

Editorial

Here, at last, is another general issue to give a voice to those of you who have sent us valuable contributions whose subject matter fell outside the themes of the special issues on training, livestock and urban areas. This issue includes a variety of newly emerging conceptual and methodological issues. Besides these contributions, there are many novel applications which draw wider conclusions from their specific examples.

- **Conceptual reflections**

Several of the articles emphasise, yet again, how we, as practitioners of the increasingly widely-used PRA, must keep a watchful eye on how the term is used, and to what it is applied. The first contribution, *Sharing our Concerns and Looking to the Future*, arose from a workshop on developments in the theory and practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal held in May 1994 at the Institute of Development Studies in Brighton. As part of this process, a group of PRA practitioners and trainers discussed their growing concerns about quality assurance, cooption, and ethics surrounding the use of PRA. The group identified basic principles by which 'good practice' could be both realised and identified.

Clas Lindberg, Vesa-Matti Loiske, Wilhelm Östberg and Claude Mung'ong'o provide a detailed case study to illustrate how rapid studies can easily overlook the poorest members of a community, even if they aim to represent their views. Their conclusion is that if a study is to be rapid, methods such as wealth ranking must be used sensitively and intelligently.

Richard Edwards deals with the difficult topic of raised expectations, so often cited as an area of potential danger with PRA. After discussing how to ensure that expectations are not unnecessarily raised, he concludes that if handled sensitively, raised expectations can actually be a motivating force in encouraging

communities to participate in their own programmes, and not a liability.

- **Methodological innovation**

Creativity, innovation and refinement remain a key feature of many of the articles that we receive. For example, Nurul Islam Nazem and Pete Atkins' Grandfather Graph is an innovative extension of David Mosse and Mona Mehta's piece in *RRA Notes* 18 on genealogies and social mapping. Prahlad Mishra and Gayatree Mohanty developed a method for more accurate social mapping in larger villages (more than 500 households) where information is more complex than smaller, more homogenous communities, while Claus Euler adapted a ranking exercise to demonstrate the awareness needed about the timing of visits to rural communities.

Simon Maxwell and Claud Bart provide a clear and insightful critique of the commonly used method of ranking. In a detailed analysis of a number of studies which used the method, they point out that the results should always be interpreted with great care. They use an example from Ethiopia to demonstrate how scoring can be a more useful approach than ranking for discussing relative preferences.

- **Thematic pieces**

Derek Denniston's description of Andrew Leake's work in Central America graphically shows how participatory mapping can be the first vital step in a sensitive political process - providing recognition for the rights of indigenous peoples and their livelihood activities.

David Adriance describes the use of PRA at the meso-level, within a water and sanitation project. Most PRAs concentrate on a single village or 'community', while the tiered approach presented here generates some interesting lessons. He also warns about the

far-reaching implications of participatory work for implementing agencies: *"If PRA is not going to have a totally predetermined outcome, the implementing agency must build an element of uncertainty into their project proposals."*

Few articles in previous issues of *RRA Notes* have discussed applying RRA/PRA methods specifically to coastal resource management. Michael Pido describes how a multidisciplinary team used RRA in the Philippines to generate information about problems and opportunities, establish monitoring indicators to determine the impacts of future development, and pinpoint subjects for further research in Malampaya Sound, one of the region's richest fishing grounds. Staying on the subject of water, S. Kaivelu, Rupert Howes and John Devavaram show how PRA can help to make the most of the complementarities between farmers' and engineers' knowledge when rehabilitating minor irrigation tanks. In their experience, farmers knew what problems exist, and prioritised them, while engineers provided the most effective solutions.

Ravai Marindo-Ranganai gives an account of the inventive way in which she used PRA methods to gather demographic data on the Tembomvura people of Zimbabwe. She asserts in her conclusion *"that demography, by its very nature, can not be divorced from quantification. However PRA methods can be used to strengthen demographic data collection by providing flesh for the skeletal figures that are collected by the quantitative questionnaire."*

Savina Ammassari used several PRA methods in one of the largest resettlement sites in Ethiopia. Her main aim was to explore general adjustment problems and constraints, needs and priorities, and the expectations and aspirations of the settlers. At the same time, however, her use of PRA proved a means for encouraging people to become more self-reliant in a development context characterised by 'project dependency'. Her account is also useful methodologically, since she assesses the use of PRA methods for exploring *"phenomena evolving over time and, thus, for the investigation of the dynamic contexts characterised by migration."*

Mick Howes and Chris Roche used an ingenious way to introduce the concept of PRA to the staff of the London Secretariat of ACORD. They encouraged staff members to use PRA methods in an appraisal of their own work as a familiarisation exercise, and at the same time to generate some useful insights into how the organisation was operating and what it was achieving. The article describes which PRA methods were particularly appropriate to this application, and identifies those topics for which there are currently no methods. In a similar vein, employees at the grassroots level of a Community Forestry and Soil Conservation Development Programme in Ethiopia were given the chance to assess, through a ranking exercise, which of the programme constraints had implications for sustainability. The process is described by Kebede Asrat.

This issue is rounded off with two articles on the use of PRA and RRA approaches with communities living near national parks. John Mason and Elijah Danso used PRA to assess people's perceptions of the benefits and difficulties of their life near Mole National Park in Ghana. They found the approach not only useful but also *"frequently the only approach acceptable to villagers, biased by years of mistrust and conflict with the Ghanaian Department of Game and Wildlife (GWD)."* Their experiences led them to conclude that PRA must be viewed as an important component to any conservation approach. Sarah Pocknell and Danny Annaly also point out that conservation expeditions from the North to protected areas in the South all too often ignore the ecological knowledge of local people. Often the results are not only an inaccurate picture of the local ecology but also overlook local needs when protected areas are established.