Editorial

Addressing the gaps or dispelling the myths?: participatory approaches in low-income urban communities

· Participatory urban appraisal?

Over the past 18 months, the Human Settlements and Sustainable Agriculture Programmes of IIED have been inundated with enquiries about the use of participatory research and development approaches in community development programmes in urban areas. In response to this interest, the two programmes have jointly compiled and edited this special issue of *RRA Notes* focusing on the use of participatory methodologies for research and project implementation in cities and towns, thus allowing us to consider this theme from both urban and rural perspectives. In this overview, we introduce readers to the 13 papers included in this collection and highlight some of the key issues

This paper is divided into a number of sections. The first section discusses the 'problem' of applying participatory approaches in urban communities and explains why we consider it a priority to produce a special issue of *RRA Notes* on this theme. The second section describes the complex characteristics of urban settings and how they differ from the type of rural contexts in which Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is commonly used. We ask, *"Can Participatory Rural Appraisal become Participatory Urban Appraisal (PUA) simply by applying the approach in urban contexts - or is there something more that we need to understand about the nature of low-income urban communities and urban community development interventions?"* This section also compares and contrasts participatory approaches in urban and rural areas. The third section introduces the papers included here and considers their range and scope. In the final section, we seek to draw together the lessons emerging from the contributions of both PRA practitioners and urban development agents included in this special issue.

The papers are more about raising crucial questions and identifying key issues than supplying answers. While they broadly demonstrate the value to be obtained from such methods and tools, many issues are not addressed. For example, it is clearly important to understand better the added contribution that participatory tools and methods might offer in urban areas. In addition to providing a cost-effective means of poverty analysis for the World Bank, do such methods make a significant addition to the range and quality of existing and planned urban community development initiatives? If, for example, the major challenge faced by urban communities is how to develop greater community strength in order to better negotiate improved services from local government, are participatory tools and methods among the first three resources required by communities, or among the first 20? And when used by the World Bank, have such tools and methods resulted in a real transfer of programme control to local people?

The papers have been drawn from organisations and individuals whose work we know to be interesting, with some emphasis on diversity of applications and orientations. Hence, this collection is not based on a comprehensive analysis of best practice and we would argue that such an analysis would not be possible at this stage without a much more thorough review of what has been done and is being done, and what is working and what is not. However, we hope this special issue is of assistance to the many people who have contacted IIED and we would like to take this opportunity to thank them for encouraging us to explore this theme in more detail.

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· The problem and context of participatory enquiry

The interest in urban applications for participatory tools and methods is taking place within a specific context. At the level of national and international development planning and policy making, two particular trends can be identified:

- Active participation of local `stakeholders' is considered to be an important part of effective, efficient and equitable development projects and programmes. Experience has shown that participation cannot be imposed but must be developed through a process of joint analysis and constructive dialogue between the relevant actors (local people, external agents, etc.) and that there is a range of principles, concepts and techniques that can assist the adoption and application of effective participatory methodologies. Some participatory methodologies such as Participatory Rural Appraisal and related approaches increasingly are accepted as sound methodologies by development professionals and organisations (both governmental and non-governmental) (Scoones and Thompson, 1994).
- Development professionals are recognising that urbanisation trends are continuing and are unlikely to be reversed in the foreseeable future. There is increasing interest on the part of many development agencies (including multilateral, bilateral and Northern non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to develop effective programmes to address the development needs of low-income urban communities (Arrossi et al., 1994)).

These two tendencies are reflected in the growing interest in the use of participatory approaches in urban areas. The 'problem', as it was first understood by us, was: *"How might we learn from the experiences of those using PRA in rural environments for improving participatory research and development practice in urban settings?"*

When people first asked us what we knew about the different methodologies used by organisations working in urban areas, we replied that we knew very little. In the last year, we have considered a number of important questions:

- What participatory approaches are urban organisations using?
- What are the methods associated with those approaches?
- What impact has the use of these approaches and methods had on the lives of low-income urban people?

This brief, unrepresentative and informal survey has suggested that our initial problem statement was too simplistic. Some organisations actively working in urban places (e.g. NGOs, community-based organisations (CBOs) and government agencies) are employing participatory approaches that rely on methods that are broadly similar to those used in rural areas. It is our own process of learning that is reflected in the title to this overview: *"Addressing the Gaps or Dispelling the Myths?"*. In a process analogous to the development of rural appraisal approaches (i.e. rural people's knowledge and capacities were unseen and unrecognised because they were unrecorded or at least not recorded in ways that were accessible to outsiders), the introduction of *rural* appraisal approaches in urban areas was first required to fill a methodological 'gap'. It is now evident to us that such a `gap' is a myth.

However, to date there has been very little documentation of this work by the urban organisations and hence, no real exchange of ideas. Some urban organisations are developing approaches that are similar to those used by their rural counterparts, but it may be that they are spending time and resources reinventing the participatory 'wheel' rather than learning from those experiences. At the same time, those familiar with PRA in a rural context are often using it in larger settlements with several thousand residents that could be considered to have urban characteristics.

This lack of documentation and inter-organisational sharing has also meant that these methodological innovations and experiences are rarely accessible to organisations outside the informal urban networks. This has encouraged such organisations to act as if no new innovations have been occurring elsewhere, rather than seeking to better understand what

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has taken place already and how they might contribute to it. Furthermore, where such participatory methodologies are identified, they tend to be treated as something distinct from the broader development strategies of the organisations that are developing and promoting them. We would argue that, in most cases, participatory research and development approaches cannot be isolated either from the broad organisational systems and structures within which they are situated or from the relations between the major organisations working in a particular location, be they CBO, NGO or government.

For these reasons, we have felt it necessary to redefine our problem statement to more accurately capture the complexity of promoting participatory development in urban environments: *What do we need to understand about the nature of urban life and the context and conditions of urban community development interventions to enable us to employ participatory approaches with local people in those places?* OR *How might we develop participatory tools and methods drawing on the experiences in both rural and urban areas?*

· Is urban different?

A starting point for many of the papers in this special issue (and indeed for the compilation of a special issue) is the assumption that 'urban is different'. This section explores the accuracy of this conjecture and considers the scale and nature of some identified differences. We focus particularly on differences between the livelihood strategies and development challenges faced by urban and rural low-income communities, rather than on the differences between urban and rural in general, as these are the groups that the promoters of participatory approaches and methods seek to assist.

We believe that 'urban' may be different but it does not seem to be *very* different. Later in this section, we show that many of the proposed distinctions between the use of participatory approaches and methods in urban and rural areas may be otherwise explained. We start by reviewing some areas in which general distinctions seem to be most valid. Clearly, there is great diversity within urban and rural areas. However, it does appear to us that there a number of ways in which the nature of the urban context may differ from the rural context. A clear understanding of these may be helpful for consideration of the papers included here. For low-income communities such differences are primarily in the nature of work and of settlements.

· Maybe it is different

- *Economy*. Agriculture, livestock and petty trading are the mainstays of the rural peasant economy. By contrast, livelihood opportunities in poor urban communities may also include manufacturing and service industries including public sector employment. For instance, members of low-income urban households may be engaged in formal or informal employment within any aspect of the public sector, or manufacturing or service industries, as well as urban agriculture and small scale trading.
- *Natural Resources.* There are generally fewer opportunities in urban areas for direct household exploitation of the natural resources which all low-income households require, including fuel, fresh water and food. Hence, with only limited access to natural resources and meeting basic nutritional needs through 'self-sufficiency', the diversity in employment strategies is as important for spreading risk and reducing uncertainty for low-income families in urban areas as diversity in agricultural practices is for their rural counterparts. This diversity also represents a challenge to urban development programmes, which must find ways to understand and respond to the complex range and changing conditions of urban employment options and opportunities.
- *Heterogeneity*. Communities may be more heterogeneous in urban areas than rural areas. Urban settlements may include residents with a great variety of different birthplaces. In regard to household composition, there is some evidence to suggest that a significant percentage of households in low-income urban settlements are primarily supported by women (Moser and Peake, 1987). However, a proportion of urban residents

Source: RRA Notes (1994), Issue 21, pp.3–12, IIED London

are single people, often men, who may retain links to a family in another area. Other households may contain either nuclear or extended families.

- *Tenure.* Not only is household composition varied but so are forms of tenure (Hardoy and Satterthwaite, 1989). However, of remarkable consistency is that low-income urban households often lack legal tenure. It is common for between 30-60% of the population in Third World cities to be living in houses and neighbourhoods that have been developed illegally. Such residence does not necessarily involve the illegal occupation of land; illegality may arise from contravention of building or zoning regulations (Hardoy and Satterthwaite, 1989). Contravention of regulations is only one of many reasons municipalities and national governments give to justify evictions of poor urban residents, whom they refer to as `squatters'. Many communities live at risk of evictions and tenure is, almost universally, a sensitive issue.
- *Local government.* Although generally weak, local government is often important within the local urban development process. Local governments may be important as land owners and therefore of immediate relevance to squatters on their land. In addition, they are often responsible for drafting and implementing building and zoning regulations. In many cases, they have responsibility for the provision of local services. They are also likely to be responsible for issuing licenses for enterprises and regulating their operation. In urban areas, the role and importance of local authorities may be more pronounced than in rural areas where the state's influence is relatively weak (as in parts of Africa).

· But maybe it's not

However, beyond such broad distinctions are many similarities. We now turn to some distinctions between the experience of using participatory approaches and methods in urban and rural communities that are proposed within the papers included in this collection. In a number of cases, it appears to us that these distinctions cannot be simply (or completely) explained by differences between urban and rural areas and alternative explanations may be equally likely. In the paragraphs below, we suggest some alternatives.

- *Mapping* may be sensitive in an urban context where land tenure is unclear but this is also likely to be true in a similar situation in rural areas. Insecurity of tenure is a frequent feature in many low-income urban communities and gaining legal status a common component of assistance programmes. A first step of this process is securing agreement to existing plot size and to any adjustment required for the installation of basic services. It is likely that one major area of participatory urban appraisal will be methods for mapping areas (and for securing community agreement to the defined plots) and for re-blocking sites for improvement (including the provision of services, reducing densities and leaving 'safety areas' around hazards such as rivers and steep slopes.)
- *Newly formed communities* in urban areas may lack a sense of cohesion but this is also true of new communities in rural areas and refugees. While in some countries in the South, urban in-migration is still significant, in others most urban population growth is a result of natural population increase and there are relatively few new residents.
- *Scheduling* of participatory exercises may be important in urban settlements if many people are employed for long hours outside the settlement. But a similar problem is faced by PRA practioners in rural communities if people are working in the fields for long hours.
- *Basic service provision* (such as education) may be greater in urban areas but low-income residents (particularly those with illegal tenure) may be denied access.
- *Willingness to talk* may be greater in urban communities, but it does not appear that this is a consistent finding. In some urban communities, there is suspicion of strangers and/or a cynicism with development professionals and improvement projects.
- *Definitions of communities may be ambiguous* in urban areas but the same may

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also be true in rural areas. Communities may be defined by any one of a number of different factors including employment or source of livelihood, residential area, lineage bonds, class affiliations and religion. This is the case in both rural and urban settlements. One problem with PRA is that practitioners may assume that the village is a single community when it is made of several different communities.

When considering differences between urban and rural areas, it is also important to examine the size of those differences. Why should the use of participatory approaches and methods within an urban context be seen as being so dramatically different from their use in complex and diverse rural areas? From our review of the available material, it is not evident that the differences between urban and rural areas within one country are any greater than the differences found among various urban or rural areas in different countries or regions. In other words, the differences in the kinds of conditions and constraints faced by smallholder farmers in Pakistan and Zambia may be at least as great as differences faced by farmers and low-income urban dwellers in both of those countries.

· Spanning the rural-urban divide

Despite clear economic, social and environmental differences between low-income rural and urban communities, we would argue that they have many aspects in common. Given the nature of modern economic and social change, one could even say that rural and urban are inextricably linked, as the livelihoods of many low-income people depend on resources in both spheres. Those commonalities are rarely described, let alone understood, thus making it difficult for urban and rural development researchers and practitioners to learn from one another.

Perhaps the most significant obstacle to the introduction, understanding and application of participatory approaches and methods in urban areas is the compartmentalisation of the development profession into distinct 'urban' and 'rural' disciplines. Such a division, applied both spatially and sectorally, is a construct of development planners and researchers. It fails to represent the real world, particularly that inhabited by low-income communities. Though there are human activities or forms of enterprise that can be defined as either uniquely urban or rural, most take place in both rural and urban settings, and most depend on rural-urban connections. The livelihoods of most people are based on a combination of activities and resources from both settings. Poor rural people, for example, rarely make a living solely from agriculture, forestry or livestock, as they commonly rely on income from household members engaged in employment in both rural and urban areas or on goods developed specifically for urban markets. Low-income groups in urban areas also do not necessarily make a living only from the industrial or service sectors; they may cultivate food in cities or in small plots nearby, or obtain it from relatives in rural areas, with harvests critical to household food security. The exact nature of these interconnections and the interface between the rural and urban is rarely understood.

This rural-urban divide has inhibited the flow of ideas, information and even methodologies between rural and urban practitioners. This is due not to the differences in the actual context on the ground, but in the way in which the development profession and development institutions are structured. Learning and information exchanges usually take place within each discipline, i.e. for 'urban' or 'rural' specialists. For rural and urban specialists, there are more opportunities for meetings with others in their field - even from abroad - than there are for learning about work outside of their specific area. To date, there appear to have been few opportunities for those working in urban areas to learn from P/RRA experiences and few opportunities for P/RRA specialists to see what has been occurring within community development programmes in urban areas. It is such institutional rigidities and the inertia in addressing them that, we would argue, are the major reasons for the use of participatory methodologies in urban areas being seen by rural development professionals and agencies as such a significant 'step'. This special issue of *RRA Notes* is an attempt to overcome this divide.

· Scope and range of the papers

Methodology matters. That is the first and most obvious point arising from papers featured in

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this collection. All the papers focus to one degree or another on how participatory approaches enable development organisations to work more effectively with urban communities. The methodologies described here have two specific characteristics: first, they are participative, and second, they are all concerned with research and/or development work in low-income urban communities.

Beyond these aspects, the papers range broadly over a number of different dimensions:

- Geographic location - both North and South;
- From top-down to bottom-up; and,
- Rural-originated and urban-originated.

Spanning the globe

The Northern perspective is touched on in the two papers by Tony Gibson and David Wilcox, although the papers deal more with conceptual issues relating to participatory approaches and methods in general, than in specific case examples. It is evident that, in the urban context, there is an overlap of issues and strategies between North and South. Ellen Wratten's paper examines a pilot programme in 12 countries which draws from the 'Planning for Real' methodology developed for use in low-income public housing estates in the UK. Experiences reported in other papers use similar tools to those included within this methodology. For example, the Community Action Planning approach developed in Sri Lanka includes a similar prioritisation exercise to that used in Planning for Real. Surveys conducted by community members are used in both Planning for Real and the methodology described by Joel Bolnick and Sheela Patel and used in both South Africa and India. The experience in this collection, although brief, suggests that North and South have much to learn from each other that may be of direct relevance and fairly immediate application in seeking to improve the quality of community participation.

In addition to themes that link North and South, the papers include community development experiences from Africa, Asia and Latin America. In Asia and Latin America, there is a rich tradition of community-based urban development efforts, which is reflected in the contributions in this collection. In Asia in particular, participatory approaches have been integral to the work of some urban development programmes for the better part of a decade although we know far to little about this. In all three continents, RRA, PRA and related approaches are gaining greater currency in both NGO and government-supported urban programmes. Informal discussions with various practitioners in these places suggest that the examples included in this volume only scratch the surface of the many participatory methodologies and innovative applications that are being developed and applied in urban areas. For example,

- In Fortaleza, Brazilian NGOs have worked with community groups to collectively redesign houses and settlements;
- In Manila, the Philippines, women have been exploring critical events in the development of settlement through sharing life histories;
- In India, participatory methods have been used to assist in identifying appropriate responses to the earthquake in Maharashtra;
- In Chile, houses have been designed by non-specialists using house modelling exercises;
- In Pakistan, the Orangi Pilot Project makes rapid and low-cost surveys of areas that are to be provided with secondary drains by drawing on the community's expertise; and,
- In Birmingham, England, participatory tools have helped to initiate discussions and development programmes with Bangladeshi immigrants.

A range of actors and initiators

The organisations responsible for initiating the development and application of participatory approaches and methods described here are drawn from three main groups: (1) NGOs; (2) government agencies; and (3) official agencies (i.e. multilateral and bilateral development organisations). Some of these institutional actors work independently, though the tendency is to collaborate with others on projects of mutual concern.

Several contributors examine programmes initiated by NGOs. For example, Gustavo Romero, Patricia Nava and Lilia Palacios look

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at the efforts of two programmes in Mexico City, the Calpulli del Valle Housing Cooperative and the Settlers Union of San Miguel Teotongo. Both cases illustrate how a participatory action research approach can influence and improve development planning in low-income urban communities. Joel Bolnick and Sheela Patel offer an important example of South-South sharing through their analysis of the partnership between the People's Dialogue in South Africa and three organisations in India: SPARC, the National Slum Dwellers Federation and *Mahila Milan*, a federation of women's collectives. That collaboration has resulted in a initiation of participatory process for community-based shelter training programmes, as well as a valuable intercontinental exchange of ideas. Michael Drinkwater discusses how PRA methodologies have been used in Zambia.

Governments are also involved in some ground-breaking efforts to apply participatory approaches in urban settings. In Sri Lanka, for example, the government recognised the need to involve communities in their neighbourhood development and also the need to develop new methodologies in order to achieve this. Through its Community Action Planning, the Sri Lankan Government's Urban Housing Division is attempting to directly address the need for community involvement with a form of urban development appropriate for the needs of low-income households.

René Reusen and Jan Johnson of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) describe how, in Guinea, the Office National pour la Promotion de la Pêche Artisanale en Guinée (Guinean National Office for the Promotion of Artisanal Fisheries), together with the regional West African Integrated Development of Artisanal Fisheries Programme (IDAF) of FAO, have established a national programme with a number of important elements: (1) adaptation of PRA to an urban artisanal fisheries environment; (2) use of participatory appraisal to prepare and publish baseline studies and problem identification for several artisanal ports; (3) training of government field agents as 'participatory' technical consultants; (4) organisation of a legally-recognised Port User's Committee around the priority problems; and (5) management of the fieldwork programmes of government field officers in different ports by a Coordinating Committee composed of field worker representatives. This initiative is important not only because it has strengthened the capacity of government officers and port users' groups to use participatory appraisal approaches and helped improve their relations, but also because it has directly influenced national policy on artisanal port development and management.

From rural to urban appraisal

Some official development agencies, already familiar with using participatory approaches and methods in rural development activities, have shown a willingness to draw on such techniques to improve the quality of their work in urban areas. Sheelu Francis draws on her extensive experience with Participatory Learning Methods (PALM) to assist the Slum Improvement Programme of the Overseas Development Administration (ODA-UK) in five cities in India. She describes how the use of PALM, developed for work in rural areas, helped increase local people's participation in the Programme. Michael Drinkwater discusses how CARE, a Northern NGO, has drawn in expertise in participatory methodologies in order to improve the effectiveness of a food-for-work programme. These two are probably the best examples in the collection of how a rural approach has been adapted and situated within an urban community development programme.

A related set of experiences discuss the adaptation of rapid and participatory rural appraisal approaches for training and research purposes, rather than as an integral component of a community development programme. Philip Amis outlines an action learning approach - a modified form of RRA - which he and his colleagues at the Development Administration Group (DAG) at the University of Birmingham, have developed to public administration training. Over the past few years, Amis and his colleagues have used this approach to train government officials at the Town and Country Planning Organisation (TCPO) in the Ministry of Urban Development, New Delhi, India. The aim has been to enhance the problem-solving skills of the administrators, especially their ability to identify, diagnose and produce recommendations for a particular issue

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or problem. Hilary Cottam focuses on the strengths and limitations of applying P/RRA in an urban public health context. Cottam describes research she undertook using Participatory Urban Appraisal in Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic, in which she explored the links between urban women's perceptions of their multiple productive roles and their health. Her paper examines what methods worked and what did not for this purpose - and why.

One paper specifically describes a training process used to reorient urban project staff towards participatory approaches. Michael Drinkwater recounts how CARE Zambia is now using PRA, combined with Training for Transformation techniques, to reorient its strategy in several Lusaka compounds away from purely infrastructural improvements through food-for-work, towards stimulating low-income communities to take the initiative to better their own livelihoods. The emphasis was particularly on re-training project staff to enable them to move from a technically-oriented project to one which focused on social and livelihood analysis. However, the training course not only included the project staff, but also members of the community to allow all to understand the reality of livelihoods in the Zambian economic and political context.

Two papers illustrate the increasing use of rural appraisal approaches for rapid assessment of urban poverty issues. In his paper, Martin Leach discusses a European Community-supported programme's efforts to employ Rapid Urban Appraisal (RUA), the urban equivalent of RRA, to channel aid to very poor people in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Although the field team was still experimenting with the methodology to see how it would work in an urban setting, the approach proved successful because they remained open to new opportunities as they arose and had the confidence to modify their strategy as they went along, something most effective rural appraisal teams do. Andy Norton summarises some of the lessons he and his team learnt from preparing World Bank Country Poverty Assessments in Ghana and Zambia in which P/RRA methods were used. He points out that certain implicit assumptions about rural conditions and livelihoods - the mutual knowledge among neighbours, the homogeneity in local livelihood strategies and the definition of 'community' - have influenced the development of RRA and PRA. When those approaches are applied in urban situations, these tacit assumptions may not hold true. Norton urges researchers to recognise the distinct differences between urban and rural contexts and not treat them as being one and the same.

Expanding on this last division, a distinction can be made between those papers that draw directly from the rural research and development and P/RRA traditions and those that reflect a more spontaneous experimentation by groups working with low-income urban communities. Within rural areas, PRA/RRA was developed in order to ensure that the potential contribution of farmers was better understood by the development professionals supposedly assisting such communities. A second reason, identified as the methodological 'toolkit' or 'repertoire', began to develop was the strengthening of community decision making and management potential. Both traditions are evident in this collection of papers.

Silvina Arrossi of IIED/America Latina describes the use of focus groups in the Habitat and Health Project in Barrio San Jorge, Argentina, for identifying priority issues, mobilising local resources and building rapport between local people and external facilitators. In this work, she draws on another tradition, that of Rapid Assessment Procedure (RAP), used mainly in the health sector.

Top-down, bottom-up: meeting halfway

For local level planning to be effective, there is a need for it to link with higher level planning structures. Without such a link, these higher level plans may diminish or destroy local activity. The articles in this special issue of *RRA Notes* highlight two ways of linking local-level development planning with higher level planning structures through the use of participatory approaches:

- Cooperative government authorities provide local groups space to manoeuvre, regularise land rights, fund local initiatives and employ participatory approaches as a way of better understanding local needs and priorities. Their emphasis is on establishing constructive dialogue and improving a

Source: RRA Notes (1994), Issue 21, pp.3–12, IIED London

sense of trust between parties. The process is driven, at least initially, by outsiders. Examples from this collection of papers include the Slum Improvement Programme, Community Action Planning and the Food and Agriculture Organization. These programmes recognise that community participation is not just needed for the efficient use of resources but also because effective improvements in urban areas cannot be realised without community involvement and commitment. The nature of many urban development programmes is such that considerable rearrangement of the settlement is required. Without a means to ensure the community's involvement in, and acceptance, of the plans, such re-blocking is likely to be divisive and discriminatory. In both these examples, essentially of top-down programmes, the government agencies recognise the value of using participatory tools and methods in order to ensure that the plans of the 'top' draw on the needs and expertise of the households to realise their broad objectives.

- Community development groups employ participatory approaches as a way of creating local awareness and mobilising local resources for communal action. This is sometimes necessary where the state is seen as either uncooperative or inefficient. Their emphasis is on empowerment, developing sense of local ownership and cohesion, and gaining access to state resources. Participatory approaches, in this instance, can help local groups create room to manoeuvre and organise means of resistance to thwart or challenge negative government policies. The process, in this instance, is driven by insiders. Examples here include Planning for Real and the methodology developed by SPARC (Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres) and the People's Dialogue. The papers by Bolnick and Patel and by Gibson illustrate the contribution of such methodologies to increasing community awareness of their own skills and understanding. The use of participatory tools and methods is an integral part of a process to develop a confidence within the community about their ability to deal with professionals on equal terms *and* to enable collective planning to take place so that the community develops the wisdom and strength that it requires to be effective.

Both of these strategies can be seen within PRA approaches in a rural setting. While there has perhaps been an increase in the number of initiatives proposed by government authorities in the last ten years, this does not simply reflect a growing enthusiasm for participatory approaches and methods. Other reasons include new decentralisation policies and a reduction in public sector investment following the adoption of structural adjustment policies.

· Participatory approaches and methods in urban areas; an opportunity for mutual learning?

Reflecting the division of the development profession into its urban and rural components, the papers in this collection are drawn both from authors with a long experience of working in urban areas and by those more familiar with the rural tradition of participatory methodologies experimenting with their use in urban areas. What is the contribution of each and what do urban and rural development professionals have to learn from each other?

The papers originating within the urban community development traditions offer participatory methodologies rooted in a local context and development programme. Their strength appears to lie in their ability to identify the needs of the communities with which they are working and to draw in community resources, including knowledge. The effectiveness of many community development interventions in urban areas relies on the active involvement and participation of community members. In this work, there is evidence from the papers included here and from other projects with which we are familiar that tools and methods have been developed similar to those associated with PRA and other participatory approaches in rural areas. However, few urban groups have documented this aspect of their work and there have been few (if any) opportunities for exchanging information through newsletters and meetings. This lack of documentation may have delayed the development of such approaches.

The papers authored by those familiar with rural traditions in participatory methodologies

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clearly come into the urban environment with something to share. In this collection, they describe very specific experimentation with particular tools and methods, in some cases adapted to make them more appropriate to the urban context. With an emphasis on methodology, they offer a challenge to the urban development community to meet with them in the sharing of participatory tools and methods. But these papers also reflect an early weakness of rapid rural appraisal. Located outside of development projects and programmes, they suffer from being one-off interventions rather than being part of an on-going development programme located within that community. As such, the learning processes are inevitably introductory, indicating further lines of enquiry rather than conclusions. Another potentially fruitful area of exchange for the development of urban participatory approaches might be a better understanding of the history of the spread of participatory approaches within the rural context over the last ten years.

The dual origins of this set of papers demonstrate how the institutional division between urban and rural has stultified and compartmentalised the development process within participatory methodologies. Within rural development, contexts and networks mean that it is relatively easy for professionals working in one area and wishing to extend into a new area (spatial or otherwise) to work together with a local institution. Across the rural urban 'divide' there are few such opportunities. The experiences recounted by Sheelu Francis and Michael Drinkwater offer the only examples within this collection of how people trained in PRA methodology have used that knowledge within long-established urban community development programmes. Equally, while some of those working in urban areas are increasingly aware of the development of participatory approaches within rural development including PRA, they often do not know the individuals and institutions to whom they can turn to for more information. We hope that this collection can be the beginning of a more formal process of information exchange; and that this exchange might be the start of a more constructive and creative relationship between those working in urban and rural areas.

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