

8

Comparison of RRA and intensive residential study: the case of Marit, Plateau state, Nigeria

RRA Workshop Participants (Marit Team) and Newcastle University Expedition

• Introduction

The advantages of RRA as compared with conventional survey have become widely accepted over the past decade. There now seems little doubt that RRA can quickly generate adequate information for rural development planning. However, the promotion of this methodology has not been accompanied by much critical examination. Little attempt has been made to crosscheck the results of RRA's with those of other methods, which though less rapid could prove more reliable. In an attempt to tentatively address this issue, the results of an exploratory RRA are compared here with those of an intensive residential study in the same area.

The aims of this article are to: crosscheck the results of the RRA, assess the extent to which the purpose of the RRA was fulfilled, and consider any implications for RRA methodology.

• Background

Marit is a village in the Barakin Ladi Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria. This village is located in the tin-mining region of the temperate High Plateau, about 60km S.S.E. of Jos, the State Capital. Marit comprises the main settlement of the same name, the former mining camp of Buka Bakwai and six small hamlets. The total village area is approximately 25km² and the estimated population of 2,112 (calculated from PADP, 1990) gives a population density of about 84 persons/km². The population mainly comprises Ron or Challa people who originated from Bokkos some 20km to the

south. Significant minorities of Hausa, Fulani, Birom and Mwachaval also live in the village.

The main economic activities in Marit are agriculture, livestock husbandry and small-scale tin-mining. The people of Marit are locally renowned for their skill in rain-fed farming. Maize and Irish potatoes are the main crops grown, with smaller amounts of *acca* (the small-grain cereal *Digitaria exilis*), beans and sweet potatoes. During the dry-season (November to April), Irish potatoes, maize and tomatoes are produced by small-scale irrigation. Livestock husbandry involves cattle-rearing, mainly by settled and migrant Fulani, and the production of goats, sheep, chickens and pigs. Small-scale tin-mining provides a readily available extra source of cash income, though few people are full-time miners.

Marit was selected as one of two villages for pilot-project activities under the Jos Plateau Environmental Resources Development Programme (JPERDP), which is executed jointly by Durham University (U.K.) and the University of Jos (Nigeria).

• The RRA in Marit and Buka Bakwai

The approach adopted was based on that of Conway *et al.* (1987) and Kabutha and Ford (1988). The RRA included staff of Barakin Ladi Local Government, State-level organisations (including DFRRI, MAMSER and 'Better Life') and the University of Jos. Co-ordination and training was provided by the Durham Fellows (Andrew Kidd and Kevin Phillips-Howard), with the latter also serving as Marit Team Leader. The RRA occurred in

September 1990 and involved use of the following six instruments in Marit main settlement and Buka Bakwai: mapping, village transects, historical profiles, seasonal calendars, trend lines and organisation (Venn) diagrams.

These instruments were applied through direct observation and semi-structured interviews in task groups. The RRA culminated in a village meeting at which the results were presented. These results, are described in detail in the Marit Village Report (RRA Workshop Participants (Marit Team), 1991).

- **The intensive residential study (IRS)**

The Newcastle University Expedition visited the Jos Plateau from early July to late September 1991 under the auspices of JPERDP. The Expedition team in Marit comprised three students of geography (Fergus Lyon, Heather Laycock and Chasca Twyman) and one of social studies (Barney Wells); they stayed in the village continuously from July 17th-31st, 1991. During this period the team 'came close to the villagers', gained their confidence and, through 100 or more interviews, gathered much detailed and reliable information.

The aim of the Expedition was to carry out an intensive comparative study of three villages, one of which was Marit. In Marit the Expedition focused on knowledge and use of fertilizers, gender roles in household economic organisation and water-related health problems. The methods used included direct observation, questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and group meetings.

- **The 'key issues'**

Qualifications to the 'key issues' of the RRA discovered during the IRS are outlined below.

Soil fertility

Soil fertility was confirmed as a key issue. The observation that the soils have 'become used to chemical fertiliser' and less responsive to traditional manure was also reiterated. However, the role of cattle in the economy and

their manure as a widely-used traditional fertiliser seems to have been understated. This probably resulted from insufficient attention to the Fulani, who manage most of the cattle in the village. Since no Fulani were included in the second round of interviews, when the key issues were clarified, the role of cattle manure was not revealed by the RRA. The IRS found that cattle manure is in fact widely used, albeit in a secondary role to chemical fertiliser. However, it also discovered that women 'hate' cattle manure because it generates many weeds that they must remove.

It appears that some economic aspects of soil fertility were not adequately clarified by the RRA. In particular, the point that the issue is seen as a shortage of cash to buy fertiliser was not grasped. During the IRS some women indicated that they solve the problem themselves, by tin-mining to earn the necessary cash. An important cultural consideration missed by the RRA was that, in Marit, a farmer's prestige depends on the extent to which his or her farm is visually impressive, i.e. flourishing with highly productive dark green crops. The appearance of a man's farm is also assessed when considering his suitability for marriage.

Water use

Water quality was a particular concern of the IRS and was confirmed as a 'key issue'. However, the drinking-water situation was found to be worse in the small hamlets than in the settlements covered in the RRA since several of them apparently had no wells at all. The main reason for this was the high cost of well construction. Nevertheless, this issue was not emphasised, possibly because it was less of a concern at the time of the IRS (in the middle of the rainy-season). Alternatively, its lack of emphasis, in Marit main settlement at least, could have been due to the fact that a project was already underway to improve the spring. Similarly, the fact that the feasibility of fixing a broken pipe (for use in irrigation) was being investigated may explain why it was not mentioned during the IRS. With regard to irrigation the issue was again expressed in terms of a lack of cash, in this case to buy pump-engines. It was discovered that, in the absence of engines, women used calabashes to irrigate small dry-season farms.

Income

Income emerged as a critical 'key issue', especially with regard to the youth. Traditional agriculture is not attractive to many youths, though they are derided if they refuse to farm. Tin-mining is considered among the Challa (but not among non-indigens) as 'lazy man's work'; it is socially acceptable as a means of gaining cash to solve an immediate problem, but not as a main source of income. It was discovered that a man who does not farm is regarded as 'a man in name only'. Yet, according to the village chief, 'an industry' or some other modern sector, non-farm, source of employment is very much sought for the village; though how realistic an aspiration this is remains uncertain. These concerns were not shared by the cattle-rearing Fulani who apparently had no employment problem.

Electricity

Electricity supply appears not to be a widely held priority, although it is important to the Chief who wants Marit to be connected to the sub-station 2km away. This issue was also mentioned by a women's group, at the beginning of the IRS, among a list of benefits which it was hoped that the Newcastle Expedition may be able to help bring to Marit.

Clinics

Clinics were apparently no longer a key issue, at least in Marit main settlement, probably because circumstances changed in the nine months between the RRA and the IRS. No mention was made of the village health committee, perhaps because its primary aim (the launching of the maternity clinic project) had already been achieved. Also a private clinic had opened and a previously established dispensary had resumed the sale of drugs.

Organisations

Organisations were not systematically studied in the IRS (and not at all in Buka Bakwai or the hamlets), but a number of useful discoveries were made about them in Marit. The Young Farmers' Club (YFC) allegedly collapsed because of fiscal mismanagement by members of its committee. Now the Club exists, but has no members. The committee

allegedly hires tractors through the Club to plough their own farms. Fiscal mismanagement also led to the dissolution of the Village Development Committee, but it was soon to be reformed through the election of new Officers.

There are in fact more organizations in Marit than was discovered in the RRA. The additional ones include Boys' and Girls' Brigades, the Baptist Womens' Fellowship, the COCIN Youth Church Movement and the Baptist Convention Farm. Of these, only the last post-dated the RRA. A 'Better Life for Rural Women' group has formed in the village, since the RRA, with the assistance of the JPERDP.

Protection

Regarding protection of crops from livestock, live-fencing with Euphorbia cactus is not liked because it prevents the villagers from seeing each others' farms.

Mineland use

The issue and the observations of the RRA were confirmed and it was discovered that many people want pump-engines to enable them to take up irrigated farming on former mineland. A visitor from Bokkos indicated that he intended to start fish-farming in Marit.

Acca

This issue was apparently misconceived in the RRA. Although *acca* is much liked, people do not actually want to produce more because of the high labour requirement, the low yield, its unimpressive appearance (to Marit people), and the indication it gives that the farmer cannot afford fertiliser. However, when asked if they would grow more *acca* if they had a mechanical thresher, informants answered affirmatively.

Agricultural development

In addition to the problems identified in the RRA, a shortage of labour, the high price of labour, the lack of tractors and transport for crops were also discovered. The IRS also contacted the village extension agent (VEA) to the village, who indicated that she was not

able to visit the village regularly because of transport difficulties.

Other issues

Sanitation emerged as an issue mainly because there was no latrine available for the Expedition and this embarrassed the village leaders. However, as the Expedition adjusted to using the bush, both the embarrassment and the issue faded. Some villagers did independently raise the issue of sanitation and its effects on health. Moreover, an attempt was made to promote the construction of pit latrines in the past, but with no success.

Issues which were identified but not elaborated by the IRS include inadequate nutrition, matrimonial problems, overdrinking and the sexual division of labour. These issues were raised by women, in discussions with the women on the Expedition team - after a familiar relationship had been established between them. The IRS also discovered a Mwaghaval minority with a ward head and an elder on the village committee which had eluded the RRA.

• 'Best Bet' projects

On the basis of the 'key issues' identified in the RRA, the following 'best bet' projects (elaborated in RRA Workshop Participants (Marit Team), 1991) were identified:

- Well improvement in Buka Bakwai;
- Assistance to the development of irrigated farming;
- Promotion of small livestock and poultry production;
- Legume production;
- Agricultural advice and training;
- Food processing;
- Gaining electricity supply;
- Improvement of the Buka Bakwai road; and,
- Better drinking-water supply in Marit.

The relevance of each of these projects was confirmed, but extra information was gathered that could have implications for their potential viability. For example, with regard to No. 2, it was discovered that the specialist knowledge about irrigated farming held among the

migrant Hausas, is not generally shared with other people. Similarly, regarding No. 3, there is a large prestige element to possessing greater numbers of livestock in Marit; though feeding and keeping them can be both difficult and risky.

• Conclusion and implications

This comparison has enabled the results of the RRA in Marit to be crosschecked. But, since the IRS did not coincide exactly with the RRA, spatially, temporally or in topical coverage, the comparison was neither comprehensive nor clearcut. Nevertheless, the IRD did largely overlap the RRA and helpfully reveal the following points:

- The RRA was generally successful in rapidly identifying the 'key issues' in the village, though some issues (clinics, electricity and *acca*) were not re-confirmed by the IRS. However, certain issues of particular concern to women (inadequate nutrition, matrimonial problems, overdrinking and sexual division of labour) were overlooked by the RRA, despite efforts to include female interviewers and village women in both rounds of interviews and the final village meeting.
- Most of the 'best bet' projects identified by the RRA were confirmed by the IRS without qualification, but with extra information. In this respect the IRS made little difference to project implementation. However, the IRS did discover socio-cultural and political considerations (significance of farm appearance, prestige aspects of economic activity, cases of embezzlement and intrigue) with important implications for project viability. It is doubtful whether these considerations could have been discovered, even in topical RRA's without the relationships of trust and familiarity developed by living in the village.
- With regard to the effect of relationships on the information provided. The IRS found that the problems articulated by some informants changed with time as their preconceptions about what benefits

the researchers could bring them were amended. The 'kawo (bring) – solvable' problems (Phillips-Howard and Kidd, 1990), such as fertiliser, seeds and electricity, were articulated initially, whereas those which could not be solved through inputs by outsiders (eg mismanagement of funds) emerged later.

- The IRS particularly drew attention to the significance of culture, especially values, in decisions about 'key issues' and 'best bet' projects. On reflection, the pro-modernisation values strong among the educated male elites apparently influenced the characterisation of certain issues and projects during the RRA (e.g. pro-tractors, irrigation pumps and electricity), whereas those of the women (e.g. greater independence and respect from men, matrimonial happiness and better nutrition) were less evident. In other cases the values of some outsiders became incorporated, both in the RRA (e.g. support for traditional crops (*acca*) and organic farming techniques?) and the IRS (improved sanitation).

Some implications of these findings are that:

- greater effort should be made to ensure that the views of women and minority groups (e.g. the Fulani) are included, especially at the stage of issue clarification; this might best be achieved by interviewing such groups separately;
- appropriate means should be sought for improving relationships so as to access critical information that may not be forthcoming under RRA conditions; IRS involving a period of continuous residence in the village is one such means;
- means should be found to distinguish problems articulated in 'kawo' (bring) terms from those which, though not obviously 'kawo-solvable', could equally form the basis of viable participatory projects. Again, IRS involving continuous residence in the village is one such means;
- given that decisions about 'key issues' and '-bets' appear to be strongly influenced by culture and values, explicit consideration should be given to these influences, both among the appraised and

the appraisers. Perhaps through specific interviews on them with independent key informants and inclusion of self-awareness exercises for RRA trainees.

- **RRA Workshop Participants (Marit Team) and Newcastle University Expedition**, Dept of Geography and Planning, University of Jos, PMB 2084, Jos, Nigeria.

NOTE

One of the members of this team, Fergus Lyon, is currently writing a report for the Royal Geographical Society of London on *Rapid Appraisal for Research Expeditions*.

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