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## Juggling game to energise a seminar

Sarah Holden

In November 1992 we organised an international livestock seminar in Indonesia. An interesting mixture of people from very diverse backgrounds attended and I think almost everyone felt their minds were broadened by the event. Inevitably some people reacted (almost violently) against the PRA theme that weaved its way throughout the whole seminar. However, many people were left wanting to know more and another seminar is planned along the lines of participative farmer research and development.

As the week progressed an element of playful competition emerged between the various ideological camps and this culminated at the final closing session of the seminar. Each topic group had to make a short presentation of the key points of their session. A somewhat dry academic kicked off with a conventional lecture on using data to elucidate farm problems. Another followed with a long ramble on quantitative surveys and the insights they can provide into farmers' needs. At this point, at the end of a long and hard week, the audience was beginning to lag - eyes were drooping and heads sagging. It was the turn of the 'alternative approaches'.

Tim Leyland stood on the stage and began juggling three oranges. A few seconds lapsed. Sriskandarajah then spoke: "*Farmers operate complex, diverse risk prone farming systems*". The audience woke up.

John Young (from ITDG) then stepped out of the audience wearing a suit. He studied the juggling Tim, and then he began to toss a single orange. Sriskandarajah spoke again: "*As professionals we often perceive a simplified version of the farmer's environment*".

John (the scientist) deftly replaced his single orange with a small model black and white

cow. He turned to face Tim (the farmer). Sriskandarajah intervened: "*The technology we develop is frequently inappropriate for farmers' needs*". The scientist throws the model cow to the farmer and in doing so causes the farmer to drop all his oranges.

Whilst John and Tim re-collect the dropped balls, Sriskandarajah says: "*Participatory rural appraisal uses a basket of methods*" and Sonaiya, Stella Maranga, Raul Peresgrovas and myself step forward and plaster the names of different PRA methods onto a white board.

By this time Tim and John have collected themselves together and stand facing each other. They act out a scene where the farmer, by demonstration, teaches the scientist how to juggle with three balls. Sriskandarajah explains: "*PRA allows scientists to learn from farmers about their farming environment*".

The farmer and scientists then begin to juggle together, exchanging each other's balls in mid juggle (very tricky). Sriskandarajah concludes: "*Participatory rural appraisal allows farmers and professionals to work together to solve their problems*".

A standing ovation followed.

Raul Peresgrovas then gave a very moving speech on behalf of the participants and had the last word on participative approaches to change. I don't think anyone could have summed it up better:

(rounding off his speech)... "*This seminar has been about the smallholder farmer..*" (He then produces a short set of slides, accompanied by Indonesian music, to introduce us to different farming families from around the world). "*This is a shepherdess from Mexico..., a farmer from Indonesia.....and here is a Masaai family from Kenya.....I wish that*

*some of these people could have been here with us today. I wonder what they would have said. Whatever you might think of PRA, remember that above all it gives these people a voice; it gives them a chance to be heard”.*

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