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Extracts from a trainer's notebook

Alice Welbourn

• Introduction

This was the first three¹ week training course I had run for eighteen months. A lot has changed in PRA in that time. I sought to incorporate these changes in my agenda. I drew on others' recent workshop experiences in Pakistan, Ethiopia and Sri Lanka (Guijt, forthcoming; IIED, 1993a; ActionAid/IIED, 1992), as well as Redd Barna's experience of working with young children on communication skills (Redd Barna, 1991). The results proved exciting. Before I arrived in Zimbabwe, I had sent the course coordinator (Andreas Fuglesang, Africa Regional Director) guidelines for good training courses (IIED, 1993c). This helped them to clarify what they wanted out of the training.

I was most impressed by the commitment shown by Redd Barna to the workshop. The agency aimed to get the most out of this training, by including staff from levels where follow-up action could be taken. Thus their Africa Director, the Senior Research Officer for Africa, the Zimbabwe Resident Representative and the Uganda Deputy Representative all committed themselves to the full training course. Senior staff from Ethiopia, Mozambique and Zimbabwe were also all in full attendance. In all there were twenty course participants.

Trainer's preparation

It is hard work for one trainer to keep the momentum going for so many people over a prolonged period. So I find that good preparation is vital. You can never over-

¹ Most trainers prefer to take only 14 days or less over this training.

prepare and each evening you have to review your schedule for the next day, in the light of what you have or haven't covered already. Every group responds differently to a training session, so you can never predict who will find which bit hard or easy to grasp. Openness and humour are also precious aides. Things are bound to go wrong, or at least not according to plan, so I try to be as flexible as possible and do try to admit my mistakes!

The approach before introducing the techniques

The more I train in PRA, the more I appreciate the importance of skills in cooperation, good communication, observation, the development of good rapport and understanding of others' perspectives, and the avoidance or effective management of sabotage. Thus before I introduced any of the specific visual methods of PRA, I ensured that we did adequate ground work in these areas, to secure a solid framework for semi-structured dialogue throughout the fieldwork. Redd Barna staff have already been trained in much of this to a further extent than many development workers, because of their work experience in child counselling. Nonetheless, they felt it worthwhile to review the issues. One thing they found very helpful was the explicit recognition of our own and others' sabotage in our daily work, and our discussions around how to avoid it and how to manage it.

The analysis of difference

Redd Barna had explicitly asked for my help in their analysis of the existence and varied needs of different sub-sections of the communities with whom they work. This included their concern for a greater attention to the needs of the worse off, of women and of

children. They recognise, however, that attention to the needs of these more vulnerable groups alone could arouse antagonism and resistance from those who are more powerful. Thus we endeavoured to develop a working strategy which would explore the needs of people of all perspectives. As a group, therefore, we had to develop a common acceptance that everyone's perspective mattered, had to be listened to and had to be taken seriously. This involved the early adoption of ground rules, not only for behaviour within the group, but for our rapport with village members.

One central ground rule included the adoption of four permanent teams for simultaneous fieldwork in the chosen village. The older male Redd Barna staff worked with the male elders, younger Redd Barna men with younger village men, Redd Barna women staff with village women and a mixed team, male and female, of Redd Barna staff with village children. There were not enough staff members to work with separate age groups of women also.

• **Training extracts**

The timetable introduces certain key themes each day. To ensure that the workshop does not become too intensive or boring, it is important to make use of games regularly. Most games can have a learning element in them. It is also good to have short quick games which just make everyone laugh a lot and move around, such as fruit salad. These keep the group's energy levels high. Regular sessions to review the learning points at the start and finish of each day are also important, as are feedback and evaluation sessions, where everyone has a chance to air what they have found good or bad, easy or difficult about the work, the food, the heat or whatever.

Below is an outline of the pre-field work period, showing the themes covered each day. A few of the exercises used are described in detail.

- *Day One:* Introductions;
Expectations and fears;
Cooperation, not conflict;
Ground rules;
Schedule for training;

Sabotage;
Management/worker relations;
Communicating instructions;
Challenging our assumptions;
and,
Making good observations.

A particularly good game for addressing cooperation early on - and for the trainer to gauge the tensions in the group - is described below.

The chairs game (9.45-10.05)

"Alice handed us each a bit of paper with an instruction. We were told not to share this instruction with anyone else. We then discovered that people were carrying chairs all over the room. We began to realise that some people wanted to do what we wanted to do: but that other people wanted to do something quite different. Eventually, one group of people surrendered their chairs to some others, who promised to hand them back to them later...! In fact a third of us had been told to put all the chairs by the wall; a third to put them all by the door; and a third to put them all by the windows. We then had a discussion about cooperation versus conflict; about interpretation of instructions - why didn't we question the instructions when they were so difficult; and about cultural differences in coping with problems. This game was followed by the establishment of ground rules for cooperation and behaviour during the training course".

It is also good to address sabotage soon after this. The following game works very well.

Sabotage (11.30-12.00)

"We then played a game called saboteur. We worked in groups of three. Each of us took it in turns to play one of three roles: talker, listener and saboteur. Every two minutes we swapped roles. We then discussed how it felt in different roles. We all agreed that being the saboteur was the easiest role. We considered different means of sabotage. We realised that development practitioners should equip themselves with different techniques to enable themselves to deal with saboteurs. We wrote up our suggestions on flipchart. In general we

agreed it was good to handle the domineering tactfully”.

- *Day Two:* Body Language;
Semi-structured dialogue;
Presentation by the Africa Director on the potential relevance of PRA to Redd Barna’s effectiveness; and,
Introduction to PRA.
- *Day Three:* Maps, transect walks, seasonal calendars.

With each visual technique, I find it important to cover certain procedures for learning. These are:

- discussion of the relevance of potential information available from use of the technique;
- viewing and analysis of examples from elsewhere of the use of the technique;
- practical demonstration of the technique and/or;
- opportunity for participants to try out techniques on each other;
- review of each others’ attempts;
- discussion of details of process; and,
- summary of technique learnt.

Below is an extract from Day Three to show how mapping was presented in the pre-fieldwork training agenda, describing the exercises, their purpose and the points learnt.

Mapping for Mars (8.30-9.20)

“Alice explained that she was a development worker from Mars. She said this month(!) she was ‘developing Africa’. She asked us to divide into groups. Each group was to draw a map of Africa on flipchart paper with marker pens. Each map was to include five to ten issues which our particular group felt was important to us about Africa. We were not to use any writing because she did not understand earth script. She divided us into the following groups: Ethiopians, Zimbabwean women (and Margharida, from Mozambique, who chose this group), Mozambicans, Zimbabwean men and Europeans. As we drew and discussed, Alice came round and made the following points:

- the importance of drawing on the ground, so all can see;
- the importance of symbols, rather than words, so as to include all;
- the importance of letting the community do the discussion, analysis;
- the chance for the development worker to watch group dynamics, leaders, disputes, those excluded, etc.; and,
- the chance for development worker to listen to the process of analysis.”

Plenary feedback on Africa maps (9.20-10.00)

“We all looked at each map in turn. One representative from each map presented it to the rest of us. To begin with, each map was covered with unrecognisable symbols, but once each map had been explained to us and we could understand the meaning of each symbol, it was clear that they included a lot of information.

Each map was different and no one map included the same information as another. For instance one map mentioned literacy, another AIDS, another environmental problems. So we could see that each map was representing the perspective of those who drew it. Alice then asked us which was the best map. The women said theirs was best. So Alice said she would take that back to her head office on Mars. She then asked how the others felt about that and pointed out that there were more in the room whose ideas were not represented on the map than there were those whose ideas were shown.

Solutions were called for and it was finally agreed that there was **no best map**: each map has its own story to tell and each fills in its own particular part of the jigsaw which makes up a complete picture of Africa. Thus Alice went back to Mars with all the maps, ensuring that all the different perspectives were represented”.

Bangladesh maps (10.55-11.20)

“An exercise was conducted using three maps drawn by different members of one village in Bangladesh. The three maps were first studied in small groups and we then had a plenary session. This time we were told that one map

was drawn by women, one drawn by young men and the third by old men. We had to guess which map was which. Each of our groups reached a different conclusion about who drew which map! Alice then explained to us the story which was told us in the process of each map drawing by those who drew it. Thus we learnt about the maps in the context of their particular problems in life. Again we could see how there was **no best map**: but that instead each map contributed to the jigsaw which made up the overall picture of the villagers' needs. We also realised how we make assumptions about other societies which may be false!"

Sierra Leone wells (11.20-12.00)

"A final exercise with maps was also conducted first in groups and then in plenary. This time we were shown a map of a village with four potential well sites marked. One site had been chosen by women in the village, the other three sites had been chosen by men. First we had to identify which wells had been chosen by whom. Then we had to explain why the men had chosen three sites, whilst the women had only chosen one. Again, each group reached different conclusions on both questions. Alice finally revealed the answers and we discussed the complex implications of choosing something as apparently simple as a well location, in terms of social, economic, political and gender issues.

All three of these exercises highlighted the importance of learning about different people's perspectives - how there is **no best map**. They also emphasised the importance of how much is learnt from the process of these exercises - listening to the story which is being told as the maps are drawn. The finished item on its own can be misleading and can lead to false assumptions!"

Other maps (12.00-12.15)

"Alice then showed us some overhead sheets of other types of maps which villagers could be asked to draw. These included a socio-economic map and a mobility map. She also mentioned historical maps, literacy maps and so on".

- Day Four: Well-being ranking;

Priority ranking;
Chapati diagrams;
What if...; and,
Identification of main speakers for plenary village meeting.

- Day Five: (Half day) Use of Flow diagrams to explore 'but why', 'what if' .; Main issues RBZ wants to address in fieldwork; Divisions into permanent field work teams (old men, young men, women, children); Appropriate techniques for addressing the issues; and, Planning for fieldwork: team contracts, sequence of activities, meeting plans.
- Day Six: (Half day) Preparation for fieldwork continued: what we all say we are doing; More info on background of the project; Further discussions on local concept of 'household'; Dry run of introductory explanatory speeches for first meeting with village; and, Equipment and logistics review.
- Day Seven: First day of fieldwork.

Finally...

It is important for a trainer never to forget that miscommunication is primarily the responsibility of the communicator. A successful workshop is immensely rewarding, but there is always more to learn, a better way to approach something. We must never close down and assume that we know it all. That is why it is so useful to write up training notes, so that we can share each others' experiences. I have to be pretty disciplined to make myself do this at the end of each day, but it does help me to review for myself what I have done and I certainly appreciate reading the notes of others.

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NOTE

There is a forthcoming report on this training workshop: Redd Barna. 1994. *Not Only But Also: Report of a Workshop in PRA and the Analysis of Difference*. Redd Barna, Zimbabwe.

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