

Section III: Community participation and rapid rural appraisal (RRA)

Section introduction

23. Some thoughts on development, people's participation, and research

24. Rapid but relaxed and participatory rural appraisal: Towards applications in health and nutrition

25. Participatory rural appraisal and participatory learning methods: Recent experiences from MYRADA and South India

26. Rapid rural appraisal (RRA) methodology and its use in nutrition surveys

27. Rapid rural appraisal and rapid assessment procedures: A comparison

28. Rapid rural appraisal applications in Africa: Achievements and problems

29. Rapid appraisal to assess community health needs: A focus on the urban poor

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

31. The use of rapid rural appraisal methodologies in development research: The experience of the centre regional pour le développement et la Santé Republic of Benin

Section introduction

Richard Young introduced the conference session on Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), and highlighted its people-oriented approach. He pointed out both the growing diversity of RRA uses and its strong adherence to community participation both in data collection, its analysis, and use.

In the context of the conference as a whole, this section demonstrates both the similarities and differences of RRA and RAP. The use of RAP, originally limited to programme evaluation in health and nutrition, and its initial focus on community-based behaviours has expanded. Previous chapters show that RAP use has expanded to become a tool now commonly used for programme planning, and that RAP now encompasses study of service deliverers, decision makers, and policy makers.

RRA, on the other hand, as reflected in the papers in this section, appears to have moved ever closer to the active participation by the community. Indeed, as called for by Mascarendas, some of the pioneers of RRA now wish to abandon "rapid" for "participatory" (PRA) and they see the process of collecting data in the community rather than the data per se as the primary source of learning from these tools. Emphasis is also placed on problem solving by the community. While the primary users of the results of RAP have tended to be those outside the community, information generated through RRA tools is used as much or more by those inside the community.

Participation in RRA by those outside the community appears to be moving toward roles of facilitation and sensitization as opposed to roles in which the outsider controls the data collection design, analysis and interpretation. With RRA, policy makers are becoming the target for actual participation in the methodology's use. Through such means RRA proponents hope to bring research closer to action and have action more closely linked to data and to a better understanding of what actually happens and is known in the community.

Community-based methods improvements and new methods are outlined by several authors including Robert Chambers. He also provides a set of guidelines for RRA work that includes a rare and highly appropriate list of attitudes, demeanor and behaviour that would be useful for all those who seek information and work at the community level.

As Young points out, the papers included reflect the diversity of work being done under the rubric of Rapid Rural Appraisal. It is obvious that many who use the term are far less concerned about developing the methodology or distinguishing it from RAP and other methods than in learning and using community-based qualitative methods for gathering data. Indeed, as reflected in the conference discussions in other chapters, and in the papers of Mascarenhas, Kachondham and Epstein which follow, attempts to clearly name and classify groups of qualitative methodologies may be less important than work on honing and improving the range of excellent work now being done under various rubrics. One common denominator appears to be that data gathering tools that reach into and work with the community are beneficial to those planning and attempting to improve social development.

Since the RAP conference, RRA has continued to develop and new techniques and studies continue to evolve.