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TWO ARTICLES FOCUSING ON PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

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TWO ARTICLES FOCUSING ON PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

1 PARTICIPATORY TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT:
A critique of the new orthodoxy
researched and written by Stephen D. Biggs,
School of Development Studies, University of East Anglia.

2 PARTICPATORY RURAL APPRAISAL AND SOUTH AFRICA:
an interview with Robert Chambers,
conducted and transcribed by Michael Randel.

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NOTES ON THE PAPERS

PAPER 1

Paper prepared for the Participatory Technology Development (PTD) workshop on *The Limits of Participation* organised by Intermediate Technology at the Institute of Education, Bedford Way, London, March 1995.

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PAPER 2

Robert Chambers (of the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, United Kingdom), recently spent a few days in South Africa. He is a well-known advocate of *Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)*, an approach to development that is becoming widely utilised in many countries. Chambers spent two days in Durban where Olive correspondent, Michael Randel had an opportunity to talk with him.

PARTICIPATORY TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT:
A critique of the new orthodoxy

Researched and written by Stephen D. Biggs *

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
1	Introduction	1
2	The New Participatory Orthodoxy	1
3	Recent and Old Critical Reviews of the New Participatory Approaches	2
4	Technology Development as the Resolution of Contending Coalitions of Science and Technology	5
5	Rapid Rural Appraisal in Bangladesh	6
6	The Wheat Green Revolution	6
7	Ways Forward	7
	ENDNOTES	9
	REFERENCES	9

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1 Introduction

In recent years there has been a growing literature that advocates various forms of participatory development. This is illustrated by the promotion of approaches/tools such as participatory rural appraisal (PRA), participatory technology development (PTD), and participatory process projects [1] These "new" approaches are fast taking on the form of a new generalised orthodoxy for solving development problems. It would seem from the perspective of some of the promoters of this orthodoxy that the problem of development is no longer one of not having the right approaches and methods, but one of getting recalcitrant policy makers, bureaucrats, academics to appreciate and adopt these new methods and techniques.

My concerns with this new advocacy are that:

i It does not relate to experience;

ii It does not address issues of power structure and control over information and other resources in multiple and complex arenas of science and technology (S&T);

iii By placing major emphasis on management approaches and tools, the new orthodoxy is cutting itself off from a critical reflective understanding of the deeper determinants of technical and social change.

Unfortunately, I suspect that if this new orthodoxy does not develop a more critical reflective view of itself then, like previous dominant orthodoxies, it will soon have to develop a range of "escape hatches" to explain why these participatory approaches are not giving the results that their advocates promise. [2]

2 The New Participatory Orthodoxy

The new orthodoxy is well summarised in a recent issue of *Appropriate Technology*.

> The birth of yet another piece of development jargon in the term CSD (community-based sustainable development) is a result of many trends in development thinking. First, the vital importance of participation. Secondly, the concepts embodied in other terms such as Primary Environmental Care, which signal a greater synergy between the environmental and development movements. Thirdly, it reflects the evolution of working methodologies, such as the appearance of the extractive tools of Rapid Rural Appraisal, and their transformation into the facilitating tools of Participatory Rural Appraisal. There is little difference between the essential philosophies of PTD and CSD.
> (Bush, 1994).

In addition to new participatory methods, participatory process projects are being promoted by many donors such as the World Bank, ODA, and many NGOs. Popular participation is seen as "a process whereby those with legitimate interests in a project influence decisions which affect them." (Eyben and Ladbury, 1995). Stakeholder Analysis, Team Up, process documentation and monitoring, DELTA techniques, are some of the methods being advocated. Words that keep appearing in the current discourse are: participation, community development, and process projects.

Within the new orthodoxy the development problem is taken as a given. In the past old theories and approaches have not given the results hoped for. The new approaches are seen as the solution. It is now only a matter of training people in the new approaches and removing obstacles such bureaucrats, academics, professional experts who are not convinced by the relevance, effectiveness or efficiency of the new methods.

3 Recent and Old Critical Reviews of the New Participatory Approaches

A few recent studies that have looked at the actual practice of the new methods make salutary reading. Mosse in a reflective piece on the use of PRA shows how many of the issues that are central to the training of anthropologists have predictably come up in the application of PRA. For example, the way in which "public" social events-such as a PRA-construct knowledge in a way that strongly reflect existing social relations of power and gender. The reflective piece by Richard Burghart (1994) on his efforts to understand local cultural knowledge in Nepal also highlights the tricky ground which "outside" development workers traverse when thinking that they are understanding and interacting with local knowledge systems. As Burghart concluded after trying to work with a local cultural knowledge system in improving the quality of water in drinking well of some cobblers:

> Our encounter took place in a mismatch of raised expectations in which, at the end of it all, the Cobblers' own ideas and values remained intact. They are probably even now saying to one another, 'The water from our well used to taste sweet'
> (Burghart, 1993,p.99).

In another recent article (Eyben and Ladbury) on process projects two aid donor practitioners conclude there are four main reasons why beneficiary or user populations participate relatively little in development decisions which affect them: economic, political, professionalism and the nature of the product.

The economic reasons relate to the emphasis given by outside agents to the "ideal" notion that communities are (or want to be, or should be) harmonious arenas of social interaction. They argue "that there is often a strong individual-based economic rationale for collective action, even in small-scale, culturally and economically

homogeneous communities". On the political explanation for non participation they say: "participation of all or some of the beneficiaries may not be in the political interests of other actors in the project." This point is also powerfully demonstrated by Von Ufford's review of the behaviour of a participatory process project in

Indonesia. In this example it was the donor and the Indonesian government who for political reasons did not want to hear the information - from a mid-term process review - that showed there was minimal democratic village level "participation" taking place in the process project.

As regards their third reason: professionalism, they clearly bring out that it is not always a matter of the "outside expert professional" adopting a top down approach. Indeed, it is a far more complex issue, and one that is inherent to all societies. Namely how much information different parties (with mixed abilities, sources of social power, intentions, etc.), such as professional workers, different "beneficiary" groups, administrators, etc. need to know about one another in order to make their own informed decisions and "participate" in different ways in different arenas of discourse.

On the nature of the product they stress the need to look at the particular product that a project is delivering. They say for community health projects it is clear that it is very hard for communities to meet the costs of community health workers. This is because health services benefit individuals as individuals rather than as members of communities.

Reviews of a large range of participatory farmer research projects undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s show, even for a particular technology - agricultural technology - that there is a tremendous diversity in what is meant by "participation" in projects (Biggs, 1989, Merrill-Sands, et al., Martin and Farrington). Some of the current orthodoxy appears to imply that there is no need to analytically address this issue of complexity that reflect social power structure.

A further criticism voiced about the new orthodoxy is that it places attention on democratic participation at the community level (and within projects) but fails to address the issues of hierarchy and control within the donor or advocacy group. Elizabeth Goold's reflective piece on the use of the DELTA techniques illustrates well the dilemmas and contradictions that she had to address in her work in Sierra Leone as part of a hierarchical church organisation. One cannot but reflect that some of the proponents of the new orthodoxy are in senior and powerful positions in donor, government and academic institutions.

For my own experience of having been involved in participatory projects, some of the most important factors that determined the outcomes of the participatory processes were the selection of team members and their power and influence inside and outside of the team. In some cases it turned out that there were important disagreements about what was a "process" project, hence one found different and competing views about what was expected and what was reasonable behaviour at that point in time. In addition, the institutional and larger political context of the project were always an important consideration for an understanding of anyone's actions.

Finally, one has a sense of *deja vu* about some of the recent observations on the way the new participatory methods and process projects are getting on. For example, many ideas of the activities of current process projects were in the work of the Comilla project in Bangladesh in the 1960s. In 1970, Aktah Ahmed Khan the

charismatic coordinator of the work undertook a rapid rural review of the 20 blocks where the cooperatives were at work. He found, when the experiment was extended beyond the social laboratory that few of the democratic and other participatory methods were working in the field (Khan).

At the academic level there have also been concerns for many years with the apparent apolitical and technical nature of participatory techniques and approaches. Martin Bell in an aptly titled article: *Exploitation of Indigenous Technical Knowledge or the Indigenous Exploitation of Knowledge: whose use of what for what*, drew attention to the issues of the social construction of knowledge and social control over information. Geoffrey Wood in an 1982 IDS workshop pointed to the way that dominant social actors have power to control information and the need to place any information exchange in a broader political and socio-economic context. Recently, Simon Bell (1994) has argued that the techniques of the new orthodoxy are becoming a powerful new tyranny.

In response to these criticisms the advocates of the new orthodoxy could come up with plenty of counter examples of successes and academic arguments to support their position. (If they do not have successful examples I could provide plenty of illustrations of where specific participatory tools and management techniques have been used by different actors to great effect.) However, rather than go down this confrontational route and get into a debate over whether or not the new packages of tools and approaches have been "successful", and whether they have been correctly applied or not, I would like to suggest another way forward. This is a route that:

i Avoids having to accept the problem solving position of the new advocacy which suggests there is some sort of agreement over "the development problem" (and that the new approaches are a new and better solution to "the problem");

ii Fully accepts that participatory tools and methods have been developed and used to good effect by a wide range of actors in the past, and;

iii There is role for their advocacy in the future, albeit a different way from the one currently being followed.

4 Technology Development as the Resolution of Contending Coalitions of Science and Technology

As an alternative framework to the new orthodoxy we might see technology development and social change as the continuous resolution of contending coalitions of science and technology. This framework does not reject the idea that there may be "new" tools and approaches but takes them away from the centre of the development stage and sees them as scripts and props used by actors in a larger drama. In this approach it is not the "new" tools and approaches that are important but the actors that use them in selective ways to achieve certain goals. Of course in the hands of effective agents some tools might legitimately be seen as having made contributions to bringing about social and technical change.

Over time these contending coalitions of practitioners, beneficiaries, scientists, activists, etc have some common cause over a particular issue. Each coalition has formal and informal behavioral norms and networks of communications. Within coalitions there are strong elements of trust between people who come sometimes from totally different cultural, professional and practical backgrounds. Within coalitions "participation" can be enormously varied, depending on the issue at hand and the political, cultural and social context. The coalitions have flexible and unclear boundaries. People may be members of one "coalition" for some things and part of another for other issues. These coalitions contend for influence, power and agency role in different arenas of social activity. This takes place in specific historical, political, cultural and social contexts. There are other arenas of social discourse taking place around those that are focusing on a particular theme. Here also the boundaries are often permeable and flexible over time. Within particular arenas of discourse, actors selectively use a whole range of stories, myths, theories, tools, techniques, approaches, and "evidence" to promote particular causes. In this "contending coalition" representation of science and technology there are no prescribed notions of:

i "insiders" meaning local people, and "outsiders" meaning "experts";

ii formal science meaning western science and "informal" science meaning indigenous (cultural) knowledge;

iii spatial hierarchies of knowledge (eg household, village, national and international).

The specific (local) circumstances define all of these things. For example, while some writers describe western science as being conducted in a "formal" way, those who look at the actual practice of "western" science find it is always combines the formal and informal (Latour). The two cannot be separated and make up the particular science and technology culture at that time in that location.

5 Rapid Rural Appraisal in Bangladesh

To illustrate the ideas of contending coalitions of S&T I will give one or two examples.

Some of the earliest RRAs which I am familiar with were in Bangladesh in the early 1970s. Groups from many local institutions were involved in quick rural studies initiated by the Ministry of Rural Development and by the Agricultural Research Council (Biggs, 1995). One of the initiators was a Secretary in the Ministry of Rural Development, Mr. L.R. Khan and another was Professor Mohammed Yunus. At the time Professor Yunus was head of the Economics Department at Chittagong University and subsequently led the Grameen Bank which has been so effective in providing credit to poorer rural women (Hulme). Because the RRAs took place at a time when the ideas for the Grameen Bank were being initiated, it is possible that some of the Bank's success might be ascribed to the information gathered and analyzed by the RRAs. However, to conclude this without placing those RRAs into some political, economic and social context would be a very questionable exercise.

On reflection, what can be said is that in the early 1970s there was a "coalition" of people who had a whole range of complex formal and informal relationships. These included contacts with rural people, sources of funding, the ability to influence powerful people, and so on. Many reports were quickly written and widely distributed. At the time there were plenty of other contending coalitions of S&T that were suggesting that information be collected and used in different ways for different purposes. However, what is important to note is that some individuals (and groups of individuals), wanted to use the information for specific goals at that time. For all those involved this entailed taking political decisions-whether in the sense of institutional politics or broader political decisions. In the case of Professor Yunus, it would appear that he used the RRA information with other knowledge to start a banking programme aimed at the needs of poorer people. His success in conducting this enterprise depended not only on his moral commitment to a certain cause, but also on many other features, such as his position in the academic and planning community and participation in the liberation movement. To ascribe agency or causation to the RRA techniques themselves in isolation from the political and social context in which they were developed and used would be to miss the very essence of understanding the role of tools and methods in processes of social and technical change.

6 The wheat green revolution

One story about the wheat green revolution in Asia is that it represents a classic example of international top-down scientists achieving tremendous results. By the early 1990s it has been estimated that over 95% of all wheat in Asia is accounted for by improved varieties, many of which originated from CIMMYT, the international agricultural centre in Mexico (Byerlee).

One of the other stories about the Green Revolution tells us that it is a classic example of farmer first participatory research and a certain amount of luck. In the 1950s, Dr Norman Borlaug worked very closely with farmers in the Sonora valley of Mexico. He talked regularly with them and took up their cause with the Mexican government. He and others in the "coalition" mobilised funds, political support and agricultural policy, to develop and promote the improved wheat seeds for local farmers in the Sonora valley. There was a very high degree of "participation" in complex arenas. This was informed by and interacted with the political and social power struggles that were taking place at the time. There were other contending coalitions of S&T that disagreed with the wheat coalition (Jennings).

When the wheat seeds were tested in India in the early 1960s, scientists were lucky to find that under Indian conditions they did well. We again find that there was a coalition of scientific, farmer, donor, administrator, and political actors who were committed to the common cause of advocating and promoting a particular type of wheat Science and Technology strategy. One of the biggest debates in India in the mid 1960s was over whether the risk of promoting imported exotic wheat seed was worth taking when the new seeds had only been tested in India for two or three years. (Genetic vulnerability risk comes as a result of a new varieties spreading under "good" conditions, but then failing when pests or diseases become dominant. [3])

While many "participated" in the debates and conflicts in India, those who were against taking the risks lost out. In the whole process there was a large degree of "participation" on the part of "beneficiaries". They were involved as the projects were drawn up, modified, and changed over time. Some of the Punjabi farmers were very dominant in determining the direction and content of pro-wheat agriculture policy. This is a case where many of the tools, techniques and management procedure of the new participatory approaches were used in practice. For example, talks with farmers in the field, group discussions, scientists living and working with farmers, etc. Many of the projects funded by the Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Foundation had features which would now be included in "process" projects. In the promotion of wheat it is crucial to see that the approaches, methods, tools, etc. were selectively used by actors in contesting arenas of S&T. The contests over the alternative histories and the outcomes of the Green Revolution continue. Alternative stories about what happened, when and why, are as powerful in influencing current debates as ever.

7 Ways forward

My concern about the new orthodoxy of participatory approaches/methods/techniques is that it is reducing rather than opening up our understanding of past processes of social and technical change. In addition, it is placing emphasis on techniques as the missing ingredient for development rather than helping us to investigate the more difficult personal, agency and political issues of how methods and techniques are used selectively to gain personal, cultural and political ends.

To address this concern a few measures might be considered:

1 **Question and unpackage the new participation orthodoxy.**

2 **Advocacy and Influence**: Only teach the approaches/methods in a context where contending histories of effective use are placed in a historical, political, cultural and economic context. There may be alternative histories that have to be legitimized. For a particular organisation, this might mean bringing out into the open the "informal" knowledge and folk law of the organisation and reconciling this with the "public" and official images.

3 **Claims to Agency Roles**: Be cautious of the way in which advocates of methods and techniques claim an agency (causational) role in development intervention situations. The pressures on development actors, as a result of the need to show development usefulness, can lead them to make claims to an agency role which is (or could be) contested by other actors. In any area of science it is always difficult to show causation. However, some cultures of science and technology are particularly eloquent and powerful in making knowledge and truth claims. (Harding, Hobart, Long and Long).

4 **Reflective Analysis**: Encourage critical reflective writing on the part of those who have been involved for many years in S&T. Their experience of different types of "participation" are potentially useful. It is important to encourage into the public domain, contending histories and stories about the agency role of different actors in past arenas of technical change. For development workers, the anthropology and sociology of development of organisations is particulary important.

5 **Coalitions and Negotiations**: Recognise that there are contending coalitions of S&T in different arenas. [4] Organisations and individuals have to decide which ones to be part of in different political arenas. Some groups have a comparative advantage to contribute to those coalitions. Actors have to be ready to change in the light of changing circumstances, and be prepared to negotiate with other actors, both "formally and "informally". In a political sense it is important not to alienate coalitions partners by a simplistic, uncritical commitment to the new participatory orthodoxy.

ENDNOTES

1 For example see Chambers, and his three articles in World Development in 1994; ODA, Goold, Eyben, and Wallace.

2 For a discussion of development "escape hatches" see Clay and Schaffer.

3 This was no imagined fear as was demonstrated in 1978 when a large part of the wheat crop in Pakistan went down to rusts as a result of unusual weather conditions and the fact that one or two varieties of Mexican origin dominated the crop.

4 For a more detailed discussion of contending coalitions in science and technology, and the implications of these for research planning and management see Biggs and Smith.

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Participatory Rural Appraisal and South Africa: an interview with Robert Chambers

Robert Chambers (of the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, United Kingdom), recently spent a few days in South Africa. He is a well-known advocate of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), an approach to development that is becoming widely utilised in many countries. Chambers spent two days in Durban where Olive correspondent, Michael Randel had an opportunity to talk with him about PRA generally, and its application in South Africa.

"**Summary.** - Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) describes a growing family of approaches and methods to enable local people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act. PRA has sources in activist participatory research, agroecosystem analysis, applied anthropology, field research on farming systems, and Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA). In RRA information is more elicited and extracted by outsiders: in PRA it is more shared and owned by local people. Participatory methods include mapping and modeling, transect walks, matrix scoring, seasonal calendars, trend and change analysis, well-being and wealth ranking and grouping, and analytical diagramming. PRA applications include natural resources management, agriculture, poverty and social programs, and health and food security. Dominant behaviour by outsiders may explain why it has taken until the 1990s for the analytical capabilities of local people to be better recognised and for PRA to emerge, grow and spread."

Source: *The Origins and Practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal* by Robert Chambers, published in the journal, *World Development*, Vol 22, No 7, pp 953-969, 1993

1 What is the background of PRA? How has it developed into its current form?

PRA comes originally from *Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA)* which developed in the late 1970s as a response to the ineffectiveness and biases of rural development tourism and questionnaire surveys. RRA developed into PRA, and they are now interchangeable in some respects, made possible by new insights and approaches to social anthropology, farm assistant research, agroecosystem analysis and forms of activist, participatory research based on the idea that marginalised people should be able to do their own analysis.

2 How did you become involved with PRA?

My own involvement has been fairly marginal. I happened to be in India at the time it was being developed by a number of other people.

3 PRA is described as being an initiative from the south - is it still true that activists and practitioners from countries in the south are continuing the development of PRA or has that shifted to other parts of the world?

I think the great majority of renovations which are taking place are happening in the south. Sometimes people from the north are involved but it's really something which has evolved in the south - and it has spread from the south to the north. It's been introduced into Norway and other countries of the north by people from the south. So there's been a transfer of Technology, if you like, which has been in the reverse of the "normal" direction. The interesting thing is that its method and approach seems to have worked just the same way in the north as it has in the south.

4 How would you describe PRA? Some people describe it as a set of tools, others talk about it as being an approach and some talk about it as an ideology. Would you choose one of these terms or something different?

Well I would use approach and that's it! The approach actually has a philosophy in it. It's not a philosophy which was thought out by somebody and then translated - it's something which has evolved and grown from the use of the approach and the methods. This is something which is experienced-based rather than intellect-based in origin. People have been trying things out and finding that they work and only then asking why it worked. So again it's a reverse flow from practice to understanding. It has evolved in a process of practice to theory, not from theory to practice.

The description that I sometimes use is that PRA is an approach which provides methods to enable local people to appraise their conditions and to plan and act. The "local people" is an interesting change because it used to be "rural". But there are now many urban applications of PRA.

5 Are the tools being used in other ways? Are people moving into implementing and managing projects led by local people?

I think it's most unfortunate that the word "appraisal" is there. The term evolved through appraisal and analysis by local people. In fact the approach and, to some extent, the methods, are used all the way through planning and through implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

What I think is more important is the philosophy of openness - being self-critical, handing over the stick and embracing error. To try to empower people by helping to start things is to act as a catalyst: but then one has to step back, and try to respond to the rich data which people generate from their own analysis rather than to transfer to people a package of some sort. These aspects apply all the way through the process. Very often, the hope is that it leads to institution building at the village level, or community level, or in a slum or maybe in a rural community - often through the formation of a new organisation which then develops its own capabilities. Hopefully, it can then be left, so that there is a transformation which leaves a community, or group within a community, empowered in a way that they were not before.

6 **There is criticism of PRA which says that participatory methods work fairly well when talking about needs and ranking priorities. But when scarce resources enter the picture, there is a lot more competition and the role of local gatekeepers looms quite large. Is that a particular issue that would come out when one moves into implementation, as resources are made available to sustain the implementation? Does one have to do different kinds of things, to work on different techniques at that stage, to continue the participatory involvement of people? What is the experience in different parts of the world on this issue of power and conflict?**

This is a question which is difficult to answer because every situation is unique and every experience is different. I think that what is really important is sensitivity on the part of any facilitator to what is going on, to changes that are taking place and particularly, to what conflicts may be generated within a community. The facilitator must work sensitively as a convenor, as a negotiator and sometimes even as an intermediary, in managing the outside relationships with certain elements of the community. There are situations where it is extremely difficult for projects to be egalitarian because of the gatekeeper phenomenon, but at the same time most NGOs or facilitators have found ways to deal with this. The gatekeepers themselves can change. It's very easy to imagine that there are "baddies" who are permanently "baddies" but it really isn't so. One of the great challenges is to find ways in which people who are powerful can enjoy giving up power - and there are ways.

We tend to think in zero sum terms about power. That's because we are just taking one dimension, which is really control - being able to make people do things, being able to get things for yourself. We know from experience that there are many other satisfactions in life and that people who are powerful are quite often fearful in one way or another. So if they find ways of handing over power, of being friends with people instead of being enemies, or being equal rather than dominating, they may find that this is satisfying. They may find it leads to peace of mind and well-being of a type which they have not previously experienced. You may think that this is "pie in the sky" idealism - I really don't believe that. I think that it's common experience that these sort of changes can take place in people. There is a threat that we could underestimate this sort of social synergy which is possible when people collaborate

and get on with one another. We shouldn't treat the lack of power as a zero sum at all, but as a positive sign with the possibility of win-win situations occurring. Half of the wins are gained by losing a lot of stress and tension which may be inherent in a powerful situation.

7 An increasing number of people are saying that PRA does not always take into account power issues in society, and gender issues. Does PRA tend to localise itself so much that it loses sight of the macro issues in communities and in societies?

It depends on the facilitators. Some facilitators are not very aware of these aspects and they may ignore them, leading to unfortunate instances. Others are very conscious of these issues and there are a number of ways of handling questions of power and difference within communities - differences related to age, gender, wealth, political affiliation and so on. Being aware of these and managing to handle them in a sensitive and equitable way is part of the skill of being a good facilitator.

8 PRA has really only emerged over the last six or seven years. Is it possible to draw lessons from the global experience? What would you affirm when people are making use of PRA, and what should they warned about?

There have been many abuses. People have been doing research by just rushing into a community and taking a lot of people's time, arousing expectations and rushing out again. There has been an awful amount of bad practice. We all recognise that, and most of the good practitioners are very concerned about the abuses that do occur. Some of the critiques have been "auto-critiques" by northern researchers. I think that most practitioners in the south would agree with the critiques and are aware of the problems they document - we are trying to take care of them now.

The errors that can occur are many. For example, an aid agency may demand that PRA be used in a local context. Then consultants can pop up and say: "We will train in PRA". We have a major problem with people being in too much of a hurry. There is a problem of raising expectations in communities which cannot be met. All of these are behavioral pertaining to the outsiders. Here, the approach in attitude of self-critical awareness, of embracing error, is extremely important because we all make mistakes. We all need to share mistakes and their corrections with other people so that we can help one another to do less badly in our practice.

The PRA label was first used in 1988/1989. Some people say its new, others say there is nothing new. I think that one thing that is obviously new is that a number of issues have come together which were not together before. There have been some methodological innovations in bringing them all together. The main innovation has been that issues which outsiders thought they had to do are now done by local people. There was nothing like this happening on any scale in the mid 1980s,

although bits and pieces were there. There has been a great deal of innovation in terms of the range of issues to which PRA has been applied: urban community development, organisational development, health and poverty programmes, natural resource management of many different sorts and even issues of violence and the welfare of children.

9 You suggested that one of the factors that adds to poor practice is that northern donors and aid agencies require PRA to be done with projects, forcing people to rush things. How does one bring these concerns back to the donor agencies?

People in the north who are working with PRA have a responsibility to try and persuade the donors to be more reasonable and I think we are making some progress. But there are donors that still demand things on a wide scale. The biggest problem here is the pressure for speed. If you look at the reward system within agencies like the World Bank, there is pressure on people to disburse money and that destroys participation. There are two bad examples - one from Sri Lanka and one from Vietnam. In both cases there are good participatory programmes which have been gradually established, where communities do a great deal themselves with rather low inputs from outside and which are sustainable. International aid agencies have introduced new programmes in "Father Christmas" mode, calling them participatory but implementing them in a great rush. And so the people who have been working slowly, suddenly see their neighbouring villages getting lots of "goodies" and it undermines the whole programme. So any evaluation of programmes should include the damage done to other programmes by rushed, so-called participatory approaches. Some of the donors are learning this but these are very early days... I think that practices are beginning to improve but the dangers remain and this makes for a great need to educate, to make it possible for people working in donor agencies to understand the damage done by rushed programmes.

10 How does one deal with that process-product tension in PRA? Obviously participatory approaches tend to be slower. It takes more time to get yourself introduced into a community as a facilitator, to establish groups that you are going to work with and to gain trust. How does that tension hold against the need that donors are expressing, about getting delivery on the ground?

There has to be considerable institutional change in the donor community. This includes NGOs, northern NGOs, and government departments. Reward systems are needed which do not reward disbursement, but which reward the facilitation processes that are good and sustainable. That is a massive change yet the World Bank is moving in that direction. They are now saying that sustainable poverty reduction should be one of the criteria by which staff performance should be judged. I would go further and say it should be the overriding criteria. Disbursement should not be a criterion at all, although I would accept that scale impact can be a criterion.

Sometimes it is necessary to go slowly to start with, so that you can go faster and better, later. A lot of the problem is the pressure to spend in the early stages and the pressure on visiting missions to get loan agreements and grants approved. So the reward systems in the donor agencies are a crucial point. I believe they should change. I don't think most of them realise that.

11 That's a huge politically contested area because obviously the donor agencies are tied up with all sorts of foreign affairs policies - would you comment?

They have less money than they used to have. Some are saying that this may be a good thing. It may actually have some good effects, although I am in favour of increasing the aid

12 In the South African context there are a number of organisations that have formed a network around PRA. What do you think is the best way to increase the number of skilled facilitators in this country, to respond to the increasing demands that are coming in for PRA, without sacrificing the quality? Are there ways to increase the pace of facilitator training and learning, that we can learn about?

Training is one approach - quite a lot of training in PRA takes place. I think sharing between organisations is extremely important and undervalued. If one organisation, NGO or government department is hoping to do something which is participatory in the PRA mode in one place, then invite people from other organisations to come and help, to share and to gain experience from it. Sometimes it is necessary to support a few people within a large organisations who want to work in this mode, so they can rely on alliances. I think lateral alliances, helping one another in different organisations without worrying about boundaries, is a very important element in increasing the number of good facilitators.

13 Regarding opportunities for South-South sharing - As South Africans, should we be learning more from our East African neighbours or from our Asian neighbours?

I think sharing with both East African neighbours and with Latin American neighbours would be useful. After all, when we talk about neighbours, we have a global village. I think sharing and learning across continents as well as within continents is very important, because what happens is that cultures of participation develop and become self-contained. It could happen within a country and it could happen within an organisation. Sharing between organisations, between countries, between continents is one way of loosening this up. Continuously loosening up to be open to change and to innovation is one essential part of the philosophy of practice.

14 Finally, for readers who might be interested in PRA and want to learn more about it, what would be two or three thoughts that you would want to leave with them?

There are lots of injunctions. One of them is "don't rush"; another one is "relax"; another is "embrace error" (which means that you make mistakes to learn from). Try and work with other people and use that experience to learn from it. Don't be upset if you stub your toe at any point. We all have difficulties - some situations are easier and some are more difficult than others. Don't be put off by experiences which are discouraging. Recognise that we are all different and there are some people who find it personally problematic to get into a PRA mode which means sitting down, shutting up, not interfering with people, facilitating, not putting forward our own ideas. Some people find that very difficult! We need to understand and help practitioners to try and stop them wrecking the process, as they can do!

The last thing is a sort of slogan which is: "Start, stumble, self-correct and then share the experience". Some people feel that you need to be trained and then trainer-trained before you can really start doing anything. I don't agree with that. I think that as long as one is critically self-aware and attentive, there is nothing wrong with starting on a small scale.