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DEMYSTIFYING PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AND ITS ROLE IN DEVELOPMENT

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PREFACE

Development interventions are commonly accompanied by the discourse of participation and democracy. In South Africa the *Reconstruction and Development Programme* of 1994 was a good example of an ambitious government-led development programme that promised full participation by the disadvantaged population in planning and implementation of developmental governance and service delivery. In practice, much of the planning and implementation remained in the hands of planning experts and politicians, with mounting resistance by excluded categories or underserviced populations to the lack of good services and transparant decision-making and the prevalence of corruption. The more populist direction that South African politics seems to take post-Polokwane 2007 is perhaps an indication of the lack of success with the RDP and its successor GEAR in the South African context with regard to incorporating the 'people's voice' into development interventions. This is an indication of how difficult it is to act out participation in practice rather than just pronounce it as a form of ideological discourse.

The work of Tim Hart, offered here, explores the meaning of participatory research and development that has become more noted in its ideological form than in practice. He explores the way in which participatory research in the development field has developed from Rapid Rural Appraisal to Participatory Rural Appraisal and then to Participatory Action Research as well as Participatory Learning and Action. Important dimensions of these emerging forms of research and intervention are discussed, especially the historical linkages of the methodologies and their accompanying power dimensions. With this study, Hart gives us a much needed overview of participatory approaches in development which often tend to be idealised as a *panacea*. He stresses the need to contextualise and analytically follow the process of participatory development in specific situations, which then leads on to the conclusion that these techniques are far from ideal, although they have led to much more local-based research in applied fields, such as in agricultural extension.

Kees van der Waal
February 2008

DEMYSTIFYING PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AND ITS ROLE IN DEVELOPMENT[1]

By

Tim Hart[2]

Introduction

Since the 1960s and particularly from the early 1970s the idea of people's participation has crept into the international development arena. Internationally, the desirability of local people's participation in development projects has increased tenfold during the past thirty years (Mensah 1994; Burkey 1998; Guijt and van Veldhuizen 1998; Mosse 2005). South Africa, since the 1990s has been no exception to this with numerous multilateral, bilateral and national donors and government departments increasingly highlighting people's participation and consequently participatory research as one, if not the primary method to be adopted in the planning, implementation and evaluation of development interventions (Emmett 2000). In 1993 the first South African training workshop on Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) was organised by the Farmer Support Group, a local non-governmental organisation, in Bulwer, KwaZulu-Natal (Bulwer Participants 1993). PRA has become one of the leading participatory research approaches in development research in sub-Saharan Africa. While the notion of participation is becoming increasingly fashionable and often lending legitimacy to development programmes during the past three decades (Guijt and van Veldhuizen 1998), the idea of what constitutes participation and the constraints inherent to PRA have become increasingly contested (Mosse 1994; Nelson and Wright 1997; Guijt and van Veldhuizen 1998; Cooke and Kothari 2001). What follows is a discussion of the origins of Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). In order to understand the development of and the movement from RRA to PRA, and ultimately to PLA (Participatory Learning and Action) it is necessary to look at the origins and purposes of participatory research and the debate regarding its use in development projects; particularly

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[1] Parts of this paper are based on a chapter from a thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of a Master of Philosophy degree at Stellenbosch University in 2004.

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rural and agricultural programmes. This is followed by a discussion about the notion of participation and then the RRA approach is contrasted with that of PRA, raising the issue of social reform versus empowerment and social transformation. This synopsis concludes with an examination of the constraints in participatory research that are often overlooked by practitioners and advocates. This critique illustrates that the constraints inherent to participatory research, and in particular PRAs, are largely related to issues of power and the manner in which participatory research is currently practised in development. In practice many of the characteristics that distinguish PRA from less participatory approaches, such as RRA, do not materialise.

The origins and theory underlying Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA)

Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) is a research process or method that developed in the late 1970s in Asia and Kenya out of the work of Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway, amongst others. As part of the movement away from technocratic and infrastructure orientated development models towards a human-centred approach, it emerged in response to the realisation that the social context in which agricultural / rural development takes place was largely neglected and that holistic analyses were avoided. It was also a response to the growing dissatisfaction that arose from the biased and very often erroneous perceptions made about the social dimension in agricultural development which resulted from the brief rural visits made by urban professionals (Burkey 1998). These visits were often referred to as 'rural development tourism' due to their short duration and desire to always go to the same localities that were within easy travelling distance (Chambers 1994a). Such short visits are still common practice today.

The primary constraint of these research activities was that the preferred quantitatively designed questionnaire surveys presupposed that all the dimensions of a system / culture could be identified in advance. Consequently, the questionnaires mainly reflected the culture / experience of the researchers and not those of the researched. Such problems were compounded with the high costs and numerous defects associated with quantitative questionnaire surveys. Very often survey research results were never analysed or took too long to analyse and the different disciplines were seldom integrated in the analyses (Chambers 1994a and 1994b; Gibbs 1995; van Zyl 1999). Many of the classic approaches to rural development research undermined rural people's knowledge, were incomprehensible to them and were extractive by nature. The purpose of more classical approaches to research

is to extract or obtain information from respondents or informants so that the researchers can analyse this information for the purposes of the research, whether this be for a Ph. D. thesis, book, policy formulation or development project plan. The locals or respondents generally react to questions put to them by the researchers. The idea that research is primarily extractive has been applied equally to quantitative surveys and to more qualitative approaches such as ethnography (see Chambers 1994a and Guijt and van Veldhuizen 1998 who argue that this essentially extractive nature is really only overcome since the progression from RRA to PRA). PRA, and to a lesser extent RRA, encourages the locals to be proactive rather than reactive, although this is not always achieved in practice. These two methods, like similar participatory methods, generally share six common principles:

- *A defined methodology and systemic learning process* – the focus is on cumulative learning by all the participants (including the outsiders) and, given the nature of these approaches as systems of enquiry, their use has to be participative.

- *Multiple perspectives* – a central objective is to seek diversity, rather than to characterise complexity in terms of average values. Different individuals and groups make different evaluations of situations, which lead to different actions. All views of activity or purpose are heavy with interpretation and prejudice, and this implies that there are multiple possibilities of descriptions of any real-world activity.

- *Group enquiry process* – all these approaches involve the recognition that the complexity of the world will only be revealed through group inquiry. This implies three possible mixes of investigators, namely those from different disciplines, from different sectors and from different backgrounds (e.g. outsider professionals and insider local people).

- *Context specific* – the approaches are flexible enough to be adapted to suit each new set of conditions and actors, giving rise to multiple variants.

- *Facilitating experts and stakeholders* – the approaches are concerned with the transformation of existing activities to try to bring about changes which people in the situation regard as improvements. The role of the 'expert' is best thought of as helping people in their situation carry out their own study and so achieve a desired outcome.

- *Leading to sustained action* – the inquiry process leads to debate about change, and debate changes the perceptions of actors and their readiness to contemplate action. Action is agreed upon, and implementable changes will therefore represent an accommodation between different conflicting views. Analysis both defines

changes which would bring about improvement and seeks to motivate people to take action to implement the defined changes. This action includes local institution building or strengthening, thereby increasing the capacity of people to initiate action on their own.

(Pretty and Chambers 1994:184).

RRA was developed as a somewhat different approach to the classic research methods. Instead of developing a statistical description of the basic units forming the local system, as in surveys, the goal of RRA was to get an 'insider's perspective' on the system and to understand it holistically, which is more in line with the ethnographic method but is done much quicker. Chambers and Conway refined a set of tools based on elements of various research traditions and approaches that were showing positive results during the 1970s and 1980s. According to Chambers (1994a) these traditions included:

1. Agro-ecosystem Analysis;
2. Applied Social Anthropology; and
3. Farming Systems Research.

The ensuing tools were packaged into what became known as the RRA method. These tools are continually evolving and being refined by practitioners (Mosse 2001). At present the tools have evolved into an umbrella term for various participatory methods known as Participatory Learning and Action (PLA)[3]. Despite this dynamism, some primary techniques and their analytical purposes are illustrated in Table 1.

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[3] I do not focus on Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) for it is described by IIED (2006: Inside Front Cover) as "... an umbrella term for a wide range of similar approaches and methodologies, including Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), Participatory Learning Methods (PALM), Participatory Action Research (PAR), Farming Systems Research (FSR), Méthod Active de Recherche et de Planification Participative (MARP), and many others. The common theme to all these approaches is the full participation of people in the processes of learning about their needs and opportunities, and in the action required to address them". My intention in this paper is on contrasting RRA and PRA and arguing that in practice the latter is unfortunately no different from the former although it is believed to be different, especially in theory (cf. Guijt and van Veldhuizen 1998).

Table 1

The more commonly used RRA / PRA Tools and their analytical purposes

Analysis	Tools
Resource Analysis	Social Maps Natural Resource Maps Farm Maps Census Maps Livelihood Maps Transect Walks and Maps
Seasonality Analysis (Some of these tools are extremely useful in Gender Analysis to note different roles, responsibilities and resources)	Seasonal Calendars Time Lines – recording local histories and various key events Daily Routines Time Clocks Flow Diagrams Trend Analysis
Institutional and Group Analysis	Participatory Diagramming - Venn and Analytical Diagrams
Preference Analysis	Matrix Ranking Matrix Scoring
Well Being Analysis (Often used for Gender Analysis to note sexual interpretation and distribution of wealth / ownership of resources)	Wealth Ranking
Problem Analysis	Pair-wise Ranking Problem ranking SWOT Analyses
Crosschecking and clarity	Semi-structured Interviews Questions of Clarity
Selection of Participants	Checklists Sampling Convenience sampling and self selection

Source: Adapted from Guijt & van Veldhuizen (1998) and Lundall-Magnuson (2000)

The tools worked together to ensure that not only were data captured but also that this was done in terms of the local context. Researchers could now understand the 'what' in terms of the 'why'. A key purpose of this approach, especially manifested in the simplicity of the tools, was to provide a common platform on which researchers and rural inhabitants could interact, allowing researchers to obtain an understanding of the local circumstances from the perceptions of the local people who were able to develop their own questions and responses. In essence the intention was to shift from reactive to proactive behaviour. The developed RRA tools were relatively simple and consisted largely of visual representations, such as simple graphs, maps and sketches, thereby making the information generated by the process accessible / understandable to both insiders and outsiders (particularly those from diverse disciplines). These tools have demystified some natural and social science techniques making them available to non-scientists. Visualisation has made the techniques available to both literate and illiterate people. Some tools involve a bit more writing (historical

timelines) but because the issues are openly discussed before they are recorded people are able to follow the process. Typical qualitative research techniques such as participant observation for a short period, focus group interviewing, semi-structured and informal interviewing are also used.

As with qualitative and quantitative research methods, reviews of prior research reports and literature is done when these are available. The tools that are used to generate information with the participants tend to generally allow for the use of open-ended questions. This permits a more qualitative collection of data than is typically the case when questionnaires consisting of closed questions are used. Furthermore questionnaires are generally designed by outsiders with their concerns and categories in mind. Tools such as semi-structured interviews (including workshop discussions), mapping and diagramming are open-ended and encourage proactive involvement rather than reactive responses. Popular (local) categories are used as a means to understand local knowledge. The use of the RRA method brings about a shift from the etic to the emic, resulting in a greater focus on the local situation rather than the broader or universal situation. However, the broader situation is not ignored, especially when it impacts on the local situation, but is considered from an insider perspective.

By using the tools and techniques in the manner discussed above, knowledge / data relating to local practices and circumstances is recorded, and problems and opportunities are identified and ranked. However, as its name implies, the RRA method is conducted in a rapid fashion and development workers tend to use the tools in a predominantly extractive manner and while many tools allow for co-analysis of the information with the farmers during application, this is seldom done. The tools are often administered in the same fashion as questionnaires and consequently used solely to generate and record information in a quicker, more holistic and representative manner than that achieved by questionnaires. The process is also quicker than ethnography but consequently lacks the typical detail of the ethnographic experience. Unfortunately, in RRA the recorded information is seldom discussed in any detail with the respondents. This oversight means that while the farmers can verify the information generated and recorded in the tools, they are not able to verify the results and the researchers' subsequent analyses. Consequently, RRA does not always enable farmers to directly control how the information is used and for what purposes.

Chambers (1994a), Matata et al., (2001) and Dunn (1994) all stress that the value of the development and use of RRA in the seventies and eighties was that the data obtained was

more contextually relevant and holistic in comparison to that previously obtained by using questionnaire surveys. Similarly, it was beneficial because it was rapid (took no longer than a week or two) in comparison to the six months to one-year participant observation fieldwork periods of traditional ethnography. Admittedly, it did not record as much detailed information as typically obtained in ethnographic studies and therefore lacked their depth of analysis. Furthermore, the RRA method and tools made the extraction of data easier than traditional methods and instruments:

- The tools bring together a range of disciplines, knowledge and informants providing a simple framework for interaction and analysis (Grenier 1998).
- Valid and reliable questionnaire design and coding is a long process and requires significant skill and experience. A new questionnaire is usually drawn up for each research topic. The basic RRA (and also PRA) tools are simple and can be used in a variety of studies and contexts from agriculture to education, in corporate boardrooms and rural villages without any great change (see IIED 2000).
- The basic tools described here do not have to be pilot-tested beforehand like questionnaires. However, Narayan (1996) suggests that some aids to discussions should be prepared and tested before being used in the workshop. Grenier (1998) describes this lack of a need to know all the questions at the outset as 'progressive learning'.
- The information obtained from the use of the tools tends to be freer of researcher bias because the tools do not generally emphasise outsider preferences and categories.
- The tools are used during group situations rather than with individuals and the information obtained is a result of consensus seeking that is verified by the presence of others[4]. Unlike questionnaires and field notes the tools are visually displayed for all to see and can in this manner be adjusted when some respondents disagree. However, we need to remember that group situations bring complex social processes into play and are not without their own constraints (Burkey 1998; Grenier 1998). Disagreements might be a result of power relationships and not necessarily because of the presentation of incorrect knowledge.
- Different tools can be simultaneously displayed to triangulate and crosscheck information, or to explain how information from one tool relates to that of another.

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[4] Note that while consensus might be desirable we also need to be aware of differences of opinion and the reasons behind such differences.

For example, a *timeline* can explain when and why certain practices have changed when it is contrasted with the *trend line in a trend diagram.*

- The visual nature of the tools, the use of diagrams and proportions, makes them easily understood by all, even by illiterate respondents. Grenier (1998) reports that the visual nature facilitates mutual learning as well as aiding with the crosschecking of the information.

- The fact that the tools immediately elicit patterns and trends means that these are immediately identified without having to carry out prolonged analysis. Consequently questions of clarity can immediately be asked, avoiding the necessity of having to return to the village or group at a later stage.

- Tools often define the sequence of their use. For example, *resource mapping* might lead to *transect walks* and subsequent auditing of local trees, soil or water samples and the condition of these. This in turn can lead to the identification of cropping patterns and the most suitable varieties.

Typically, in the application of RRA, a multidisciplinary team enters a community or village and stays in the area for about a week. The team members apply the various tools during their stay and the generated information is recorded. However, the information is not really shared with the locals and is not analysed in any great depth with them. The manner in which the information is generated does not encourage local people to be proactive and to use it for their benefit even if copies of the tools are made and the originals are left behind. The researchers return to their universities and research institutes, analyse the information they have recorded and put it to their own uses, including project proposals, reports, journal articles, theses, etc. In some instances researchers might only include selected bits of information that fit the purposes of their proposed project, in other instances they might use the information to make changes to their projects or they might design projects based predominantly on the analysis of this information. The last use is the most preferable for it is the one that is most likely to be in line with the priorities of the rural inhabitants. However, it would be better if the rural inhabitants took part in this analysis and subsequent project identification and planning.

Rapid Rural Appraisal and social science research methodology

In the preceding discussion we have seen that RRA has originated from a number of research methodologies, including those of the social sciences and involves a mixture of

natural and social science techniques. Given the influence of the social sciences within the development of RRA, we now examine how the approach fits within the three main methodological paradigms of the social sciences: quantitative, qualitative and participatory.

RRA tends to be predominantly qualitative in method, relying heavily on qualitative techniques and data analysis. Subsequently it tends to generate trends, patterns and insights rather than statistics. However, the tools also allow for the collection of some quantitative data (Chambers 1994a; Barahona and Levy 2003). This is largely in the form of descriptive statistics. These are usually collected by means of matrices and on maps and diagrams. The type of information generated can include population characteristics and sizes, number and type of water sources, etc. Tools such as graphs indicate patterns, trends and proportions rather than absolute numbers. Some practitioners have argued that there is no reason why mini-questionnaire surveys cannot be done and use made of inferential statistics after the relevant questions have been identified by means of RRA or PRA (Thomas-Slayter 1995; Matata et al. 2001). This would necessitate the use of representative sampling procedures to allow for the making of inferences. However, there is no reason why, where necessary, more quantitative data cannot be collected as part of a RRA / PRA process (Barahona and Levy 2003).

Chambers (1994a) draws our attention to the fact that RRA tools are able to produce worthwhile quantified data and can be used as complements to questionnaire surveys. In the early 1990s the National Council for Applied Economic Research in India (NCAER) undertook a research project to contrast RRA / PRA tools with those of the survey questionnaire (Chambers 1994b). The NCAER found that these tools were able to provide valid and reliable qualitative and quantitative data at village level. At state level the tools were found to provide good ratio estimates for many of the variables. The questionnaire survey sampled 120 villages while the RRA tools were only used in ten. In the report of this study NCAER officials argued that it was conceivable that if the number of villages was increased then the RRA approach would very likely provide equivalent data while using a smaller sample of respondents in each village than required when doing a questionnaire survey (Chambers 1994b: 1443). Other surveys using questionnaires that were carried out in Africa and Asia also verified that very little conflicting or new data was collected in comparison to the use of participatory methods using the RRA / PRA tools (see Guijt and van Veldhuizen 1998; Barahona and Levy 2003).

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The fact that RRA is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies allows it to collect a wide variety of data, such as spatial, temporal, social and institutional, discrete and cultural data without having to change methods and methodologies (IFAD, ANGOC and IIRR 2001). This is a time saving factor for it allows the reliable collection of a wide range of data by means of simple and easy to use tools. According to Chambers (1994a:1254) it also makes "... trade-offs between the quantity, accuracy, relevance and timeliness" of the information collected and analysed. The wide range of quantitative and qualitative data that is generated makes the tools appealing and acceptable to natural scientists, statisticians, social anthropologists, bureaucrats and extension officials alike (Chambers 1994b). This undoubtedly makes RRA / PRA tools extremely valuable for use in the multidisciplinary teams required in agricultural research and especially when they work in an interdisciplinary fashion.

According to Beebe (1995) RRA has three basic principles that strengthen its ability to collect valid and reliable data:

- It follows a *systems approach* in that the subject under study is assumed to be part of an integrated system[5]. In order to understand the role, function and place within the system it is necessary to get an 'insider perspective' before formulating hypotheses (see Grenier (1998) for a similar view when RRA is used to collect information on indigenous knowledge systems).

- *Triangulation or crosschecking* is done on two fronts. Firstly, when information obtained from the tools is triangulated with information from other tools and sources, allowing for verification. Secondly, by retaining clarity about each person or group's tendencies towards bias (both locals and researchers), the sources of information, and the system itself. The awareness of the inherent biases in these three areas has often not been maintained. While locals might or might not provide all the necessary information in an unbiased manner, it is just as likely that the extension officer or researcher, who are both intrinsically embedded in a political system, can also provide biased information. In recent years greater emphasis has been placed on this second front, especially with regard to how it can affect knowledge generation (see Scoones and Thompson 1994).

- *Iterative data collection and analysis* throughout the process. As the information is generated and recorded it is used to modify the research process by means of

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[5] The field reality is that the studied subject is often part of a fragmented system which at the outset appears to be neatly integrated.

feedback and reflection with team members and others involved. This looping process does not detract from the rigorous and systematic way in which the data is recorded but allows it the necessary flexibility to ensure that the process is in fact effective in understanding the local context and perspective on various issues. If done correctly this can reduce the influence of the biases noted above.

In the discussion on the origin of RRA we noted that besides being a cost-effective approach, it was also developed to get an "insider's perspective" on the local circumstances and to bring about a more bottom-up approach to rural development, thereby reversing the conventional practice of research in development (Chambers 1992; 1994a). In the previous section we saw that this necessitated researchers, often with their own agendas, interacting with locals in the form of a dialogue to determine what the local issues were and how best to go about identifying and implementing improvements. It has been argued that out of necessity this implies some participation of the locals in the research process, especially in terms of generating knowledge and discussing the local circumstances (Dunn 1994; Matata et al. 2001). While RRA is typically viewed as an extractive approach as explained previously (Chambers 1992; 1994a; 1994b), it also seemingly involves a necessary element of participation by local residents and farmers. This element of participation and the fact that PRA subsequently developed out of RRA makes it necessary to discuss RRA in terms of the participatory research paradigm in the social sciences.

The participatory research paradigm in the social sciences

Within the social sciences the participatory research paradigm is relatively new, owing its development to Action Research (AR) work done in the 1940s, which was later refined to the development of Participatory Action Research (PAR) in developing countries during the 1970s. Mouton (2001) stresses that there are a number of debates which surround participatory research and PAR in particular. The understanding of what does or does not constitute participatory research is complex. Sometimes radically different research approaches are termed participatory. In other cases very similar approaches are given different labels by different practitioners, thus to achieve clarity we need to attach distinctly different labels to distinctly different phenomena (Mouton 2001:94).

The approaches of PRA, RRA and PTD (Participatory Technology Development), as used in agricultural development, provide us with good examples of this complexity. Within

agriculture participatory research is often used to refer to the practice of researchers and farmers jointly developing technology. However, this can probably be more correctly understood as the participatory development of technology and go by the name of Participatory Technology Development (Guijt and van Veldhuizen 1998). PTD is an activity in which participatory methods are used to develop locally appropriate technology and has recently become known as Participatory Innovation Development (PID) in order to move beyond the exclusively technical developments and to include innovations of social group formation and marketing practices, to mention a few. According to Waters-Bayer and van Veldhuizen (2005: 1) it incorporates "learning from own experience over generations [and] also knowledge gained from other sources [which is] fully internalised within local ways of thinking and doing". Participatory research is more along the lines of PRA and sometimes RRA, although even here there is some disagreement (Guijt and van Veldhuizen 1998 and Matata et al. 2001). Participatory research does not necessarily involve the development of technology. It is something that is done throughout the process of interaction between the researchers and the local residents. It involves the generation, recording and analysis of social (village and resident profiles, gender analysis, situation analysis, etc.) and technical data (rainfall patterns, land size and use, herd size, existing practices and technology, etc.), which might be used to bring about social change, policy formulation or some other end.

In an attempt to reach clarity on what is and what is possibly not participatory research, and to place RRA within the participatory paradigm debate we can begin by contrasting Action Research (AR) with Participatory Action Research (PAR). According to practitioners AR actually implies participation and would in fact be impossible without participation, because the research process is carried out in collaboration with those who experience a problem, express a need or priority and at the very least it is done with their representatives (Mouton, 2001). A similar issue has been raised with regard to the use of the Rapid Rural Appraisal method. We may well ask, what is the requirement that makes the addition of "participatory" justified to distinguish between AR and PAR?

According to its proponents, PAR not only implies greater participation but more importantly it redefines the concept of participation by giving researcher status to all the participants in the process, both insiders and outsiders (Mouton 2001). Here participation is understood as the co-management of the research process and the co-generation of solutions to problems and new knowledge. The emphasis is on the co-researcher status of locals whose knowledge is equally required for "valid scientific sense making, as is outsiders' technical expertise and abstract general knowledge" (Mouton 2001: 95).

Fals-Borda (1988) has argued that Action Research, as opposed to Participatory Action Research, does not attempt to bring about social transformation but rather maintains the political status quo in terms of the power relationships between the poor and the wealthy. While both AR and PAR aim at gaining knowledge and taking action, added to PAR is the purpose of redressing inequity and redistributing power. Simply put, AR aims at social reform while PAR aims at social transformation (Mouton 2001).

If we consider this argument within the current international debate on people's (farmers') participation (Chambers *et al.* 1989) and people's (farmers') knowledge (Scoones and Thompson 1994) and if we accept Fals-Borda's (1988) argument, then RRA is closely related to AR and more likely to look at social reform while PRA is more closely related to PAR, involving a political element and more concerned with actual social transformation (Guijt and van Veldhuizen 1998).

Despite the implication of participation in AR there are numerous examples of non-participatory action research in which the subjects of the research do not participate in the research process. According to Mouton (2001) this is applied research which does not require participation. It is action research in the sense that the research informs the need for and type of action required. The argument is that only action research processes having the following characteristics can be given the title of PAR (Mouton 2001):

- Local people are involved in setting the research agendas;
- Local people must participate in data generation, recording and analysis;
- Local people control the use of outcomes while there is shared ownership of the research process and the products of this process;
- The separation of the researcher and the research subject is removed – all involved are now researchers; and
- It is political in that it aims at social transformation and considers the question of whose interests are best being served by the research process and its outcomes.

We shall see later in our discussion that it is precisely these characteristics, inherent in PRA, which distinguish it from RRA.

Fals-Borda (1988) stresses that a major differentiating characteristic between PAR and AR is their respective origins in the southern and the northern hemispheres, coupled with the fact

that they are each predominantly practised in their respective hemispheres of origin. He argues that where it is practised determines whether it is PAR or AR and therefore participatory or not participatory. This debate is problematic in terms of RRA and PRA as these have been continually practised and refined in both hemispheres. Given that their origin is probably more northern because Chambers and Conway are northerners this might lend credence to Fals-Borda's argument. However, the approaches and tools were developed and evolved out of the work that they and others did in India and Kenya (Chambers 1994b) with many southern colleagues expanding on these tools and developing new ones. Therefore Fals-Borda's distinction probably does not apply. By the mid-1990s the use of participatory appraisals and PRA tools spread to approximately forty countries in the South, of which most could be described as developing countries, and were refined by southern practitioners and farmers (Chambers 1994b). At the same time the use of PRA was spreading to the countries of the North, including the United States, Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and Norway (Chambers 1994b; IIED 2000). Both RRA and PRA have been put to some of the following uses in countries in the North and South (Chambers 1994b; IIED 2000):

- Policy research and analysis in Canada and Tanzania;
- Village or community level assessments, planning, monitoring and evaluating in Indian rural villages and inner cities in the United Kingdom;
- Natural resource management in Scotland and India;
- Social intervention programmes for disadvantaged groups in deprived areas of the North and South;
- Japanese urban planning; and
- Organisational development in large multinational corporations.

Some scholars (e.g. Rahman and Brown) consider PAR as the convergence of action research and participatory research implying that it is participatory research which leads to action.. Others (such as Cornwall and Jakes) propose that PAR is a type of participatory research (Mouton 2001). To clarify the issue we need to consider the origins of participatory research, as it is understood in the social sciences.

It emerged as a result of the increased emphasis on participation in development activities in the Third World during the latter part of the 1970s. Participation promised a new version of development that was populist, bottom-up (in contrast to top-down) and free from the usual colonial and techno-economistic constraints of the conventional approaches (Burkey 1998). It

was also believed that the participation by local residents in research and development activities would not only ensure appropriate interventions, but also local commitment and thus sustainable development. In the words of the former Vice-President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD):

"A meaningful rural development programme is one which not only obtains the political commitment of the government, but also implies the full commitment of the rural communities concerned. Hence the importance of a participatory approach to the design and implementation of such programmes" (Mensah 1994:2).

Brown and Tandon have characterised participatory research in the following way (Mouton 2001:97):

- The problem is identified in the community;
- It ultimately aims at the cardinal structural transformation and improvement of the lives of the participants;
- The community participants are involved in the management and control of the whole process;
- It strengthens peoples' awareness of their own abilities and resources while supporting their mobilisation and organisation;
- The term researcher is applied equally to all participants, both those with and without formal training as well as to insider and outsider; and
- The external researchers are committed participants and learners in a process that results in assertiveness rather than detachment.

We can recall that this set of characteristics includes some of those highlighted for PAR and we shall see later that it is precisely these characteristics that are used to distinguish PRA from RRA, as most of these characteristics are found in PRA theory but not in RRA (see also the debates in Chambers et al. 1989 and Scoones and Thompson 1994).

In agriculture and rural development many variants of participatory research have been developed, such as PRA, Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBRNM), Research for Agricultural Development (RAD) and PAR (Rahman 1993), to name a few. So PAR could also be considered to be one of the many variants of participatory research and Reason has argued that it is the most widely practised of these approaches (see Mouton 2001: 98). Given this, PAR and participatory research are likely to share many common

features and as previously noted a comparison of their characteristics confirms this. Mouton (2001) points out that in the development context these two terms are in fact used interchangeably. However, there is justification for the use of separate terms because participatory research can occur in which people participate in the process without any action being planned or actually implemented. Mouton (2001) suggests that in such a case the research is participatory but that the term PAR can only be applied when such a project evolves through action developed, planned and implemented by the researchers and the participants. Here the crux is that the project must evolve into action with the continual involvement of the participants in the project activities. This is something which proponents of Participatory Rural Appraisal claim it does and that distinguishes it from Rapid Rural Appraisal (Guijt and van Veldhuizen 1998).

Apart from the distinction of the need for action, PAR can also be understood as a type of participatory research in which the type or level of participation is distinguished. This is to say that research processes or activities that are currently termed participatory research actually involve different levels of participation. Mouton (2001: 99) identifies four types of participation.

1. *Contractual* – Local people are contracted into projects and take part in the investigations and experiments that have been designed by researchers.
2. *Consultative* – The researchers ask people for their opinions and consult them prior to designing and implementing interventions.
3. *Collaborative* – The researchers and the locals work together on projects designed, initiated and managed by researchers.
4. *Collegiate* – Local people and researchers work together as colleagues, offering diverse skills, in a process of mutual learning in which the locals have control over the process.

When considering these four types of participation, PAR might be defined as a variation of participatory research that aims towards a more collegiate and collaborative research process coupled with the need for action. Other scholars, particularly those involved in agricultural development, argue that the issue of participation is not clear and that one needs to distinguish between the concepts of participation and participatory (Mikkelsen 1995).

The issue of different types of participation

During recent years both the concepts of 'participation' and 'participatory' have become buzz-words in agricultural and rural development circles to the extent that they are often misused and abused as token lip-service in the attempt to obtain credibility and funding for projects. Given the frequency of these misstatements there is a need to analyse current understandings of participation. According to Mikkelsen (1995), participation is defined as the voluntary involvement of people in interventions, but without their taking part in the decision-making. While some might rightfully object to this being termed participation, because the local people are merely present, it is considered important to this discussion. All too often we have heard development workers, researchers and agricultural officials talk about the participation of local farmers / villagers in their projects or research activities when in fact all that is taking place is that locals are present, are observing the outsiders and provide specific, but limited, information when asked. In such instances the term participation is tagged to an activity in an attempt to give it credibility, although participation is not really taking place. In light of similar practices, four types of participation are usually identified in agricultural development (Matata *et al.* 2001:79):

1. *Passive participation* – most decisions are made by the project staff who in turn tell the local people what to do. This is mostly one-way communication between the project staff and the locals. This is a version of contractual participation identified in the previous section by Mouton (2001);

2. *Active participation* – the local people interact with the project staff and two-way communication occurs. This is possibly a mixture of consultative and collaborative participation described in the previous section; and

3. *Participation by subscription* – local people are allowed to subscribe to the project. In return they will receive some benefits from the project. In a sense this is contractual participation in that in return for community action the project will reciprocate;

4. *Participation based on locally expressed needs* – planned activities respond to locally expressed needs but the locals do not necessarily take part in designing and implementing the project although it is definitely demand driven. I see this as being similar to consultative participation.

None of these four types consider the idea of researchers and locals working together as colleagues who are involved in a mutual learning process in which the locals have control.

Consequently, within the discussion of action research and RRA these four types of participation can essentially be considered to bring about social reform but not social transformation, as suggested by PAR and PRA.

Mikkelsen (1995) distinguishes the concept of participatory from levels of participation in that for him the former concept implies that local people make decisions over their own lives. According to him they participate in all stages of the project from conceptualisation, design, implementation and evaluation and make most of the decisions regarding the process. Autonomy lies with them and this type of process often results in empowerment and self-mobilisation – everybody having the right and capacity to make decisions concerning their own lives. In a sense their participation is so complete that it transforms them and subsequently the status quo. In the grammatical sense participatory is an adjective while participation is a noun. In our discussion so far participation has always been preceded by an adjective to indicate the type or degree of participation. However, Mikkelsen is using the concept of participatory to refer to the highest level of participation in a research process, to distinguish it from other levels of participation. He therefore seems to apply the label of participatory research only to a process that includes the characteristics identified by Brown and Tandon (Mouton 2001). Following from this, we suggest that there is in fact a fifth type of participation that can be added to the list of Matata *et al.* (2001); full or complete participation which embraces the characteristics that Mikkelsen considers to be embodied in the concept of participatory – it is participation that is empowering, leading to self-mobilisation and transformation. It also needs to be added after the term collegiate to the list provided by Mouton (2001:99) as collegiate does not suggest the idea of empowerment and transformation, only that of collaboration and co-ownership.

Pretty (1996: 7,8) identifies seven types of participation (see Table 2) that range from manipulative and passive participation to self-mobilisation where people are predominantly independent of external institutions and make most of the key decisions. While he does not distinguish between participation and participatory his argument is that participation can be understood along a continuum from no participation to self-autonomy.

Table 2

A Typology of Participation: how local people participate in development projects

Type	Characteristics of Each Type
1. Manipulative Participation	Participation is simply a pretence, with 'people's' representatives on official boards but who are unelected and have no power.
2. Passive Participation	People participate by being told what has been decided or has already happened. It involves unilateral announcements by an administration or project management without listening to people's responses. The information being shared belongs only to external professionals.
3. Participation by Consultation	People participate by being consulted or by answering questions. External agents define problems and information gathering processes, and so control analysis. Such a consultative process does not concede any share in decision making, and professionals are under no obligation to take on board people's views.
4. Participation for material incentives	People participate by contributing resources, for example labour, in return for food, cash or other material incentives. Farmers may provide the fields and the labour, but are involved in neither experimentation nor the process of learning. It is very common to see this called participation, yet people have no stake in prolonging technologies or practices when the incentives end.
5. Functional Participation	Participation seen by external agencies as a means to achieve project goals, especially reduced costs. People may participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the project. Such involvement may be interactive and involve shared decision making, but tends to arise only after major decisions have already been made by external agents. At worst, local people may still only be co-opted to serve external goals.
6. Interactive Participation	People participate in joint analysis, development of action plans and formation of strengthening of local institutions. Participation is seen as right, not just the means to achieve project goals. The process involves interdisciplinary methodologies that seek multiple perspectives and make use of the systemic and structured learning process. As groups take control over local decisions and determine how available resources are used, so they have a stake in maintaining structures or practices.
7. Self-mobilisation	People participate by taking initiatives independently of external institutions to change systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice they need, but retain control over how resources are used. Self-mobilisation can spread if governments and NGOs provide an enabling framework of support. Such self-initiated mobilisation may or may not challenge existing distributions of wealth and power.

Source: Pretty 1996:7; 8

Matata *et al.* (2001) and Mouton (2001) presented a similar understanding of participation although not as extensive. However, Mikkelsen (1995), who seems to be a purist, only labels those practices that ensure self-mobilisation and transformation as participatory, thereby discounting other types or levels of participation as not actually being elements of participatory research in the development context[6]. However, while informative to our discussion, Mikkelsen's use of the term participatory is grammatically confusing and I opt to

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[6] Action Research is most closely linked to research as an extractive process, with the purpose of generating knowledge. RRA and PRA are more closely linked to development activities and are thus development focused, with the purpose of assisting the design and implementation of development projects in order to bring about social reform and possibly social transformation.

go with the idea of different levels or types of participation within participatory research rather than using an adjective to conceptualise what is generally considered to be the highest and most desirable level of participation. Rahnema (1992) suggests that participation in the form of Pretty's types one to four is unlikely to have any long lasting positive effect on local people's circumstances, while Hart (1992) argues that these first four types should in fact be considered types of non-participation because manipulation is often used. At this point the debate could probably continue but given that there is general agreement on the existence of various levels of participation and action, I argue for the acceptance of Pretty's notion of a continuum of participatory research as it is the most encompassing. If we do this then we are justified in putting RRA and PRA on a continuum of research approaches to ensuring participation and empowerment, with the understanding that while RRA does not ensure empowerment and self-mobilisation, PRA (and subsequently PLA) developed out of it to ensure that this can occur (Chambers *et al.* 1989; Mascarenhas 1990a; Matata *et al.* 2001; IIED 2002). RRA is then understood as a type of participatory research just as AR, PAR and PRA can be so understood.

The desire for increased participation and the emergence of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)

At the same time that RRA was developing on the African and Asian continents in the 1970s, participatory research and participatory action research were developing in Latin America. While some have argued that RRA is participatory and falls within the participatory research paradigm and is the same as PRA (Dunn 1994; Matata *et al.* 2001), others might argue that this is not the case and it is rather PRA that is more likely to fall within the participatory action research paradigm (Mikkelsen 1995) while RRA is not. Our preceding discussion identified a number of characteristics of participatory research, many of which are not evident in RRA but we shall now see that most are evident in PRA, at least in theory. This will strengthen the contention that RRA and PRA should be seen as different points along a participatory research continuum.

The development and use of RRA was able to elicit a range of quality information and insights that had previously been unobtainable with traditional research methods. However, its essentially extractive nature and the limited participation it encouraged with the local residents led to dissatisfaction with the Rapid Rural Appraisal approach during the later part of the 1980s, resulting in the development of the Participatory Rural Appraisal, which

increased the number of techniques used and encouraged increased participation (Chambers *et al.* 1989; Chambers 1992; Chambers 1994a). This approach not only entails shared knowledge but also shared analysis, creativity and commitment to the process. It is the evolution and application of simple, structured interactive techniques based on game theory and social science research methods, which are able to produce reliable information through means of dialogue and group work (Shepherd 1998:200). Since the late 1980s until the present an increasing emphasis has been placed on the participation of the beneficiaries of agricultural development interventions, their empowerment and subsequent self-mobilisation. It is argued that not only must conventional agricultural research and extension be aware of local circumstances and work with local knowledge to improve these, but they must do so in such a way that local people participate in the entire process and develop extra skills that empower them to act on their environment. As Grenier (1998) explains, the rural inhabitants must become the main investigators, analysts and applicators. It is argued that this type of integration will lead to sustainable development (Chambers 1994a; Pretty 1996; Shepherd 1998). PRA emerged from RRA as a result of wanting to ensure sustainable development by means of increased awareness and self-mobilisation that would result in social transformation, rather than simple social reform.

One could argue that RRA and PRA are essentially similar methods (Dunn 1994; Matata *et al.* 2001), sharing much in common because the latter grew out of the former and that they generally have access to and make use of the same tools (Davis Case *et al* 1990). However, there are some very important differences between the two approaches i.e. the way in which the tools are used and the emphasis that is placed on certain tools:

1. PRA is based on the same research traditions as RRA but includes an emphasis on participatory action research (PAR) following the work of Paulo Freire and Fals Borda in which empowerment and social transformation are emphasised. Shepherd (1998) distinguishes between a set of techniques (RRA) and a set of techniques wrapped up in a participatory approach (PRA). However, even when PRA activities are used, there seems little evidence to support that empowerment and social transformation have occurred and as I point out later this is often due to the manner in which PRAs are conducted.

2. The process of information gathering in RRA is such that the information is extracted, analysed and owned by outsiders while in PRA the emphasis is placed on the insiders and outsiders jointly producing, analysing, sharing and owning the produced knowledge as part of a process of their mutual empowerment. All

relevant information and reports possessed by the outsiders are shared with the locals (Chambers 1992). While this is the theory, it is not always the case in practice due to constraints such as timing, duration of research activities and beliefs of project leaders (Hart 2004).

3. With PRA insiders ultimately own and control the knowledge that they generate. Chambers (1994a, 1994b) cites examples and gives references to examples in which insiders have owned the information and used it to their own purposes and benefit (see Ashby et al. 1997 for an example of this occurring in participatory technology development). In other methods, including many uses of RRA, the generated knowledge is recorded and removed for further analysis but in PRA the recorded information is supposed to be analysed with the locals. The records of original information and analysis tend to be left behind or copies are given to the locals. Locals can now act on this information as and when they please (Narayan 1996; Grenier 1998; IFAD, ANGOC & IIRR 2001). A review of the PRA literature suggests that if this is not done then the process is not participatory and is not PRA but rather RRA, despite it often being given the name PRA.

4. In PRA the outsiders act largely as facilitators and only contribute their specialist knowledge once the issues have been identified and discussed by the local people. Outsiders are another source of information and not necessarily the dominant source or the controllers of information. In practice this is largely dependent on the strength of the facilitator and his/her ability to manage the outsider group and to create the opportunity and space for insiders to have their say. This person also needs to ensure that insiders are providing the correct information.

5. In RRA the approach aims for consensus or general agreement with the issues put forward at workshops while in PRA negotiation, trade-off and difference are highlighted. However, these aims are not necessarily achieved in practice.

6. PRA includes in its repertoire a number of tools that encourage local people to express themselves in various ways, including role-playing and mini-dramas (Narayan 1996). These are not found in earlier RRA activities and are often only used in those PRAs of long duration.

7. RRA was initially a once-off investigation at the beginning of a project or to identify a possible project. The use of PRA has been similar but the tools and processes are usually used throughout the project lifespan making it a continuous process of participatory knowledge generation, reflection and action (Guijt and van Veldhuizen 1998). If this is not done then PRA essentially loses its

participatory characteristics, to follow Mikkelsen (1995) and reverts back to RRA (Chambers *et al.* 1989).

The fundamental differences seem to be in the way in which the tools are used, i.e. in the approach. PRA stresses complete or meaningful participation that is associated with interdependency leading to empowerment and self-mobilisation while RRA does not stress these criteria. Cornwall *et al.* (1994:109) acknowledge that both approaches are valuable for they "offer a creative approach to information sharing and a challenge to prevailing biases and preconceptions about rural peoples' knowledge." However, they caution against the common trap of applying the tools mechanistically and warn that the application of PRA is often not participatory in the true sense but rather a term applied to short-cut research (*ibid.*) such as RRA to give it credibility. This is a concern emphasised by Chambers (1994a) and Grenier (1998). It is therefore likely that PRA can become more like RRA if it is not applied as intended – to ensure full participation in order to bring about empowerment, self-mobilisation and social transformation. The inherent difficulty in these approaches, which detracts from their intentions, is the fact that both RRA and PRA (and of course other participatory approaches linked to PLA) often have the characteristics of being short-term, outsider-induced and often an inflexible workshop format.

Matata *et al.* (2001) point out that the main difference between PRA and RRA is theoretical and argue that in the practical application of the methods the theoretical extremes are unfounded because in application both approaches exhibit elements of extraction, outside facilitation and are able to contribute to capacity building and empowerment of all involved. They suggest that in practice both approaches reach a middle ground in which outsiders can initiate or facilitate the process, but subsequently, the local people take greater control as the process develops and knowledge is shared. The implication is that neither process can claim to be exclusively participatory as stressed by Mikkelsen (1995). Rather it is up to the people who partake in the process and the manner in which the process unfolds, or is allowed to unfold, that determines the level of participation and the strength of the participatory outcomes of the process, i.e. empowerment, self mobilisation and social transformation. We should remember that participatory research is equally exposed to gatekeepers, opposition and bias as qualitative and quantitative research. The intention, on the part of the researcher, who opts to use a participatory methodology, should therefore be to strive to ensure that such a process is allowed to be participatory to the extent that it encourages participation, is empowering and leads to self-mobilisation, while simultaneously gathering and analysing data. It should also control for biases and undue influences of extraneous variables where

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possible. Chambers (1994a) draws the distinction between RRA and PRA in that the former is about getting more relevant and reliable research data, while the latter includes rethinking the communication between the development agents and the local people during the data collection process. To this end a team of PRA researchers should include at least one person whose role is to observe and document the process as it unfolds, paying specific attention to the interaction amongst the actors and the inherent power dynamics – this activity would be participant observation as opposed to participatory research (Mosse 2001).

PRA not only collects data by means of visual diagrams but should also be conducted so that the process encourages groups of local residents to reflect on their knowledge of local circumstances in ways that lead to locally driven action and change. One of the important effects of their participation in the PRA process and the use of the tools by local people is that they should be able to make use of a scientific research method that includes both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. By virtue of their participation in the process local capacity is increased, allowing them to understand the tools and their use, and their self-esteem is raised. They are able to use a scientific research method that was previously alien to them, for their own purposes. Whether or not they do so depends on them, the attitude of the researchers and ultimately on the entire process of the PRA. Narayan (1996) points out that PRA is about capacity building and that this requires much more than the exposure of participants to a set of participatory research techniques and their inclusion in the research process, which is what normally transpires in the typical RRA process:

> "[Capacity building] is the result of a sustained process involving new experiences, reflection, analysis, exploration, decision making, acting and evaluation. At some point in this process, the researcher's role must give way to the facilitator's role and the human development objective must override the more extractive data-gathering objective" (1996:142).

In instances where local people use the PRA approach regularly they can become skilled proponents in this approach, to the extent that they educate scientists and other professionals in its theory and use (Chambers 1994a and 1994b; Mascarenhas 1990a–g). Such a result would be unlikely in a RRA process because the locals would not be encouraged to use the tools and the manner in which the process is carried out would prevent them from getting any real experience in the tools. We shall now see how this is often the case when PRA processes are implemented.

Constraints regarding participatory methods and especially PRA

In the previous sections I discussed the normative view of participatory research, in particular RRA and PRA, while occasionally alluding to a number of concerns over the use and effectiveness of such methods. Because development agents in South Africa increasingly mention the use of PRA in research reports and funding proposals, we now turn to the constraints inherent in the application of this method. The purpose is not to discredit the method but to make practitioners aware of the obstacles and biases involved in the application of PRA so that the effects of these can be reduced.

Typical training in PRA is about five days. Consequently, my experiences, and that of others, are that the implemented PRAs are rapid research events of the same or lesser duration (Hart 2004; Mosse 2001). Donors, who want people's participation, but are unwilling to supply sufficient resources for this to transpire, further restrict the levels of meaningful participation that can occur (Hart 2004). During these subsequent rapid probes small teams of researchers guide local people through a series of structured group exercises followed by interviews. In most cases only the basic tools such as Seasonal Calendars, Timelines, Venn Diagrams, Transects, Maps and Trend Lines, to name a few, are used. After this short period the information is usually analysed back at the agency and projects are planned, or the data is used for other purposes such as reports and publications. Similarly there is a tendency to carry out a short PRA at the beginning of a project for diagnostic purposes and then never to repeat the process during the course of the project. In essence a very low level of participation occurs with an even lower level of capacity building and empowerment being encouraged, if at all. Such activities should be termed RRAs rather than PRAs in order to illustrate what is actually transpiring.

In recent years it has been argued and is now a recognised fact that women face constraints to participating in development activities, including PRA workshops (Hart 2004; Mosse 2001). This is mostly due to their social marginalisation in many communities and the fact that heavy domestic and economic demands are placed on their time, constraining their ability and availability to participate. Therefore, it is vital to work with women in smaller groups at places and times that suit them. However, the typical shortness of a PRA and the abilities and resources available to the PRA team might well prevent this from happening (Hart 2004). In PRA settings where women and men are present, it is unlikely that women will articulate

concerns and requirements that differ from socially accepted gender roles (Mosse 2001). Their story is being missed or at least underplayed.

Participatory research and especially PRAs occur within a specific social context, thereby producing a distinctive type of information (Mosse 2001). The PRA exercises are highly visible in that participants work with a large group of peers, in the presence of local and external figures of authority including headmen, village elders, councillors, extensionists and researchers. The outsiders are often viewed as resource-bearers to whom the 'correct' image has to be conveyed. According to Mosse (2001: 169) this extremely public nature of the research activities has a profound effect "...on who participates, what is said (or drawn), and what is not said (or not drawn)." Such public situations make it difficult for people to depart from socially acceptable norms of discussion or behaviour. They are bound in a micropolitics of consensus which, rather than revealing social relations actually obscures them. This will directly influence and effect their contributions to the process. To some degree then PRAs actually confirm and reinforce local and external dichotomies of 'us and them'. Therefore the PRA workshop is not necessarily the egalitarian platform it is often purported to provide.

In a similar vein the way in which local people represent their situation in the form of needs (often representing 'wants' and 'nice to have'), circumstances and involvement in projects are often products of local social dynamics, which are in turn a consequence of existing social relationships and networks. The dominance of men over women or elders over youths tends to hide the divergent interests and opinions of the non-dominant groups. Consequently, the views of the local elite or dominant groups tend to be most forthcoming and are heard by outsiders. This can especially be the case in circumstances in which these groups or individuals and their supporters have facilitated the researchers' access to the research site (Mosse 2001). Often they organise the workshops, provide the venues and invite the participants, thereby controlling the situation (Hart 2004; Mosse 2001). The longer the research team is in the area and the greater reflection members give to the process, the greater likelihood they have of recognising and controlling these influences. The significance of social dynamics influencing people's willingness to get involved in PRAs and development projects should not be underestimated or overlooked. An example is provided in Box 1.

Box 1: Ulterior motives for local project support

In 2002 I had the opportunity of facilitating the participatory assessment two deciduous fruit projects in the Eastern Cape, South Africa (Hart *et al.* 2003). The orchards had been started a few years previously by a local NGO with some input from the local extension service. In the one project the land was waterlogged and in the other it was severely eroded in places. In most cases the soil and the rootstocks were incompatible for successful peach production. The second orchard project was repeatedly struck by hailstorms, which wiped out most of the crop during the previous two seasons. Despite this, the villagers involved in the assessment were adamant that the project should continue. After some clever local political manoeuvring they got the NGO and the extension services to officially launch the project despite the lack of any previous harvest and the strong likelihood, according to technical experts, that there never would be a harvest of any significant quality or quantity. At the official launch of the project in 2003 a number of local councillors and provincial ministers were present. The road to the village was almost impassable in anything but a four-wheel drive vehicle or one with significant ground clearance. Consequently, the dignitaries had to enter the village and the project site on foot, scrambling over rocks and down small gullies. At the launch ceremony one of the ministers promised that the road would be repaired. Within six months the road was repaired and tarred. People now had access to taxi services and therefore easier access to neighbouring towns. Participating in and 'clinging' on to the project was the villagers' unified means of ensuring that they got the road that they wanted.

I mentioned previously that PRA and participatory research are often invoked to give legitimacy to projects or proposed projects and to obtain funding. While local power relations may well shape livelihood needs they are also shaped by the preconceptions, assumptions and self-interests of development professionals, agencies and their projects which promote these needs (Hart 2004). Short, structured PRAs whereby researchers arrive with a specific set of tools that instead of serving a research need become a framework for research inevitably restrict the information generation process so that it reflects what the project might be able to deliver without considering other preferable options. Similarly, the team may also misrepresent the summaries, analysis and reporting of the information so only that which exclusively fits in with the project requirements is reported. In a nutshell the issue is one of "whose reality counts?" As Mosse (1994: 517) points out:

> "...in PRA outsiders determine the 'ground rules'. Consciously or unconsciously, project workers impose ideas of 'relevance' and determine what is accepted as knowledge."

Some researchers have suggested that such practices make participation nothing more than a new tyranny in the development sector (Cooke and Kathari 2001).

Despite its close links to the social sciences, participatory research seems to have been more successful in areas where there is a need to generate agro-ecological information and similar topics (Mosse 2001). However, experience informs us that in the current rapid and diagnostic forms PRAs are inadequate in generating any analysis of social relationships. Even the Venn diagrams do not really illustrate community level patterns of dominance or dependence, factions and conflicts and even spheres of influence. As Mosse (2001) emphasises, such social information is indispensable to project fieldworkers. In order to achieve this significant understanding of social relations a parallel process of participant observation and a more ethnographic focus is called for to complement the PRA process. This process should consider various internal and external spheres of influence. Such an activity is process monitoring and documentation, which focuses on the processes of project delivery, intervention and the interaction of all actors, including the project staff (Mosse 1998a, 1998b, 2001). It is a continual and reflective process during the course of the project.

Despite the current hype around PRAs they suffer a number of significant constraints. These are largely related to issues of power. At the local level the public nature of PRAs often obscures the voices of the local marginalised groups such as women and youth, and those whose allegiance might be to a less dominant local faction. Because of the reverence often bestowed on outsiders, who are often better educated and the bearers of resources, they are often told what local people think they want to hear, thereby obscuring the true situation. Similarly, the interests of the outsiders often shape the information generated during PRAs and in instances only certain 'suitable' information is acted upon. Beyond the dimension of power and politics the PRAs have another serious constraint. The PRA tools and exercises actually prevent certain types of knowledge, specifically those relating to local social relationships and the various spheres of influence, from being generated and recorded. To achieve this a complementary process of observation and reflection is required.

Conclusion

This overview of the development of participatory research in both the academic and applied social and natural sciences stresses that the core principle is the degree of participation of the respondent in the process. The discussion indicated that participation means many different things to different people. RRA and PRA are only two of a number of methods in the participatory research paradigm. This paradigm has developed a set of research methods

that can be located on a continuum from no participation to complete participation. Those closer to the latter end of the continuum not only foster the participation of the beneficiaries of the research but simultaneously promote their empowerment. The participatory research process is not only a research process but also a social, political and cultural process. The political process is indicated by the power sharing between researcher and subject, the reversal of historical roles and the ultimate process of social transformation. While borrowing from the two traditional methodological paradigms (the quantitative and qualitative paradigms) it is the political element of wanting to invoke change that distinguishes participatory research from these two methodologies.

To simplify the distinction between PRA and RRA we can consider them to exist not only on a participatory research continuum but also on an empowerment continuum. I would suggest that RRA would lie closer to the centre while PRA would lie very close to that end emphasising empowerment and transformation of the status quo. In terms of Pretty's (1996) typology RRA would probably be situated between types 3: *Participation by Consultation* and 5: *Functional Participation*, while PRA would be type 7: *Self-mobilisation.*

The techniques and principles of rapid and participatory appraisals have allowed numerous people to empower themselves by understanding and applying the approaches to improve their own circumstances. The success of this is evidenced by the many instances where they are used and the fact that PRA practitioners in the South have improved and adapted the techniques, and have trained many scientists in the North (see Chambers 1994a and 1994b, and Narayan 1996 for examples). The growing acceptance and application of RRA, and more importantly that of PRA in recent years, is an indicator of its worth, its recognition and increased acceptability within the international scientific community involved in human development, and the numerous situations in which it can and is used. With regard to the preference of using RRA or PRA, we have seen that Grenier (1998) suggests that RRA techniques can be used to obtain an intimate knowledge of the local area in a short period of time. She posits that the newer PRA tools can then be used to move towards empowerment and self-mobilisation of the local residents. She notes that the use of participatory methods does not guarantee participation and empowerment as we have discussed these here; the approach used and the facilitation and communication skills of the users are important (see Chambers *et al.* 1989 and Scoones and Thompson 1994 for similar arguments). Mosse 1994, 1998a, 2001) and others (Nelson and Wright 1997; Cooke and Kathari 2001, Hart 2004) have drawn our attention to the serious issues of power and dominance that underlie participatory research and the usefulness of the techniques in unscrambling social relations

and spheres of influence. RRA, PRA and other participatory approaches make no claim to being perfect nor do they profess to be free of extraneous variables but then which methods within the social and natural sciences can make such a claim?

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