

Community Participation in Research

**Proceedings of a
colloquium held in
Nairobi, Kenya,
23-27 September 1991**

**ARC HIV
94832**

IDRC - Lib

94932

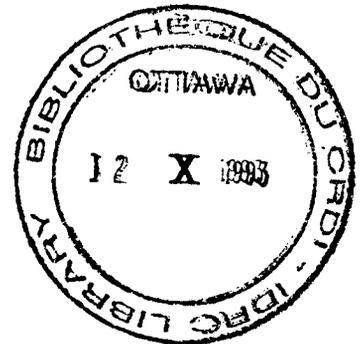
April 1993

Community Participation in Research

Proceedings of a workshop
held in Nairobi, Kenya, 23–27 September 1991

Edited by
Sandra Baldwin and Jenny Cervinkas

Co-sponsored by
the International Development Research Centre (IDRC)
and the University of Nairobi



INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE
Ottawa • Cairo • Dakar • Johannesburg • Montevideo • Nairobi • New Delhi • Singapore

ARCHIV

303(6)

B 3

Material contained in this report is produced as submitted and has not been subjected to peer review or editing by IDRC Public Information Program staff. Unless otherwise stated, copyright for material in this report is held by the authors. Mention of a proprietary name does not constitute endorsement of the product and is given only for information.

ISBN 0-88936-677-2



Printed on recycled paper

Contents

Foreword v

Executive Summary

Jenny Cervinkas and Sandra Baldwin 1

Working Groups 13

Tools for Community Participation: Learning from
the PROWESS Experience 20

Participatory Research: An Alternative Approach
Jenny Cervinkas 26

Rapid Assessment Procedures: The East African Experience
David Nyamwaya 42

Participatory Rural Appraisal for Sustainable
Resource Management in Rural Kenya
Isabella L. Asamba, Julius Muinde, and J. Ayieko 48

Sudan Reforestation and Antidesertification Project
Diana de Treville 53

Assessment of Decentralized Health Services Using LQAS
Joseph J. Valadez 65

Participatory Village Development Planning in
Morogoro, Tanzania
Sizya Lugeye 73

Participatory Research in an Academic Setting
Sizya Lugeye 85

Problem Areas in PRA and Related Methodologies
Diana de Treville 88

Appendices

1. Participatory Research Bibliography 93
2. Additional Resources 99
3. Evaluation Feedback 105
4. Workshop Agenda 109
5. Participants 113

Problem Areas in PRA and Related Methodologies

*Diana de Treville, Program Officer, Africa-Middle East
Division of Winrock International, Winrock International Institute for
Agricultural Development, Nairobi, Kenya*

Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and related approaches¹ (RA, RRA, PTD, RAP, FSR, etc.) aim to be client/farmer-centred; that is, to involve clients systematically (farmers and others) at key stages in the problem identification, technology development extension process. Clients play an active and central role in the identification, development, testing, and dissemination of particular technologies and interventions. This methodology is often associated with NGO (nongovernmental organizations) project work in Africa and Asia, but increasing members of international and national research institutions, university staff, and ministerial and other government agencies and donors are also experimenting.

In contradistinction to classic transfer of technology (TOT) models, these approaches generally begin by working with clients in developing an understanding of local conditions, in other words, working with local clients to construct a "model of" local reality from the client's perspective. Finally, they seek to introduce or modify specific practices or technologies to meet local demands and to mesh with local conditions.

As with all research and development (R&D) methodologies, there are difficulties associated with PRA and related approaches. Some result from incorrect use of the approach, others are linked to the current stage of development of the approach and the corresponding need to continue working out and refining both tools and methods. A few of these difficulties are discussed in the following.

¹There is a profusion of acronyms now being used in conjunction with participatory approaches to research and development. Some of the most common are rapid appraisal (RA), rapid rural appraisal (RRA), participatory technology development (PTD), rapid assessment procedures (RAP), and farming systems research (FSR).

Difficulties

Concerning the myth of self-containment, first, one needs to ask "bottom up" to what? The relevance of the question lies in the commonly found assumption that "people-oriented" approaches can "do it all" and require no, or few, linkages with either (a) higher-order (public or private sector) entities such as research institutions, universities, national extension, and other agencies; or (b) lateral linkages to local extension, marketing, research, or other relevant entities.

Second, methods and tools associated with the approach, if not knowledgeably and sensitively used, can overemphasize the ability of local people to define and prioritize comprehensively their own problems in ways that can be realistically addressed through project activities. It may be assumed by users of PRA and related approaches that local communities can identify their needs and prioritize them fully and correctly and that, based on plans of action developed out of the PRA exercises, local participants will be able to proceed with implementation, or will at least know where to go next, for assistance. Thus, that they do not need, or need little, ongoing assistance from the outside by research, extension, and other public- or private-sector services either during the problem identification/solving stages or afterward during the implementation stages. Thus, the myth of the self-contained local village or community is perpetuated.

This conclusion, however, misses an important point. By definition, the process of development implies increased and more regularized linkages by local villages and communities with broader, more capital-intensive markets and other institutional processes as well as with professionals with specialized training. Development thus implies transformations from segmented markets and partly monetized economies to increased integration into regional, national, and international economies, together with the development of systems of legal and policy checks and balances. It also implies increasing differentiation of professional and technical skills, and thus increasing use of "technical" specialists in all areas of society and economy – in agriculture, health, education, administration, and the like. In part, this is what the "discovery" (or recent creation) of a world economy is all about (Wallerstein, I. 1974. *The modern world system: Capitalism, agriculture and the origins of the European world-economy in the sixteenth century.* Academic Press, New York. 410 p.)

Thus, neither communities nor NGOs, nor government organizations can "do it all." Failure to treat this issue of micro-macro linkages, as well as the issue of lateral linkages, may be one of the most problematic aspects of PRA, "farmer-first" or "bottom-up" approaches to R&D. Put another way, empowering end-users to define their condition, diagnose key constraints, and develop community action plans to address these constraints, is but the *first phase* of a

PRA-based R&D process and is generally incomplete if it is not systematically integrated or coordinated with complementary R&D activities that extend this process and develop it.

Indigenous Knowledge and Action

Indigenous systems of knowledge and action do need more recognition and systematic attention. However, just as transfer-of-technology approaches can lead to difficulties by their lack of client involvement, so can participatory technology development (PTD) models take a pendulum swing too far in the other direction. This creates, in reverse, the same degree of difficulties that can be associated with the TOT approach. In the case of PRA, this can lead to an overemphasis on indigenous knowledge, indigenous farming, or natural resource management systems, etc., as models for development. PRA becomes a reverse image of classic TOT models that brush aside the very same indigenous system in favour of supply-driven technology development and transfer approaches that marginalize or disempower clients as well as make the environmental impact of the technology less sustainable.

Timing and Nature of Client Involvement

Participatory approaches can lead to the assumption that direct client involvement and concurrence is necessary at all stages of technology development. This is not the case. In fact, what clients may perceive as a major problem may in reality be addressed through more efficient and locally sustained methods. For example, a locally perceived lack of water can perhaps be satisfied by managing water resources through plowing and planting configurations, water harvesting, or the like. The key factor is not simply promoting direct client involvement and empowerment at field level. It is also a question of seeing that the local perspective is well understood by researchers and others involved at different stages of R&D activities. This perspective then needs to be taken "back" with them to their laboratories, government offices, policy centres, development institutes, NGOs, and the like.

Specialized Skills and Resources

Just as some TOT advocates sometimes ignore or exhibit outright hostility to traditional or indigenous technical and socioeconomic forms and processes, so too can PRA advocates spurn or down play the specialized skills and resources of R&D specialists and institutions. This not only obstructs the flow of knowledge and methods in both directions but also encourages the notion found among some institutions that "we can do it all ourselves."

Other Difficulties

There are other difficulties that can weaken the use of PRA. For example, there may be a temptation to reduce "the community" to a homogeneous grouping separated at best only by considerations of gender. Questions such as how stratification is determined and maintained by locals and the attributes associated with it can form part of the most important data that a good PRA and related follow-up provides. Similarly, PRAs that are not implemented and followed up sensitively can miss critical aspects of the local context coming up with one dimensional and static facts rather than with an understanding of local processes.

PRAs, because they are easily conducted, may be associated with a certain lack of critical rigour. There is a danger of making oversimplified decisions and judgments in the name of the community, without giving the matter objective and thorough scrutiny. Being easily conducted, PRAs may be implemented by persons who have not yet had sufficient hands-on experience in leading such an exercise. Associated with this difficulty may be an implicit antiscientific or anti-intellectual bias; a notion that minimal training and "hands-on" work can "do it all." In some cases, this is true. But the reality must be judged on a case-by-case basis.

Finally, a PRA can raise local expectations unrealistically, especially because of the degree of local involvement that it generates. This can make future project work with the same people extremely difficult. The ideology associated with "participation" may backfire if misused, being transformed into politically charged fodder for use in ways that undermine the real intent of the exercise.

Need for Critical Reflection

The discussion thus far may appear overly critical or to suggest that one must employ either TOT or PRA. This is not, however, the case. In this discussion, the two have been analytically separated to clarify major differences, both strengths and weaknesses, especially with reference to PRA methods. Indeed, taken separately, each tends to be incomplete; supply-driven, classic, top-down TOT approaches need better linkages with end-users and their indigenous contexts, just as demand-driven, bottom-up PRA approaches need better linkages with the community of research institutions, universities, and other institutions and processes.

Thus, it would be irresponsible, or at the least naive, to shift direction toward PRA approaches to the extent that the most positive aspects of TOT approaches to R&D could (or would) not be incorporated. Conversely, for those

trained primarily in a TOT approach, it would surely be self-defeating not to incorporate into this approach the most appropriate aspects of PRA in addressing a particular R&D issue. The current trend in some research and training institutions is to do just that, and an emerging emphasis on "retooling" their researchers and staff through training courses in on-farm and on-site research that stress PRA and similar methods can be seen.

The issue of technology development and of developing reliable and cost-effective delivery systems is a difficult, costly, and time-consuming process that is pot-holed with failed or misguided attempts. The complexities involved are enormous. In the process of unravelling these complexities, there is always the temptation to grab for a new method, a new approach, a new model for R&D. As the "new kid on the block," PRA is similarly being grabbed for, often without the kind of rigorous assessment and judicious use and associated analysis that it, or any methodology, requires.

By critically reflecting on some of the difficulties associated with PRA, both researchers and developmentalists stand to use it, together with their clients, in more informed and productive ways, thereby enhancing the many benefits that are associated with this approach.