

Editorial

• What's in a name

Rapid Rural Appraisal as it is currently practised covers such a great variety of methods and techniques that the name is sometimes misleading. Some RRA methods are not particularly rapid - they may take weeks or months to complete rather than days. Others are applied in urban rather than rural situations, and yet others are more concerned with the development process - farmer participation, project implementation or monitoring - rather than its appraisal.

But this problem of definition does not matter very much in practice, because most of us recognise an RRA approach when we see it or hear of it. What RRA methods tend to have in common are:

- greater speed compared with conventional methods of analysis;
- working in the 'field', whether it be a farm, a refugee camp or an urban slum;
- an emphasis on learning directly from the local inhabitants;
- a semi-structured, multidisciplinary approach with room for flexibility and innovation; and,
- an emphasis on producing timely insights, hypotheses or 'best bets' rather than final truths or fixed recommendations.

In this series of notes 'RRA' covers any method or technique which can be broadly described in these terms. Similarly in terms of subject matter we are taking a broad interpretation. The topics may include agriculture, or irrigation, or health or urban development. The aim of the notes is to share a wide set of experiences and ideas - our success

though depends on receiving contributions from practitioners. PLEASE WRITE TO US.

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