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Summary of workshop presentations and discussions

Local level adaptive planning: Looking to the future

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● RRA and adaptive planning

There is some misunderstanding over what the term Rapid Rural Appraisal means. It appears to imply lightning visits by outsiders with no follow up. It appears to satisfy the need for the quick answers required in the aid context. It can look like a recipe, with simple and easy fixes. For these reasons consultants are increasingly required to 'use RRA' even when they are not appraised of the essential set of attitudes associated with the use of the methods. Yet without the appropriate attitudes, skills and behaviour, the methods work badly or not at all. And this means that the priorities and knowledge of the poorest, disadvantaged and vulnerable remain unheard, even though RRA was initially developed to offset rural development biases against these groups.

The debate about adaptive planning relates historically to debates in rural development over the role of decentralisation, the need to take account of basic needs, the requirement of integrated development with appropriate technologies. Current concerns about economic liberalisation and reducing direct state control over development are also relevant. However recent concerns focus on the importance of participation in local planning for sustainable development and the need to institutionalise the attitudes and behaviour that lie behind the RRA and PRA approach in the context of devolved, adaptive and participatory approach to planning. Planning is often thought to be synonymous with intervention, and the starting of 'projects', implying the involvement of

outsiders and external funding. The development aid business reinforces this with its concentration on discrete project identification and funding. This is a dependency that needs to be challenged and a wider, more flexible, process-oriented approach to planning evolved.

Adaptive planning implies that:

- local people participate in agenda settings, resource allocating and controlling processes;
- the acquisition of knowledge which occurs through an improved compendium of planning tools;
- there is collaboration between disciplines and sectors in data collection and analysis;
- information gathering systems and decision-making processes are local people-centered, site specific and change according to external circumstances;
- interests and activities of different formal and informal institutions are co-ordinated;
- technology generation, adaptation and extension are participative; and,
- for validation and corroboration, recording, the information gathering, recording, analysis and use is cyclical, with continual analysis, reflection and action.

• Institutionalising adaptive planning

The advantages of adaptive planning are most obvious when seen in the context of the drawbacks of conventional practice. Standard land use planning, for example, is flawed by many factors (see Adrian Wood; Barry Dalal-Clayton; Margie Buchanan-Smith and Susanna Davies; all this issue):

- it focuses on a narrow technical view, rather than considering overlying social and economic complexities of farming and livelihood systems;
- it is data and information hungry, with information needs being partly defined by large quantities of money available and partly by the apparent utility of sophisticated technologies, such as satellite imagery. These measure too few factors, become the domain of ‘skilled’ outsiders, claim accuracy and are often not ground truthed;
- the results are nice maps or mesmerising taxonomies that gather dust on shelves or need to be translated into another form before they can be used at the local level. In some cases they are badly wrong: a satellite-based food security survey of northern Mali suggested irrigation, diversified cropping and credit for farmers in an area north of the 200mm isohyet - where farmers cultivate no cereals at all (Susanna Davies, workshop);
- outsiders define local needs, and there is little use of local expertise, knowledge and skills;
- techniques and innovations are developed on research stations, and based on hypotheses of real situations;
- there is no capacity for adjustment or change once land use capabilities, suitability or classifications are completed; and,
- there is no possibility for teasing out complex problems such as vulnerability from the simple data collected.

The response to such shortcomings has been the realisation that local involvement and multidisciplinary analysis are vital ingredients in planning. But too often these end up as empty slogans, as effective institutionalisation of alternative planning mechanisms has not been assessed. The linkages between local level and central planning bodies and between conventional and alternative adaptive planning methods and techniques needs to be considered.

The issue of participation of the community in the planning process is an important goal for effective planning. Yet the two terms, participation and community, are used in many different ways. Local people, for example, may participate in the information gathering, but still be excluded from decision making. There is a tendency for those who use the term to adopt the moral high ground, implying that what they do is the best. They give an ‘illusion of inclusion’ (Susanna Davies, workshop), implying that everyone is involved, that development will serve everyone’s needs. External solidarity, though, may mask internal differentiation. And understanding internal differences is crucial. Certain people know special things, for example the success of male-managed riverine fodder crops in Mali can be assessed by asking women about the degree to which children are given ‘Kundou’ drinks made from *Panicum* grasses (Chris Roche, this issue); water transporters in dry lands know where wild-food gatherers are, and what they are collecting (Margie Buchanan-Smith and Susanna Davies, this issue). Differentiated livelihood strategies imply differentiated local knowledge systems. This requires methodologies that are sufficiently responsive to such complexity, that can accommodate an understanding of agriculturalist-pastoralists’ views, interpretations of men and women, of the old and young, and in turn reflect these in the responses made by development agents.

The final difficulty is with the term participation. It may be a term used to accommodate a failed political process; politicians may accept ‘participation’ and its associated rhetoric, but not democracy, pluralism and accountability in planning. Effective participation implies involvement

not only in information collection, but in analysis, decision-making and implementation - implying the devolution of the power to decide. The political context of attempts at institutionalising participatory planning is thus critical. It must be asked: how democratic and accountable are governments or NGOs promoting 'participatory approaches'?

Two approaches are crucial to institutionalising adaptive planning processes. These centre upon improving accountability and increasing the number of stake-holders. It is generally felt that financial accountability, in the form of successful cost-recovery or cost-contribution, is a measure of the value that people put on an intervention or change. Support at the local level is seen as encouraging local autonomy and independence. But this may depend on the degree to which these are revenue-earning technologies are supported. Political accountability is important too. An important question arises: are NGOs concerned with accountability? Where there is economic and political liberalisation, governments may be more concerned with accountability? Who has a stake is also important. Local people could have an increased stake if they are empowered to make decisions; local governments could more effectively achieve developmental goals; donors could see a more efficient use of funds; but state-wide institutions, with competing interests, may be threatened.

It is essential, therefore, to sensitise bureaucrats to be adaptive planners. In some cases they have negative attitudes towards villagers, they lack probing skills and have a poor understanding of informal approaches to participatory data gathering (Robert Leurs, this issue). They may lack local credibility and transport, and may be restricted with whom they can establish dialogue - perhaps only through traditional authorities. But most importantly they lack the political and financial support to establish new ways of both gathering and dealing with new and sometimes sensitive information. There is a need to train planners in the use of local level information. This will require examining potential linkages with the formal government planning system, articulating local responses with sectoral concerns of line ministries/agencies and integrating high and low-tech, conventional

and new approaches to planning (Robin Grimble, workshop).

Support for change can come in several ways - provision of appropriate training (see next section), better dialogue with NGOs and the creation of local pull on their services. In Kenya, the Soil and Water Conservation Branch of the Ministry of Agriculture has established participatory extension planning at the catchment level - not only are extension workers enthused, but rural people from those catchments have become more vocal in requesting support on their farms from the public service. More people now have a stake in a process of negotiation in which they may all benefit.

Is adaptive planning capable of revitalising the processes of government? Flexible approaches prey on government's fear of anarchy, but do provide some solutions to many of the problems faced by ineffective centrally controlled planned development. Adaptive planning offers the opportunity for local level negotiation on the share of the planning gain, encouraging an active bargaining process for external support. But expectations may be biased towards simple service provision and the project centred approach to development, where budgets must be spent on essentially predetermined themes (agroforestry, soil conservation, water development and the rest). For effective institutionalisation, new organisational and management structures for innovative planning will be required.

● **Methods and training**

There is an ever growing range of methods, techniques, tools and instruments available to practitioners of RRA, PRA, adaptive planning or related approaches. These have been employed for data and information gathering, for animation, for conflict resolution, for organisation, for joint analysis, for collective planning and for local monitoring and evaluation. These methods may be used in sequence, with one leading to another as part of an evolving process of interactive planning (Robert Chambers, workshop). They include:

- secondary data review;
- direct observation, observation checklists;
- semi-structured interviewing;

- participant observation, including doing-it-yourself;
- key informants;
- group interviews;
- review meetings and presentations;
- focus groups;
- listening surveys;
- drama, theatre, puppets;
- models;
- participatory mapping;
- seasonal calendars;
- other diagrams - pie diagrams, histograms, venn diagrams, daily routines;
- transect walks;
- ethnohistories and oral histories;
- workshops and brainstorming sessions;
- wealth ranking;
- matrix ranking and scoring;
- preference ranking;
- time lines and chronologies of events;
- stories and songs;
- livelihood portraits and profiles;
- identifying intriguing practices and beliefs;
- aerial photographs;
- rapid report writing;
- team management and interactions;
- mobility maps; and,
- health mapping.

A great deal is now known about the potential value of these methods. In some contexts their use has long been proven to be successful. One such success story is 'Planning for Real' in the UK (Tony Gibson, this issue). Less well understood or institutionalised are the methods for training. Conventional training or teaching does not necessarily imply learning, nor learning to learn. There is a need for training styles and programmes that are experiential and emphasise attitude forming. The basic precept of such training implies practice of the methods, reflection, and more practice, rather than teaching of information. It is more than simple skills-training.

The experience of using them can promote understanding of the underlying principles and lead to attitudinal change. An important facet of these methods that can foster this process is that they are neither value nor ideologically neutral. Evidence suggests that, although theoretically many can be used simply for data collecting, their use does actually provoke

individual and institutional change. It is not necessary to understand all the principles underlying the methods before using them. The maxim is 'do, learn, change attitude'. In some circumstances this may be seen as a disadvantage or threat. However, there is no necessity for the methods to be promoted as provokes of attitude change. Training should thus be action based.

This has important implications for the site for training. Hitherto conventional training and educational institutions, such as agricultural universities, have largely failed to supply technical graduates capable of understanding the complexities of rural people's livelihoods. The maize agronomist, for example, is not encouraged to think beyond maize - which is simply a small subset of any rural livelihood system. Such institutions could be challenged by adopting some of these RRA and PRA philosophies. Only with effective training throughout the educational system can the appropriate attitudinal changes be enhanced; single one-off training exercises will inevitably have a lesser impact if the educational and professional culture then remains unaltered. Most educational and learning innovation does not, however, occur in core institutions, and progress is unlikely to be quick. The style of training exercises required differs from conventional teaching, with an emphasis on group work, experiential exercises and real-world context rather than on fact acquisition. Although there is a shortage of facilitative trainers, many of the training exercises are modular, and can be tried by inexperienced trainer. In all cases trainers learn with trainees.

There is enormous immobility in this field: a common response is "give me a checklist and tell me how to do it" (Peter Oakley, workshop). Experiential and interactive training means taking personal risks which, in an unsupportive institutional context, may be impossible to make. There is a need for a professional transformation of the outsider's role. The outsider's involvement should be seen as transient and s/he as a convenor, facilitator and networker, rather than as a permanent instructor. The outsider needs to learn to withdraw, to let local people engage (for instance, in drawing maps of their local environment). The expert should only be

drawn in on local terms, with expert assistance negotiated from below. This requires alternative structures for planning that are not dominated by the planners or sectoral concerns (Tony Gibson, this issue).

The major challenges for training are:

- review of successful learning and training approaches;
- documentation of outcomes and product of successful learning and training approaches; how did people and institutions benefit and change;
- convening of workshop or network of practitioners to share training experiences;
- create demand for training of this sort - better if demand-led rather than pushed from outside;
- develop better methods for conducting training needs analyses for different institutions;
- ensuring quality remains high during spread and replication - can self-correction be promoted?; and,
- who to train? Should the focus be on senior planning staff to ensure the establishment of credible of alternative approaches, or on enhancing the capacity of junior extension/community workers in effective local planning capability?

- **Scaling up - scaling down**

There are many local successes in community-based, participatory and adaptive planning. But these remain local and tend not to spread. A major challenge lies in widening the impact. This may go beyond simply replicating 'successful projects' in different areas, but towards strategic policy changes. Projects are situated within wider policy frameworks and sustainable efforts may be reliant on strategic policy changes. How then can local level successes be used to generate the capacity for strategic or regional change? A clear understanding of the principal advantages and

disadvantages of both scaling up and staying scaled down is necessary.

At the local level, organisations can finely tune their strategies. Locally based organisations are also good at having an integrated view of problems, tend to have a power base with local links and receive ready feedback. But their major difficulties lie in commanding technical expertise, and that diagnoses at local level cannot solve problems arising out of the wider political context, such as product pricing and labour markets (Tony Bebbington, this issue). Disaggregated local institutions also find it difficult to influence state policies.

There are three approaches available for scaling up - federations, co-ordinating networks and strategic change at the centre. Smaller organisations can federate to produce larger organisations, which can then have a regional lobbying role and can express political concerns to state level. In Ecuador, CAAP maintains close links to the local level, whilst co-ordinating regional and national research, as well as engineering formal and informal relationships with government departments (Tony Bebbington, this issue). Moving up does not necessarily have to imply institutional growth - which can be a threat in itself. But it may involve simply spreading good ideas (or avoiding the spread of bad ones) through an area. Co-ordinating networks can perform an efficient scaling up function, such as those at department level in Bolivia (Tony Bebbington, this issue). A major advantage to local institutions of these scaled up networks or federations is that they present a united front to donor organisations and governments. These create the opportunity for more efficient and more effective disbursement of funds by donors, with lower administrative costs. They have a greater 'absorptive capacity for dollars' (Martin Greeley, workshop). At this level organisations with greater membership carry greater political clout, can begin to influence state policy and are able to draw on technical expertise. But they do also stand the risk of missing or misrepresenting local diversity, and become less driven by local needs. Such organisations may not necessarily be representative of popular movements. Within NGOs an important distinction between

accountable membership and non-membership organisations needs to be made.

The third approach is to encourage change in strategic organisations, such as government departments, where there are often many people who would like to innovate if they had the support and resources to do so. Sometimes strategic organisations can be as successful as local ones in picking up the local diversity and finely-tuning approaches. And heterogeneity may be greater than conventional planning approaches would have us think. For instance, in the tea-dairy zone of Kericho District in Kenya a recent planning of six catchments no further than 20 km apart by the Soil and Water Conservation Branch of the Ministry of Agriculture, came up with a total of 32 different proposals for action following participatory analysis, consultation and presentations for review to rural people. Each catchment planning team produced 10 proposals given the expected homogeneity then scaled up planning would have suggested that there should have been the same for each catchment. Most of the proposals were site-specific -only 8 were suggested in 3 or more of the catchments. Such changes to extension approaches can be encouraged by new training approaches and organisational and management changes (see below).

● Governments and NGOs

There is considerable debate over whether only NGOs can be successful at adaptive, participatory planning, or whether more collaborative partnerships between NGOs and the public sector are the best way forward. Government institutions may be bypassed, because they are weak, a trap for human capital, or simply repressive, and funds are channelled to NGOs to create parallel structures. The alternative is to work with governments so that NGOs 'identify how best they might support but not substitute for what exists' (Chris Roche, this issue). The principal objectives are now to foster change from within, not to threaten power but to pressurise, and to support innovative individuals.

Governments are currently under wider political pressure, the result being an opening up of new opportunities for local level grassroots approaches to be implicitly or

explicitly supported. Participation, empowerment and increased awareness can create a pull on the public extension service, so increasing accountability and making the extensionist's job more rewarding.

It is important to draw attention to some further aspects of NGOs. There are significant differences between those in the north and those in the south, between service and people's organisations, and between single unit and federated organisations (Alan Fowler, workshop). As described above, NGOs are successful at small scales and, as they are locally based, may be a better defence against repressive states. But where there have been transitions to elected democracies, 'NGOs are presented with the difficult fact that governments are to some extent popularly elected whilst NGOs are not'. (Tony Bebbington, this issue). Many NGOs (at least non-membership organisations) are not accountable, and just because they are NGOs does not mean they are not subject to corruption. With increased access to donor resources in recent years, there is growing evidence of wastage of funds and wastage of rural people's time.

Opportunities exist for innovative work to catalyse change within governments, particularly under conditions of increased decentralisation and participation in planning. An enormous amount of human capital and resources are locked up in government institutions. It would be foolish to ignore this. There is a severe danger of evolving parallel structures with the NGO sector being highly funded by donor aid, and at the same time being parasitic (for staff, technical support) on under-resourced government services.

It is important to disaggregate governments too. Adaptive planning and PRA/RRA methods have supported marginalised regional administrations in the face of strong central government (Chris Roche, this issue). Governments also need capable co-ordinating institutions and ministries involvement to a minimum.

There is a strong need for partnerships between institutions. These may be tripartite, such as in Eritrea between technical, intermediate and local institutions (Miranda

Munro, workshop); or at community level but subject to implicit government rules (Hugo Slim, workshop). Partnerships either open up information flows or define the need for dialogue. In Mali, there is often a large difference between what local development committees think people want and what they actually desired -thus it is essential to keep the local committees informed in a continual dialogue. These partnerships accept that 'in short, the aim is to change the state rather than simply criticise it' (Tony Bebbington, this issue). There are obvious opportunities for joint funding and training activities between the government and NGO sectors.

● Organisation and management

All of these desires, goals and objectives are rooted in the organisational and management cultures of governments, NGOs, communities and donors. Although there is a growing literature on organisational and institutional development and change, little has filtered through to have a significant impact on the development process. There are four central requirements: a need for new institutions to represent the user constituency better; a need to understand fundamental differences between commercial organisations (most management literature is about these), NGOs and governments; a need to identify pressure points through which change can be made; and the need to learn how to manage for innovation and experimentation in a turbulent environment.

Government as the central planning body tends to be commandist in orientation. Although decentralisation is often talked about, it may lead to fragmentation. Opportunities for bureaucratic reorientation to develop a commitment to a listening and responding approach are missed, and the trend has been to rely on the non-government sector for adaptive approaches. However, the post-adjustment 'culture of government' should evolve towards rewarding enterprise, innovation, good governance and self-reliance. Government needs to become responsive and enabling rather than merely a service provider.

Caution is required in the establishment of new local institutions, in that they may depend on transitory external funding and not be

sustainable. They may lack accountability and popular support and so may be inappropriate channels for local concerns. But in many cases they have been successful in giving a voice to their users. By participating in technology generation, adaptation and extension they create new demands on the research process. These new institutions include innovator workshops, producer organisations, group workshops, options testing groups, farmer networks, functional groups and village fora.

For change to be fostered in current organisations there are several factors that determine the different organisational and management demands on institutions. These relate to the way organisations relate to clients, to the rest of the outside world, the sources of resources, and the controls over performance (Alan Fowler, this issue). Commercial organisations have simple and short transactions with clients -they sell an obvious product. Governments supply services and goods, and have permanent and obligatory relationships with people; whilst NGOs have no authority, and so can only extend their influence through dialogue and negotiation. In the end 'rural people must own induced social development processes and benefits if they are to be sustainable' (Alan Fowler, this issue). Governments regulate and control, whilst NGOs must negotiate to integrate. Commercial organisations are paid by clients for their goods and services; governments get taxes and payments; NGOs rarely have a financial relationship with clients, resources coming mostly from donors of one type or another. The final differences relate to the feedback received that gives messages about performance. A drop in sales tells a commercial organisation they are performing badly - the feedback is rapid. Governments get indirect, and lagged in time, feedback from elections and tax evasions. NGOs rarely receive feedback to influence their performance, especially if they are based far from their clients (Alan Fowler, this issue).

These factors imply a need for new methods and a more structured approach. Leaders have a responsibility to offset bureaucratic stresses by adopting new methods for managing in a turbulent environment, staying in touch, walking about, ensuring a steady two-way flow of information in an informal fashion.

There must be the flexibility and capacity to allow adaptation and change, in which management is responsive and enabling. In planning institutions a bias for action must be created, in which managers and planners remain as close to the client or customer as possible. Incentives to innovate and experiment, rather than accept the status quo, are needed. Non-hierarchical structures that do not inhibit creativity and dynamism. Too often rural people and their knowledge and perceptions are seen as a nuisance whose unpredictable behaviour damages carefully made strategic plans. For problem identification, as well as monitoring and evaluating, there is a need for new information systems that are adaptive, flexible and people-oriented to provide steady flows of relevant information.

An important strategy for change clearly rests on training and human resource development. Training must be targeted at key people - so as to create a critical mass within an institution. Training needs analysis must concern individual, group, institutional and outside needs together. Training processes are threatened by postings and poaching, but nothing can be done about this save for more training. The approach must be multi-level, especially to create an understanding in senior staff - get them in the field - and put field staff more at the core rather than at the periphery.

The final changes necessary are those in development assistance agencies or donors. Many are strong on rhetoric, but find it difficult to be client-led when they are supposed to take a strategic focus. There have been many cases of community-based, people-based and process-based development projects, but relatively few documented successes. Evidence does, however, suggest that adaptive planning and implementation can result in increased productivity (food, health, trees etc.) at the local level on a sustainable basis, and that this represents a more efficient investment. Although potentially more expensive to administer, the feedback and community-base means fewer mistakes and greater effectiveness.

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