences relating to these themes.

This issue starts with a valuable methodological contribution on genealogies, which are well-established in anthropology. David Mosse and Mona Mehta draw on several experiences in India to describe how discussions around kinship 'mapping' can help understand local social identities in a community. Such genealogies help to "*overcome the statistical fiction that communities are composed of assemblies of independent households*".

Gerry Gill provides a light look at ethnocentric biases in research methods, focusing on pie diagrams. He argues that "*the concept of a pie or cake cut into wedge-shaped servings is quite alien*" and describes an approach to measurement that is both indigenous, easier to understand and more accurate than pie diagrams. We hope that the underlying assumptions in other methods will continue to be discussed in later articles.

We move on to case studies with a reflection on the advantages and disadvantages of working in larger and smaller villages. As N. Narayanasamy and M.P. Boraian say "*Big is a bother... (and) small is smooth*", and conclude

that, in general, smaller villages are easier to work in.

However, we are not always in a position to work only at the small village level. To encourage us, we take a look at three case studies, each of which describe work at different levels, from the village level to the national level. Huub Gaymans and Yanti Maskoen provide a look at the Indonesian context in their discussion of a *community self-survey* on water sanitation activities. Community members used questionnaires and mapping as the basis for the planning, improvement and construction of facilities. The authors say the process must go beyond data collection by the community, to giving "*responsibility to use the results of the study for planning themselves the desired improvements in their environment*".

Tony Dunn provides insights into an ongoing national experience with the use of RRA in Landcare in Australia. This article focuses on how a group of researchers and students got started with the methodology and how it was used in two communities. Dunn reflects on the institutional barriers to an RRA approach and concludes that "*RRA principles and methodologies are transferable [to Australia] because they include an appreciation of the knowledge and expertise of farming people*".

Margie Buchanan-Smith and her colleagues in Chad used the RRA principles at the national scale "*to try and understand how people perceive and prioritise their food security problems*". This is a rare case study on how the principles of RRA can be used beyond the micro at the meso - and even macro-level. They have learned much from this process and conclude that "*only this kind of informal survey approach could have enabled people's views to be incorporated into a national level planning process*".

Following the case studies, we focus on wealth ranking¹. Carter and his colleagues describe their use of wealth ranking in Zimbabwe as the basis for understanding diversity among farmers regarding soil fertility management. While the stratification provided a useful basis for further, the *“differences in wealth did not explain all the differences in practices which we observed amongst the households interviewed”*. The more detailed interviews *“raised a set of much more informed questions about soil fertility management that now need to be pursued”*.

G. O'G. Sharrock, K. Waldie and Y. Joshi used wealth ranking in Nepal to understand better the diversity of agricultural households and to help target research efforts more appropriately. They focus on the methodological dilemmas raised after the wealth ranking is done: *“the real expertise is needed at the stages of data collation, interpretation and application”*. The danger lies in seeing the method as a simple tool and an end in itself. They urge those contributing to the *RRA Notes* to write about the uses to which the information resulting from the use of RRA/PRA was put.

We welcome another contribution from Ly Tung and F. Baliña who have continued using wealth ranking at FARMI in the Philippines. They have been trying group interviews instead of individual key informants, and compare the two approaches in their article.

Our last contribution from the field is an account of matrix ranking from Tamil Nadu, India. With a group of villagers, M. Manoharan, K. Velayudham and N. Shunmugavalli conducted two ranking exercises on rice and banana to understand better what the varietal characteristics should be that they, as plant breeders, should focus on.

This time, *Tips for Trainers* might give you ideas for the beginning of a training. ‘*Symbolic Introduction*’ describes one easy way to break the ice. *Endnotes* once again contains information about some of the many documents we receive that are too lengthy to reproduce as RRA Notes and yet deserve more exposure. Please do let us know about any

documents that you would like to announce in the *Endnotes*.

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¹ See also *RRA Notes 15. Special Issue on Wealth Ranking* for further articles and discussions.