
UNIT 8 PRACTICAL ACTION

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8.1 INTRODUCTION

In the Unit 7 we have highlighted the role of women's participation in community decision-making as case study in Pakistan. Also we have discussed that they are sound managers of natural resources and as such they are close to nature. In the present unit we will discuss the evaluation of participatory appraisal with a view of necessity and utility of rapid rural appraisal.

Power and poverty are polarised at the extremes, with a global over class and a global underclass. An evolving consensus converges on well-being, livelihood, capabilities, equity and sustainability as interlinked ends and means. Huge opportunities exist to make a difference for the better. The challenge is personal, professional and institutional, to frame a practical paradigm for knowing and acting and changing how we know and act, in a flux of uncertainty and change. In this unit we will examine reversals and reality, practical appraisal for outsiders, field practice and ethics, reversals in learning, and putting the first last.

Objectives

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- explain reversals, with shifts of orientation, activity and relationships away from past normal professional practice, six stand out: from closed to open; from individual to groups; from verbal to visual; from measuring to comparing; from higher to lower; and from reserve and frustration to rapport and fun;
- discuss PRA and the evolving paradigm implication and demand changes, which are institutional, professional and personal;
- describe common and serious errors of practice and ethics;
- list ways of tackling problems by improving rural development tourism; and by developing and using techniques for rapid rural appraisal; and
- explain putting the last first means reversals in learning.

8.2 THE CHALLENGE

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) confronts the dominance of uppers. A well coordinated PRA generates synergies; the three pillars – methods, behaviour and attitudes; sharing and partnership-reinforce each other; and participatory training sets the style for participation in the field and adoption of the behaviour and principles of PRA, like the methods, can spread and catalyse other good changes. Empowerment is achieved through identifying the weak and enabling them to gain skills, confidence

and knowledge. They then analyse, monitor and evaluate, make presentations, become consultants and trainers, organise themselves, and negotiate the resolution of conflicts.

The PRA and the evolving paradigm imply and demand changes, which are institutional, professional and personal.

- Institutional change needs a long-term perspective, with patient and painstaking learning and reorientation.
- Professional change needs new concepts, values, methods, and behaviours, and new curricula and approaches to learning.

Personal change and commitment have primacy, and can be sought experientially. Learning to change, and learning to enjoy change, are fundamental to PRA.

The Challenge presented here is to the powerful, i.e. to the structures of power. The personal, professional and institutional changes entail reversals of much that prevails as normal. The changes are radical. For they are not just to put the last first, which is altruism but to put the first last, which is disempowerment.

Reversals would be absurd if pushed to anarchy, dismantling the state, abolishing bureaucracy, removing all rules and controls. They would be improbable if uppers have always to lose. They would be immoral if driven to extremes, which made lowers into new uppers. But what is sought is not revolution. It is reorientation, retaining some hierarchy while loosening constraints and freeing actors. The final theme is that reversals are sane, not improbable but practicable.

The experience and philosophy of PRA are part of this, and a source of learning, insight and inspiration. PRA has spread with alarming speed, across boundaries of disciplines, professions, organisations, communities, countries, and continents. In doing so, it has repeatedly confronted the relations of uppers and lowers. Issues have been raised concerning the concepts, values, beliefs, methods, behaviour, and cultures.

8.3 FIELD PRACTICE AND ETHICS

Many errors occur in field practice. The following are some of the common and serious errors of practice and ethics:

Dominating

Dominant and superior behaviour is the most widespread error. We start with unavoidable remarks and signals, regarding colour, sex, language, accent and age that complicate the action. Dominant behaviour includes verbal, through lecturing, interrupting, criticising, contradicting, preaching, pontificating and putting forward ones own ideas, telling lowers what they ought to think, and overbearing; and non-verbally, through dress, body language, facial expressions. Dominant and superior behaviour damages participatory processes.

Rushing

The work 'rapid' may have been needed in the late 1970s and early 1980s to offset the long-drawn-out learning of traditional social anthropology and counter that of the large-scale questionnaire. RRA came to be seen as a short cut. But by the late 1980s rapid has become a liability. In practice, PRA facilitators often, take too little time; they fail to explain who they are, why they have come, what they can do, and what they cannot do; they are in a hurry to get on with the methods, not taking time to earn trust and gain rapport.

Routines and ruts

Repetition breeds regular habits. There are many ways the local people can map models, do transects, diagram, rank, and score. But rigidity easily sets in, with the idea that there is only one right way. PRA facilitators in any organisation, or even region, have shown signs of slopping into unvarying standard practices, overlooking other options and missing the creativity of inventive interaction.

Gender and upper-to-upper bias

The community members who often interact with visitors are usually men. Under the pressure of time, and for convenience, it is easier to encounter and consult them, or only a few others. Unless carefully offset, the familiar bias to elite in, will manifest itself. If it is offset by a generalised and populist concern and gender-blindness and the neglect of women and girls. Differences between gender, groups, ages and occupations are easily overlooked. Those left out are the women, the poor, children, those of inferior status, the marginal, the destitute, the disabled and the refugees.

Taking without giving

PRA methods have frequently been used for ‘extractive’ research. Outsiders can often induce local people to give up time to processes. The lower, the analysts feel, may enjoy and be empowered by discovering their own abilities and knowledge. But as with all research involving local people, there are ethical questions about unequal relationship and the cost of people’s time.

Arousing unmet expectations

PRA methods and processes can engage local people for long periods in intense and creative activities. These lead to expectations of future action, especially where appraisal and planning are involved. While this is not a new experience to most communities and not peculiar to PRA, it remains an issue of serious concern and self-questioning among facilitators.

Moreover there are problems like providing training for financially challenged small NGOs overcoming the language elitism of English, French, Spanish and Portuguese; changing donor and government procedures; networking and sharing of South-South experiences; approaches and methods for training in behaviour and attitudes; and above all moving from a ‘doing phase’ to a ‘being phase’.

The writing on PRA issues by academics point out that PRA methods are used only briefly and neglect the process as such. Many experienced practitioners are striving to achieve another reality of PRA, that is inventive through interaction, practical in application, rigorous through self-criticism, and empowering through process.

8.4 PRACTICAL ACTION

Practical appraisal for outsiders

While academics are inclined towards longer, unhurried appraisals, the practitioners need instant information to meet the deadlines of seasons, budgets, committee meetings, and ministers. Shortage of time is likely to contribute to the antipoverty bias of rural development tourism and to careless and misleading investigation. These problems of practical appraisal can be tackled in two ways:

- by improving rural development tourism; and
- by developing and using techniques for rapid rural appraisal.

8.4.1 Tactics for Tourists

For the outsiders who are concerned with rural poverty and who practice rural development tourism, measures can be taken to offset the anti-poverty tendencies.

Urban, tarmac and roadside biases can be countered by areas by visiting not only project but also other areas and by non-scheduled stops; by deliberately seeking out the poorer people, by meeting women, taking time to see those who are ill and could not be at the clinic, by asking about those who have left or who have died; by introspection to see the limitations of professional conditioning, by learning from other disciplines, by being observant, and by asking open ended questions.

Spending longer and going further

In many ways the poorer people are at the end of the line. They take the longest to reach; they are the last to speak; they are the least organised and the least articulate. They often keep a low profile. While some are migrants, women often hide from male visitors. It is after the courtesies, after the planned programme, after the tourist has ceased to be a novelty, that contact becomes easier.

Being unimportant

The cavalcade of cars, the clouds of dust, the reception committees and the protracted speeches of the VIPs generate well-known problems. By contrast, the visitor who comes by bicycle or on foot fits more easily and disturbs and distracts less. Unscheduled visits and avoiding the impression of having influence over the benefits, which a community might receive, reduce the dangers of misleading responses and impressions.

8.4.2 Rapid Rural Appraisal

Questionnaires, surveys and statistical analysis limit the investigations. The realities of rural deprivation are often missed. The challenge is to question the conventions of academic purity and find better approach. Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) is one of the techniques that is cost-effective for outsiders.

These techniques have been widely practiced and recognise the trade-off between the cost of information gathering, and its quantity, accuracy, relevance, timeliness and actual use. Using 'dirty' as a term meaning not cost-effective, they try to avoid both the 'quick-and-dirty' of incompetent rural development tourism and the pathological 'long-and-dirty' of some questionnaire surveys.

The opportunity presented by RRA is the avoiding of lengthy methods to save the budget and time setting. The techniques of RRA that are carefully developed and used, can raise awareness and understanding of rural poverty, and improve actions to counter it.

8.5 REVERSALS AND REALITY

Most of those who have innovated the PRA have been practitioners, concerned with what works and what will work better. They have been searching not for new theories or principles but for new and better ways of learning and of relating to local people. For them, the power and utility of RRA and PRA, undertaken with rapport and self-critical rigour, are common experience and empirical facts: they know that they work, and can lead to better local development. But the "why" questions remain, leaving issues to explanation.

At the practical level, much of the explanation can be found in shifts of orientation, activity and relationships that are different from the past normal professional practice. Six stand out- from closed to open; from individual to groups; from verbal to visual; from measuring to comparing; from higher to lower; and from reserve and frustration to rapport and fun.

From Closed to Open

The pervasive shift or reversal is from closed to open. This can be expressed as form etic to emic, from the knowledge, categories and values of outsider professionals to those of insider local people. The reversal is like a turning inside out, and expression and presentation of inner personal, family, community and local realities to outsiders and the outside world. These are not known to the outsiders in advance. While questionnaires, interviews, semi-structured interviews are more open, PRA adopts mapping and diagramming. In a semi-structured interview there can be a checklist for reference, but not a pre-set sequence of questions; and a value can be set on probing, on pursuing leads, on serendipity. In conversations there can be greater freedom and equality. In PRA methods such as participatory mapping and modelling, matrix ranking and scoring, the insiders can not only feel free to express their knowledge and values but are also encouraged and enabled to do so. The shift is from pre-set and closed to participatory and open.

From Measuring to Comparing

Normal professional training is to make absolute measurements. So if trends or changes are to be identified, or conditions compared between households or between places, measurements are made either at different times, of different things or in different places. Schoolteachers often value correct measurements more than independent judgement in their pupils. Our preoccupations with numbers drive us to ask 'how much.' For sensitive subjects like income, such questions usually lead to suspicion and generate misleading data.

Often, there is a need for practical purposes through values, which are relative and not absolute. Comparisons without measurements have advantages: involving reflection and judgements, they are easier and quicker to express; they can be elicited for trends and changes without formal baseline data; and they are less sensitive, as has been shown by wealth and well-being ranking, and by seasonal analysis – how income comparisons are easier to gauge and less threatening to reveal than are absolute figures. Comparisons, as with matrix ranking and scoring, can, in a short time, elicit complex and detailed information and judgements of value which are inaccessible by other methods. Moreover, trends and comparisons lend themselves to visual sharing, with all its potential gains in participation, cross-checking and progressive approximation and learning; comparing is usually easier, quicker, cheaper and less sensitive than measuring.

From Individual to Group

Normal investigations stress individual interviews. Professionals' need for numbers is met by questionnaire surveys; individual or household schedules generate commensurable statistical data. In PRA, discussions with individuals can and do take place, but there is relatively more attention to groups and participatory analysis by groups.

Group dynamics can present problems, such as dominance by one person or an influential lineage, faction or ethnic group, or by men. Facilitators do have a repertoire of ways of handling this; by requesting for a separate discussion; social mapping and diagramming to learn about social groups; and sequences of meetings with separate groups, often with women. Personal commitment and sensitivity on the part of facilitators is the most important factor. How best to convene and facilitate groups remains an area for learning and invention.

At the same time, the advantages of groups have been undervalued. Typically, group members have an overlapping spread of knowledge, which covers a wider field than that of any single person. Groups can also generate numbers with observable mutual checking through self-surveys, whether verbal or visual.

Contrary to many outsiders' beliefs, sensitive subjects are sometimes more freely discussed in groups, for example individuals would not wish to discuss some topics alone with a stranger. Several sources have indicated that village women in parts of India, freely discuss intimate sexual matters in groups. Among Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, it was found that with participatory methods in groups, refugees shared sensitive information about illegal activities more willingly and accurately than in the conventional context of participant-observation and semi-structured interviewing.

From Verbal to Visual

With traditional questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviewing, most of the transfer or exchange of information is verbal, and often one-to-one. This contrasts with participatory mapping and diagramming where the information shared is visual, and often created as a group activity.

With visual analysis, there is a change in the relationships and processes. The topic and method may be determined, or at least suggested, by the outsider, but the outsider's role is not to extract through questions but to initiate a process. The outsider is a convenor and facilitator. The insiders are factors and analysts and determine the agenda, categories and details. Information is built up cumulatively and cross-checking is often spontaneous. If a dozen women diagram a census map of the small community, showing women, men, children, handicapped persons, and so on, not everything may be known by any one woman, but each item may be known by several of them. Groups often build up collective and creative enthusiasm, fill in gaps left by others, and add and correct detail. Debate can be lively because of each member's participation. The visuals then present an agenda for discussion, and it is the visuals rather than the people that are interviewed.

Visual methods can also be empowering for those who are weak, disadvantaged and not literate. In the ability to create and understand symbols, three types stand out: alphabetical literacy, meaning reading and writing; visual literacy, the way people understand pictures; and diagram literacy, the ability to understand maps and diagrams. Many local people may not understand the written work, and have difficulty with pictures, maps and diagrams brought from outside. But almost all local people can map and diagram for themselves. In the words of a Zimbabwean villager: 'one does not need to be able to write in order to be able to translate thoughts into concrete actions'. The faculty of being able to map and diagram may include all except some of the handicapped in community, without privileging those who are literate. So it is easier for almost all to take part, and understand maps and diagrams, which are prepared by them.

Visual diagramming can then be an equaliser. All those who participate—children, women, men, poor, rich illiterate, literate – can similarly understand what is being shown. Describing the experience of the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation (NIF) in the UK, Tony Gibson (1992) has pointed out that in conventional processes 'the talkers nearly always win.' But with a physical model of their neighbourhood, timid people can put down their ideas. Often people who put down an idea wait for others to talk first about it, and then say themselves, "I agree with you". Similarly participatory mapping and matrices by marginalised groups enable them to express their preferences and proprieties.

Good facilitation in participatory mapping and modelling often requires that the facilitator hand over the stick. The action is with those who map and diagram. After the early stages, outsiders have to keep quiet, observe the process, and not interrupt. In the NIF experience, roles are reversed. Instead of professionals presenting their plans for residents' comments,

"the residents are consulting the professionals to establish the range of options, the limitations, the possibilities – so that they can reach their own informed conclusions. The experts are on tap, not on top."

Table 8.1: Verbal and visual compared

	Verbal (interview, conversation...)	Visual (map, model, matrix, diagram...)
Outsider's mode and role	Probing investigator	Facilitating initiator and catalyst
Insider's mode and style	Reactive respondent	Creative analyst and presenter
Investigative style	Extractive	Performative
Insider's awareness of outsider	High	Low
Eye contact	High	Low
The medium and materials are those of:	Outsider	Insider
Detail influenced by:	Etic categories	Emic categories
Information flow	Sequential	Cumulative
Accessibility of information to others	Low Transient	High Semi-Permanent
Initiative for cross-checking	Outsider	Insider
Ownership of information	Appropriated by outsider	Shared; can be owned by insider
Utility for complex analysis	Low	High

The shift from verbal to visual is one of the emphasis in PRA. Maps and diagrams are part of the repertoire. They can be facilitated on their own early in interactions. They can also be part of semi-structured interviews or conversations, introduced as a means for local people to express, share and analyse their knowledge. They then present an agenda for discussion. Interviewing the matrix,' and interviewing the diagram' have not only proved the most fruitful, but also the most neglected stages of a discussion and diagramming process. With the visual, a whole new set of questions and discussions arise which do not happen in the verbal'. The PRA experience suggests that combinations of visual and verbal, with early primacy to the visual, can help to bring in those normally marginalised, and can express much of the complexity and diversity of local realities, and that verbal and visual combined express more than either on its own.

From Higher to Lower

In both medium of expression there is a shift from higher to lower. In the medium of expression, practitioners of PRA have debated on the relative advantages of paper or ground for participatory visual analysis. One view has been that in mainly literate cultures, as in China, Jamaica, Sri Lanka and the UK, it is appropriate for diagramming and analysis from the beginning to be on paper. Some have argued, before the experience, that the ground is an insult to people who are educated, and that it is patronising for a facilitator to encourage the use of the ground. Cultures and conditions vary but to date these reservations have proven to be unfounded. Ground and paper both have pros and cons, as summarised in the Table 8.2.

Table 8.2: The advantages of ground and of paper

Ground	Paper
Democratic, less eye contact and dominance	Permanent
Inclusive, more can take part	Portable
Friendly for marginalised people, non-literates, women etc.	Easy to copy
Easy to alter and add	Easy to display
Size less limited	Can be updated
Wide range of materials	Usable for participatory monitoring and evaluation
Can be 3 dimensional	More authoritative (with officials, policy-makers etc)
Fun and creative	
Local ownership	

Note: Advantages only are given, as the advantages of one are the disadvantages of the other.

Most importantly, the ground is an equaliser. The media and materials are often those of insiders – soil, stones, sand, seeds as counters, sticks as measures, vegetation and so on. Eye contact, and insider’s awareness of the outsider are low. It is elitist, valuable and linked with literacy. All the same, the non-literate can use paper and pens to map and diagram. In Pakistan, in March 1992, several non-literate women drew systems diagrams of their farms and households with internal and external flows and linkages. For people who do not read and write, the ground is usually better. It belongs to all and is costless, familiar, fun and easy to alter. Paper empowers those who hold the pen; the ground empowers those who are weak, marginalised and illiterate.

Personal relationships differ when analysis takes place on a wall, a table or the floor. In the Visualisation In Participatory Programmes (VIPP) approach, much of the participation is through writing on cards. These are grouped and ordered, usually pinned or stuck on a board or wall. The wall has advantages of visibility and items on it have some permanence. But with analysis on wall, there is a tendency of one person to take over, making the process slow and limiting the participation. The process can even become tedious.

In contrast, the ground is freer and faster. When cards are placed on the floor, they are easier to rearrange and more accessible to all. It is for all to intervene, by work or action, to express their reality, with the flexibility of moving items. Participants tend to think much more about what is being expressed than about who is expressing it.

Sequences are often the key. In terms of medium, the advantages of both ground and paper can be captured by starting on the ground and then redrawing on paper. So a ground map can be redrawn on paper, and cards can be sorted and ordered on the ground. The maps and cards alike can be stuck up and displayed more visibly on a wall.

From Reserve to Rapport

The shifts and reversals outlined so far generate and reinforce a further reversal, that of relations, from suspicion and reserve to confidence and rapport, and often from frustration to fun.

With outsider-insider interactions, there is a scale of formality-informality, from the short-term structured interview with questionnaire, through the semi-structured

interview with checklist of subtopics to the open-ended conversation. With interviews, and sometimes also conversations, outsiders ask questions and probe. The outsider maintains control, and largely determines the agenda and the categories. The interviewee responds, conscious of an interaction with a person who is seeking information.

RRA and more so PRA stress the process of gaining rapport. An initial reserve of local people towards outsiders is common. Their responses are often prudent in order to avoid loss and hopefully gain benefits. Some social anthropologists have expressed skepticism about the relative speed with which rapport can be established. For their deeper and more fully emic understanding, there is a case for more lengthy immersion. But the experience with both RRA and PRA is that when outsiders behave well and methods are participatory, good rapport can come quickly. This is paradoxically through outsiders taking time, showing respect, explaining who they are, answering questions, being honest and interested, and asking to be taught, being taught, and learning.

Some earlier participatory research also suffered from being long-drawn out. The pilot project in appropriate technology for grain storage in Bwakira Chini village in Tanzania involved an outside team living in the village for eight weeks. This was considered a short period of dialogue. But even so the application of the dialogical methodology was time-consuming and tiresome.

The contrast with RRA is sharp. Professional conversations are mutually stimulating and interesting. Of cattle keepers in Nigeria who ranked browse plants, Wolfgang Bayer (1988: 8) wrote that: 'Pastoralist were very willing to share their knowledge about browse plants with us and appeared to enjoy the interviews as much as we did'. Reflecting on the comparison between a topic RRA and a questionnaire survey on forestry and fuel wood in Sierra Leone, Andy Inglis (1991: 40) wrote that the RRA approach enabled respondents 'to enjoy a professional chat about their livelihood or kitchen habits, instead of being subjected to an intrusive questionnaire.'

With PRA approaches and methods, the contrast is usually even sharper. Data are not collected by outsiders, but expressed and analysed by insiders. What is shared is often unexpected and at times fascinating. For insiders, the creative act of presentation and analysis is usually a pleasure, and a process thinking through learning and expressing what they know and want. In matrix scoring for trees or varieties of crop, using the ground and seeds, it is a common experience for the outsider to become redundant as the process takes off. People debate and score on their own, oblivious of the outsiders.

The process is often enjoyed, and found interesting and useful. Quite often, dissatisfied with their first attempt at a map, local people scrub it out and start again with concentrated enthusiasm. Again and again, villagers in India have lost themselves in mapping and modelling, and outsiders have to learn not to interview, not to interrupt, and not to disturb their creativity. There is pride in what has been made, and pleasure in presenting it to others.

SAQ 1

- i) Explain the following in your own words.
 - a) Gender and Upper to Upper bias.
 - b) Practical action.
 - ii) Bring the distinction between reversals and reality.
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8.6 REVERSALS IN LEARNING

Putting the last first means reversals in learning. The objectives of the rural developers include 'We must educate the farmers' and 'We must uplift the rural poor'. Outsiders have first to learn from farmers and from the rural poor. But many outsiders are

hindered from such learning by their educational attainment, urban status, and roles as bearers and dispensers of modern knowledge. The staff working in rural areas distance themselves from rural people, showing their separate style and standing through clothing, shoes, vehicle, office, briefcase, documents, and manner and speech. Hierarchy, authority and superiority prevent the learning 'from below'. Knowledge of one sort perpetuates ignorance of another.

Conventional learning through formal schooling, university courses, and staff training can contribute to these reversals through changes in syllabus. One example is to illuminate the problems and rationality of small farmers through insights. There are two methods, which deserve to be developed and included in courses and training.

The first of these is learning directly from rural people, trying to understand their knowledge systems and eliciting their technical knowledge. This is still rare as a part of education and training. The second is trying to experience the world as poor and weak person. The problem here is to enable professionals to step over and see and feel the world from the other end. The humanistic psychotherapies may have methods to offer for this, but their application to the training of rural development professionals has so far been little.

a) Sitting, Asking and Listening

Sitting, asking, and listening are as much an attitude and a method. Sitting implies lack of hurry, patience, and humility; asking implies that the outsider is the student; and listening implies respect and learning. Many of the best insights come this way. Relaxed discussions open up the unexpected.

The pooling of knowledge and mutual stimulation of a small casual group can be an excellent source of insight. The composition of a group can also be designed for a purpose. It is not only the outsider who holds initiative or who gains, but all who take part can influence the direction of the discussion, and be absorbed in learning. Evening meetings may be ideal, going on into the night, when the outsider's presence is less obtrusive and distorted responses less likely.

b) Learning from the Poorest

The poorest are usually considered to be the most ignorant, those from whom there is least to learn. But how much do outsiders know about how the poorest cope? To enable the poorest to do better, one has to understand how they manage at present. And on this the poorest are the experts – they know more than the ignorant outsiders who have not bothered to try to find out.

Learning from the poorest is rarely any part of anti-poverty programmes and projects; yet it is a key to enabling them to improve their lot.

c) Learning Indigenous Technical Knowledge

There are many ways for outsiders to learn from the rural people. There is a comprehensive approach of a social anthropologist concerned with knowledge systems, including concepts and patterns of thought. There are less complicated approaches including compiling the glossary of local terms, and games, quantification and ranking.

d) Joint R and D

Other reversals in learning can come from the location and mode of research. The strong reasons for carrying out much agricultural and agricultural engineering research jointly with farmers in their fields and under their conditions are now widely accepted. Research conducted outside the rural environment (on a research station, in a laboratory) often entails heroic simplifications or gross distortion. In the past, much agricultural research undertaken without the small farm and the small farm family has had the wrong priorities and has generated misleading

‘findings’. There are, to be sure, some stages or forms of research, which require stringent controls or special equipment, which only a research station or laboratory can provide. But professional biases weigh heavily towards working in research station and laboratory instead of in field condition.

e) Learning by Working

For many outsiders, there is scope for learning by physically working with farmers and others, and doing what they do.

Putting the first last

This means putting first those who are poor, physically weak, isolated, vulnerable and powerless, and their priorities and the things that matter to them. Norman Uphoff (1992) has taken this further making a case for rehabilitation of the concept of altruism and generous behaviour. He has identified a continuum of orientations toward self and others (Table 8.3) from aggressive behaviour (destructive of others), through selfish behaviour (in which one’s gain is another’s loss), to generous behaviour (in which all gain) and finally sacrificial behaviour (which is self-destructive). The generous or altruistic person gains either from the satisfaction, which is seen to be inherently good. Putting the last first is generous or altruistic behaviour in either or both of these senses. It has a positive-sum orientation in which all can gain.

Table 8.3: Continuum of orientations toward self and others

(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)
Aggressive Behaviour <i>(destructive of others)</i>	Selfish behaviour <i>(zero-sum orientation)</i>	Generous behaviour <i>(positive-sum orientation)</i>	Sacrificial behaviour <i>(self-destructive)</i>

Source: Uphoff, 1992:343

Disempowerment as loss

Putting the first last goes further and confronts issues of power. With altruism and generous behaviour, the first remain first: uppers remain uppers. Putting the first last is more radical. For it means that those who are uppers and powerful step down, disempower themselves, and empower others. It means putting the first (oneself) last, or at least lower. It implies that uppers have to give up something and make themselves vulnerable. It sounds like sacrificial behaviour, a zero-sum in which uppers, the powerful, have to lose.

That such loss could be accepted on any scale may seem improbable. In personal terms, it looks contrary to normal self-regard and self-protection. Ideologically, it conflicts with the pervasive ethos of the neo-liberal market and of the materialism and global greed of the mid-1990s. The very language we use expresses a zero-sum mindset. It treats power as a commodity where one’s gain is another’s loss: it is something we lose, surrender, give up, are stripped of, or hand over. If we are socialised into wanting more of every thing, then we want more power.

Professionally, reversals can also be seen as threat. For professional uppers, ‘lowers can do it’, and to imply loss of self-esteem, status and control. To recognise and privilege lowers realities can seem a Pandora’s box – the expression of complex and multiple realities. Criteria, categories and demands might cause the simple standard bricks of central citadels to crumble. The fear of freedom afflicts not only fascists but also daunt those whose dominance is grounded in denials of democratic diversity.

Politically and personally, those who are most reluctant to give up power are often those who have done wrong. They fear exposure, punishment and revenge, and feel that to protect themselves they must retain control. They are also victims of their own

wrongdoing, trapped by fear of retribution for what they have done and been. For them, disempowerment is dangerous. The challenge is to find ways uppers can free themselves from these traps.

Disempowerment as gain: effectiveness, liberation, fulfillment and fun

Fortunately, disempowerment is often a positive sum, in which all gain. This can take several forms.

Effectiveness

Instrumentally, disempowerment offers new roles with new effectiveness in development. To facilitate the participation of others is often practical and cost-effective. The errors of “all power deceives” diminish. Local realities, which are complex, diverse, dynamic and unpredictable can be better expressed and local needs better met. Equity can be served in empowering the weak. Good change can be more sustainable when it is locally owned. In many ways, uppers can gain because empowering lowers is so practical. Against expectations, it often works.

Liberation

Power on a pinnacle is lonely. Centralised control of more than the minimum is stressful. In contrast, decentralisation, spreading responsibility and enhancing trust can defuse tension. Relationships are more equal, with mutual exchanges, learning, partnership, friendship and collegiality. Openness, honesty and realism are foundations of peace of mind.

A striking contemporary example is the extraordinary forgiveness of black Africans manifested in Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa after colonial and white domination. Before independence in Kenya, and before majority rule in Zimbabwe and South Africa, many whites in those countries were consumed with fear. They could not believe that ‘giving up and handing over’ power and control could lead to anything but violence and revenge. As of now they are almost completely wrong. So far, in several senses, almost all have gained from the disempowerment of the whites. A great gift of Africa to humankind has been to make manifest the healing powers of magnanimity. Like Mahatma Gandhi earlier, Nelson Mandela today towers as an inspiration.

One can ask then, in how many other conditions and places, in political systems, organisations, communities and families, similar fears may be tragically unnecessary, perpetuating pain for lowers and fear for uppers, and how often there is an alternative of positive synergy where lowers’ forgiveness generates uppers’ relief and gratitude, and where disempowerment liberates.

Fulfillment and Fun

As many teachers know, enabling others to learn, grow and fulfill themselves is in itself fulfilling. So too, in a PRA mode, empowering others through facilitating their analysis, planning and action, some of the fulfillment, too, comes from processes which people enjoy. Until recently with PRA, the word ‘fun’ has scarcely been used in development. Faced with horrors of war and extremes of cruelty and deprivation, fun may sound self-regarding or even frivolous. But creativity, play and laughter are part of what most people value and wish for themselves and for others; and they are quite often part of PRA processes.

The most seminal learning from the PRA experience comes from going beyond the altruism and generosity of putting the last first to the exhilaration of putting the first last; to responsible disempowerment, eased by the forgiveness of lowers and enhanced by the fulfillment of uppers. In reversals of dominance – stepping down, handing over the power facilitating – uppers have means and opportunities for taking pleasure in

empowering lowers to do that; putting the first last is not a threat but a fulfillment, a liberation, a gain.

For well-being which is sustainable, equitable and responsible, the prison of power is one problem, while the material possessiveness is another. A great methodological challenge for the twenty-first century is to find good ways to enable those with more to be better off with less.

SAQ 2

- i) Explain the following in your own words.
 - a) Learning Indigenous Technical Knowledge.
 - b) Disempowerment as loss.
-

Let us summarise what we have learnt so far.

8.7 SUMMARY

For participatory appraisal, the outsiders have to change their ways of learning about rural conditions. The problem of time and timelessness can realistically be tackled by those involved in two ways: by improving rural development tourism, and by developing and using techniques for Rapid Rural appraisal.

Tactics of tourist include:

- Offering the anti poverty biases.
- Spending longer and going further.
- Being unimportant.
- Rapid Rural appraisal.

Reversal in learning:

- Sitting, asking and listening.
- Learning from the poorest.
- Learning indigenous technical knowledge.
- Joint R and D.
- Learning by working.

8.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Explain the following in your own words.
 - a) Field Practices and Ethnics.
 - b) Rapid Rural Appraisal.
2. What do you mean by reversals and reality? Explain.
3. Write a note on the reversals in learning.

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