Editorial

This issue of RRA Notes includes three accounts of applications of RRA approaches in the fields of agroforestry in the Philippines, rural artisans in Zimbabwe and poverty investigation in Swaziland. The authors outline the techniques and context for the studies, and particularly emphasise any limitations encountered. In addition, there are two short discussion articles, one on the dangers of poor listening skills among interviewers, based on the authors' experiences in Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan and one on the question of the cultural appropriateness of RRA, based on the author's experience with a RRA activity in Guinea-Bissau.

While the majority of RRA publications are still in the form of informal reports and documents for limited circulation, there have been a number of recent publications of wider availability. We will be trying to keep up with these publications and pass on the information as and when available. The announcements at the end of this issue include three recent publications and notice of a forthcoming conference. Please let us know of any other events or publications, which would be of interest to RRA Notes readers.

Jennifer McCracken, IIED, 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H ODD, UK.

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.5, IIED London

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Wealth ranking in Swaziland: a method to identify the poorest

Verona Groverman

• Introduction

Many development projects aim to improve the living situation of the poorer people. In so-called participatory projects the target group itself is highly involved in the implementation and at times identification and evaluation phases of the project. In less stratified societies it is difficult to identify the poorer men and women in order to approach them about the project and their possible involvement. Wealth ranking might be a method to select the poorer in a community.

· The setting

In the eighties the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations launched a special programme to reach the rural poor in Africa: the People's Participation Programme (PPP) and set up projects in eight countries. Part of the project staff, so-called 'group promoters', assist the men and women in group organisation, income-generation and in self-monitoring and evaluation, while living together with the people. Essential to the approach is that the people themselves decide about group membership and leadership and about the activities, while the project plays a guiding role.

I will not go into details of the project approach, the individual projects or the data collected as discussions at international, national and project levels have already taken place. Especially the definition of 'the rural poor' and the selection of beneficiaries were subjects of debates. The success in reaching the rural poor as the main beneficiaries varied between the different projects. In one of the projects, in Swaziland, the method of wealth

ranking was tested for its suitability to identify the poorer community members.

I will describe our experience with wealth ranking in Swaziland, where I worked as a rural sociologist. My views do not necessarily represent those of FAO.

· Experiences in Swaziland

The PPP in Swaziland started in 1985. Five action areas for group formation were selected. The criteria used were not recorded clearly which made repetition of this selection procedure impossible. In 1988 the project staff decided to expand the project into two new areas. Discussions took place about which criteria to use for selecting suitable areas and potential beneficiaries and which methods could be applied for identification of both. The keyword was 'poor' but what is poor and how can one look for poverty and poor people? I will concentrate on the identification of potential beneficiaries in the selected areas.

To identify the poorer people, we were looking for a method which:

- could be carried out fast,
- did not involve a lot of 'researchers',
- was easy to learn and apply by the project staff, and,
- was not threatening since the main issue was the sensitive 'poverty'.

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.6–11, IIED London

We decided to try a wealth ranking method and assess its usefulness afterwards. We used B. Grandins 'Wealth ranking in smallholder communities: a field manual' (ITP, 1988) (See RRA Notes 5). I prepared the training for the project staff and the planning of the different steps.

· The planning: rapid or not rapid?

In July 1989 a first meeting took place with all staff involved. There were nine women and two men, of which six female group promoters would do the fieldwork. A plan was made from the first steps of introduction to relevant authorities and extension staff of other projects in July to the follow-up of processing the collected data by wealth ranking in September. The first steps were essential since permission from the chiefs was required for any activity in their chiefdoms and we needed the assistance of other local staff to get relevant information.

Due to several reasons beyond our control this schedule proved impossible: the extension staff were too busy in July, the authorities were engaged in traditional (Royal) duties, and at times some of our own staff were not available. Finally, the data processing took place in December, and the follow-up was planned for February 1990.

Thus, the 'rapid' method was spread over a period of five months. The objective of the exercise changed: from 'identification of potential project beneficiaries and collection of relevant socio-economic data about the area to be followed by group formation based upon the information collected' to 'acquirement of the staff of understanding and practical skills for identification of potential beneficiaries' purposes'. In other words, instead of research it became a training in research.

Despite the long time period, when looking at the actual days of the exercise, the method can be called 'rapid' indeed:

- Training of project staff: 3 days
- Introduction to authorities and extension staff in the two areas: 4 days
- Preparations for the ranking: 8 days
- The ranking itself in 2 areas: 4 days
- The processing of the data: 1 day

· The training and first steps towards the ranking

The training of the project staff, not familiar with any theory or practice of research, seemed crucial. The method was discussed thoroughly and first steps taken. With a detailed map of the two new action areas we identified agro-ecological zones and decided to work in maize-production zones only. Then we defined what the appropriate type of community would be for the ranking exercise. This is quite a complicated discussion in a country where most of the people live scattered in isolated or somewhat clustered homesteads. We concluded that the neighbourhood is the smallest traditional administrative unit in a chiefdom in which the people have close social relations. The agricultural extension workers in the chosen areas were needed to identify all the neighbourhoods and choose representative ones for the ranking.

We talked about the concepts of wealth and household as the unit of research. We found a suitable word for wealth in the local language. But the household as being 'a group of people eating from the same pot', led to a long discussion: could we refer to the male heads of household when they were absent due to labour migration? Could we refer to the wife, but what to do in case of polygamy? We were aware that the men often sent little money home and that the women did not earn much money. Also the distribution of a man's income among his wives and of any other remittances were complex and secret matters. We decided to collect the names of the de jure heads of

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.6–11, IIED London

household and to inquire about the situation of different wives if applicable.

Another topic of discussion was the choice of informants. Who could give the best information about the community in view of the patrilocal tradition: male or female informants? Since we were looking for people who know the place well, women or men who had been married longer were best. We decided to select two women and one man and to check if there were differences in the ranking. Here we also had to ask local people to help us with the choice.
During the training, a lot of time was spent on role plays about the introduction of the purpose of the visit and the explanation of the ranking to informants. I also held a few individual sessions with the group promoters doing the ranking to discuss problems that had arisen, for example with the representativety of communities.

· The preparations for the ranking exercise

The preparations for the actual ranking were the most time-consuming part. The six group promoters who were going to carry out the ranking consulted the runners (traditional officers, in charge of a community, who know all the people by name and in person) and the agricultural extension workers. In this way they got proper information about the communities and all the names of the heads of households in the representative communities. The extension workers chose the informants and made appointments for the group promoters

During the introduction visit to one of the areas we had an interesting discussion with the local authorities and extension staff. While asking about what defines a community we already got to know some of the problems. When talking about close social relations it was stated that "there was no co-operation any longer" and "people do not assist each other on the fields any longer" and "some do not go to their neighbour to borrow sugar". When we added that the relations also involved attendance of weddings and funerals they mentioned the neighbourhood as the appropriate smallest unit of close interaction.

· The ranking

The ranking was carried out in four communities in the two action areas using three informants each. Two group promoters and a supervising staff member, Aaron or myself collected the data in each community. Only three informants could be visited per day because the homesteads are scattered in hilly areas without public transport and many inaccessible roads.

Contrary to the first day, the extension workers were absent on the second day either due to a communication breakdown or lack of interest. On-the-spot solutions had to be found to find the addresses and to make the introduction possible. The main criteria used to select informants by the extension workers had apparently been 'age' - a drunkard was included, a blind man and a women who had forgotten a lot. Also a few of the informants were not at home, maybe because no specific time for the visit had been given. We went around to find people at home who were willing to co-operate. Finally eight women and four men ranked the people in their communities. Some of the group promoters were more skilful than others to make the informants feel at ease while others got more information about the area and the people during the exercise - although they were not aware of it. They complained that the people talked around a question before giving an answer. Especially with older informants it took some time before they understood our intentions.

When the informants more or less understood the purpose of the visit, the ranking was done in a pleasant atmosphere. They ranked the community members easily, at the same moment explaining why and giving additional information. We noticed that the women talked more openly than the men.

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.6–11, IIED London

"We arrived at a homestead with a few houses of stick and mud (some plastered) and of bricks, next to the dirt path. Goats and chickens walked around. Two young women were busy. An elderly woman with a child on her back came to greet us, followed by eight other children of different ages. She knew about our visit. We all sat down on mats under a tree. Lindiwe introduced us and explained the purpose of the interview. Nomsa added some details. The woman did co-operate, although she had 'problems with her memory'. Lindiwe explained the cards with the names and gave an example of what she wanted to do. It became clear to the woman. She pointed to places on the ground for the piles when Lindiwe mentioned the names. At the same time the woman said why she put somebody on that pile: "they have money to hire a tractor"; "they do not have enough food and live in stick and mud houses". She talked freely and without hesitating. Sometimes the extension worker had to explain the site of a homestead before she remembered the people. Nomsa wrote down the information on a record sheet. Afterwards Lindiwe inquired if the woman would have ranked differently if the names of the wives were mentioned - the answer was no. Referring to the widows she said that the children took care of them, only two women were worse off after the death of their husband. Lindiwe re-checked the piles but no changes were made. The ranking took about 25 minutes. Afterwards some additional questions were asked about income-generation and organisations in the area, prepared in advance by the group promoters. We thanked the woman very much for her assistance and left the place to visit another informant at the other side of the valley".

· The results of the ranking

Finally, in December, the project staff gathered to process the data and to discuss the method.

The processing of the data collected was carried out as described by Grandin: from the records about the ranked heads of households of a community, an average score of the three informants per pile was calculated. Then the heads of household were rearranged on another sheet according to their score number from richest to poorest. Next we tried to group the households into a number of wealth strata not exceeding the total number of piles used by the informants. Here the problems started. There were no natural breaks between the scores to indicate clear strata. The result looked more like a continuum from rich to poor with clear criteria for wealthy and for non-wealthy people. All the informants had mentioned the same type of criteria during the ranking, referring to property and possibilities based upon the properties. Ownership of cattle, tractor, farm implements resulted in higher output of farming, more food and better houses. Those who did not own anything did not have the money to buy/rent farm implements and inputs, did not have enough to eat and lived in stick and mud houses.

The staff were quite disillusioned because during the ranking itself it had seemed that clear strata were given by the informants. However caution is needed when drawing conclusions because the data collection was a training exercise. The data from the first ranking looked less reliable than those from the second ranking. For example, the first time two group promoters collected data they had not been aware that two of the informants had ranked almost half of the people in one pile.

Originally we had planned to analyse differences in ranking between men and women but due to on-the-spot choice of informants we were not able to look at these differences. However, at least the names of the poorer people, or not-very-wealthy people were known. We decided that the staff would use this data to start their group formation work in the field. Depending on the situation in

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.6–11, IIED London

the communities they would include other people and collect additional information.

• Conclusions

It can be concluded that wealth ranking is a method to get information about the way people in a community view wealth and how wealth is distributed in that community. In this sense it can be used to find the poorer people in a community as a starting point for the people's participation approach. Due to cultural and situational constraints the method might not prerequisites for successful use of wealth ranking. Firstly, a thorough training in research methodology for the project staff, preferably including outside assistants like extension workers, is needed. It should be spread over time to discuss the experiences with the different steps in the field. Secondly, a proper, but maybe more time-consuming, organisation of the ranking will give better results. Although it is stating the obvious, time constraints often prevent good arrangements.

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NOTES

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be rapid over time but in total few days are needed.

In the beginning the group promoters found the ranking complicated, but when they carried it out it appeared simple. They felt four constraints: the long-winded stories of the informants, the informants' slow understanding of the purpose of the visit, the poor relations with the extension workers and the small number of visits per day due to the long distances between the homesteads.
Our experience in Swaziland has signalled two

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.6–11, IIED London

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Rapid Rural Appraisal: lessons learnt from experiences in Palawan, The Philippines

Victoria Ortega-Espaldon and Leonardo M Florece

• Introduction

Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) has become highly acceptable in government bureaucracies amid their humble recognition of the gross failure of traditional or top-down planning. The appreciation of such methods springs from the realisation of the importance of a quick method to gather information, for planning and formulating community projects (Lamug, 1985) and a method to elicit local community participation at the onset of any development programme. As a methodology it is claimed to generate accurate and useful information on rural conditions in a more timely and cost effective manner (Chambers, 1980 as cited by Sajise, 1989).

The Institute of Environmental Science and Management (IESAM) is one of the numerous groups practising RRA in the Philippines. One recent experience is the RRA conducted in Northern Palawan. This was done on request of a non-governmental organisation (NGO), the Palawan Center for Appropriate Rural Technology (PCART) as part of a proposed agroforestry project funded by a Swiss NGO, Helvetas. The five member IESAM team was assisted by several staff members from PCART who knew the sites well.

The three upland communities chosen for the RRA are located in Northeast Palawan, an island province now being referred to as the 'last ecological frontier' (Figure 1). Each site is located in a valley interspersed with large river systems and tributaries draining towards the east coast of Palawan. The total land area of the barangay (settlement area) ranges from 400 to 600 ha. Sixty percent of the farms in

the three sites have 10-30% slopes and are found within the settlement areas while 40% of the farms have 30% slopes and lie below the forest zones.

· The RRA

The specific objectives of the RRA were:

- to assess the biophysical and socioeconomic conditions of the three sites;
- to identify upland development issues and constraints and opportunities confronting the people; and,
- to determine appropriate implementation strategies for a community-based agroforestry project.

The RRA team included a soil scientist, a forester, an economist, a horticulturalist and an ecologist. The RRA was carried out from May 8 to 15, 1988 with five days of fieldwork. Three days were spent travelling since the communities are far apart.

A week before the field interviews, PCART staff notified the farmers and community leaders on the purpose and the dates of the interviews. On arrival the PCART community organiser briefed the team on the location using a rough sketch of the areas to be appraised. PCART staff who joined the team are known in the communities, so interviewers did not

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.12–17, IIED London

have the problem of establishing rapport, which facilitated the interviews. Just before the team set out for the field, the members of the farmers organisation -Samahan ng mga Magsasaka ng Palawan (SAMAPA) - were listed with the help of the host farmer. These farmers are the target clienteles of the project. The people interviewed made up almost 85% of the total membership of SAMAPA.

Besides formal interviews, two members of the team conducted biophysical characterisation and mapping of the existing land use and settlement pattern in every barangay. Another team, which was led by the soil scientist, conducted soil sampling in the major land use areas. Soil analysis was done using a portable soil test kit.

After the data had been analysed, a draft report was presented in community meetings.

The IESAM RRA made use of the following patterns, most of these are from Agroecosystem Analysis (Conway and Sajise, 1986): space patterns (Figures 2 and 3), time patterns (Figure 4), flow patterns and decision patterns (Figure 5).

Besides these data, gathered from the interview and direct observations, other information was also collected:

- Family portraits: derived from interviews.
- Map of the Palawan Province with a scale of 1:50,000, showing land use and topography.
- Socioeconomic and demographic data of nearest towns, since records specific to the sites were not readily available.
- Land tenure - this information was obtained during discussions with other institutions.
- Information on previous programmes of the government and NGOs in the area.
- Historical information derived solely from the PCART staff.

· Presentation of observations and findings to the community

After the data analysis, the first draft of the report was written and checked with the communities. Presentation was made using visual aids such as:

- Sketch map of the community showing the various structures, such as: houses, secondary forest, river systems, farms and fallow fields;

- Transects of the agroecosystems in the community to show the relationships of the agroecosystem components;

- Cropping calendars and diagrams showing species of crops raised and their yield, and animals raised; and,

- List of management problems encountered by the farmers

Slide presentation of the general features of the area and existing land-use/cropping systems in Palawan were shown in contrast to other marginal uplands in different parts of the country. The objective was to give the farmers a clear view of environmental situations in the country and develop their perspective regarding sound environmental management.

After the presentation of RRA results and slides, the farmers' comments on the RRA findings were solicited, refocusing attention on the problems in their own community. Discussion about alternative solutions to their problems did not happen immediately after the evaluation because the checking of the findings was really meant to stir their awareness.

One month after the evaluation 'echo training' to farmer beneficiaries by PCART agroforestry staff took place to broaden farmers' knowledge and explain the various activities in pursuing an agroforestry project. Detailed activities were lined-up starting with nursery development activities and individual

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.12–17, IIED London

farm development activities. Priority crops to be planted on each farm were listed during the workshop including the desired number that the family could plant in the coming planting season.

Figure 2. Site map of San Jose' Barrio proper Approx. area = 250 Ha.

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.12–17, IIED London

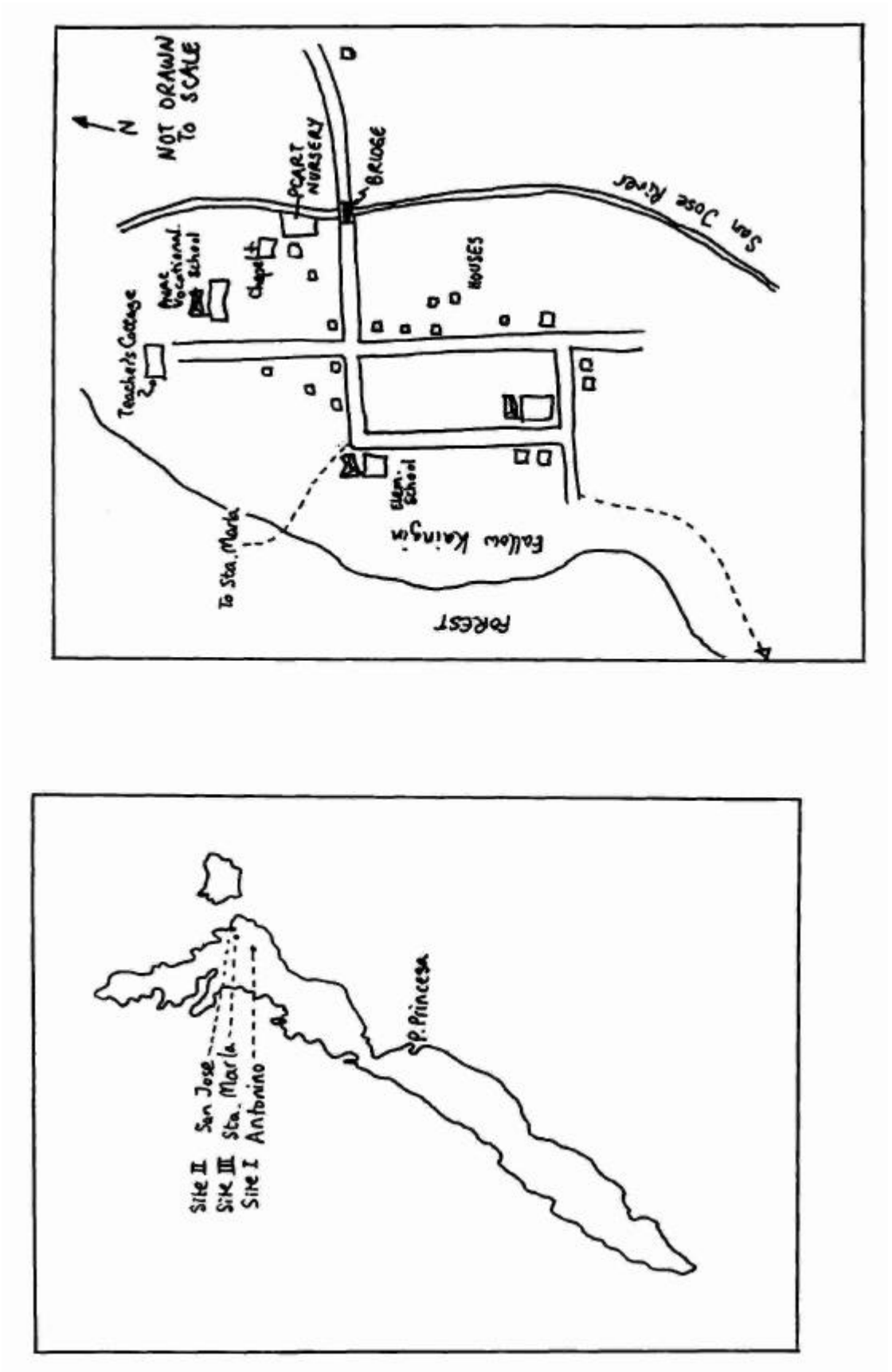
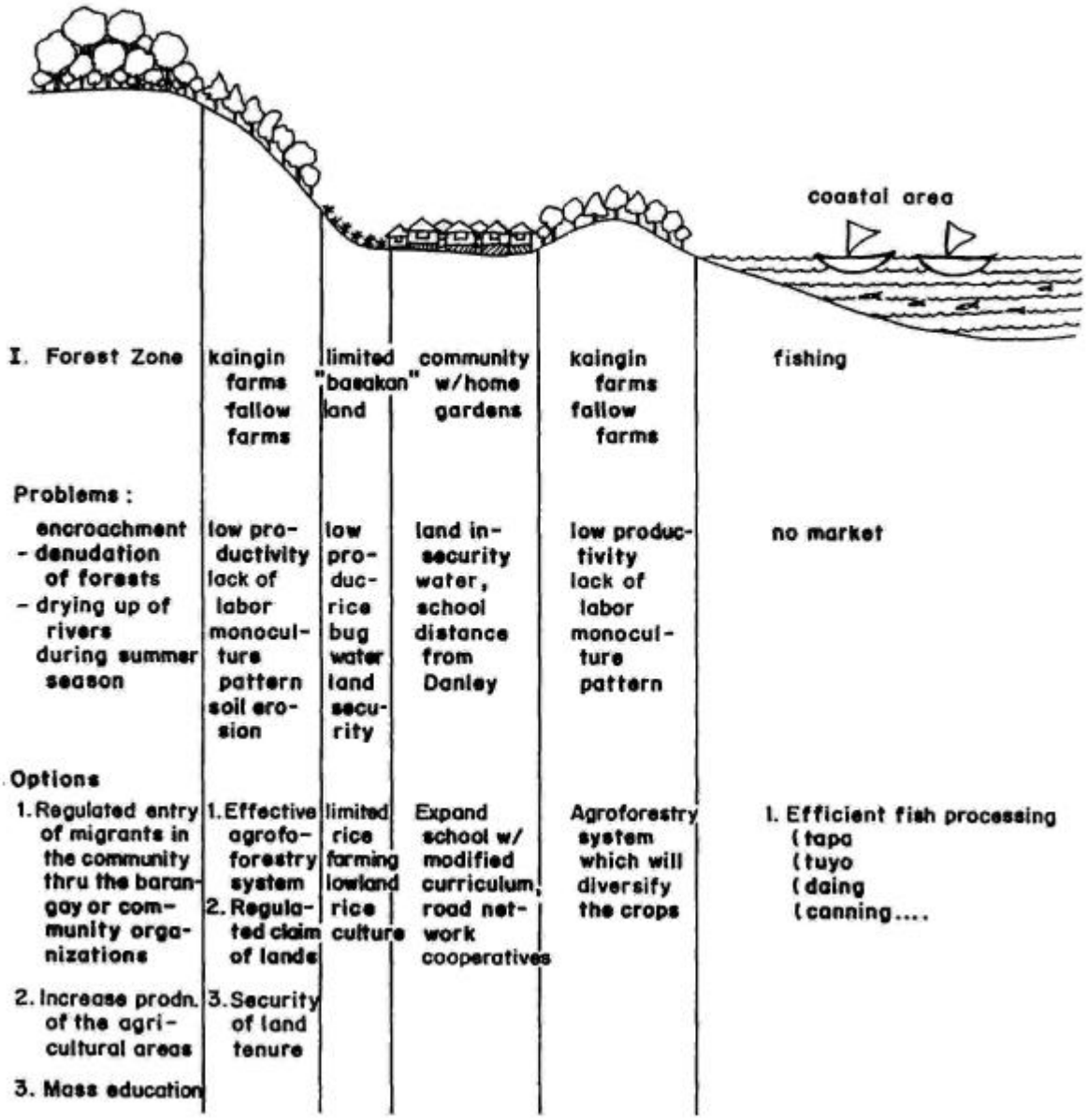


Figure 1. Map of Palawan showing location of the three pilot sites

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.12–17, IIED London

Figure 3. Transect of the agroecosystems in San Jose'



Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.12–17, IIED London

Figure 4. Cropping pattern of annual crop in Antonino

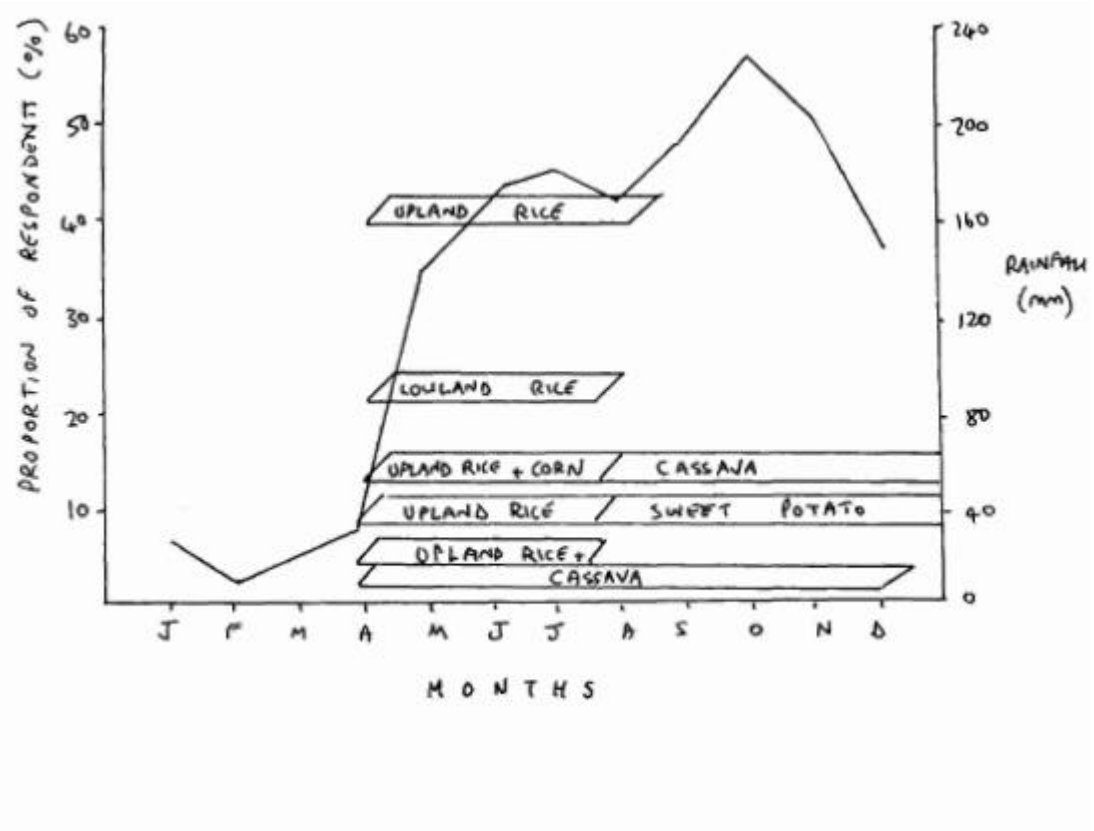
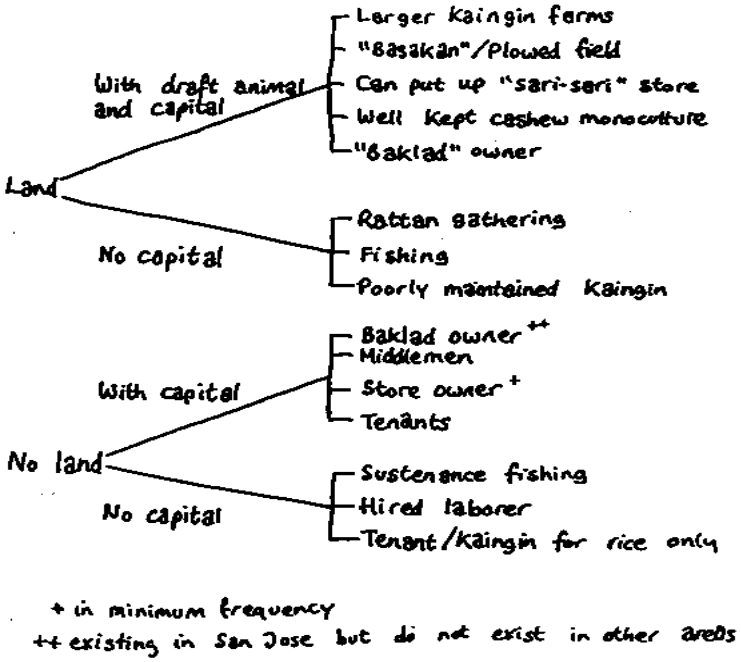


Figure 5. Decision tree of the livelihood systems for farmers in the three sites

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.12–17, IIED London



Farmers identified two priorities:

- Strengthening of the farmers organisation, SAMAPA. Bylaws of the organisation will be prepared by them, including rules and guidelines that will be enforced to make development activities effective and efficient, e.g. in distributing benefits to individual farmers and their responsibilities to the project. Training will be given to enhance their capacity in handling organisational matters.

- Intervening support. Water buffalo distribution scheme was discussed by the farmers and PCART staff. Other services like a water system, a marketing co-operative and land tenure security were also discussed.

After the detailed plan of activities was laid down the organisation was divided into 4 sectors or groups. Selection of sector members was based on geographical considerations for effective mobilisation and channelling of information. Leaders responsible for assigning tasks were chosen and groups were given their respective assignments and specific schedule as stipulated in the action plan.

When enough seedlings and other planting materials are ready, the farmers will be trained in land-use planning in preparation for the coming planting season. Each farmer is expected to have his/her own farm plot and specific plan of activities.

· Lessons learnt from the RRA

The RRA experience has taught us specific lessons concerning interviewing and the project, village and institutional contexts in which it took place.

The structured interview used was too rigid so the team had to keep separate notes to record the information missed on the questionnaire. It would be better to identify key respondents in

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.12–17, IIED London

advance with the help of the local agency prior to field visits. Then guiding questions can be formulated depending on the objectives of the RRA, instead of preparing a survey questionnaire which is the 'get-all-the-information-that-we-can' type of 15-20 pages. Interview schedules would need to be modest, to neither frighten nor bore the respondents by their length.

The RRA experience has helped to streamline the agroforestry project. This has finalised the overall thrust of the project - giving details such as the desired species vs the suitable species in the area. For example, cashew has been found to be the most preferred cash crop. There is, however, a tendency towards monoculture which is unstable for a site as tropical as Palawan. As an island, it is also more vulnerable to pests and diseases. The risks and possibilities in farm development were discussed openly in the community dialogue.

At the village level however, Antonino, which is the most accessible of the three sites, has developed a kind of 'dole-out' mentality, perhaps because of past development efforts in the area. Social rifts are appearing between the different social groups originating from different parts of Palawan and between these groups and migrants from other provinces. On the other hand, San Jose and Sta.Maria, which are the more inaccessible sites, appear to be more cohesive communities. The development activities implemented by PCART and the government-sponsored Palawan National Agricultural College are knots that have strengthened their ties instead of knocking the community into pieces.

RRA is an effective rural assessment method which will identify appropriate strategies for rural development projects (Sajise 1989) when handled skilfully. But this is not going to stand on its own without additional institutional support. This means that RRA must be fully reflected and incorporated into the development project plan. This has been the best advantage of working with an NGO like PCART. RRA results can be conveniently integrated into the plan unlike in government-initiated programmes that leave little room for adjustments and a large number of people to convince.

Assistance by an NGO is a vital aspect of local community development. The technical staff from the community-based NGO are important in facilitating an effective RRA. They know the language and the people. However, one shortcoming of our RRA was that the technical staff were relegated to the background and functioned only as guides. Their potential of the community-based technical staff can be fully harnessed in the RRA process by letting them help in administering field data collection. Perhaps a background in RRA can be given to them prior to its application so that the process is known to them in advance, and its difference from other known methods of gathering data is known.

The strongest feature of the RRA findings was that they were incorporated into the plan of the NGO. To ensure the smooth implementation of the development programme, a forester and a technical staff member were committed by IESAM to follow-up and monitor the development of the project.

Staff development for the implementing NGO was also conducted by IESAM with the sole purpose of building the institutional capability of the organisation. This must be followed up by more intensive and integrative training and synthesis of field experiences. Furthermore, IESAM has helped in establishing institutional linkages with government agencies involved.

One major limitation of this RRA was its operating cost, which runs to thousands of pesos. However, we cannot do away with this initial amount. One possible improvement is to develop the capacity of local technical staff to conduct any type of RRA. In the long run, the community-based development office can be self-reliant and expenses can be minimal. In this context, both formal and informal RRA training for many private and government development agencies must now be given

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.12–17, IIED London

priority. This will finally liberate RRA from the domain of constancy firms and educational and research institutions.

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NOTES

Other member of the RRA team: Antonio J Alcantara, Efren Operio and Plato Tirol.

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Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.12–17, IIED London

3

Some techniques for rapid appraisal of artisanal infrastructures

Godfrey Cromwell

· Introduction

In areas where agriculture is the predominant household activity, rural artisans (blacksmiths, tinsmiths, carpenters, potters etc) often constitute important productive infrastructures complementary and/or essential to agricultural production. However, the essential inputs both to agriculture and to other aspects of rural life that these networks of demand and supply, production, credit, income diversification etc provide, sometimes become invisible when attention is focussed too exclusively on agriculture. Better understanding of artisanal systems is required if their contribution and potential for development are not to be ignored or attempts to assist them are not to be counter-productive (as has sometimes been the case).

This paper includes some of the techniques/approaches useful in a recent three-person rapid appraisal[1] of production, repair and use of metal goods in rural Zimbabwe.

· Techniques / approaches

Expanded calendars

Most rural artisans in Zimbabwe are agriculturalists first and artisans second. Household food security depends on subsistence agriculture with, in some cases, marketing to surplus production but the requirement for cash income has become increasingly important with the growth of essential cash-only payments such as school fees and the purchase of agricultural inputs. Artisanal activities are generally prized by artisans' households because they provide access to (additional) cash income.

It is important, therefore, to see artisanal activities within the context of both the interviewees' and the communities' farming system(s). One technique we used with artisans and in community group interviews was the construction of an expanded calendar covering both agricultural and non-agricultural activities.

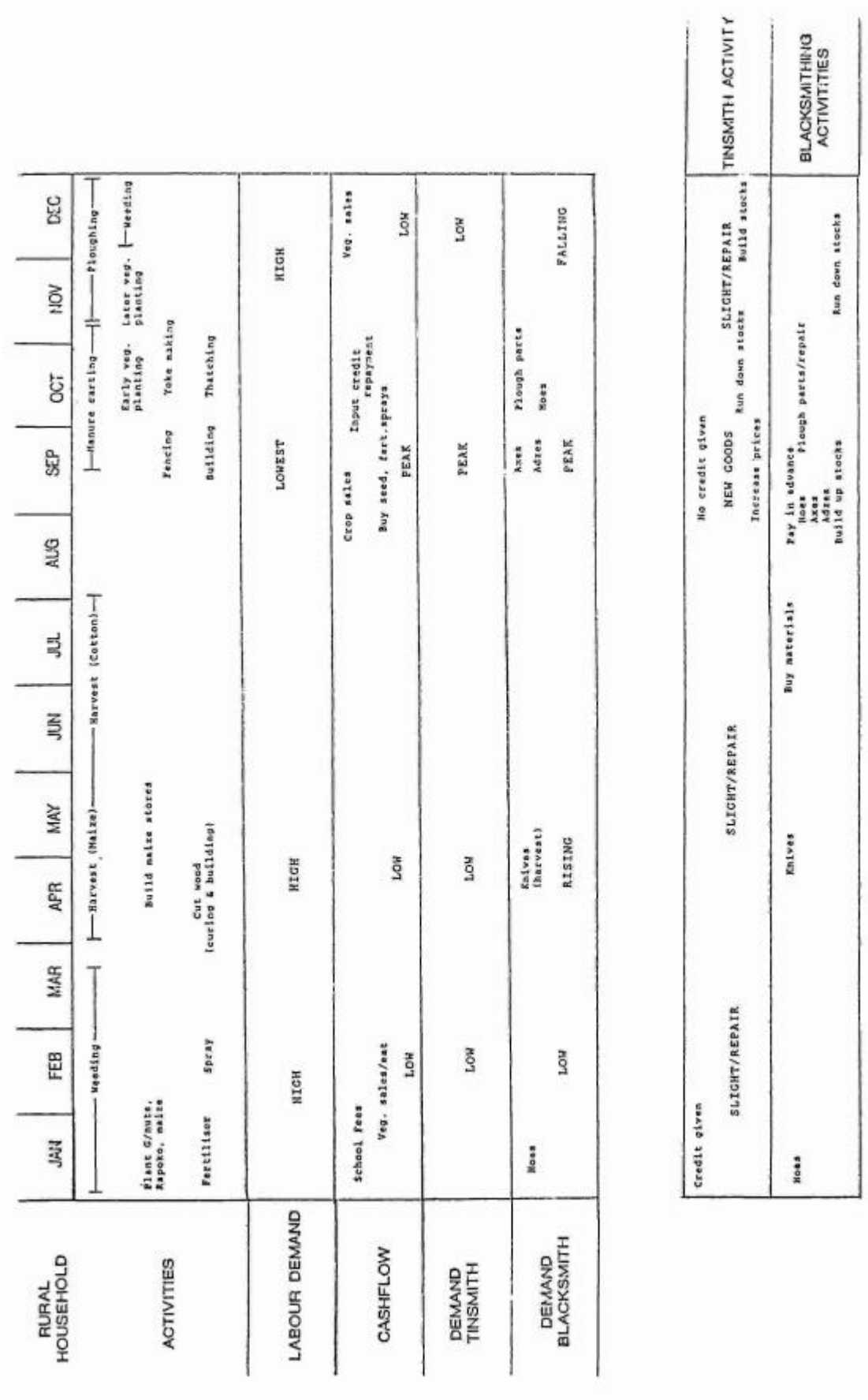
First, interviewees' agricultural labour calendars were sketched. This was usually fairly straightforward since agricultural communities are generally accustomed to conceptualising agriculture as a well-defined cycle of activities. Then interviewees were invited to compare the patterns emerging with those of their artisanal activities (Figure 1).

The most effective point of entry into such comparisons was found to be peaks and troughs of demand for labour. These were widely occurring in agriculture and, once these had been discussed, it was generally easy to apply the same questions to metalworking.

[1] The team was Godfrey Cromwell, David Harries (also ITDG) and Philemon Sifo Ongware (Inst. Agric. Engineering, Harare).

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.18–26, IIED London

Figure 1. Expanded calendar



Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.18–26, IIED London

This approach revealed patterns of work which differed between the types of metalworkers interviewed. These differences were, in turn, closely related to the types of market served. Thus, while rural blacksmiths experience fairly predictable demand for repair and production activities across the year, tinsmiths' production and repair activities occur almost exclusively in the post-harvest period and depend on variations in rural incomes. Different patterns of production of this type were traced by supplementary questions to the commodities produced (essential agricultural implements in the case of blacksmiths; domestic items in the case of tinsmiths).

Comparisons of labour calendars led naturally into demand calendars for artisanal services as perceived by the producer. The use of 'expanded calendars' of this type proved very effective in:

- obtaining information about existing agricultural system(s);
- understanding the dynamics of this system and its inter-linkage with artisanal production - for example the production of axes at the period of compound construction and land clearance, of plough-parts in the pre-rains period, of hoes for the weeding period, of large knives in the harvesting season etc;
- understanding patterns of credit availability and the use of rural incomes. The frequency and terms of credit extended by different metalworkers were also useful indicators of their respective dependency/power in their markets; and,
- understanding rural labour patterns and the resolution of conflicting labour demands. For example, discussion of interviewees' stated reactions when customers asked for products or repairs during periods of peak agricultural labour provided insights into the perceived value of cash income.

Group interviews

Since the study covered the production, repair and use of metal goods the team also investigated the perceptions of non-artisans. Group interviews were selected as the means to obtain this information.

Group interviews with non-artisan community members allowed:

- cross-checking of information including agricultural calendars;
- comparison between consumers' and producers' perceptions of, for example, demand for metalworkers;
- development of a wider demand map for, in this case, metal goods purchased and/or repaired by/for rural communities. For example, the roles and perceptions of goods and services supplied by welders and hardware stores in rural service centres were explored; and,
- identification of users' perceptions of the quality, availability and affordability of different products.

Brainstorming

In this study interviewees were asked either individually or as groups to list all the items currently found in local houses/compounds. This brainstorming was assisted by asking interviewees to imagine that they were walking around their compound/house describing the items seen. Finally, interviewees were asked to describe the activities of a 'typical' day in different seasons and any metal items or substitutes involved were noted. This procedure established a database of products from which items which were or which could be made of metal (for example wooden plates) were extracted for further discussion.

These techniques proved not only to be a rich source of information but were also entertaining for those involved - particularly when the group obliged the interviewer to undergo the same process.

The list generated during these discussions was then systematically worked through with interview groups and the following characteristics of each item were recorded:

- Source(s) of new goods (store, local blacksmith, tinsmith, home-made etc), with reasons;
- Source(s) of repair, with reasons; and,
- Issues of frequency of purchase and repair, availability, durability, popularity,

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.18–26, IIED London

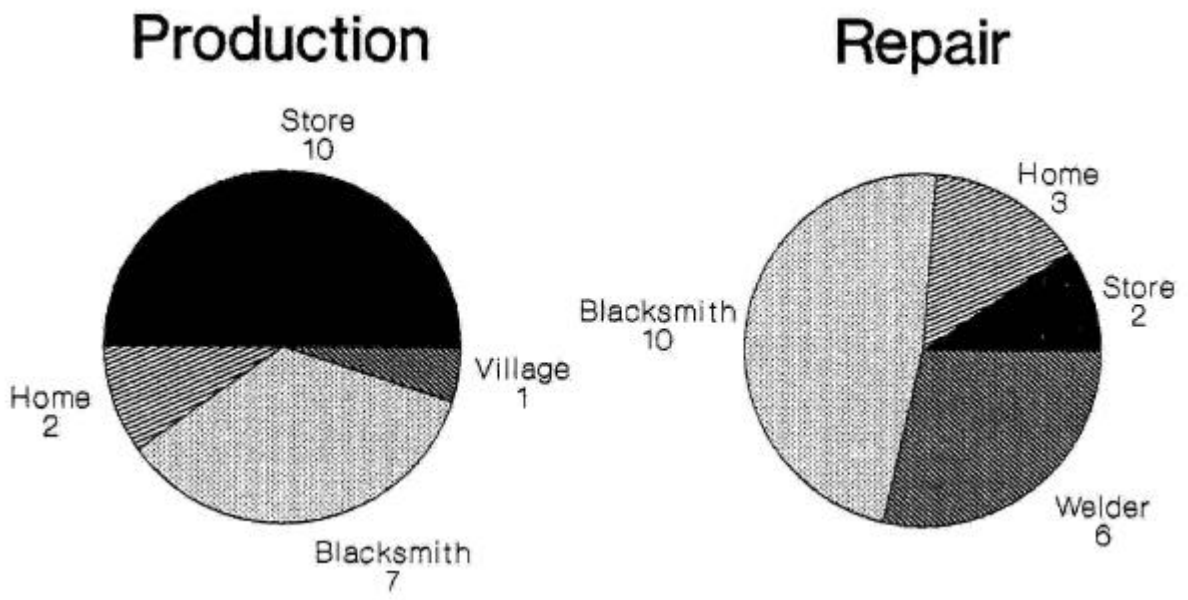
affordability, perceived shortcomings and advantages.

By comparing the number of items recorded as purchased or repaired by different types of metalworkers and discussing the reasons for this situation it was possible to assess:

- The relative importance of each sector (blacksmith, rural centre welders, tinsmith, industrial sector etc);
- The relative market security and product diversity of each sector; and,
- Changing patterns of rural demand over time.

One method used to analyse (and subsequently present) the appraisal findings was to display the list of products in pie chart form and thereby obtain impressions of the relative importance of different sectors. Presentation could be focussed as required to highlight the involvement of different sectors in each case. For example, by inputting the number of items produced or repaired by each sector (an example of this method is shown in Figure 2), or by selecting only certain items, the most commonly owned for example, or those used in agricultural production etc, hypotheses were generated for discussion and testing as the appraisal progressed.

Figure 2. Charts for agriculture (production and repair of metal items)



Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.18–26, IIED London

Focus on non-artisans

All the artisans encountered during the study were male and no female metalworkers were known of, either by the artisans or by the community groups interviewed. One benefit of the four group interviews held in different parts of the country was that they enabled the survey to gain access to women's perspectives. This was essential given the central role played by women in both agricultural and domestic activities. One group interviewed consisted predominantly of men while the three others were dominated, both numerically and in terms of contributions, by women.

Diversification

Many programmes attempting to assist artisans are very enthusiastic about product diversification. By exploring with the group composition, dynamics and rationale of the whole network of supply systems a useful database was compiled of:

- items currently owned;
- local perceptions and uses of these commodities;
- means of access to metal products and repair services; and,
- constraints and opportunities for product diversification.

In particular, we explored the extent to which, and the reasons why, each item discussed was owned by all, some or just a few households.

Questioning techniques

Many of the strictures applied to interview techniques in general (no leading questions, clarity, no multiple questions and so on) of course apply equally to non-agricultural surveys. However, there are some detailed practical questions which this study suggests are useful. These are now explored.

Sequence

Arriving at the most useful sequence for questioning is to some extent a matter of luck. Interviews are also likely to differ as to the order in which topics arise. Nevertheless, careful consideration of question sequencing can ease the progress of an interview. Moving from the well-conceptualised agricultural cycle to the possibly less familiar idea of artisanal cycles is one example of this approach.

Needs assessment

When trying to assess artisans' needs it is very easy for interviewers either to suggest 'needs' or to shirk their responsibility to ask further questions about the rationale behind any perceived need. Posing the question "What do you need?" often elicits a wish list which is a poor start for exploring feasible options.

More specific and concrete questions, for example "What is your greatest difficulty?" followed by "why?" questions, tend not only to receive more considered answers but also to avoid the tendency for the interviewer to be faced with a wish list which he/she then often demolishes with supplementary questions. Such questioning or even apparent ridicule, of interviewees' answers can seriously undermine both their confidence and the atmosphere of the interview.

Questioners should thus remain aware of and sensitive to informants perceptions and aspirations. Motives and rationale need to be clearly understood. However, self-appointed 'disabusing' of interviewees of their perceptions by the interviewer is generally as unhelpful as the suggesting of 'solutions'.

Similarly, questions such as "Would you like to diversify your product range?" can produce misleading or unrealistic answers which are difficult to follow up. Questions such as "Do people sometimes ask you to make things and you refuse them?, Why?" not only enable discussion of actual local demand but also assist in identifying constraints on diversification. These constraints can be diverse: lack of materials, skill inadequacy, insufficiently regular demand, excessive time requirement to produce, availability of cheap alternatives etc. All of these have different implications for any attempts to diversify production and the importance of each must be clearly identified, ranked and explained.

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.18–26, IIED London

Perceptions about the future

A major difficulty with RRA, as with every survey methodology other than projections based on market research, is that RRA tends to provide useful insights into the status quo but reveals little about the future. The assessment of the needs and constraints perceived by artisans described above goes some way to addressing this.

Another method found helpful as a basis for exploring artisans' perception of their trade and its future was to ask artisans how they would/had advise(d) their children as regards following in their fathers' footsteps. This, without exception, produced thoughtful assessments and useful summary appraisals by the artisans interviewed.

Similar questions were usefully included in group interviews with non-artisans. Groups were able to explain and explore the role, markets and prospects of rural artisans at least as well as the artisans themselves. This, in addition to any new data generated, provided a means to re-evaluate information supplied by artisans. Combination of perceptions - those of artisans and those of their clientele/community - proved to be an effective means of obtaining local assessment of both the present status of artisans and the future that they are believed to have.

Finally, asking different types of artisans for their perception of other types was also interesting. For example, discussions with welders in rural centres about the role of blacksmiths in the surrounding rural areas was revealing about the perceived market niches of both groups.

Focussing

It is important not to become over-focussed when investigating a particular topic. In the case of metal goods, an exclusive focus on metal items would have been misleading in that items made of clay, wood and plastic are currently also used in place of metal equivalents. Again it is important to unravel the reasons for these choices.

Similarly, neglect of a wide range of secondary sources detracts from such appraisals. In particular an understanding of the history and current status of competing sectors-from the rural artisan to the industrial manufacturing base - is essential both when analysing artisanal systems and when appraising their future.

Inclusion of family members

Many rural metalworkers depended on their wives for agricultural subsistence production while the interviewees generated cash income from their artisanal activities. Interviews where both (or more) members attended were often more balanced and provided a good means for verification of information, either as a result of unprompted debate/interjections or by addressing some/additional question to other family members. For example, metalworkers who suggested that household food security (as opposed to cash income) was based on their artisanal activities were several times pulled up sharply by their wives.

Exploring technical ability

Simple, open-ended questions allow artisans to demonstrate their knowledge of key skills. For example, technical questions put to rural blacksmiths interviewed during the study included:

- How do you select metal for making knives?
- How do you make a knife?
- What happens if you leave a piece of metal in the fire for a long time?

These three questions alone enabled exploration of:

- artisans' knowledge of metals (including high and low carbon steels);
- artisans' methods for identification of metals (for example some judged by the sound made when the metal was struck, others by the ease with which it was cut etc);
- artisans' access to and use of different metals and the reasons for these choices;
- knowledge/use of hardening and tempering techniques; and,
- the efficiency of artisans' forges (could metal be melted).

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.18–26, IIED London

Wherever possible a technical specialist should be included in the team since, for example, assessment of the technical quality of products and skill-use requires experience (although any such assessment should be set in the context of local perceptions). However, assessment of technical knowledge, seemingly a daunting task for the non-specialist, can actually be greatly facilitated by using this type of simple questioning. Even where a technical specialist is included, simple, non-abstract questions should be developed and tested before embarking on a survey.

In many cases a drawing or photograph, for example of technical innovations encountered, was by far the most succinct method of describing and recording items. During the survey a number of drawings of this type were made and photographs were also taken at the end of some interviews.

Assistants and interpreters

Where surveys are conducted by expatriates, assistance from a national of the country concerned will be essential. This team member is likely to be the main conduit of communications with interviewees. Consequently, responses obtained during a survey will be only as good as the assistant asking the questions, eliciting the answers and translating them to the other team members.

No matter how carefully questions are worded in the original, it is the translation and exploration of these questions by the assistant that really determines the degree to which replies are unaffected by leading, distortion and so on. An appraisal is far more likely to generate good information when the assistant fully understands the purpose of the work and the desire to obtain artisans' opinions rather than try to suggest or 'sell' things or ideas to them. While this type of understanding develops during the course of any survey it is essential to brief the assistant very fully in advance.

When selecting assistants (and any other team members) my personal prejudice is to emphasise the need for someone with good inter-personal skills: a sympathetic and interested listener who is able to communicate these qualities repeatedly to each interviewee.

A further requirement is a familiarity with the technical subject area (this need only be to trainee level). Firmly at the bottom of the list are academic qualifications in social science, since these are no substitute for empathetic personality!

· Conclusions

Artisanal activities are, for artisans and their households, primarily a strategy for spreading risk and generating cash income. More importantly, many artisans provide essential goods and services to rural communities - particularly in the provision and repair of both hand and animal powered agricultural technologies, but also in the supply of domestic items, non-agricultural tools etc.

While the role of artisanal infrastructures is increasingly recognised by organisations seeking to assist rural development, the context of these activities is often incompletely understood. This can lead to projects which are either unrealistic about or even damaging to these infrastructures.

Broader awareness of these issues can be created by sharing both the techniques employed and the results generated by artisanal appraisals. I hope that the techniques described above will contribute to the development of methods for including analysis of artisanal activities in rural appraisals. If greater awareness and effective techniques can be developed, projects may be assisted both in promoting and making use of the important resource base that artisans represent in many rural communities.

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Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.18–26, IIED London

4

Hearing AIDS for interviewing

John Mitchell and Hugo Slim

· Introduction

Rapid Rural Appraisal is a way of piecing together the parts of a jigsaw to try and give you a picture of a particular situation. Listening to people in informal interviews is a means of providing many pieces for this jigsaw. However, listening is difficult and interviewers can often 'mis-hear' and so miss important parts of the jigsaw. This mis-hearing happens often in informal interviews but there are ways in which improved hearing and wider sensitivity by interviewers can lead to better understanding. Two main ways are:

- always check and verify what you hear.
- don't always take answers literally, interpret what you hear with a bit of 'lateral listening'.

The following examples show some incidents of mis-hearing which were corrected by further probing, verification and interpretation (lateral listening). The first is an example of 'cultural mis-hearing'. The second is an example of the risk of 'half-hearing' when one only hears half of the answer one is given. The third is an example of 'non-hearing' when one receives an answer but treats it as a non-answer.

· Example 1- Cultural mis-hearing, Somalia 1988

There are many occasions when questions are interpreted by the interviewees within their own socio-cognitive frameworks which clashes with our own. This can lead to cultural mis-hearing and consequent mis-information. However, if the interviewers are open to the possibility that they might have mis-heard, this mis- information can be avoided.

One clear example of this came up in a recent socio-ethnographic survey of the Upper Juba Valley in Somalia[1]. Part of the survey was aimed at understanding the land tenure system of riverine farmers.

Initial questioning followed official. informants in assuming that ownership and rights to land were on an individual basis. Interviewees seemed to confirm this by appearing to acknowledge their individual rights to a particular piece of land. However, the interviewers' personal observations of the 'ratio of people to land made them question the possibility that so many people could own so little land. To verify this they set about measuring every field with claimants being interviewed. This revealed that many people had varying claims on the same piece of land.

At this point, the interviewers questioned what they thought they had heard and asked the question of ownership again. Further probing showed that the claims were in proportion to the genealogical distance from the claimant to the farmer. Several people could therefore be said to "own" a particular piece of land. This proved that contrary to official information received and to what the interviewers thought they had first heard from the farmers, land rights and tenure in the area were in fact fluid and evolving and not fixed.

In this example, there was a problem in picking up important information which was hidden and concealed by a clash of different cultural understandings of the idea of

[1] Mitchell, J. and A. de Waal, 1988. 'Socio/Ethnographic Survey -Baardheere Dam Resettlement and Compensation Plan for Inundated Reservoir Area'. Halcrow Fox Associates/World Bank.

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.27–30, IIED London

"ownership". The interviewers initially misheard the answer to their question but by 'verification' and listening again they were able to understand what was to be a vital piece of this particular jigsaw.

· Example 2- Bearing through falsehoodl, Ethiopia 1989

Some rural communities inevitably see interviewing as an opportunity. These are often people who have been interviewed before and so have developed interview 'skills'. Other people can see interviewing as a threat -such as people who are living *in* fear and do not trust outside interviewers. In either case of opportunism or fear, people and communities can feed interviewers false information about needs, priorities and community activities. However, to hear only the false information would be to half-hear the answers given by these people. A better understanding of the community can be gained by also trying to hear the motives behind the false information.

One clear example of this occurred in an evaluation of community participation in a church development programme in southern Ethiopia[2]. Several communities exaggerated their needs and their participation in community development projects and played down their receipt of relief items in recent months in an attempt to ask for more. Verification with project staff and relief records proved this to be false information.

Having established that the information they had heard was false, the interviewers tried to interpret what this false information revealed and why it had been given. In other words, what motives could they discern behind the false information. They began a bit of lateral thinking and realized that the false information they had heard signalled that these communities were becoming relief-dependent, were unmotivated and often 'deaf' to development messages. By not taking their original testimony at face value and by listening for deeper motives, the interviewers therefore uncovered important information about these communities.

· Example 3 -Getting no answer, Ethiopia 1985

Very often, people have no answer to questions posed by interviewers. In these cases there is a tendency for interviewers to view this lack of all answer as ignorance and so to provide the answer themselves according to their own preconceptions. This is a particular kind of mishearing which again tends to view the answer as a non-answer and so dismisses it and replaces it.

In discussion about imminent food shortage with rural people in Ethiopia and Sudan[3], interviewers asked questions about the build-up to, the severity of and the reasons for the expected crisis. These were enormous questions which people obviously could not answer in a nutshell. They often gave answers like "God knows" or it was "the will of God" or simply shrugged their shoulders. Interviewers initially considered this to be a non-answer and were tempted to take it upon themselves to interpret what had happened. This would have meant providing answers according to their own preconceptions and so 'filling in' the situation with their own analysis.

However, recent evidence from Darfur in Sudan has shown that people's knowledge and understanding of famine is highly developed and much better than our own. In the initial questioning in Ethiopia, the interviewers had mis-heard the answer. "God knows" was a statement of faith but it is also a way of saying how complex the issues were and how the question could not be answered so simply. Further probing and questioning has begun to show that rural people's perceptions of and understanding of famine is in fact a vast and complex area needing further research and a lot more listening[4].

[2] Mitchell, J. and H. Slim, 1989. MA Review of EECMY-SES Community Development Programme in Sidamo and Gama Gofa Regions of Ethiopia'. Rural Evaluations/Norwegian Church Aid.

[3] Mitchell, J. and H. Slim, 1985. Unpublished Reports, UN Emergency Office, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

[4] De Waal, A. 1989. 'Famine that Kills -Darfur Sudan 1984/85'. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
Young, H. 1988. Unpublished Oxfam Reports, Darfur, Sudan.

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.27–30, IIED London

As this example shows, many short seemingly evasive answers are not 'non-answers' but flags which signal enormous complexity in the question and the impossibility of a quick answer. These short deflecting answers are also often related to fear or emotion which makes something too painful to talk about[5]. Openness to the improved hearing of these apparent non-answers gives a better understanding of how people view the question and should lead to renewed listening.

· Conclusions

These are a few examples of the many ways in which outside interviewers can mishear rural people. They show that an informal interview may not always produce the kind of 'direct information' which the interviewer aims to extract. It will however, always offer hints of other kinds of 'hidden information' which may be very revealing. For outsiders to overcome the problems of mishearing and uncover this hidden information, it is always necessary to check what one hears and to enter into a bit of lateral listening to interpret what at first may seem like 'non-answers'.

In our experience, there *is* no such thing as a bad answer or a bad interview, but only bad listening or half-hearing. The most awkward, silent and embarrassing of interviews (of which there are many) always mean something -the onus *is* on the interviewer to look for this meaning and to verify it. The interview examples above show that better hearing and more open-minded listening can enable interviewers to interpret what they hear and so understand the voice of rural people a little less imperfectly.

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NOTE

This article will appear in the journal Disasters, volume 14, Issue 4 in December 1990.

[5] Mitchell, J. and H. Slim, 1990. 'Interviewing Amidst Fear'. In Press.

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.27–30, IIED London

5

Participatory Rural Appraisal: is it culturally neutral? Thoughts from a PRA in Guinea-Bissau

Weyman Fussell

A pilot project was implemented in Guinea-Bissau to explore the methodology of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) as a tool for village based community development workers. An in-service training was given jointly to a group of expatriate and host country development workers. Additionally, needs-assessments were done in two villages to test the PRA process as a programming instrument for village based workers. In its general form, PRA is a variation of Rapid Rural Appraisal and emphasises an especially broad scope of community participation in identification and prioritising of needs and solutions. Rapid Rural Appraisal teams characteristically include individuals from outside the host community. Consequently, there is a prominent cross-cultural aspect to the team's activities, and cultural predispositions are interwoven throughout the PRA process and reflected in the resulting conclusions and recommendations. The Guinea-Bissau activity sought to test a variation of PRA which would address the somewhat unique circumstances of expatriate development workers who are village based for extended periods of time - persons not faced with the constraints of time usually associated with Rapid Rural Appraisal applications. During the process of our work we became contemplative about the power of the PRA to catalyse change and the role of outside change agents in addressing the values and beliefs of a community. The following rationalisation resulted from our philosophical ramblings, and is believed to hold thought-provoking implications for all who are concerned with development issues.

We spent several days in each of the villages of Pelundo and Bara. We were graciously

invited into the homes of the community, we joined the men and women at work in their fields, we shared food at their tables, we drank their wine, we joked with the children, and we talked of aspirations and exchanged questions about the quality of life in our respective countries. Throughout it all, we were struck by the sense of well-being and absence of compelling felt needs among the village residents. The village environment was idyllic in a pastoral sort of way. But nevertheless, according to our standards the people worked too hard, ate too little, infant mortality was high, and the general conditions of health and sanitation left much to be desired.

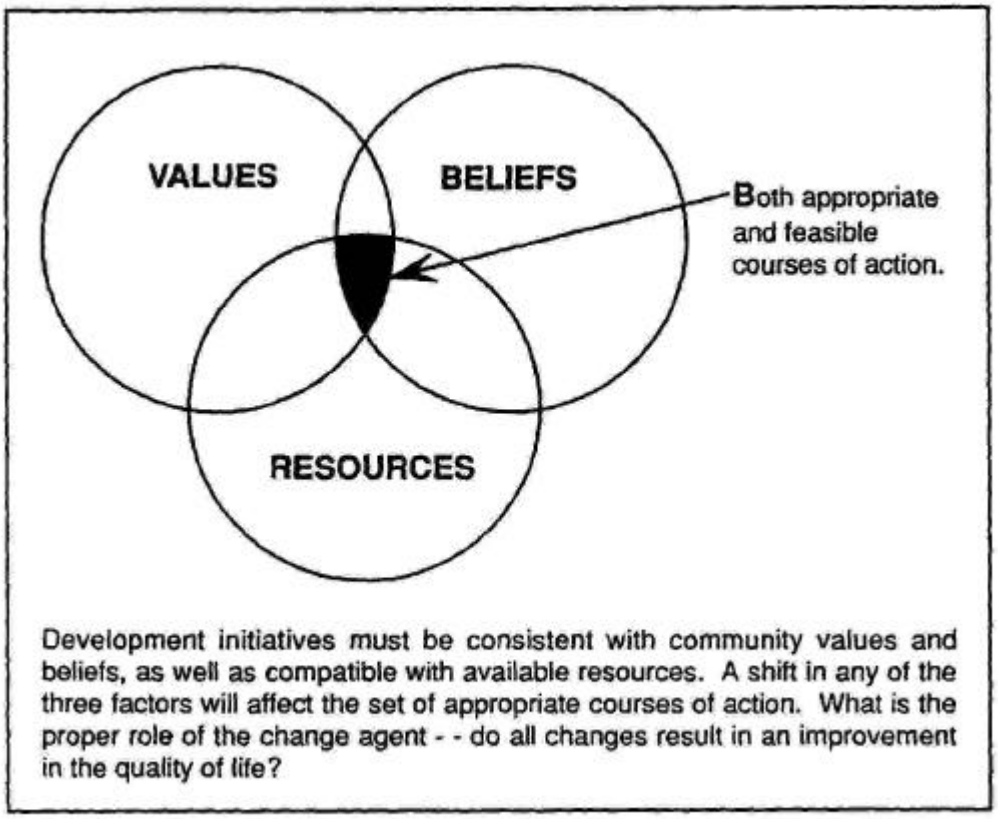
During the off hours we pondered this paradox. The apparent inconsistency between our perceptions and those of the villagers seemed to be a matter of cultural values and beliefs. This line of thought led us to wonder to what extent it is indeed appropriate for outsiders such as ourselves to tinker with a society's cultural foundations. Likewise, in order to generate an opportunity to make changes in the life of the village must we inadvertently create in their consciousnesses a sense of ill-being and discontent? What are the limits to the role of outside development agents in catalysing community change?

If the answers do hinge on the issue of values and beliefs, exactly does this imply - and what do we mean by 'values and beliefs'?

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.31–33, IIED London

It seemed to us that 'beliefs' are ideas concerned with how the world is put together. That is, concepts of reality... such as 'disease is caused by spiritual disorder' versus 'disease is caused by germs'. We tended toward the conclusion that it is consistent with human nature to want to understand more about how the world is put together. So, we concluded that it is a proper role of a change agent to engage in exchange of knowledge about fundamental natural processes.

Values, we decided, may be a different matter! Values, we concluded, are ideas about the way things should be. For example, 'the wives in a polygamous family should pool their agricultural produce for the benefit of the entire household' versus 'each wife is responsible for feeding only herself and her own children within the household unit'. The danger of many development interventions is that judgements are sometimes made by outsiders about what is needed in a village without due respect for the proprietary nature of a community's values. This may be complicated by confusion over distinctions between values and beliefs in the minds of outsiders.



Development initiatives must be consistent with community values and beliefs, as well as compatible with available resources. A shift in any of the three factors will affect the set of appropriate courses of action. What is the proper role of the change agent - - do all changes result in an improvement in the quality of life?

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.31–33, IIED London

Our reasoning brought us full circle in our effort to identify the felt needs of our host community. The process that we were using was founded upon the ideal that any development initiative would be doomed to fail if it is not consistent with a community's values and beliefs. How far should we go in attempting to influence these values and beliefs in order to promote our 'enlightened' ideas about what their future should be? That is, should we seek to overlay our values on those of the host community? We decided that the answer is no.

We grew comfortable with the process that we were employing. When properly applied, PRA seems to be well suited for maximising possibilities and placing intervention activities in step with the community value system. Beliefs are perceptions about what is possible; the PRA process works to help the community generate ideas about what is possible. Values are perceptions about what is appropriate from among the possibilities.

We became increasingly confident that the PRA methodology can be especially effective in addressing the goals of cross-cultural understanding and catalysing development initiatives that are consistent with the felt needs and values of a community.

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Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 9, pp.31–33, IIED London