Editorial

• Introduction

Most of this issue is devoted to the use of participatory approaches with children. Why did we feel that children’s participatory merited a special section? As the articles in the section reveal, and as those working with other ‘invisible’ groups can confirm, the benefits of ‘community’ participation and sustainable development will not automatically trickle down to children unless their specific needs and situations are taken into account. Victoria Johnson opens the section with an excellent introduction to the subject, and to the articles in the issue. These present a variety of perspectives, from the conceptual to the practical, yet all demonstrate the value and importance of seeking children’s views.

The articles are just a taste of the work being done. We hope they will inspire others to work with, and for, children. If you have any experiences to report on working with children, or comments about the section, please write to us - we’d like to hear your views.

• Taking the long view

First, however, the issue opens with a collection of more general articles. These again reflect an amazing variety of themes and locations. However, a theme common to three of the articles is the value to be gained from taking a historical perspective when trying to make sense of, or improve upon, today’s situation.

For example, participation has a long history in Latin America, and last August the first ever meeting to share experiences of practitioners was held in Mexico. Costanza de Toma’s neat summary of the event illustrates how the advent of democracy generally in the region is helping to institutionalise participatory approaches. The roots of participation in the region lie in the empowerment focus of radical political thinkers in Latin America, notably Paulo Freire and Orlando Fals Borda. However, workshop participants warned that institutional co-option may dilute how ‘participation’ is put into practice. Remembering these eminently political roots may be a way of avoiding this dilution.

The importance of understanding history in other situations is described by Ailsa Holloway and Diane Lindsey. They used a variety of time-related PRA methods with refugee returnee populations in Mozambique. Their aim was to identify people’s historical capacity to withstand drought, as well as their vulnerabilities, and to build on these to strengthen them.

The way that certain approaches to relief and development create dependency is a common obstacle to many trying to encourage more self-reliant communities. Wilbert Sadomba describes a useful PRA method, again based on a historical perspective, for addressing this issue. Described as a “growth-oriented learning approach”, Retrospective Community Mapping proved to be an ideal way of enabling people to understand historical cause and effect in their present situations. He found it created a strong sense of common identity and cohesion in the Zimbabwean communities with whom he worked: “When they reflect upon their history and understand the way things have developed to the present, they appreciate that poverty is not a static and immutable condition, and has not been there for time immemorial.”

• A question of perspective

We are pleased to be able to include two gender-related articles - a welcome addition since the subject is relatively scarce in past issues. Janet Seeley and colleagues deliver a timely reminder, based on their experience in Uganda, that gender affects the way people interpret and contribute to PRA exercises, in
this case, well-being ranking. They warn against aggregating information given by a ‘community’ as this will iron out important gender (or age) related perceptions. Judith Dent’s reflective account of a recent PRA training in Indonesia provides some practical steps for incorporating an awareness of gender into PRA activities.

Robert Leurs presents a rare account of staff perceptions of the impact of PRA on the work of the Indian NGO MYRADA and on the communities involved. While the staff felt that while their work had definitely become more participatory, especially in the planning stages of projects, the evaluation stage of the project cycle remained largely donor-driven. He also highlights the difficulty of separating cause from effect in impact analysis. We hope to be able to include more examples of impact analysis in future issues of *PLA Notes* - if you have any examples, please do write to us.

Finally, Ann Hudock writes from a context that is fairly new to the *Notes* - the difficulties associated with attempting participatory research in conflict-ridden situations. Her experience in Sierra Leone throws up some important lessons, not least of which is the necessity of and approach needed for gaining a community’s trust when fear and suspicion are rife. She concludes that too often, conflict situations are seen as separate and distinct from the development process. However, as she says, "if care is taken to adapt PRA exercises to the context of conflict, they can provide a means of enhancing people’s understanding of conflicts, and ensuring the appropriateness of interventions undertaken to alleviate their effects".

Finally, we must thank readers for the overwhelming response to the readership survey sent out with the last issue of the *Notes*. Completed survey forms are still pouring in, so we hope to be able to present you with the results in the next issue.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The section on children's participation would not have been possible without Victoria Johnson's help, input and encouragement, all of which she has managed to give whilst caring for her very own child, who was born in October.

Many thanks also to Save the Children Fund UK for supporting this issue.

### HELP NEEDED

IIED is launching a major project which aims to evaluate the environmental, social and economic impacts of community-oriented wildlife management initiatives in both developing and developed countries.

Our first task is to identify existing community wildlife management initiatives worldwide, and research being undertaken in this area, and we would like to hear urgently from any individuals or organisations involved in work of this type.

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Sharing experiences of participation in Latin America: a workshop report

Costanza de Toma

Introduction

The first regional meeting on participatory development to be held in Latin America took place in Mexico, in August 1995\(^1\). For the first time, over 100 practitioners met to exchange experiences and discuss future strategies. Most countries in Latin America were represented and the meeting revealed for the first time the full extent of the spread of participatory methodologies in the region.

The aim of the meeting was to identify common problems, issues and interests, foster greater coordination between the different institutions and set up a regional network for furthering the spread of participatory methodologies.

Issues discussed

Three main issues were discussed:
- Historical and political aspects
- The new professionalism
- Scaling up from micro to macro

Historical and political aspects

The variety of participatory approaches discussed at the meeting reflected the long history of participation in Latin America. An eminently political dimension characterises the meaning of popular participation there with the work of Paulo Freire (popular education) and Orlando Fals Borda (participatory action research) being very important. The influence of PRA is much more recent.

Discussions were had about the wave of democratisation that is occurring in the region and which is encouraging the institutionalisation of participation. For example, in Bolivia there is a Law of Popular Participation that encourages the use of participatory methodologies in development and because of this grassroots actions are supported, with NGOs playing a vital role.

This example was received with mixed feelings. Most participants believed that use of participatory methodologies will itself greatly strengthen the process of democratisation. The only concern was how to make the most of the opportunities and institutional spaces that were being opened.

Others argued that the institutionalisation of participation has led to a process of vulgarisation in which it has been co-opted. This was seen to have diluted the political basis of the original philosophy of participation into a ‘basket of tools’ to be used \textit{ad hoc} within existing frameworks. Thus, ‘conscientisation’, a heavily loaded term, was seen to have given way to ‘participation’. For this reason it was suggested that remembering the history of participation in Latin America may counteract its dilution.

The new professionalism

Participants agreed that the concepts of a ‘new professionalism’ and ‘conscientisation’ both advocate the need for role-reversal and a change

\(^1\) The ‘First Latin American meeting for sharing experiences on participatory appraisal and community planning’ was sponsored by the World Resources Institute, Grupo de Estudios Ambientales (a Mexican NGO), and Centro de Estudios Sociales de la Realidad Economica y Social as part of the Forest Trees and People programme of FAO-Bolivia.
in the way development is perceived. They require a ‘bottom-up’ understanding of development, a strong personal conviction of what participation means and an ability to ‘hand over the stick’, allowing the ‘researched’ to take the lead.

The difficulties of working according to these principles in Latin America were highlighted by those practitioners who had to deal with power dynamics and social exclusion on a regular basis. As participatory projects inevitably cast light upon all sorts of exclusions and injustice the problem was seen to lay in the practitioners’ inability to harmonise social groups and manage inequalities often exacerbated by opposing political allegiances or different religious/ethnic identities within communities.

**Scaling-up from micro to macro**

The main concern shared by all was how to ensure participation throughout the project cycle. In connection with this the role of NGOs at the micro and macro levels was questioned. Although most NGOs in Latin America have played an important part in denouncing social injustice and public inefficiency they have often failed to go beyond denunciation, into long-term policy-making at government and international levels. Greater coordination, therefore, was not only advocated between all NGOs in Latin America, but also between NGOs, government agencies, and international organisations.

It was recognised that in order to take the opportunities offered in the drive to institutionalise participation, a series of short, medium, and long-term actions have to be identified. Most importantly, it was hoped that with democratisation a consensus between micro and macro level interests will be possible.

**Networking in Latin America**

The issue of sharing experiences and findings was fundamental to the meeting. It was recognised that unless sharing occurs the full potential of participatory development will never be realised.

Networking on the Internet and using email was suggested despite the drawback that most of the smaller organisations, and the people for whose benefit all this is, will be excluded. For example, in Bolivia and in Mexico there are already such networks with a number of databases being shared amongst users. The next step there would be to open a discussion group on the Internet. Translation to and from English would also enable communication with networks existing elsewhere.

**Conclusions**

Latin American networking was greatly encouraged by this first meeting. Although, as expected, no consensus was reached, all participants agreed that the essence of participation, irrespective of the methodology employed, was to allow people to be the subjects, and not the objects of development. It was also agreed that the role of participatory development in Latin America has to be strengthened so as to support the process of democratisation.

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PRA for risk reduction: lessons from Mozambique

Ailsa Holloway and Diane Lindsey

Introduction

Today we are acutely aware that community participation is key to the success of development programmes. But what about community involvement in, and after, disasters? For example, what about the hundreds of thousands of internally displaced and refugee Mozambicans who returned to villages destroyed after nearly two decades of hostilities? Are the communities affected by events such as these merely passive recipients of aid? Have they become so dependent on outside help that they are disinterested in taking measures themselves which could help them be better prepared?

PRA is increasingly viewed as a method which enables NGOs and their clients to plan programmes jointly to reduce community vulnerability. The Southern African Regional Delegation of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is one of many humanitarian agencies which actively promotes the use of PRA for community assessment, and has advocated its use in community-based disaster mitigation planning.

In this paper, we intend to show how PRA can be a useful tool in assessing the hazards, vulnerabilities and capacities of disaster-prone communities, for empowering them to reduce their risk to known threats and for improving programme planning. The paper is based on a field experience with refugee returnees in Tete Province, Mozambique.

Background and methods used

The community in Tete is in the process of re-establishing itself after several years in refugee camps in neighbouring countries. As part of the rehabilitation process, a number of outside organisations have developed programmes to put these communities back on their feet. However, it seems that many of these programmes were carried out without a complete picture of the area’s risk profile (especially the fact that it is drought-prone). Moreover, there appeared to be little understanding of the community’s capacity to deal with drought in the past, and how this capacity needed to be supported and strengthened as the returnee communities re-established themselves.

As a result the programmes, although well-intended, have not been as effective as they might have been in reducing the vulnerability of the communities. For example, while returnees did receive seeds, these were non-drought-tolerant maize seeds and were delivered late for planting. Thus the crop failed because of the prevailing drought conditions.

We spent three days working with several communities, followed by a review of the information gathered. Information for programme-planning that was risk-sensitive and, specifically, drought-sensitive was generated. They were also of help to outsiders trying to understand the drought-related vulnerability and capacity of the refugee returnees. Box 1 describes the type of information generated using a variety of PRA methods.

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1 More details of ways in which PRA can be applied to disaster mitigation are also described in Reducing risk: participatory learning activities for disaster mitigation in Southern Africa, jointly published by and available from the Southern African Delegation of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Department of Adult and Community Education at the University of Natal.
BOX 1 METHODS FOR UNDERSTANDING COPING STRATEGIES

Time-line
From the time-line, events that had occurred in the community were tracked over many years. This revealed that the hazard of drought was a recurrent event in the community’s past. We also learned that the community had been able to cope with these droughts in the past. For example, the ‘Kansale’ drought of 1973 got its name from the particular wild fruit that the community ate to survive. At this time, the community was also cultivating drought-tolerant crops, such as sorghum. So although people were drought-affected, they were fully able to manage without external assistance.

Time trend
This helped us understand the rain patterns during a good harvest year, compared with those during a bad one. This way we were also able to understand the drought’s impact on crop production. The time trends were also useful for knowing when the demands are for work in the fields. This was key for planning community meetings or other gatherings that would take time away from cultivation.

Seasonality mapping
This revealed the times when people collect wild foods such as fruit, nuts, roots etc.

Community mapping
This showed where the water sources were located, allowing a better understanding of drought-related vulnerabilities.

Needs matrix
This helped to prioritise the community’s most urgent needs: food, water and medicine.

- From PRA to disaster reduction planning

The key findings generated by the PRA methods allowed us to begin planning a programme to build on existing capacity amongst the community and address their vulnerabilities in order to reduce the impact of recurrent drought. Some of the capacities and vulnerabilities revealed during the PRA exercises include:

- The fact that the area is drought-prone.
- Hunger/food insecurity is perceived as the most important risk facing the community.
- Lack of safe and accessible water as well as essential medicines are perceived as key vulnerabilities by the community.
- Older members of the community have good knowledge of and openness to using drought-tolerant crops.
- Older members of the community are knowledgeable about the availabilities and use of wild foods.
- The community indicated when they would be fully committed to preparing and cultivating their fields, highlighting a capacity to protect household food security, which any outside intervention should not undermine.

Building on some of the capacities identified above (such as the awareness amongst older community members of the importance of drought-tolerant seed, and the clear commitment by the community to cultivate fields actively, due to their desire to not remain passive recipients of food aid), a programme to reduce drought-related vulnerability could have three components:

- Start up distribution of drought-tolerant seeds such as sorghum, as well as maize and groundnut.
- Start a community-managed seed bank.
- Provide training for young people in local cultivation methods by involving the older members of the community. It should be remembered that most of the young people have spent much of their formative years in refugee camps, where food was delivered by relief agencies and not cultivated by the household.

- Conclusions

As shown here, it is important that from a disaster-reduction perspective, PRA be used to assess key vulnerabilities and capacities, as these relate to the risks faced by disaster-prone...
communities. Compared to other assessment methods, PRA is particularly powerful as it:

- actively involves the community;
- empowers the community to identify the risks and priorities as well as their capacities to reduce these risks;
- provides a picture of the community’s perceptions of the risks it faces;
- allows both community insiders and outsiders to jointly identify risk reduction measures; and,
- is both time- and cost-effective.

In this example, PRA provided a wealth of information directly relevant to the risks affecting returnee communities, and the capacities which could be strengthened to reduce these. This type of information is critical if outside agencies are to develop programmes which lower both disaster risk and community vulnerability in the long-term.

- Ailsa Holloway and Diane Lindsey, c/o Regional Delegation, International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 11 Phillips Avenue, Belgravia, Harare, Zimbabwe.
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Retrospective community mapping: a tool for community education

Wilbert Z. Sadomba

• Introduction

When we\textsuperscript{1} were conducting Community Based Planning (CBP) in Beitbridge, a southern district in Zimbabwe, there came a request through the council, from the communities, for community education. This surprised us as we had assumed that community education was interwoven with the participatory planning that we were doing. Until now I do not think we were completely wrong. Certainly the process of participatory planning is, by its very nature, educational. So the question was, why this request for education?

We were about to embark on project design with the communities, the step before the implementation of the ideas. In our view, all had been done. It was only when the councillors evaluated our earlier visits that we learnt our mistake. We had not done any community education and this was very clearly a problem.

• The dependency problem

Although the process of CBP had been going on in every community with varying degrees of success, it was clear that this had not removed the ‘chronic dependency syndrome’. Communities had gone through mapping, data gathering, problem analysis, and needs identification. From the beginning of the project there was emphasis in the councillors’ workshops that communities had to understand that they should not expect any outside assistance. In many cases communities have developed a dependency idea that someone else, not them, was responsible for ensuring the success of the community plans.

Project design, the next step after needs identification, therefore was in danger of raising community hopes and expectations. Communities would design projects thinking that the government or other agencies would fund whatever they identified as needs. This stems from experiences in the past where ‘shopping lists’ were submitted, resulting in District Development Plans. In forwarding the list of wants, communities never questioned where the resources would come from or who would do it. If this was done for our project it would be disastrous for the whole process.

This was not a small issue. Participation of the communities in the decision-making process was not enough for judging success of the project. For us, success would be manifest in the changes that would occur in the thinking of the communities about their capability to redefine their philosophy of development and finally determine the course and pace of that development through well designed projects. Project planning would remain hollow and mere rhetoric if everything was perceived as impossible without outside interference.

The participatory approaches used had not adequately made communities "grow in judgement, including ability to critically examine their own beliefs and practices and make sound decisions on future courses of action" (Srinivasan, 1992). This is because the methods seem to be limited in that they address the problems from the present to the future. For example, community mapping was too narrow as it only focused on the present situation

\textsuperscript{1} This article arises from work done by the author while working on a UNICEF supported community-based water and sanitation management programme.

without enough probing into the historical development of the community.

The other problem was that there was no method which would assist people in reflecting on how their life had changed over time. They have not been able to assess limitations stemming from historical changes. This comparison of a harmonious past on one hand and the present miserable conditions of the community on the other, is vital not only for better judgement, but also for developing self-esteem and pride. This is what seemed to have been lacking in the development of the programme.

- **Retrospective community mapping**

To resolve these problems, we came up with a participatory tool called Retrospective Community Mapping (RCM). This method seems to be a major breakthrough in community education and participation. It provides a strong basis for communities to understand and appreciate their "problems based on fuller exploration of their causes and alternative solutions" (Srinivasan, 1992). It is a participatory method which prepares communities not only for participation, but also for general development - a growth-oriented learning approach. It begins with the tangible (the physical historical map) and moves on to the abstract (discussion of socio-cultural and economic life). However, accuracy of time is not the issue, community experiences are more important. This is especially true of African societies where the concept of time is not cardinal in people’s philosophy of life.

Thus, the objectives of RCM are to:

- Help the community revisit their own history in order to provide community cohesion, a sense of belonging and a sense of identity.
- Develop community self-esteem and pride.
- Develop critical thinking through the analysis of positive and negative aspects of the changes in their social life.
- Give a better understanding of the root causes of community problems and misery.
- Identify risky behaviours in the community or by individuals owing to the changes of life patterns and environment over time.
- Develop enthusiasm to act and build a better and sustainable future.

RCM is a method which makes people appreciate the constant motion in their life. When they reflect upon their history and understand the way things have developed to the present, they appreciate that poverty is not a static and immutable condition, and has not been there for time immemorial. "They ... perceive their state not as fated and unalterable, but as limiting - and therefore challenging". (Freire, 1972). There is evidence that where this method is used, communities have better plans for their future than others. In Mutetengwe Ward of Beitbridge district, for example, communities developed plans covering geographical information, economic strategy, social development and environmental issues.

In Africa, where interdependence amongst individuals of the community is not in the distant past, RCM resuscitates the more progressive idea of community cohesion. The community will realise their common background and how conditions were adverse to them as a community and not as individuals (Box 1).

RCM gives the community an opportunity to evaluate and critically reflect upon ‘development’. In assessing the institutions and infrastructure that were introduced in the given time periods, the community develops independent and critical thinking. This is a prerequisite to achieving all-round development. They start to appreciate that not all that came in the name of ‘development’ was positive to their life and that all their traditional practices were not negative and should be destroyed in the name of modernism. In fact they begin to realise that development should improve their life and not lead to its overhaul or to a complete reversal.
BOX 1

RETROSPECTIVE MAPPING IN MALALA VILLAGE

The retrospective map made by the Malala Village Community in Beitbridge showed the settlement pattern of the indigenous people in the 1920s, how it changed and the effect on the environment, leading to the present water and sanitation problems.

The people were concentrated at the confluence of the Mzingwane and Venbe (Limpopo) rivers. This choice of the area reveals deep analysis of land use planning. The soil in these places is rich alluvium gaining its fertility from the millenia of organic matter deposited from upstream. As three old people explained, it was the most suitable land for cropping. Shifting cultivation was the method of farming. Croplands were not stumped. They did not practise monoculture and there was no cash cropping during that time. There were a bit of bumper harvests. The catchment areas of the rivers were intact and the rivers were perennial. The rest of the hinterland which comprised marshlands, forests and grasslands, were left for wildlife and grazing. This included the drier parts, not suitable for cultivation.

This life did not continue for long, as shown by subsequent maps. One year the people were just given orders to leave the land because it had been bought. Convoy of trucks came to ferry the villagers. The old people narrated the story in graphic detail and outlined how the area was made a commercial farming area. The people were then driven into the hinterland where they live today. More people came from other parts of the province to join them and within a few years the land started to fill up. When they arrived in that area (Mtetengwe) there were only three homesteads. From the subsequent maps one could see how the communities were enmeshed by the cash economy, how the environmental problems started to unfold and with that the progressive deterioration of living conditions. They were no longer masters of their destiny.

From this passionate narration the community started to gain a deeper appreciation of its history and the origins of their present life.

They noticed that the causes of their poverty and misery were common, starting with the loss of their economic base; their fertile croplands. This developed a great sense of identity, belonging and mutual interdependence amongst members.

From a number of retrospective community mapping sessions which we did with different communities, there was a critical evaluation of a variety of institutions like schools, health institutions, communication network etc. The underlying question was, what were the pros and cons of introducing this or that institution? The school, for example, taught people to read and write and therefore made communication much easier. But it also destroyed institutions that were responsible for moral education and replaced them with nothing or, worse still, unrestricted and corrupt media. Here the example of sex education films that were shown to primary school children was cited by the people of Kombatakala Village as negative to the morality of the Venda people and their way of bringing up children.

The introduction of the health institutions were analysed in much the same way again. Although they handled some of the illnesses, they destroyed more important institutions like the system of traditional health care delivery. Detailed analysis of traditional health care institutions, pathways and referral systems were discussed in varying depths including handling of diarrhoeal diseases. For the water and sanitation programme, this was very valuable information.

- Procedure of RCM

Box 2 shows the procedure one should follow when doing RCM. The starting point is to have as mixed a community gathering as possible according to gender, age, status, etc. It is important that the facilitator make sure that the community is well represented.
BOX 2
A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO RCM

Step 1. Establish a baseline date and intervals of maps
When the community is gathered, and the procedure outlined, let them decide on the baseline date for their mapping. The basic question at this point is, “How far back do we remember about our community?” Usually those who have lived longest in that community will determine the year to begin from. Then the community decides on the intervals of maps. From our experience, maps were easily developed for each decade with 1920 being the base year.

Step 2. Divide the community into mapping age groups
Each community member has to decide at which age she/he was mature enough to understand the pattern of life and the environment of the community. Relevant groups are formed for each mapping period.

Step 3. Drawing of maps
Each group draws a community map for their given period. They can do this on the ground using available resources. It is important that they try by all means to show everything that can be shown on the map eg. their hunting grounds, rivers that used to flow and fish in them, wildlife, vegetation, settlement pattern, croplands, grazing etc.

Step 4. Presentation of maps
All groups gather and go round to each group to present their map. Question time is given during or at the end of each presentation, whatever is preferred by the community. If the maps are drawn on paper, the groups will take turns to present the maps.

Step 5. Description of socio-economic and cultural conditions
The community goes back into their respective groups and describe the pattern of life in their period. They discuss demographic changes and associated impacts. They recall various institutions for health, education, bringing up children, family, marriage etc. They discuss their cardinal philosophy of life and belief patterns including religion, social cohesion etc. They discuss economic activities, (hunting, tillage, industrial production etc). They also discuss access to means of production during their period such as land and finished commodities.

At times it is very difficult to separate this step from step 4 above. Often when maps are being presented people start asking questions and discussions go on. However our experience is that subjects tend to be more exhaustive if the groups have an opportunity to reflect upon the socio-economic conditions of their time.

Step 6. Presentation of life patterns for the period
The community goes into another plenary session where each group presents the life pattern of their period. The community describes different patterns of life for each mapping period. Other community members can ask any questions and this can lead into any course of discussion. This provides a good background for the communities to choose what themes they will want to discuss and what problems they want to focus on and resolve. This becomes an important step, because this is how people determine themselves what they want to learn and decide the content of their education.

"We simply cannot go to the workers - urban or peasant - in the banking style, to give them knowledge or to impose upon them the model of the ‘good man’ contained in a programme whose content we have ourselves organised ... The starting point for organising a programme content of education ... must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people.”

(Freire, 1972)

Step 7. Focus group discussions
A focus group discussion usually flows naturally from the questions raised. Themes can be chosen without control whatsoever, by the facilitator. Community members should ask questions, debate and discuss freely without fear of getting out of topic. The focus group discussions will also show the facilitator what the community is interested in. If the facilitator has other areas he/she feels have to be discussed, then open ended questions and other methods are suggested.
Specific themes can be introduced into RCM (Box 3). For example the maps can be used as a story with a gap. One can take maps of consecutive decades and ask what the community thinks could have caused change from one condition to the other. For example, what caused the drying of a stream that is shown to have been perennial in all the previous maps; or what caused deforestation?

Socio-economic changes can be analysed in a similar manner.

**BOX 3
UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF FARMING**

This technique was used in Zimuto Communal Lands (Masvingo Province) during a community write up of a project proposal for environmental conservation related to small earth dams. The question was, how has agricultural production changed over the period 1920 to 1993?

There was heated discussion when traditional methods of tillage (shifting cultivation, without stamping, contour ridges, chemical fertilizers or mono-cropping) were positively presented by the elders. They cited conventional methods as root causes of erosion and other environmental problems. Extension workers vehemently resisted, arguing for conventional methods of farming. The conclusion reached by the community in the end was to have a serious study of the past methods to fight problems introduced by conventional methods of farming.

Open-ended questions that stimulate debate and thinking can also be asked. For example:

- Did sexual behaviour change at all during the period? If so, how, and which periods had different sexual behaviour from others?
- How did tasks, authority and general status for men and women change?
- What has been the role of outsiders in the past and is this changing?
- Which abandoned institutions could have positively survived alongside the educational system, health services etc.?

• **Conclusion**

What is apparent in a project that genuinely attempts to be totally community-based is the complexity of social structures and motion. Even those communities which are considered to be simple have an intricate thread woven in a way that no outsider can easily understand. The community ought to educate not only themselves but even more importantly, the outsider, especially the extension worker. The serious blunder that is always made is that the outsider comes in as a godfather with knowledge to be passed to communities. This is commonly termed community education; with specifications of objectives, content, methods, even timetables and facilitators or educators. The question is, do we really end up with an educated community?

To us, community education connotes a process of unearthing the origins of a community in order to understand its own life at a time when it managed its own affairs. What were the intricate webs of social institutions, belief systems and philosophy of life that sustained the community in its daily interactions with nature? How did this change; who controlled the changes and with what effect on the thinking of the community? Why? Who is master of the community’s destiny today? Should that be the case or should they control their own change?

Retrospective (or Historical) Community Mapping is a method which probes into this. It is no doubt one of the ways communities educate themselves in ‘reclaiming the commons’. It lays the basis for any other education or community ‘development’. We sincerely suggest other educators use it.

**REFERENCES**

Revealing gender differences through well-being ranking in Uganda

Janet Seeley, Januario Nabaitu, Lorraine Taylor, Ellen Kajura, Tanance Bukenya, Elizabeth Kabunga and Fatuma Ssembajja

Introduction

In a wealth-ranking exercise conducted in 1990 in nine villages in the Masaka District of southwest Uganda, we asked respondents to rank households in their village according to their *obugagga*, the Luganda term for ‘riches’ or material wealth (Nabaitu *et al.*, 1993). Whilst analysing the results a difference was observed between the way the seven male respondents interpreted *obugagga* and the interpretation of the one woman respondent. The woman ranked according to material wealth, but she also took into account the present social circumstances of the households. The men concentrated on the ‘richness’ of the householders. From the explanations given for their ranking criteria, not only were we able to gain some insight into villagers’ perceptions of who was best and worst-off in their villages and the reasons why this was so, but the findings also alerted us to the differences which may exist between different people’s ranking criteria, perhaps because of varying social situations, experience and gender.

In a follow-up in 1993 we tried to tap these perceptions further in another ranking exercise. We also hoped to verify the usefulness of indicators derived from a longitudinal study of household coping strategies (Seeley, 1993). For this ranking exercise we asked respondents about the ‘well-being’ of householders in their villages. The Luganda phrase used was *embeera n’obulama bwabantu*, literally translated as ‘the conditions of day-to-day life of people’. However, this change of term did not make much difference to the way respondents perceived the exercise; some respondents insisted that all we wanted to know about was material wealth. One man raised the fear that we were conducting a tax assessment exercise although we had hoped that talking of ‘well-being’ not ‘wealth’ would allay such fears.

Rationale

A considerable amount of data on the socio-economic status of households in the study area was obtained through a questionnaire-based household survey in 1989/90. Researchers found the interpretation of these data difficult for a variety of reasons. Some people feared that we would disclose details of landholding and crop production to tax officials and so withheld this information. Others had only a general idea of harvests and buying and selling of farm products over the year or were reluctant to disclose the details. Information given on education or employment status did not help in providing a guide to economic status because in present day Uganda most salaries are so low that purchasing power is very limited. Thus, the 1990 wealth ranking exercise was conducted in order to shed some light on the survey data.

The well-being exercise in 1993 was carried out to:

1. Explore gender differences in the perception of socio-economic status.
2. Enable researchers to arrive at a stratified sample for a study of female-carers and coping with sickness.
3. Provide data to verify the socio-economic indicators drawn from the study of household coping strategies.
Method

For the well-being exercise nine villages were selected, five ranked in the previous wealth-ranking exercise (which included one of the household coping study villages), and four others chosen to represent parts of the study area not represented by the other villages selected. Three men and three women undertook the ranking in each village. They were selected by the leaders in their village to represent, according to these leaders’ perceptions, different socio-economic groups. Two local interviewers trained in the use of the technique, a man and a woman, visited the home of each participant for the purpose of the ranking exercise.

Results

Households best able to cope

Table 1 shows the criteria used to identify those people who were best able to cope. They had well-maintained houses, ate good food, had bedding and clothes. They owned cars, bicycles and radios and they employed labourers. They could afford to go to fee-paying clinics and pay school fees.

Table 1. Criteria for households best able to cope

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATORS</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own &amp; cultivate a lot of land</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sell matooke/mbidde*</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sell coffee</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own cows from which they get milk</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have many friends &amp; relatives</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have many sources of income (traders/taxi drivers/builders)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own goats/pigs/hens (could be sold in an emergency)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own rental properties</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sell brew</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are well-educated</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are with few dependents</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Matooke is a type of plantain (cooking banana) which is the main staple in the area. Mbidde are bananas used in beer brewing.
Respondents explained their choice of criteria:

One 36-year old man said that householders in this category “communicate well among themselves so that problems are easily solved”.

A 24-year old man said “They are able to help themselves because they have income from buildings. They have land from which they get food for consumption and sale. Some have vehicles so that when they travel they do not waste money on transport. They have banana and coffee plantations. The roofs of their houses have iron sheets.”

A 55-year old woman gave the following detailed description of these households: "They have income and relatives who can help. They have more than one piece of land on which they have banana plantations and shambas of coffee. They have bicycles. Their houses are modern looking although some are roofed with grass. Children are in school. Some of them are well-educated. They have cows which give milk and goats and hens. When they don’t have their own milk they can manage to buy it. They can employ casual labourers. They have knowledge, can plan for the future and can solve their own problems. If they are short of money at a time of crisis they can sell a pig or goat.”

Households less able to cope

Those who were less able to cope (Table 2) were said to eat poorly (cassava and potatoes with meat only on festive occasions) and use only herbs for treatment. Their children were not in school and they could not pay their tax.

Table 2. Criteria for households least able to cope

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATORS</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without a permanent job (casual labourers)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without land or having infertile land</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With a very small, poor hut to stay in or are squatters</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without relatives or friends in the area</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are sick/old/disabled</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are youth just setting up their households</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are drunkards</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are widows (with many dependents)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With no possessions (that they could sell in a crisis)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who live alone</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents described a range of different householders who were in this situation:

A 24-year old man described these householders as "very old and unable to work. They have orphans to care for. Some have no land. Some are sick. They have no children to support them."

A 43-year old woman said: "He is old. He doesn't have his own kibanja. He sleeps anywhere. He is given food by people. He has no clothes to wear."

One woman described the worst-off household as one where the head, a widower, was dying of AIDS-related illnesses, he had little land, his children were always sick.

A 71-year old man said "These people have a place to stay but their houses are in the worst condition. Some will soon fall down and some are leaking. If they have land it is small and poor. Most labour for food in the village even if it is not a famine period. Some are drunkards. Some are youth living on the land of their parents."

**Discussion**

There was agreement among the 54 respondents that householders who were best able to cope with daily life and its crises were those who owned and cultivated large pieces of land on which they grew, in particular, *matooke*, *mbidde*, and coffee for sale. They tended to have more than one source of income and resources, such as livestock, which could be sold when cash was needed urgently. Twenty-two out of the 27 female respondents said that these householders had many friends and relatives who could help them. Only five of the men referred to the importance of such a support network.

Householders who did not have these resources were classed as the worst-off, and least able to cope in the villages. However, compounding factors such as sickness and old age which prevented people from earning a living and thus made things worse, were often referred to.

There was a tendency for the male respondents to divide their ‘worst-off’ groups into the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor. Those who deserved assistance, in their view, were the sick, weak, old, widowed and disabled (or in four cases the mentally handicapped or mad) as well as those who were landless. Those who were undeserving of assistance were said to be ‘lazy’, ‘drunkards’ or ‘having too many children’ (which in one man’s view should have been avoided).

The youth were given a low rank by many respondents because they were just starting out in life. One woman observed "they are just building themselves, they get their food from their relatives". The men tended to take a less charitable view of the youth. One man complained that "the youth are carefree and don’t work for their living". An older man contrasted the youth unfavourably with the people in his ‘best-off’ category who were "willing and able to participate in development projects". The two youngest respondents (both men aged 23 and 24) did not single out ‘youth’ in their ranking. They ranked the ‘old and helpless’ as the least able to cope.

Interestingly, two male respondents, from different villages, had a sub-group of their category one (the best-off) made up of people they called ‘misers’ and thus made the family suffer, those who had many resources but did not share them with their families (they did not pay school fees, treatment costs or buy good food).

All respondents were able to describe households who were vulnerable in times of crisis. Many of these had difficulty making ends meet from day to day. It was clear from the explanations given for the different

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1 These male informants complained that their own household was not included in the ranking exercise because they thought they should be in the ‘deserving poor’ category. They thought that if they were so ranked they might receive development assistance. Interestingly, one woman informant who wanted to rank her own household told us that it would be in category one (the most prosperous). Her self-ranking agreed with the rank given to her household by the other five informants. The informant’s own household was omitted from the ranking that they did for their village, because it was thought that they would find it difficult to rank themselves.

categories that many respondents distinguished between people with the same resources who coped or did not cope because of the way in which the resources were used. One woman, for example, had ten different categories carefully defined according to the households’ present circumstances and described who was coping better than in the past and those who, because of deaths and sickness, were poorer than before.

**Conclusion**

There were some interesting differences between the indicators selected by the two genders: men tended to concentrate on material wealth, while the women noted the social circumstances of the households. This is in keeping with the findings of the initial wealth-ranking exercise.

While the variations in the indicators of socio-economic status did provide insight into the social make-up of the study community, the variation shows that the ‘well-being ranking method’ is not a precise tool for establishing socio-economic rank in a community. When different scores are combined, as is the usual practice in such ranking exercises, much of the variation in ranking given by individual respondents are ‘ironed out’. If obtaining a socio-economic profile of an area is the sole aim of a study, perhaps with a view to providing information for further research or development inputs, this method should be used in combination with other, preferably qualitative, and perhaps longitudinal, data collection methods. This would help to ensure that the different ways in which women and men (old and young) see their communities are taken into account.

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Stumbling towards gender aware PRA training in Indonesia

Judith Dent

Introduction

_Pusat Pengembangan Sumberdaya Wanita_ (PPSW-Centre for Women’s Resources Development) is an Indonesian NGO that has been working since 1986 on the involvement of women in Indonesia in the development process, in line with governmental policies. It has lengthy experience in addressing gender issues in its own fieldwork and in training other agencies to be gender aware.

For some time now PPSW has wanted to adopt PRA approaches. Thus it called on a fellow NGO (Lembaga Pengembangan Teknologi Pedesaan (LPTP-Institute for Rural Technology Development) that has been applying PRA in community development programmes and in training other NGO for the last three years for help with this. It was decided that PRA training would be carried out for the PPSW staff with a dual purpose: firstly, direct training on the approach and techniques of PRA and, secondly, to ‘genderise’ them within the cultural context of Indonesia.

The training

The five-day training session took place in Jakarta in April 1995. Two days in class were followed by three days in the field and a day’s evaluation at the PPSW office.

In class

Two facilitators from LPTP carried out the training based on an adaptation of the training manual by Theis and Grady (1991). The PPSW community development team and staff from _Mahwaddah Foundation_ (an offshoot of PPSW that works with women migrant workers) were joined by two participants from Lombok and Bali in East Indonesia. The PPSW staff had been given a task in addition to learning: to continuously critique the training in terms of gender and urban appropriateness. However the trainers could hardly be criticised for failure to include women in the simulations of PRA techniques - the men to women ratio was 2:31!

Preparation for the field included a presentation by a local community leader who described the circumstances in Pondok Ranggon, our destination in East Jakarta. This area is semi-urbanised and characterised by the presence of newcomers who were attracted to Jakarta by hopes of work and better standards of living as well as people indigenous to the area. PPSW facilitated a women’s community development group in the area for four years, and activities include garden crop development and a savings/credit scheme. Given the plan to extend this to other parts of the area, Pondok Ranggon was selected as the location for the PRA field training.

In the field

Ahhhh.....reality! PRA may have many differences to other methodologies but it shares the ‘in theory/in reality’ dilemma. The latter rarely reflects the former. We immediately hit

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1 PPSW favours a Women In Development (WID) approach and, in its community development work, it targets marginalised women who want to raise their level of prosperity through small businesses. Given that the informal sector in Indonesia is enormous and is the main route out of unemployment for both men and women, this is a fruitful source of income generating for women, even though cultural stereotypes about women’s roles have to be tackled in the process.
the problem of ‘no community’, or at least none that was ready for our appearance. PPSW is used to a lengthy approach to the community appropriate to Indonesian culture with its emphasis on the importance of community, religious and local government leaders. These leaders all require at least courtesy calls if not full clarification of planned activities before house to house visits and community meetings. Yet with PRA we fell straight into the pitfall of focusing on ‘rapid’, assuming that the PRA techniques themselves would replace this ‘approach to the community’ stage.

However the three PRA teams, each having its own area within Pondok Ranggon, quickly made contingency plans and begun mapping and transects. Things began to fall into place and the community input started to show results. We learnt that:

- There was a lack of cohesion between the indigenous residents and newer arrivals.
- Women in these two groups varied in their use of time. The indigenous women have inherited skills for making ‘pengki’, a bamboo scoop used by labourers and farmers to shift earth. The female newcomers lacked productive activities and have more ‘empty’ time but less social integration.
- The main source of employment for men is factories or offices in Jakarta.
- The residents’ land is no longer used for farming but more likely to be used to build houses for their children or to lease out.
- Within community institutions, it appeared that women have no place in decision-making due to the strict segregation of men’s and women’s roles, perhaps more segregated than in traditional, farming communities in Indonesia due to the lack of productive roles for women in this transitional stage of urbanisation.

How did we get this information? A selection of PRA methods were used. Those judged to be most effective during the fieldwork were mapping, transects, Venn diagramming, time line, trend and change, daily routine and seasonal calendars. As shown in Figure 1, a Venn diagram completed with eight women revealed their interest in developing links with organisations in the area that had yet to have an impact on them or, alternatively, to establish their own group.
The obvious next step was matrix ranking to determine how they could do this. However, three days was not enough for a full needs assessment and so this was followed up on a separate visit.

Meanwhile one of the other PRA teams used Venn diagramming quite differently, to look at who makes decisions in the home. Thus, in our post-training evaluation, we realised the flexibility of PRA tools.

**Lessons learnt**

As usual we learnt more from our mistakes than from our successes:

- Do not assume that PRA can replace the normal culturally necessary approach that ensures a good entry point into the community.

- The inclusion of gender does not necessarily mean ‘consciousness raising through PRA’ but instead ‘adapting PRA to ensure women’s involvement in information gathering, ensuring women’s voices, opinions, knowledge and information are heard, acknowledged and applied’.

- Do not overburden the community with your presence. Although we took our own food and so on, without doubt the community carried the burden of our temporary residence there. In Indonesia, strangers are usually accommodated by the local neighbourhood leader which can be reinterpreted to mean that his wife takes care of guests.

- The three PRA teams found differences in the circumstances of the community in their respective areas despite these areas being directly adjacent to each other. For example a shortage of bamboo in one area resulted in less ‘pungki’ production and thus under-employment for local women. Thus we recognised that each area is unique and the results in one cannot be transferred to others.

Overall, we were impressed with the suitability of PRA techniques for working with women. For example, daily routines proved to be a valuable tool for determining the timing of meetings and activities with women, within the planning of a programme, and for identifying the real amount of women’s available time for the development of small businesses etc. But we still felt that gender needed a more specific place in the training, so we set about.....
‘Genderising’ the training

Back in the office we evaluated our efforts and, in small groups, set about analysing what we had learnt and experienced so that we could make the training more gender-oriented. A selected team then met again with the LPTP facilitators to revise their module. The main adaptations are summarised below:

Each word in the term PRA should be looked at in a gender sensitive manner. In short: participatory means participation of men AND women; rural means village or farm communities that consist of men AND women; appraisal means assessment, information gathering, measurement etc. of aspects of the community that affect men AND women.

Thus PRA that does not involve women will lead to discrimination and is incomplete. Maybe this seems obvious to those used to working in a gender sensitive manner, but for those who are not, we feel sure that if they just learn to use PRA they will simply apply it in the framework of their usual way of working, including ‘gender blindness’. In Indonesia, involving women requires special efforts as men usually ‘represent’ their communities in all meetings with outsiders. Thus the awareness process needs to commence with the very definition of PRA, so that field-workers are proactive in involving women from day one. The gender aware PRA ‘outsider’ will thereby affect local beliefs and values (Scheuermeier, 1991) by virtue of how s/he involves people.

‘Gender’ requires its own explanation and a separate session for the concept to be clarified before the introduction to PRA. Implementation of gender sensitive PRA training involves continuous attention to the issues of:

- **Timing.** When can women join in activities?
- **Location.** Where are women allowed to meet? Where will they feel comfortable and able to speak?
- **Representation.** Are women represented in the PRA local team?
- **Topics.** Are issues covered which are relevant to women (in their eyes, not yours) eg. schooling, children’s health, food seasons, rituals and celebrations?

- **Equal roles.** Are women able to have an equal voice in mixed meetings, perhaps with the facilitator’s help? Or will separate meetings for men and women be more effective? (But giving equal weight to the information from both).
- **Marginalised women.** Are minority groups of women seen and heard: widows/divorcees, disabled, elderly?

These issues need to be stressed in the context of each technique as it is learnt and practised and are especially important in the preparation for fieldwork.

**The next stage and an unresolved query**

Further field experience of using PRA adapted to PPSW’s gender-focused approach is obviously necessary to test and strengthen it. Other tools that were not covered in the training but which are valuable for gender analysis, such as mobility mapping, could also be used. Should this prove to be effective, PPSW and LPTP will offer the adapted PRA training to other Indonesian NGOs.

We also need to develop contact with other NGOs that are using PRA in Indonesia to ‘cross check’ our limited learning. Most importantly, we need to ensure that what we learnt from the people in Pondok Ranggon does not remain ‘our learning’, but helps the community reach decisions about PPSW’s involvement in their development.

Meanwhile we were left wondering about the field element of the training. We were lucky to have a ready made ‘laboratory’ given the request for extension of PPSW’s work in Pondok Ranggon. But we were still left with a feeling of ‘experimenting’ on the community, the antithesis of the basic principles of PRA. We therefore wonder whether in-class training could be followed by ‘magang’, Indonesian for ‘apprenticeship’ or ‘placement’, by the participants, in projects that are currently undertaken by NGOs using PRA. This could minimise the effect of errors and the failure to meet expectations that are raised in the community.

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Staff perceptions of the impact of PRA on MYRADA's work

Robert Leurs

Introduction

This article summarises the perceived impact of PRA on the work of MYRADA, a rural development NGO based in Southern India. These perceptions were shared at a two day workshop in November 1994, which was attended by over 15 MYRADA staff.

The MYRADA workshop was one of a series of seven workshops held with other NGOs and government organisations in South Asia, which have been using a PRA approach in their work with communities. Uniquely, amongst all these workshops, participants at the MYRADA workshop decided to use the project cycle (planning, implementation and evaluation) as an organising theme for reflection. This proved to be very useful in practice and also reflects the continued domination (at MYRADA and elsewhere) of the project and the project cycle in the practice of externally initiated development efforts.

In writing this report, I have tried to use the words used by the workshop participants themselves (as recorded in their workshop report), wherever possible. Many of the sentences in this article which may sound like statements of fact, are therefore only the subjective impressions that emerged from the MYRADA workshop, as written up by one or more of the participants. They may or may not, therefore, correspond to the ‘objective’ reality, a reality about which other staff at MYRADA (or indeed individual MYRADA workshop participants) may have different views. The views expressed in this article are therefore not the views of the author, nor of MYRADA as an organisation.

Methodology

Reflections on the perceived impact of PRA were encouraged using a system of cards, where everyone was asked to write down (or draw) what they felt this had been. All the participants chose to write down their reflections.

The participants considered the impact of PRA on a before and after basis. This was done in four groups, all of whom also looked at the perceived impact of PRA in terms of the project cycle.

Perceived impact of PRA on planning

Methods

Before PRA was used planning was done mainly through discussions (often group-based ones of a general nature); using baseline and other surveys, secondary data, visits and other unspecified forms of interaction. Heavy reliance was placed on the verification of information and records produced in this way.

After the adoption of PRA, the various PRA methods used encouraged visual analysis, more focused discussions and more field-
based interaction. This led to less emphasis being placed on secondary data and surveys, with the continued use of only a minimal baseline survey.

**Forms of participation**

Before the adoption of PRA, participation was perceived to be limited in the following ways:

- participation was dependent on availability (i.e., those who were there at the time of the visits and surveys etc.);
- participation, in terms of planning (and the associated analysis and decision making), was forthcoming mainly from community leaders and community organisations;
- participation in planning discussions was also limited to the more articulate; and,
- for other members of the community participation took the form of contributions in cash or in kind.

After the adoption of PRA, participation was perceived by the MYRADA workshop participants to have improved, both quantitatively and qualitatively:

- the preferences and analyses of ordinary people were really considered;
- specific target groups were involved and the planning was more detailed;
- emphasis on people’s management meant that MYRADA staff had to put less effort into organising and mobilising people; and,
- information exchange became more of a two-way process, where MYRADA staff informed community members about funded programmes, as well as gathering information from them for planning.

**Attitudes and guiding principles**

Before the adoption of PRA, MYRADA staff had more of a "we know/they do not know" attitude or a "we know better/they are learners" attitude. As a result, the knowledge, skills and experiences of community members were not really considered; people were treated as beneficiaries and information was gathered for the use of MYRADA staff. Information was not shared and planning was programme centred and initiated from the organisation.

After the adoption of PRA, the attitude amongst staff changed towards a "we know and they know" attitude:

- more importance was given to indigenous technical knowledge;
- emphasis was placed on building rapport with people, with a special focus on less vocal groups and their preferences and analysis;
- there was more awareness of the importance of "getting closer to the facts" as one participant put it, as well as awareness of the importance of timely and cost effective information; and,
- the relationship with community members came to be seen as more of a partnership, where community members were no longer simply seen as beneficiaries.

**Documentation**

Before the adoption of PRA, documentation of field visits was not systematic and took the form of written reports. After the adoption of PRA documentation became more systematic and more visual. According to one participant MYRADA now had "pukka documentation through visuals".

- Perceived impact of PRA on implementation

**Finance**

Before the adoption of PRA, according to one workshop group, all financial matters were controlled by MYRADA. This included the control of funds, book-keeping, accounts, and financial monitoring.

After the adoption of PRA, the perception of several workshop groups was that monies were being transferred more to community organisations; that there was more joint
financial management and sharing of budgets; and that community organisations were also taught how to keep and maintain their own books and accounts.

**Technical assistance**

Before the adoption of PRA, technical assistance was perceived to be provided through the project by MYRADA staff; local contributions took the form of unskilled labour and/or cash; and there was little scope for local community contributions of knowledge and skills because these were not perceived to be valuable and useful.

After the adoption of PRA there was greater recognition of local knowledge and skills and their application to development was encouraged. More emphasis was given to enhancing local skills and knowledge through externally provided training.

**Management**

Before the adoption of PRA, management functions (including monitoring) were perceived to be carried out by MYRADA. Management skills were therefore also confined to organisation and project staff.

After the adoption of PRA management was perceived to have become a joint function shared with the communities. The formation of appropriate committees was encouraged, which had overall responsibility for the implementation of programmes. Local people became involved in programme appraisal and thought was given to analysing impacts and considering alternative implementation strategies.

**Organisation and attitudes**

Before the adoption of PRA, one guiding operational principle was, in the words of one of the workshop groups "to make sure that programmes were implemented according to plan". Another guiding principle, according to the same group, was "to implement activities with people’s involvement". These principles did not change after the adoption of PRA. Nevertheless, the methods for implementing these principles did change. As a result, the staff were perceived to have been more directly involved in programme implementation before the adoption of PRA.

The community were perceived to have often implemented responsibilities assigned to them half-heartedly because they did not consider it their programme.

After the adoption of PRA, the following things were perceived to have changed (though not necessarily due to PRA):

- proposed activities were discussed jointly;
- budgets were prepared jointly; and,
- decisions were honoured and responsibilities were shared with the community.

**Perceived impact of PRA on evaluation**

Before the adoption of PRA, the majority of evaluations were perceived to be donor driven and for their purposes. Most sector and programme evaluation was done by project staff. The role of community members in all of this was passive.

Some participants also felt that systematic evaluations were not designed, conducted or documented and that where data was evaluated, it was done mainly for the purposes of the organisation.

After the adoption of PRA, the only significant perceived impact on evaluation was that it was now carried out in communities where PRA had been used for planning purposes and involved both MYRADA staff and community members.

**Summary**

The perceived impact of PRA on planning included greater awareness of who was involved (and encouragement of those

Source: PLA Notes (1996), Issue 25, pp.23–26, IIED London
formerly left out) through the use of visual methods.

The perceived impact of PRA on implementation included further devolution of group management and financial controls from MYRADA to the village based credit and savings groups, as well as a wider concept (and practice) of people’s participation in these terms (as opposed to the contribution of labour and money).

The perceived impact of PRA on monitoring and evaluation was that the community was now more involved in monitoring. However, one group saw no difference before and after, in terms of evaluation, and still saw the process as being donor-driven.

• Conclusions

The workshop participants felt that PRA was only one factor contributing to all the above mentioned changes and that, even without it, there would have been changes in patterns of implementation between 1990 (when PRA was introduced) and 1994 (when the workshop was held). At least some workshop participants also felt that MYRADA had adopted participatory approaches before PRA was introduced in 1990, particularly in terms of implementation through autonomous community-based credit and savings groups.

Overall, the perceived impact of PRA on planning was the clearest and most accepted. The perceived impact of PRA on implementation was the most hotly disputed; many of the workshop participants felt that the practices employed at the time of the workshop would have come into effect even if PRA had not been adopted officially.

This raises the difficult question of cause and effect. How can we know that the changes (impacts) described above are fully or partially attributable to PRA? Except in terms of the subjective judgements, based on personal experience, that we make we cannot know with absolute conviction. Although we can seek to define and measure impacts, there will always be room for debate and argument. Indeed, what is important and interesting, in the PRA context, are these subjective opinions, as well as the differences between them.

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Facilitating PRA amidst war: experiences from Sierra Leone

Ann C. Hudock

Introduction

This field report discusses some of the difficulties of facilitating PRA in conflict-ridden situations. Suggestions are made for ways facilitators can adapt their approach when working in such situations. Experiences of using PRA in Sierra Leone suggest the need for local facilitators who are acutely aware of the community and the local structures available to draw on if problems arise during the course of the PRA exercises.

This research was undertaken to further understanding of how grassroots service organisations (GSOs) assist membership organisations (MOs) with institutional development. The strategies used by the Association for Rural Development (ARD) to promote the institutional development of four MOs were examined. The MOs were selected from ARD’s database of MOs registered with them. The MOs selected were based in the capital, Freetown, because travel outside this city was risky, given the internal unrest in Sierra Leone’s upcountry areas. Two of the MOs selected were relatively strong organisations, having received funding for institutional development or related project activities. The other two MOs were weaker organisations, either because they had received little or no assistance, were newly formed, or lacked appropriate organisational structures to maximise the assistance they received. Efforts were also made to select at least two organisations that emphasised gender or women’s issues. Using PRA approaches and methods, the research was carried out with two project officers from ARD.

War in Sierra Leone

Since 1991, war has torn apart Sierra Leone. Fighting began when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), formed in Liberia in the early 1980s to overthrow the All People’s Congress (APC) government of Sierra Leone, attacked the Kailahun and Pujehun Districts. Sporadic attacks continued in these areas and gradually spread to nearby towns.

In 1992, a group of disgruntled soldiers led by a young military captain, Captain Valentine Strasser, left the war front and travelled to Freetown to demand back pay. In the process, they overthrew President Momoh’s government. The captain established himself as president of Sierra Leone and installed the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) to run the state. The NPRC made three promises on the eve of its takeover: to stop the war, improve the economy and to restore the country to democratic rule. While at first the new government enjoyed enthusiastic support, particularly among the youths, disillusionment gradually set in as the fighting continued, economic conditions worsened and democratic rule looked a far off prospect.

In 1995 a coup replaced Strasser with a new leader, Brigadier Julius Amaada Bio, drawn from within the NPRC. The situation worsened and many hostages were taken. International investment declined after two foreign-owned mining companies suffered serious attacks and many senior personnel were abducted. Children, some not more than 12-years old, have also been abducted and used by the attackers. Girls are often taken as ‘wives’ and the boys used to carry heavy loads. Bus-loads of civilians have been ambushed en route from...
the upcountry areas to Freetown, making travel along any main road dangerous.

While it is clear that the conflict has worsened, it is entirely unclear who is to blame. In the first instance, the RUF rebels are responsible for many attacks. It is possible that the RUF has splintered, and any number of breakaway factions could be operating in various areas.

Other perpetrators of the violence might be supporters of the former government, the All People’s Congress. They may be interested in carrying out the attacks to create dissent and destabilize the government. Finally, bandits might also be responsible for these attacks since economic conditions have worsened since the war started, leaving many people without access to resources.

Some people tell of their village initially being attacked by rebels, and then by the government soldiers who followed. Finally, bandits took anything that the rebels or soldiers left behind so when people came out of hiding, they found nothing left in their houses or villages.

- **PRA amidst paranoia**

The war has devastated Sierra Leone’s economy and ripped apart its social fabric. Because no one knows who is conducting these attacks, no one knows who to trust and everyone is suspect. This has destroyed the interdependence and trust that once characterised social relations in Sierra Leone. People can no longer rely on their extended family for resources or support. Even close family members might be collaborating with the rebels or informing the government soldiers. The psycho-social damage caused by the war, and the subsequent siege of fear, cannot be overstated.

Conducting PRA in these conditions presents new challenges, since such participatory learning methods are based on entering communities, spending time with them, gaining their trust, and asking them for often sensitive information. Doing this was problematic since people were extremely wary of community members, and even more wary of outsiders. Also, when people agreed to spend time sharing information, it was clear that they were distracted by the war. Conversations on any subject inevitably turned to the fighting and its consequences.

People were often unavailable for discussions since they were busy making contingency plans to flee if the situation worsened. They spent their time hoarding food, searching for cash, securing travel visas, and contacting friends and family in Banjul or Guinea to arrange to stay. Many Sierra Leoneans were themselves hosting family members who had been displaced by fighting. It was not uncommon in Freetown to find 30 or 40 people staying in already-overcrowded houses. This drained people’s resources and energies.

While it was not the most opportune time to enter a community to assess its needs and priorities, and to ask people to analyse their situations, the PRA exercises seemed to provide people with a welcome release and an opportunity to vent their fear and frustrations. However, outsiders’ presence served to increase people’s expectations that they would receive assistance. While this is a common tension often resulting from field visits and PRA exercises, it was more pronounced in this instance since people’s needs were so urgent and their situations so fragile. They had little hope of receiving assistance elsewhere.

Specifically, care had to be taken when using mapping and well-being ranking exercises (Box 1). Amidst a war where no one knows who the enemy is, the information generated by mapping is extremely sensitive. People feared that knowledge of roads in and out of the village, grain stores, key houses, etc. could fall into rebels’ hands and jeopardise their safety. Moreover, they had no guarantee that the PRA facilitators were not collaborating with the rebels or were not rebels themselves. And, in a war waged on economic grounds, as opposed to ethnic or political grounds, information generated by well-being ranking was sensitive since it offered a complete picture of who held what assets. This posed a potential threat to people’s security.
**Box 1**

**Managing Mapping Amidst Mayhem....**

On a field visit the all Sierra Leonean research team countered people’s fears by relying on local structures for support. The team was contracted by a NGO to collect baseline information about communities where the NGO planned to work. Two weeks prior to the visit, the team asked the Paramount Chief of the area to contact the villages announcing their arrival. However, the Chief failed to do so since he assumed the team would be conducting a formal survey that asked relatively standard information. When the team arrived, the community agreed to work with them, but once the mapping exercise started people grew uncomfortable. The mapping was eventually halted by one of the villagers. The man said that the community could not give out such detailed information about their area and its resources since they could not be sure that the local facilitators were not rebels. The villagers, after discussing the situation among themselves, told the team that if they were really sanctioned by the Chief and doing work for an NGO, then they should return the next day with a note from the Paramount Chief’s police. After this was agreed upon, the team continued with other PRA exercises but put the mapping on hold until they returned the following day with the note from the Chief’s police.

The story in Box 1 illustrates the need for facilitators to understand the environment in which they are conducting PRA and to adapt their approach accordingly. In conflict situations, it becomes even more important for facilitators to be aware of increasing community expectations that they as outsiders will bring assistance. The facilitators need to take extra time to make clear, and to reiterate, the purpose of the PRA exercises. When the PRA is done solely for research and is not directly linked to development assistance, facilitators may ensure the work is less extractive by working with the community to identify external sources of support. They may also facilitate the communities’ efforts to create action plans for seeking assistance, based on the community’s analysis of its problems.

In conflict situations, it is important not to rush through PRA exercises and discussions since people may need time to build trust, and to vent frustrations about the conflict. This release may provide an important function in terms of processing the communities’ trauma. However, while it is important not to rush, it is also important not to overburden the communities. The principle of ‘optimal ignorance’ applies since people are already burdened by more pressing needs, both emotional and physical.

Ultimately, facilitators must be responsive to community concerns and respect their fears, even if they initially seem unfounded. This means altering work schedules and the type of information gathered when necessary. This may mean not using certain PRA exercises, particularly mapping and well-being ranking. Conflict situations highlight the need for local PRA facilitators who understand the environment and the structures available to counter community concerns.

**Conclusion**

Conflict situations are increasingly recognised as obstacles to the development process, rather than events occurring outside of it. The causes and effects of conflict are inextricably linked to development. Only when development programmes address the underlying roots of conflict, rather than its consequences, will they have a lasting effect. If care is taken to adapt PRA exercises to the context of conflict, they can provide a means of enhancing people’s understanding of conflicts, and ensuring the appropriateness of interventions undertaken to alleviate their effects.

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Children’s participation
Special issue

Starting a dialogue on children’s participation

Victoria Johnson

• Introduction

I recently led a policy and research programme in ActionAid, which resulted in the publication *Listening to Smaller Voices: Children in an Environment of Change*. My experiences with this, and with working with SCF-Vietnam (Save the Children Fund) in Ho Chi Minh City on programmes for street children, led me to believe that there is a need for individuals and groups within organisations to share experiences, reflect on their work and gain from the insights of other researchers and practitioners. It is important to share both the positive and negative details about methods and techniques which have worked and not worked with children, but also to understand the different problems which people face in their work with children within a context of ethical principles, power relationships and the broad institutional context in which they are working.

It was for these reasons that we held a workshop at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in Sussex last September. This overview paper summarises the issues arising from that workshop, and the papers which follow in this issue of *PLA Notes* are just the start of what I hope will be a continuing process of sharing and exchange.

The composition of articles in this issue reflects the fact that most of the articles are drawn from experiences offered by workshop participants and invitees, most of whom were from European-based institutions. There was also a broader call for papers sent out by the Sustainable Agriculture Programme of IIED in a previous issue of *PLA Notes*. Papers from Nepal, India and Vietnam were sent in response to this broader call. Thus, while this issue of *PLA Notes* does not claim to be comprehensive in its geographical or thematic coverage, many of the issues raised are also of relevance to those working with children in Africa or Latin America. The purpose of the issue is to start to share experiences and start a dialogue with a broader audience.

Workshop on participatory techniques with children

The aim of the workshop was to share experiences between people working on child-focused programming and on the use of participatory techniques for research with children. The participants were from academic institutions and some of the UK-based organisations worked with children, both in the UK and overseas (see the list at the end of this article). It was hoped that the meeting could start a process of information exchange and help to coordinate work and action in the future.

The possibility of a larger network or workshop to include participants from the North, including Eastern Europe, and from Asia, Africa and Latin America was also discussed, but this idea is still under review.

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1 The workshop was hosted by the Institute of Development Studies, in collaboration with Save the Children Fund (SCF) ActionAid and IIED.
The following topics were discussed by groups in the workshop:

- Conditions for success and ethical issues;
- Positive and negative experiences of the use of participatory techniques with children;
- Power relations and links with adult power;
- The broader institutional context: how participatory techniques with children fit in with other programme objectives and processes; and,
- Present initiatives within agencies and institutes represented at the workshop. Discussion of longer term strategies for coordinating information exchange and action (not covered in this paper, but available in the proceedings of the workshop c/o Robert Chamber’s office, IDS).

- Issues arising

The issues arising from these group discussions are summarised in the rest of this paper. Experiences offered by the participants included work with children in the UK, USA, Africa, Asia and Latin America, and varied from young people’s evaluation of their local health services; assessment of the impact on children of development agency programmes; detailed research and analysis of children’s roles in education, household tasks, local and national economies; and the involvement of children/young people in national and international processes and conferences.

In writing this overview I have drawn heavily on the rapporteur reports by Tilly Sellers (University of Hull), Rachel Baker (University of Durham) and David Woolcombe (Peace Child International). I must, however, take responsibility for interpreting and summarising these reports and other ideas discussed in the workshop while, no doubt, adding any of my own interpretations.

Although techniques were discussed to some extent in the workshop, we were drawn towards discussions of process, power and the ethics of working with children. This forced us to think carefully about different ways of working and analysing the development process, including reconsidering what constitutes a successful development intervention. The importance of support and confidence, or lack of it, in the institutional context was also discussed. Much of the experience so far in the use of participatory techniques with children leads us to realise that definitions must be clarified - who do we regard as children or young people? and what do we see as their role in participation and empowerment within the development process? (Chawla and Kjørholt; Edwards, this issue).

- Conditions for success and ethical issues

Informed consent

Children must be informed about the objectives, process and end-use of the research so that valid consent to participation can be obtained before any fieldwork is started (Sapkota and Sharma, this issue). The consent of parents or guardians should be sought where appropriate, or where there is a legal requirement. There are, however, occasions where children would prefer their parents not to know they are participating or to see the results of the research (see reference to confidentiality and abuse below). Researchers must make themselves aware of their own legal boundaries (Sellers and Westerby, this issue).

There must be recognition in planning research that the process of gaining consent and of overcoming suspicion takes time and cannot be rushed. The research project must aim to provide an atmosphere whereby children have opportunities to remain quiet or leave should they wish. Sometimes it is questionable as to whether children feel able to say ‘no’ to an adult-initiated activity.

Confidentiality

Children and researchers need to agree on confidentiality at the beginning of a project. It should be recognised that privacy may be important to the child’s continued well-being (Milne; Sellers and Westerby, this issue). This
may mean working in a place where children cannot be overhead by adults who may have power over them and ensuring that the children know that their real names need not be used. If children can only be assessed through institutions or at home where adults are present, adults can be made to feel important and distracted from the fact that the main focus of attention is on the children.

PRA techniques seek maximum involvement of the children, mutual trust and an open forum for debate. Hence, during the course of discussions children may reveal personal and social problems that the researcher is unable to deal with both at the time and, due to confidentiality, in the longer term. Incidents of child abuse were mentioned as particularly difficult; appropriate training and action should be discussed by the research team prior to the research. Children must be protected should they disclose information of a personal nature implicating adults in any form of abuse and, where possible, referral information should be made available in such cases (Sellers and Westerby, this issue). As mentioned above, however, researchers should be aware of their legal boundaries.

**Transparency and awareness**

There must be transparency about the aims and processes of children's participation in community development issues, with parents, children and other community members. It is important that there is an awareness amongst staff and field workers that children are capable of analysing their situation and can make viable suggestions for change (Milne; Woollcombe, this issue).

**Access to children**

Calling children to meetings will probably only elicit partial representation, if anyone comes at all! Poor children may be reluctant to be seen at public gatherings because of their clothes, others will be at work, or may lack permission. Attention should be paid to sampling and ensuring representation of all age, caste, wealth, or gender groups, while respecting the friendship between groups of children, their wishes and rights to privacy (Milne, this issue). Researchers should think carefully about whether to implement participatory techniques with both or single sex groups. Activities can also be facilitated by peers, who use the same language and who share a similar culture.

Accessing different groups of children can often be most successful in an informal atmosphere (Narayanasamy et al.; Sellers and Westerby, this issue). Field-workers should try to go to where the children are carrying out their own activities and perhaps help with tasks (e.g. collecting firewood). However, participation in research should not impede their ordinary work. Cultural implications of access to children should also be examined, such as talking with girls in cultures where they are forbidden to talk in public. Ways should also be found to access children with special needs.

**Piloting methods and cultural differences**

When designing research methods, the various stages within a child's development need to be taken into account as well as the particular culture in which a child is living. Researchers should also be clear about who is defined as a child, as a young person or as an adult in the culture in which the research is conducted.

Researchers at the workshop established that in many cases collecting information about children’s daily lives can usually be successful with any age group. Information analysis and planning, however, probably work better with older children. Therefore, it may be more useful to look at potential levels of participation rather than at child developmental stages. We must also accept that our own internal models of child development may not be accurate in different situations and that even recognised models may not be appropriate for the particular culture (Theis, this issue).

Methods need to be adaptable and specific to the children’s role in the community (Milne, this issue). They should be fully piloted and adapted in the research location, not least as training for researchers, and exercised rigorously to ensure that data generated is valid and well understood. Materials used need to be appropriate to the culture and children should be comfortable about using them. Illiterate children, for instance, may not be comfortable using pens or pencils, and in some cultures...
there are superstitions about drawing on the ground.

Research which is fun

Children should be given the power to stop or opt out if they are not comfortable with the content or context. The shorter concentration spans of some children should also be considered. Activities should be broken up, and should be fun, not boring (Narayanasamy; Theis, this issue). Breaks in activities, shorter activities and games can be used. Issues were found to often be best approached initially through group work. If children are not enjoying the methods, stop and adapt.

- Children’s participation: positive and negative experiences

Positive experiences

The participants in the workshop discussed the high quality data that could be collected and analysed by children (Milne; Edwards; West; Woolcombe, this issue). It was commented that children often gave an interesting new slant to the data they provided. They showed a capacity for triangulating data in innovative and unexpected ways. Children were also able to raise sensitive issues, such as drugs, abortion, AIDS, sexuality or crime, without embarrassment or fear.

It was also suggested by one group that children often disclose more to a child interviewer than to an adult (West, this issue), and that data collected by children is often more rigorous than data collected by adults (Milne; West, this issue). Participation in an inter-generational research team seems to raise each child’s self-esteem, especially if the children feel ‘ownership’ of the project (Sellers and Westerby; Woolcombe, this issue). Young interviewers often found the experience enjoyable and took great pride in their results. Children can show great professionalism in their presentations, and a great sense of team spirit, enthusiasm and fun (Narayanasamy et al., this issue). It was suggested that in some projects children had also showed a great willingness to accept adult, professional advice as long as it was not delivered to them in a patronising way. They also sometimes chose to ignore that advice if it went against their better judgement.

Methods that have worked well with children include mapping, flow diagrams, matrices (older groups), transect, role play, visualisation, and songs which children make up.

Negative experiences and obstacles

Some of the groups described the problem of raised expectations, where children clung to an exciting idea which may have been utterly unrealistic. They are then disillusioned when their expectations are not met. There is sometimes a lack of clearly explained boundaries between what the children are expected to do, the follow-up action and the adults’ or institutional role (Baker, this issue). There was also a problem of addressing community fears. In some cultures, adults and officials are disturbed by the sight of children and young people investigating their community (Milne, this issue). As a result, new barriers between children and adults and some sectors of the community may be created.

There was discussion of ‘over-empowerment’, where a dominant child takes advantage of the partnership offered and manipulates the adults and their peers to take a direction arbitrarily chosen by them (Woolcombe, this issue).

While discussing the success of various methods, one of the groups agreed that Venn diagrams often caused tears! It was also agreed that participatory techniques which may have been successful with adults are not necessarily successful with children. Techniques must be flexible and tested in the area of research.

Many of the papers in this issue give more detail of some of the methods used and discuss the positive and negative aspects (see Niewenhuys; Baker; Sapkota and Sharma; Narayanasamy et al.; Theis; West; Sellers and Westerby).

- Power relations

It was generally accepted in the workshop that the idea that development trickles down to the children just does not work. Even when gender
is recognised as important, it is often a huge step to recognise age as also important in intra-household distribution of resources and power relations.

It should be accepted that children’s needs are largely invisible in development planning (Milne; Theis, this issue). Many people believe they know what children want, and even the most well meaning will need to change their attitudes to listen to children when it comes to planning change (Edwards, this issue). There is therefore a need for a reorientation of training in organisations towards age and gender.

Groups in the workshop acknowledged that a problem exists at senior levels within organisations. There was a tendency to treat children’s active roles in development as relatively unimportant, except for the more visible issues relating to education, street children, sexual exploitation and labour in factories.

There are also negative attitudes expressed in agencies about whether, if children participate, you can take their views seriously (Niewenhuys; Milne, this issue). However, it was noted that if children are old enough to collect fodder and fuel, look after siblings and work for waged labour, they are certainly old enough to consult about decisions which affect their development.

Power relations affect the way researcher and child interact. The presence of other adults (eg. teacher, parent) may also affect the research environment and hence the data generated (Baker, this issue). Adults cannot equalise themselves with children but can try to empathise, and training can be important in achieving this (Theis, this issue). People associated with authority (and that may sometimes include the researcher!) are likely to be told what the children think they want to hear. It may be difficult to distinguish between such normative statements and those that are closer to children’s feelings and experiences. Relationships within and between groups of children are also likely to include status and power relations. Researchers need to be aware of these and may have to devise ways to allow all members to contribute evenly (Milne, this issue).

In light of the above points, one group questioned who should facilitate the participatory techniques. It was suggested that outside researchers were more appropriate than the staff members, particularly as cases of abuse by staff are often brought to light. Discussions in the workshop suggested that the PRA experience is richer for children and researchers if they have known each other for a long time and developed a good rapport (Baker, this issue). In addition there is the question of who should present the results of the research to the institution responsible for taking action. Encouraging children’s participation up to this point while avoiding tokenism is difficult. One idea was to use a video made by the children to present the results.

The workshop helped to establish that the use of participatory techniques can act as a catalyst to enable children’s needs to be articulated at some level, possibly for the first time. It helps to initiate the process of change. We still, however, have to think of how to sustain the process of change and how to draw children into the planning process, bearing in mind that for child representatives involved in the adult planning process it can be threatening and non-productive. We must beware having ‘token’ children as part of the planning process (Milne; Niewenhuys; Woolcombe, this issue).

Practical projects should be such that children achieve ownership of the process of data collection, their information and the conclusions they draw (Niewenhuys; Theis; West, this issue). However, it should be remembered that there are some sensitive issues (eg. teachers having sex with pupils) which we cannot expect children to confront adults with.

- **Institutionalising children’s participation**

For the outcomes of participatory research with children to be used in programming there needs to be active support throughout the institution concerned (Edwards; Niewenhuys; this issue). Channels must exist to support field-workers and mobilise action to avoid raising children’s expectations unrealistically. It is disturbing to realise that within many different institutions children are seen as objects of development interventions rather than important development
actors in their own right. For example, the concept of ‘children as citizens’ rather than ‘children as a resource’ in planning and development is discussed in many of the articles in this issue (Chawla and Kjørholt, this issue). The Convention on the Rights of the Child also provides a framework for participation (Milne; Edwards; Niewenhuys, this issue).

Questions were raised about how to convince the doubters in large institutions of the validity of data generated through participatory research with children. Suggestions included collecting a portfolio of case-studies and examples of reliable and valid data gleaned through PRA with children; and showing these people directly by inviting them to workshops in local schools, youth groups. The capabilities of differently aged children in analysing and describing should be recognised and described in detail so that children are not viewed as a homogenous group. It is also important to anticipate conflicts in opinions and competing interests between children and other groups in the community (or between children themselves) so that this can be explained and built into a broader planning process (Milne; Sellers and Westerby, this issue).

Participatory methods were thought to be suitable for exploratory work to understand children’s concerns, their use of space and time and inter-relationships within their community. However, one of the groups felt that to achieve full participation, adults and children should, if possible, identify and implement a project together2 (Narayanasamy et al., this issue).

One group at the workshop concluded that the only way programme planning would have a positive impact on the development of children, would be if it was be child-focused. Also that funding agencies should discriminate in favour of child-focused development and that child-focused indicators should be used to evaluate the impact of a variety of projects. It was also important to avoid being prescriptive in discussion of research and programming and instead to follow broad principles of children’s participation in research and development (Milne; Niewenhuys; Woollcombe, this issue; Johnson et al., 1995).

It was clear that the lack of an empowering, enabling infrastructure within the agencies had a debilitating effect on the field researchers trying to use participatory techniques. Worse, the agencies often try to pull the ground from under them. One participant remarked, "If the agencies don’t even listen to their own researchers, what chance is there of any of this happening? Kids learn to ignore all this: the kids who did our programme went out and found a place on their own to meet and discuss it all, away from the adults and agency people....".

2 For example, when collating an entire village’s development priorities, consensus could be reached first in peer groups. This then allows children to have a separate output. Afterwards, each group could review their own priorities in the light of the priority needs of the other groups, and a plan could then be created based on all the groups’ views.

PARTICIPANTS AT THE MEETING ON PARTICIPATORY TECHNIQUES WITH CHILDREN

- Rachel Baker – University of Durham
- Jonathan Blagborough – AntiSlavery International
- Robert Chambers – IDS
- Andrea Cornwall – SOAS/Independent
- Sara Cottingham – ActionAid
- Mike Edwards – Save the Children Fund (SCF)
- Clare Fenley – Women’s Environment Network
- Irene Guijt – IIED
- Rachel Hinton – University of Cambridge
- Victoria Johnson – IDS/Independent
- Richard Lansdown – Child-to-Child Trust
- Sophie Laws – SCF
- Kimberly Ogadghoh – IDS/Independent
- Judy Pointing – IDS
- Tilly Sellers – University of Hull
- Arti Sinha – IDS
- Hilary Standing – University of Sussex
- Leo Thomas – IDS
- Andy West - SCF
- David Woolcombe – Peace Child International

Children’s participation resource list

Books


Other materials

- Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN), Kathmandu, Nepal publish a newsletter and working papers.
- Concerned for Working Children, Bangalore, India publish the journal, ‘Molake’.
The ladder of participation

Hart's Ladder of Participation is frequently referred to in this issue. We have reproduced it here. Hart designed it as a typology to guide thinking about children's participation.

1. Manipulation. If children have no understanding of the issues and hence do not understand their actions, then this is manipulation. One example is that of preschool children carrying political placards concerning the impact of social policies on children.

2. Decoration. This refers to those frequent occasions when children are given T-shirts related to some cause, and may sing or dance at an event in such dress, but have little idea of what it is all about and no say in the organising of the occasion. This is described as one rung up from 'manipulation' as the adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by children. They simply use children to bolster their cause in an indirect way.

3. Tokenism. Children are apparently given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating it, and little or no opportunity to formulate their own opinions. There are many more instances of tokenism than there are genuine forms of children's participation. A good example is the token use of children on conference panels.

4. Assigned but Informed. This rung of the ladder marks the start of true participation. To be truly labelled as participatory it is important that:
   - The children understand the aims of the project;
   - They know who made the decisions concerning their involvement and why;
   - They have a meaningful (rather than 'decorative') role;
   - They volunteer for the project after the project was made clear to them.

5. Consulted and Informed. The project is designed and run by adults, but children understand the process and their opinions are treated seriously.

6. Adult-Initiated, shared decisions with children. Though the projects at this level are initiated by adults, the decision-making is shared with the young people.

7. Child-Initiated and directed. Children in their play conceive of and carry out complex projects. When the conditions are supportive, even very young children can work cooperatively in large groups.

8. Child-Initiated, shared decisions with adults. Regrettably, projects like these, on the highest rung of the ladder of participation, are all too rare. This is not due to the absence of a desire to be useful on the part of teenagers. It is rather the absence of caring adults attuned to the particular interests of young people.

Children’s rights and the changing face of work in the field

Brian Milne

Introduction

For as long as aid and development work has existed, and whether we have been involved in research, assessment, evaluation, policy or programmes, some of us have worked with children. Or so it seems. Research and programmes with children were more likely to have been by proxy than direct contact. Work in rural areas tended to be part of community-based projects and urban programmes usually only worked with special-needs groups such as disabled and handicapped children or ‘children in especially difficult circumstances’. Even then it was often implemented through adult ‘brokers’. On the whole these means of working ‘for’ children were successful. At least, they gave the impression of achieving their goals.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in November 1989. It is the first international instrument of law that guarantees children many of the civil and human rights that many adults do not enjoy. The vast majority of nations have signed the CRC; many others have ratified and are already working towards implementation in their countries. An important change the CRC introduced was that children should now be included in all work that directly involves them.

After more than a decade of mainly incorporating them into community-based projects, many focusing specifically on women, we now have to consider children the front line in our work. In the CRC there are six Articles, 12 to 17, that demand children’s participation in a number of areas that directly affect them.

During a recent visit to India and Nepal a number of interesting issues arose. Using the Articles as a basic framework for developing criteria for the evaluation of children’s participation in civil society, these issues are examined.

The right to express opinions

Article 12 has frequently been identified as the most significant expression of children’s participation. It gives children the right to express their opinion and have that opinion taken into account whenever there are issues or events that affect them. Research that focuses on children, or includes them as part of the wider community, has been encouraged to take children’s views on board from the beginning of the process and carry it over into all stages of programme work. Children’s opinions are simply the basis of the participatory process, since the five other articles in this ‘block’ either supplement or reinforce the inclusion of opinions.

For NGOs working in Nepal this is not a conceptual problem. Several of the numerous organisations working with street and working children have included children’s opinions since the late 1980s. However, given that they are mostly urban projects in the Kathmandu Valley, there are problems with the conversion of experience into wider practice in rural areas, where practice leaves project work and moves into the wider community. In India we find the
same problems. In both countries field workers are nervous about implications of caste, class, wealth, traditions and the generally accepted position of children within the family and wider community.

The right to freedom of expression

Article 13 gives children the right to freedom of expression. It gives them the right to obtain and make known information and to express their views, except when this violates the rights of others.

In Delhi and Kathmandu there are again no conceptual problems. Outside of the two capital cities there are, indeed, numerous children’s newspapers, art and drama workshops and other ways in which children can express themselves. However the same reasoning as with Article 12 (caste, class, etc.) means that in reality participation by children is limited. Thus, one finds, political actions and statements ‘by children’ tend to be made by adult NGO workers, but rarely by children themselves. It is often hard to tell exactly how much input children have at all.

The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion

Article 14 falls comfortably in line with 13. It gives children the right of freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Guidance by parents or legal guardians and the national law have been taken into account within this article. In some cases, comments and reservations have been expressed that reflect the religious and moral environment children are growing up in. For instance, this article does not satisfactorily conform with many interpretations of Quoranic law, so some Islamic states party to the CRC have simply excluded Article 14.

In Nepal I found a very relaxed attitude, whereby people were clear that where religion is that strong it is not worth the effort of introducing that freedom. Otherwise, the strong influence of ancient Buddhist philosophies makes freedom of thought and conscience every person’s right from birth. In contrast in India, almost unsurprisingly, the same criteria as before (caste, etc.), slightly modified, were expressed almost unanimously. Despite the secular constitution and the diversity of religions in India, the conservatism inherent in the society provides little religious freedom. Grassroots workers are themselves often held back by their own beliefs and they made all the usual arguments about the position of children in Indian society.

The right to freedom of association

Article 15 gives children the right of freedom of association. The principle is that it enables them to meet other persons of all ages and to join or form associations except where such activities are not against the interests of national security or public order, offend public health, morals or rights and freedoms of others. This offers children increased mobility within society, with a guarantee of ‘visibility’ hitherto virtually unknown. Within NGOs, schools and other institutions this was considered to be ‘normal’.

In India when this question was further probed, practice itself often proved that the right of association meant, for instance, children listening to adult speakers or as the audience at a drama workshop on the environment, human rights and such themes presented by adults. For many people, the fact that children played together achieved this end satisfactorily. In Nepal, NGOs working with child workers encouraged association and self-organisation. However it was quite clear that this is not yet well developed in rural areas. Plan International’s proposal for a children’s conference in a remote rural area of the country in 1997 was welcomed and considered neither extraordinary nor difficult to arrange - indeed, children will be involved in staging it.

The right to privacy

In contrast, Article 16 gives children the right to the protection of their privacy. The intention is that in personal, family and home spheres and in correspondence, the integrity of the individual as a private being should be enforced. With the guarantee of protection of honor, reputation and integrity, they are protected by libel and slander laws to the same extent as adults.

Here I have little comment. In India and Nepal, as even the most Westernised and open-minded...
commentators said, this is not a key priority as these societies are not particularly closed ones. As for laws to protect against libel and slander, they are reserved for only the tiniest minority of the wealthy elites anyway.

**The right to access appropriate information**

Article 17 gives children access to appropriate information. The principle is that nations party to the Convention are required to encourage the media to disseminate information to and for children that is consistent with moral well-being and also respects the cultural background of those children.

In urban India and Nepal, children’s media is viable. Elsewhere, the proposition was that media for children would develop as funding was found. As such it will be a very slow process.

- **Implications for work in the field**

  - When we spoke of work with children in the past, we may really have meant community work that usually examined and delivered services through adult agency, but seldom through direct contact with children. That has changed. We are now obliged to do exactly what we say. Recent reports by ActionAid (Johnson *et al*, 1995) and SCF (1995) have clearly stated the case for children’s participation in development programmes. Whilst ActionAid briefly, but very carefully, shows the importance of the inclusion of children in PRA, and SCF examines socio-economic factors that directly affect children, neither agency includes extensive use of children’s contributions in its overall work. This is not because of a reversion to the exclusion of children, but because the nature of inclusion is itself changing:

    - Most importantly, many adults are still having to learn how to work with children.
    - We have to convince communities that children must now be included. They are often accustomed to the notion of children as recipients of programmes through adult agents. Children were usually invisible clients whose adult caretakers serve as conduits. Because of this it is often difficult to measure exactly how successful programmes really were. Now we have to meet the needs of children and incorporate their views on quality and success into evaluations.

    - The bottom line for serious consideration in policy and programme planning is that we are now finding out exactly how competent, efficient and adaptable children really are.

With this ‘awakening’ some field workers are now beginning to move into the role of facilitators who oversee tasks carried out by members of the community. These include children. In the research world it is becoming acknowledged that data collected by young research assistants within their peer group is often more thorough than that previously gathered by adults. Researchers now have the freedom to nominate and allocate work within the community, oversee without being too invasive, then draw data together and leave the field with material that is appropriate rather than what was previously perceived to be right. Of course, assessment, analysis and evaluation still remain in our hands. However, there have been some attempts to incorporate children into the completion of analysis and evaluation for final presentation of research findings.

Not only are some of us attempting to go down this challenging road, but as we reflect on these six articles of the CRC, new questions arise as to how we apply each complicated set of rights. NGOs mentioned here are part of a growing movement of agencies who are genuinely concerned with the fulfilment of the aims and objectives of the CRC. In the past their work was often far more likely to have been with women as first line contact with children and thus, given the similarity of many issues surrounding empowerment, they have no great problem with the transition in principle. The reality is that direct comparison is difficult, given the problems of working across age barriers instead of with adults with whom we more or less identify as peers.

Letting go....

The real challenge in this transition is letting go of the control we have exercised over children directly and through adult caretakers and then incorporating them into all levels of research, programmes and so on. Conceptually it is very difficult for someone with a great deal of experience to turn to young, inexperienced colleagues and say "you do it". When making children colleagues we must bear in mind that we should not impose participation on children any more than we would on adults. Article 16’s protection of privacy should remind us that there are limits beyond which we should not go. We should not aim to make children into ‘little adults’ or ‘probationary grown ups’, therefore we may go only as far as they can and not expect endless and tireless devotion to the task. They should have the choice to accept or not. We should not set out to go to the absurd extremes of the ‘kiddie libbers’ of the 1960s and 70s. This is not a political campaign that puts children first, as children’s liberation proposed, but a process of creating a society that is inclusive of young citizens. We must also guard against making participation what Hart has called ‘tokenism’ with little or no substance behind what we demand of young partners (1992 and this issue, page37).

In India the proposal to give children rights was often considered contentious. Although India has ratified the CRC and their first report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child was being finalised at the end of 1995, the general view was that it was an unachievable goal. The whole set of reasons raised several times already (caste, etc.), and the additional view that the ‘Indian Child’ is not the ‘Global Child’, were raised. The difference between the two versions of the child, it was held, was that the CRC contains too many things that do not apply in India. The Indian child is unique. The CRC is about the global child. In Nepal, conversely, people were willing to try to apply the CRC. The main problems were lack of experience and resources.

Within the children’s rights movement, experience of their full integration into all levels of project work has existed since the 1970s. A small but fast growing number of children’s organisations throughout Latin America have seen adults and children share all stages from planning and research to assessment and evaluation, through finance and management, and even seen children as young as eight or nine years old travel vast distances to speak at international conferences. Similar projects are being adopted in a small, but steadily growing, number of African countries. In India and Nepal they exist, but as a tiny minority. As a result, organisations such as the Concerned for Working Children in Bangalore and Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN) in Kathmandu stand out for their uniqueness. They are deeply distrusted because they had the courage to incorporate children into their work several years ago (for instance, children helped start CWIN in 1989), well before their governments had signed the CRC. Because of their advanced positions, they also threaten the primacy of older but less flexible organisations. Behind all of this, there is an obligation to change. Signature and ratification of the CRC demands and assures that.

This obligation to change is what drove the ActionAid and SCF publications. Whilst policymakers and legislators struggle with notions of children’s participation in civil society in the West, and are hardly daring to step too far beyond token roles for children, developing nations have divided into two fronts. There are those who have a great deal of good will and are trying to meet their obligations. Then there are others who are obliged, but are nervously avoiding action. Thus far, experience is limited to NGOs who often specialise in work with street and working children and whose experience is almost entirely within the confines of the project cycle. That means we have restricted terms of reference for evaluating

1 Roger Hart’s ‘ladder of participation’ shows the eight steps that divide non-participation from fully comprehensive inclusion. Although it was a typology to begin the discourse, three years on people are still having conceptual problems developing new models, drawing children into practice and thus moving up the ladder from ‘tokenism’ to participation. Whilst including children in research is increasing often well-intended, the movement away from token involvement is still far more a good intention than apparent.

2 For examples see Baker, Narayanasamy, Nieuwenhuys, Sapkota and Sharma, this issue.
the context of the CRC, since only a small, often non-representative community, and not the whole of civil society, is putting it into practice. For the hesitant nations there are still no precedents.

A barrier against taking this task forward may be that change is threatening. The developing world is not very good at the ‘South-South’ dialogue version of this debate because of the depth of cultural differences that serve as yet another excuse for inaction. In India I was told that it is easy in the West because we are so used to changes and our culture allows us that anyway. In reality changes in the West are as radical as changes anywhere in the world. That aside, the demand for evidence that children’s participation can work outstrips our ability to set up and evaluate new projects.

It is striking that whilst Nepal is one of the most traditional countries in the world, the mood is optimistic about the diffusion of children’s increased participation. India claims to have adopted great liberal and democratic traditions, be academically and, in some respects, socially progressive and aspires to join the modern industrial world as a force majeur. Yet, positive indicators for using children’s participation in the delivery and enjoyment of rights are hidden behind conservatism.

**Conclusions**

The prognosis must be that the criteria for the evaluation of children’s participation in civil society depends not on ‘hands on’ work with children but on the progress had with opening adult minds and the acceptance of children as their partners. Although the brief may be to change policy and programmes to be inclusive of children’s rights, particularly participatory ones, in practice it may be more useful to spend a little longer with adults who need reassurance that children’s participation will not threaten their position. For researchers and NGO practitioners it is not an easy time since we sit between two fronts. One thing is on our side. As countries commit themselves to full implementation of the CRC, and delivery of participatory rights in particular, we can keep one step ahead by continuing to include children in research and programme implementation in order to deliver our greater experience once the ice breaks.

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Children as special citizens

Louise Chawla and Anne Trine Kjørholt

**Introduction**

Our experience has shown that even though there is more and more rhetoric about children’s inclusion in decision-making at both local and regional levels, it is difficult to realise children’s actual participation in practice. Often projects aimed at involving children in local decision-making turn into planning processes that use children as ‘hostages’ for adult interests. For children to really participate in planning requires something more than just asking them about their opinions. It takes an extended period of time, and means involving children and adults in an open-minded process in which no one knows the final outcome. In order to grasp the wide variety of children’s thoughts, feelings, and creative abilities in the course of this process, it is necessary to invite a variety of expressive methods, such as texts, drawings, photographs, model-building, and drama. The relations between the children and adults also need to be carefully evaluated. Do adults take the leading and structuring role, or are the children allowed a wide sphere of freedom to formulate their own problems and priorities, select action strategies and research methods, and document and apply results?

The case studies below illustrate firstly what can unfold when their process is supported and secondly, when it is not.

**Children as citizens**

In 1988, the Norwegian Council for Cultural Affairs allocated a total of 1.5 million kroners to a three-year experiment to provide grants earmarked for children. Responsibility for directing the project was given to the Norwegian Centre for Child Research, and eleven local council authorities took part in the experiment. The project, entitled *Try Yourself*, tried to connect children’s participation to play-like activities (Chawla, 1994). The intention of the project was that children themselves should take the initiative to plan, apply for funding, and carry out a variety of leisure-time activities. The project gave the children an opportunity to apply for financial support to put their own ideas into practice: such as starting a newspaper, producing a play, making a film or video, building a hut. It was important that adults should not organise the activities - children themselves were to have this responsibility.

The objectives of the project can be summarised as follows: to give children support on the basis of their own premises and needs; to increase children’s opportunities for creative development, and to promote their own culture; to give children opportunities to take responsibilities and carry out tasks; to increase knowledge about children and their culture; and to improve the environment in which children grow up.

Nearly 2000 children registered as participants in *Try Yourself* activities. A striking feature of the results was the diversity and variety in the types of activities for which children applied for support. Their activities were marked by imagination and inspiration derived from various sources:

- children produced newspapers, arranged a photographic exhibition, started rock bands, made skateboard ramps and model aeroplanes;
- they taught other children to dance, they acted, arranged evening entertainment for
old people, started clubs to look after cats, and sold eggs; and,

- they opened kiosks and local neighbourhood cafes, cultivated fish, built Stone Age huts, and learnt data processing, etc.

This work shows that children’s play represents an exciting focus for discussing the realisation of children’s role as citizens. When children play, they often create a common symbolic reality, transforming themselves and their environment into a new reality in which they create both the play context and the play text.

Figure 1. Children building a hut with materials they obtained through a grant from the Try Yourself project

This process often involves communication and cooperation on advanced and complex levels, but the process is often here-and-now oriented, with a very different character to conventional adult forms of democratic participation. An interesting question to consider is what kind of participation, and what kind of rationality do projects aimed at realising children’s role as citizens promote?

- Children as a resource

A good example of the limitations and advantages of participation is a term-long school study of their local community by eight and nine-year-old children. The children were from an old working-class section of Louisville, Kentucky in the USA. The study was followed by participation in planning for an extension of a public walk from the city’s downtown area out to the community’s abandoned waterfront (Kjørholt, 1993). At the end of the year, the participating class was compared with classes following conventional curricula. The project students were evenly divided between a desire to stay where they were when they grew up and raised their own children and the lure of exotic places like Florida and California. Only 12% of the non-project students, in contrast, were willing to stay in their community, and almost a quarter described their place as ugly and violent, in contrast to only one project member. For the project students, just having a chance to focus their attention on their community as they studied its geology, history, architecture, and culture appeared to affirm its value as a place with future potential.

When the students followed the city’s river-walk planning process, and prepared and suggested plans of their own in collaboration with a local museum, they demonstrated sophisticated group skills and original ideas. They showed a particular sensitivity for preserving existing community uses of the waterfront. For example, they were concerned that homeless people who had built shelters beside the river should not be displaced, and included a residence for these people in their recommendations. They also included low-cost suggestions to preserve fishing sites, and an ‘archaeology area’ where children liked to dig for old pottery and ironwork from homes that had been levelled when a flood wall was built.

However, after the children drew up their recommendations, the city put the river-walk extension into their community on an indefinite hold. Another community, closer to the city centre, was given a say instead. It appeared they were more politically significant. Thus the children became a resource that was no longer needed. It would have been valuable to assess what the children learnt from the aborted process, even though adult facilitators preferred to put the frustrating process behind them. However, follow-up was complicated by simultaneous cut-backs in the museum staff and the lead teacher’s sudden illness. Under better conditions the project facilitators should have stayed with the children to work through the shift in city government plans, and to show how community groups can demonstrate persistence.
and resilience by finding other opportunities for local improvement.

**Reflections**

These case studies show that just as it is necessary to reconsider the meaning of ‘children as citizens’, it is also necessary to reconsider the concept of ‘children as a resource’ in planning and development. This perspective is connected to an instrumentalistic attitude towards children, which is difficult to combine with the notion of the child as a subject having certain intrinsic rights as a human being. The slogan-like presentation of ‘children as a resource’ can serve the function of selling a project and the notion of children’s participation, but it is a concept borrowed from the field of economics, and may be interpreted as an illustration of the increasing incorporation of children into the capitalist market.

Another term often used in connection with participatory processes is ‘empowerment’, but this word and concept must also be used cautiously in work with children. As a group, children are the least powerful members of human society. They are usually not expected to have useful ideas and insights of their own, and through the first years of life they are dependent upon others for all their basic psychological and physical needs.

Thus it is necessary to be explicit about the probable limits of a programme’s outcomes. Given their own vulnerability, children are likely to be sympathetic to a facilitator’s open admission of a programme’s constraints. Participation may indeed be an empowering process, but the limits of this power need to be acknowledged in order to make the potential for real achievements clear. This rule is true for human limits as well as for political and economic limits. For many children, the main motivation for work may be an activity’s intrinsic interest. Therefore as much attention needs to be given to a programme’s intrinsic value as a means of play, learning, and fellowship as to its other goals. Even on this basis, the limits in facilitators’ abilities to invest in children’s lives, in terms of personal time and resources, need to be made clear.

Another consequence is that little is systematically known about just what children do gain from participation. If they are indeed empowered, in what ways? Are there ways in which they can be hurt? When programme funding comes to an end, what effects are left behind? As well as using participation as a form of research for development planning, the effects of participation itself need to be researched. Simple pre- and post-involvement measures need to be developed and shared; and programmes that use different processes, within different political and cultural contexts, need to be selected for more intensive evaluation.

Finally, if children’s participation is not to be mere tokenism, adults need to see themselves and children as genuine collaborators - but adults need to be very careful about the part they play in this relationship. The main challenge is to find the right balance between giving too much and too little assistance.

In interviews at the end of the *Try Yourself* project, for example, children’s observations about adults showed two tendencies. If adults interfered too much, it made the children feel inadequate, and they lost the fun of learning from each other and imagining and thinking up new things together. Children’s most common observation, however, was that adults could have given more help. Particularly with larger groups, including class-size groups, the demands on leadership, organisation, and conflict-solving skills are often more than children can master without adult examples at key moments. To believe that all children know everything about what they want to do, or are able to learn it themselves, is to over-estimate children, and not take them seriously. When adults show too much distance, children can also take it as a sign of a lack of genuine interest and investment in the project’s success. A true collaboration with children involves learning to observe when to follow the children’s lead, and when to come forward with the practical and social skills that are needed to carry the project forward.

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Institutionalising children’s participation in development

Michael Edwards

Introduction

The experience that Save the Children Fund (SCF-UK) has had with the use of participatory research and planning techniques with children and young people has shown that involving children in programme development is possible and practical, though challenging and difficult.

But why involve children in the first place? Is this simply a way of getting information from yet another special interest group to feed into planning processes controlled by outsiders, or is there something more fundamental at stake? We already know that PRA with adults can either be an empowering process, or an extractive one, depending on the degree of commitment to the principles of participatory development. The same concern applies to PRA with children. The proper use of PRA techniques with children requires a radical reversal in the way children are viewed in the whole of development policy and planning and so depends on wider changes in the way we view children’s place in society.

SCF’s early experience has shown these changes to be difficult and controversial - more so than similar reversals with regard to other (adult) social groups. Working for an agency with ‘children’ in its title is no guarantee that children’s participation will be accepted as legitimate.

Against this background, this article tries to do three things: first, to outline the reasons why participation by children makes people particularly uncomfortable; second, to relate these factors to the general case for children’s participation as a fundamental principle of effective development planning; and third, to explore how SCF has tried to promote children’s participation in its own work and address the difficulties that have arisen along the way.

Convincing staff of the underlying rationale for children’s participation has been seen as a prerequisite for encouraging the proper use of PRA with children; but PRA with children has also been a useful and less threatening way into the wider debate. What follows is an honest account of the realities of promoting a ‘Children’s Agenda’ in a large NGO bureaucracy (SCF-UK, 1995).

Why is there a problem with children’s participation?

On the surface, the case for promoting children’s participation in development planning is the same as that for any other group: no-one would accept that women, or people with disabilities, or ethnic minorities, should be excluded from participating in decisions which affect them, and a commitment to promoting participation by these groups in development planning is now widespread (in theory if not in practice). Yet children and young people are regularly denied these opportunities. Why is this? There are at least five reasons:

1. Planners use a standard model of childhood which has its roots in 19th-century Western thinking. This model treats all children as immature and irrational. People are qualified to participate in decisions only when adulthood has been reached, at a predefined age (usually 16 for some things and 18 or even 21 for others). By definition, children’s views are considered
‘childish’ and their opinions are not sought.

2. Children are seen as inherently non-productive. Despite the reality that they participate all the time in economic development, family life and culture (especially in non-Western societies), they are routinely excluded from official definitions and measurements of work.

3. Children are treated as by-products of other units of study such as the household, family or parent. The need to collect information which is specific to children’s lives is not perceived.

4. Adults may feel that, as they have once been children, they understand the needs of children without having to ask them; children’s own views are seen as unnecessary.

5. By treating children as passive and dependent, adults reinforce their monopoly of power in the world over and above that required to nurture children towards adulthood. This is a particularly sensitive area, and one in which adults who are also parents may feel particularly threatened.

These reasons help explain why children’s participation is often seen as unnecessary or unhelpful, even among people who accept that adult participation is essential for development interventions to be relevant, effective and sustainable. Reversing such attitudes requires convincing those who hold them that children’s participation is essential - for the development of individual children, the success of projects and programmes, and the development of communities and societies as a whole.

- Making a general case for children’s participation

Most SCF staff are already convinced of the need to put children’s needs and interests higher up the development agenda. But some are not persuaded that children’s participation is itself an essential part of this process - they acknowledge children’s rights to health care, education and so on, but not their right to participate in decisions about these things. This indicates just how entrenched the standard model of childhood has become.

In terms of children as individuals, there is plenty of evidence that excluding children from participating in decisions deprives them of crucial opportunities for personal growth and socialisation. And at the project level, a failure to listen to children can be shown to harm their interests too, as in the examples cited below.

Damage to individual children which could be avoided is a straightforward moral outrage, but it can also be argued that society is damaged by a failure to allow children a voice in policy decisions. This is because:

- Children are the future: childhood is a once-and-for-all biological window of opportunity for investment in human beings; miss it, and the losses incurred can never be made good.

- Children are not a minority in most countries of the world; decisions which exclude and damage children exclude and damage a huge proportion of society.

- Children have specific needs and interests which often differ from those of adults; just as when adults’ views are excluded, policies which fail to do this will be ineffective or will result in unintended outcomes.

Added to these pragmatic arguments is an argument of principle: Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is explicit about children’s right under international law to participate in decisions which affect them.

- From principle to practice

Although many people inside and outside SCF are convinced of the soundness of these arguments, many others are not. A major challenge of the last few years has been to find ways of persuading the ‘doubters’ that participation is a fundamental part of a more effective approach to children’s development and development for children. A number of ‘strategies’ have been adopted to do this, much of them in an ad hoc manner, with much learning-by-doing and often confined to (and
led by) particular field offices or individuals within programmes in the field.

**Recognising the special difficulties involved in participation by children**

Failing to recognise and deal with the particular problems posed for participatory approaches by age, gender and culture can lead to children’s participation being trivialised - ‘how can you expect five-year-old children to have an informed opinion about what sort of health care they need?’ Obviously, children’s ability to participate in decisions increases with age and biological maturity, and is further complicated by adult attitudes towards participation by children of different genders in different cultural traditions.

There are also ethical issues such as ‘informed consent’ which are more difficult to handle with children than with adults because of the issues of biological maturity and parental rights. By getting these issues out into the open and recognising the complexities, sensitivities, gradations and limitations of children’s participation, it may be possible to defuse some of the opposition to participation in principle. The ‘ladders of children’s participation’ have been useful tools in this respect (Hart, 1992 and see this issue, page 37).

Another tactic has been to compare the exclusion of children (which is tacitly accepted) with the exclusion of women (which is not). The point of doing this is not to indicate that the situation of children is the same as that of women, nor to pose a false conflict between age and gender as issues of difference, but to illuminate the basic principle at stake.

Table 1 deliberately lists the differences between the two social groups as well as the similarities; and in reality age and gender (and other issues of difference such as disability and ethnicity) reinforce rather than contradict each other.

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**Table 1. Gender and generation (women and children) in policy-making**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARALLELS</th>
<th>DIFFERENCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invisible in policy-making</td>
<td>Childhood is transitional, not permanent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not counted in statistics</td>
<td>The empowerment of children is circumscribed by biological immaturity and parental rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies made in their ‘best interests’ by others</td>
<td>Boundary between adults and children is less clear than that between men and women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socially-constructed</td>
<td>We have all been children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large social groups but treated as ‘minorities’</td>
<td>Less likely that children will represent their own interests in the absence of a political movement akin to the women’s movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seen as ‘unproductive’</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Both suffer oppression</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Both suffer disproportionate costs of adjustment/austerity programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Both denied participation in decision-making</td>
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<tr>
<td>Effects of ignoring them are long-term as well as short-term</td>
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Developing new techniques and building capacity to use them

Promoting practical ways of involving children in research, programme design and evaluation can be a less threatening way of convincing people of the importance of participation, gradually and over time. Practice rarely changes unless those involved see tangible benefits from new innovations which repay the time and effort involved. For example, SCF’s credit and income-generation programme in Vietnam has been more effectively evaluated using child-specific indicators such as time-allocation patterns; a more accurate analysis of children’s needs has been achieved through the use of PRA methodologies in Kratie Province, Cambodia. For field-workers, an argument based on learning from practice is often more effective than one based on general principle or policy, especially if it emanates from the head-office.

In SCF’s case, the development and use of child-centred research and planning methods is being backed by a systematic programme to build capacity to use such methods effectively. Building on a pilot venture funded by Redd Barna in Ethiopia, capacity-building workshops were held in India and Bangladesh during 1995. These workshops brought together SCF staff, staff from other NGOs, and local researchers, for a series of classroom and field-based sessions on research with children. Participants try out the techniques in their own work and share the lessons learnt back in the classroom.

A manual on child-centred research is in preparation, and a full-time post has been established in London to provide support to the capacity-building process as it unfolds. SCF’s UK Department has set up a ‘Children’s Participation Unit’ in Leeds to act as a resource centre for those involved in this kind of work with children.

As with PRA with adults, not all of these exercises have been successful; but with children, the need to ensure standards of quality is even higher because children are more vulnerable to bad and unethical practice. For this reason, the capacity-building workshops also look in depth at the ethics of research with children, how to deal with problems of confidentiality (for example, when examples of abuse by adults come to light), and the principles of early childhood development. While it is important not to constrain experiments and innovations in PRA with children, issues such as quality-control have to be at the top of the agenda for responsible practice. Training people in childhood development principles as well as PRA methods helps to reinforce the point that PRA with children is not the same as PRA with adults (though the links between stages of childhood, and levels of participation, are not well understood).

Gathering more evidence of what happens when children don’t participate

At the same time, participatory techniques help to produce the essential child-specific information upon which a more general case for the merits of children’s participation can be built. Without such techniques, it is not possible to demonstrate that children’s participation produces positive results, or that their non-participation produces negative results, either for children themselves or for the families, communities and societies they live in. The absence of such information is one of the problems which reinforce the conventional, non-participatory model of childhood which lies at the root of the problem in the first place.

For example, child-specific indicators in some SCF-supported credit programmes have revealed that children’s workloads have been increasing in families taking loans. In addition, research by the World Bank in India has shown that children did not attend a school sited outside an ‘invisible boundary’ which marked the limit of safe travel on foot from their homes - the boundary was only visible to children, but no-one had bothered to ask them.

Support from the centre

It is vital to encourage experimentation and learning at field level. However, in a relatively controversial area such as this, backing from senior managers in the headquarters is also essential. This legitimates experiments among field staff and increases bureaucratic backing.
for the expenditures of time and resources involved. A good deal of effort has therefore gone into securing support for the ‘children’s agenda’ at the top of the organisation (with a series of presentations and workshops for trustees, directors, and senior managers in the programmes and fund-raising departments). Most recently, ‘raising the children’s agenda’ has been institutionalised as one of SCF’s three corporate goals. Of course, such high-level support does little by itself, but when field staff are feeling nervous or unsure about their ‘room for manoeuvre’ it can be very important in encouraging innovation at programme level.

**Conclusion**

It is early days yet, but SCF’s experience shows that it is possible to institutionalise support for participatory approaches involving children. But these changes have been difficult - more difficult than similar shifts in practice involving adults. The reason for this is that accepted arguments for adult participation are not translated into support for participation by children and young people. And the reason for this is that too many development workers still cling to a model of childhood and society which is outdated, inaccurate, and damaging. PRA with children will help to break down these attitudes and prejudices, but much deeper changes are required.

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Action research with street children: a role for street educators

Olga Nieuwenhuys

**Introduction**

The media have brought to the drawing-rooms of the television-viewing public disheartening stories of children living on the streets. Time and again this public is a witness, through the eye of the camera, of how children are exposed to indifference, violence and abuse.

Set against this wealth of images, it is astonishing that social scientists have been slow to acknowledge street children as a legitimate area of study. While everybody seems to know who the street children are, social scientists are still struggling with categories and definitions (Glauser, 1990). The reason for the dearth of research may seem clear: the urgency to support children who find themselves on the fringe of survival can ill be combined with undertaking time-consuming and costly research, the results of which are often of scant practical value. Underlying this obvious reason is, however, a deeply ingrained belief that children are the products, not the makers, of development. In the real world, in the meanwhile, evidence to the contrary is clearly accumulating.

But even then there remains a gap between the research needs and the paucity of data and conceptual tools that will not easily be filled. An obvious solution seems be to adopt a participatory action research perspective, and the past few years have clearly demonstrated that research has much to gain from the active participation of the people for whom the results are intended in the first place.

The research unit, *Childhood and Urban Poverty*, based at the Institute for Development Research (InDRA) in the University of Amsterdam, to which I belong, is committed to academic research while strongly believing in participation and dialogue. We see those we research not as ‘objects’, as academia traditionally has done, but as ‘subjects’. This means eliciting their active participation at all stages of research, including the formulation of the problem, the selection and application of methods of research and the ways results are documented and made accessible.

**Action research with children**

Much of the experiences with action research has been with adults. In the case of children, the method becomes not only less self-evident but also not devoid of risks. This has however not discouraged us in trying to find out whether action research would hold when applied to situations involving street children.

The first step was evidently to identify the research needs of street children. This confronted us with our first choice: should we devise a procedure to consult with children directly or should we consult with the organisations that work for them? We did not feel that the first option would actually lead us very far. We felt that we should beware of tokenism, and saw little chance of avoiding the decidedly unattractive pitfall of finding ourselves pretending that children were doing their own research while in fact they were not (Hart, 1992 and see this issue, page 37). We also did not know of any research in which children had actually been actively involved in all stages of research (though we knew of some in which children had been instrumental in the collection of data). We were, in short, familiar enough with research to foresee serious
methodological difficulties if we embarked upon this option.

So, we started from 1992 onwards, a series of workshops and seminars to discuss the setting of goals and priorities for our research programme with experts who had been working with street children for longer periods of time. What finally emerged from the consultation was a demand for support in developing methods of action research that could be carried out with children. Though we were now back to our starting point, we were no longer on our own: we had started a dialogue, though not directly with children, at least with those we believed were in constant dialogue with them.

**Including street educators**

Our plans became articulated when Fr. George Kollashany approached InDRA with an explicit request. During 14 years of work on the streets of Bangalore (India), he had increasingly become aware that there was a huge gap between children and the experts who work for them. The gap was, to some extent, caused by the fact that experts come from institutes that have but fragmentary knowledge of the world of poor children. Those who know them best, because they work daily with them, he felt, were street-educators. But many of them have trained ‘on the job’, lack professional diplomas and are therefore not taken seriously at decision-making levels even within their own organisations. This is particularly true of educators who were themselves street children in the past. They find themselves at the bottom of their organisation, mainly because they are not qualified to staff most programmes that are now being undertaken by both the government and NGOs.

Kollashany’s request, in short, was to help develop ‘on the job’ training that would start with the experiences of street-educators, encourage them to share and reflect upon what they are doing; train them in systematising and documenting their knowledge; help them clarify their needs in terms of information and insights; and guide them while they struggled to improve their interventions so that they could gain the credit they needed to do their job.

From our point of view it struck us that training street-educators could fit very well into our more general aim of developing the methodology of action research with children. It would, most importantly, provide us with the expertise mandatory to carrying out a research project. We felt that, in the case of children, well trained and dedicated ‘facilitators’ were essential to obtaining relevant results. This is how the project ‘Child Welfare for the Urban Poor: A training in action-research for street educators’ (CWUP) was born (InDRA, 1995).

**Designing the training**

During a two-weeks workshop held at InDRA in June 1994, with a small team of experts both from academia and the field, we set out the outlines of how street-educators could be trained as facilitators of action research.

At the onset we were confronted with questions that confirmed that the task ahead was far from easy. Though many of them apply when the ‘actors’ are adults, they hold even more strongly for children. How do we avoid, for instance, simplifying the complexities of children if we are unable to understand what they are? How can children have a voice, knowing that even those who work for them are much too eager, for a variety of reasons, to push them into frameworks (‘prostitutes’, ‘drug addicts’, ‘abandoned’, ‘at risk’...) and have hardly developed methods to listen? The professionalism of field staff working with street children being proverbially inadequate, how can we hope that they will be able to encourage children’s active participation or train them to do research? How do we know that an intervention benefits children if actually so few want to listen or accept their ways of participating? And, most importantly of all, can we really ever pretend that we, as adults, will not (wish to) patronize children?
BOX 1

PROJECTS FROM THE CHILD WELFARE FOR THE URBAN POOR PROGRAMME

Scaling up successful interventions for poor urban children in Ethiopia and India

The projects seek to scale up successful interventions for poor urban children by building upon staff’s experiences of innovative interventions, be they initiated by NGOs or local governments. Field-workers are involved in identifying the successful elements of these interventions and replicating them in new activities through action-research.

The research started by identifying organisations that have developed successful interventions in Addis Ababa, Bangalore and a number of cities in South India. The organisations, together with local universities, selected trainers and 15 street-educators, organised a refresher course, technical and research training, coordinated activities and were responsible for evaluation and reporting. The selected street-educators followed the short training sessions (of about three days each), executed an action research project and documented their experiences. The team of trainers linked to the project, resource persons from academic and training institutes and researchers, supported the process of constructing children’s experiences into knowledge.

Action Research in the Philippines

The heightened awareness among policy makers in the Philippines that children are seriously in danger of becoming the silent victims of the way urbanisation is taking place is a clear sign that current interventions are not alleviating problems. Although a variety of research has been done to better appreciate the problem, and numerous GO and NGO programmes have been initiated to respond to them, many fundamental questions remain such as: What factors drive the children to the streets? Who are they? How are their relationships with their families? Are certain age and gender groups more at risk? What are the life conditions of street girls? What are the impacts of NGO interventions created by the failure of state welfare? Is it possible to draw generalisations and formulate long-term solutions for street children? Our research aims to address these questions.

While discussing these questions our thought was that both children and educators are sources of knowledge and do research every day of their lives. What they would need to make this research ‘scientific’ were tools to map, record, analyze and act upon their environment.

Looking for tools made us aware that children and street educators have already evolved their own tools to understand their world and construct knowledge. Rather than training them in using research tools that were alien to their ways of communicating, we believed we should encourage them to use those that existed already in a creative way. Researchers should, for instance, be aware of the problems involved in interviewing children. The interview technique, we thought, assumes a certain amount of consensus and is therefore in many cases likely to distort what children have to say. The word ‘work’ for example, refers to serious, adult work that is paid in cash. In an interview about work with an adult, a child is easily forced to deny the value of his/her own ‘childish’ activities because they do not fit the meaning of ‘work’ in the adult sense. One may expect the same effect from adult notions about family, school, games, hygiene, etc. But this is not to say that researchers cannot talk with children: they have to do it differently, seeking a situation that we termed ‘speech in action’. Children may find it easier to talk about what they do because they can then attribute meanings to their activities and in this way reveal a lot more than in an interview.

Likewise, preferred activities of children such as games, story telling and drawing may be more effective in bringing out the complexities of their experience than methods and techniques used by/with adults (such as focused group discussions, questionnaires) However, action research with street children does not boil down to collecting drawings or organizing games. For the use of familiar tools to become a research method they must be used in context and in continuous dialogue with the children concerned.
Having started with the intention of doing action-research with street children, we found ourselves developing a training curriculum to help street-educators share, reflect on and improve their method of work. We believe this strategy will recognise both children and street-educators as partners in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of research. It is also hoped that by documenting the process of action research in various countries and by different NGOs and comparing and analysing the results, this strategy will result in the ‘bottom-up’ development of a method of doing action research that can be used, if applied carefully, to scale-up successful interventions.

• Conclusions

I believe that the causes of success or failure of interventions for poor children are still ill-understood, and that one of the major drawbacks is the problem of ‘listening to children’. We can hardly hope to develop good intervention methods if we not only cannot obtain reliable information from those for whom the intervention is intended in the first place, but also still have to convince those in the decision-making positions that children’s experiences and opinions really matter.

CWUP is now well under way in India, the Philippines, Ethiopia, Kenya and Colombia. Box 1 highlights two of these projects. For us, the academic researchers involved, the opportunity to reflect in dialogue with those who work in the field is an invaluable opportunity to broaden our understanding of the world.

One of the main problems we now have is the question that was put so pointedly at the beginning of the workshop in 1994: "Can illiterate street educators find a place at the university?" We believe not only that they can, but that it is of utmost importance to enable them to do so. A challenging experience, as I was to find out last year when I participated in the first training organised by Kollashany. He and his team had selected from the participants, three young educators who had been on the streets when boys. One was entirely illiterate. His presence was extremely fruitful in that he constantly reminded the rest of us ‘literates’ that whatever we plan to do with action research has to be more creative (and certainly less boring) than producing written reports....

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13

PRA with street children in Nepal

Rachel Baker

• Introduction

This account outlines why and how I used certain PRA techniques for research on the health, backgrounds and life-styles of street children in Kathmandu, Nepal. I then assess the process of data collection and results generated for their impact on the children’s livelihoods.

Research with street children in Kathmandu began in 1993 as part of a multi-disciplinary study of urban and rural children in Nepal. We compared the growth status, family background and lifestyle of street children with urban squatter children, privileged urban school children and rural village children (Baker et al., forthcoming in 1997; Panter-Brick et al., 1996). In brief, the results showed that street children (defined as those who work and live on the streets) achieved lower growth scores than the urban school children, but were taller and heavier for their age (higher growth scores) than urban squatter and rural village children. The street children described a broad spectrum of home and work experiences that had led to their living on the streets. They made significant use of various resources found within their social networks of peers, local communities and the staff of NGOs. Hence, my aims in the following year of research were to:

• Question how such social relations were perceived and used by street children for health services and their impact on their health status.

• Develop participatory methodologies appropriate for research with street children. The aim was to give informants a directive role in and facilitate their ownership of the research process and also to obtain results of use to policy makers, programme workers and children.

• Rationale for the PRA approach

The PRA approach, yielding both qualitative and quantitative data, provides scope for the collection and comparison of health issues identified by street children (Baker et al., 1996). For example, in the final stages of research several sources of data relating to the health of street children were available, including the comparative study of growth status (Panter-Brick et al., 1996), records kept by two NGO clinics of the numbers of cases of particular conditions attended to each month and my own observations of the children’s health seeking behaviour. I sought to triangulate these with the children’s own experiences and views concerning periods of ill-health and any action taken. I felt PRA was the best means of achieving this.

Participants and the method implemented

Four groups comprising of between five and 15 children participated in this part of the study. They were all boys aged 10 to 16 years whom I had known for several months. I had built up a good rapport during daily interactions with the children in their living and working environments: namely the junkyard (where a group of 12 children who live by rag-picking are based), the squatter community and the NGO centre. The groups were chosen to represent a cross-section of street-living

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1 The two NGOs with whom I did this research were the Child Workers in Nepal and the Child Welfare Society.
experiences and the individuals were interested and willing participants.

The methods were adapted from PRA approaches used in other research contexts (IIED 1992). To prepare appropriate exercises I first consulted the NGO health workers about their experiences and questions concerning children’s health behaviour. Secondly, I discussed the proposed research with children from the four groups to ascertain their interest in the topic and their views about possible practical limitations.

Initially we made a ‘spider diagram’ of boys’ experiences of ill-health in their homes, while living on the streets and for some, while they were based in the NGO centre. In the centre of a large piece of paper a key word is circled to form the spider’s body and participants’ experiences are added as the spider’s legs (see Figure 1). Using the health complaints mentioned, we made a table and, by group consensus, ranked each one (on a scale of one to five) according to frequency, degree of pain, how much it affected the ability to earn and the places where treatment can be obtained (see Figure 2). To assess how dietary habits related to health, a second table was made with common food items identified by the children. These were also ranked for frequency of consumption, tastiness, cost and suitability for consumption when ill.

A NGO health worker and/or a 15 year old ‘ex-street child’ (who now attends a local school) and I facilitated the discussion and recording of information. One boy was chosen by the children to write down the scores agreed by the group. Facilitators noted particular comments and points relating to group dynamics that were pertinent to the research topic.

- **Scope of results**

The children enjoyed comparing their experiences and being able to represent them visually. The discussion was purposefully not restricted by the facilitators but nevertheless tended to be focused on the relevant health issues through the ‘hands-on’ task of completing the table. A good rapport with both the children participating and the local adults was fundamental to establish understanding of the purpose of the activity and the relaxed atmosphere required to generate valuable data. I would warn against over-ambitious group tasks as participants may not sustain interest or concentration. Clear explanations, tasks that are divided into manageable chunks, large sheets of paper, erasers to allow for changes and a simple ranking scale are vital.
Figure 1. Spider diagram drawn by street boys

Figure 2. Table completed by street children showing impact of illnesses and action taken

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illness</th>
<th>Boil</th>
<th>Dog bite</th>
<th>Wound</th>
<th>Scabies</th>
<th>Diarrhoea</th>
<th>Hit by vehicle</th>
<th>Cold</th>
<th>Fracture</th>
<th>Hunger</th>
<th>Fever</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of pain</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect on earning</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment sought at/with</td>
<td>Free homeopathic clinic</td>
<td>NGO clinic / state hosp.</td>
<td>NGO clinic</td>
<td>None-friends</td>
<td>None-friends</td>
<td>NGO clinic/junk yard owner</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>NGO clinic / state hosp.</td>
<td>Friend s /junk yard owner</td>
<td>Homeopathic clinic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparison of the data produced by the four groups sheds light on the factors that influence health status. For example, the ill-health emphasised (in terms of frequency, degree of pain etc.) by the children can be related to variation in income-generating activity and the social relations formed in the work context. The role of adults in guiding health related behaviours varies among the total sample and is most influential among some of the squatter children (who live with their families) and some street children based in an NGO centre. Nonetheless some relatively independent street children demonstrated knowledge of both the conditions and the means of seeking treatment.

The range of health complaints volunteered by individuals can be compared to the complaints recorded by the NGO clinics. Parallels are evident in acute conditions (for example infected boils and dog bites). However some chronic conditions (including worms and skin sores) are described by street children as debilitating and yet are commonly treated in the clinic when patients are seeking help for acute complaints. Some children did not see it as appropriate to seek help beyond their peers for diarrhoea and wounds unless they were totally immobilised. There is evidence of differences in children’s ideas and experiences of intervention according to the degree of previous or current association with NGO provision.

Overall, many children knew the health risks that their work and living conditions exposed them to and could identify means to minimise them, for example washing regularly, wearing shoes while rag-picking and drinking clean water. While many rag-picker boys keep soap, a second set of clothes and go to regular eating spots, a large number of children, (who are mostly below 14 years), are very mobile, have no possessions and do not appear to prioritise behaviours specifically to maintain good health.

By identifying the level of concern for overall health and their current methods of dealing with ill-health, this research can be used to design appropriate action or further research. For example, the NGOs might consider investigating ways to improve the treatment facilities in clinics known to the children. Community health amenities could be provided in the squatter and junkyard areas, perhaps facilitated by some of the older street children.

**Limitations**

This was a group task and hence lacked the fine-grained data available in individual health profiles.

I was unable to gain further quantitative data concerning perceptions and experiences of stress or psychological well-being. The Western concept of stress is not one that can be easily transferred to other cultures. In Nepal, the children would talk of ‘worries’ or ‘hardship’ but not in terms of being unwell. There is scope for the development of methods in which children can record their own sense of well-being. Among street children in particular, there is a need to investigate how self-esteem affects children’s ability to use social relations and opportunities in different environments.

It was impossible for both myself and the NGO health worker to enquire about the children’s sexual habits and health. Our gender and regular interaction with most of the boys, in addition to our links to the NGO centre, may have prevented open discussion of these topics. However, of increasing concern to the NGOs was the fact that the street boys were very reluctant to talk about sexual matters, even among trusted male social workers.

As described above the sample of children was not stratified nor selected to be representative of the wider street child population. The purpose of the research was not to draw conclusions about all the street children. Firstly the mobility of street children makes selecting a reliable sample very difficult. Secondly, the category of ‘street children’, although widely used by policy-makers and development organisations, may not be relevant to the children’s own life experiences and needs in particular environments within Kathmandu.
• Issues arising

Researcher role

Street children are put in the limelight in both the international policy arena and the local media. Hence researchers are working with people whose social status is under constant negotiation. In common with many anthropologists, I was aware that appropriate research could not be led by my own agenda and I could not just be a ‘participant observer’ (Hinton, 1995). Rather, in the eyes of the street children, local NGOs and wider society, I had a role in the debate and action surrounding provision for the children. This evolving role was manifested in my daily interaction in particular settings. Within this context, both the practical feasibility and my role in the social dynamics underlie the choice of methods, the scope of children’s meaningful participation and the validity of the research results.

In the junkyard, I was only able to carry out more organised research methods (the PRA methods described above) after I had spent five months becoming familiar with the relationships between the owner, his family members and the rag-picker children, and assessing what was expected of me in that context. Researching within the NGO programme areas required careful consideration of how particular research exercises and their results related to the agenda and aims of the NGO staff. For example, the use of diagrams to discuss health issues needed to be set within the broader aims of health education and building incentives to pursue literacy classes. Hence we prepared a special workshop on health issues and self-help as part of a non-formal education programme. Diet was discussed and a tasty, nutritious meal was served to attract children and reinforce what they knew or learnt about good food.

Validity of results

Group exercises rarely reflect equal contributions from all members, so while facilitating this research I noted when age and status differences within the group affected interpersonal relationships and hence the discussion. In addition, I was aware that some children may have been seeking to please me, an adult associated with the NGO programme, and therefore tended to give the expected response.

Attendance and participation

Prior to the health exercises I carried out focus group discussions on various cultural and socio-economic issues in three locations; the junkyard, city square and NGO centre. A small core of usually older boys attended regularly; however there were many others whose attendance was sporadic. The quality of data obtained in single sessions of the health research shows the potential for continuing this technique over a period of time with the four groups of children (either to further explore health issues and strategies for action or in other pertinent areas of street living). It was evident to me that for such research to be effective in action programmes the children’s regular attendance and participation are vital. To guarantee the latter, the obvious strategy is for researchers and children to conceive, prepare and implement the research. However, such an undertaking needs considerable investment of time and energy by all participants plus a supportive infrastructure through which results can be disseminated and action facilitated. Although my efforts increased children’s participation in defining and evaluating their health experiences, they did not meet my aim of giving ownership of the research to the informants. Part of the problem was that street children are not always interested in such long-term proposals as they are keen to discuss and bring change to their lifestyles immediately.

• Summary

The PRA exercises that I have described are certainly potential channels through which the health experiences and perceptions of children can be fed into policy and programming. Of particular relevance to NGOs and other health service providers are the children’s responses about their current health-seeking behaviour and reasons why they cannot always access appropriate resources. Moreover the experience of participation in this research contributed to the children’s role
in directing decisions normally made by adults on their behalf. This empowerment of street children is one of the broad aims of the NGO in Kathmandu. However, there have to be effective means of ensuring that children’s health needs do not remain simply points of discussion as this is unfair to all participants. Despite our preparatory discussions, some children had high expectations of immediate further action, for example a full health examination and treatment. It may be argued that research will always lead to expectations that cannot be met. However, at the very least, the means (in terms of support from adults) must be available to enable children to act towards meeting their own health needs.

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Participatory interactions with children in Nepal

Pashupati Sapkota and Junita Sharma

Introduction

ActionAid-Nepal considers children to be some of the most important beneficiaries of development programmes. Until recently the emphasis has been on education and health programmes. Now importance is given to the approach used to provide these services.

This approach lays the stress on our own attitude towards children. In order to promote their participation in development the essential requirement is to understand their lives, their roles and responsibilities, their dreams and aspirations. This means that we have to learn to listen to them and respect them. We have to look at them as our equals and not as inadequate and incapable beings. Involving children also requires consistent and conscious effort on our part to reduce the temptation to exploit the power that we as adults enjoy over children.

In 1992 ActionAid-Nepal initiated a research project with children from the district of Sinduli (Johnson et al., 1995). This paper describes some of the participatory methods that are subsequently being used with children from Sindhupalchok as well as from Sinduli.

Drawing

The use of drawing as a PRA method with children confirmed that creative activities are universally popular with them. It proved to be an important tool for initiating the research process as it was easy to implement and as it effectively overcame the barriers of illiteracy and muted silence. It gave valuable insights into their minds without being too imposing. It was also something they enjoyed. It allowed them the freedom to express views, imagination, and interpretation of the surrounding world on their own terms. Moreover, the adult-child power imbalance was relatively reduced by giving full control to the child; this in turn enhanced their confidence.

After explaining the topic, "Best things about school" for school-going children and "What I do at home away from school" for school drop-outs the children started to draw enthusiastically. Some needed guidance, while others were quite happy to copy from their neighbours.

There was not much difference in the artistic capabilities of both the groups. Most of the drawings featured things around them like the flowers, trees, sun and the river. The school-going children featured mainly the school and school-related activities. Blackboards and books were invariably depicted and most of them drew themselves playing or friends and teachers. The drop-outs drew visiting the market place and playing in the river. Some girls drew the temple.

Some drawings were difficult to decipher and interpretation was not eased by the passive nature of the participants. Some ambiguous ones could not be explained by the children themselves. However the overall response was noteworthy and proved to be an effective ice-breaker. It captivated their attention and interest for almost an hour and was a stimulus for further discussions.

Activity profile

Ten days were spent with 10 school-going children in order to understand the economic contribution they make to their village. Initially
several visits were made to the weekly meetings held by the informal children’s group which gathered together to sing, dance and perform drama. At one of these, the children were told in detail the purpose of the study and asked to choose a sample of children according to certain criteria. The sample needed to consist of 10 school-going children, boys and girls, all below the age of 16 and able to work for seven days. By the next day they had done this and had also selected four school drop-outs (two girls and two boys) as a control group. Pen and paper were then distributed to each child for diary writing.

First, an example of diary writing was given by referring to the daily work activities of one boy. The time he got up, had breakfast, lunch, and so on were noted according to his response. Then the same was requested of another boy. He hesitated to tell the exact time when he got up since he did not have a watch. Instead we decided to base the time on when the cock crowed. We then discussed the other activities performed during the day. To make it easier the children decided to divide the day into three major parts, namely - activities before lunch, activities in the afternoon and activities performed in the early evening until bed time.

After two days the children gathered and shared their problems. It was sensed that some information was lacking in their diaries. For example, some children who weave fishing nets for income while they are herding cattle had only mentioned ‘herding’ in their activity profile. Once they understood the value of noting such overlapping activities we agreed to meet a week later. This time when we met we discussed their income, their economic contribution, their participation in decision-making in the family and their authority over the pattern of expenditure and gender relationships.

Two boys voluntarily completed the activity profiles of non-school-going children while we did the same for two school-going children. An example of each is given in Figure 1 and 2. After this process the information was analysed, findings were presented and comments received. This exercise made the children aware of the economic contribution they make and their use of time. It also allowed the exploration of activities the children were involved in, that would not otherwise have been valued. Moreover information could be provided in a short period by the children themselves and the relationship between us improved due to our working together.

Limitations include the fact that some children participated more than others; some (illiterate children in particular) tended to get bored with maintaining a diary.

- **Mobility maps**

Mobility maps worked well with children. Firstly, they provided information on the spatial dimension of the child’s freedom. The boundary depicted in the map encompassed the places frequented by the child, which in turn said a lot about aspects of the child’s life such as livelihood, workload, and surrounding physical environment (Figure 3). Secondly, the maps were useful in providing opportunities for further probing and individual interviews. The most visible difference between the school-going and the drop-outs’ maps were the pictures of the schools which dominated the maps drawn by the school-going ones. Instead of the schools, the forest occupied the most space in the drawings of the school drop-outs. There were slight variations in the maps of the boys and girls. The girls included temples as well since they regularly visit them.

This tool proved effective for communicating with the children. Literacy was no barrier and of course the simplicity of the tool helped understanding and implementation.

- **Interviews**

The objectives and purpose of the interviews were explained and the children were asked to commit some time to the activity. Half of them decided they did not want to take part.
Figure 1.  Time-allocation of school-going child (Sunita, 11 year old girl, Grade 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>PM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
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Work

Figure 2.  Time-allocation of school drop-out (Umesh, 13 year old boy)

<table>
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Work

Index:

Works for Income: | Work in Home: | Time for Self:

- Fishing
- Fishing net weaving
- "Jama"
- Wage labour
- (Grinding)
- Water fetching
- Cutting grass
- Cooking
- Cleaning
- Brooming
- Baby care
- Pounding
- Cattle grazing
- Irrigating
- Firewood collection
- Ploughing
- Digging
- Husking grain
- Reading
- Smoking
- Relaxing
- Eating
- Sleeping
- Visiting

Figure 3.  Mobility map by Balkumari, a school drop-out
Their choice was respected since they obviously the choice they were making. Aspects such as the time and place of the meeting were left to them to decide.

An informal conversational style was used to make them feel comfortable. Ice-breakers like songs and games helped them open up. Folk songs are part of their everyday life and reveal a lot. One girl (a school drop-out) sang a song which went like this: "girls and boys are like the two eyes of a person, it is the parents to blame if they don’t send them to school".

The findings from the other methods provided leads to follow up. It was necessary to have many sessions since the children became restless quickly and have other interests. We found it important to avoid difficult words and use local phrases whenever possible. Questions have to be as simple as possible and linked to things they are familiar with. Conversations usually flowed at their own pace with only subtle manoeuvring and probing needed from the interviewer. Recording was done by writing since tape-recording made the children suspicious and self-conscious, and some were more interested in the machines than in the questions.

Group interviews worked well for getting general information. The security of being in a group gave most of the children confidence to voice their opinion. In one session when we were talking about "What I would like to become when I grow up", the children’s aspirations varied according to their educational status. Most of the school-going ones had ambitions like becoming a teacher, a doctor, a pilot, whereas three drop-outs said they would like to work in the fields or make beaten rice. They also had aspirations for their future but these were not very different from what they are doing now, or what their parents are doing.

It is equally important to interview parents and teachers in order to understand the children better. Most parents tended to blame their children for losing interest and quitting school. It was only after much discussion that some felt comfortable enough to talk about the reality of poverty that does not allow them the luxury of education. The teachers said that because of the work-load at home the children do not study enough. This results in poor performances and eventually failing class.

### Conclusions

The effectiveness of the use of PRA methods with children depends a lot on the context, implementation, and the team composition. Like in other research, ethical issues, such as ensuring that their informed consent is given, confidentiality is maintained and that findings are disseminated, need to be heeded.

Triangulation is particularly important. Rather than using a single method in isolation it is better to supplement the research with more than one method in order to cross-check the validity of the information collected. For example the drawings showed what they did away from school, and the mobility maps gave information on their movements, the places they frequented, and all these were further discussed in the interviews with children, parents and teachers.

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**REFERENCES**

Whither children’s hour?
An experimental PRA among labouring rural children

N. Narayanasamy, B.R. Dwaraki, B. Tamilmani and R. Ramesh

Introduction

Normally in any village meetings, children are the first to come and last to leave, no matter what the meeting is convened for, who are to be addressed and what are the transactions. However in the use of PRA, the emphasis is normally placed on adults and the elders. Children are considered more of a hindrance than a help.

This is counter to our experience at Gandhigram Rural Institute in Tamil Nadu, India where it has been seen that children are potential informants. Our observations on many an occasion in villages have been that children could be directly used in PRA exercises as active participants and not mere spectators. As a result it occurred to us that it would be worth trying a PRA exclusively with children.

Thus a three day workshop was held in June 1994 with the stated objectives being to:

• Explore whether the different PRA methods could be used with children.
• Examine whether children have an understanding of the various dimensions of family and social life.

We collaborated with an NGO called Peace Trust based at Dindigul which is serving children in particular. They chose for the workshop a village 10km from Dindigul, called Gandhinagar where they ran an Education Centre for Children (ECCL).

The PRA team included 10 members of staff from various faculties of Gandhigram Rural Institute and 4 field staff from the Peace Trust.

Figure 1. We know what we are doing....
There were around 75 children - both boys and girls, most of whom were in their early adolescence (below 14 years). Although there were three above 14 years of age, they realised that the programme was meant for children and hence did not interfere in the process.

On all three days, the PRA team formed three groups, each one conducting a particular exercise which included village mapping, time-use analysis, key indicators of well-being and poverty, seasonality analysis, semi-structured interviews, matrix, case analysis and focus group discussions. A selection of these exercises are described here.

- **Time use analysis**

**Objective**

The objective of this exercise was to know how children spend their time.

**Process**

As we reached the village around 6.30 pm we met only a few school going children. The working children were yet to return from their work; so we waited for them. After some time, we could see the working children returning from the nearby town after the day’s work. It was around 8.30 pm. The children looked tired, but they joined us straight away without even going home. They started participating in the PRA exercises with eagerness and enthusiasm.

A small number from the PRA team interacted with them, asking what they felt about their work and their family condition. Initially, there was some reluctance on the part of the boys and girls to talk. Later they came closer and their initial hesitation disappeared. Gradually, they started talking and giving views and opinions on many matters.

After some time, we interviewed three working children at random. All three children vividly described what their activities are in a day and how they use their time. One example is shown in Box 1.

**Observations**

- The boys are made to cook food at home before they for their regular work.
- The hours of work is more than 11 a day.
- Girls below the age of 14 years are shouldering the responsibility of a 35 year old women.
- There seems to be virtually no scope for mental or physical development of working children.
- Working children are blissfully ignorant of their bleak future.

**Case analysis**

| 6 am  | Wake up, bathe. |
| 6.45 am | Breakfast. |
| 7 am  | Comb hair and dress. |
| 7.15 am  | Go to work (vermicelli factory) |
| 8 am  | Start work. |
| 2.30 pm  | Lunch break. |
| 1 pm  | Work starts again. |
| 7 pm  | Leave work with Rs.1-50 (daily rate), buy groundnuts or biscuits for 50 paise. Play with friends on the way home. |
| 8 pm  | Reach home, wash, supper. |
| 9 pm  | Sleep or sometimes attend ECCL |
| 10 pm  | Sleep. |

**DAILY ROUTINE OF ARUMUGAM**

(A BOY WORKING IN A VERMICELLI FACTORY)

**BOX 1**

6 am Wake up, bathe.
6.45 am Breakfast.
7 am Comb hair and dress.
7.15 am Go to work (vermicelli factory)
8 am Start work.
2.30 pm Lunch break.
1 pm Work starts again.
7 pm Leave work with Rs.1-50 (daily rate), buy groundnuts or biscuits for 50 paise. Play with friends on the way home.
8 pm Reach home, wash, supper.
9 pm Sleep or sometimes attend ECCL
10 pm Sleep.
Some of the key informants from the time-use analysis exercise were chosen to be case studies. The situation of one child is described in Box 2.

**BOX 2**

**CASE STUDY OF MS. C (A GIRL TENDING BUFFALO)**

Ms. C dropped out of school after she failed in the third standard. Her parents, both landless agricultural labourers, are unlettered. Her family consists of eight members, including her parents.

For Ms. C the day starts at 6 am. She sweeps the house, helps her mother cook, fetches water from a far-off well, cleans the vessels and takes care of her younger sister and brother. Her most difficult job is carrying water from a far-off well, two pots every time, one on the head and the other on the hip, three times in the morning. After her mother leaves for work around 8 am Ms. C has her breakfast and cleans the vessels before taking the buffalo for grazing. She plays with her friends while the buffalo are grazing and returns home around 3 pm. for lunch.

She says that during the summer they often do not have enough food to eat three meals a day. When asked whether then she does not feel hungry, she says that she is accustomed to it and that if she plays with her friends she forgets the hunger.

When asked whether she does not like to go to school she says, she would like to very much as she dreams of becoming a teacher one day, but poverty does not allow her dreams to come true.

**Key indicators of well-being and poverty**

**Objective**

To understand children’s perceptions of well-being and poverty.

**Process**

After creating an informal setting and favourable environment by asking one of the children to sing a song, the interviewer asked every boy and girl in the group the amount of money each one has in his/her pocket at that moment. Each one showed 10 paise, 25 paise, 50 paise etc. while some did not have any money. Then the interviewer enquired as to who among them was rich/poor at that moment. They showed the boy who had many coins as rich and showed those who did not have any money as poor. With these examples, the interviewer asked whether there are rich and poor people in the village.

All of them answered in the affirmative. Then the interviewer asked them whom would they call rich and poor in the village. The interviewer asked them to explain the indicators they use. They made a visual presentation on the ground (Figure 2). Then they listed out the indicators for the poor and rich. These are shown in Table 1, arranged as narrated by the children themselves.
Figure 2. A proud presentation.....

Table 1. Key Indicators of well-being and poverty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATORS OF WELL-BEING</th>
<th>INDICATORS OF POVERTY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Own a pumpset</td>
<td>Fetch water from public tap/hand pump or from a far off place where there is a public well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own a cow or bullock</td>
<td>Landless or own a small piece of dry land and without any money to undertake agricultural operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own farming land</td>
<td>Own a sheep/goat/hen or nothing at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have regular bank transactions</td>
<td>Own a house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have all stainless steel vessels</td>
<td>Live in a thatched house with a leaky roof or homeless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consume rice as the staple food</td>
<td>Eat jowar and bajra regularly but rarely take rice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase grocery items on a monthly basis</td>
<td>Purchase grocery items and rice daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own a radio, TV, cupboard, fan and clock</td>
<td>Purchase grocery items and rice daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own a motor cycle or moped</td>
<td>Purchase grocery items and rice daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send their children to standard schools</td>
<td>Purchase grocery items and rice daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own a latrine</td>
<td>Use open air defecation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own plots either locally or in town</td>
<td>Use open air defecation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have installed a borewell in the house</td>
<td>Use open air defecation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work at a bank/office, run a big business and earn thousands; have additional income from bribe-taking</td>
<td>Use open air defecation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wear neatly washed clothes</td>
<td>Use open air defecation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Use open air defecation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Use open air defecation</td>
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Observations

- Children have their own clear perceptions on the indicators of well-being and poverty.
- Almost all the indicators suggested by them are quite realistic and interesting.
- In their view, owning a latrine is also an indicator of being rich.
- Children even in their early adolescence know about the corruption prevailing in the country.
- They enjoyed depicting indicators using stones, leaves, flowers, sorghum, rice, coins, etc.
- When they used a material to indicate something, they ensured that the material had some relevance to the subject under discussion. For example: bullocks were indicated by straw (i.e. feed for the bullock); goat/sheep by leaves (feed for the goat/sheep); hens/ cocks by sorghum (feed for the hen/cock); harvesting by blades; construction works by small bricks and unlettered people by charcoal.

Focus group discussion

Objective

Focus group discussions were conducted to find out the children’s understanding of the ECCL’s functions.

Process

Twenty working children aged below 14 years participated. Of this 12 were female. We gave a brief introduction with some stories to ensure their attention before starting the discussions. The children grouped well and answered the questions very enthusiastically (Box 3).

BOX 3
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION
ABOUT ECCL

A heavy burden is placed on the children at work. In recognition of this the ECCL tries to provide for their working needs as well as their educational needs. As perceived by the children the benefits of ECCL are that it provides books and stationery, teaches them how to sign, do arithmetic and write simple words and also helps them understand bus routes and timetables.

The children were keen to have an association and willing to pay Rs.5 each month as subscription. In addition all the children contribute 10 to 50 paise every day to a saving fund set up by ECCL. At the end of the saving plan they get something of equivalent value, like a sari, shirt or suit.

Conclusions

Since the PRA exercises, the children’s attendance at the ECCL has increased. However participation in the exercises is itself unlikely to induce significant changes in the children’s life as their situation is so dependent on that of their family. However some changes have been seen after a follow-up workshop was done with the children’s parents - ECCL successfully encouraged a few children to move away from child labour and back to school.

If the experiences described here are compared with ones of working with adults, it can be said that the children’s ability to do most of the PRA exercises compare well with the ability of adults. For example, the children’s visualisation of the village was almost as clear as it might have been among adults. In addition there is a general level of awareness of the social forces that govern their life. Their limitations are apparent only when it comes to analysing deeper problems and when it comes to thinking in specific directions.

We found doing PRA exercises with children to be real fun. Rapport building was much easier with children than with adults, possibly because they are relaxed and uninhibited, have no expectations and assume less about the facilitators and about the PRA exercises.
themselves. In short the experience was a thrilling one with benefits that far outweighed the effort involved on our part.

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Children and participatory appraisals: experiences from Vietnam

Joachim Theis

- Child, family and society

In conventional development projects children are largely ‘invisible’ (not seen and not heard) and are regarded just as part of the family. There is a general assumption that children will benefit automatically from project activities, since parents, in particular mothers, will ensure that benefits accruing from a project are passed on to the children. However, this ‘trickle-down-in-the-family’ theory has not always been substantiated in practice, and experience shows that children do not necessarily benefit from otherwise successful projects. In some cases children may be adversely affected, even where the broad objectives of a project have been achieved. An example would be a credit project which improves family income but increases children’s workload, reduces school attendance rates, and undermines the health status of children.

Over the past year *Save the Children Fund (SCF)* in Vietnam has begun to involve children in participatory needs assessments and evaluations to get a better understanding of children’s lives, their roles in community and family, and their wishes, desires and capabilities. A secondary objective is to explore and develop practical methods of communicating with children and involving them in information gathering and analysis, and in decision-making. Although SCF’s experience with children’s participation in PRA is relatively limited, it is hoped that this paper will contribute to the emerging debate on children’s participation in development.

Participatory appraisals often focus on a community without giving sufficient consideration to the external factors that impinge on the lives of the people. It is easy to overlook the relevance of laws, institutions and power structures for the lives of villagers when such issues are not mentioned by the community members during a participatory appraisal. If anything, the risk of being blind to the broader context appears to be even greater when involving children in an appraisal. Any research on children’s lives needs to understand the political, cultural and historical realities that form the context in which children, their families and communities live. Children are part of communities and interact with their environment in their own ways. Child focused development agencies, such as SCF, believe that the needs, rights, responsibilities, views and interests of children and adults are not synonymous. Children’s needs, capacities and roles vary with age and gender. Different cultural traditions and concepts of childhood have to be recognised, without, however, endorsing the discrimination and exploitation of children that may occur. We need to be aware of our own culturally-determined concepts of childhood, and clarify and question our assumptions about children.

- Children as actors

Most development projects treat children as passive targets or beneficiaries rather than as active participants in the development process. Children, however, are ‘social actors’ in their own right who make their own social, economic and cultural contributions to society. A child-centred approach builds on children’s potential, capacity and capability and seeks to actively involve children in research, implementation, awareness raising and advocacy work.
Beyond data extraction

Paying tribute to ‘community participation’ has become a ritual obligation for development workers, but the term may be used for many different situations, and we should make explicit what we mean by participation. NGO development workers, government officials and community members involved in an appraisal tend to have different objectives and different needs for information. NGO staff spend much time collecting village-level data, while the community members themselves become more interested in the process - when decisions are being made about concrete project activities and resource allocations. True participation means that community members do not just provide data but are actively involved in the analysis of the gathered information and in decision-making. When children are involved in PRA we need to ask "why should they be involved?" and "what do they get out of it?"

Methods for children’s participation

The rapid spread of the PRA approach among NGOs in Vietnam has led to the development and popularisation of a plethora of participatory methods and tools. SCF’s experience in Vietnam has shown that it is more important for the whole process to be participatory rather than each tool being so. PRA should be seen as part of a participatory learning approach rather than a collection of participatory methods. Methods used by SCF to learn about children’s lives in rural communities of Vietnam have included:

- observation of children’s work and play;
- discussions and informal talks with individual children or groups of children;
- classroom-based exercises where pupils write or draw on a piece of paper about a particular aspect of their lives (for example: children’s daily activities, children’s most favourite or least favourite things, children’s aspirations and wishes);
- children’s daily and seasonal activity calendars;
- playing and singing with children (children’s games, rhymes and songs are representations of their world);
- discussions and interviews with adults (parents, teachers, health workers) about children and their lives; and,
- statistics about children’s health, nutrition and educational status.

The examples that follow illustrate some of these experiences.

Breaking the ice

It is essential to establish rapport with children before any exercises are initiated. Children tend to be more shy than adults, but if they are approached in an appropriate way they will rapidly lose their inhibitions. Using ice breakers such as songs, games and so on made children feel more at ease, broke the tension through laughter, and encouraged them to talk more freely with adults. One boy was asked to tear a piece of flip chart paper in half so two groups of children could draw at the same time. This also served to break down any psychological barriers that children may have against writing on a large piece of clean white paper, a barrier which extends to many adults in rural areas, since poor farmers consider paper a luxury that is not usually given to children.

Facilitators

Communicating with children is not particularly difficult, but some adults may find it harder to do than others. The general stereotype that young, female adults find it easier to approach children than do older men is easily confirmed in practice, but this does not mean that all young women are adept at establishing rapport with children. Adults who have been professionally trained to interact with children, such as kindergarten teachers, paediatricians or puppeteers can be especially useful in encouraging children’s participation. It is worth testing facilitators for their skills in dealing with children before going to a community.

Using an intermediate medium

Children often did not respond when addressed directly by an adult. Using an intermediate medium, such as pen and paper, a diagram, pictures, a ball or a toy in communicating with children immediately broke down these inhibitions. The intermediate medium allowed
the children to focus their attention away from the stranger and on a neutral and non-threatening object. One 12-year old girl, for example, sat quietly in a corner of her house and did not respond to the interviewer’s question. She was, however, quite happy to write her daily activity schedule on a piece of paper. When the interviewer later tried to talk to the girl again, she stood up and left the room.

**Children’s likes and dislikes**

A member of the PRA team asked a class of fifth grade school children to take a piece of paper and to "List all activities which you do in one day". She used chalk to draw on the blackboard things typically used by children in the village, such as a house, buffalo, pig, school, goose, etc, to give them some examples and to ensure that they understood the task. After all students had completed writing or drawing their daily activities, she asked them to "Put a circle around those activities which you like best". Finally, the facilitator asked them to "Put a box around those activities which you like least".

This exercise produced a wide range of responses from the students and highlighted some of their wishes and needs. The children were accustomed to such exercises and the use of pen and paper allowed them to explore the topic on their own, rather than having to respond to individual questions posed by a stranger. However, the school environment and the status of the outsiders contributed to a certain amount of set answers which revealed more about what the children thought the adults wanted to hear, than what their real desires were. This could be avoided and overcome by talking to different age groups of children both in and out of school.

**Children’s problems**

During a meeting with a group of women, a large crowd of children gathered outside the meeting hall. Several children were given a piece of flip chart paper and some markers and were asked to write down their most pressing problems. This produced a list of shared priority problems, and was followed by discussions with the children.

**Next steps**

SCF’s experience of involving children in PRA in Vietnam has demonstrated the importance and the potential of children’s participation in project appraisals and evaluations. Children have a lot to contribute to the development process and over the coming years Save the Children plans to systematically increase children’s active involvement in its programme activities in Vietnam. I would appreciate hearing about similar experiences elsewhere.

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Source: PLA Notes (1996), Issue 25, pp.70–72, IIED London
Young people, participatory research and experiences of leaving care

Andrew West

Introduction

This article is about a participatory research project, run by Save the Children-UK (SCF-UK). The research examined the experiences of young people leaving care. It was done by young people who had themselves recently left care, and involved five projects across England. The process of developing the research is outlined below, with some indication of the findings and reflections emerging from this example of participatory research (Alderson, 1995; Dodson 1995).

Young people leaving care

Every year around 10,000 young people who have been looked after by local authority social services in England, leave care to live independently. Care leavers are a particularly powerless and stigmatised group. Statistics focus on the fact that they form a significant part of the young homeless population, that they are over-represented in the prison population, and that they have low or no educational achievement. Such figures, whilst highlighting policy issues, serve to reinforce the stigma. They negate the depth and quality of the experience of leaving care, and are part of the process of marginalisation that reduces self-esteem.

The participatory research process

In 1995 a research project on leaving care was developed by SCF and the funders of the project, Natwest Bank. It was decided that it would be ‘participatory’. Care leavers were to be involved as far as possible; they were to make the decisions in the research process and carry out the interviews themselves. Ten young people, mostly aged 16 or 17 years, were recruited from five SCF projects across England (Bolton, Kirklees, Leeds, London, Oxford).

Throughout the research process they were supported by staff from the five projects and myself. Overall responsibility for project administration lay with a youth worker. A video company filmed the process as it unfolded.

Residential meetings

Over the next four months the young researchers met with the two youth workers, a group facilitator and myself at five short residential meetings, each lasting two to three days. The meetings provided a forum for:

• sharing experiences, first of being in care and later of doing the research;
• providing peer support; and,

3 There were some areas where decisions were not made by the young researchers - largely due to time and geographical constraints. These included the selection of the location and premises for the residential meetings and the overall structure of the residential process. The creation of a summary of the report could have been an area where the young researchers had greater control over layout and content, but we ran out of time.

1 A full report is being written for publication in 1996 by SCF-UK. All SCF-UK publications are available from: 17 Grove Lane, London SE5 8RD, UK.
2 Many are 16 years old; under-18s are officially defined as children in the UK, but in this article 15-18 year olds are referred to as young people, following their general wish.
• making group decisions (on matters such as the methodology, the means of analysis, and how to promote the findings).

Discussions among the young researchers revealed that they thought of themselves as a particular social category (people who were or had been in care) and that there is something distinct and unifying in the experience. Despite already having this perception, they were keen to find out (or perhaps, check) whether their own regional/local experiences were replicated elsewhere. Their findings confirmed that this perception was shared and this reinforced their feeling of commonality.

Designing the methodology

The choice of method, face-to-face interviewing with questions and written recording by interviewers, emerged through group discussions and piloting. There was some discussion of the use of tape-recorders and video cameras in addition, but these fell by the wayside. The decision on method came from the young people, and was based on their experiences, and knowledge and, in particular, what constituted validity both for themselves and for others.

Firstly they discussed the key areas for investigation and who exactly to interview. It was felt that the most appropriate people to interview would be young people who had recently left care, preferably within the last two years, as well as staff who worked with young care leavers.

In groups, the researchers developed a semi-structured interview schedule and questionnaire for young people. This was then agreed by them all. They piloted this individually back in their regions and then revised the schedule at the next residential meeting, again working first in groups and then collectively. They conducted the interviews individually, and then jointly developed an initial analysis of their findings.

While the interviews with recent care leavers were in progress, the researchers followed a similar procedure for developing and conducting the staff interviews, although the schedule and questions were formulated much more quickly. Each of the researchers hoped to interview 10 care leavers and five members of staff. In the end, 77 care-leavers were interviewed, and 21 staff.

Recommendations were made as the project progressed. Using their material, I wrote a report, supplemented by additional statistical material drawn from their findings, and the records of all researchers’ meetings. This was then approved at the fifth residential meeting where the conclusion was drafted and the format of the publication agreed. A summary of the results is shown in Box 1.

BOX 1
ISSUES ADDRESSED BY THE REPORT

The report and its recommendations focused on ten issues in all. In order of importance these were: income, housing, work, education, support, health (both psychological and physical), social life, police, public attitude, preparations for leaving care.

Concerns such as income and housing, often given less emphasis in other studies, were prominent. Issues such as those of health and support also arose. The other important categories were ‘police’ and ‘public’. The former reflects the significant presence of the police in the lives of young people in and from care. This is due to a variety of reasons. For example, police are often called to deal with fights between peers in residential homes, even though they are not called to deal with comparable occasions that occur in domestic life.

The ‘public attitude’ category demonstrated the strength of the (usually negative) experiences that young people had when the general public, neighbours, acquaintances and so on, found out they had been in care.

There was an additional concern that was often discussed. This was the subject of the ‘leaving care grant’, monies paid (or, rather, frequently not paid), of vastly variable amounts, to enable care leavers to set up home independently.

Many of the young people participated in the promotion of the report and summary (West et al., 1995) and video (SCF-UK, 1995) by taking a lead role at the press conference and giving interviews for television and radio. The type of publicity (to influence through media, rather than, say, a conference), was proposed by the young researchers at the start of the project.
The problems faced

Problems with staff who were reluctant to participate on various grounds arose during this work (West, forthcoming). However, enough were interviewed to indicate important differences in perception between the staff and the young people.

For example, staff agreed with both the researchers and the young people interviewed that a key area of leaving care was ‘support’. However when the meaning of the word was explored, important differences in perception were highlighted. Young people sought a personal support system, modelled on that which they believe to exist in ‘normal’ families. They wanted support to be provided by a nominated individual with a long-term interest in them. Staff sought to enable care leavers to become independent, to support their use of ‘normal services’ for advice and so on. The difference is clearly important and seems to be part of a greater divide which reflects differences in a myriad of other issues and perceptions.

- Reflections on the research process

Many of the reflections that emerged are perennially present and concern power, professionalism, purpose and decision-making.

- For pragmatic reasons of timing, some decisions were made before young people were recruited: earlier recruitment would have allowed them to be more fully involved in structuring the research. Such decision-making, taken a stage further back, could have dealt with the research topic - which might then, of course, not have been young people leaving care!

- The timing of the project was set before the research began. Thus, it was always at issue because those involved had not participated in that part of the decision-making process. However, for me now there is some ambivalence. The young people (and others, including outsiders) said that it was too short. However, it did succeed in concentrating efforts and provided a focus. Also worth emphasising is the need to maintain interest and momentum, which probably dictates against a lengthy process when working with young people.

- The length of the interview schedule, despite piloting, raised questions. Should adults have intervened to shorten it?

- When it came to the production of the report and the organisation of the press launch, the lack of time meant the young researchers could not be involved in as much detail as with their earlier work. However, to fulfil the ultimate goal of influencing policy-makers, politicians and other professionals (social workers, civil servants and so on), at some point the baton would have to be passed to professionals - that is, to those who know about, for example, design, layout, media, pacing events, etc.

- The problem (even though its existence may be denied by many staff) of interviewing staff demonstrated the divide, the ‘us and them’ under-currents, that clearly exist between staff and care leavers, adults and young people and reflected the power structures which exist.

On training and learning

Participatory research requires the development of new perceptions and learning on the parts of both the community and outsiders. This learning may be formal training and/or gained informally from involvement in the process. In this case there was potential for both parties. For example, the adult researchers could have introduced different research methodologies (diagrams, drawings etc.) and insisted on particular sampling techniques or statistical methods. However the young researchers defined their preferred method according to their own understanding of validity. They demonstrated the use of qualitative and some quantitative information and showed (and so taught) that they could undertake valid research.

There is a broader issue here concerning training and learning. Put quite simply it is that learning gained formally or experientially produces change. If part of the point of the...
participatory research is to welcome the knowledge and ability of community members
to establish questions and categories, then training, even with the best intentions, can alter
those perceptions. ‘Trainings’ mould participants into the dominant and powerful
system of beliefs and establishing proof - something which, paradoxically, it may be the
aim of participation to challenge.

On the benefits of using the participatory approach with young people

- The young people brought fresh categories and perceptions to the research.
- The data gathered was of high quality and the findings compare well with research
conducted by adult professionals.
- Their ongoing analysis gave a structure to the final report that emphasised the key
experiences and issues and the ways in which they interrelated. These views are of a
different order to those held by some other adult researchers in this area.
- The young interviewees enjoyed being interviewed by their peers.
- The young researchers were clearly able to raise issues and ask questions in a way
adults could not.
- Individual learning, experience and development were also benefits.
- The power inherent in the conclusions is enhanced when the research has been done
by those actually affected.

- Conclusions

Participatory research projects are multi-faceted as they are not merely about research findings
and outcomes, but a broader engagement between those with and without power. Cultural
differences between such groups, even within the same society, mean that the negotiation of
the participation is important. What are the benefits for each party? And where do the
priorities lie? But also, are the aims, processes and outcomes clear and understood? Continual
negotiation is bound to occur where powerless groups are attempting to research not
themselves, but those in power.

REFERENCES

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Teenage facilitators: barriers to improving adolescent sexual health

Tilly Sellers and Martin Westerby

- Introduction

Hull, a city in the north-east of England, has a high rate of conception amongst young women aged between 13 and 16 years, relative to the rest of Britain. No-one is quite sure why this is the case, but there are many theories. Some believe that young women deliberately get pregnant to get government housing. Others say that young people lack the skills to access information and contraception, or that services themselves are failing those under 16 years. Another group believe that this is a cultural issue and that young teenage pregnancy is perfectly acceptable in some parts of the city; and so it goes on.

The British government is concerned about the levels of teenage pregnancy in England and has set targets to reduce the rate by at least half. What is not clear, however, is whether young teenage conception is a problem for anyone else. Do teenagers in Hull, their parents, other professionals or people in the wider community see it as a problem? The goal of the Faculty of Public Health Medicine is that "women should become pregnant by choice". Perhaps if there is a problem, it can be seen as not teenage pregnancy in itself, but whether teenagers are becoming pregnant by choice. If they are not becoming pregnant by choice, what then are the barriers to improving adolescent sexual health? What changes would need to be made to increase effective contraceptive use amongst teenagers? What methods do we have for finding this out?

Current research indicates that many factors may contribute to young teenage conception. These include: educational factors, developmental, psycho-social and skills factors, service provision and use and cultural factors (Peach et al. 1994). It also states that without a multi-agency, ‘whole community’ approach, these factors cannot be addressed effectively. The idea of a ‘whole community’ approach is explained by Ashton and Seymour (1988) who say that health education "is only able to make its full contribution to the reduction of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease when it is part of an integrated community-based programme and supported by public policies which set out to influence the entire health field in relation to sexual attitudes and the expression of human sexuality”.

The government Health Authority responsible for the Hull area (East Ridings Health Authority) is interested in finding out two things in relation to young teenage conception:

1. Which of the above factors are operating in those places with the highest young teenage conception rate?
2. How can the idea of a ‘whole community approach’ best be implemented to address these factors?

One of the Health Authority’s main concerns is the effectiveness of services providing information, referral and clinical sexual health services for young teenagers. They are keen to know what changes are needed to make improvements. To try and answer some of these questions, they funded the Young People and Sexual Health project, which is based at the Department of Public Health Medicine in the University of Hull.
• The project

The Young People and Sexual Health project is using a participatory approach to involve young people, parents, workers and the wider community in:

• Identifying factors which influence the way young people make decisions about sexual health.
• Evaluating the provision of information, referral and clinical sexual health services to teenagers, including education, youth and social services, community and voluntary agencies.
• Finding ways to improve teenage sexual health.
• Planning and monitoring the changes suggested.

We discovered that few people knew of, or understood, the concept of PRA. Our first task, therefore, was to introduce the concept of participation to a variety of key people. Most important of these were those who would have to give permission for young people under 16 to be involved, such as teachers, parents and youth workers. We had to make them understand that we would not ask personal questions; that information would belong to the participants; that there would be complete confidentiality for individuals and organisations; and that everyone, regardless of age, literacy level or disability could make a worthwhile contribution. We did this by demonstrating PRA tools wherever possible and by training workers, teenagers and parents in the approach. This has given us the added bonus of creating a pool of local facilitators from different backgrounds who are happy to publicise, support and actually work in the project. The training is in the process of being accredited, which means that participants, if they wish, can gain a national qualification.

• Teenage facilitators

For several months we have been meeting weekly with a group of 15 year-olds (three young women and four young men) for sessions usually lasting two hours. We met this group through local youth workers who described them as ‘non attenders’, young people who regularly truant from school. After a ‘taster’ session in which they mapped their local area, the whole group were keen to learn more. During the first weeks they worked on becoming a team and on learning basic PRA tools and techniques. For legal reasons, two youth workers also attended the sessions. The workers were interested in PRA for their own work and it was a challenge to involve them in such a way that they did not dominate the group. Whilst we have not been completely successful in this, they have been encouraged to develop their own skills and a comfortable balance has slowly been achieved. Some of the work done by the young people is described below.

Leaflet evaluation

During a session on evaluation, we looked at ways in which sexual health information leaflets could be evaluated using participants’ own criteria (Figure 1). First the whole group discussed what needed to be included for teenagers to read, enjoy and understand sexual health leaflets. These were listed on a large sheet of paper.

The young people then split into pairs, taking one leaflet at random from a pile. Each pair was given a sheet of coloured card with a circle drawn in the middle. Using the ‘evaluation wheel’ (Pretty et al, 1995) they divided the circle into equal parts, each part representing one of the criteria they had listed before. The resulting triangles were then shaded in to show the extent to which the leaflet complied with each criterion. Finally they pasted the leaflet next to its evaluation wheel and presented their work to the rest of the group. Comments included: "3D effect on writing is attractive; all the leaflets had too much writing and this is not the way young people will take information in; most leaflets are boring; cartoons and ‘super stars’ would be more eye catching; no leaflet was amusing; some pictures are not relevant to the text; pictures are very clinical, too small and old fashioned; illustrating steps for contraceptive use is good if done clearly."
Figure 1. Leaflet evaluation using the evaluation wheel

![Evaluation Wheel Image]

Figure 2. Young people’s concerns when visiting a family planning clinic

![Family Planning Clinic Diagram Image]
**Tool development**

This group has also been developing their own tools. In their first session they were asked to design tools that would allow other young people to express their concerns about going to a clinic for advice about contraception.

They elected to split into two groups according to gender. Each group decided who would play the roles of facilitator, reporter and observer. When they finished designing their activity, they tried it out on the other group. The young men’s group developed the following activity: They drew a picture of a clinic on a large sheet of paper and gave this to the participants. Their facilitator asked the participants to draw spokes from this building and to write or draw the queries that a young person would have when going to a clinic (Figure 2).

These young men and women will continue to develop tools over the next few weeks. Their aim is to gather information from a wide variety of young people and from sexual health workers in their area and put together a video which answers questions such as those above. They are concerned about teenage literacy levels and would also like to make a cassette tape to complement sexual health information leaflets. Until they are confident, we will facilitate their activities. They aim to work in schools and youth clubs, on the street where young people congregate, with young people in residential care, with those with specific learning difficulties and with disabilities and if possible, with young people in prison.

- **Conclusions: PRA with young people in Britain**

Working with young teenagers under the age of 16 in Britain requires planning, but can be enormously satisfying for all concerned. Young people’s ability to contribute to decision-making is often underestimated and the process can bolster confidence and self-esteem in some young individuals. The Barnardos publication about children, ethics and social research has been very useful in this respect (Alderson, 1995).

Some additional points to bear in mind include the fact that facilitators and trainers should be ‘police checked’ to reveal their conviction history; teachers need details of activities well before work can be done in schools and in some cases parental consent is required; in institutions, sufficient numbers of facilitators need to be present so that work can be done simultaneously with the adults in charge; confidentiality is paramount and young people must always be able to choose whether they participate. On the street, young people can just walk away if they don’t like the activity. In schools and youth clubs if you can secure a corner during normal recreational activities, participants will be able to come and go as they please. In a formal classroom situation, it is difficult for young people to opt out.

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The process of empowerment: lessons from the work of Peace Child International

David Woolcombe

Introduction

Empowerment is the process whereby you take a shy child and transform him or her into a confident, self-assured young person, able to contribute effectively and responsibly to society. When the process is followed carefully, an excellent team of motivated young people is created, thrusting energy, vision and new life into adult-directed activity. Having worked with children on projects as varied as musical drama to house-building, I know what a great contribution empowerment can bring, both to the activity and to the young people themselves. It builds their self-esteem, improves their academic performance and, in an international context, creates social cohesion between disparate ethnic groups.

But it can go disastrously wrong. When empowerment goes too far, kids can become overbearing, commanding adults and peers alike to do their bidding. Social cohesion evaporates, kids become increasingly brat-like and untamable, adult tempers fray, and the kids themselves eventually burn out in a fusion of anger and disillusion.

Degrees of empowerment

So at what point are the frontiers of empowerment crossed? What are the degrees of empowerment? First some disclaimers: I am not a teacher nor am I an academic. My only experience is working for the last fifteen years in an organization whose mission is to "empower children". My introduction to the field was driving kids home from rehearsals of a musical I had been asked to write and direct. Called Peace Child, it told the story of how Soviet and American children persuaded their governments to end the Cold War. What struck me was the children’s conversations in the back of the car: they were more interesting than the lines I had written! So I replaced them, secretly at first - then with growing joy as the kids and I co-created the play.

Peace Child became a movement where children would use the musical stage as a platform to express their concerns. A 15-year old from Minnesota described it thus: "Standing on a stage saying lines that you'd written yourselves to an audience of mums and dads and teachers cheering - that was the most awesome experience of my life!"

Between 1982 and 87, there were about 5,000 performances of Peace Child - each different, each allowing young people to write their concerns into the framework of a play that resolved an issue that deeply concerned them: the threat of Nuclear War.

We have now moved on to empowering young people to participate in the creation of books, to run the office, act as ambassadors to groups overseas, and to build the hostel in which our student staff now live. With each experience, we have learned more about the technology of youth empowerment. Examples of over-empowerment have been rare. More common are histories of nervous teachers or directors giving up on empowerment halfway through a process. That is debilitating for young people.

The dangers of over-empowerment remain real. I now run the Rescue Mission project with a 20-year old co-director from Finland. I asked her about it when she was hired:
"For me, the way to fight the peace monster scenario is by having a deep respect, a sense of humbleness, and being forever grateful to the adults who took the risk of believing in you and your capabilities when you were just one kid in a crowd. Also, it’s vital to have communication relentlessly between adult and youth so that dangers can be spotted and dealt with."

- **Principles to guide the process of empowerment**

In discussion with her and the interns that now run our organisation, I have developed a series of principles to guide the process of empowerment. So far, we have agreed on ten:

- **Ownership**: The child must be given the sensation that the work being done belongs to him/her. Any sense that the final result belongs to a different set of people immediately diminishes their commitment to it.

- **An enabling culture**: In setting up child participation, the surroundings, the chemistry, must be familiar to the child’s culture and life-style. Kids are easily daunted, or deflected, by the trappings of adulthood - formality, suits, official bureaucratic processes. This can kill their creativity by marginalising them.

- **Real power**: Any children’s council, parliament or partnership must have real power to influence decision-makers or else the children will perceive their efforts to be useless, and quickly lose interest. The adults have to be prepared to let the kids "win one!" They smell manipulation and, though they may still do what they are told, they will be resentful.

- **Expectations**: harbouring unrealistic expectations of what the kids can do is destructive both for the children and the adults working with them. Encourage both kids and adults to expect nothing. Then anything that does happen is positive.

- **Honour their forms of expression**: Not slavishly - adults should correct a child’s spelling etc. but they should honour the style of their language; in editing, look only for clarity; honour the color in their language. Paintings, illustrations and other forms of expression should remain untouched. In this way, young people feel that the finished expression is essentially their own.

- **Support**: Support the young people with adult experience, do not threaten them with it. Discourage them from feeling that they have to do everything themselves. Encourage them to lay off difficult tasks on adult professionals - like playing music for a show, preparing color lay-outs for printers, handling money. This last is especially difficult as bank accounts and the disciplines of handling money are generally unfamiliar to young people. Encourage and enable them to ask for help.

- **Respect**: It is impossible for any kind of partnership to work without respect. Children’s respect for adults is generally the product of all these other principles being observed. Adult’s respect for the young partners has to be present at the start of the exercise: it is the essential component of the adult’s attitude.

- **Openness and communication**: Adults and kids must communicate constantly and openly for any partnership to work. There will be secrets, there will be back-chat, but harbouring corrosive feelings of malice and resentment, or trying to keep from kids difficult decisions, is utterly destructive to the process. The kids, and the adults, must feel able and supported to be totally open to each other.

- **Time alone**: In any participation process, children must be given time totally alone. With no adult presence. Preferably in small groups. This enables the less forthright members of a group to come forward with ideas and feel included in the process. It also enables the strange chemistry that occurs between kids to produce the unexpected ideas and strategies that are the most lasting products of any participation.
• **Democracy and other ground rules:**
  Kids must adhere to democratic principles and established laws of fairness, respect for minorities, ethnic groups etc., if possible without being conscious of it. They must know the principles of personal choice and democracy, secret ballots, equal time etc., to ensure a fair discussion.

The symptoms of each degree of empowerment can be checked against these 10 principles. They cross all boundaries of age, gender, social background, ethnicity, intellectual capacity, sporting, dramatic or other talent.

• **Conclusions**

In every case, the degree of empowerment reflects the degree of responsibility passed on to the young person. If they have little or no responsibility, they will behave irresponsibly - unless there is an iron discipline to prevent them from so doing. The more responsibility, and support and respect one gives to the young person, the more responsible and rewarding will be their behaviour.

Tips for Trainers: problem hat

• Objectives

• To give individuals the opportunity to discuss immediate problems, anonymously and constructively.
• To emphasise equality in power and authority within the group.
• To encourage participants to share problems and actively seek experiences and suggestions from each other.
• To highlight that everyone has relevant experiences.

• Materials

A hat, bowl or any container
Pen and paper

• Time

Depends on size of group (5 minutes to think and write, 2 minutes per problem)

• Procedure

1. Ask everyone to sit in a circle and including yourself, to write on a slip of paper a particular problem they are facing and would like to resolve:

"I have difficulty with...."

If it concerns the behaviour of another participant, then ask them not to mention that person by name but to describe the problem in general terms.

2. Ask them to fold the paper and put it in the hat. When everyone has done this, pass around the hat and ask each person to take one slip of paper. If they draw out their own, then ask them to put it back and pick another.

3. Give the group a few minutes to reflect on the problem. Then start with anyone, perhaps yourself to set the example, and ask them to read out the problem and to say briefly how they suggest that the anonymous writer deal with it.

4. Continue around the circle, making sure that everyone just listens and does not comment on the suggestions.

• Comments

This is a simple but powerful way to deal with immediate problems. It can be used when tensions are running high, to air the issues publicly. This created the opportunity for those who might be responsible for some problems to reflect on their behaviour and change.