

30. The relationship between rapid rural appraisal (RRA) and development market research (DMR)

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This paper lays out several useful considerations in organizing participative research for programme planning. However, the reader may find that there are definitional ambiguities in terms such as "academics" vs "business." It becomes apparent that the arguments for "Development Market Research" (DMR) reflect an orientation toward usefulness by development planners, particularly donors. In following the arguments posed on "cost-effectiveness" and "usefulness" the critical question remains, "To whom is it cost effective and useful?" The orientation here is clearly toward those planning to help. Most others dealing with Rapid Rural Appraisal are among those who seek approaches with a stronger orientation toward the beneficiaries as planners and genuine participants in transforming the development process. Since the conference, DRM has continued to develop and a training manual was published in 1991. - Eds.

SEVERAL DIFFERENT TYPES of Rural Appraisal (RA) methods are now available. They are all rooted in the disillusionment that began in the 1970s with the top-down bias of development activities. This disillusionment is exemplified, for instance, by the now famous McNamara speech of 1972 [1] and an ILO publication of the same year [2], both of which contributed to the explosion of the myth that a fast rate of economic expansion automatically solves the problem of poverty. Prior to that realization, if planners sought grass roots level information at all, it was collected only by means of survey questionnaires. The survey results yielded quantitative data that lent themselves readily to statistical analyses, which in turn provided the basis for the design of development plans that focused on optimizing growth rates of gross national income. These plans normally left the distribution of income to a "trickle-down" process and paid no overt attention to the impact of the development process on the quality of life of affected populations.

Qualitative data were then - and often still are - labelled by development planners as "woolly" because they were not generated through rigorous statistical sampling and therefore do not facilitate easy generalizations. Many planners still seem bewitched by computerized statistical data, though they themselves often realize the high degree of unreliability and lack of meaning of the basic data that are fed into the computer.

The new focus in the 1970s on basic needs and poverty alleviation programmes necessitated a change, not only in the type of developmental data gathered, but more important, also in the techniques of collection. The Green Revolution, which switched research and planning attention to the problems of farmers in poorer and more heterogenous environments [3] further emphasized the need to change the focus and methods.

The beginnings of rapid rural appraisal (RRA)

The academic researchers in the vanguard of those attempting to displace the top-down bias, first used techniques that were little more than organized common sense [4]. There is no evidence in the Rapid Rural Appraisal literature of research methods other than those used within academia. Except for Kumar's reference to focus group interviews that have long been used by market researchers in industrialized nations [5], there is no reference in any of the RRA publications to the many types of qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques that long have been part of market research. Therefore, some of the RRA techniques now listed [4] represent efforts in re-inventing the wheel. While not an efficient approach, it highlights RRA's flexible, holistic, and open-minded academic approach to development research. It also led to novel ways of involving target groups in self-analysis of their problems. However, these innovative techniques often reduce emphasis on rapid procedures. This has led some RRA advocates to suggest that "rapid" should give way to "participatory" [4-7].

Development market research (DMR) and its evolution

DMR has been defined as a cost-effective methodology that provides relevant information and analysis about people's needs, demands, and receptivity for developmental services/products [8]. The techniques employed include focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, sample surveys, and retail audits, among others.

Some people oppose DMR because they consider it a "brain-washing" exercise; they mistakenly identify DMR with social cause marketing (SCM). However, DMR and SCM are similar only inasmuch as both involve the adaptation of concepts and techniques that have been developed in the context of business to socially beneficial ideas and causes [9]. But whereas SCM aims to bring about behavioural changes, DMR is change-neutral enquiring into existing behaviour patterns.

A detailed comparison of the administrative and operational aspects of RRA and DMR Administrative arrangements can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Administrative Arrangements: Comparing RRA with DMR

	RRA*	DMR
<i>Research Contract</i>	Unclear who funds and commissions RRA	Every DMR Workplan is supported by a budget. Time required, available funding and information needs are the three variables that must be balanced when making a judgement about research design (10)
<i>Timing</i>	How rapid is rapid?	One to five months depending on requirements
<i>Cost-effectiveness</i>	Usually cocooned in publicly funded research institutions	Cost-effective because of competitiveness

<i>Preparation of Report</i>	Quick in the field	Carefully compiled at headquarters
<i>Submission of Report</i>	Not specified	According to terms specified in original contract

*extracted from RRA publications

Non-profit academic versus commercial RRAs

RRA's main objective is for experts in the different development subjects to come face-to-face with grass roots level realities and to learn "...from and with rural people...gaining from indigenous physical, technical and social knowledge" [4]. It is thus a truly academic research exercise though with an action orientation. In contrast, DMR conducts client-based research dealing with a development problem(s) as a business proposition in a cost-effective manner. Every DMR starts with a work plan that includes budgetary and timing details that are negotiated between the commissioning organization and the DMR agency.

Table 2. Research Design: Comparing RRA with DMR

	RRA*	DMR
<i>Problem formulation</i>	Flexible, only vaguely defined	Precisely defined
		Research objectives explore and learn from and with informants; discover reasons for behaviour and views
<i>Research focus</i>	The poorest farmers at the beginning, now more general poverty focus	Audience segmentation according to project requirements
<i>Research components:</i>		
• secondary sources (desk research)	Extensive use	Extensive use of desk research (establishment of data banks)
• cultural adaptation	Some awareness	key cultural variables
• qualitative studies	Almost entirely	important but not always exclusive part of DMR complementary to qualitative and desk studies used for cross checking and limited generalization

• quantitative surveys	Hardly used (avoided!)	
<i>Sampling</i>	Often small size, statistical requirements not always adhered to	Appropriate for the different DMR components to produce both illustrative and representative data
<i>Validation</i>	Triangulation	Part of every DMR to check accuracy of data collected

*extracted from RRA publications

Research design (See Table 2)

Problem formulation

RRA displays flexibility in its problem formulation and research objectives, whereas DMR usually has more clearly defined goals that result from a business agreement between the commissioning organization and DMR contracts.

Research focus

RRA began by focusing on the agricultural problems facing small farmers. Since its inception, its focus has been widened to include studies of health care facilities [11], nutritional problems [12], non-formal education [13], etc. But, as Aslop [14] says,

"...partly because the information is difficult to collect, and partly because much of the work has focused on technical information, techniques for assessing micro-level social and economic information remain the province of sociologists and anthropologists often demanding professional training and a lot of time. There has been some development in the relatively rapid collection of this type of material, particularly in the area of participatory research but this article appeals to field workers to continue to develop and publicize cross-disciplinary techniques for the collection of project-related social and economic information."

There are thus even among some of the RRA exponents those who plead for a greater concern with rapid and systematic data collection techniques. Yet there are others who maintain that one of "...the delights of RRA is the lack of blueprint, and the encouragement to practitioners to improvise in a spirit of play" [4].

In contrast, DMR has access to a list of well-tried techniques of which the most appropriate are chosen prior to the onset of field work with the possibility of changing the techniques if the field situation should demand it. DMR, by adapting established market research techniques, is geared to tackle a variety of development problems. It may be used to answer questions about specific projects such as:

- What are the perceived benefits and advantages of the project for the various parties who will be affected?
- How effectively is the project carried out?
- How effective are the project's communication strategies?
- What is the demand for the output the project sets out to encourage?

"In the developing countries the use of market research to define problems and formulate appropriate solutions in the food technology sector is minimal. Many research projects aimed at improving the postharvest handling of foods or at combating malnutrition are initiated in the complete absence of reliable data on the intended market" [15].

Research components (*See Table 3*)

RRA and DMR are made up of similar components: secondary sources provide vital background information for subsequent field studies. DMR refers to "desk research", to denote all the information that can be collected from behind a desk, which may also include primary data collection by means of phone calls. However, DMR, with its business-like approach, also compiles computerized archives of the desk data collected. This offers the benefit of economies of scale for both syndicated and omnibus research. Cost-minimization is obviously of greater importance to DMRs conducted by commercial agencies than for RRA researchers who are usually cocooned in publicly-funded research institutions.

RRA's and DMR's qualitative studies have very similar if not identical ingredients, except for the fact that DMR is using the concept of key cultural indicators [7] to enable field workers to appraise local cultural elements rapidly and effectively. Also, DMR chooses its respondents on the basis of carefully selected sampling techniques, such as stratified locational units, which, in an agricultural context, may involve geographic categorization according to predominant cropping patterns that can be established by means of aerial photographs. Each of the DMR components is carefully pilot-tested and validated. RRA is much more subjective than DMR and relies heavily on the expertise and commitment of field researchers.

Quantitative surveys are almost completely ruled out as part of RRA; if they are conducted at all the answers are supposed to be memorized by the researcher who, at a later stage, completes the questionnaires. RRA's initial strong opposition to exclusive reliance on quantitative data is still reflected in the continued rejection of statistics. In DMR there is emphasis on the complementarity between the different research components and hypotheses that emerge from desk research, and qualitative studies are tested by means of quantitative studies and vice versa.

Table 3. Research Components: Comparing RRA with DMR

	RRA*	DMR
<i>Secondary sources:</i> (desk research)	Aerial photos and other available data relating to specific situation	Different types of available data, also relating to a wider context to compile a data bank for quick future retrieval
<i>Qualitative studies:</i>		

• Direct observation	Yes, but not systematic	Systematically conducted
<i>Qualitative descriptions and diagrams</i>	Considered at least equally important as hard data	Considered an integral part
<i>Interviews</i>	Semi-structured interviews with rural people and key informants	Semi-structured and in-depth interviews with carefully sampled informants using MR techniques; e.g. sentence completion etc.
<i>Group discussions</i>	Semi-structured workshops and brain storming	Focus groups, gossip groups, mini-groups, synectics
<i>Quantitative surveys:</i>		
• Formal questionnaires	Avoided	Carefully pilot-tested questionnaires based on desk and qualitative data (rarely used in purely diagnostic studies)
<i>Statistical analysis</i>	Little or none, use of triangulation	Conducted in conjunction with desk and qualitative data

*extracted from RRA publications

Field studies (See Table 4)

RRA's field staff is made up of multi-disciplinary teams of academic researchers and/or other experts. As Chambers [4] suggests, "All too often senior officials and academics who pronounce and prescribe on rural development lack recent direct knowledge, and base their analysis and action on ignorance or on personal experience which is decades out of date. RRA can bring them face-to-face with rural people. It can keep them up to date and can correct error. It can provide learning which is intellectually exciting, practically relevant, and often fun...The word "rapid" can also be used to justify rushing. . . the "R" of RRA should stand for "relaxed", allowing plenty of time."

For instance, the expert technologists participating in the Sondeo teams' field studies may genuinely want to discover the problems facing farmers, but it is questionable whether they possess the necessary communication skills to do this successfully.

Second, language poses another problem; outside experts who conduct RRAs often do not speak the vernacular or the particular dialect of the population with whom they interact. They are involved in RRA because of their expertise in one or other of the development-related disciplines and/ or official position rather than for their communication skills. RRA researchers are obviously aware of the difficulties and disadvantages of conducting unstructured in-depth interviews or brain-storming group discussions in this way and therefore stress that, " ... interpreters should be chosen carefully to ensure that they understand the questions...The

interpreter should not be physically between the speaker and the person being interviewed, but rather beside or slightly behind so that his or her function is clearly indicated" [13]. Third, if RRA is no more attempting to be rapid, but rather to be a relaxed exercise, does it still qualify as a RA method?

DMR has different skill requirements for the different research components: desk researchers are recruited for their ability to collect and collate relevant available data - most of them have studied history; qualitative researchers usually need some social science training as well as expertise in interviewing and communication; quantitative researchers, whose task it is to collect answers to structured survey questionnaires, in general only need to be able to establish rapport easily with respondents and to record reliably the information gathered. In cases where the survey involves quota sampling, which puts great responsibility on the field investigator, some knowledge of sampling techniques will be necessary. All qualitative and quantitative DM researchers are expected to communicate directly and freely with their respondents; they never work with the aid of interpreters.

The strength of DMR investigators lies in their interdisciplinary communication skills, and their weakness is their lack of expert knowledge of the numerous disciplines concerned with development problems; the reverse holds true for RRA investigators.

Table 4. Field Studies: Comparing RRA with DMR

	RRA*	DMR
<i>Staff</i>	Multi-disciplinary team of academic experts (often including expatriates)	Specially trained local investigators
<i>Training</i>	Not specified	Meticulous training
<i>Skill requirements</i>	Disciplinary expertise and preparedness to learn from target audiences	Different requirements for each of the DMR components desk research: ability to collect and collate relevant available data;
		<i>Qualitative studies</i> : social science interviewing techniques, ability to communicate
		<i>Quantitative surveys</i> : Rapport establishment and recording of data gathered
<i>Language</i>	Often need of interpreters	Vernacular speaking interviewers
<i>Professional Development</i>	Re-emphasis of disciplinary expertise	In many LDCs a new indigenous interdisciplinary profession of DM researchers at different levels of operation with promotion possibilities.

*extracted from RRA publications

DMR is almost exclusively conducted by indigenous DMR firms - for instance, UNICEF contracted with the Indian-based MARG to provide information on the perception of family

planning among some of the poorest South Indian women; SRG companies in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand have done DMR on such subjects as rural development projects, vasectomy among Moslem males, urban family planning development programmes, and ORT. These DMRs range from concept testing to evaluation.

DMR firms based in Third World countries rely entirely on indigenous investigators, who receive special training for each of the DMRs in which they get involved. Obviously, the pre-project training period inversely relates to the experience of individual investigators.

The total indigenization of development research not only ensures that all investigators tune into the local cultural wavelength and that a new profession is created to help absorb, for example, the many unemployed graduates in India, but it also should increase the self-sufficiency of developing countries.

In what sense is DMR complementary to RRA?

RRA offers the advantage of joining academic development experts and rural populations in a participatory learning process, which can yield insightful and valuable in-depth information on a small scale [16]. If, for instance, a development agency intends to alleviate the poverty problem in a specific area without clear ideas about what needs to be done first, and if time is not of the essence, RRA with its holistic approach offers the best method to produce viable recommendations. Though these recommendations obviously relate fully only to the *targeted* area, DMR can be employed to discover their possible applicability over wider areas. However, since ideas for most development projects still appear to emanate from expert researchers, DMR's systematic and cost-effective techniques in providing reliable and meaningful information make it an attractive proposition to development agencies.

For example, when the Indonesian Nutritional Rehabilitation Centres discovered that the weaning food that doctors had advised be distributed cost-free to mothers was rejected by the infants for whom it was intended, they arranged for a DMR to be conducted. This involved qualitative information collection and experiments with alternative food preparations as well as quantitative surveys from carefully sampled mothers of small children. The results clearly indicated that what was needed to make infants accept the weaning food was to give it a different colour. Once this was done mothers had no more problems in getting their infants to consume the food and in turn, this was reflected in considerable weight increases among these infants.

Endnote

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