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Bottom-up planning for urban development: the development *planning for real* pilot project

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• Introduction

Parallel with the development of RRA and PRA, bottom-up planning methods were being pioneered in urban communities in the UK and USA from the late 1960s. These ranged from advocacy planning, in which professional planners acted as advocates for a particular community, bargaining with city authorities on the community's behalf and interpreting technical language (Davidoff 1973), to formation of neighbourhood corporations where participants directly managed state grants to plan their own economic development programmes in the ghetto (Arnstein 1969), to the use of cardboard models to facilitate community decision-making and planning of resources (Dean 1993). PRA methods have been applied in urban community projects in developing countries from the early 1990s, but the results have not hitherto been documented and widely disseminated. However, there remain important gaps in the development of PRA as an urban planning tool.

- First, the techniques have largely developed from work in rural areas, and then been adapted for use in cities. We have relatively little experience with which to assess how appropriate PRA may be in a complex urban society, where the 'community' may be highly heterogeneous and difficult to define.
- Second, the nature of participation - who does what and when, and for what objective - is often determined and guided by outsiders. Existing participatory methods have provided an excellent source of local information, but there have been few attempts to integrate people's participation throughout the planning

- process¹. Can professionals stand aside and allow people to manage the entire process themselves?

This article explores both of these issues. In particular, it describes a new approach for integrating participation into the urban planning process. This approach - *Development Planning for Real* - was designed by a group of postgraduates on the MSc course in Social Policy and Planning in Developing Countries at the London School of Economics, working with Dr Tony Gibson of the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation, UK, and myself. Pilot trials of the approach are nearing completion in cities and rural communities in Africa, Asia and Latin America².

• What does community participation in urban areas mean? Exploring key concepts

Two basic questions underpin an understanding of community participation in urban areas. What is the purpose of community participation (and whose interests does it serve)? And what is an urban area (and how does it differ from a rural area)? A further issue is the different nature of participation in urban and rural areas.

¹ An exception is the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (India), which in the 1980s trained villagers as PRA facilitators both for their own and for other villages. These village volunteers have worked with their communities to prepare village natural resources and forestry plans. In July 1992 they told the AKRSP staff that "*they need not bother to attend*" any longer (Chambers, 1992).

² Development Planning for Real is being piloted in Cambodia, Colombia, Ecuador, Gambia, India, Mexico, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania, and Zambia.

In terms of providing services to low-income communities, the role of government, international agencies and NGOs is limited compared with that of the people themselves. Although aid agencies are influential in terms of policy, most 'development' in developing countries is generated by low-income people either acting on an individual self-help basis, or through community mobilisation. For example, the majority of low-income people are housed either in accommodation they have built themselves or, in urban areas where renting is increasingly important, in squatter housing built by the informal sector. The urban poor are increasingly dependent on their own resources. Already limited expenditure in the social sector has been reduced still further by the structural adjustment and stabilisation programmes introduced in many countries in the last decade; typical measures include cuts in government expenditure, a retrenchment of jobs in the civil service, and the removal of subsidies from basic food items.

During the twentieth century there has been a massive shift in where people live. It is estimated that by the year 2010, half of the world's population will be town-dwellers, compared with only 14% in 1920 (UNCHS 1987). Despite considerable regional variation, at an aggregate level the trend for urban growth is unquestioned. The data have three important implications for policy makers and planners:

- A growing proportion of people in the Third World are living in cities and towns.
- Big cities (those with at least 100,000 inhabitants) are expanding twice as rapidly as the average urban rate of growth. By the year 2000, just under half of all urban dwellers in developing countries will live in metropolitan cities with half a million or more inhabitants. The coordination of bottom-up planning in large cities poses an enormous challenge.
- There is great diversity between and within urban centres. Planners must be flexible and innovative in adjusting participatory techniques to take account of local conditions.

A 'community' has both consensual and conflict-ridden relationships. 'Community participation' which openly reveals conflicts

also has to be able to resolve them without the less powerful members of the 'community' becoming worse off in the process. There are several reported cases where people who voice complaints in public have been subjected to house burning and beatings (IIED/IDS 1993). The definition of 'community' is thus problematic: if it is too broad, then the difference of interest within the community may be greater than the consensual interests. If it is too narrow, then it can serve to divide and weaken the disadvantaged (it is relevant that the aid agencies' good government agenda does not address accountability within the international community, but rather focuses on the national or sub-national level community of other peoples' countries).

The participatory methods discussed below are all implemented at the level of the 'community' and therefore such questions need to be addressed. In this context, it is important to consider how far urban participation differs from participation in rural areas and how urban and rural communities differ. While many similarities can be expected, there are four areas of potential difference:

Scale and Geographical Proximity of Settlements: The spatial boundaries of the 'community'; may be less sharp in the urban context than in a rural village. Urban residents may live in one neighbourhood, and work, attend school, go to markets and health clinics in others. They often interact on a daily basis with people living outside their own immediate residential environment. This creates special problems in the use of PRA. Another problem is scale; how can a city-wide plan in a metropolis with millions of inhabitants directly involve more than a small proportion of people? Alternatively, how can a planning process developed by residents at neighbourhood level take account of the activities of people living in surrounding areas and the strategic needs of the city? Crucially, can local plans be scaled up to city-wide level without losing accountability to the community?

Social Diversity: PRA studies have revealed that rural communities are far from homogeneous (RRA Notes No.15, 1992). Within a village there are wealthy, poor and ultra-poor households. Members of the same household have different gender and age-specific roles, needs and entitlements. Such

socially constructed differences are likely to be magnified in urban areas. Rural-urban migrants are still a significant proportion of city-dwellers in Africa and Asia. Ethnic and language diversity can be great. Household composition can also be expected to be more varied.

Complexity of Issues and Interests: Within cities there is likely to be social segregation between high and low income neighbourhoods, and greater awareness of diverging class interests. People who live and work in shanty settlements on the urban periphery are confronted by conspicuous wealth in the city centre. There may be greater opportunity for organised social movements and open conflict.

A growing proportion of urban dwellers - up to 90% in squatter settlements in major African cities - are tenants rather than owners. Tenants are likely to be transitory and mobile. They have to earn a regular cash income to pay rent, and may have limited time to attend community meetings. Urban squatters, landlords and tenants are likely to have different interests, which will affect their willingness to invest time and resources into upgrading and maintaining infrastructure.

Practical Constraints to Participation: In large cities, urban working patterns and travel to work may require workers to be away from home for all but a few hours of the day. For example, in the early 1980s some of the squatters resettled in Hong Kong's new towns returned home at 11 or 12 at night, after travelling from work in the metropolitan centre, and left again at four or five in the morning, while others became weekly commuters (Wratten 1983). Those who are never there are never listened to. In conducting social surveys, night visits in squatter areas are usually deemed too dangerous, so that commuters are missed even in carefully selected random samples.

• **Development planning for real**

Tony Gibson's article in this issue of *RRA Notes* discusses *Planning for Real*, an innovative methodology which uses a three dimensional model of the neighbourhood - built by members of the community - to initiate a community-driven planning process. The methodology enables everyone in the community to play an active part, using their local knowledge to reach appropriate solutions,

and organising skills and resources in order to make *their* plan work. It shifts the power to initiate and implement away from experts in the government or development agency and towards the local community. *Planning for Real* has been developed and used extensively by community groups throughout the UK and Europe. Versions have been adapted by field workers in South Africa and the Caribbean (Wratten 1984).

In February 1993, Tony Gibson introduced *Planning for Real* to students on the MSc course in Social Policy and Planning in Developing Countries at the London School of Economics. An international group of nine students³, with extensive development experience and abundant enthusiasm, decided to work with Tony Gibson and myself to design a new participatory planning methodology for use by community groups in developing countries. The idea was to develop a set of prototype kits, which would be piloted by the students when they returned to their home countries that autumn. The Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation and the LSE's Reprographics Department provided practical help in producing the kits.

The methodology

Development Planning for Real encourages people to build a model of their area and use it to identify their problems and resources, find solutions which best use scarce resources and

³ The design team are: Terezinha Da Silva (senior adviser, Ministry of Social Welfare, Mozambique); Carla Faesler (researcher with the Ministry of Agriculture in Mexico, interested in land reform programmes); Steven Ginther (spent three years as an agricultural extension agent for the Ministry of Agriculture in Guatemala); Monica Jativa (worked as an economist for the State Oil Company in Ecuador, before joining UNDP, where she spent four years as assistant to the President's representative); David Johnson (policy adviser with the European Commission Humanitarian Office in Brussels); Karim-Aly Kassam (worked with the Aga Khan foundation in Pakistan, and has development experience in Zanzibar, Syria and in native Canadian communities); Iain Levine (a nursing graduate who is currently based in Nairobi, coordinating refugee assistance in Southern Sudan); Moses Pessima (social worker who has worked with homeless children and on the drug abuse control programme in Freetown); and Patricia Ramirez (economist and anthropologist with the Social Development Unit of the National Planning Department in Colombia).

which address problems in an integrated way, prioritise action, determine what they can do for themselves and what kinds of outside assistance are needed, and decide when and by whom each activity will be undertaken. It extends PRA in providing a framework within which local people can direct the entire planning process, from information gathering and decision making through to implementation and monitoring. Low cost materials are used. Pictorial symbols overcome the difficulty of involving illiterate people and allow women to participate non-verbally and anonymously where men would normally dominate public meetings. Children are also encouraged to participate fully.

The methodology starts with the assumption that people know their own surroundings better than any outsider. They know what needs to be done to improve matters. In every community there will be at least a few 'Moving Spirits' - people who want to change things for the better, and who are prepared to give time and thought to something they think might help. The kit is designed to help them to involve the rest of the community, in such a way that nobody feels that someone is trying to dominate, or to push everyone into accepting a particular set of proposals. The 'Moving Spirits' make a rough model of their neighbourhood, using readily available materials (such as cardboard cartons or scrap paper) and coloured cards supplied with the kit, which can be folded to make houses and buildings. They display this model anywhere people meet - in the queue at the clinic, in the market place or outside the mosque - and use it to attract people's attention. Made in portable 2' by 2' sections, the model can be readily transported around and reassembled at another site. The scale is such that everyone can quickly identify their own homes, work places, markets, wells, rivers and roads. People have a bird's eye view of the model, and that helps them to see their neighbourhood as a whole, without losing sight of particular problems and possibilities.

Once the model has been seen by a lot of people, and checked by them to ensure that nothing important has been missed off, a *Development Planning for Real* meeting is held. At the meeting, everyone clusters around the model (which is placed on several tables placed together or on the ground itself), rather than sitting in rows and passively looking at

speakers on the platform. In areas where story telling is a popular means of communicating information, a story might be told to introduce the model and show how it can be used.

The kit includes different coloured cards with cartoon drawings which represent particular problems, needs, skills and materials and equipment that might be found in the local community. People are invited to select those which they think are relevant, and to place them on the model. Less articulate people are able to show their ideas without speaking, so that all points of view can be considered. Suggestions are not identified with particular people, thus no one is committed to holding a fixed point of view - people can have second and third thoughts without losing face.

When this process has been completed, everyone can stand back and take stock. The coloured cards show up clearly, revealing the amount of concern about each issue and where people most want to see improvements. The next stage is to identify various kinds of action which the community might take together (represented by gold tokens), and various kinds of outside support (shown by blue tokens) that might be obtained if the community comes up with a practical proposition. People are asked which activities they think should be done first, and what should be done later on. They are then shown the Action Chart. This is divided into three time periods - NOW, SOON and LATER - and has spaces for activities to be done by the community itself, and those to be done by outside partners such as government, NGOs, private firms or international development agencies. People are invited to transfer the problem and solution cards from the model onto the Action Chart, placing them on the spaces provided on the left hand side, and starting with the problem they want to tackle first. The community's resource cards (light yellow, gold and orange) are separated from those which have to be obtained outside (the blue cards), and placed in the appropriate time period.

If there is disagreement, people show this by placing a pink 'disagree' token on the chart. These cards (which are generally few) are discussed and rearranged or removed if necessary. Groups may be formed to follow up particular issues and consider possibilities in more detail and report back later to everyone

else. Similarly, new groups can be formed to undertake particular activities required in order to implement the plan, such as researching the problem, organising practical activities such as repairs or building, and working out how best to contact and draw in outside sources of support.

While drawing on the original *Planning for Real* concept, *Development Planning for Real* was worked out from first principles, taking account of the important development issues facing low-income people in the different contexts in which members of the team had worked. Many of these issues are not easy to depict without words (e.g. structural adjustment policy!), and cannot be identified with specific spatial locations on the neighbourhood model. Cards were developed to represent social problems including domestic violence, corruption, costly medicines, high rents and child prostitution. These can be added to by users, using blank card supplied with the kit. For the pilot kits, we took care to choose symbols that would be recognisable in all of the countries where we have experience, but where this difficult to achieve we produced different local versions. There is no reason why locally designed sets of symbols should not eventually be produced in each region or country where the kit is used. The kit materials were also adapted to eliminate the need for sellotape or staples in constructing the houses and use scrap cardboard cartons in place of the polystyrene base.

We thought a great deal about ways to include women and men, and are experimenting with holding separate women's and men's sessions in order to unmask differences in knowledge and needs of these groups and allow members of the sub-groups time to acknowledge their own needs before negotiating with others. The problem cards include issues relating to women's and men's practical gender roles as well as strategic gender issues (Moser 1993).

The pilot trials

Two training days were held at the LSE in September 1993, attended by those undertaking the pilot trials, and representatives of NGOs and the Overseas Development Administration. We asked each piloter to try the kit out up to four times: once with a group they are familiar with, once with an unfamiliar group, and then two trials by another facilitator who had not

been on the training, who should also work with groups which are familiar and unfamiliar to them. Standard feedback forms were provided, and piloters were asked to send us photographs of their trials. So far we have received feedback reports from Cambodia, Tanzania and Zambia (see the boxes below).

BOX 1 THE CAMBODIAN TRIAL

This trial was conducted in the ODA Battambang Urban Water Development Project. The whole process was guided by the village planning team, local people nominated by the village leader, with no intervention from ODA project staff. They carried out the exercise with a great deal of enthusiasm and hard work. The model was shown outside in three locations - in the morning at Toultaek Village Wat on a festival day, in the afternoon near Boules ground, village office and market, and in the early morning on the main route into the town centre. Several meetings were held attracting 750 people. A short story was told by a retired schoolteacher to illustrate the process. People were attracted by the model, and liked choosing the cards: "*above all it was an activity which everyone seemed to enjoy using and in doing so gain confidence in the value of their own opinions.*" However, some people were confused by the visuals on the Action Chart, and most people placed their cards in the NOW column. The gold community resource cards were less popular than the blue cards for government resources.

• What development planning for real adds and what it doesn't solve

The early pilot results suggest that the methodology has the following advantages:

- The kits can be produced cheaply (the limited pilot edition cost £16 per kit, excluding the labour for assembly). Future production could be decentralised to the countries where the kits are used, since the required photocopying facilities and card supplies are readily available.

**BOX 2
THE TANZANIAN TRIAL**

In Tanzania, trials were initiated by Makongolo John Gonza of the Worker's Development Corporation in three urban communities in Dar es Salaam, Kibaha and Tanga, and in two rural villages in Mwanza and Kibaha. Three of these were facilitated by Gonza himself (who had attended the training course at LSE) with villagers making the model, and the others were conducted by community members after a one hour briefing. Again, the model attracted a great deal of attention from passers-by. People commented that it was *"a beautiful place for living"*, that *"using the model they can identify easily problems facing them and (show) their location on the model"*, that the exercise *"helps to save time and reach agreement quickly...is interesting (and people feel) comfortable, like playing cards, while (dealing with) very big issues touching peoples lives and development"*, and *"they praised the process because it enables all people to participate without any fear"*. In Dar-es-Salaam, people from outside the locality asked if they could also join in.

Meetings were held in a primary school, two childcare centres, under a mango tree (in a village which had no meeting hall), and at the village godown. 620 people of all age groups attended these meetings, and others expressed interest in helping to implement the plans prepared if outside support was obtained (there is some justified scepticism because, in the past, many community projects have not materialised: *"they end up as stories"*). While all of the trials produced community plans with relatively little disagreement, consensus was achieved far more quickly in the rural villages.

The trials have been followed up with favourable responses from NGOs, private firms and local and central government. In all five communities, committees have been formed to coordinate the activities. The community groups are already implementing the activities which do not require external assistance (for example, in Mondo village, Mwanza, in northern Tanzania where the Saharan desert is extending towards the South, the community group has already planted 6,000 trees in the communal forest and each of the 600 families plans to plant 60 trees this year).

**BOX 3
THE ZAMBIAN TRIAL**

This trial was conducted under the auspices of the CARE-International Peri-Urban Self-Help Project in part of George Compound, Lusaka. The CARE project manager briefed the three trial conveners (a project community development officer and two members of the George Residents' Development Committee), using the User's Guide only as she had not been able to attend our training sessions. Local residents constructed the model, which was displayed on two mornings at the health clinic, and on a third morning on one of the side roads. Four main meetings were held at the clinic meeting room, attracting a total of 110 people, each meeting being better attended than the earlier one. A story to demonstrate the model was told by two members of the RDC. People used the cards to identify problems and solutions, and found it easy to prioritise problems: *"the participants seemed to really enjoy the process and the interaction was great"*. As in Cambodia, there was some confusion over the 'We Do It' and 'They Do It' rows on the Action chart, and the chronological time sequence (NOW-SOON-LATER), and it is clear that the Action Chart requires redesign in the light of these comments. The exercise has been followed up a sub-group of people from the main meeting, who are interested in setting up a zone Residents Development Committee within this part of George Compound. NGOs and councillors observed the trial, and interested government departments and NGOs have been identified. The CARE project staff see scope for zone committees to use the kit in their further work.

- The model is very flexible, can be transported easily, and the parts can be constantly rearranged so that new ideas can be tried out without commitment.
- People identify with the model: they can point to their own homes and workplaces, and they *enjoy* working with it.
- Conflicts of interest between different members of the community are mediated because people concentrate on the real problems (represented on the model) rather than the personalities in the group: frequently, solutions emerge that are in everyone's interest.

- The model allows every member of the community, including children and those who do not normally speak at public meetings, to contribute their knowledge and experience of the problems faced in the community and to have an equal say in decision making.
- The information placed on the model and used in planning reflects local people's knowledge about problems and opportunities, and their own priorities rather than the agendas of outside 'experts', though professionals can give advice when invited.
- The model clearly shows the interlocking nature of development problems and leads to an intersectoral approach to solving them (for example, linkages may be made between problems of ill-health, bad housing and malnutrition).
- The emphasis on non-verbal communication of ideas is useful in multi-ethnic urban communities, where there is no single common language.
- The methodology builds in the opportunity to negotiate for resources both within the community and from outside bodies (such as local and central government and international donor agencies), and shows how communities can use their own resources as bargaining counters to lever in additional resources for things they can't do entirely by themselves.
- The approach has been successfully used to generate a community-controlled planning process in both rural and urban contexts, and in a variety of societies and cultures.

Development Planning for Real adds to the existing panoply of PRA techniques a systematic community-managed planning process, which has the potential - by raising awareness, confidence and bargaining skills - to initiate a longer term community building process. While further work is required to simplify and improve the Action Chart, by showing when activities should be completed (NOW, SOON or LATER) and by whom ('We Do It' or 'They Do It'), it is the starting point

for community monitoring of plan implementation. The methodology does not automatically resolve conflicts, but it can concentrate people's minds on the problem and make consensus or consensual acceptance of difference easier. It can enable individuals to 'own' their own views, and to see what others are saying, before entering into open discussion. Methods of conflict resolution might be developed in future work on the kits.

As a neighbourhood level pack, the pilot version of *Development Planning for Real* is not designed to solve national or city-wide problems. However, it can help people to organise and lobby for wider policy changes. It should be possible to develop a city model which people could use to show their views about strategic planning decisions. In the UK an interesting experiment has recently been conducted in the town of Ashford, in Kent. An aerial photograph of the town and its surrounding countryside was displayed in a public space in the town centre, and participants were invited to annotate and mark the map with coloured stickers to show their desires, tastes and frustrations. Each participant was then invited to 'play the planner' by allocating stickers designed to represent new development. At a later stage a sample of respondents were presented with a series of artist's impressions of eight alternative future landscapes, based on the information collected from participants in the exercise, and asked to express a preference, explaining their choice. People were found to be willing to consider very carefully the issues involved in city-wide planning, expressed strong preferences, and were willing to learn and to accept compromise as they wrestled with dilemmas (Potter et al. 1994).

There are many ways in which the approach can be taken further. Diversity and the discovery of local variations are to be encouraged. Yet there is a danger, as with any PRA technique, that imitators will adopt a top-down version, co-opting the approach rather than using it to facilitate a community building process. We have already received a draft of one such top-down adaptation, where scaling-up is achieved by preceding the neighbourhood *Planning for Real* exercise with a 'City Game' in which unelected professional planners from government, the private sector and academia

decide the city's planning priorities with no input from ordinary citizens. The residents' role is confined to considering the impact of the professionals' proposals, and bargaining over the location of the new developments proposed. Negotiations between localities would be conducted by 'trading-off gains and losses to arrive at a mutually satisfactory compromise'. There is no mention of the unequal powers of professionals and ordinary people, and the community building process is totally ignored. To compound the misery, the approach is misleadingly entitled 'Urban Development Planning for Real'. Beware of cheap imitations!

Where we go from here

A second group of MSc students at the LSE has decided to take the design of *Development Planning for Real* further this year. We hope to revise the Action Chart, improve the prototype kit, and work on the conflict resolution and monitoring aspects. Several of the group are interested in using *Development Planning for Real* as the basis for developing a community planning methodology for use in refugee situations, while others would like to adapt the kit for use in the education sector. We might possibly end up with a menu of kits, comprising a main course basic kit and sets of specialised sectoral or regional card packs to accompany it.

If anyone else is interested in participating in our pilot trials, we have a small number of the prototype kits left. We welcome further ideas and correspondence.

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