

Editorial

PRA and livestock development: some challenges

• **Why PRA and livestock?**

Much of the PRA debate and literature thus far focuses on the collection of data on crop production, and presents few case studies on methods for understanding livestock production and planning with livestock owners. This special issue therefore attempts to bring together some examples of practice and experiences in this field.

Among researchers and development practitioners alike, there is increasing recognition that the use of the range of techniques known as PRA (as distinguished, often, from RRA) involves far more than a series of methodologies for improving the speed or efficacy of data collection. PRA, if it is to live up to its ideals, must form part of a much wider process of participatory planning, controlled by local communities themselves (Chambers, 1992).

As the next century fast approaches, there is an increasing realisation among development agencies (bilateral, multilateral and NGOs) that the efforts of the last few decades have substantially failed to eradicate, or in many cases even reduce, poverty for many millions of people around the world. As a result, the development debate is turning anew to the importance of poverty alleviation, and to the emerging concept of livelihood security: it is now becoming recognised that poverty levels will only be substantially reduced when livelihoods are made more secure, with all that that entails (Maxwell, 1991).

Livelihood security encompasses not only access to food and the resources required to produce it in the present, but also those required to maintain production in the future, and the social networks which are necessary

for survival in the longer term. Among the vulnerable groups whose livelihoods are under threat, are smallholder farmers and pastoralists, for whom livestock play a significant role in the support of their livelihood and lifestyle. Development practitioners need to understand the nature of these livelihoods if they are to address the issue of poverty alleviation.

• **What role can PRA play?**

The significance of PRA data collection techniques is that local communities potentially gain greater access to and control over the process of understanding and analysing themselves, in which development workers are engaged. This in itself is a welcome departure from more 'extractive' forms of data collection which historically have disempowered communities. Furthermore, the advent of PRA, and the debates surrounding its good practice, have done much to expand the range of methods of information collection for both research and for project appraisal.

However, the extent to which PRA is ultimately effective depends on the context in which it is used, and the end point to which it is contributing. As highlighted above, PRA is only as participative as the remainder of the process into which it fits. A fully participative exercise which involves the community in analysing its own problems and even in preparing its own solutions, can be followed by an implementation phase conducted and controlled by outsiders. John Devavaram presents an example of this in his case study (this issue) of a buffalo restocking project in India. A participative evaluation, using PRA techniques, resulted in the identification of key weak areas in the design of the project and

clear recommendations for improvement. However, the recommendations were not acted upon, with the result that the community refused to participate in a later evaluation, feeling that their previous input had been wasted.

Similarly, Hadrill and Yusuf, in their case study of Sanaag herders in Somaliland, explain that the research on seasonal migrations, whilst making use of PRA techniques, was not in itself participatory, in that it did not form part of a wider participative process involving joint planning with the community. One of the positive outcomes of the research, however, was the identification of the need for further, and more participatory, appraisal in the future.

Since this issue focuses largely on the actual practice of the various PRA techniques which have been used in work with livestock owners, the end point of the work is understandably not always made explicit. The challenge remains, however, for both researchers and development practitioners, to ensure that the end point of participatory appraisal is not only participation by the community in whatever activities ensues, but also a real increase in the livelihood security of the community through the alleviation of poverty.

This is particularly - but not only - a challenge to researchers, for whom the direct links between their research and an increase in livelihood security may be harder to make, though nonetheless imperative. Participative involvement in a research project may in fact be more cruel than more extractive forms of information collection, if the end point is not some tangible benefit to the community. Expectations may have been raised further by the use of such methods for which the initiators may have some responsibility¹.

• How appropriate is PRA?

The appropriateness of PRA methods is also of central importance. PRA theory is characterised by flexibility and adaptability, which encourages the practitioner to develop

¹ The recent workshop on PRA and Gender (IDS, University of Sussex, December 1993) involved considerable discussion on the responsibility of those initiating participatory appraisal.

and enhance the techniques according to the local context. Nevertheless, despite this recognition, there is still the danger of an emerging 'new orthodoxy', which makes rigid a once open and flexible approach. Thus there is a need for constant vigilance and a commitment to real adaptation and learning.

This is highlighted by several of the case studies found in this issue. For example, Braganca questions the appropriateness of wealth ranking in a community recovering from many years of civil war: the community had been so dispersed that the normal levels of knowledge of each others' wealth were absent. Braganca also points out that the majority of women were absent, which provides a considerable challenge not only for the obtaining of gender balanced information *about* the community, but more importantly for participatory planning *with* the community.

Leyland too refers to the constraints due to the war: he explains that traditional decision-making bodies have been broken down, with the result that ultimately the project planning was performed by the outside NGO and the local mujihadeen leaders, in spite of the participative appraisal carried out. Leyland also explains the difficulties he encountered using graphics and pictorial representation, a cornerstone of PRA techniques, with farmers in the Daye Chopan valley, Afghanistan. In this case, oral communication proved more appropriate among communities unaccustomed to diagrams².

Clearly, the challenge for PRA practitioners is to develop appropriate participatory processes in each and every context. A key factor in this is not only a recognition of the wealth of indigenous knowledge, but also a willingness to learn about indigenous forms of communication and adapt or even reject PRA methods in response.

² Gerard Gill (*RRA Notes 18*, June 1993) questions whether "some 'participatory' techniques are culturally biased". He describes how he and colleagues unsuccessfully tried to use pie charts to explore cropping patterns with Nepali farmers, and outlines the adaptation which was subsequently developed, which involved using money as an analogy. This was based on a local tradition of using *annas*, the subdivision of the *rupee*, to express relative quantity.

A further challenge for PRA practitioners involved in livestock development is the understanding of the role that livestock plays in the community, in particular in securing livelihoods. While 'livestock' is the unifying theme of this issue, the case studies cover examples from a wide range of livelihoods, from pastoralists to small-scale mixed farming communities. In each community, the role of livestock needs to be understood as part of the livelihood system for household survival, and the PRA methods and techniques used need to reflect this. There can be therefore, no standard 'PRA for livestock'.

• Conclusion

For PRA practitioners, then, the challenges abound: to ensure that participatory planning, in the control of the local community, is an integral part of the PRA process; to make sure that that process will actually contribute to the livelihood security of the community (or at the very least, not undermine it); and to be flexible and adaptive in all contexts, in particular to be open to learn about local communication methods and channels. Livestock specialists face the particular challenge of understanding the varying roles which livestock play within the community, especially in relation to the other factors which make up the livelihood security of the livestock owners. PRA is a useful tool which can facilitate this understanding, whilst at the same time contributing to the empowerment of those communities.

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