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**“THOSE WHO ARE SILENT HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY”:
PARTICIPATORY RURAL APPRAISAL AND THE
DISCOURSES OF DEVELOPMENT**

by

Robert Opp, B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

The Norman Paterson School of International Affairs

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The undersigned hereby recommend to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research acceptance of this thesis submitted by
Robert John Opp as partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Professor Fiona Mackenzie
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ABSTRACT

Despite its radical origins, participatory development has become an accepted part of mainstream international development discourse. Participation, however, is understood in different ways by different actors. Reflecting on a case study of a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) research project in Southern Malawi, participation in development is conceptualized in this study as a contested space, within and over which actors negotiate meanings and practice in both local and global contexts. Key to the analysis of participation as a site of struggle is a careful reexamination of the underlying assumptions of the institutions and practices of development in terms of the role power and knowledge play in the strategies of various actors. It is argued here that a dynamic understanding of how power and knowledge are articulated in both symbolic and material struggles is crucial in the analysis of how contests over participation are waged from the macro to the micro level.

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INTRODUCTION

"Getting the participation of the poor involves a lot more than finding the right technique"

-World Bank Participation Sourcebook (1996:8)

In response to the strong critique and noted failures of centralized, 'top-down' or 'blueprint' approaches to development, many forms of 'bottom-up' or 'grassroots' development have been adopted by national governments, development agencies and NGOs wishing to improve the effectiveness of their development efforts (Korten, 1990; Uphoff, 1993; World Bank, 1996). This new shift in thinking has been characterized by the increasing use of the concept of 'participation' and a number of complementary notions such as 'local organizations' and 'community-based' initiatives, in addition to the rise of a myriad of methodological approaches to development research such as 'Participatory Rural Appraisal' and 'stakeholder analysis' (Esman and Uphoff, 1984; Chambers, 1994a). Listening to the voices of local people in the process of development is thought to facilitate the emergence of more effective, efficient, and responsive interventions. At the same time, local actors, through their active participation, will be 'empowered' to guide and sustain their own development (World Bank, 1996:8).

The excitement generated by participatory development, especially in the late 1980s and early 1990s has facilitated the emergence of participation as a 'buzzword' in international development. It can now be found in proposals, project designs, organizational mandates, and on the lips of practitioners throughout the field of international development. Yet such a widespread adoption of participation and its

related concepts into the mainstream channels of development thought (including the World Bank, as the opening quote demonstrates) is perhaps surprising given the ostensibly revolutionary implications of the notion. Indeed, some of the earliest applications of the concept to development had rather radical connotations. Found perhaps most lucidly in the writing of thinkers such as Paulo Freire, who advocated the participation of oppressed peoples in authentic development as active subjects of knowledge and action, the participatory process would ultimately result in the overthrow of their oppressors (Freire, 1970; Goulet, 1989). Meaningful support of participatory development efforts, claim many of its advocates, requires a real “transfer of power” from the dominant, decision-making people and institutions of development to those who are subordinated during the process (Chambers, 1994d:1). This ‘role-reversal’ would certainly seem to challenge developmental orthodoxy and its inherent power structures, and require drastic and difficult changes to both attitude and practice in the field of international development.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that an increasing number of observers have noted that the rhetoric of participatory development is not matched by action (Rahnema, 1992; Chambers, 1994d). Like any buzzword concept or instant fashion, participation has a broad range of interpretations and an even more confusing array of applications. Despite the radical roots of participatory development, the mainstreaming of participation in development has in many cases resulted in the reduction of the term to the process of consultation or simply participation in the implementation of a project. In some of the worst instances, it has been charged that the same concept which is applied to an

ostensibly emancipatory process is in fact employed as a legitimization for pre-existing hegemonic structures (Gardner and Lewis. 1996).

This thesis examines the struggle taking place over participation within development theory and practice. From its emergence as a challenge to development orthodoxy to an increasing tendency toward co-optation into top-down hierarchies, participatory development is interpreted and employed in a wide variety of ways by many different actors, from development professionals to local people. Has participatory development been institutionalized to the point of losing its ability to alter significantly mainstream development practice? Are participatory approaches truly an effective means through which local people can voice their concerns and become 'empowered' to oppose top-down development hierarchies?

Reflecting on a case study of a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) research project in Southern Malawi, participation is conceptualized in this study as a contested space, within and over which actors negotiate meanings and practice in both local and global contexts. Key to the analysis of participation as a site of struggle is a careful reexamination of the underlying assumptions of the institutions, policies, and practices of development in terms of the role power and knowledge play in the strategies of various actors. It is argued here that a dynamic understanding of how power and knowledge are articulated in both symbolic and material struggles is crucial in the analysis of how contests over participation are waged from the macro to the micro level. Such an understanding is also necessary in the formulation of strategies to strengthen or improve participatory approaches in order that the position of local actors is fortified in the face of

powerful global actors.

The relevance of posing these questions in the study of development interventions has been highlighted by a number of recent works which seek to move beyond simply an investigation of policies and practices to examine the underlying modernist assumptions and epistemological foundations of the theories and institutions of development (Pieterse, 1991; Sachs, 1992; Peet and Watts, 1993; Porter, 1995; Watts, 1995). Influenced by postmodern and post-structural thought, such analyses reconceptualize the language and accompanying practice employed by development institutions, agencies and experts as comprising discourses of development, or as Crush (1995:3) puts it, "the forms in which it makes its arguments and establishes its authority, the manner in which it constructs the world". Since its post-World War Two inception, the 'Third World' has been measured, mapped, and analyzed under the gaze of 'experts' trained in a wide range of Western scientific techniques from agriculture to public administration, resulting in the "colonization of reality" by dominant discourses of development (Escobar, 1995a). A number of scholars, most notably in the field of anthropology, have begun to deconstruct the objectification and colonization of the developing world by considering the institutions, practices, and corresponding discourses of development as objects worthy of study (Escobar, 1984; Ferguson, 1990; Escobar, 1995a; Gardner and Lewis, 1996; Grillo and Stirrat, 1997).

Chapter One of this thesis is devoted to reviewing and examining the function of power, knowledge and discourse in development. The reconceptualization of development in terms of discourse (and dynamic understandings of power and

knowledge) is seen as a necessary step toward penetrating the modernity-based constructions of reality which have for decades defined the dominant development paradigms. It is argued that development is better conceived of as an 'arena of struggle' in which a multiplicity of voices and knowledges negotiate meanings and identities in the effort to promote or resist strategies of power. In development practice, the struggle to impose one version of reality as more legitimate than others has been one of the most important.

Although it is not usually framed in terms of discourse, power and knowledge, the field of participatory development has emerged in recognition of the need to reform the practice of development in order to allow more than the voices of development experts to define modes of intervention in the South. The results of top-down, expert-driven development interventions have been disappointing (Picciotto, 1992; Hobart, 1993; Korten, 1995). It is suggested that by "putting people first" (Cernea, 1985) and doing "projects with people" (Oakley et al., 1991), local people's knowledge can inform development interventions to improve their effectiveness and efficiency. Moreover, placing people at the centre of development and giving them power to influence development decisions, is an empowering process which should ultimately lead to 'people's self-development' (Rahman, 1993).

Chapter Two of this study examines the emergence of participatory development and its ability to present a challenge to the dominant thinking and practice of development. The 'space' of participation in development, it is argued, is a site of contest and a point of interface between local people and larger systems of modernity. In

reviewing the history of participation in development in terms of discursive struggles, it is clear that while its origins were based in truly radical and revolutionary notions, the language and practice of participation are increasingly being adopted into mainstream forms of development while being stripped of their political overtones.

Chapter Three focuses on one participatory approach in development.

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), in order to elucidate further these concepts. The recent popularity and widespread acceptance of PRA, even by such actors as the World Bank, would seem surprising, given the aim of the approach to effect a number of reversals in the behaviours, attitudes and practices of development professionals, at the same time as privileging and channelling local peoples' voices into development bureaucracies. As most PRA literature tends to focus on the techniques and field practice of the approach, to the exclusion of larger theoretical questions, this chapter suggests that there is a need to examine the practice of PRA in light of ongoing struggles of meaning and practice both at the organizational level and in local social contexts. The inability of the approach to recognize such struggles limits its effectiveness in fostering the empowerment of local people, and in some cases, the assumption that the techniques of PRA are apolitical in their approach may actually exert a 'de-politicizing' force over development interventions.

Chapter Four details the background and the narrative of a case study of a PRA project in Southern Malawi. The project, part of an evaluation of a Malawian Ministry of Health program in which the author took part, raises a number of questions concerning the discursive struggles which take place over the 'space' of participation offered by the

approach, from the local level to the global. Chapter Five analyzes and reflects on the questions stemming from practice.

Chapter Six concludes the thesis by drawing the insights gained from the case study and comparing them with the lessons from the earlier chapters. PRA, functioning within the arena of struggle which comprises development, is found to be subject to co-optation on a number of fronts, including local contexts and powerful global discourses. Thus the efficacy of the approach depends on which actors are involved in its implementation as well as which discourses it has to function within. Chapter Six offers a number of recommendations for improving the practice of PRA by strengthening its ability to analyze the discursive contexts in which it works, as a means of resisting co-optation, and fortifying local subjugated knowledges.

This intention of this thesis is not to argue for the abandonment of participatory approaches of development, but rather to contribute to an understanding of how such approaches actually function in wider discursive contexts. Through an improved analytical comprehension of how power and knowledge are articulated in development practice, counter-hegemonic discourses or discourses of opposition may be strengthened, rather than co-opted. Ultimately, local expressions of diversity and resistance must be heard, and even imposed upon, development bureaucracies.

CHAPTER ONE: DEVELOPMENT AND THE COLONIZATION OF REALITY

"For years, the literature arrived at the analytical conclusion that a missing factor or tool, or the perverse, corrupt, or inefficient use of something, could explain the damage done by development to people and their environments. These 'analyses' have come to a dead end."

-Gustavo Esteva (1986:136)

Introduction

Esteva is not alone in his dissatisfaction of development and development theory. After nearly fifty years of development, the results of development interventions have been disappointing (Edwards, 1989; Mehmet, 1995). As Mark Hobart (1995:3) has commented, "by most standards of judgement, including the professed goals of the developers, most development projects fall seriously short." The World Bank admits to "high project failure rates" in its activities, and notes that capital intensive patterns of development have fallen short of their primary goal of poverty reduction (Piccioto, 1992:3). Voices from the South, too, are questioning the whole notion of development. "...[Y]ears of national and international development efforts have passed without any fundamental changes in the lives of the rural poor", notes Sithembiso Nyoni of Zimbabwe's Organization of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP). "[s]omething must be very wrong" (Nyoni, in Carmen, 1996:41).

Despite the questioning of development practice, critiques very seldom extend to the root of the concept itself, to place the epistemological foundations of development under scrutiny. The fundamental belief that development, with its associated theories, institutions, and practices, is in essence still relevant to addressing the needs of the

‘underdeveloped’ nations of the world remains for the most part in place. Arturo Escobar (1995a:5) has argued that development has “achieved the status of a certainty in the social imaginary” in the latter half of the twentieth century, making it “impossible to conceptualize social reality in other terms.” Similarly, Graham Hancock (1989:41) has observed “[o]bviously it is better to be developed than to be underdeveloped...[it] would be crazy to suggest anything else.” Consequently, most attempts to analyze and reform development are located within its own created reality: as Esteva points out in his opening quote, finding the missing factor or tools in development has been the preoccupation of the majority of critiques.

This chapter represents a theoretical, or perhaps more suitably, an analytical exploration of alternative ways of conceptualizing development and how it functions in language and in practice. By investigating the epistemological foundations of the concept and employing alternative analytical perspectives, the dissatisfaction with and obvious failure of development theory can be shown to lie within its modernist assumptions. The chapter will begin with a brief review of past development theory and its limitations, followed by the introduction of alternative analyses of power and knowledge in the social spheres. It will be argued that in order to comprehend the successes and failures of development, it is necessary to penetrate the meta-narratives and discourses (facilitated by the articulation of power and knowledge) which actively construct social reality around the concept. Development practice is better conceptualized as an “arena of struggle” in which different interests seek to project their own representations of reality upon others (Crehan and Von Oppen, 1988:113).

The Crisis of Development Theory

Modernization

As the opening quotation from Esteva notes, the general response of development scholarship to criticisms surrounding interventions has focussed on the analysis of missing factors, tools, or the inadequacy of the analyses themselves. Aside from methodological adjustments, the majority of development critiques focus on the shortcomings of many of the 'traditional' theories of development. Modernization theory, introduced in the post-World War Two period and modelled after the Marshall Plan in Europe, focussed on the wholesale transfer of Western institutions and values as the means of developing the 'underdeveloped'. This required the transformation of 'primitive' cultures, or the "passing of traditional society" (Lerner, 1958), the introduction of Western technology and capital, and the subsequent development of an industrial base. Observers such as Rostow (1960) conceptualized this transition in terms of stages of growth, dependent on the presence of certain formulaic variables (capital, savings, investment) at each level. Underdevelopment is explained in terms of 'obstacles' which are particular to each country, ideologically neutral and have straightforward solutions (Gardner and Lewis, 1996:13).

Modernization theory has been criticized for its failure to predict and model accurately the actual economic, social and political conditions in the Third World, largely due to its pro-capital bias and overwhelmingly eurocentric nature (Toye, 1993; Mehmet, 1995). Most of all, the linear path of growth upon which the theory is founded assumes a political and historical world vacuum, into which Western democratic (mostly American)

values and institutions may be inserted easily. This paradigm completely ignores not only the differences among nations in their social and cultural spheres, but also their histories of imperial domination.

Dependency Theory

The inadequacies of modernization theory spurred a number of alternative theories, many utilizing a Marxian analysis of global capitalism to expose the fundamentally exploitative relationship between nations of the North and those of the South. Although there were many strands of thought which used this type of analysis, the critique will be mentioned here as part of the 'dependency' school. Dependency theorists, many of whom were Latin American or other Southern economists, accused modernization theory of ignoring patterns of colonial and post-colonial exploitation and the growing disparity between the industrialized nations at the 'centre' of the global economy and the 'underdeveloped' poorer nations of the 'periphery'. The economically powerful elite in the core deplete countries of the periphery of resources and profit, with the effect of weakening their domestic economies. Andre Gunder Frank, one of the founders of the dependency school, pointed out that at the heart of this process lay a relationship of exploitation: "If the now underdeveloped were really to follow the stages of growth of the now developed ones, they would have to find still other peoples to exploit into underdevelopment, as the now developed countries did before them" (Frank, in Pieterse, 1991:14).

Dependency theorists also challenged the ethnocentrism of modernization theory.

“The dependency school,” writes Kate Manzo (1989:10), “was united in its refusal to see the West as the privileged agent of change and progress in the ‘developing’ countries.” The inherent hierarchy of ‘traditional’ versus ‘modern’ societies was refuted by calls for historically-situated studies of the way in which underdevelopment results not from purely internal obstacles, but it is also dependent on external factors. While the recognition of external factors (the imperialistic relationship between centre and periphery) is useful, dependency theories have been criticized for overemphasizing this aspect.¹ Moreover, the issue of *how* or *why* this form of imperialistic control or power is effected is not explained (Ferguson, 1990:13).

Although modernization and dependency seem diametrically opposed to one another, a number of scholars have pointed out that they share a great deal as well. Manzo (1989) and Jan Pieterse (1991) have labelled both theories as “developmentalist”. For Manzo (1989:6) they are both trapped within a “modernist discourse...which accepts the Western model of national autonomy with growth as the appropriate one to emulate.” Pieterse (1991:15) similarly notes that dependency and modernization are simply “variations on a theme”:

What these...perspectives...have in common is economism, centrism and teleology: economism because economic growth is the centrepiece of social change, teleology in that the common assumption is goal-oriented development, centrism because development (or underdevelopment, according to the dependency view) is led from where it is furthest advanced - the metropolitan world.

¹ Dependency theories also tended to focus on exchange relationships rather than relations of production. For a more complete evaluation of dependency theory, see Kay (1989).

The similarities between these two superficially different theories is a testament to the strength and dominance of the underlying modernist assumptions which each holds.

This, according to Manzo (1989:6), is the root cause of the crisis of development theory:

...such is the strength of the modern way of thinking and knowing that it influences the thought of supposedly discrete theoretical traditions so that what it means to be 'developed' is the same for both...the current impasse, or crisis, plaguing development theory...relates not to the fragmentation of the field but to its unity: to this failure to conceive of development in any other manner.

The inability of development to analyze its own failure, then, must be the focus of examination. If, as Escobar (1995b:212) suggests, "[d]evelopment has been the primary mechanism through which the Third World has been imagined and imagined itself, thus marginalizing or precluding other ways of seeing and doing", then looking beyond the notion itself becomes necessary. The question which must be posed is how development has been able to colonize reality: how "certain representations become dominant and shape indelibly the ways in which reality is imagined and acted upon" (Escobar, 1995a:5). Pieterse (1991:24) concludes that ultimately the "problem of developmentalism cannot be settled in terms of political economy, nor in terms of social philosophy...it requires a profound historical and cultural review of the western project."

Discourse and the Analytics of Power

The review of the western project recommended by Pieterse has already begun in a number of ways. The power which development (and modernism) wields over the social imaginary, and the manner in which social reality is created and controlled, indicate

the dominance of one representation of reality over and above others. Showing *how* and *why* this dominance is established and maintained, in addition to how it may be penetrated or resisted, requires a close examination of the formation of the hegemonic discourse of modernism within which development is situated. A fundamental reconceptualization of the ways in which power and knowledge are articulated in the social sphere and in development interventions is also necessary. To this end, it becomes useful to employ the notion of an 'analytics of power', a set of critical tools able to expose the interrelations between discourse, knowledge, and power instrumental in the construction of reality surrounding international development practice.

Discourse

Central to the work of many scholars addressing these questions is the use of discourse analysis as a means to uncover and demystify the socio-political and cultural belief systems which have "ordered our knowledge" and "shaped our social reality" (Faveri, 1993:23). Discourse, used here, refers to much more than language. It also embodies social roles, cultural practices, and political positions which deploy and channel power. Influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, discourse is defined by a number of scholars as a "historically, socially and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories and beliefs...the site where meanings are contested and power relations determined" (Parpart and Marchand, 1995:2-3). In every society the production of discourse is controlled, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures (Escobar, 1984:379). It is able to produce "permissible modes of being and

thinking while disqualifying and even making others impossible” through its articulation in not only in language but also related institutions which promote a particular knowledge set (Escobar, 1995a:5).

Foucault’s work contributed to the larger critique of Western rationality and modernist discourse undertaken by a number of scholars in the 1970s. Similar to other postmodern and post-structuralist writers such as Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jacques Derrida, he ultimately rejected the universal truth claims of modernity. As a “grand narrative...constitutive of a set of attitudes found dominant in Western culture, but not limited to that culture”, modernism can be seen as being comprised of hegemonic metanarratives based in Enlightenment thought, with its corresponding fundamentals of reason and objectivity (Johnston, 1991:152). These metanarratives, in their attempt to ‘explain’ the world using universal and often homogenizing concepts, actually construct their own versions of reality by privileging some forms of knowledge over others. Conversely, alternate and competing discourses are silenced in order to maintain the hegemony of the metanarrative (Parpart, 1991:1-2). For Lyotard, metanarratives have been the means through which Western constructs such as modern science have “successfully managed to safeguard [their] aura of transcendence” (Bertens:1995:125).

Derrida has analyzed modernist discourse and its principles in terms of binary oppositional structure. In his work he argues that Western (rational) discourse is able to maintain its hegemony by privileging a “‘central and ordinary presence’” which is “‘necessary to the interpretation of history, and which is itself regarded as unproblematic and beyond history’” (Johnston, 1991:152). This ‘logocentrism’ of hegemonic discourse

places its privileged terms in hierarchical opposition to their inverse notion: male/female, rational/irrational, modern/traditional, developed/underdeveloped, core/periphery, among others (Johnston, 1991:152). The term in opposition to the privileged one (the 'other') is viewed solely in relation to that term and defined as a negation or complication, with universalizing tendencies. Thus Derrida (in Peet and Watts, 1996:14) notes that the universal claims of truth and power on the part of Western discourse of rationality and colonialism calls for a "relentless anatomization of the collusive forms of European knowledge."

Knowledge and the Construction of the 'Third World'

The management and control of the non-European world by Western discourses of truth and rationality has been traced by a number of scholars interested in exposing the hierarchical power relations between hegemonic and dominated regions. Seminal works produced by Edward Said (1979) and V.Y. Mudimbe (1988, 1991), for example, illustrate how, in colonial and post-colonial times, the representation of reality presented by 'Western' sources promoted a vision of universal European economic, political and cultural hegemony at the same time as disregarding other traditions. For Said, "Orientalism" (scholarship on the Orient, or Middle East) must be examined as a discourse in order to understand the "enormously systemic discipline by which European culture was able to manage - and even produce - the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (Said, 1979:3). This process suited the needs of expanding European colonial

empires, and the “setting off” of European culture against the Oriental one even strengthened its hegemony (Said, 1979:3).

Similar to Said, Mudimbe’s works, *The Invention of Africa* (1988) and *The Idea of Africa* (1994), document how an “epistemological ethnocentrism” on the part of Western scholarship marginalizes systems of African knowledge and philosophy, and instead constructs or invents discourse surrounding Africa based on Western knowledge (1988:16). Mudimbe’s detailed examination of art and literature from ancient Greece until the present day documents how these ideas concerning Africa are perpetuated in the culture and institutions of the West. In his effort to go “beyond positivism”, Mudimbe (1991:xiv) tries to understand the “powerful yet invisible epistemological order that seems to make possible, at a given period, a given type of discourse about Africa” in an effort to uncover or re-establish African knowledges and discourses which have been subsumed or silenced.

A number of feminist writers have used similar analyses to penetrate the tendency of discourse to homogenize and objectify its subjects. Scholars such as Chandra Mohanty (1988:61) and Jane Parpart (1991, 1995) have challenged the construction of a ‘Third World Woman’ in scholarship and literature as a singular monolithic subject (or the ‘other’) which has been utilized by some Western feminists as a means of forging universalistic bonds among women. The essentialistic categories produced by ethnocentric “western humanist discourse” have erased differences between not only women of the North and the South, but also among women of the South (Mohanty, 1988:63-64). To reclaim and recognize difference and identity, some deconstructionists

have indicated a need for “local, specific and historically informed analysis of different realities” (Parpart, 1991:2).

In all cases, the construction of the ‘other’ as homogenous stereotypes serves to reinforce the supremacy of Western society and knowledge, constructing the non-European world as being in need of assistance. In colonial times (as now), this translated into a need for ‘civilization’ or scientific knowledge. In the case of feminist writing, the portrayal of the ‘Third World Woman’ can serve the interest of western feminist scholars who use western women as “the referent point for modern, educated, sexually liberated womanhood” and therefore justify certain interventions on their behalf (Parpart:1991:5).

All of these critiques illustrate the importance of recognizing the effect that the production and maintenance of knowledge within the discourses of modernism have over representations of reality. The establishment of Western ‘scientific’ knowledge as the ultimate authority on the non-European world led to the construction of the colonial world as the ‘other’, promoting the hegemony of Western power interests in global affairs. In considering contemporary development interventions, the role that knowledge plays in the colonization of reality also demands considerable attention. Using Western scientific knowledge as the basis of theory and action, discourses that surround development tend to construct their subjects and strategies as objective and indisputable.

In his inaugural speech of January 20, 1949, the President of the United States, Harry S. Truman, declared that:

More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate, they are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a threat

both to them and to more prosperous areas. For the first time in history humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these peoples with the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life...Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge (Harry S. Truman, quoted in Escobar, 1995:3).

In Truman's speech, the role of development is clear: to address the "misery" of the "primitive and stagnant" underdeveloped world. While the uncivilized and barbaric nature of the people of the non-European world found in colonial representation is replaced by economic backwardness, the opposition of the West to the rest of the globe as the 'other' remains. As such, the portrayal of the Third World as in need of Western knowledge is a construction consistent with the perspective of the dominant powers, the developers, not necessarily "those to-be-developed" (Hobart, 1993:2). The particularly prominent position of Western scientific knowledge to the exclusion of other local, "primitive" knowledges is a key factor in the maintenance of the version of reality promoted by development: underdeveloped nations need what the developed West already possesses, namely, the knowledge necessary for economic success.

Indeed, throughout its history development has been based largely upon the principle of knowledge transfers from the developed world to the underdeveloped one. As Hobart (1993:9) notes, development "consists in no small part of knowledge, positivistically conceived as true propositions about the world, being treated as a valuable resource." Under the assumptions of "western scientific epistemologies" that knowledge is a "tangible stock, body or store to be tapped, extracted and documented", scientific knowledge is privileged over other forms because of its apparent ability to be proven

through reason and objectivity, themselves constructions of Western thought (Scoones and Thompson, 1993:3). Development planning, then, is based upon the assumption that problems (defined by scientific methods) can be reduced to a technical level, and solutions found.

According to Hobart (1993:21), the dominance of Western, or scientific discourse has, in effect, "commoditized" knowledge, which "becomes a thing in itself and turns people into objects or patients". The effect of the commoditization of Western knowledge is that it is easily separated from the context or perspective of the individual, and portrayed as objective and static. Piers Vitebsky (1993:105) argues that in industrial society as a whole, this process has led to a move away from the individual's ability to determine who or what is knowledgeable (and the existence of multiple knowledges, dependant on individual perspectives) to a deference toward 'experts' and their scientific knowledge portrayed as complete and non-subjective:

Lay persons cannot participate in these experts' knowledge very actively, but only as its patients, objects or clients. As the lay person is excluded from exercising an area of knowledge or participating in it from any angle except a passive one, so knowledgeability becomes less of an attribute, knowing becomes less of an action and knowledge becomes more of a thing in itself. As the adjectival and verbal forms are squeezed out, the nominal form of knowledge hardens, this reification appears to take on a reality, and knowledge becomes a commodity, alienable and subject to hoarding and trading (Vitebsky, 1993:105).

Parpart (1995) suggests further that the commodification of knowledge in development has given rise to cadres of 'experts' (and their corresponding institutions) who, with their universally valid knowledge, sell or transfer their exclusive expertise to the Third World, which is desperately in need of assistance. The construction of Third

World economies as underdeveloped. Parpart (1995:224) argues. actively creates a demand for this expertise:

...with judicious effort and the assistance of developmental experts, less developed economies could eventually be brought up to modern standards...[o]nly then, and only with Western assistance, would they become full partners in the modern world, ready to participate in the adventure of progressive modern development already well under way in Europe and North America. Of course, the discourse and institutions of modernity had already been set by the West.

Corresponding to the commoditization of scientific knowledge and enshrinement of development experts is a reverse process in which there is a concurrent construction of ignorance surrounding the people or nations who do not possess the privileged knowledge. But as Vitebsky (1993) has argued, the notion of ignorance reaches beyond simply not to know: it suggests an active confrontation between knowledges, the dismantling and vilification of one system of knowledge by another. This process, suggests Vitebsky (1993:108), is a crucial part of the development enterprise:

The very essence of 'development' is to declare an essence in someone else, in order to end their previous state of knowledge by transmuting it into ignorance - a sort of reverse alchemy. If local traditions are allowed to survive, they do so only as 'beliefs' and are encapsulated as 'folk' or 'little tradition' and put into quotation marks...There is created a great chain of being, of life-forms...At the lowest level are people who cannot even fill out a form or sign their name...truly ignorant people... And so a report is written about what the natives do and even what they think, by those whose model is so un-dialogic that it even presumes to pre-empt experience.

The labelling of local forms of knowledge as ignorant corresponds to what Foucault (1980:81) referred to as "subjugated knowledges". As a "whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently

elaborated". subjugated knowledges are "located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (Foucault, 1980:82). Compared to the greater systematization and scientific nature of Western technology and knowledge, the relevance of subjugated knowledges is obscured. The ultimate aim of developmentalism then becomes the enshrinement of hegemonic (modernity-based) knowledges as valid 'truths' at the same time as subjugated knowledges are disqualified as unscientific.

Power and Normalization

In the dynamic struggles which take place between hegemonic and subjugated knowledges, the effects of power are manifested. This is demonstrated most obviously in the ability to control who is authorized to speak and who is not: "the criteria of what constitutes knowledge, what is to be excluded, and who is qualified to know involves acts of power" (Foucault, 1971, cited in Scoones and Thompson, 1993:12). The ultimate effect is the creation of "regimes of truth" in which certain versions of reality struggle with others to present the appearance of universal validity:

Truth is not outside of power or itself lacking in power....Truth is of this world: it is the product of multiple constraints....Each society has its own regime of truth, its general politics of the truth....There is a combat for the truth, or at least around the truth, as long as we understand by the truth not those true things which are waiting to be discovered but rather the ensemble of rules according to which we distinguish the true from the false, and attach special effects of power to 'the truth' (Foucault, in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983:117).

Foucault documented the regimes of truth found in the Western scientific discourse of various disciplines such as medicine, criminology, and psychology in an

attempt to penetrate their hegemonic appearances and examine their effects on populations. The aim of power, Foucault (in DuBois, 1989:5) concluded, is to enforce the conformity to the norms and truths of Western scientific discourse by producing “docile bodies” and “normalized” subjects. The process of “normalization” is propelled by the creation of abnormalities among populations (ignorance is one example) which it must then address and reform (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983:195-196). In doing so, hegemonic discourses of modernity justify their dominance and expand their influence.

In his study of how modern power (together with knowledge) produces docile bodies and normalized subjects, Foucault analyzed how a “subterranean realm of nondiscursive practices” are “supported, justified, and imbued with meaning by discourse” (in DuBois, 1989:8). In the new administrative regimes of modernity, imbued with the reason and rationality of Enlightenment, these included ‘scientific’ procedures such as techniques of examination and architectures of surveillance found in institutional settings such as schools, hospitals, and prisons, as well as government policies to maintain the conformity of populations to constructed norms and truths (Luke, 1991:277).

Luke (1991:276), following from Foucault, notes that discourses of modernity (and their corresponding political and economic institutions and mechanisms) attempt to exert a force of normalizing reason over their subjects. This is reinforced by practices such as scientific classification and objectification, in which the “energies and consciousness of individuals” are reduced to *things*, thus enabling them to be more “rationally spatialized, temporalized and mobilized”. Thus as the ‘normal’ is established within various societal domains, such as the prison, the factory, the home or the school, it

serves as a measuring standard from which subjects may be judged. Paradoxically, the process of normalization results in two very different outcomes. In the most immediate sense, it can indicate membership within a homogenous societal group, such as students, prisoners, or citizens. Perhaps more importantly, technologies of normalization can also introduce hierarchies among subjects, such as the poor student, sick patient, delinquent citizen, and, as Deborah Johnston (1991:162) points out, the 'Third World' nation. Normalization, then, imposes homogeneity at the same time as individualizing by "making it possible (and desirous) to measure gaps, to determine levels, and to render differences useful by fitting them together" (Johnston, 1991:162).

The power of judgement inherent in normalization to determine normalcy and deviance has other important implications. Discourses of modernity are placed effectively beyond criticism by transforming into a technical problem "what might otherwise be construed as a failure of the whole system of operation" (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983:196). Technologies of normalization, then, not only define social anomalies (Foucault used examples such as the sexual 'pervert' and the 'delinquent') and then seek to treat them in a technical or 'scientific' fashion, but they also rely on the continued presence of those anomalies for their own expansion. Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983:196) elucidate this important point:

Political technologies advance by taking what is essentially a political problem, removing it from the realm of political discourse, and recasting it in the neutral language of science. Once this is accomplished the problems have become technical ones for specialists to debate.... When there was resistance, or failure to achieve its stated aims, this was construed as further proof of the need to reinforce and extend the power of the experts. A technical matrix was established. By definition, there

ought to be way of solving any technical problem...any other standards could be shown to be abnormal or to present merely technical problems. We are promised normalization and happiness through science and law. When they fail, this only justifies the need for more of the same.

An Analytics of Power

In order to investigate how power accomplishes this process of normalization, Foucault recommends a move toward what he calls an “analytics of power” as opposed to a theory of power (Foucault, 1978:82). The success of such a concept, however, depends on its ability to free itself from the traditional notion of power as a commodity held by one party to the exclusion of another, toward a more dynamic understanding. Foucault argues that the commonly accepted version of power, which he labels “juridico-discursive”, is usually presented as a repressive or negative force (Foucault, 1978:82), following a liberal framework which “understands power as emanating from the sovereign and imposing itself upon the subjects” (Fraser, 1989:26). Foucault rejected this “reification” of power, insisting that it “is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared” (Foucault, 1978:105).

Foucault maintained that the focus on the negativity of power, and the discourse which supports it, actually conceals the more important aspects of power. He wished to “remove the blind spots created by a unidimensional notion of power” by conceptualizing power as productive rather than restrictive, exercised rather than possessed, omnipresent rather than localized (DuBois, 1989:5). Power is “capillary” and “polymorphous” in nature, circulating throughout the social sphere, rather than emanating from central

sources (Fraser, 1989:26). "Power is everywhere." Foucault (1978:93) writes, "not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere....[it] is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (Foucault, 1978:93). Thus power, which is "immanent" in the multiplicity of force relations found throughout the "entire social body down to even the tiniest and apparently most trivial extremities" works differently than commonly assumed. Conceptualizing power as coming from below, rather than a "binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled" (Foucault, 1979:94) allows us to view hegemonic power structures as the product of an alignment of "micro-relations":

At a particular historical juncture some of these microrelations of power fit together or complement one another, a process that builds 'strategies' of power - the weave of power relations that is the condition for macro-relations of power and more 'general' or 'global' forms of domination. The State, or ruling class, then, results from the configurations and consequences of the microrelations of power. In return, these superstructures of domination determine the environment of the microrelations and, hence, modify or influence them to a certain degree (DuBois, 1989:5).

The idea of circulating power exercised at all levels allows for the introduction of the notions of struggle, resistance and intentionality. According to Foucault (1980:35), power is "employed and exercised through a net-like organisation, and not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power." These relations are both "intentional and nonsubjective...there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives" (Foucault, 1978:95). Yet, as Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983:187) point

out, while at the local level actors are clear in articulating their actions, "it does not follow that the broader consequences of these local actions are coordinated....the fact that individuals make decisions about specific policies or particular groups jockey for their own advantage does not mean that the overall activation and directionality of power relations in society implies a subject." This is a crucial insight into Foucault's notion of power, as the idea of a subjectless power leaves the analyst with only the task of examining practices. The practices themselves, at the local, institutional and societal level embody what the analyst seeks to comprehend:

There is a logic to the practices. There is a push towards a strategic objective, but no one is pushing. The objective emerged historically, taking particular forms and encountering specific obstacles, conditions and resistances. Will and calculation were involved. The overall effect, however, escaped the actors' intentions, as well as those of anybody else. As Foucault phrased it, 'People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does' (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983:187).

Power and Development

The implications of the preceding discussion surrounding power and normalization are profound for the study of development interventions and practices. In the effort to assert universal validity and establish regimes of truth, dominant discourses of development employ a number of strategies. The reconceptualization of both power and knowledge is critical to the understanding of not only *how* but *why* the hegemony of the modernist discourse of development is maintained.

Technologies of normalization in development exist at many levels. One of the most visible is the development expert (already discussed above) and the concrete role

he/she takes in the surveillance and management of the Third World. After World War Two, the proliferation of international organizations, state agencies, university programs, and research institutes focussing on the problem of development led to a dramatic increase in the amount of studies and writing on the developing world. 'Experts' invaded the dwellings, fields, towns, schools, markets, and hospitals of Asia, Africa and Latin America, measuring everything from birth rates to literacy to GNP. "Development fostered a way of conceiving of social life as a technical problem." Escobar (1995a:52) writes, "as a matter of rational decision and management to be entrusted to that group of people - the development professionals - whose specialized knowledge allegedly qualified them for the task." Johnston (1991:165) notes that the "mountain of statistics" generated by such experts became the means through which the North "largely came to know the Third World".

Johnston (1991:165) links the collection and use of statistics with the process of normalization in their ability to "compare and hierarchize". The comparison which can be made on the basis of statistics, such as high or low GNP per capita, levels of social service provision, birth and death rates, and other demographic surveys allow economies, countries and people to be placed (judged) on a linear continuum of less developed or more developed. The purpose of hierarchization is to normalize behaviour by suggesting an ultimate end, in this case the modern developed nation-state, and indicating the need for reform or discipline of those states which do not achieve this goal (Johnston, 1991:165).

The invasion of the Third World by experts and the measurement of social

variables designated as vital led to the mapping and objectified production of the nations of the South (Escobar, 1995a). Statistics were employed as a means of observation and surveillance, allowing development agencies, institutions and national governments to judge progress being made in development, in relation to standards already set in the developed world. As Timothy Luke (1991:290) notes, each developing nation is “put on its own stage to enact its own version of a familiar script...Norms are internalized by locals to get access to power and wealth, and conform to the dictates of powers in Washington, London, Geneva...or Moscow.” Foreign aid agreements between Northern donors and Southern recipients attached conditionalities to the transfer of resources to ensure that the proper reforms would be implemented. For example, according to Johnston (1991:167), IMF and World Bank agreements with developing nations can be viewed as “examinations” that qualify, classify, and punish the economic delinquency of the Third World. Similarly, Marc DuBois (1989:17) shows how, at the level of policy, social control over the issue of population is effected and evaluated by the collaboration of scientific studies and donor agency strategies which tied the channelling of economic resources to the adoption of ‘population control’ measures. By casting birth and population control as technical problems, the dominant discourses of development were able to redefine the issue as economic, rather than political, in nature. This had the ultimate effect of promoting the belief that the poor are the cause of their own poverty, as well as stifling any competing discourses of “redistribution or transformation” of global power relations (DuBois, 1989:16).

At the macro level, discourses of development observe and control the production

of the Third World through statistics and articulations of policy, including conditionalities of aid. The normalizing power of development is also deployed at the micro level, most notably in the form of localized development organizations and their concrete interventions. DuBois (1991:19) points out that it is somewhat ironic that development organizations operating at the grass-roots level designed to reach marginalized populations may in fact be the most efficient instruments of colonization on behalf of larger power strategies of which they are part.

One of the most striking examples of this local level normalization is the development project, the mechanism which links outsiders and their expert knowledge with individuals with a perceived lack of knowledge and other problems. DuBois (1989:19) writes:

One significant trait of projects is that intervention is made on behalf of a problem - the correction of an 'anomaly' - which is identified in and constructed by specific discourses...there are 'beneficiaries' - the population of region X or the inhabitants of village Y - but they receive only secondary focus. The central axis of the project is rectification - the 'objective' assessment of a situation in which there is a 'need' and the 'scientific' prescription of a set of actions intended to remedy said need.

Projects play a crucial role in normalization, in that they actively seek to 'train' beneficiaries to act in certain ways, and fit into pre-existing systems. In the initial phase of most projects, beneficiaries and their geographical location, day-to-day practices, and social customs are objectified and dissected; names, addresses, and histories are collected and analyzed (DuBois, 1989:21). Afterward, scientific prescriptions of safer, more efficient and better ways of doing things can be implemented and monitored with evaluations. Non-compliance and the failure to adopt proper procedures is often labelled

as ignorance or the blame is placed on social constraints such as traditional belief systems (Vitebsky, 1993).

It is important to remember that this type of pressure can be linked to larger, macro-level strategies of power that seek to avoid a radical alteration of the existing order. It can be argued, for example, that dominant discourses of development are guided and formed by larger world agendas of transnational commerce and discourses of modernization. Luke (1991:282) points to the parallels of the developing world with the emergence of centralized autocratic states and early capitalism in Europe; national governments of the developing world now face the challenge of attempting to harness the productive capacities of their populations in order to enter the world economy. This process of integration, however, requires the mobilization of people into the fold of modernity, something which, contrary to popular rhetoric, may restrict freedom rather than instill it:

As the LDCs modernize, social choices, political options, technical alternatives, and cultural diversity are sacrificed in order to gain rapid entry into - it is believed - the core-dominated modern economy. Discourses, knowledge and values other than those of science, technology, and the secular approach to social relations, are largely precluded from the LDCs' frame of action by the pre-existing structural disciplines of the metropolitan world system. Choices are already made, options are foreclosed, alternatives are discounted, and diversity is not encouraged as the local modernizers mobilize their nations and peoples for development (Luke, 1991:283).

Thus limitations on development imposed by discourses of modernization obviously influence grassroots development practices, rendering it difficult for projects to effect truly innovative or autonomous strategies of development. "If the majority of

development efforts did not fit into and help constitute overarching strategies of world domination,” suggests DuBois (1989:22), “if they disrupted the *net* transfer of capital that underpins the superficial transfer called ‘aid,’ then such activities would be obstructed. and they would find no footing in the weave of strategies.” James Ferguson (1990:70). in his study of a development project in the context of Lesotho. notes further that the same principle holds true for development reports and intellectual analyses produced by experts: “The analysis which is most helpful to a ‘development’ agency. then - and the one that will naturally rise to the top of authoritative ‘development’ discourse - is the one that ‘moves the money.’ the one that presents Lesotho as a likely target for the standard ‘development’ intervention. and serves as a charter to justify and legitimate the sort of programs that the bureaucratic establishment is there to execute.”

Tracing Power

Analyzing exactly how power and discourse are articulated in a context of a development intervention requires careful investigation of not only what occurs. but how and why certain events take place. Ferguson's *Anti-Politics Machine* (1990) provides one of the strongest examples of such an examination of development discourse in a project setting. His investigation of a World Bank-CIDA rural integrated development project in Lesotho focuses on neither the donor agencies nor the program beneficiaries; his interest is an examination of the “development apparatus” itself and how it functions in a particular setting (Ferguson, 1990:17). Ferguson notes that the difference between planned outcomes and actual results in a project setting cannot be attributed to simply

structural flaws or the actions of the subjects involved: “Whatever interests may be at work, and whatever they may think they are doing, they can only operate through a complex set of social and cultural structures so deeply embedded and so ill-perceived that the outcome may be only a baroque and unrecognizable transformation of the original intention” (Ferguson, 1990:17). Discourse, then, becomes important for an understanding of how, in the context of a development project, actions and events are articulated. “The thoughts and actions of ‘development’ bureaucrats” writes Ferguson, “are powerfully shaped by the world of acceptable statements and utterances within which they live; and what they do and do not do is a product not only of the interests of various nations, classes, or international agencies, but also, and at the same time, of a working out of this complex structure of knowledge” (Ferguson, 1990:18).

An important element (for the present study) of Ferguson's comprehensive investigation of the Thaba-Tseka project in Lesotho is his analysis of the relationship between discourse and power in a developmental context. He notes that a “decentered” conceptualization of power is necessary for an understanding of the guiding intentions of the various “animating subjects” (Ferguson, 1990:18). Project plans and outcomes cannot be interpreted simply as a production or consequence of the interests of the different parties involved, some of whom possess power, and others who are powerless. Rather, conceiving power as “subjectless” allows micropractices found within the complex web of relations that comprises the development apparatus to be analyzed. Planned interventions, then, can be viewed as “coming together into powerful constellations of control that were never intended and in some cases never even

recognized” (Ferguson, 1990:19).

Thus Ferguson is able to interpret the ‘failure’ of the Thaba-Tseka range management project in light of the articulation of power through micropractices such as the creation of project reports reflecting the needs of the development agencies and the disregard of political structures in Lesotho. The project, with a planned outcome of improving agricultural outputs actually resulted in an expansion of the state at the same time as “exerting a powerful depoliticizing effect” (Ferguson, 1990:21). In this sense, Ferguson (1990:254) suggests that “what is most important about a ‘development’ project is not so much what it fails to do but what it does do; it may be that its real importance in the end lies in the ‘side effects’”. The logic of this ‘failure’ of the development apparatus in Lesotho, which “transcends the question of the planners’ intentions”, is found in the political deployment of the state:

By uncompromisingly reducing poverty to a technical problem, and by promising technical solutions to the sufferings of powerless and oppressed people, the hegemonic problematic of ‘development’ is the principal means through which the question of poverty is de-politicized in the world today. At the same time, by making the intentional blueprints for ‘development’ so highly visible, a ‘development’ project can end up performing extremely sensitive political operations involving the entrenchment and expansion of institutional state power almost invisibly, under cover of a neutral, technical mission to which no one can object (Ferguson, 1990:256).

It would, however, be a mistake to assess the ultimate effect of increasing state power through development as the result of a conspiracy. It is simply that the de-politicized and objectified space of development allows state power a chance to manoeuvre. “[B]ecause ‘failed’ development projects can so successfully help to accomplish important strategic

tasks behind the backs of the most sincere participants.” Ferguson (1990:256) writes, “it does become less mysterious why ‘failed’ development projects should end up being replicated again and again.”

The active force of de-politicization represents perhaps one of the most insidious side-effects of power manifested in development practice. Drawing upon the legitimacy of Western science and technology, development interventions are able to be wrapped in an apolitical cloak which obfuscates both opposing voices and underlying strategies of power. Such effects are not intentional, from the perspective of planning or conspiracy, but are rather a result of an “anonymous set of interrelations that only ends up having a kind of retrospective coherence” (Ferguson, 1990:275). Yet it is precisely this non-intentionality, the “unquestioned prestige of the idea of development” and the good intentions of those who work in the field, which leads to a “combination of activities and discourses that have the effect of reshaping everyday life in ways unintended, [and] unforeseen...development efforts are uniquely efficient colonizers on behalf of central strategies of power.”

An Arena of Struggle

The picture of development that emerges, then, is one composed of multiple layers of discourse and power strategies which effectively create a reality surrounding the Third World and its problems, and then proceed to solve those problems. In this sense, it is also engaged in disciplining the South in order to bring about the conditions for ‘proper’ development, an agenda which is set by Northern power interests. It is possible

here to borrow a definition of development from Escobar (1995b:213) in order to elucidate this reconceptualization: "development can best be described as an apparatus that links forms of knowledge about the Third World with the deployment of forms of power and intervention, resulting in the mapping and production of Third World societies." Development discourse, with its basis in the discourse of modernization, attempts to control and manage the social imaginary to such a degree that it is placed beyond questioning.

Yet the presence of a dominant discourse of development which seeks to enlist its subjects in a modernist project should not lead to the assumption that such a discourse is static and impervious to change and to challenges. Far from being monolithic in nature, the discourse of development is a site of contest among countervailing trends and discourses of resistance which struggle over meanings and practices. While it is true that certain representations of reality are dominant within the discourse of development, it is also the case that struggle is always present in their establishment. The appearance of homogeneity and universal validity of certain forms of development point simply to their dominance. As discussed previously in the chapter, the ability to objectify their subjects scientifically, statistically, and socially is perhaps one of the greatest strengths of discourses of modernization.

It is suggested here that development is perhaps better conceptualized as an "arena of struggle", a "complex web of meanings, out of which...different actors weave their competing strategies" (Crehan and Von Oppen, 1988:113). While development discourses may seek to present uniform appearances, an analysis of how power and

knowledge are articulated in social spheres reveals many diversities and strands of opposition. This is certainly true at the level of policy and interventions, as there is a wide variety of practice observable in field situations, as well as differences of opinion among development practitioners. "Rather than being wholly monolithic, static, and encompassing". Katy Gardner and David Lewis (1996:78) suggest, "development work actually comprises a variety of countervailing perspectives and practices, as well as a multiplicity of voices".

This notion is not restricted to differences within development institutions and among practitioners, but should also be extended to the recognition of the diversity and agency of those at the receiving end of development interventions. As Kate Crehan and Achim Von Oppen (1988:143) note in their study of an agricultural development project in northwest Zambia, peasants should not be regarded as "targets" of planned interventions, but as "self-motivating subjects consciously devising strategies to improve their living conditions in line with their own perceptions of their needs, although also enmeshed in structures of administration embodied in individual bureaucrats and politicians who too have their own goals and their own strategies". The implication is that individuals, within "specific life-worlds" and constructed realities, are engaged in both symbolic and material struggles in order to "manage their everyday affairs" (Long, 1992a:33). Analyzing the agency of local people in this way reveals a complex social world of multiple knowledges, discursive contestations over meanings, and intricate

articulations of relations and strategies of power.²

Conclusion

Overcoming the impasse of development theory depends on the reconceptualization of how power and knowledge function in development practice. The dominant discourses of development are guided and shaped by larger discourses of modernity such as global capitalism and forms of state power. These discourses seek to create regimes of truth, in which development practice and institutions are placed beyond questioning by the privileging of Western scientific forms of knowledge and the subjugation of others. Analyzing and resisting the power of normalization which hegemonic discourses seek to cast over reality depends on recognizing the existence of multiple discourses within development practice, and the diversity of local contexts and identities which are expressions of human agency. Development is better conceptualized as an arena of struggle in which subjugated voices struggle with dominant ones for the establishment of various representations of reality.

The following chapter is devoted to an examination of participation in development, a notion which would ostensibly aspire to challenge hegemonic discourses by providing for a channel through which local voices and identities can be expressed in the face of the systems of modernity. The limitations and potentials of participatory forms of development in accomplishing this goal will be discussed in detail.

² One example of many can be found in Scott (1985) who documents instances of “everyday forms of peasant resistance.”

CHAPTER TWO: THE CHALLENGE OF PARTICIPATION

Contested Terrain in the Discourse of Development

Introduction

Dominant discourses of development seek to establish their representations of reality as hegemonic and unchallengeable. This is accomplished through a dynamic and continuous process of constructing reality in such a way that underdevelopment is presented as a series of technical problems which are able to be solved through technological means, dispensed by the institutions and interventions of development. Consequently, some forms of knowledge are privileged while others are subjugated and labelled as ignorant. Such constructions of reality serve to strengthen the dominance of Western scientific knowledge over local knowledges, and ensure that other central strategies such as global capitalism and state power continue to advance.

As Chapter One noted, however, there is a growing recognition that development theory and practice do not respond well to the needs of development beneficiaries. Voices of opposition to forms of development which may impede, rather than foster, improvement in the quality of people's lives are becoming more common, as calls for 'bottom-up development', 'development from within', and 'local empowerment' are being heard and even adopted by the largest and most mainstream development institutions such as the World Bank (1989).

'Participation' is another term which, especially in recent years, has achieved almost universal acceptance among development actors and attained the status of a 'buzzword'. Participatory approaches to development, which ostensibly seek to

'empower' development beneficiaries by providing a means through which local views and knowledges can be expressed, are meant to challenge and reform the top-down structures of development bureaucracies. Participatory development, many believe, can bring people back into the process of development.

Yet the widespread acceptance of participation in development has been accompanied by a confusion over exactly what the term means, and may leave the term open to co-optation. While Sarah White (1996:6) notes that there is "[h]ardly a project...without some 'participatory' element", Katy Gardner and David Lewis (1996:111) are even more extreme in their analysis of the frequency of participatory language, suggesting that it "has now become so ever-present in development jargon as to be often virtually without meaning." In fact, the ambiguity of participation in development derives not from the absence of meaning, but rather from the plethora of connotations attached to the concept by various parties, each representing different intentions and even ideologies. Related terms and methodologies of participation are being applied in a variety of ways, at different times, and for diverse purposes. Does participatory development provide a viable means through which mainstream development may be opposed and transformed, or has it been coopted for use, as in Esteva's (1986:136) terms, the "missing factor or tool" that will explain or remove the constraints to forms of development which are otherwise sound?

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the ability of participatory development to challenge more orthodox forms of development. Following from Chapter One, the analysis presented here focuses on the discursive battles waged over the concept of

participation itself. It is argued that the discursive 'space' of participation becomes a battleground for various actors in the development process to contest meanings and identity, as well as engage in struggles over resources. While many of the origins of participatory development were based in what were perceived to be revolutionary sentiments, the rhetoric and practice of participation are increasingly being adopted into mainstream development agencies and their ideological positions, a process which is also stripping them of their political and radical connotations. Instead, participatory development, in its most common form, appears as a means of improving the efficiency of development delivery, or in the role of a 'safety-net' for neo-liberal reforms, a paradigm which dominates the discourse of development. The analysis presented here begins with a review of the history of participation in development, then continues with a discussion of the various forms in which participatory development currently appears.

A Brief History of Participation in Development

Participation and the 'Big Push'

Like the meaning of the term itself, the origins of participation in development are somewhat ambiguous. Indeed, in a field in which improving people's livelihoods is a priority, it seems ironic that the participation of people was not included from the very beginning as a main concern, and should have to be added later as an afterthought. In fact, human concerns *were* secondary to economic growth and other forces of modernization in the early years of development. The focus of modernization theory on technology transfers and capital growth (Chapter One) virtually ignored the contribution

of people beyond the economic construction of *homo economicus*, the purely rational and self-serving model of a human being who would choose logical courses of economic action. As Norman Uphoff (1997:3) has noted, it was expected that a nation's residents would participate in economic development to the extent that "the best thing that [they] could do in such a system was to further 'tighten their belts', foregoing consumption so as to support capital accumulation for national investment."

Of course, an ideal of political participation in democratic society existed at this time among Western planners, who envisioned that responsible citizens of a modern society would take part in electoral activities, as well as other aspects of societal decision-making. It was generally assumed that the level of this kind of participation would increase as development (and modernization) proceeded, as it had in Western societies. As Cohen and Uphoff (1980:216) suggest, this notion proved complementary to theories of rapid modernization, as it justified the economic and political privileging of a highly educated elite who would provide the leadership for societal progress: in other words, the "'big push' for development was to be made possible by the 'big squeeze' on the majority". Thus, while these ideologies of participation "purportedly encouraged democratic processes", David Moore (1995:23) has argued that participation was restricted to an elite, and only then to the extent that it served the purpose of facilitating "the emergence of capitalists oriented to producing for the world market. If other sorts of people participated...the conditions for sustained growth were thought to be imperilled." Thus Moore sees the limited application of participatory rhetoric (in reference to political participation) by Western developers as a means of justifying foreign policy stances

which accepted authoritarian states, as long as they remained aligned to capitalism.

Community Development

Aside from the existence of the language of participation in reference to political processes, the early years of development also featured a number of small-scale attempts at local development, some of which have been considered the fore-runners of participatory development. Community development (also known in some areas as *animation rurale*) featured the first ventures at very localized development interventions. In this stage, John Abbott has pointed out that community development and community participation were considered synonymous, as they both referred to the “process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation” (United Nations definition quoted in Abbott, 1995:158).

The ‘active participation’ of the community here is rather limited in scope, referring essentially to the role of the people in accepting and implementing changes brought to them by outside developers. As one textbook of the time states, the main problem of community development is “*to find effective ways of stimulating, helping, and teaching people to adopt new methods and to learn new skills*” as well as “*to help people to adapt their way of life to the changes they accept, or have had imposed upon them.*” (Batten, 1957:5-6, italics in original). The failure and criticism of community development in this period have been attributed largely to its lack of contextualization; its interventions were often inappropriate, and although purported to promote political democracy and societal integration, its reductionist analysis of ‘community’ often led to

the exacerbation of inequalities and conflicts (Abbott, 1995; Gilbert and Ward, 1984). Moreover, community development may have, in some cases, functioned as a form of manipulation both at a local and global level. In an analysis of the discourse of community development, Derek Mulenga (1994:257) suggests that local programming was inextricably linked to wider power interests and may have provided the “micro-site linkage for complex and dispersed philosophical, intellectual, professional and institutional apparatuses of management and control of the ‘third world’”. In the case of Latin America, Gilbert and Ward (1984:771) suggest that in some instances community development strategies were used to secure the support of the poor in order to “counteract the spread of communism”.³

If community development and community participation were considered synonymous, however, then the failure of one must mean the failure of the other. In fact, as Abbott (1995:160) points out, the idea of participation was salvaged from the wreckage of community development by a rhetorical shift which “de-linked” the two concepts. Rather than seeing fault in the principle of participation, it became the particular approach to participation, embodied in community development, that resulted in failure. Thus the UN acknowledged that, “the major weakness of community participation lay in its emphasis on mobilisation rather than participation...Community

³ Gilbert and Ward (1984:771) are referring here to programming under the US-initiated “Alliance for Progress”, which poured millions of dollars into community development projects as a means of supporting US hegemony in the hemisphere. It is also likely that community development could have served in an almost opposite capacity, as locally led, Marxist-inspired endeavours, although this study did not uncover any literature which documents such occurrences.

groups have rarely been given the power to choose how they should be involved” (Gilbert and Ward, 1984:771). Participation, therefore, was released from its attachment to one particular development methodology; with its new flexibility, it could be adapted to suit a number of different approaches and situations.

Overall, however, it must be concluded of this early period of development that participation was of relatively little importance compared to larger concerns of transfers of technology and economic growth. Certainly the participatory rhetoric that did exist was very limited. In the case of political participation, privileges were extended only to a ‘westernized’ elite, which was believed to be the only societal group capable or ‘modern’ enough to take on that responsibility, so as not to derail more important economic transformations. In the case of community development, the ‘active participation’ of recipients meant the responsibility to adjust to new changes being implemented, still a very passive notion. Moreover, despite the efforts of community developers, local concerns overall remained in the margins of development, for as Carmen (1996:43) argues, community development, as practised in the 1950s and 1960s, “never stood the virility test of male-dominated development economics”.

‘Development Participation’

In their brief review of the history of participation in development, Cohen and Uphoff (1980) draw a distinction between forms of political and even social participation as seen in early period of development, and the emergence of a version of participation which was intended to address specifically the shortcomings of traditional approaches to

development. This form of participation, which they claim is not as narrow as political participation alone and focusses more on improving the effectiveness of development interventions, has lagged behind economic development theories, which have undergone rapid changes throughout their history (Cohen and Uphoff, 1980:216). In fact, it was not until the late 1960s, nearly two decades after the inception of development, that 'development participation' began to receive more attention.

One of the first major steps toward isolating 'popular participation' as a specific element of development thinking came from neither academia nor practitioners, but from a legislative body, the United States Congress (Uphoff, 1997). In 1966, an amendment known as Title IX was inserted into the Foreign Assistance Act, directing the US Agency for International Development (USAID) to emphasize "maximum participation in the task of economic development on the part of the people of the developing countries" (text from Title IX, printed in Hapgood, 1969:xiii). The recognition of the importance of participation to development (more specifically to economic growth⁴) was recognized by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs:

...it has become increasingly clear that failure to engage all of the available human resources in the task of development not only acts as a brake on economic growth but also does little to cure the basic causes of social and political instability which pose a constant threat to the gains being achieved on economic fronts.
 ...The great potential for planning and implementation of development activities, contained in the mass of the people of the developing countries

⁴ Hapgood (1969:2) writes that: "Setting up the promotion of participation as a pillar of aid policy does not in any sense imply a devaluation of the goal of economic growth...participation and growth are complementary not competing goals: no either-or choice is involved...Congress wrote Title IX because it was unhappy with economic growth as the only target of development assistance."

is still largely untapped, which slows down the achievement of the objectives of the foreign assistance program (Printed in Hapgood, 1969:20,26).

It was not only the United States which began to adopt the principles of 'development participation'. At roughly the same time as the adoption of Title IX, participatory discourses also began to emerge in development circles at the United Nations. The Declaration of Social Progress and Development, a General Assembly resolution adopted, in 1969, states that "Social progress and development require the full utilization of human resources, including in particular...the active participation of all elements of society, individually or through associations, in defining and in achieving the common goals of development" (printed in United Nations, 1975:1). The 'common goals of development', here, referred to those defined by government, at this time still largely economic in nature. Consequently, in the 'means and methods' section of the Declaration emphasis remained on centralized government planning, augmented by "the adoption of measures to ensure the effective participation of all elements of society in the preparation and execution of national plans and programmes of economic and social development" (re-printed in Manoukian, 1990:376).

Despite their relative prominence (compared to earlier periods of development), these measures seem to have been largely adopted in rhetoric without accompanying plans of implementation. Uphoff (1997:4) points out that in the case of USAID, despite the early mandate given to participatory approaches, "most social science thinking was still oriented toward planning approaches", and it was several years before any tangible

forms of research were directed to the area⁵. The question lingers, then, of why such rhetoric was accepted at all. While Cohen and Uphoff (1980:230:fn.20) remain convinced that it was a direct result of "disillusionment with previous approaches to development, buttressed by diffuse liberal/democratic sentiments", there may have been other factors at work.

One explanation may be that economic growth with the added benefit of participation was not the only goal of Title IX. The text of the amendment itself is relatively political in nature, calling for the achievement of "maximum participation" through the "encouragement of democratic private and local governmental institutions" as well as the support for "civic education and training in skills required for effective participation in governmental and political processes essential to self-government" (in Hapgood, 1969:xiii). While these measures seemed to some to be an imposition of American institutions and values on other societies, for others it was a step toward liberating US foreign policy from its support of undemocratic regimes which were previously a strategic necessity:

Because the world is less bipolar than it was, because new military technology makes bases less valuable than they once were, the Cold War

⁵ USAID sponsored a workshop at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1968 to discuss Title IX. Most of the scholars invited, however, were political scientists, who focussed (naturally) on political issues (see Hapgood, 1969). It was not until 1976 that USAID asked the interdisciplinary Rural Development Committee at Cornell University to generate some more concrete recommendations concerning 'development participation' (see Cohen and Uphoff, 1980). Carmen (1996:47) has noted critically that "just as in the case of development communicology which subsequently spouted an entire 'rural extension subdiscipline, research into rural development participation was spearheaded by a North American base under the direction of Northern Scholars."

posture of individual nations of the Third World no longer seems as critically important to the national security as it once did...This change opens up new options for the U.S. In the past, the U.S. has considered itself forced for short-run cold-war reasons to support governments that were repugnant in American eyes (and whose policies were contrary to Title IX). Now, freed at last to some degree from those once imperative short-run goals, the U.S. is also freer to pursue longer-term goals like those of Title IX even at the risk of losing friendly but distasteful regimes (Hapgood, 1969:3-4).

The impact of the larger (geo-) political climate clearly indicates the relative unimportance of development assistance compared with perceived national security needs. It was only when the discourse of security changed that the discourse of participation was able to surface.

The adoption of Title IX and the equivalent declarations of the UN may have been spurred on by other factors as well. The late 1960s was a time of domestic crisis for many nations, including the United States. Social movements protesting for civil rights, environmental issues, and political reform were challenging governments throughout the world for more popular influence in decision-making circles. Moore (1995:26) notes that the "discursive practice of participation" was a key part of these movements, often influenced by 'revolutionary' thinkers such as Che Guevara, Ho Chi Minh and Nelson Mandela. Indeed, in the United States the "New Left" movement as early as 1964 called for the restoration of "popular democracy" in government (Tindall and Shi, 1989). The adoption of such measures as the American Community Action Programmes domestically and the Peace Corps abroad, are indicative of the effort of the US government to bring such movements back into the orbit of traditional democracy and capitalism (Moore, 1995:26). Even within the documents of the UN the discourse of participation is used at

times to address the domestic unrest of its member states; one of the first listed benefits of ‘popular participation’ in development is the “elimination of popular resistance to decisions”. In this sense, the discourse of participation was employed by national governments and the UN as a means of reducing resistance to political systems, bolstering centralized development plans, and, in doing so, legitimizing the maintenance of state power and its course of economic development.

Popular Movements and Participatory Action Research

Some of the social movements which threatened Western states began to coalesce in the South in the late 1960s. These largely grassroots movements had a wide variety of forms, a multitude of intentions, and many different origins, but they shared in common a dissatisfaction with their socio-economic position, and an emphasis on collective action to do something about it (Rahman, 1995). While some of these movements and organizations existed within the traditional development apparatus, many others did not. It was rather their focus on concepts such as ‘empowerment’ and ‘people’s power’ that set them apart from orthodoxy, as well as an expanded and holistic view of ‘participation’.

While it is difficult to generalize about this varied collection of movements, a large number of them were inspired by a number of liberationist writings from the South which espoused the critical role of education and conscientization for development. Scholars such as Freire (1970) and Orlando Fals-Borda (1991), who perceived a global state of victimization and oppression of the poor (both on individual and societal terms)

by power-wielding elites, became convinced that development came only as a result of individual self-awareness and subsequent collective action.

It is important to note that at the centre of this 'empowerment' paradigm lay fundamentally different definitions of development and participation. According to Freire (1970:143), the determination of whether development is taking place or not "must go beyond criteria based on indices of 'per capita' income". Development can only be achieved when humans are "beings for themselves", when they possess their own decision-making powers, free of oppressive and dehumanizing circumstances; it is the "struggle to be more fully human" (Freire, 1970:29). Thus participation is part of this struggle of humanization. When people are subjected to the "culture of silence" imposed by oppressive elites, they cannot participate in their own development (Freire, 1968). Conversely, as Denis Goulet (1989:165) points out, "when they participate, thereby becoming active subjects of knowledge and action, they begin to construct their properly human history and engage in processes of authentic development."

At the heart of this version of participation is the belief in the transformatory and liberatory powers of education that promotes self-awareness. This self-awareness will then turn to praxis, or action. "To surmount the situation of oppression," writes Freire (1970:29), "people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity." Most often, this transformation occurs through "collective self-inquiry and reflection", in which the people "meet in cooperation in order to transform the world" (Freire, 1970:148).

The process of self-awareness has been articulated by a number of empowerment thinkers in the methodological concept of Participatory Action Research, or PAR. "The basic ideology of PAR", writes Mohammed Anisur Rahman (1991:13), "is that a self-conscious people, those who are currently poor and oppressed, will progressively transform their environment by their own praxis." According to Fals-Borda (1991), PAR will facilitate the emergence of countervailing political power to pressure the state with the demands of the people. This "people's power", which "belongs to the oppressed and exploited classes and groups and their organizations," will "enable them to advance towards shared goals of social change within a participatory political system" (Fals-Borda, 1991:196). Majid Rahnema (1992:121) has further summarized the main assumptions underlying the PAR approach:

(a) present obstacles to people's development can and should be overcome by giving the populations concerned the full opportunity of participating in all the activities related to their development.

(b) participation is justified because it expresses not only the will of the majority of people, but also it is the only way for them to ensure that the important moral, humanitarian, social, cultural and economic objectives of a more humane and effective development can be peacefully attained. 'Dialogical interaction', 'conscientization', 'PAR' and other similar activities can make it possible for all the people to organize themselves in a manner best suited to meet their desired ends.

While obviously espousing very different values and priorities than traditional forms of development, grassroots movements (many inspired by PAR) began to find their way into the fold of mainstream development agencies throughout the 1970s and 1980s.⁶

⁶Some of the most oft-cited examples are: the Bhoomi Sena movement in India, the Six S movement in Burkina Faso, Sarvodaya in Sri Lanka, ORAP in Zimbabwe, etc. For more information on these and other movements, see Rahman (1995).

Indeed, the challenge they posed to development orthodoxy was “too serious to be brushed away or frontally imposed” (Rahnema, 1990:200). Instead, despite their ideological opposition, traditional development actors actually welcomed some of the new movements and their ideas of empowerment under the increasingly popular name of ‘participatory development’.

Basic Needs

In some ways, development orthodoxy had no choice but to accept change. Rahnema (1990:19) suggests that this was due to two main realizations. “On the one hand,” he writes, “both the donor and the receiver countries now began to recognize that the billions spent on blueprints and projects had only added new problems to the old...On the other hand, a growing number of development analysts and experts working within the most responsible international organizations began to recognize the importance of participation.” Thus during much of the 1970s, the World Bank and other major development agencies turned their focus away from trickle down hopes of economic growth toward a new philosophy of satisfaction of basic needs and growth with equity, something which altered the accepted notion of development.

The first thing that needed changing was the notion of development itself. The UN Cocoyoc Declaration of 1974 stated that “our first concern is to redefine the whole purpose of development...not...to develop things but to develop man” (cited in Manoukian, 1990:378). This included the alleviation of poverty through the satisfaction of needs such as food, shelter, clothing, health and education. Participation was seen as

taking on a crucial role in the process of provision of basic needs. According to the Basic Needs Approach (BNA) to development, endorsed by the ILO World Employment Conference in 1976, popular participation is regarded as central to development for four reasons: "1) By playing a part in the definition of basic needs...2) By enhancing the generation of resources to meet basic needs...3) By improving the distribution of goods and services...4) By fulfilling a psychological need for participation" (1985:52-53). Popular participation also became a crucial part of development planning for the BNA. for without it, the "fuller utilisation of a country's physical and human resources may be stifled" (Lisk, 1985:21).

Taking its focus off economic growth alone and placing it within the human realm, mainstream development began a process of re-legitimization. According to Rahnema (1990:20), development gradually entered into popular partnerships in order to acquire a new face:

...the face of a repentant saint, ready to amend, to work in a new fashion with the poor, and even to learn from them. Projects of a more technical and infrastructural nature still had to be designed and implemented by professional experts, but for more socially oriented projects, the new grassroots participatory mendicants were accepted as suitable partners.

Part of this repentance included a reflection of some of the ideals of the PAR and empowerment approaches, such as the recognition that development includes more than basic needs: "There is a deep social need to participate in shaping the basis of one's own existence, and to make some contribution to the fashioning of the world's future" (UN Cocoyoc Declaration, reprinted in Manoukian, 1990:378).

Yet while such sentiments would indicate an increasing internalization on the part

of mainstream development of the process of humanization introduced by Freire and others, the majority of Basic Needs strategies avoided the crucial issue of political power, the second half of the equation of liberation. In other words, the concentration on basic needs and 'target groups' allowed the wider notions of economic growth and structural changes to go unchallenged (Gardner and Lewis, 1996:7). Moreover, Raff Carmen (1996:44) suggests that this distraction from political issues merely reinforced the traditional development paradigm, in which peasants were "drawn towards participation, as beneficiaries of progress, in the design and execution of projects devised and financed *for them by outside agencies*". At the root of the majority of Basic Needs strategies (at least, as adopted by the World Bank and other mainstream development agencies) was the predominant concern with increasing economic productivity. "The World Bank and other assistance organizations saw the provision of basic goods and services as a precondition for increasing the productivity and income of the poor," writes Dennis Rondinelli (1993:67), "enabling them to contribute more effectively to national development".⁷

Neo-Liberalism and Structural Adjustment

The Basic Needs Movement was short-lived, ending essentially in the early 1980s after its eclipse by a rising force of neo-liberal economic reform. The shift from BNA strategies to macroeconomic structural adjustment reforms was justified by the World Bank as a means for developing countries to overcome their overwhelming debt loads in

⁷ Rondinelli (1993:67) also recognizes the existence of the view of basic needs as a basic human right, held by some observers.

order to continue the course of human development.⁸ This led to drastic changes in development practice, such as budget reductions in the area of basic needs programming, and a decline in interest in participatory forms of development (Stiefel and Wolfe, 1994:18). In the late 1980s and into the 1990s, however, a number of factors have led to renewed interest in participation in development as well as widespread acceptance and popularization of such approaches.

The emphasis placed on macroeconomic policies in the majority of international development institutions featured a neo-liberal philosophy of reform which included the drastic reduction of public expenditures and services in favour of the private sector, and a focus on what was defined as economic efficiency and pragmatism. This meant that donors “not merely withdrew from the earlier models of state-centred development: they made them the object of attack by an armoury of policy reforms” (Farrington and Bebbington, 1993:7). In many cases this action was embodied in what have become known as ‘structural adjustment programmes’ (SAPs), packages of reforms which must be adopted by developing countries as a pre-condition of assistance from the World Bank or the IMF. Typically such measures include removal of subsidies, producer price reforms, deregulation of foreign exchange, liberalisation of internal and external trade and the introduction of cost-sharing for state-supplied services, all in the belief that economic growth will be resumed only through a “contraction of state activity and the development

⁸ Moore (1995:27) notes that there was “no precise linear logic” to the shift to neo-liberalism. However, once the this shift occurred, the liberalism of the 1960s and 1970s was regarded as co-optation by “radical ideologies”, and by the early 1980s the strongest supporters of the BNA and poverty reduction approaches to development had been effectively purged from the World Bank and other agencies.

of liberalised markets” (Bangura and Gibbon, 1992:7). Wrapped in a discourse of “scientific capitalism”, seeking to “present itself as a non-moral order, in which neutral, technical principles of efficiency and pragmatism give ‘correct’ answers to questions of public policy”, SAPs have become the dominant feature of development’s macro-economic landscape in the 1980s and 1990s (Ferguson, 1995:138).

Although as Rondinelli (1993:84) points out, even the “harshest critics” of SAPs have admitted that many developing countries were in desperate need of “fundamental readjustment and reform”, it is also likely that the adoption of adjustment programs had more to do with the needs of international commercial systems than the plight of the poor. “Although it seeks to create an image of serving the poor and their borrowing governments”, writes Korten (1995:166), “the World Bank is primarily a creature of the transnational financial system.” In 1990, after a decade of structural adjustment, while many developing countries had experienced economic growth, the number of people living in poverty grew to over one billion, and the percentage of those who were immersed in extreme poverty rose to almost twenty percent (Rondinelli, 1993:89). At the same time, Northern banks and corporate contractors continued to benefit from the continued collection of loan payments, the procurement contracts offered by World Bank projects, and the favourable trade relations with developing countries anxious to export natural resources in exchange for hard currency (Korten, 1995:167).

Structural adjustment signalled a shift from a “bottom-up to a top-down approach” to development⁹, from concerns with equity to a preoccupation with exchange-

⁹ This movement occurred at least in theory, if not in practice.

rates, trade, and fiscal policies (Rondinelli, 1993:83). Yet it has been in the era of SAPs that the language of participation has flourished in the official discourses of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Again, this apparent irony may be explained more in terms of economic and political motivations than a fundamental shift in the nature of mainstream development discourses.

There is, by now, a substantial amount of evidence which suggests that SAPs, in their emphasis on macroeconomic growth, have had negative effects on the most vulnerable groups of society (Rondinelli, 1993:84, Rahman, 1995:27). In the face of harsh criticism and political instability resulting from the wide-ranging reforms, supporters of structural adjustment have necessarily attempted to put a "Human Face" on SAPs (Jolly, 1991). In many cases it would appear that participatory development is being viewed as somewhat of a saviour for SAPs for their contribution toward the main goal of efficiency in delivery of development but also amidst accusations of being 'poverty-augmenting' as opposed to poverty-alleviating in their implementation of reforms which disproportionately affect the most vulnerable societal groups (Rahman, 1995:27).

A World Bank report from 1989 entitled Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth, provides a good example of the move toward the incorporation of participation into official discourse. The report, intended to refocus efforts on poverty reduction, with an added emphasis on "national institutional capacity" or "governance", was produced as a direct result of early disappointments with SAP performance (Goetz and O'Brien, 1995). The concept of "governance" here refers to both 'technical areas' of legal framework and political institutions, as well as civil society, inclusive of groups

such as NGOs and voluntary organizations (Williams and Young, 1994:87). Such elements of civil society are to be supported by the Bank as they create channels of participation, by establishing “links both upward and downward in society and [voicing] local concerns more effectively than grassroots institutions” (World Bank, 1989:61). With the creation of a proper “enabling environment” the Bank intends to “channel the energies of the population at large, ordinary people should participate more in designing and implementing development programs” (World Bank, 1989:1).

The official discourse adopted by the World Bank in the 1989 report accomplishes a number of different objectives. By employing the language of “empowerment”, “self-reliance” and “participation”, the Bank assumes a populist appearance that is reminiscent of PAR. This even extends to a pseudo-political stance in its suggestion that the “crisis of governance” in many countries is due to the “appropriation of the machinery of government by the elite to serve their own interests”, and the fact that a “deep political malaise stymies action in most countries” (World Bank, 1989:192). While the implication is that people should be empowered to overturn this state of affairs through increased political participation, the actual intent is somewhat different. As Moore (1995:17) argues:

...the World Bank is not about to give the state to these people even though it contends that the state has taken the resources from them. Rather than have the state controlled by the common people, the World Bank would control the local state’s withdrawal from the economy. Resources must be taken away from the state and placed in the ‘market,’ where all citizens will supposedly have equal access to them.

Thus liberation or empowerment of people in this conceptualization is not linked

with political or state power. Instead, there is an implication that empowerment is derived from liberation from an interventionist state, and that participation in free-market economics and their further enlistment into development projects will enable them to "take fuller charge of their lives", is inherently empowering (World Bank, 1989:187).

"What is remarkable about much of the fashionable discourses of 'participatory development'", writes Gerald Schmitz (1995:57), is "the extent to which they evade the actual relations of power which keep people poor and dis-empowered....In fact, the word 'empowerment' has been virtually co-opted to promote the ideological linkage of popular participation to economic liberalization".¹⁰ The overall result of such discourse, is that an apolitical perspective on the meaning and practice of participation is conveyed where "issues of the fundamental conflicts between the poor and elites do not figure" (Goetz and O'Brien 1995:25)¹¹.

The incorporation of participatory and empowerment discourse into the neo-liberal framework also serves to legitimize and support the implementation of neo-liberal

¹⁰ Graf (1996:46) argues that "democratization" and its associated concepts (such as participation, empowerment and civil society) has been "successfully coopted into the neo-liberal vocabulary" and linked to the promotion of "capitalism-liberalism". This universally accepted notion of "democracy" is a reflection of the continued struggle of the North to maintain its hegemony over the South, a battle waged at the level of "vocabularies, language, definitions and discourses" (Graf, 1996:53).

¹¹ But while the usage of participatory discourse within the report is absent of politics, the report itself is not. According to Bjorn Beckman (1992:91), the 1989 World Bank document is an "ideological intervention" in itself. The move toward 'grassroots empowerment' and participation is a political move on the part of the Bank to neutralize resistance to SAPs by creating alternate bases of popular support. As the "principal protagonist", the Bank is "challenging on a neo-liberal platform the state-led, nationalist development ideology which...has distorted development thinking in Africa since independence" (Beckman, 1992:87).

reforms which might otherwise be rejected. Rahman (1995:26) has argued that “far from being adopted in practice anywhere in a way which leads to major structural reforms and the transfer of resources away from those vested interests that control dominant social and political structures towards underprivileged people”, participatory development has been appropriated to serve the marginal role of a “safety net” to keep popular discontent from adjustment policies in check. Even the structure of projects is intended to keep people politically marginalized; policies of targeting, in which one agency may work in thousands of villages, but only segments of those villages, actually maintains isolation and prevents collective action (Rahman, 1995:28). Indeed, Rahman (1995:28) suggests that perhaps this has become a survival strategy on the part of participatory development initiatives, which may otherwise be stifled if challenges to orthodoxy became too strong. Thus the majority of activities under the label of participation remain focussed on aspects of project implementation and consultation, without a substantial political component.

Struggles in Participatory Discourse

A review of the history of participation in development clearly shows that participatory discourses have been advocated at various times, in various ways, by various actors. From its marginal beginnings as a virtually ignored aspect of ‘big push’ modernization and community development to the widespread usage as a complementary strategy to structural adjustment, the language of participation has been used to refer to many different concepts and objects. The most radical divisions remain between those who would see participation as a means of generating self-awareness to achieve a form of

development autonomous from the mainstream and those who view the process of economic development as inherently empowering and liberating, and seek to incorporate participation as a means to promote that development. At least in the case of the most recent phase of development (the era of macroeconomic reform), the rhetoric of participation has been drawn upon and popularized to give the appearance of radical change in development practice, undoubtedly with an intent to reduce resistance to SAPS and other unpopular policies.

The historical analysis points to the fact that discourses of participation must be viewed in the larger political, economic, and social climate in order to understand their emergence and strength. At various periods, certain discourses of participation seem to be favoured over others by the dominant discourses of modernity, as evidenced by their popularity. When participatory approaches begin to pose a threat to the larger power interests which guide the dominant discourses of development, these radical forms are marginalized or coopted.

Co-optation and Challenge

It should not be assumed, however, that all forms of participatory development have been subordinated and are impotent in the face of more dominant discourses. The discourse of participation, while susceptible to co-opting forces, continues to be a site of struggle. Participatory development remains, in some cases, a source of opposition to more mainstream development approaches.

The ability of participation as a concept to be coopted is due in part to its

appearance in a wide variety of development settings. As White (1996:8) suggests, it is in "the ambiguity of participation, as both concept and practice, that the scope for its colonisation lies." Moreover, the fact that participation can accommodate such a broad range of interests may provide one explanation for its "widespread acclaim" (White, 1996:7). The "apparent consensus" about participation on the superficial level of language is problematic, in that it is able to obscure difference and secure legitimacy for a wide range of activities which can be argued to be participatory (Mayoux, 1995:237).

Indeed, it appears that discourses of empowerment and participation in different contexts and strategic locations in a struggle to gain legitimacy. As Rahnema (1992:116) argues, this is a hallmark of discursive struggles:

Modern jargon uses stereotype words like children use Lego toy pieces. Like Lego pieces, the words fit arbitrarily together and support the most fanciful constructions. They have no content, but do serve a function. As these words are separate from any context, they are ideal for manipulative purposes.

Participation, which continues to hold a positive and somewhat moral connotation in development¹², is de-linked in this way from its socio-cultural origins of radical bottom-up ideologies. Through the attaching and re-attaching of pieces of unorthodox discourses, the discourses of modernity attempt to transform the general connotations assigned to participation. According to Rahnema (1992:120) it is now "simply perceived as one of the many 'resources' needed to keep the economy alive...[for] the modern

¹²Rahnema (1992:116) points out that participation tends to be perceived as a free exercise, which "neither conforms to the meaning of the word, nor the way in which it is translated into practice. For, more often than not, people are asked or dragged into partaking in operations of no interest to them, in the very name of participation."

construct of participation, a person should be part of a predefined project, more specifically, an economic project, in order to qualify as a participant.” This application of participation is an indication of who has gained control of the established discourse in development. As Schmitz (1995:57) points out, “in the area of participation and empowerment, it is quickly obvious that it is not poor people’s organizations (which may more likely be expected to be consumers of others’ expert ‘help’).”

Yet there are struggles taking place over the use of participation, at the level of development policy, scholarship, and, perhaps to a greater extent, at local levels. Just as dominant discourses are able to employ language and practice in strategic ways, so are voices who are in opposition to hegemonic forces. Indeed, despite the dominance of certain policies and practices, discourses of participation within development are hardly static, monolithic structures. Here it is useful to turn to Gardner and Lewis’ (1996:125) conceptualization of development discourse:

It is important to remember that just as ‘development’ does not involve a unitary body of ideas and practices, ‘developers’ are not a unitary body of people. The discourse is contested by different interest groups and individuals within agencies, as well as between them. A development policy or resulting project may be the result of considerable struggle by different actors to promote what they believe development should involve...

In the field of participatory development this is certainly the case. Partly manifested in the type of participation adopted (ie. participation in consultation vs. decision-making), divisions can also be seen in the entire definition of concepts such as participation and empowerment.

There are some very significant actors who support such autonomous movements

in development. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) (1990:4), noting that “orthodox” programs such as SAPs actually “undermine the human condition and disregard the potential and role of popular participation in self-sustaining development”, has called for a “redirection of resources” coinciding with popular participation. While much of the ECA’s language of empowerment, local initiatives, and participation is very similar to that of the World Bank, there is a marked difference in that there is both an emphasis on resources that come from within the region as a means of self-sustaining development, as well as the recognition of the “positioning of people’s power alongside state power. [insisting] that the sovereignty of the state should be the popular sovereignty of the people” (Carmen, 1996:88).

People’s Power

Rahman (1993:67) has identified a number of case studies and strategies of “people’s self-development” in which “people’s power” assumes the role of “counterdiscourse and countervailing praxis” to orthodox forms of consumerist development. Key to this notion is the avoidance of any dependence on outsiders for development, even if it means accepting a slower pace of economic growth (Rahman, 1990: 308). Indeed, the entire definition of development itself for the popular movements which he studies differs from dominant conceptions of the term; central to ‘people’s self-development’ is the “primacy of human dignity” as well as the promotion of people’s creativity, rather than the stifling ‘fitting in’ process of conventional development (Rahman, 1990:307).

The popular movements identified by Rahman and others, many of them perhaps influenced by the 'empowerment' and 'conscientization' notions of participation espoused in earlier periods, have indeed played an important part in the struggle to change mainstream development practice. The implementation of SAPs and other neo-liberal reforms in the mid -1980s not only led to the marginalization and dissatisfaction of vulnerable societal groups, but it also coincided with the so-called "wave of democratization" processes which swept through Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, and parts of Asia and Africa (Stiefel and Wolfe, 1994:197). The rise of these "civil society" movements were, according to Amin (1992:77), "an expression of unsatisfied social needs" facilitated by disruptive and exclusionary economic and political systems. In many cases, the decline of the state, brought on by pressure from above (international financial institutions and their policies) and below (ethnic, religious, environmental movements, etc.) opened the space for such groups to flourish (Stiefel and Wolfe, 1994:198).¹³

¹³ Korten (1995) outlines an "Agenda for Change" which would see an "awakened" civil society reclaim political and economic power from that of corporations and supra-national power structures. This would involve measures such as "removing corporations from the political sphere" by eliminating tax exemptions for expenditures related to lobbying and public 'education', and limiting corporations' ability to influence the voting behaviour of citizens through campaign contributions (Korten, 1995: 309-310). Economically, Korten (1995:313) suggests that a market economy "composed primarily, though not exclusively, of family enterprises, small-scale co-ops, worker-owned firms, and neighborhood and municipal corporations" provides a viable structural alternative to globalized capitalism or communism. Establishing local control of productive assets "through institutions that are anchored in and accountable to the community" is an important step to building the "foundations of healthy societies" (Korten, 1995:313).

Struggles Within the Mainstream

While the rise of grassroots movements has been discussed in greater detail elsewhere¹⁴, it is relevant here to illustrate their interaction with mainstream development actors. Undoubtedly, the desire of many social movements to achieve more distance from the state and claim “autonomy and immunity from...world economic forces which promise to isolate their members from or to overcome them” demonstrates a form of participatory struggle which may or may not be compatible with development orthodoxy (Fuentes and Frank, 1989:187). The energy and growing strength of these grassroots movements has attracted attention from mainstream actors, however, who have employed various strategies to incorporate them into larger developmental efforts.¹⁵ In part, the move toward participatory development may be seen as one such approach, as can the increased emphasis on the use of NGOs in development interventions. NGOs, which are often assumed to be more participatory in nature than larger aid agencies¹⁶, have assumed a role of prominence (in light of the decline of the state and proven efficiency in the

¹⁴ For more detail on “New” Social Movements, see Fuentes and Frank (1989), Evers (1985), Escobar (1992), Calderon et al., (1992), and Wignaraja (1991).

¹⁵ Certainly some of the attention is from the ‘subversive’ nature of such grassroots movements. At the level of conscious thought on the part of development agency staff (as well as development theorists), the justification for incorporating local initiatives is largely based on efficiency. When such movements are ‘scaled up’, issues of power and politics are marginalized in favour of the economic connotation assigned to empowerment (Rahman, 1995:26) See also Uphoff (1993).

¹⁶ Laura Macdonald (1995:202) points out that this assumption is problematic: “...to characterize NGO assistance as an inherently more participatory alternative to other forms of aid overlooks the fact that most NGOs are dependent on state funding, are heavily influenced by (as well as influencing) official development bodies, and developed historically as a useful complement to official development assistance.”

delivery of development services) as intermediaries between local and national levels (Farrington and Bebbington. 1993:13).

In her study of NGOs and participatory development in Costa Rica, Laura Macdonald (1995:202) suggests that the “degree and form of participation promoted by NGOs” is dependent on “i) the NGO’s approach to participation; ii) the influence of international actors (either state donors or international NGOs), and iii) the nature of linkages between the NGO and local groups or social movements.” Macdonald’s study finds a great variance between the practice of ‘progressive’ NGOs, with a history based in struggles for ‘empowerment’ through conscientization and popular education, and ‘mainstream’ NGOs which are tied much more closely with international donors and ‘instrumental’ forms of participatory development to enhance efficiency. While problems in approach are noted among both types of NGOs, Macdonald’s (1995:224) series of case studies are useful both in dispelling the myth that NGOs are “inherently and unproblematically participatory” and showing that active struggles to reclaim participatory processes are taking place, even within the funding mechanisms of mainstream international donors.

Also found within NGO practice and even amidst donor agencies are strains of participatory research and participatory methodologies which, although inspired largely by earlier, more radical, sources, are now receiving more attention from mainstream development. According to Johnson (1996:22), the current manifestations of participatory research in development practice owe their origins to both a growing opposition among social science researchers to “dominant, positivist-informed” types of research as well as

the Freirian-inspired “conscientization” approaches such as PAR (already discussed above). Although such approaches contained both methodological and ideological content and were often Marxist-aligned, the forms of participatory research which find their way into mainstream practice tend to focus on the methodological aspects to the exclusion of ideology¹⁷, and indication of the pressures of standardization and institutionalization found within development agencies.¹⁸

Yet even without overt ideological intentions, participatory research has effected a number of significant changes within development orthodoxy. It has been heralded by the World Bank as a means through which the limitations of “conventional research” can be circumvented, and people can take increasingly important roles in the development process (Narayan, 1996:17). Certain approaches, such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), which will be discussed in detail in the following chapters, have proved influential in drawing attention to the complexity and diversity of local people’s lives, and the need to counter the tyranny of professionalism within development practices (Chambers, 1997b). While such techniques remain subject to co-optation they nevertheless signal important changes within the dominant discourses of development which may in the future prove indispensable in the struggle to transform development

¹⁷ Or perhaps more accurately, they are not explicit in their manifestations of political agendas.

¹⁸ It is not suggested here that forms of participatory research and PAR which are, at their core, ideological, no longer exist. Rather, they tend to be found at the margins of mainstream development, perhaps a necessary strategy for survival. Such cases, some of which may be found in Fals-Borda and Rahman (1991) provide interesting examples of how strategies in opposition to the mainstream can function and allow for critical examinations of hegemonic forces.

practice.

Challenges to Hegemony: Local Voices and Participation

The picture of participatory development which emerges is one of dynamic struggle. Although mainstream development practice has been influenced and changed somewhat by the emphasis on listening to local voices which participatory approaches espouse, it is clear that the dominant economic and political systems which guide the discourses of development remain in control. When participation appears in orthodox development discourses, it tends to support, rather than oppose these systems. Yet there are undercurrents of resistance which may also find expression within forms of participatory development. Giving voice to these points of opposition in order to mount significant challenges to dominant development discourses will require a close examination of how the 'space' of participation is contested.

Systems of Modernity and the Local

One of the clearest lessons which emerges from the historical analysis of participation in development is that the concept itself has been enlisted by various ideologies and their projects of power over time. This notion is especially relevant in the latest period of structural adjustment, in which participation has been assigned the role of a 'safety net', yet it has also retained the populist language of 'empowerment' and 'local initiatives' (Rahman, 1990). It is clear that participatory development, in this case, is being used by some interests to justify neo-liberal economic and political ideologies

currently endorsed by the World Bank and other international institutions. As Moore (1995:7) suggests, the discourses of participation, and development generally, form “an integral part of capitalism’s organizers’ ongoing attempts to gain and maintain hegemony - to make capitalism seem the natural order of things - all over the world.”

Yet it is possible to problematize even this notion. Chapter One demonstrated that the rise of capitalism can be associated with the establishment of modernity¹⁹, signifying that even larger questions must be asked about the significance of the struggle over participation. Alf Hornborg (1994:257) has argued that modernity is “essentially a strategy for encompassment of the local”. Thus, throughout the world engaged in the transition from a pre-modern to a modern state of affairs, there is a polarity which has developed between local and global identities; while local identities are formed of the “specifics of a place or community...incorporated in, and largely constitutive of, a person’s self-image”, modernity heralded the “emancipation of the ‘individual’”, the detachment of people from their local surroundings to larger, abstract “membership in supra-local sectors of meaning production” (Hornborg, 1994:258). The project of modernity, then is to enlist people into “systems of national and international integration”, such as states or markets, which “require centralization, [and] mobilization”, while denying, transforming or absorbing local identities (Hornborg, 1994:258).

Viewed in this context, participation, a process which essentially links micro and macro levels, may be conceptualized as a site of struggle between those interests seeking to establish modern systems and those in opposition to them. Moreover, while such

¹⁹ See also Escobar (1992:67).

battles are waged on the level of ideology and meanings, the struggle is in essence one of autonomy and access to resources. Participation can be conceptualized as a space in which local communities and individuals ('resources' in terms of means of production, i.e. labour) may be incorporated into larger economic and political systems, essentially a 'modernizing' process. Conversely, participation (and similarly, development) can be seen as a process of asserting autonomy and local identity within, or even against larger systems of domination. Much of this contest takes place at the level of discourse, as Hornborg (1994:260) points out:

Ambitious local actors will appropriate abstract modes of discourse in order to gain access to external funding and other forms of recognition. Conversely, 'global' actors from the outside will attempt to evoke local frameworks and reference-points for purposes of political or commercial infiltration.

Strengthening the Local

How can the expression of local identity and autonomy be facilitated in the face of hegemonic power structures? One step may be the recognition that participation is hardly a straightforward and apolitical process, as is commonly assumed. Gismondi et al. (1995:243) identify the notion of participation embodied by most mainstream approaches:

What does giving voice to little people and listening to little people imply? Surely, the suggestion is that often these groups in society are silent; that they have different views because of their role and place outside the power structures and decision-making structures of society; that by giving them voice, letting them speak, we allow their views, their consciousness, their values and ideas to enter into and contest the terrain of public debate. Or, does this occur?

In answer to their own question, Gismondi et al. (1995:243) suggest that rather than

providing a “fair and equitable opportunity” for the exchange of ideas and knowledge, participation is a “contested idea, a contested right”, in which participants must struggle to have their views heard and accepted. The ‘space’ of participation then becomes a site of conflict in which opposing views and voices are articulated through struggles over meaning. Naturally, the shape of this ‘space’ (i.e. its predefined limits) will determine how well “little people” are heard by other actors in the development process. as Linda Mayoux (1995:244-245) points out:

...participation is rarely a result of ‘spontaneous grassroots initiative’ where there is consensus between all participants or potential participants. On the contrary it is generally a complex political process in which inequalities in resources and power between participants and potential participants strongly influence the aims of participation and the forms which this takes....Even where there is relative consensus between participants, this may be mainly because ‘participation’ and co-operation reflect and serve the interests of dominant groups rather than presenting a challenge to them.

Examining the nature of the struggles occurring over participation is also important to recognizing the expression of local voices. Struggles waged over the issues of autonomy and access to resources occur simultaneously on a symbolic and material level has been pointed out recently by a number of scholars investigating issues such as gender and environmental conflicts (Carney and Watts, 1990; Moore, 1993; Hornborg, 1994; Mackenzie, 1995; Carney, 1996). In her study of agrarian change and gender relations in the Gambia, Carney (1996:164) illustrates the notion that “[s]truggles over labor and resources reveal deeper struggles over meanings in the ways that property rights are defined, negotiated, and contested within the political arenas of household, workplace, and state.” As Andrew Long (1992c:167) notes, material forms, such as commodities or

resources, may “assume social significance because of their ideological use by actors in developing particular negotiation strategies”. In this way, discursive forms become “strategic resources” in social contests (Long, 1992c:167).

Thus the ‘spaces’ of participation, whether they are found at the local level in meetings or research interviews, or within project documents, are contested terrains where negotiations at the symbolic level ultimately translate into struggles over access to resources. Without recognizing these symbolic factors, a participatory approach to development will not provide an accurate representation of local realities.

Finally, struggles which take place over participation should not simply be viewed as an opposition between ‘the local community’ and ‘the development agency’. The contests which take place simultaneously over access to resources and symbols of identity also occur *within* communities, between individuals and groups contesting the terrain of participation. Although this issue will be discussed in detail in later chapters, it is important to note at this point that participatory approaches which seek to articulate local realities must be aware of the multiple “axes of difference” found in communities, in overt divisions such as gender, ethnicity, and age, as well as those which are more obscured, such as class, lineage, and traditional belief systems (Welbourn, 1991).

Conclusion

Participatory development has been presented in this chapter as a site of contest and struggle. An historical analysis of participation in development practice reveals that despite some very radical and challenging roots, concepts such as participation and

empowerment have been incorporated, most recently, into a largely top-down, economically oriented version of development. Strengthening participatory approaches, so that local views may be expressed in the face of larger systems of modernity, will require that a careful examination is undertaken of the contested nature of the process of participation. The manner in which power, knowledge, and discourse function within participatory approaches becomes extremely important in any such effort.

The next section of this thesis is devoted to a closer investigation of one participatory approach. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), which will be used to illustrate a number of the points raised so far. The claims of PRA to empower local people through collective analysis and investigation, combined with its widespread acceptance in recent years, provide a suitable case study for such an analysis.

CHAPTER THREE: PARTICIPATORY RURAL APPRAISAL AS A SITE OF STRUGGLE

Introduction

The widespread acceptance of participation in development theory has resulted in a corresponding growth in approaches and methodologies designed to implement the principles of participatory development. One of the most popular of these is Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), a form of a participatory research used for planning, initiating, and evaluating development interventions. PRA can be described as “a family of approaches and methods to enable rural people to share, enhance, and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act” (Chambers, 1994a:953). Intended to effect a number of reversals in development practice, PRA has the potential to privilege local knowledge over that of outsiders by overcoming urban and technological biases, and inverting power relations in development interventions. PRA focuses on facilitating changes in attitudes and behaviours which will enable the ‘empowerment’ of local people (IDS, 1996:1).

As the previous chapters have revealed, however, participatory approaches to development are also sites of struggle in which various actors contest meanings, identity and resources. PRA, while acknowledging that social contexts are diverse and ridden with unequal power relations both within its theory and practice, is rarely viewed in this light. As with participatory development as a whole, there is a need to look beyond reductionist social analyses to the discursive battles which are waged at all levels of PRA within development processes. If PRA is to provide an effective means through which

local voices are able to challenge development bureaucracies and local people may be empowered, the theory and practice of the approach must come to terms with these issues.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine PRA, including its origins, theory and practice, in light of the ongoing struggles of meaning of which it is part. It will be argued that while PRA is intended to be an approach which challenges many practices and assumptions of conventional development, it is subject to co-optation by larger projects of power which seek to use it to legitimate pre-existing frameworks. It is contended that the theory and practice of PRA may even lend itself to such use, as there are weaknesses in the approach's conceptualization of local social processes and wider structural change. The analysis initiated in this chapter, which focuses largely on PRA literature, is continued in the following chapter with reflections on practice drawn from case study material from Malawi.

PRA: Origins, Theory, Practice

Origins

Despite Pretty et al.'s (1995:70) claim that PRA "is not a magical package that has suddenly appeared from nowhere", the speed of the methodology's adoption by development actors certainly makes it seem that way.²⁰ The emergence of PRA in the

²⁰ The growth of PRA has been truly extraordinary, especially considering its acceptance among national governments and donor agencies. Chambers (1997a) cites the example of India, where 300 trainers were trained within four months, and Indonesia, where the government in 1995 issued instructions that "PRA should be used in over 60,000 villages, and that before the end of the financial year".

early 1990s can in fact be attributed to the confluence of several pre-existing ‘streams’ of development practice and methodology which have combined to present a very attractive and potentially effective set of approaches for participatory development efforts. A review of these somewhat disparate currents is necessary to understand the nature of PRA.

PRA is born of the same discursive shifts within development that gave rise to participatory development as a whole. As Chambers (1994a:953) comments, such shifts (at least in rhetoric) include the “now familiar reversals from top-down to bottom-up, from centralized standardization to local diversity, and from blueprint to learning process.” As the recognition of the importance of local processes to development became increasingly clear, more emphasis was placed on finding new ways of understanding and incorporating local resources into development interventions. At the same time, dissatisfaction and opposition to the assumptions of “dominant, positivist-informed social science research” led to a questioning of the manner in which information is collected in development programming (Johnson, 1996:24). Consequently forms of research were developed in a number of different domains in development, all of which sought to place local people and their knowledge at the centre of the process.

Several major streams of thought can be identified as combining to form PRA.²¹

A brief review of these traditions shows how PRA has inherited various techniques and

²¹ Robert Chambers (1994a:954) actually identifies five streams: agroecosystem analysis, field research on farming systems, Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), applied anthropology, and activist participatory research. The four, slightly modified headings offered here are not intended to alter this assessment, but rather to contribute to the brevity of this chapter.

philosophies from each.

Agricultural Research

Much of PRA has been drawn from various agricultural research and extension methodologies used by development researchers and practitioners from the 1970s onward. As it became increasingly clear that Western scientific approaches to agriculture could not adequately account for the complexity and diversity of farming practices in the developing world, new research tools were developed to respond more closely to local conditions and farmers' needs, rather than reflecting the preconceptions of outsiders (Cornwall et al., 1994:104). Methodologies such as Farming Systems Research (FSR) focussed on relocating applied research from extension stations to farms, and viewing agriculture as an holistic system. Later methodological innovations such as Farmer Participatory Research (FPR) have recognized the positivist approach and limitations of FSR and seek to place farmers as the "central actors" in the processes of research and experimentation (Scoones and Thompson, 1994:7). According to Chambers (1994a:955), field research on farming systems has contributed to the understanding (for PRA) of the complexity and diversity of farming systems, the knowledge, rationality and professionalism of local farmers, their experimental mindset and behaviour, and the ability of local people to conduct their own analyses.

The "systems" perspective to understanding agriculture was employed in ecological approaches such as agroecosystems analysis, developed originally at the University of Chiang Mai in Thailand in the late 1970s. As a methodology which

combined systems and ecological thinking with “pattern analysis” of space, time, and other variables, agroecosystems analysis developed many of the “tools” found in PRA such as informal mapping, diagramming, transect walks, and ranking exercises (Chambers, 1994a:954-5).

Anthropology and Participatory Research

While the conceptual and methodological origins of PRA owe much to agricultural research, important techniques and concepts have been drawn from the fields of applied anthropology and ‘activist’ participatory research. An anthropological understanding of the difference in world-view between ‘outsiders’ and ‘insiders’, or local people, is crucial in recognizing both the validity of local knowledge and how to approach it (Chambers, 1994a:955). Consequently, many anthropological techniques such as participant observation and semi-structured interviews are recognized as extremely important for PRA processes, as is the value of field residence and the building of rapport as part of the research process.

“Activist participatory research”, a phrase which Chambers (1992:2) applies to “a family of approaches and methods which use dialogue and participatory research to enhance people’s awareness and confidence, and to empower their action”, similarly informs PRA practice. Largely associated with the ideas of Freire, the PAR school (Chapter Two), and the field of adult education, this activist tradition highlights for PRA the importance of recognizing the creative abilities and potential of local people, as well as the role of an outside catalyst or convenor to facilitate dialogue about people’s

oppression and possibilities for their empowerment (Chambers, 1994a:954). Chambers (1992:3), however, highlights an importance difference between the traditions of PRA and activist participatory research:

Activist participatory research has taken different forms and has been practised by people with a range of ideological positions, from radical crypto-paternalism to open-ended facilitation. Its special focus on the underprivileged and on political action has threatened established interests, whether political or professional, and limited its spread. In practice, much PRA has similarly been concerned with poverty and equity. But compared with most activist participatory research, PRA has entailed less extended dialogue and those who have facilitated it have been less ideologically committed *ex ante* to radical social change.

Rapid Rural Appraisal

Perhaps the tradition which most directly influenced PRA was its immediate predecessor, Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA). Emerging in the late 1970s from (primarily) the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at Sussex University, RRA represented an attempt by development researchers and practitioners to overcome several persistent biases and shortcomings of traditional development research and practice. A set of rapid and effective data collection techniques sharing much in common with agroecosystems analysis, RRA offered a quick and cost effective way for development professionals to approach local communities.

RRA responded primarily to the biases inherent in “rural development tourism”, the “phenomenon of the brief rural visit by the urban-based profession” (Chambers, 1992:7). Robert Chambers (1983:13) argued that such information gathering trips could not accurately observe the true nature of rural poverty because of several barriers. These

include: spatial biases, in which rural areas close to main roads or urban areas are favoured over those farther afield; project biases, when areas with established “showpiece” projects are examined, rather than areas where no significant activity is taking place; and seasonal biases, when rural visits are conducted at times most convenient for the development “expert”, rather than during hot or wet seasons, which may be the periods of the most severe hardship for rural people (Chambers, 1983:13-26). Moreover, rural development tourism may only feature discussions with a selective audience, such as village elites, men, or only those who are active or present, and even these encounters are shaped by diplomatic biases in which “courtesy and cowardice combine to keep tourists and the poorest apart” (Chambers, 1983:22). Combined with the pre-conceptions inherent in the development expert perspective of practitioners, these biases form formidable barriers to interaction between the professionals and the poor.

RRA was also perceived as a way in which long, tedious, and expensive forms of conventional research could be avoided. Between “survey slavery” (expensive and inaccurate surveys which are also difficult to administer) and total immersion fieldwork which may take years and be burdened by excess amounts of data, RRA represented a compromise, a “fairly quick and fairly clean” form of research which could be very reliable (Chambers, 1983:51). Both its brevity and the fact that it drew on rural people’s knowledge for its source of information combined to create a cost-effective methodology which became increasingly accepted as valid during the 1980s.²²

²² It is significant to note that while Chambers (1994a, 1992) asserts that it is primarily the concern with persistent anti-poverty biases in development which justify the use of RRA, a document on ‘Rapid Appraisal’ methods prepared for the World Bank lists

The practice and theory of RRA can be grouped into six basic principles (adapted from Chambers 1992:14):

- **A reversal of learning.** Learning from rural people according to their priorities and needs. This is done *in situ*, in face to face encounters with people and their local physical technical and social knowledge.
- **Learning rapidly and progressively.** A conscious exploration, improvisation, and flexible use of methods, not following a blueprint program, but rather remaining adaptable to circumstances.
- **Offsetting biases.** Being relaxed rather than rushing, listening instead of lecturing, probing, seeking out poorer people to learn their priorities and concerns.
- **Optimizing trade-offs.** Relating the costs of learning *vis-à-vis* the usefulness of information, recognizing trade-offs between quantity, relevance, and accuracy. Practitioners should be guided by the idea of 'optimal ignorance', only gathering the information which is appropriate, and knowing what is not worth knowing.
- **Triangulate.** Using a range of methods and approaches, and sources of information, and crosschecking these with one another.
- **Seeking diversity.** Looking for variability rather than averages. This goes beyond triangulation to deliberately look for and investigate contradictions, anomalies and differentness.

These principles of RRA, articulated through a wide variety of tools and techniques (many of which will be discussed at a later point), form a powerful methodology that seeks to facilitate a number of 'reversals' in development practice. Development practitioners learn from rural people's knowledge in a cost-effective and accurate manner, attempting to offset spatial, temporal, and personal biases. The data generated in RRAs, however, is collected and taken away by outsiders to be incorporated

the cost effectiveness of the methodology as the "most compelling reason" for its adoption, followed by concerns over time (Kumar, 1993:18).

in development programming, excluding local people in the process of analysis. Thus RRA in its normal practice can be described, according to Chambers (1992:9), as “extractive, or, more neutrally, elicitive.”

Participatory Rural Appraisal

The recognition that the extractive nature of RRAs should (and could) be addressed emerged in the mid-1980s, when discourses of participatory development began to appear with more frequency in mainstream agencies.²³ Influences from applied anthropology, PAR, FSR, and agroecosystems analysis began to find their way into RRA practice and shift its emphasis from extraction to shared analysis. By the end of the 1980s, ‘Participatory’ RRAs were being performed in Thailand, Kenya, and India, largely in the field of natural resource management and agriculture. Spread largely through South-South interactions and the sharing of information, ‘manuals’, and trainings, many of the early innovators of Participatory Rural Appraisal were field staff in NGOs (Mascarenhas et al., 1991; Theis and Grady, 1991; NES, 1991).

While the differences between RRA and PRA are not always clear in practice, it is important to distinguish the key differences between them at least in terms of intention. Whereas RRA is mainly seen as a means for outsiders to gather information, PRA “emphasises processes which empower local people” (IDS, 1996). Instead of the data being collected and taken away to be analyzed by development ‘professionals’, a different approach is taken:

²³ A good example of this is Cernea’s *Putting People First* (1985).

PRA offers practitioners a different role, as facilitators of processes in which local people play a far more active role. Rather than treating people as the objects of study, the use of PRA enables them to take part in presenting their own information, drawing their own conclusions and offering their own analyses.

The end result of PRA may even be to plan and take action after this analysis of information, a step which often “implies radical personal and institutional change” (Chambers, 1994a:958). In this sense PRA, similar to PAR, combines research with action, “offering opportunities for mobilizing local people for joint action” (Cornwall et al., 1994:108).

PRA, then, accepts the basic principles of RRA (outlined above), but adds three more to encompass the ideas of participation and empowerment:

- **Facilitating - they do it.** Local people do their own investigations, analyses, and presentations with the intention of learning and action. Crucial to this point is the idea of ‘handing over the stick’ to allow such processes to take place without interruption.
- **Self-critical awareness and responsibility.** Facilitators constantly examine their own behaviour, embrace error, and try to do better. This involves using one’s own best judgement at all times and accepting personal responsibility for successes and mistakes.
- **Sharing.** Information and ideas between local people and facilitators, different facilitators and other organizations should be continuously shared and assessed (Adapted from Chambers, 1992:15).

Chambers (1994b:1255) points out that while the principles shared by both RRA and PRA are largely concerned with gaining knowledge and obtaining information, those aspects specific to PRA are mainly personal, affecting outsiders’ behaviour and attitudes. This variance is indicative of the larger distinctions in theory and practice between RRA and PRA.

Tools and Methods in PRA

PRA employs a number of methods or 'tools' in its effort to facilitate communication between local people and external development workers. A variety of visualization, group-work, and interviewing methods are used to allow people to express their views and stimulate discussion and analysis. "Rather than answering a stream of questions directed by the values of the researcher," Cornwall et al. (1994:108) comment. "local people represent their ideas in a form they can discuss, modify and extend." These tools can be broken into three main categories, including Diagramming and Visualizations, Interviewing, and Ranking and Scoring Methods.²⁴

Diagramming and Visualizations

One of the most innovative features of PRA is the shift away from exclusively verbal methods of research to visually-oriented ones (Theis and Grady, 1991:77). Maps are used to model different aspects of community life, natural resources, or land use patterns. Diagrams can illustrate historical trends, daily or seasonal activities, or show institutional relationships (Humble, 1994:93). Local materials are used as much as possible to render the diagrams more accessible and tangible; maps can be drawn in the ground, using sticks, stones, and leaves for representations of locations or concepts.

Several advantages of using visual techniques are identified by PRA practitioners. Chambers (1994b:1257) suggests that while the information gathered by surveys or

²⁴ These categories are suggested by Pretty et al., (1995:72.). Others have broken down the tools into more categories (Theis and Grady, 1991) or have used different titles (Cornwall et al. 1994:109).

questionnaires remains “personal and private, unverified, and owned by the interviewer”. maps and diagrams can be visually shared so that “all who are present can see, point to, discuss, manipulate and alter physical objects or representations” so that learning is progressive and the information is “verified, amended...and owned, by the participants.” Another oft-cited benefit of using visualizations is that it allows for the inclusion of non-literate participants. According to Pretty et al. (1995:77):

Everyone has an inherent ability for visual literacy, and the impact of visual methods on communication and analysis can be profound. They allow non-literate and literate people to participate in the process as equals, facilitate the exploration of complex relationships, and generate collective knowledge.

Thus with the ability to share information with a wider audience, diagrams and maps can be used to generate discussion, explore complex issues, and even lead to decision-making and monitoring.

Interviewing

Borrowed largely from anthropological research, semi-structured interviewing (SSI) remains a crucial part of PRA. Rather than reading questions from a pre-prepared questionnaire, SSIs appear more informal and conversational, concentrating on the context as well as the content of the interview (Pretty et al., 1995:73). Guided by a checklist of questions which can be modified or abandoned during the course of the interview, SSIs have the flexibility to explore participants’ responses with new queries (Theis and Grady, 1991:52). Group interviews can be used for brainstorming or to focus on a particular issue, key informant interviews seek out specific perspectives, and

ethnohistories or group walks can approach other aspects of community life. PRA also encourages the combination of SSIs with visualizations to help stimulate discussion or explore issues (Humble, 1995:92).

SSIs also require that facilitators adopt attitudes and behaviours conducive to allowing discussions to take place without interference. Interview leaders must avoid leading questions, listen without interruption, maintain sensitivity to body language and other contextual indicators, and keep a low profile (Theis and Grady, 1991:57). According to Pretty et al. (1995:73), semi-structured interviewing is not only the “most essential skill” for participatory methods, it is also the “most difficult method to master and the most difficult to train others in.”

Ranking and Scoring

A wide range of ranking and scoring methods are used in PRAs to determine preferences and explore people’s perceptions of various subjects. Employing visual methods together with some discussion, ranking methods draw out the complexities involved in decision-making, avoiding simple ‘yes or no’ questions of formal surveys (Cornwall et al., 1995:108). Not only can such methods bring researchers into closer contact with local realities, but they can also lead to discussions among local people:

By drawing eye contact away from people and towards the matrices and diagrams being constructed on the ground, these methods allow tensions to be diffused and concern to be drawn away from otherwise restrictive differences in status, style or speech among the local people or between the outsiders and the local people. In addition, vigorous debate is often generated among all those involved and can lead to exciting and unexpected results. Ranking and scoring methods are particularly valuable

for illustrating to both the outside agents and local analysts how radically different each group's perceptions and beliefs can be, and what similarities exist (Pretty et al., 1995:85).

Through techniques such as pairwise ranking, matrix scoring, and wealth ranking, PRAs are intended to inform outsiders local processes at the same time as generating a learning process among participants.

The Three Pillars of PRA

The methods used in PRA form one of what has been called the 'Three Pillars of PRA: Methods, Behaviours and Attitudes, and Sharing'. While originally it was assumed that participatory methods were the most important element of the methodology, there has been a growing recognition among practitioners that the attitudes and behaviours adopted by facilitators have as much, if not more, influence on the success or failure of PRA processes (Chambers, 1995a:1). Sharing, the third pillar, becomes important for the spread of the technique and its improvement through collaboration and the recounting of successes and failures.

Among the three pillars, PRA literature largely recognizes that an 'attitudes and behaviours change' (ABC) is the most difficult to adopt (Jones, 1997; Kumar, 1996). Singh (1996:8) points out that PRA tends to focus on 'talking' and 'doing' rather than 'being', a step that is necessary in order to adopt the necessary personal values for transformatory PRA. "At the personal level," writes Chambers (1996:3, bold in original), "practitioners and trainers have found that **the major problem in development is not 'them' - local people, the poor and marginalised, but 'us' - the outsider professionals.**"

Thus an important future struggle of PRA is asserting the “primacy of the personal”, placing emphasis on the need for change in attitudes and behaviours in individuals, which will then lead to corresponding changes in organizations and institutions.

To facilitate such changes, some recent PRA literature consciously moves away from referring to PRA as simply a methodology, toward conceptualizing it as a “philosophy, a way of life, and a set of behaviours and attitudes” (Adhikari et al., 1996:2). At the centre of such a paradigm is the primacy of personal behaviour and attitudes, the crucial step which separates PRA as a set of methods and a philosophy. “Personal behaviour and attitudes have been the missing link in development,” write Adhikari et al., 1996:2), “and can now be seen as the key....This applies as powerfully to the head of an international agency as to a fieldworker in a remote village.” Without a personal shift to more participatory behaviour, organizational and institutional cultures cannot change. “The core of good PRA is our behaviours and attitudes”, writes Chambers (1992:89). “[d]one well, [it] becomes self-improving and self-spreading: self-improving through critical awareness, embracing error, and learning what works; and self-spreading through sharing.”

Reconceptualizing PRA

PRA, in theory, represents a significant challenge to development orthodoxy and its conventional modes of research and intervention. Its emphasis on acknowledging local people’s realities and reversing top-down modes of intervention directly counteracts development orthodoxy. Yet as a growing number of observers report, it is increasingly

the case that this radical theory does not match actual practice. As PRAs become more institutionalized and commonplace, there appear to be wide variations in its practice, where labels appear often without substance. Although most analyses of the 'dangers' of PRA focus on 'good' and 'bad' practices, this simple opposition tends to belie the complexity of the struggles that actually influence the application of PRA. The neglect of such dynamic contestations may in fact leave PRA theory and practice vulnerable to cooption. PRA is more accurately conceptualized as a site of struggle, in which symbolic and material contestations occur from a variety of actors in the development process.

'Doing' PRAs

It has already been noted that PRA has experienced a phenomenal pattern of growth since its emergence in the late 1980s. PRA-related practices are now found in over 100 countries of the North and the South, in both rural and urban locales, and within NGOs, governments, and universities (Chambers, 1997a:6). As an increasing number of government departments and donor agencies are encouraging or requiring the use of PRA approaches in programs and projects, everybody seems to be 'doing' PRAs, and, at least in some cases, it has become a "flag of necessity" without which funding cannot be secured (Richards, 1995:13).

Such widespread use (and possibly abuse) of PRA leads to concerns over the quality of practice, and whether or not its challenging stance to conventional development approaches will be diluted when PRA 'goes to scale' (Chambers, 1995b, Backhaus and Wagachchi, 1995). In some cases, the use of PRA has been reported as having

empowered marginalized communities, enabled the expression of local social diversity, encouraged organizational changes, and led to community-based processes of planning, implementation and evaluation. Yet the increased popularity of PRA, especially among mainstream development actors, has often led to the adoption of the rhetoric of participation without the accompanying action (Guijt and Cornwall, 1995:3). According to Adhikari et al. (1996:1), while the widespread adoption of PRA by governments and donors has “led to some good results”, a much more common outcome has been “abuse and bad practice” of PRA on a huge scale”. Some key areas of concern, expressed by PRA practitioners include:

- The assumption that using PRA methods and/or approach in itself brings about positive change;
- Lack of conceptual clarity, transparency and accountability;
- Emphasis on information extraction with the rhetoric of political correctness;
- Unchallenged assumptions of community harmony;
- Lack of in-depth analysis which obscures awareness of political realities within communities;
- One-off training, with no follow-up by trainers or institutions;
- Poor integration of PRA into project planning and implementation;
- Lack of clarity about reasons for using PRA;
- Agendas driven from outside the community, not from within; and
- Co-option of the acronym, making it a label without substance (Guijt and Cornwall, 1995:1).

Similarly, Chambers (1994c:1441-2) adds that PRAs are vulnerable to the urge to “standardize and codify” in the name of quality; manuals and handbooks which are composed to share ideas and techniques may also inhibit and intimidate, and may ultimately lead to “routinisation and ruts” which leave practitioners “slipping into

unvarying standard practices, overlooking other options.”²⁵

Related to these problems, other practitioners have questioned the ability of PRA to account for the complexity of local social contexts. Although the approach makes use of many visualization techniques which are intended to allow for greater participation from illiterate people and PRA training focuses on seeking out the more vulnerable societal groups, the tendency for PRA to be used in shortened time frames and by staff who may not possess appropriate skills in facilitation has generated many questions. Some have recognized that PRA is “weak on appropriate methods for exploring social complexity”, and doubt the ethnographic validity of the approach (Guijt and Cornwall, 1995:4; see also Mosse, 1995; Pottier and Orone, 1995; Richards 1995; Scoones 1995). PRA techniques themselves cannot be assumed to be able to account for all of the intricacies of local contexts, and practitioners who “often lack the conceptual tools to make sense of the complex social and political contexts in which participatory research and development takes place” may assume that the approach is more participatory than is actually the case (Guijt and Cornwall, 1995:5).

²⁵ A number of other factors identified include: failure to understand the philosophy of participation and of PRA; pressures to scale up PRA rapidly, sometimes to a national level; demand for instant PRA training one-off and on a large scale; low quality PRA training, limited to routine methods; the rush to prepare projects and programmes; top-down procedures; drives to disburse funds; time-bound targets for products, neglecting process; inflexible programmes and projects; neglect and underestimation of the knowledge and capabilities of local people; neglect of local capacity building and institutional development; lack of staff continuity, and penalisation of participatory staff (Adhikari et al., 1996:1-2).

'Good' and 'Bad' PRA Practice

PRA literature tends to analyze the problems found with scaling up and misinterpretation of local realities in terms of 'good' and 'bad' practice. 'Bad' PRA occurs primarily when outsiders depart from the fundamental principles of PRA, such as the 'Three Pillars': methods, sharing and behaviour and attitudes (Chambers, 1997b:211). This can be expressed in organizational terms, such as bureaucratic bottlenecks, top-down hierarchies of decision-making (ie. hierarchical corporate cultures), budgetary and temporal pressures, and a myriad of other 'concrete' factors, but at the heart of the problem are the attitudes and behaviour of the individuals found within those institutions. A recent workshop on 'Attitude and Behaviour Change in PRA' (ABC in PRA) concluded that, above all else, the failure to adopt good attitudes and behaviour is the most important reason for the shortcomings of participatory processes such as PRA (Adhikari et al., 1996:1; see also above). 'Good' PRA occurs when organizations and facilitators shed dominant and superior behaviour, avoid rushing, do not fall into routines and ruts, and resist temptations to do only extractive research (Chambers, 1997b:216). Staying true to the fundamental principles and precepts of PRA should lead ideally to the empowerment of local people to take charge of their lives, and the liberation of the practitioner from "personal and professional prisons" (Chambers, 1997b:216).

Indeed, although what Richards (1995:16) calls "role-reversal therapy for arrogant professionals" is a valuable step toward fostering authentic participation and reforming attitudes, it should be recognized as only one dimension of changing institutions and organizations. As Backhaus and Wagachchi (1995:63) point out, the "transfer" of

participation from grassroots organizations or NGOs to government institutions which are very hierarchical cannot rely on the attitudes and behaviours of individual officers. Rather the “objectives of these institutions, their institutional cultures and identities, as well as the forces driving them are entirely different” and these must be taken into account. The intention here is not to argue that changes in attitude are not relevant or even more important than other factors in instituting participation, but rather to ask larger questions about the resistance to participatory processes within the machinery of development. For example, why is PRA so readily (and easily) adopted in language, but stripped of its radical potential in some cases of practice? As Richards (1995:13) remarks, the absorption of PRA into the institutional cultures of mainstream development agencies has “made routine and safe what in the first instance began as an approach intended to subvert development orthodoxy”. What is driving the ‘top-down’ forces within agencies or organizations which seek to negate the empowering effects of PRA? The discourse of PRA, and the struggle between what is called ‘good’ and ‘bad’ participatory practice is waged in an arena much larger than local institutions or even government agencies; it is essentially the struggle between the assertion of local autonomy versus the global entrenchment of modernity and its institutions (Chapter 2). Without this perspective, the struggle over the use and abuse of PRA cannot be fully understood.

Similarly, questions of PRA’s interpretation of local level interactions must be re-examined. Despite Chambers’ (1997b:173) contention that PRA is concerned with uncovering the “different constructions of reality” of development professionals and local

people. the approach is still grounded in a positivist understanding of social interactions. In other words, by using the correct technique with the proper attitude, complex information is rendered accessible by outsiders. "The basic idea", writes Johan Pottier (1991:2) of semi-structured interviewing, a technique prominent in PRA, "is that 'the data' are out there to be collected, objectively and quickly, and that 'asking' and a bit of commonsense is all it takes". No matter how informal and open outsiders feel their intervention in local settings is, there are likely to be underlying dynamics of power and knowledge that remain undetected. "Whatever the PRA pundits say about 'relaxed settings'", Pottier (1997:221) notes, "participatory workshops remain structure encounters marked by hidden agendas and strategic manoeuvres." Without an adequate conceptualization of social contexts and local struggles, PRA's ability to provide the space for local voices to be articulated and focussed on challenging larger discourses will be limited.

PRA and Discourses of Modernity

As the first two chapters established, the dominant discourses of development are largely determined by the parameters set by the more central and influential power strategies and discourses of modernity, such as global capitalism and state power. The World Bank provides a suitable example of how this process occurs. As the "official policy guide in the development world", the World Bank "maintains intellectual and financial hegemony" by generating policies and knowledge which support the growth of central strategies of power (Escobar, 1995a:164-5). According to Escobar (1995a:165),

the Bank uses a number of tactics to secure its position of dominance:

it channels the largest amount of funds; it opens new regions to investment through transportation, electrification, and telecommunications projects; it contributes to the spread of MNCs through contracts; it deepens dependence on international markets by insisting on production for exports...it opposes protectionist measures of local industries; it fosters the loss of control of resources by local people by insisting on large projects that benefit national elites and MNCs; it responds closely to the interests of international capitalism in general and U.S. foreign policy in particular...and it collaborates with and helps maintain in power corrupt and undemocratic regimes throughout the Third World.

By ensuring that policies suit the needs of the hegemonic economic and political systems, the World Bank continues to receive support from (mostly Northern) governments. Thus dissenting voices within and outside of the World Bank tend to be silenced, or their discourses appropriated and placed in other contexts.

In the case of PRA, ideal practice would see well-trained and behaved outsiders with sufficient time and resources carrying out good PRA which would lead to an empowering and educating process on the part of local people, and to accurate and reliable information gathered by the practitioners. Yet as in the case of the World Bank and development bureaucracies, institutions which must respond directly to larger power projects to maintain both their hegemony and their very existence, PRA in such an ideal form may not fit adequately into a managerial mode. In fact, many of the shortcomings of bad practice - rushed time frames, insufficient training, pressure to disburse funds - may be viewed as a necessary part of the adoption of PRA on the part of development bureaucracies. Thus not only is the battle for the expression of local voices espoused by PRA waged against 'bureaucratic cultures' and 'attitudes' - as though these things stand

alone and are easily transformed - but the struggle must also be waged against larger forces of modernity which may seek to keep such characteristics in place.

The 'Failure' of PRA

PRA practice, then, takes place in a complex discursive context, the implications of which are not always readily apparent. As Ferguson (1990) showed in the context of a rural integrated development project in Lesotho, it may be useful to ask not simply what PRA *fails* to do (ie. 'bad' PRA), but what it actually does do in that failure. As Foucault suggests in his analysis of the prison system:

perhaps one should reverse the problem and ask oneself what is served by the failure of the prison; what is the use of these different phenomena that are continually being criticized: the maintenance of delinquency, the encouragement of recidivism, the transformation of the occasional offender into a habitual delinquent, the organization of a closed milieu of delinquency (Foucault, 1979:272).

While the objectives of the planners were not realized in the case of the Lesotho project, the end result was the expansion of state power into regions in which it had not previously been present. This raises crucial questions about the "logic or intelligibility" behind failing strategies of development, and PRA (Ferguson, 1990:254).

What are the larger interests served in the adoption of 'bad' PRA practice, *vis-à-vis* the incorporation of 'good' PRA within mainstream development?

Framed in this manner, a number of new conclusions may be drawn. It has been suggested, for example, that PRA has been used in a number of cases to co-opt people into projects "devised by outsiders to serve their interests, without altering the balance of

power” (Guijt and Cornwall, 1995:3). Gardner and Lewis (1996:114) point out that PRA can “easily be used within existing top-down frameworks if it is misapplied....and, if it is carried out cynically, can be employed to show support for pre-existing viewpoints.”

Invoking a “participatory ritual” without actually dealing with the frustrating complexities of participatory processes is a relatively easy way for practitioners to give the impression to donors that local people’s views have been incorporated into the design or implementation of a project (Gardner and Lewis, 1996:114). At worst, PRA has been used to describe development activities which are “little more than thinly veiled manipulation” (Guijt and Cornwall, 1995:7).

Much of this manipulation occurs at the level of language and representation. As Chambers (1994c:1441) points out, the “hardened development professional who knows how to vary vocabulary to fit fashion will replace questionnaires or ‘RRA’ in project documents with ‘PRA.’ but may not know or care about what it entails.” Indeed, as much of PRA literature is filled with easily remembered tropes and sayings, language becomes a true battleground of meanings. While Chambers (1995:59) is optimistic that the ‘benign’ linguistic ‘viruses’ with which PRA literature is filled (‘handing over the stick’, ‘they can do it’, ‘use your own best judgement at all times’) will work toward changing attitudes in favour of participation and expression of local identity, it may be that those very labels and sayings can be employed by other actors with altered meanings, without losing their effect of legitimization.

Philip Quarles van Ufford (1993:140) suggests that drawing on certain language and labels in representations is part of a struggle on the part of development agencies to

maintain their dominance. Representations of reality that suit agencies' needs serve as a form of "symbolic capital" which provides "the means for the agencies to gain political support and access to funding in their own constituencies...the images of the local scene must be made to fit organizational needs, and lead to an integrated discourse in which the capabilities of the administrative 'machine' and the definitions of development constitute a single whole" (Quarles van Ufford, 1993:140). In his study of 'local participation' in Indonesia, Quarles van Ufford (1993:141) found that "official statements" of what was happening in a rural development project produced by the local government not only differed remarkably from what observers noted, but served a purpose of political legitimization through their manipulation of images of local communities and participation (Quarles van Ufford, 1993:141).

The battle is not only waged over language, however. The field practice of PRA corresponds to knowledge representations and the larger discourses in which it functions. Part of the popularity of PRA is of course its cost-effectiveness and rapidity. Yet this 'strength' in the eyes of many may be a weakness in terms of resistance to pressures of bureaucratisation. Paul Richards (1995:14-15) has suggested that, while in the late 1970s, development planners were finally coming to terms with the need for long-term field research which would investigate the complex cultural dimensions of poverty, PRA may have actually undermined its support:

My impression was that economists were beginning to listen...when the message was garbled by the emergence of PRA/RRA as an 'answer' to the 'problem' of where to fit the social studies perspectives into the busy schedules of development consultancy teams...[B]ureaucratic logic...requires PRA/RRA to be pressed into service (perhaps against its

designers' best intentions) as 'quick-and-dirty' anthropology on economists' terms.

Richards (1995:14) notes further that the format of PRA has been used to force "social scientists to work like economists and accountants", an outcome which is "part of the problem, not part of the solution!" Thus PRA can be and is forced into the 'bureaucratic logic' of development agencies: trainings are shortened, methods are emphasized over attitudes, inhibiting deadlines are imposed, budgets are reduced, and mechanistic versions of PRA are scaled up to thousands of villages. All of these factors combine to provide the information that *agencies* want, and the development agenda remains safely in their control.

In what seems to be a strange twist, then, PRAs, stripped of their radical implications, may end up legitimating the very structures which they were originally intended to subvert. It is clear from a number of observations that 'bad' PRA practices which rush procedures, assume homogeneity within communities, or employ poor facilitation, profoundly affect the representation of local knowledge and voices that emerges from the exercise. In this sense, when local knowledges are not able to challenge "regimes of truth" (Chapter One), PRA processes may actually become supporters (or perhaps enforcers) of those dominant discourses of development, or "technologies of normalization" (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983:195, DuBois, 1991:17).

Politics of PRA

The co-optation of PRA may be aided by a number of factors inherent to the

approach itself. In its attempt to offset many of the biases of top-down development and recognize the validity of local realities and knowledges, PRA seeks to initiate processes of change within development that ultimately translate to a transformation in relationships between the North and South. Chambers (1994c:1448) points to a “paradigmatic shift” across a number of fields and disciplines which provides alternatives to existing theories:

As economic growth ceases to be a simple, universal objective, as it is recognized as environmentally harmful among the richer, and as economic resources are recognized as finite, so there is a search for alternative normative paradigms, for more sustainable ways to enhance the quality of life...One way to serve these objectives is to enable local people to identify, express and achieve more of their own priorities...The trends toward centralization, authoritarianism, and homogenization are opposed. Reductionism, linear thinking, and standard solutions give way to an inclusive holism, open systems thinking, and diverse options and actions (Chambers, 1994c:1450).

While Chambers (1994c:1449) is perhaps justified in taking pride in the fact that the theory in PRA is “induced from practice, from what is found to work, not deduced from propositions”, PRA literature lacks a clear articulation of just how people’s local struggles lead to challenges of larger hegemonic discourses, and tends to view development itself with a rather apolitical lens.

PRA indeed purports not only to foster local level analyses by people themselves, but they also seek to enable people “to set their own agendas, pursue their own priorities and play a more prominent part in decision-making” (Guijt and Cornwall, 1995:6). Together with a change in attitude and behaviour on the part of practitioners and donors, this will lead to “radical but practical change” in the development process (Adhikari et

al., 1996:1). What such a change entails, however, in terms of political or economic processes, is not made explicitly clear. "In the face of the extensive and rapid 'scaling up' of the use of PRA" write Cornwall and Fleming (1995:11), "it may be appropriate to ask what the different actors and agencies involved in development mean by 'participation' and 'empowerment'."

Indeed, as a major impetus behind the rise of PRA was the "managerial need to compress and rationalise learning" in development, the practice and theory of the methodology has been based very much within the 'machinery' of development (Mosse, 1995:27). Its own evolution, largely as a 'tool' that works in the field, leaves larger questions of change unanswered. In contrast to 'activist participatory research' forerunners, such as PAR, PRA has "often remained locked into the contexts in which RRA was previously used...[its] application has remained largely sector-focussed and so fits within the existing hierarchy of planning, without seeming to challenge it" (Guijt and Cornwall, 1995:4). The localized, rapid, and somewhat apolitical nature of PRA may in fact account for its rapid growth and popularity; Cornwall and Fleming (1995:11) point out that: "Participatory Action Research (PAR) has been used since the 1970s without attracting a similar level of interest...perhaps precisely because it is directly concerned with wider political change." Agencies can adopt PRA knowing that its radical aspects can be contained or neutralized relatively easily.

Thus, while PAR and PRA share concern with "persistent inequalities in the distribution of power and resources and the development of a research and planning methodology which is more people-centred in its approach", according to de Koning

(1995:34) the participatory methods found in PRA contribute “very little to an emancipatory process.” While PRA may be able to set a process of empowerment into motion, the momentum will be lost without a long-term commitment. As de Koning (1995:35) suggests, “[u]nless PRA is explicitly linked with an educational process which enables groups of people with little power and resources to gain more control over their own lives, the term ‘participatory’ remains meaningless.”

Local Contexts

The shortcomings of PRA’s analysis of local struggles, already mentioned above, may also contribute to its inability, in some cases, to articulate strong challenges to mainstream development practice. Without recognizing, as Scoones and Thompson (1993:25) suggest, that the interaction between development professionals and local people must be viewed “in terms of the on-going pattern of struggle, negotiation, cooperation and compromise between different actors”, as well as the symbolic and material contests waged within local contexts, PRA will not be able to represent local identities accurately.

As Chapter Two has noted, the space of participation is contested and struggled over by a variety of actors. Recognizing that these struggles occur on symbolic, as well as material, levels requires going beyond the rational choice models and the “logic of capital” analyses employed by some theories of development, to centre upon a notion of “human agency” which “locates individuals in the specific life-worlds in which they manage their everyday affairs (Long, 1992a:33). Such an approach acknowledges the

dynamic nature of power and knowledge (Chapter One), and seeks to identify the strategies and multiplicity of meanings employed by social actors to enlist one another in their 'projects' of power (Long, 1992a:23). Encounters between individuals and groups can be viewed as processes of negotiation, in which discourses are drawn upon and employed to various ends; in this sense, the choice of language by actors, the issues discussed and the decisions to hide information, all "provide insight into the political and social nature of the encounter" (Scoones and Thompson, 1993:23). Forms of resistance, found in the composition of both "public" and "hidden" transcripts employed by people, reveal boundaries of power and struggle between dominant and subordinate groups (Scott, 1990:14).

Struggles at the micro-level for access to and distribution of resources ultimately inform analyses of larger-scale social change. Discursive battles at the local level form part of a process of "constant negotiation of the legitimacy of state policy", effected through "influencing the dominant discourse (the image of the state, of development, of the role of different social actors in 'development'), through populist measures, alliances with influential networks, the distribution of scarce resources and by the threat of violence, etc." (Brunt, 1992:15) Thus understanding local level social processes becomes a vital part of a larger analysis of the functioning of larger strategies of power, such as economic and political systems imposed from the top down.

The ability of practitioners working with PRA to recognize such struggles will be discussed in detail in the following chapters. It is clear, however, that if participatory tools and techniques are not able to interpret properly local expressions of identity and

resistance, it will be difficult for PRA to foster truly empowering processes.

From Apolitical to Depoliticizing

The ability of PRA to be adopted as an apolitical approach, due to some of the conceptual weaknesses already mentioned, raises some important implications for the ways in which it is employed or deployed as part of larger strategies of power. In its ideal form, PRA is intended to provide a strong challenge to hierarchical and unjust power structures of development. In many cases, however, the ‘failure’ of PRA to carry out this aim may actually result in the legitimization of pre-defined goals set by such structures. This may comprise what Ferguson (1990:256) refers to as an unintended “instrument-effect” of an intervention, the ability of “failed” development projects to “so successfully help to accomplish important strategic tasks behind the backs of the most sincere participants”. As noted in Chapter One, Ferguson’s analysis, in the context of Lesotho, demonstrated that the “failure” of an integrated rural development project to accomplish its intended goals actually allowed the power of the state to expand. “[U]nder cover of a neutral, technical mission to which no one [could] object”, the project cast a powerful “depoliticizing” cloak over the ideological actions of the state (Ferguson, 1990:256).

It is reasonable to suggest that, in some cases, PRA may function in a similar manner. Through the ‘failure’ of PRA to articulate local voices in a manner which challenges the hegemonic of larger discourses, those central strategies of power may in

fact gain legitimacy from the symbolic capital of using a 'participatory' approach.²⁶ At the local level, the instrument-effects of power may be more difficult to determine. As Mosse (1994) points out and as later chapters will suggest, the 'space' of PRA may be used by local actors for their own power projects, but the ultimate impact of failed PRA in terms of larger discourses may not be known without more extensive analysis. As Nelson and Wright (1995:18) argue, however, such questions are crucial to ask of all participatory approaches, including PRA:

Does [PRA] enable people, traditionally objectified and silenced, to be recognized as legitimate 'knowers', to extend their understanding of power relations, widen their choices and determine their ideas of development? And are such 'people-centred perspectives' transforming the apparatus of development? Or, masked by the visibility of expressed intentions, does the flow of events surrounding participatory development programmes produce side effects which incorporate marginalized people more effectively within a decentred subjectless system of power, working invisibly and 'behind our backs'?

Conclusion

It has been argued that PRA, a popular approach stemming from a number of traditions in participatory development, should be conceptualized as a dynamic site of

²⁶ It is important to stress, as Ferguson (1990:256) does, that the side effects of development interventions are not the outcome of a conspiracy on the part of development practitioners. Rather, as shown in Chapter One, the complex web of power relations obfuscates the articulation of hegemonic discourses to such an extent that it would difficult to predict or even intentionally effect particular outcomes. "[I]t is necessary to demote intentionality - in both its 'planning' and its 'conspiracy' incarnations", writes Ferguson, (1990:275). "and to insist that the structured discourse of planning and its corresponding field of knowledge are important, but only as part of a larger 'machine,' and anonymous set of interrelations that only ends up having a kind of retrospective coherence".

struggle in which many actors, from the global to the local, compete and strategize with one another. Importantly, although PRA is intended to provide strong challenges to hierarchical structures among development professionals and their accompanying institutions, some of these conceptual weaknesses may compromise the approach's ability to articulate local voices and promote wider processes of change within development practice. Careful note should be taken of the unintended side effects of power which may be articulated through PRA practice.

The following two chapters are devoted to the presentation and analysis of a PRA research project carried out in Southern Malawi. The case study will provide a practical example in which a number of issues already raised may be reflected upon.

CHAPTER FOUR - QUESTIONS IN PRACTICE

A Case Study of PRA in Malawi

Introduction

Chapter Three has argued that in order to understand the implications of PRA for development programming, including agendas of local empowerment, it should be viewed as a part of an arena of struggle, comprised of the complex and shifting discourses of development. While its flexibility to be adapted to different environments may indeed be viewed as a strength, PRA is also rather easily incorporated into programs or projects in such a way that does not challenge managerialist or developmentalist undertones of more conventional development efforts. This form of co-optation may not be intentional, but rather derives from a complex network of discursive forces which seek to limit the emancipatory potential of PRA.

Other questions arise about PRA at the level of implementation, where the process of PRA brings 'outsiders' to local settings, as well as gathering together divergent groups within communities. In its approach to analyzing local social processes, Chapter Three has argued that PRA is weak in its conceptualization of the roles of various actors in the PRA process, and the way in which competing strategies of power and knowledge are articulated at the local level. The space of participation opened by PRA activities is one of dynamic struggle, in which both outsiders and insiders contest for meanings, identities, and resources. Generally speaking, the tools of PRA are unable to probe adequately this social complexity, a situation which is only exacerbated by a PRA process which is limited by time, trained staff, and other more physical obstacles. These weaknesses may

in fact constitute another obstacle to the use of PRA in a process of empowerment.

This chapter is intended to raise a number of questions about PRA and its role as an approach to both research and empowerment in a development setting by presenting a case study based on a series of PRAs conducted in Malawi as an evaluation for a community-based health monitoring program. Based largely on personal observation and reflections on the process of one particular research project, it is recognized that the cases presented here are not representative of all PRA practice but rather serve as a starting point of discussion, a means to illustrate some of the issues and concerns which arose during one particular set of circumstances. Analysis of the material introduced at this point will be carried out in the following chapter.

The chapter is divided into two main sections. The PRA process at the basis of the observations noted here formed part of a research project conducted by the International Eye Foundation (IEF), a US-based international NGO, in its role of support for a nation-wide community-based health monitoring program called 'Monitoring for Empowerment' (also known as 'M4E'). A description of this program, and the context in which it functions will be examined first. The second section, then, focuses on an account of the research process, which took place over a period of three months.

Monitoring for Empowerment

A Response to Drought

M4E is a nation-wide community-based health and food security monitoring program which grew out of the concern on the part of a number of actors to increase the

regularity and reliability of data on health and agricultural indicators while attempting to render the same information useful and meaningful for communities (MEPD et al., 1996:1). The program, which is supported by the Government of Malawi, international organizations such as USAID and UNICEF, as well as a number of NGOs, is an expanded version of a drought monitoring system implemented in 1994-95 to measure the vulnerability of various parts of the country to famine. At the end of that program, the importance of a "continual data flow on a permanent, rather than ad-hoc bases" was realized, and by amalgamating a number of existing information systems, M4E was designed to simplify the data collection and dissemination process (Jones et al., 1996:7).²⁷

Yet while the collection of data and its distribution among governmental and non-governmental actors was seen as important, it was also felt that it was necessary to render the information more useful for people at the local level. By involving local actors it was also believed that the accuracy of the data collected would be improved:

Monitoring is for information, naturally. But what value is imprecise and non-representative information (due perhaps to a lack of vision on the part of the surveyor, improper training or mere apathy)? And equally important, what value is information which is never appropriately used, in other words, data which doesn't provide information upon which to ACT? (MEPD et al., 1996:1).

M4E therefore seeks to empower local people by including them in the process of data collection, thereby ensuring its accuracy and sustainability, as well as mobilizing communities to take action to correct problems as they are identified. "In the process of

²⁷ M4E involves the monitoring of both agricultural and health indicators. During the course of the research project being reviewed here, only the health collection processes were reviewed, and therefore the background on M4E will also concentrate on this area.

‘empowerment’”, as one report on M4E states, “the beneficiary should be the main actor, rather than an instrument of an outside actor” (Jones, et al., 1996:8).

M4E functions on cycles of data collection and “feedback mechanisms”. in which Health Surveillance Assistants (HSAs), the lowest rank of government extension worker, travel to a number of villages every month to gather a random sample of health information, then return in the following weeks to present the information back to the community for discussion of possible strategies and action (Maliro and Chilima, 1996:1). Most of the indicators focus on the health of children, including weight, oedema, diarrhoea, types of food eaten, and number of meals consumed. The cycle of data collection is done on a household to household basis, while the feedback portion of the program is carried out at a community meeting. M4E is intended to fit into the existing framework of the Primary Health Care (PHC) system of the Government of Malawi (GOM), in which HSAs cooperate with community-level health institutions already in place, such as Village Health Committees (VHCs) and Village Health Volunteers (VHVs), to carry out their data collection and feedback activities. It is hoped that during the feedback village meetings, all of these actors, including community members, can analyze and discuss the data collected in the previous month, noting persistent problems or areas of vulnerability, and it will lead to some sort of action. The scope of such action is left open-ended, but could include further health education, the digging of pit latrines, or the organization of the community for larger goals. “In other words,” write Maliro and Chilima (1996:40), “the communities should be aware of their situation, formulate resolutions for action and take action to improve their welfare.” In placing the local

beneficiaries of the health care sector as the main actors in monitoring, rather than an “instrument of an outside actor”, M4E is meant to foster the participation of all actors in the process and build relationships in the health care system (Jones et al., 1996:8).

Empowerment, PHC, and the Malawian Context

The move toward ‘empowerment’ within the health system in Malawi should be regarded both as a part of the larger shift toward participatory forms of PHC in development thinking as well as a result of the social context of the country. Indeed, while community involvement has been a significant part of PHC since its inception in the late 1970s, there has been a general recognition by a number of international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) that levels of participation need to be increased and that “people have both the right and the duty to be involved in decisions about activities that affect their daily lives” (Rifkin, in Chiarelli, 1996:35). PHC strategies in recent years have stressed community participation in terms of cost-recovery measures for drugs and health services, as well as relying on local level institutions such as VHCs and VHVs to carry out an increasing number of activities (Chiarelli, 1996:34-35). M4E must be viewed as part of the general move to encourage local initiatives as a means of improving the efficiency and efficacy of the PHC system.

Yet certain distinctive characteristics of the Malawian context have also contributed to the emergence of M4E. Indeed, the country’s health system is in a state of “crisis”: Malawi’s under-five mortality rate is the worst in Eastern and Southern Africa, child malnutrition is high, and life expectancy is among the worst in the world (World

Bank, 1995:7).²⁸ Recent drought (1992/3) and the imposition of 'austerity budgets' as a part of structural adjustment programs have left nearly all social sectors, including health, with dwindling financial resources.²⁹ Moreover, it is clear that a disproportionate amount of the financial resources in health (85%) have been directed toward urban areas, which represent only 15% of the total population (Reid, 1993:27). Thus the PHC system in Malawi is recognized as an important 'front-line' service of the whole health system. The National Health Policy developed by the Malawian government adopts PHC as "the major philosophical underpinning of the health services delivery system" (WHO, 1995:42).

Yet the strengthening of the PHC system in Malawi faces a number of obstacles. A recent survey from WHO recognizes that a shortage of resources (including drug shortages), inadequate and poorly distributed staff, and weak "intersectoral collaboration" among government ministries, NGOs and international organizations are all systemic problems in Malawi (WHO, 1995:45). These factors are accompanied by an overall lack of decentralization and local participation in the health system:

²⁸ 1992 figures for under-five mortality rates were reported by the World Bank (1995:8) as 233.8 per 1,000 live births. Life expectancy in the same year was 44 years (statistics were not disaggregated by sex. Malnutrition, the Bank notes (1995:7) has resulted in more prevalent stunting in Malawi than surrounding countries, and nearly "one in every two children under five is short for his/her age and one in four is underweight."

²⁹ Although the percentage of GDP devoted to the health sector has remained relatively stable, and the nominal amount spent on the health sector is rising, an analysis of real per capita recurrent expenditure reveals a significant decrease from 1986/87 to 1993/94 (Government of Malawi, 1993:185, Reid, 1993:39). The difference is crucial: in 1986/87 per capita expenditure was \$1.52, compared to \$0.30 in 1993/93, a figure considerably lower than the \$1.25 recommended by the WHO as a minimum amount necessary to maintain basic health services (Reid, 1993:39).

households and communities are not empowered to identify their problems and to implement activities to solve these problems. The communities, therefore, do not sufficiently know the activities... [There is] inadequate support for community structures such as village health committees to ensure sustainability of community-based PHC activities. (WHO, 1995:45-50).

Although it does not offer any significant amount of resources to the health system, M4E is intended to address some of these issues by promoting a more participatory and accountable form of interaction between Ministry of Health staff and local communities.

The Malawian Political Context

Banda and the MCP

The centralized, 'top-down' nature of the health system in Malawi is partly a reflection of the political context in which it was formed. Before the introduction of multi-party politics in 1994, Malawi was ruled for thirty years in a highly centralized system by Dr. Hastings Banda and his Malawi Congress Party (MCP).³⁰ According to one observer, Malawi under Banda actually resembled more of a 'one-man state' than a 'one-party state' (Ihonvbere, 1997:225). "Through a combination of bribery, intimidation, election malpractices, and the suffocation of civil society," writes Julius Ihonvbere (1997:225), "Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda instituted what was probably the most repressive, corrupt, predatory and violent political system in Africa." Banda's government was characterized by the "'top-down' flow of policy directives and government decrees", enforced by extensive networks of spies and paramilitary

³⁰ For more information on the multi-party elections of 1994, see Kaspin (1995), and Ihonvbere (1997).

organizations (Ihonvbere, 1997:226).

This concentration of power during the period of dictatorship left the health sector (among others) with a culture of dependency and centralization which is difficult to overcome. On the surface, the MCP maintained a “well-structured administrative system” for local development (not restricted to the health sector), comprised of village-level and district-level development committees. Most of these institutions, however, were “inactive or dormant”, resulting in a “lack of communication and participation in decision-making structures...[and] directive approaches” (Government of Malawi, 1993: 39). Consequently, the health system lacked “the involvement and ownership of the relevant participants from all levels”, and was characterized by a culture of “disinvolvement”:

At MOH the practice has been to refer all decisions, however small, up to the highest levels...Politically at the village level the Malawi Congress Party has played a significant part in all activities, working alongside the traditional hierarchy and district administration structure...[S]ome experience at the community level has shown that villagers are unused to identifying their problems and taking the initiative for tackling them and are reluctant to suggest any changes which may not have the approval of the party. Empowerment is not a word which has been used in Malawi until very recently (Reid, 1993:9).

The influence of the MCP throughout all levels of administration provided an efficient method of social control for the government. Banda consistently used local development committees and other institutions to channel development aid intended to strengthen patronage ties throughout the country. As Deborah Kaspin (1995:607) notes, this form of control was particularly pronounced among Banda’s own tribe, the Chewa:

...rural development provided the means for extending patronage along specific lines into the Chewa peasantry by targeting its most high status members, namely territorial chiefs and village headmen, who were invariably the first and most frequent recipients of state aid. As such, development aid flowed along the same channels as the administrative hierarchy and the ruling party's structure, strengthening the regime's base of support among a strategic group of clients within the Chewa population and securing them as an instrument through which the state could control the rest.

UDF and Multi-party Politics

When economic crisis³¹, international pressure, and pro-democratic protests within the country forced Banda to call a referendum for multiparty elections in 1993, a number of new political 'spaces' were opened.³² Since their election in 1994, Bakili Muluzi and his United Democratic Front (UDF) party have tried to distance themselves

³¹ Despite the "remarkable" macro-economic performance of structural adjustment in Malawi (economic growth rose from 0.5 per cent in 1987 to 7.8 per cent in 1991), the income levels of a "very significant proportion" of the country's population have witnessed a decline in their incomes over the last ten years (Government of Malawi, 1993:xv). Instead, the agricultural policies (80 per cent of Malawians derive their livelihood from agriculture) of the Banda regime tended to discriminate against smallholder families by "transferring customary land to...estate owners and by giving them the sole right to grow burley tobacco, Malawi's most profitable crop" (World Bank, 1995:2). Estate agriculture (largely tobacco, sugar, and tea), encouraged by structural adjustment, accounts for approximately 90 percent of export earnings in Malawi. The smallholder sector, which makes up the majority of Malawi's population, is engaged largely in subsistence production of maize, and is characterized by a land shortage and food insecurity (Government of Malawi, 1993:xvii). Other social indicators such as malnutrition, child mortality, and life expectancy reflect this state.

³² Ihonvbere (1997:226-229) notes that the factors leading to multi-party elections were numerous. Among the most important, however, was the economic crisis of 1993 brought on by drought and the impoverishment of the poor by structural adjustment programs, international displeasure with Banda's poor human rights record and lack of political liberalization (resulting in the withholding of foreign aid by many international donors in 1993), and a number of urban pro-democracy protests staged by church leaders, workers, civil servants, and university students dissatisfied with the government.

from Banda's legacy, using a variety of tactics, including the encouragement of a more participatory form of development in the country.

A participatory project such as M4E (and the use of PRA to study it) should be viewed in the context of a willingness on the part of the UDF government to promote participatory approaches to development in virtually all sectors, including health. With the encouragement of the World Bank, Bakili Muluzi and his United Democratic Front (UDF) government placed poverty reduction as a priority, instituting the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) to provide a framework through which the efforts of government ministries, NGOs, and international development agencies could be coordinated (Government of Malawi, 1995).³³ The PAP, considering the development management structure of the Banda regime (through local, MCP-dominated development councils) to be ineffective and stifling, espouses a new ethos of participation:

Community development and community participation during all stages of the development process will be the guiding principle of PAP implementation. Local and self-help oriented initiatives will be enhanced to mobilise the economic and social development potential at the grass-root level and, therewith, to promote sustainable development at the community level. A process will be initiated where people will be assisted to become masters of their own development. PAP will provide the opportunity for communities to build up capacities in organising, identifying, implementing and administering community actions to improve their own welfare. While communities retain ownership of the entire process, appropriate technical assistance will be provided to them by

³³ It is interesting to note that, similar to a number of other African nations, during the 1980s, Malawi underwent a series of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) under the advice of the World Bank and the IMF. This resulted in some economic recovery, but it was concentrated in the estate (cash crop export) sector, while smallholder production remained stagnant, and social indicators fell. According to the Situation Analysis of Poverty in 1993, "the majority of the country's population have not participated in and benefited from recent economic growth" (Government of Malawi, 1993:55).

sectoral agencies of the Government, NGOs and the private sector (Government of Malawi, 1995:13-14).³⁴

Under such a framework, and in light of the international trend toward participatory approaches to development, an increasing number of participatory projects and methodologies (such as PRA) have been adopted since 1994 by a wide variety of development actors, including government ministries, UN agencies, the World Bank and NGOs such as Actionaid, Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief (CPAR) and Concern Universal. In addition, a country-wide Participatory Development Methods (PDM) network has been formed to link practitioners of PRA together to share information and experiences. Indeed, in a context where, according to one PRA practitioner in Malawi, for at least thirty years local people's "initiative, responsibility and empowerment have all been suppressed", the role of participatory development in Malawi is seen by many as extremely important (Donnelly, 1996:14). It is also this context of a growing recognition of the value of participatory approaches in which the PRAs researching the M4E program were employed by IEF staff.

M4E and Participatory Rural Appraisal

The Research Project

Between July and September, 1996, the International Eye Foundation, with

³⁴ One possible 'side-effect' of such a policy is that by allowing the UDF to redefine the relationship of the government with its citizens by entreating 'community participation', it is able to side-step any allies of Banda still present on the MCP-created village, district, and regional development committees. While it is presented as a matter of 'good development', it is most certainly 'good politics' as well.

sponsorship of UNICEF, undertook a research project in the Chikwawa district of Malawi's Southern Region in order to examine the 'empowerment' aspects of M4E (which had been introduced in January, 1996) and how they were functioning at the local level. This included assessing the use and perceptions of the program among Ministry of Health (MOH) staff and community members, as well as an exploration of its "potential to strengthen the capacity of local health institutions, from the health centre to the village health committee" (Jones et al., 1996:8). The research design consisted of a combination of individual interviews with local MOH staff (HSAs and their direct superiors, Health Assistants (HAs)), and three village-based PRAs of approximately four days each.

The choice of PRA as a research method was made largely by the coordinator of IEF's M4E activities in Chikwawa, an expatriate American consultant employed by IEF and UNICEF to "assist in the start-up and implementation of the M4E system in the district, working closely with the [MOH] team to build sustainability" (Jones et al., 1996:7). Having attended two PRA trainings in the previous year (one of them with a number of IEF staff), the consultant chose to use PRA because of its participatory essence, complementary to that of M4E, and because of the desire to engage in a research process which avoided the extractive nature of conventional research (K. Jones, pers. comm.). The PRAs had two main purposes.³⁵ Firstly, they were intended to serve as a

³⁵ Although PRA literature warns against viewing 'a' PRA as an event, rather than PRA as an approach, in the experience narrated here, the researchers did indeed refer to field work as 'doing a PRA'. The current study will use the PRA in the same sense as it was understood in the field.

more holistic tool of evaluation than a conventional survey questionnaire, providing an understanding of the communities themselves, and how local people and VHCs perceived the M4E program and the PHC system as whole. Secondly, the a PRA process was intended to initiate an empowering process of dialogue and collaboration between the various actors in the health system, such as the HSAs, VHCs, and the community. Throughout the course of the PRAs, the target communities, as well as the lower-level health extension workers, would be 'empowered' to take a greater role in both the M4E program and more generally in the development activities of the village as a whole (K. Jones, pers. comm.). Eventually, it was hoped that the PRAs would be able to gauge how well M4E was functioning in the villages, in addition to leading to the creation of village action plans, in which communities would be able to articulate how to improve their local health care institutions, and identify concrete actions to be undertaken (Jones, 1996).³⁶

The M4E research project was undertaken within the context of IEF's other work in the district. IEF has administered health-related projects in Chikwawa district since 1989, receiving the majority of its funding from USAID with "an overall goal of improving infant and child health survival" through activities such as Vitamin A

³⁶ The use of the term 'empowerment' here must be problematized in the same way that 'participation' is questioned. As Pieterse (1992:11) points out, empowerment is "politically neutral" as a term; it can denote anything from individual self-assertion to upward mobility through adaptation and conformism to established rules". In the case of both the M4E program and the PRA research, 'empowerment' is understood as directly linked to autonomous action. In M4E, it is hoped that, when provided with information on their own health situation, people at the community level will take action collaboratively to work towards solving persistent problems. The PRA process was intended to explore the ways in which such mobilization could be facilitated, and to actually lead to a form of action by their conclusion.

education and distribution, diarrhoeal diseases control, AIDS education and the cooperative establishment of a PHC infrastructure (Venemans, 1993:17).³⁷ Reflecting the larger discourse of PHC, community participation comprises a substantial part of these activities. As part of its USAID “Child Survival Grant”, IEF is “committed to enabling communities to participate in improving their own health” by forming and training VHCs and ensuring that they are “empowered to choose and oversee the work of village volunteers” (IEF, 1995a:6).

IEF Malawi first used PRA in 1995, in connection with its Child Survival Grant, with the express purpose of identifying appropriate income-generating activities that could be adopted by villages in order to support the activities of the community-based volunteer institutions such as the VHC and VHV (IEF, 1995b:5). These PRAs, carried out in connection with another Malawian NGO, also functioned as a training for a number of IEF staff at the same time.³⁸ This initial experience with PRA lasted for a duration of ten days. The M4E project represented IEF’s first use of PRA without the collaboration of outside organizations.

³⁷ The PHC ‘infrastructure’ refers to the creation of VHCs and VHVs in the villages of the district. IEF also assisted in the training and equipping of HSAs throughout the district in the early 1990s (Venemans, 1993:17).

³⁸ The PRA training was done by the Coordination Unit for the Rehabilitation of the Environment (CURE), a Malawian NGO with a number of PRA trainers on staff.

Background Knowledge: What We Knew, and What We Assumed We Knew

The research team for the M4E research was comprised of the team leader (the expatriate consultant already mentioned), three Malawian IEF staff members from the Child Survival Project, and myself, a graduate student taking part in the project as a Research Assistant for IEF.³⁹ Experience levels with PRA varied among the team members. The team leader, as mentioned previously, had attended two PRA trainings and participated in other projects with participatory approaches, but had never before initiated a PRA process from start to finish. Of the three IEF staff members, two had previous experience in PRA and other participatory methods, while one did not. My own familiarity with PRA was restricted to secondary sources (ie. PRA manuals and training guides) and a background knowledge of various other methods of qualitative and participatory research, including experience with processes of PAR. The fact that two members of the team had no previous field experience with PRA was not believed to be problematic; especially in the case of the IEF staff member, it was felt that his in-depth knowledge of the communities in which the PRAs were to take place was a valuable asset in spite of lack of experience with participatory approaches.

Gender composition of the team was a concern, especially as the only female on the team, the leader, could not speak Chichewa. IEF, however, had no female staff available for the research, regardless of PRA training. Little time was spent discussing the issue, apart from the suggestion that an attempt would be made to employ the team

³⁹ My participation came under the auspices of the Malawi Applied Research Program (MARP), an initiative sponsored by World University Services of Canada (WUSC).

leader strategically as a facilitator for those focus groups which were most likely to be influenced negatively by a gender bias.

The IEF research project on M4E was limited to a sub-region (Traditional Authority Region Chapananga) of Chikwawa, an administrative district in southern Malawi (Figure 1). This region was chosen because it was the area in which VHC's were selected and trained by IEF and MOH staff, and because of the familiarity of the region of the team member already mentioned. Villages were selected for PRAs on the basis of the following criteria: remoteness from major centres; the presence of an active/non-active VHC; recent/non-recent training of the VHC, and the apparent level of activity of the area's HSA, gauged by IEF staff (Jones, et al., 1996:9).

Interpreting the social context during the PRA process was left largely to the three Malawian staff, who served as both the main facilitators for the PRA tools employed, and interpreters for the non-Chichewa speaking team members. The presence of one person in the team who had extensive knowledge of the research area was considered to be an important factor in this regard. As the final research report notes, "[i]t was felt that his knowledge of people and traditions in the area would augment the research process and would help the team to interpret local situations" (Jones et al., 1996: 9). Indeed, previously established personal connections were seen as crucial for establishing rapport with village headmen and their communities, as well as identifying key informants and different power interests within villages.

In my own case, knowledge of the physical and social context of the research area was limited to the 'location description' sections of IEF and MOH reports and proposals.

Figure 1

Location of Research: Traditional Authority Region Chapananga, Malawi

Legend

T.A. Chapananga

Source: Maps on File. New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1982.

According to such sources, Chikwawa District is set apart in several ways from the rest of the country. One of the two districts which comprise the Lower Shire Valley, Chikwawa differs geographically in that it is only 100-300 metres above sea level and has a hot and dry climate with an average rainfall of 800-1200mm per year. While it is one of the least populated areas in the southern region, density is still high at 67 persons per square kilometre (IEF, 1995a:1).

Although it has already been noted that Malawi has one of the highest child mortality rates in the world, the figures for Chikwawa district, supplied by the Ministry of Health, are generally around 10% higher than the national average (Venemans, 1993:viii). Major causes of child mortality include malnutrition, AIDS-related illness, pneumonia, measles, malaria and diarrhoea. Other social indicators follow a similar pattern. According to a 1987 census, literacy levels for Chikwawa are among the lowest in the country with 41% of males and only 14% of females able to read and write (IEF, 1995a:1).

Most economic activity in Chikwawa is focussed on agriculture, with most smallholder farmers engaged in maize production, while some also grow cotton. In the eastern part of the region (outside of the research area), the Sugar Corporation of Malawi (SUCOMA) owns a large estate which produces most of the country's sugar, employing nine thousand women and men and housing up to twenty-five thousand in total. Other than the plantation, there are few opportunities within the district for salaried labour and underemployment is high. Combined with the harsh and unpredictable climate of the area, this situation leads to a high level of food insecurity (IEF, 1995a:1). The district

also hosted as many as one hundred thousand Mozambican refugees who, after repatriation in 1993/1994, left behind a “degraded environment” and took away donor aid to the region, “much of which [had] made its way into the Malawian communities” (IEF, 1995a:1).

IEF reports also note a complex social composition in Chikwawa, but do not provide detailed descriptions of social stratifications. According to the 1994 Child Survival Grant Detailed Implementation Plan (DIP):

The primary ethnic group is the Sena, comprising 62% of the total population. Other major groups include Mang'anja (16%), Lomwe (12%) and others (10%). Almost all villagers are conversant in Chichewa even though it is not their mother tongue...Christianity predominates, with 88% of the population being Catholic (26%), Presbyterian (11%), Seventh-Day Adventist (7%) or other Protestant (44%). The remain [sic] villagers identify themselves as either Muslim (3%) or Pagan (9%) (IEF, 1995:1).

Although it addresses children and women as primary targets of project activities, the proposal contains no substantive information on gender, class, or other forms of rural differentiation in Chikwawa. Similarly, no explicit mention of the political context is made other than a paradoxical reference to the effect of the transition to multi-party politics:

Recent changes in the political system from an authoritarian one-party system to a democratic multi-party system have weakened the self-help spirit of communities. Many villagers expect the new government to alleviate their poverty, but do not want to do anything for themselves (IEF, 1995a:2-3).

Such a statement would seem to contradict Reid (1991:9) and others who claim that Banda's regime had an overall disempowering effect at the community level.

Unfortunately, no explanation or further elaboration of context is provided in the IEF

document.

During preparations for the PRA project, the research team did not discuss issues of social context in any detail, other than to recognize the role of the one member who had worked in the area as a kind of ‘interpreter’ for local situations. The lack of investigation of secondary data sources, or in-depth team conversations on the local context was largely due to the short time-frame of the project.

PRA Agenda/Format

Each PRA consisted of three consecutive days of village meetings and sessions using various PRA tools, and one day, two to six weeks later on, of focus group discussions, directed mainly at the members of the VHC in each village. Publicity for the PRAs was done one to two weeks beforehand by approaching the village headman of each community and discussing appropriate times for the team’s arrival, and requesting that the message of the meetings be spread. The team arrived in the village on the day before the meetings were agreed to start, and stayed either in tents inside the boundaries of the village itself, or at a resthouse nearby for the duration of the PRA.⁴⁰ All food for the research team was arranged locally.

All PRAs, with some modifications, followed a similar pattern of sessions and tools (see Appendix 1). An initial meeting, to which all community members were invited, was called in the morning of the first day to introduce the research team and

⁴⁰ Tents were used in two of the three PRAs. In the case of the third, a small resthouse only two to three kilometres away was used.

explain the purpose of the PRA sessions. This was usually a very formal setting, in which a number of village elders and other dignitaries were invited and introduced. The presence of the HSA was requested as well. Expectations of both the villagers and the research team were exchanged, and time requirements and schedules for the research were discussed.

Following the initial meeting, a community mapping session was facilitated involving all participants of the meeting. As men and women consistently sat apart from one another in the meetings, maps were also drawn separately by gender. Mapping was done on the ground, using available materials (such as stones, branches, ash and leaves) to mark out village boundaries, households, locations of schools, churches, health centres, and other features. This session was done at the beginning of the PRA so as to try to capture as much energy and interest as possible in the research. As Pretty et al. (1995:83) note, participatory mapping and diagramming “can quickly involve a large number of local people in the appraisal and analysis of their own livelihood concerns.”⁴¹

After a break at midday, people were asked to return in the afternoon for another series of tools and sessions. The maps created in the morning were transferred onto

⁴¹ Attendance during the initial meeting tended to be high overall, ranging from 100-150. During focus groups or other sessions, the number of participants averaged around 20-30 in each group (Jones, et al., 1996:11). Total population of the village was difficult to estimate, but wealth ranking lists showed an average of 130 households. Wealth ranking data gathered was not detailed enough to be able to identify the individual participants in the sessions, but it was fairly clear (at least to our Malawian colleagues) that those in attendance tended to be from the middle or upper classes. It was generally assumed that the poorest villagers were working as casual labourers for other community members. Moreover, especially in the case of women, younger elements of the population often joined the PRA sessions after they had begun, as they were (presumably) occupied with household tasks for longer.

flipcharts by a small group of community members, who were also asked to mark down further information, such as the location of VHC members' households, pit latrines, and female-headed households. At the same time groups of men and women were divided and asked to begin exercises such as seasonal and daily calendars, disease calendars, wealth ranking, and household expenditures and income. These were also done either on the ground or directly onto flipchart paper, using beans or other local materials as indicators. At the same time, a group of elders, both women and men, was selected by the facilitators (after consultation with the village headman or another elder), and asked to construct an historical timeline. This was done orally, and the information recorded by the facilitators.

With only three Chichewa-speaking facilitators, some sessions were guided more closely than others. Generally speaking, however, the tools determined by the team as more straightforward in nature and less important for the research project (such as household income and expenditure) were monitored only periodically.⁴² The English-speaking team members were paired with Malawians, and took part in the sessions as co-facilitators.

The second day of the PRAs focussed on the health system and its relationship to the communities. Discussions and various PRA tools were facilitated with three different groups of villagers: women, men and members of the VHC (including VHVs). If groups of men and women became too large for easy discussions (more than 15 people), they were split and asked to work on another tool. In the morning, women's and men's groups undertook discussions of the previous day's mapping and carried out general problem

⁴² A list of tools and their description is found in Appendix 2.

ranking (either by pairwise matrix ranking or bean voting). In the afternoon, groups were asked to focus more on the health system including relationships between the HSA, the community and the VHC, as well as the impact, if any, of the M4E program on the health situation of the village. Linking diagrams and some matrices were employed. Groups were also asked, time permitting, for suggestions of how the M4E system (or the health system in general) could be improved.

The VHC's discussion began by asking about the activities of the committee, how often they meet, and their perceived functions. In some cases, the VHC was asked to rank health problems in the village, including their causes, effects, and possible solutions. Linking diagrams were then used to explore the relationships within the committee and between the VHC and other actors, such as the HSA, the village headman, VHV's and the community. M4E and its impact was then discussed, and suggestions of action to improve the program were elicited.

The final day of the PRAs was comprised of a plenary presentation in the morning, in which the results of the previous days' research could be discussed and analyzed. Representatives of each group explained what they discussed during each session, presented their diagrams, and answered questions from the community. The HSA and the members of the VHC were also asked to answer questions from the villagers about the health system and the M4E program. The meeting was concluded with songs and dancing from various community members, and a communal lunch sponsored by IEF.

The follow-up day of the PRAs, held two to six weeks following the initial period,

featured a focus group meeting with VHCs about the M4E program and the PHC system. A discussion between the HSA of the region and the VHC on their working relationship was held, facilitated by IEF. An afternoon meeting was called for the whole village to attend, in which the results of the morning session were presented, and the community could respond. Throughout the morning, a series of informal household interviews were also conducted randomly by two members of the research team, asking questions concerning the PRA process itself, and what was remembered as being discussed during the initial three days. These informal interviews were to serve as a sort of *ad hoc* evaluation for the research process itself.

PRA in Chapanganga: The Process

As a means of illustrating the process and findings of the PRAs carried out by IEF, this section presents a number of observations of the research from a largely personal viewpoint, in a roughly chronological order. The initial three-day PRA sessions in each village are treated separately, followed by a combined summation of the final day of research in all locations. The description of the research process is intended to provide a base from which the experience may be analyzed and reflected upon in the following chapter. It should be noted that the names of the villages in which research was done, as well as the Malawian IEF staff, are left anonymous in order to avoid any possible negative ramifications of this study for these people.

Village A

The research team arrived in the first village (village A) at 8:45am (a pre-arranged time) to begin the first PRA. The agreed meeting place was the compound of the village headman⁴³, a very dynamic man of about sixty-five years of age, who greeted the team and invited us to sit down and wait for the community members to come to the meeting.

Meanwhile, within the chief's compound, a group of men were stuffing cotton into sacks for shipment, and a continuous stream of people wanting to buy cassava from the chief shuffled in and out of the area. The comparative wealth of the village headman was instantly recognizable from the size of his houses (two large buildings, both with tin rooves), his sizeable herd of goats housed periodically in the compound, and his ownership of a diesel maize mill, adjoining the houses. The most striking indicator of the chief's wealth, however, was the fact that he owned a small pickup truck, used for *matola* or public hire. The vehicle was one of the few which consistently travelled up and down the main road of the region (which was in extremely poor condition), carrying people and goods in the back. As there was no other source of public transit in the area, the truck was almost always loaded or overloaded.

The first PRA meeting began at 10:30 am, after a group of about twenty men (mostly seated on chairs and benches), and fifteen women (all seated on the reed mats placed on the ground, separately from the men) had gathered. The research team members were seated on chairs as well. The chief began the meeting by explaining publicly that because the village was short of wells, women were having to walk a long distance to the closest river to get water, and would join the assembly later. A Christian prayer was offered by one of the village elders, who then introduced a number of people, including the members of the VHC, the chairmen of the local political party committees (MCP, UDF), other village elders, and the chief and his first wife. The research team was introduced by the member already familiar with the village.

The research team's purpose was described (by a team member) in terms of an interest on the part of IEF in asking about problems faced by the village, and the desire to work together to solve those problems.⁴⁴ In the spirit of a frank exchange of expectations,

⁴³ The terms 'chief' and 'village headman' are used here interchangeably to refer to the leader of the village in which PRAs were being held. The Malawian Traditional Authority governmental structure, implemented during colonial rule, and modified after independence, consists of several levels. According to the Government of Malawi (1993:36), the village is the basic social unit in rural areas, organized "under customary law with authority vested in a traditional village headman "Nyakwawa", or chief, helped by village elders." Villages are grouped into areas, under group headmen, sub-chiefs and traditional chiefs, the last being the most powerful.

⁴⁴ It should be noted that my account of the dialogue within PRA sessions almost always stems from the translation of one of the Malawian IEF staff. In the case of the opening session and a few other instances, the translation was relayed to me afterward. In

it was explained that we hoped that people of the village would participate in the research process, and be open about their problems and solutions. When the people were asked about their expectations, and what they hoped to receive in turn, the same village elder who had made the introductions spoke for the men's group (also a very dynamic man), commenting that their primary concern was the improvement of water sources and the main road. One woman commented that a closer health centre would benefit the village, and one male member of the VHC added that a centre for orphans was also needed in the community.

After a brief description of the schedule in the following two days, villagers were invited to begin constructing a map of the community. This was done primarily as a way of mobilizing people for the research, as well as generating a quick idea of the layout of the community and its main features, as perceived by villagers. After the IEF facilitator picked up a tree branch and scratched a line which represented the main road, which ran through the village, he handed the stick to one of the men, who continued with the drawing. As the women were simply standing and watching without participating, it was suggested that they begin their own map in another area. The men's group was very animated, stepping all over the map to argue over boundaries, the course of the river, and other physical details. There were many young boys rushing to find materials to serve as markers. The women, by contrast, were much more reserved, preferring to stand around the edges of the map and direct one person (the Village Health Volunteer, who was literate) to draw. There were very few younger women present. When the maps neared completion (see Appendices 3 and 4), IEF facilitators presented each group with a piece of flipchart paper in order to transfer the details. A number of older women were perturbed at this move, pointing out that it would have been much easier to simply draw the map on the paper in the first place, rather than wasting time drawing in the dirt.

In the afternoon, a group of a few men chose to continue transferring and filling in their map on their own, while IEF staff facilitated a number of different tools with the others present.⁴⁵ A number of elders (men and women) were gathered to construct a historical timeline by semi-structured interviewing, including previous development interventions in the village (Appendix 5). Two key informants were chosen by the facilitators to do a wealth ranking of households, using the data which had been collected from the map.⁴⁶ A group of women discussed and constructed a daily calendar and

many cases, the smooth running of PRA sessions was found to rely a great deal on the ability of the facilitator to respond quickly to statements made by participants, and it was not always possible to receive exact translations.

⁴⁵ At this point, one of the IEF facilitators was forced to leave the research site because of malarial symptoms, thus leaving the team with two Chichewa-speaking and two expatriate members.

⁴⁶ Wealth ranking was used to get an idea of the social stratifications of the village. Two village members, one woman and one man, were chosen to review the list

household income/expenditure diagrams (Appendices 6 and 7). A separate group of men also worked on a daily calendar, in addition to a seasonal calendar.⁴⁷ Work was done largely on flipcharts (partly a result of the women's comments from the morning) with a literate community member from the group doing the recording.

Initially, the use of symbols was stressed so that illiterate members of the group could understand the charts and diagrams. With time, especially among the men (more of whom were literate), there was growing opposition to the use of symbols, as it seemed to the participants to take more time than necessary. IEF facilitators, unwilling to impose too much structure on the sessions, allowed the groups to record the information in the manner they wished. At day's end, while they did not exactly resemble what the facilitators had in mind, the PRA exercises had produced an impressive number of flipcharts and diagrams.

On the second day of PRA sessions, the men's group, when it reconvened, was smaller and dominated largely by literates, in this case, younger men with at least a junior secondary school education. Diagrams were constructed with letters and words on flipcharts. They included discussions of seasonal fluctuations of various diseases and a cause-effect chart for illnesses (Appendix 8 and 9).

Another issue which emerged after the first day was the problem of stronger personalities among participants in PRA sessions dominating the exercises. This was most apparent in the women's group during a problem ranking exercise. The purpose of the tool was to identify main problem areas and clarify priorities among the women for addressing those issues.⁴⁸ The participants of the group were mixed in terms of age, and, presumably, socio-economic status. During the ranking, a group of five or six older women (among them the chief's first wife) sat closest to the facilitators (myself and the IEF staff member who was familiar with the village) and answered the majority of questions first. The younger women of the group, many of whom were carrying small children, generally remained silent despite their large majority of numbers. If one of these women was called upon to speak, or happened to raise her voice voluntarily, the older women tended to speak directly after her, either criticizing or supporting the view

of households collected on the map in the morning to sort them into different categories, the criteria of which are chosen by the informants themselves.

⁴⁷ The wealth ranking informants and the group of elders were chosen by IEF facilitators in collaboration with the chief and his first wife. All other sessions were conducted with all other village members who were present. If there were too many participants to have an easy discussion, some villagers were separated into separate groups and asked to do other tools.

⁴⁸ Pairwise ranking consists of a comparison of each issue identified with all of the others, by presenting them in pairs and then arranging them on matrix to show the comparison. Each pair of issues is compared by the participants, and the most important is chosen by consensus, after discussing why it is important.

expressed.

The discussion which drew most controversy revolved around the placing of priority between the needs of female-headed households (*amayi okhala*) and the lack of income-generating opportunities for women and the village (*bizenezi*). This was one issue when younger women did speak, arguing that opportunities for additional income were needed for the village in order to be able to buy commodities such as soap and supplemental food. The small group of older women quickly overpowered them, claiming that attention should be turned toward female-headed households first, as they were more needy and didn't have husbands to support them. When the younger women persisted, one older woman silenced the group by claiming that she could not change the fact that her husband had died. Moreover, she claimed that she was not just speaking for herself, but for other women who were not present. A passage from my research journal records the tone of the group:

we [the facilitators] sat in silence, very uncomfortable, as the younger women almost seemed to bite their tongues. It was very clear the majority supported *bizenezi*, but couldn't go against their elders...for fear of disrespecting them (Personal Journal, August 1, 1996).

The deadlock was finally broken by one person, the village headman's first wife, who declared that income-generating activities would be considered a priority on the condition that any aid provided or opportunities generated would first go to female-headed households. The tension involved in the incident was reminiscent of a Malawian proverb, relayed to me by another team member: "even if you are taller than your father, do not think that he is your peer."

The women's group reconvened in the afternoon, with fewer younger participants, in order to discuss the ranking. When the matrix chart was presented back (see Appendix 10), there was notable confusion among the women on how to interpret it. Despite our attempts at explaining how the matrix works, it was clear that we, as facilitators, were the ones most interested in generating a chart.

The top three problems for the village had been identified by the matrix chart as 1) poor access to the health clinic, 2) poor water sources, and 3) poor condition of the main road. Upon hearing the results, a cry went up among the older women, most notably the chief's wife, who declared that water should take the position as the first village priority. When the facilitators asked if the group was in agreement, most participants seemed to nod in approval. The issue was probed, and the women stated that during times of drought, they were forced to walk five to seven kilometres for water, as their shallow wells and other streams dried up. When asked about possible solutions for the problem, the chief's wife responded simply by saying that IEF had to provide a borehole well for them. No other comments were made following the statement, despite our attempts to draw more discussion out of the group.

Following the ranking exercise, women were asked about the PHC system in the village and its function in a semi-structured interviewing format. There was a general

recognition that the VHC had been formed in order to assist the HSA in his effort to improve health in the village, by visiting households to inspect pit latrines and kitchens. Women, however, noted that the VHC ceased its activities in the village at about the time of multi-party elections (1994). Similarly, the HSA rarely visited the village since that time, as under-five clinics⁴⁹ were held in a nearby village. When questioned about the M4E program, one woman could recall being briefly asked by the HSA about the health of her children, but none of the participants in the focus group recognized the program.

A lack of recognition of the M4E program was also discovered among other group discussions on the second day of the PRA. After the men's group had completed a disease chart and a disease calendar, discussions on the health system indicated an even greater dearth of knowledge on the activities of the VHC and the HSA, and absolutely no recognition of M4E. The focus group session with the members of the VHC revealed a complex web of poor relationships in the health system. The VHC members did not know anything about M4E, and they rarely received visits from the HSA. They claimed that there had been a general decline in activity of the HSA since 1992, when the primary responsibility for the VHC system, previously under the auspices of IEF, was transferred to the Malawian government. Moreover, it was clear that there were divisions within the committee, primarily between the VHV (who is considered part of the VHC) and other members that she was not active in her duties of distributing Vitamin A and ORS tablets. The VHV, who was reluctant to distribute the materials because she did not understand the required register system, was viewed by the others as exercising her authority in an inappropriate manner. Perhaps not surprisingly, the criticism of the VHV was only heard in her absence.

The third day of the PRA was devoted to a final presentation, in which the research team hoped to stimulate a discussion about many of the issues raised, as well as elicit suggestions for action which could be taken by the community to improve either the PHC system, or begin to tackle other problems identified, such as the lack of water. The team had contributed food for a communal lunch afterward as a gesture of gratitude for the participants of the PRA sessions. Although the attendance was strong for the meeting, there were fewer women present than men, because the women were engaged in preparing the food. Several participants of the meeting were also occupied with periodically supervising those who were cooking.

The session began in mid-morning with approximately twenty to twenty-five men and a smaller number of women which grew over the course of the meeting. Presentations of the maps and charts were made by participants of the groups who had contributed to their creation, after which there was an opportunity for further questions. The proceedings were slightly rushed, however, as there were several factors which necessitated an early closing. Primarily, in order for the facilitators to return to their

⁴⁹ Clinics held for mothers with children under the age of five to monitor their growth.

homes by nightfall, it was necessary to leave in the early afternoon.⁵⁰ Another overnight stay was out of the question, as it had not been budgeted or arranged with IEF to have staff absent from their positions for more than three days. Secondly, the people present seemed weary of the meetings, and were preoccupied with the meal to come. Finally, the research team did not want to distract community members from their normal work patterns any more than was necessary.

The shortage of time meant that the information given in the presentations was not able to be discussed and probed to any great extent.⁵¹ Moreover, it was found that triangulation between results was difficult because men's and women's groups had been engaged in many different tools, and there was little basis for comparison. The breadth of the topics was an additional barrier to the focussing of discussion.

The majority of time in the final meeting was devoted to issues surrounding the health system, most notably the relationships between the HSA, the VHC and the community, as well as the M4E program. When villagers questioned the VHC members on why they had let their duties lapse, the committee members defended themselves by claiming that once the HSA stopped visiting them, they had no supervision and guidance. Some community members raised the issue of multi-party politics, and suggested perhaps they had led to the VHC's inactivity. The village headman, although he had not attended any PRA sessions after the initial meeting, (he had been too occupied with his multiple businesses) then took the opportunity to state publicly his position, which seemed to reach much beyond health:

Things here became worse when multi-party politics came in because there was no proper introduction on who should do what. People think that they can now do whatever they want. The change in political system doesn't stop us from doing daily activities like opening our gardens for food, so why should it stop the VHC from doing its work?

The Chairman of the VHC, also a village elder, responded to the chief's forceful comment by denying that it was a direct result of political changes, then continued to outline the future of the committee:

What we lacked before was support, but this exercise encourages us to do what we are supposed to do. We will try to keep on visiting houses whether [the HSA] is coming or not. The committee is not dead.

⁵⁰ As virtually anyone who has visited Malawi will attest, driving at night is not recommended because of the dangerous condition of the roads. In fact, a number of NGOs have policies against allowing their vehicles to be operated after dark.

⁵¹ It should also be noted that the research team, by this time, was exhausted, mentally and physically, and in a similar manner to the participants, were somewhat distracted by the thought of going home.

Seeming anxious to end the meeting, the chief delivered a final statement concerning the presence of the research team:

We have all benefited from the discussions here. We have told you all of our problems, and shown you how we can cooperate. It appears now that we are one, you have united us. What has happened here should be done in villages all over Malawi. It is a strange thing to go to the villages and ask, instead of telling us what to do.

Modifications to PRAs

Several issues emerged among the research team after the completion of the first PRA which required reflection. Firstly, although the research project was based around examining the how the 'empowerment' aspects of M4E were functioning, it was clear, at least in Village A, that there was not very much to investigate, as the HSA and VHC had not been very active in implementing the program. After a team discussion, however, it was decided that the research was still relevant, as it could investigate the potential for improvement of the PHC system, including M4E.

Secondly, despite the good attendance and the impressive amount of information gathered during the first PRA, the team had some concerns about the research process. In my own case, I felt dissatisfied with the empowering ability of the PRA itself, in terms of the impact I had expected it to have on the community. Due to the lack of time, and perhaps the inadequacy of the facilitators, I felt that the PRA overall had been more extractive than learning-oriented. Faced with the realities of time constraints, exhaustion, and inexperienced facilitators (among other things), the 'empowerment' aspects of the PRA faded quickly in favour of the end product necessary for the research project. In this

regard, the final presentations seemed most lacking, in terms of the failure to probe potentially controversial issues in any depth, in order to facilitate reflection and learning. I was very surprised to hear the team leader comment that the final day session in Village A was the best she had seen in Malawi yet!

Another issue which came from the first PRA experience was a questioning of the purpose of the PRAs and the individual tools. I did not feel that the research team was entirely clear in the description of the purpose of the PRAs, and what IEF was committed to doing, and what they were not. We had been purposely vague in some ways, so as not to pre-determine the course of the research. Yet then we found ourselves in a situation of raised expectations, where community members were looking to IEF to solve all village problems. I found myself in strong disagreement with one team member who remarked that "expectations are not raised when nothing is promised". Even if nothing was explicitly promised, our presence in the village and the questions we were asking seemed to raise hopes among the community members that IEF could not address.

The issue of understanding the social context of the PRAs was also raised among the researchers. The experience with the women's matrix ranking was used as a case in point of dominant voices negatively influencing a participatory process. It was resolved that a better effort would be made to stay aware of who was participating in the sessions, and we would attempt to keep the groups more homogenous in terms of age, and if possible, wealth and social status. Additionally, stronger personalities in general would be redirected to other sessions or tools of a less sensitive nature.

The homogeneity of group interviews was not the only concern to be brought up

in relation to social context. After the first PRA, I became aware of the fact that although a good deal of time was spent on the discussion of the Western science-based PHC system, there had been no mention of the traditional system of health. The Malawian members of the research team indeed confirmed that the system of traditional healers present in the villages was an important part of the overall view of health among the people of the district. Yet there was a general unwillingness among other team members, including the team leader, to take on the issue within the PRAs. Reasons presented for this reluctance included the difficulty of accessing such information (both in terms of time required, and the sensitivity of the subject) and lack of relevance of the subject to the discussion of M4E.

During the gap between the first and second PRAs, it was also necessary to reconcile some internal conflicts within the research team. Over the course of the research in Village A, disagreements had emerged within the team over the general logistical arrangements for staying in the village, including food and the provision of daily allowances for the Malawian staff. After the PRA was over, these disputes reached the point of confrontation, when a letter composed by the three Malawian team members stating a number of grievances was received by the country director for IEF. The comments ranged from a confusion over my own presence to the inadequacy of daily allowances to the need for more clearly defined roles in the team.⁵² After a team-building

⁵² The confusion was generated over my relatively late entry into the research project. My contract with IEF began only a few days before the first field visits began, and the IEF staff complained that there was not time for my presence to be introduced in full.

exercise led by the country director, as well as the agreement to increase daily allowances for IEF staff, a better understanding was reached between members of the research team in terms of roles and responsibilities. Preparations for the second PRA continued.

Village B

The second PRA took place in a remote village, located within metres of the Mozambican border. The research team arrived the night before the day in which the PRA was to start and pitched tents on the edge of the village, behind the compound of the chief. The leader of Village B was a woman who had inherited her position relatively recently as a result of the death of her brother. In comparison to the chief of Village A, the village headwoman (who was quite elderly) was very quiet in nature and reserved in public settings. During discussions with the chief that night, the team was told that the village was expecting our meetings the following day, at an open-walled under-five clinic shelter, centrally located in the village.

Upon the team's arrival at the meeting spot the next morning (9:00am) there were only fifteen young mothers and their small children present. Questions to the women revealed that they had come for the distribution of *likhuni phala*, a mix of maize and soya given to small children to improve their nutrition. In addition, one woman commented that her understanding (also shared by others) of the presence of the research team was that "the whites have come to give vaccinations". By 10:30 am, the number of women present had grown to fifty-five to sixty, plus close to ten men, most of whom were members of the VHC. One of the men also told the researchers that two other meetings were planned to occur on the same day, including a local UDF party meeting with the Member of Parliament for the area, as well as a visit by the representative of the Evangelical Lutheran Development Program (ELDP), an NGO active in the area.

Although the research team was not sure what had gone wrong with the publicity of the PRA, it was decided (after consultations with the chief and the chairman of the VHC) to carry on with the PRA by giving a brief introduction before the noon meal, and then asking the women who were present to return in the afternoon, as well as assist us in publicizing the meeting among the men of the village. After a prayer by one of the male members of the VHC, and introductions of the chief, her husband, and the research team, the meeting began. An IEF facilitator explained that the researchers had come to the village to ask the people questions about the health system, and try to work together with community members to improve it. The PRA process was described as a set of meetings intended for IEF to learn about the village and their problems, as well as the people to learn about IEF and their own health situation. When asked about their expectations for our visit, the women remained largely silent, until the facilitator encouraged them to speak with a Malawian proverb: "Those who are silent have something to say". The

women then began to comment that they wished to receive a borehole, more immunizations for their children, a maternity clinic, a maize-mill, and better forms of communication and transport to larger towns in the district.

In the afternoon, about forty women and thirty men returned to the meeting place. The team was informed that the local party meeting and the visit by the NGO representative had both been cancelled. A mapping exercise was facilitated in a similar manner to Village A, only in a much shorter time. For the women's group, there was not enough time to complete the map, and the small group of women asked to transfer it from the ground onto flipcharts did not complete their task. In the men's group, the map was more detailed, and a group of mostly young and literate men were assigned (by the others) to transfer the map from the ground to the paper, and continue to mark in details. Later in the afternoon, the women's group worked on seasonal and daily calendars, the men constructed a disease calendar, and a number of elders were gathered to discuss a historical timeline.

In light of the researchers' reflections on the content of the PRAs, the sessions held on the following day attempted to generate more of a process of learning and analysis through the diagrams and tools used. Problem ranking, done in groups of both men and women, was done using a bean-voting method, rather than pairwise ranking. This proved to be less confusing for both the participants and the facilitators.⁵³ More time was devoted after the ranking to discussing the cause, effect, and possible solution to each problem. In addition, facilitators tried to a greater extent to divide groups by age and status, although this was difficult with the limited number of researchers.

The results of the ranking exercises, however, proved interesting in light of their comparison. Problem-ranking by the women's group showed an overall priority assigned to the problems of drought and hunger, followed by lack of water sources, a variety of diseases, and the need for a closer health clinic (see Appendix 11).⁵⁴ The men's group, in contrast, chose the improvement of health clinic services as the highest priority (35 beans) followed by water (26) and the need for more small businesses (22) (see Appendix 12). The results from the men's group seemed surprising to the facilitators, in light of the fact that the health centre was not too distant (approximately 5 km) and it was a much lower priority for the women. Men argued within the ranking session that if a person is sick, it is a long distance to walk. Moreover, they spoke on behalf of other members of

⁵³ This tool simply involved drawing out each problem raised in discussions on a flipchart with symbols. Three or four participants are handed an equal number of beans (or another local material), then asked to divide them among the problems depicted, placing more beans on those problems which are more important. A discussion of the results can then be undertaken with the participants.

⁵⁴ It is interesting to note how these results differed with the comments made by the gathering of young mothers on the morning of the first day, who raised issues closer to their needs, such as a maternity clinic and immunizations. The group of women doing problem ranking on the second day included more middle-aged and older women.

the villages such as the “old people who can’t walk” and pregnant mothers who “give birth along the way” to the clinic.

The reason for the results may lie in the content of the discussion before the ranking even began. Reviewing the session, the facilitators (myself and one other Malawian IEF staff) recalled that before beginning to rank, a number of men posed questions to us concerning our purpose in doing the research exercises. When it was explained that IEF was interested primarily in the functioning of the health system in the village, but that the current discussion would cover all village priorities, one man challenged us, asking “why don’t you start with discussing the problems that you can do something about?”⁵⁵ Thus it became very clear among the men present that while we (as facilitators) would elicit a variety of issues to be discussed and ranked, it was really only the health system that would be impacted by the results of the research. It is possible that those who later performed the actual ranking took this into account in setting their priorities.

After the ranking was complete, the same group of men helped to complete a linking diagram of the health system in the village. There was a low level of awareness of the HSA (only one man could remember his name) and none of the participants could name any members of the VHC, although there was a vague knowledge of its existence and function. As the researchers had noticed earlier that Village B contained a traditional doctor, or *sing'anga*, the men were questioned about his role in the health system.⁵⁶ The first response of the men was to laugh loudly at hearing health professionals ask such a question. When asked again, a few men explained that the *sing'anga* was visited to receive herbal medicines (*mankhwala*⁵⁷), and to be cured of diseases brought on by witchcraft, usually those that cannot be cured by the medicine from the health centre. Beyond this point, the men did not seem willing to provide more information, nor did my Malawian co-facilitator wish to ask for more.

Semi-structured interviews on the second day with members of the VHC in Village B found that the committee was virtually inactive. Despite the fact that they had been trained only a few months earlier (March 1996), the VHC did not have regular meetings, nor did they visit households. Their only activity in the previous months had been to assist the HSA in conducting under-five clinics. They did recognize the M4E program and its basic ideas, but a unique relationship with two HSAs in the area caused

⁵⁵ The man was later identified as the local MCP party chairman, although at the time the facilitators did not know who he was.

⁵⁶ According to Morris (1986:370), *sing'anga* come in a variety of types and are found in nearly every village of Malawi. Some signal their presence by a small sign with a cross painted on it, placed outside of their house, which indicates that they have a practice. Others are only known within the community.

⁵⁷ *Mankhwala* tends to be used as a blanket term for medicine of all types, whether it is traditional or Western in origin.

some confusion over the program. Village B was within the coverage area of two different HSAs (both of whom lived outside the village), who had agreed to cover different aspects of their work in the community. One HSA conducted the under-five clinics, while the other was responsible for M4E activities. The latter HSA, however, had been absent from the village for quite a long time, due to the death of his wife. Thus while the VHC had been briefed on the M4E program, the HSA had not had time to fully explain it to them.

On the final day of the PRA, the members of the VHC and the one of the two HSAs for the village who was present were re-introduced to the approximately fifty people from the community who had gathered for the meeting. An explanation of the M4E program was given by the HSA, and commitments were made on the part of all parties present to continue with their effort to improve the health system of the village.

During the presentation of the results of a VHC focus group on the second day of the PRA, however, the meeting took an interesting turn. One of the VHC members had reported that the HSA (the one present during the final day) had been known to become angry with women who arrived late for the under-five clinics over which he presided, to the point of destroying their government supplied record sheets for the weight of their children (known as 'under-five cards'). When the flipchart with this information recorded on it was read aloud by the VHC chairman, the IEF facilitator was able to question publicly the HSA and the community members on the matter. While the HSA denied the claim vigorously, a number of women spoke up angrily, describing various incidents in which the HSA had lost his temper and grabbed the under-five cards from the women's hands. In one such case, the card had ripped, leading to the report given by a member of the VHC. Faced with the information in a public setting, the HSA conceded that the incident had indeed occurred, and offered an apology.

The rest of the final presentation meeting, however, was characterized by much less open discussion. Despite the efforts of the IEF facilitator to stimulate discussion on the flipcharts presented, no comments were offered by the community. In addition, there was a sense on the part of both the villagers and the research team that time was running short and the meeting would need to end soon. The similarity between the final day in Village B and the meeting in Village A was noted in my research journal:

Without exception our final days in the villages have been rushed. The effect this has had is that only in a very few cases have people been given adequate time to question the diagrams and information being presented. Logistically speaking, and keeping in mind attention spans on the final day [on the part of the villagers and the facilitators], I don't really see how this can be made a lot better (Personal Journal, August 31, 1996).

No clear understanding was ever achieved by the research team on the issue of the poor publicity in Village B. Malawian IEF staff members noted that the poor leadership demonstrated by the village headwoman, who was either insecure in her position as chief, or simply did not have a dynamic personality, could be one cause. Later, one of the IEF

staff mentioned that he thought that the affairs of the village were steered largely by the chief's male relatives, one of whom was the chairman of the VHC. It was obvious that the research team did not have the time (or the desire on the part of some) to investigate the matter in greater depth.

Village C

In contrast with Village B, the third village in which PRAs were held was located along a main road, much closer to the main district centre than either two of the previous villages. It was immediately apparent that, overall, women and men were dressed slightly better than in the other two villages, and more people (mostly men) were conversant in English. In addition, it appeared as though a large number of people were intoxicated with palm wine. The village headman, a man of about sixty years, was no exception, greeting us in a clearly inebriated state. The Malawian research team members explained that the height of the palm wine season coincides with the time in which a majority of farmers sell their excess grain to the government marketing agency (ADMARC), and therefore have more disposable income than at other times of the year.

The research team placed tents under a grove of trees between an occupied compound on one side, and an abandoned house on the other. Arrangements were made through the chief to share the pit latrine of the occupied household. The doorway of the abandoned house was used by the two women and one man who had been employed by the research team as cooks to make their fires. Almost as soon as the camp had been set up, a steady stream of visitors began to arrive, petitioning the research team for work. Almost all were men who could speak a small amount of English, and most of them were intoxicated as well.

The first PRA meeting began at 10:00am the next morning with around twenty men and twelve women present.⁵⁸ The chief and a number of others explained that there were fewer women present because they were collecting water. In the introduction, the IEF facilitator was very clear in explaining exactly what the research team intended to do, and what results there might be. The community was informed in very explicit terms that they should not expect a new school to be built or a borehole to be dug by IEF, but that the research project was intended to improve the relationships in the health system. By working together, changes could be made that would improve the health of the villagers.

After the meeting, maps were started in two groups. The women's map, with fewer participants, was much slower in developing than the men's. There was very little discussion among the women present, and there seemed to be an unwillingness to bring it to completion. When the participants were asked to begin transferring the map onto paper, they refused, as no one had the confidence to do the recording. Eventually, one of

⁵⁸ By the end of the meeting there were approximately thirty men and twenty women.

the IEF facilitators asked a literate young man to transfer the map as it was, and the exercise was abandoned.

During the afternoon sessions, attendance among women dwindled again. The chief and a number of his elders explained that they were again carrying water, but that someone had already been dispatched to lock the borehole pump, so that women would be forced to come to the meetings! After the members of the research team consulted one another, it was decided to ask the chief not to lock the pump anymore, because the research was not meant to be so disruptive of necessary work patterns. He obliged, and on the following day, a number of informal interviews were carried out at the site of the borehole, with the women and children who were waiting for their turn at the pump.

On the evening of the first day, the chief was invited to gather a number of elderly village members to join the research team at their camp for a discussion of a historical timeline. Four women and six men (including the chief) were asked about the origins of the village, times of drought, and previous development interventions. It was clear by their history that Village C had been the site of many previous development activities. from the time of white settlers before independence who provided a borehole for his local plantation workers, to the World Bank which implemented a gravity-fed water scheme in the early 1980s, to World Vision International, who ran a nursery school for some time in the early 1990s.

On the morning of the second day, the research team gathered at the meeting place, in the shade of a large tree not far from the geographical centre of the village. As we waited, the chief approached one of the Malawian IEF facilitators, saying that the owners of the abandoned house and the pit latrine (two separate parties) around which we were camped had petitioned him to ask the team “what they are going to do for us?”. The Malawian facilitators concluded that clearly it was a request for money, but the reasons for such an appeal at this point in time were ambiguous. One IEF staff suggested that it could be a form of resistance against our presence, while another thought that perhaps after the first day of meetings, the people of the village were not sure how they might benefit from the research otherwise, so they were trying to get what they could. That the request would come on the third day of the team’s presence in the village was perhaps the strangest aspect of the situation. After a short team meeting, negotiations with the chief and the owners of both the pit latrine and the abandoned house led to the agreement upon a small fee to be paid as rent.

The team also began to wonder if a form of resistance on the part of the villagers was the cause of low attendance at the PRA meetings on the second day, especially among women’s groups. As noted previously, the lack of women participating at the meeting place led to the need for the facilitators to walk to the borehole, to talk to women there. By late morning, a group of about twenty women had arrived at the meeting place, and a ranking exercise (bean voting) was facilitated. Women chose the improvement of health clinic facilities as their overall priority (31 beans), followed by the need for improved roads and schools (22 each), and a desire to implement a Traditional Birth Attendants (TBA) program. Perhaps most surprisingly, given the amount of trouble in gathering women for the meetings, the lack of water was ranked sixth out of nine

problems listed. Although a lack of time limited the amount of discussion on the issues, the facilitators, similar to the men's group in Village B, were curious to note that the health clinic, only three kilometres distant, was ranked with such priority.

Later discussions on the health system, however, indeed indicated a number of problems. Similar to villages A and B, the women of Village C were not aware of the M4E program, although a few had been approached at the borehole by the HSA, who weighed children, asked about the meals the child had eaten, and offered impromptu nutritional advice.⁵⁹ Yet the HSA was not the biggest source of problems in the health system. The health clinic in a nearby village, was reportedly short of medicine and staffed by a nurse who did not perform many of her duties. Moreover, the maternal health activities at the clinic had largely stopped due to troubles resulting from witchcraft. This last point was not elaborated upon, but it was clear that women were now walking a very long distance to see other TBAs or attend maternal health clinics elsewhere.

After the mention of witchcraft, the women were questioned by the facilitators on the presence of traditional healers as part of the health system. Similar to the men's group in Village B, the women initially laughed, but went on to confirm that there was an *asing'anga* in the village, who was consulted for medical problems such as sexually-transmitted diseases, pneumonia, epilepsy, and infertility. In many cases, however, women sought medical assistance from both the traditional healer and the government health clinic. As one woman commented, "we try both; if one fails, we go to the other". Shortly after this comment the women fell silent, although it is not clear whether it was due to being uncomfortable with the discussion, or whether they were simply tired, as were the facilitators.

Linking diagrams and focus group discussions with the VHC on the second day found that the committee considered itself active, although some members were "always late to meetings". The committee was selected in 1994, after a public meeting was organized by the village headman, who "told people to nominate potential health committee members who would be dedicated to health issues for the village". Relations with the HSA seemed good, but the VHC was only vaguely aware of the monitoring activities going on, and the HSA had done no formal introduction of the M4E program. Relations with the VHV, who was the chief's daughter, seemed especially good, and all members commented that she was dedicated in her duties. The VHC also expressed interest in learning about and using the M4E program.

Over the course of the second day, wealth ranking was also done by key informants. The research team had not facilitated the tool since the first PRA, both due to the difficulty in collecting the necessary information on the map and the fact that it was not detailed enough to be useful for the research. Village C seemed to be slightly better off, however, and it was believed that the results of a wealth ranking might prove

⁵⁹ In the M4E program, HSAs are expected to visit households randomly, so that sanitary conditions of living quarters may also be examined. The research team agreed, however, that it was better that the HSA was approaching women and children at the borehole, rather than not at all.

interesting in terms of comparison with Village A. Originally, one literate man was chosen to do the ranking of a list of 139 households shown on the map. He chose three categories of wealth, including:

- 1) A household which has tin roofing, with or without cattle. Also, a household which has a large herd of animals, even without tin roofing
- 2) A household which usually has good crops. People are well dressed and they eat well.
- 3) A household which doesn't usually crop very much. They eat poorly, live in a rough mud house, and dress shabbily.⁶⁰

On the first ranking, the informant surprisingly placed no households in the upper class, and only a few in the middle ranking. The result confused the research team, as it was quite clear from personal observations that there were at least four or five houses with tin roofing within the village boundaries. Two female informants were then chosen to do another ranking together, to compare the results of the first. The same ranking categories were used for the sake of comparison. This time, only one household, that of a wealthy farmer, appeared in the upper class, while nine were situated in the middle ranking. It was clear that there was a reluctance on the part of the villagers to place themselves or others in differentiated categories. During an informal interview on the following day, the government Field Assistant (FA) for the area (a position equivalent to the HSA, only focussed on extension work for the Ministry of Agriculture) suggested that given the criteria, he would have placed at least ten households in the first category. The FA then offered his explanation for the results, commenting that "these problems come from working with illiterate populations"!

⁶⁰ It should be recognized that wealth-ranking in PRA processes has taken on many forms, and is not restricted to economic criteria. For example, Scoones (1995b:85) suggests that qualities such as "prestige, respect, esteem, conduct, behaviour and local political influence may be significant in ranking a particular household and act to trade off against potentially lower asset and income levels". The criteria used for the IEF PRAs, however, was based on the conventional notion of wealth. Whether this was due to the key informants consulted or the style of facilitation by IEF staff is unknown. Exactly what was said in Chichewa by the facilitators in introducing the ranking was not recorded.

PRA Follow-up Meetings

Focus Groups

Although they are treated separately here, the follow-up meetings, held in each village 2-6 weeks after the first three-day research session, were considered part of the PRA process itself.⁶¹ During the morning hours two IEF facilitators led focus group discussions with the VHC and the HSA, to examine the M4E program and other issues concerning the health institutions of the village. In the afternoon, a general community meeting was called, to present the results of that discussion. Throughout the day, two other IEF facilitators engaged in a series of informal household interviews, as a form of *ad hoc* evaluation of the impact of the PRAs.

The focus group discussions revealed that in all of the villages previously visited, the HSA(s) had made an effort to visit the VHC and the community in order to give explanations of the M4E program. In Village A, the HSA had arranged to see the VHC several times, but the meetings were cancelled for various reasons, including poor publicity and the absence of the chief. Thus while the committee had still not received a full explanation of M4E, they were pleased with the fact that the HSA was trying to see them more often. After the focus group discussions, in which the major aspects of M4E were presented, VHC members said that the program "seemed useful to give people 'power' to discuss health-related problems and possible solutions that would improve the lives of adults and children" (Jones et al., 1996:15).

In Village B, it was found that both HSAs of the area had visited the community together to explain the monitoring and feedback systems of M4E. VHC members were trained in how to fill in the monitoring forms by reading under-five cards and weighing children, which were seen by the committee as useful in analyzing the growth patterns of children. The members commented that M4E was good "because it helped them to know the community better, to see what needed to be improved and to keep track of diseases", in addition to helping "the chief know more about the village" (Jones et al., 1996:15).

The HSA in Village C had also held a small training session for the VHC in the two weeks since the PRA. After becoming acquainted with the system, they understood M4E as a "means of seeing problems of the village" which could help "protect against diseases, assess malnutrition and help the committee know the health status of children" (Jones et al., 1996:15). The VHC had already decided that the data collected by M4E would be used as the basis of their monthly meetings.

The afternoon follow-up meetings with the community were characterized by low attendance and relatively rushed time frames. The meetings on average only drew between thirty and thirty-five people, including the VHC members (usually adding up to ten) compared to the much stronger attendance figures of the first set of PRA meetings.

⁶¹ Follow-up meetings in Village A occurred six weeks after the first research was done. Meetings for villages B and C took place three and two weeks afterward, respectively.

The reasons for the lack of interest or non-participation in the gatherings were not entirely clear to the research team. For example, in Village B, poor attendance was blamed on a meeting of the Seventh-Day Adventist (SDA) church being held on the same day. Yet the IEF facilitator familiar with the village mentioned afterward that he didn't believe that many people of that village were actually affiliated with the SDA church.

The follow-up presentations included short discussions on the VHC and the HSA, and how they were planning to implement the M4E program, followed by an opportunity for the community members to ask questions of the VHC and HSA. Before the meeting was concluded, all of the flipcharts and other forms of recorded information from the first set of PRA meetings were re-presented to the chief, so that they could be kept with the village. The IEF facilitators also promised to return at a later date with a more concise and bound PRA report which would also stay with the chief and serve as a reference for the community members.⁶²

*Informal Household Interviews*⁶³

Informal household interviews were carried out by two members of the research team on the same day as the follow-up meetings, in an attempt to assess some of the perceptions of the community members concerning the PRA process. Households were selected on a very informal basis, during observational walks throughout the villages. An attempt was made to interview a mix of men and women from households which were close to the geographical centre of the village, and those which were farther out. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured style, with small groups of about four to six people. In some cases, gender was mixed.

Interviews in Village A (approximately eighteen people in five separate households) indicated a clear relationship between awareness of the PRA meetings and the geographical location of the household. Two of the five households interviewed, those which were the farthest from the chief's house, had not been informed of the meetings at all. Two more households, closer to the centre of the village, had heard of the meetings, and remembered that the researchers had asked about problems in the community, such as water and roads. None of the interviewees from these two households had attended personally, but had heard of the meetings from those who had gone. The members of the household closest to the chief's compounds had the highest level of awareness of the PRA. Two men remembered drawing the map and discussing diseases, but since they had missed the introduction, they did not know which organization the team was from, nor could they recall the exact purpose of the meetings.

⁶² The PRA reports were delivered in January, 1997.

⁶³ Informal Household Interviews are not usually part of the PRA basket of tools. In this case, they were initiated largely by myself, with the support of some of the team members, to monitor in some fashion the impact of the PRAs on the people in the villages.

In addition, one man remembered the discussion of the VHC and the HSA.⁶⁴

Informal interviews in Village B were conducted in three separate households, with approximately seventeen people. Most people had heard of the meetings, and approximately half had attended at least one day. None of the people spoken to had been present for all three days of the PRA. When asked about the content of the meetings, a number of people mentioned the mapping, as well as the problems of the village that had been discussed, such as the lack of water, the need for a better health centre, a maize mill, and the condition of the road. Two women recalled that there had been a discussion of the HSA and the VHC. One woman commented that the meetings had been important because “problems were raised that [we] expect to be solved.” Another woman in the same group suggested that the “meeting could improve the relationship between members of the community for doing self-help and other things.”

Response from household members in Village C were similar to the other two villages, although there was an overall greater awareness of the PRA meetings and what they had discussed. Out of the fifteen people from four households who were interviewed, nearly all had attended at least one day, and several were present for all three. Two compounds identified the researchers as coming from IEF, and three remembered that the team had been interested in the health system. One older man mentioned that originally he thought that the facilitators were spies sent either by the government or the MCP. As a former local MCP chairman, he claimed that he was aware of the financial resources the party possessed which allowed them to hire white people (*azungu*) to do their publicity.

The same man identified himself as one of the elders who had been present during the discussion of the historical timeline of the village. Without any intervention of the facilitators, the old man continued speaking, saying that he had not been satisfied with the results given during the meeting. The description of the founders of the village, he claimed, had been inaccurate, as it had left out several important steps in the arrival of many of the inhabitants from Mozambique and from other parts of Malawi. More importantly, his own father’s role as chief years ago was left out. The old man provided the facilitators with an alternate history which detailed how his father, a maternal nephew of the village founder, was passed the chieftaincy upon the old village headman’s death. Shortly after the succession, his father died, and the position of chief was secured by the father of the current village headman, who passed it to his son upon his death. When the interviewers asked the old man why he had not spoken out during the meeting, he commented that he “had not been able to say anything, only ‘young’ people spoke”. After a few more questions, he added that “[I] was afraid that the village headman would think [I] wanted to take over his responsibilities”.

⁶⁴ Household interview findings in Village A were perhaps skewed by the fact that most of the people interviewed lived quite far away. This imbalance was due to the fact that the farthest households were interviewed first, and when the facilitators had returned from walking the long distance, there was not much time left to interview households that were closer to the chief’s compound. Village A encompassed the largest geographical area of all three villages in which research was conducted.

After leaving the old man, the interviewers (myself and one other Malawian team member) discussed what had been said. Although the man was afraid of speaking his mind in front of the chief, he was clearly not shy about sharing his views with us. It was obvious that the old man and his lineage represented a very strong challenge to the leadership of the community. My Malawian colleague informed me that it was not uncommon for chiefs to fear their rivals in the community, who may induce a confrontation, either through witchcraft or other means. "In Malawi," he continued, "being chief until you die doesn't mean that you are chief until you are old." We were uncertain what role, if any, we had played in this village struggle.

Reflections on the Research Process

Reported Results

In light of the primary objective of the research project, to "investigate the 'empowerment' process in M4E and to explore its potential to strengthen the capacity of local health institutions...and find ways of improving the community-level use of information" (Jones, et al., 1996:6), the three PRAs conducted in this study indeed contributed a number of interesting findings. It was clear, for example, that virtually no 'empowerment' activities associated with the M4E program had been carried out in the villages. Although HSAs were to have begun their implementation of the program in January of 1996, calling M4E 'feedback' meetings every couple of months to explain the results of data collection, there had been essentially no introduction procedure undertaken in the villages. HSAs were only rarely monitoring the health of children in the villages, and even then they were not returning to the village to present, discuss, and analyze the results (Jones, 1996:15).

The PRAs also discerned that there were serious problems in the relationships among actors in the PHC system. Most VHC members claimed the committee was

active, yet other villagers reported only rarely seeing them perform their duties, such as household visits to advise on sanitation and nutrition information. VHVs seemed at times to be at odds with members of the VHC, over a variety of issues. HSAs were accused by the VHCs and the community members of not being active enough in carrying out their duties, both in relation to M4E and otherwise.

It became clear that health was only one concern among many for people in the villages. Water shortages, drought, poor road conditions and other problems figured prominently among community members. Engaged in a myriad of daily and seasonal activities (as shown by daily and seasonal calendars), it was found that many people were not clear on the functioning of the health system, nor did they feel that they were able to improve it on their own. The tools and techniques of PRA, especially ranking and calendar exercises, provided valuable data in this sense.

These findings allowed the research team to make a number of recommendations concerning the M4E program, including the provision of additional training for HSAs and VHCs in the M4E methodologies, increased supervision of VHCs by HSAs, and an explanation of the functions of VHC to the communities. In addition, it was concluded that in order to promote 'empowerment' in health, "villages need to recognise health, nutrition and sanitation as a priority in improving their lives and also as something which they have control over, through more contact and communication of health issues" (Jones, et al., 1996:23). The account of the research and its findings was compiled in a bound report and presented to IEF Malawi and UNICEF, who received it with great enthusiasm (K. Jones, pers. comm.).

The research process, however, also generated a number of questions among the IEF team. As noted in the narratives of the PRA process, there were clearly a number of constraints which affected the course of the research. These included both logistical or 'physical' limitations such as time and experienced staff, in addition to more intangible yet equally important impediments such as miscommunication between the IEF team and villagers (including raised expectations), the dominance of some voices over others within the context of PRA sessions, and an inability to grasp social complexities of a more elusive nature, such as traditional health practices and beliefs.

Conclusion

The material presented here, based on field observations, has outlined the context and process of a PRA project in Malawi, in an attempt to distill a number of critical issues which arose from practice. PRAs have been shown to be social events in which a number of actors, including the practitioners/facilitators themselves hold varied perspectives and function in a complex environment of social processes. The following chapter is devoted to analyzing the PRA research in Chapananga in these terms, focussing not simply on the successes and failures of the approach but, the myriad of factors which impact on the process of PRA, and the struggles which take place over its use.

CHAPTER FIVE - REFLECTIONS ON PROCESS

Introduction

The description and narrative in Chapter Four of the PRA process undertaken by the IEF research reveals a number of interesting issues to consider. Affected by a host of different constraints, the PRAs in Chapananga were by no means ideal in their formulation or execution. While the process generated a relatively high level of motivation among community participants and the team was able to collect valuable information concerning the functioning of the M4E program in the region, the use of PRA did not result in the formulation of a concrete 'action plan' as the researchers had originally hoped. Moreover, it became clear, at least from a personal perspective, that the PRAs (as carried out) were unable to grasp the complexity of social struggles occurring at the local level, an observation reinforced by the persistent problem of dominating voices within PRA sessions, and misunderstandings between the research team and members of the villages.

This chapter reviews the PRA process in Chapananga region in terms of achievements and constraints, but also keeping in mind the impact of multiple-level struggles which were occurring during the research. The purpose here is not to evaluate the efficacy of the PRAs in questions, deciding whether they represent 'good' or 'bad' PRA practice, but rather to examine PRA as a site of struggle, in which contests, on both a material and symbolic level, are waged by a variety of different actors, including the researchers themselves (Chapter Three). By exposing some of these struggles, and the impacts which they can have on the process of PRA, a number of suggestions are offered

to improve the conceptualization (and subsequent practice) of PRA on the part of practitioners and academics.

Approaching Communities - PRA and the Role of Outsiders

A hallmark of PRA practice is the emphasis placed on the 'reversals' necessary to facilitate the interaction between 'outsiders', usually development professionals, and 'insiders', the local people of the communities in which research is being carried out. By 'handing over the stick', either metaphorically or literally, an effort is made on the part of outside facilitators to place local people in control of their own analysis and research (Chambers, 1994c:1265). In doing so, outsiders 'empower' insiders by 'disempowering' themselves. Such reversals seek to create an atmosphere of sharing, in which the research process can be characterized as moving from "reserve to rapport, frustration to fun" (Chambers, 1997b:152). "[T]he experience with...PRA," writes Chambers (1997b:153), "is that when outsiders behave well and methods are participatory, good rapport can come quickly". With the establishment of good rapport and more equal power relations, the assumption is made that the data gathered will be more accurate (useful for outsiders), and in the end, more empowering for insiders.

The PRA experience of the IEF team in Chapananga raises a number of questions surrounding the role of the outsider in approaching local communities. For example, what does the presence of an outside group in the community mean for local people? Is it possible for outsiders to 'disempower' themselves, either by 'handing over the stick' or otherwise? Can informal contexts of research and learning truly be created in a short

time? By reflecting on the IEF PRA experience, these questions will be considered.

Initial Approaches and Communication of Purpose

In all three villages in which the IEF team conducted research, problems with channels of communication between the PRA facilitators and local people were experienced. Presenting the intentions of the facilitators and the purpose of the research proved to be a more complex process than anticipated. Reflecting on the experience reveals several points of concern surrounding the approach taken.

Pre-PRA publicity was always done through the village headman or headwoman, with the assumption that they would be able to pass the message of the research meetings on to their communities. Afterward, it was realized that an assumption was made that the leaders were powerful enough to carry out the task, which was not always the case. The chief of Village B, for example, clearly lacked the ability to spread the proper information concerning the PRA to come. For whatever reason, the news that reached most families in the village was that immunizations would be delivered. Alternatively, it could be the case that the vaccination message was deliberately spread in order to ensure a gathering of at least some people. What is perhaps most significant, however, is that the research team was simply unable to find out exactly what had gone wrong!⁶⁵

Similarly, it is difficult to discern exactly what impact the perceived alignment

⁶⁵ One team member commented in an interview after the PRA was finished that the chief of Village B “deferred publicly to the chairman of the VHC”, who was her brother. Another colleague suggested that the headwoman was simply not respected “because she was a woman”.

between the IEF facilitators and the traditional authorities may have had on the research process. In all villages, the chiefs proved to be the main contacts of the team, going beyond publicity to the arrangement of meeting times and locations. In those cases where the team stayed right in the village (Villages B and C), the village headmen were also asked to designate a number of people who would serve as cooks and guards for the facilitators' encampment. These people were paid a pre-arranged amount for their labour, thus putting them in a possibly enviable position in the village. Undoubtedly, their appointment had political implications in the local context, which were never grasped by the team.⁶⁶

In Village A, the fact that all PRA discussions occurred within the chief's compound may also have had an impact on the process. One Malawian team member stated afterward that the location of the meetings was the "greatest misfortune" of the PRA, because of the village headman's wealth and power. Whatever the chief or his family said was perhaps "not quite agreed by everybody, but nobody opposed it". Most of the PRA sessions were indeed monitored by the chief or another member of his family.

Communicating the intentions of the research was found to be a complex matter also. The first barrier was explaining the approach to the research that the team wished to use. Certainly the message that a PRA-style process sends to local people may be confusing, and different from their past experiences, as evidence by the comments made

⁶⁶ As a matter of protocol, the chiefs were invited to share meals with the IEF team members also.

by the chief in Village A.⁶⁷ “Paradoxically”, notes David Mosse (1994:504), “participatory rhetoric...can be a bar to effective communication when seen by villagers as a devious refusal by outsiders to state their intentions plainly. The participatory approach contradicts experience and usually prompts local inquiry and conjecture as to the project’s ‘real’ motives.”

Indeed, the initial assumption of one old man in Village C that the IEF facilitators were spies employed by the MCP highlights such a misunderstanding. It is not difficult to understand such a suspicion of outsiders, given the only recent change in government to a multi-party democracy. During the thirty-year rule of Banda and his MCP, the despotism of the state created in a Malawi “a climate of fear almost unparalleled anywhere in Africa, even in countries wracked by violence” (Inhonybere, 1997:225). While the climate of suspicion is quite widely recognized in Malawi as a barrier to participatory development, exactly how it is articulated in interactions with outsiders is not often considered. Although PRA is premised on creating a relaxed atmosphere of open and honest dialogue, Mosse (1994:505) warns that “where deeply entrenched suspicion of the motivation of outsiders’ development intentions exists, participatory styles of interaction often do not have the effect of allaying fears and suspicions.”

Another problem in communicating the purpose of the research team’s presence involved raising expectations on the part of the community members that immediate action would be taken or resources would be provided for all problems discussed. Richard Edwards (1994:19) notes that this may be a result of the fact that “PRA-based

⁶⁷ “It is a strange thing to go to the villages and ask, instead of telling”

work tends to look at a whole spectrum of issues in order to discover underlying inter-relationships". Indeed, the team attempted to correct its approach throughout the course of the PRAs, moving from very general introductions which were intended to not direct the course of the research too much, to very specific explanations of exactly what could come from the process, and what was not possible. Yet despite this effort, the follow-up informal interviews, even from the third village, indicated that people in the villages were still expecting that the PRAs would lead to a direct intervention on the part of IEF, such as the provision of better water sources, or the construction of a new health clinic.

Although it is difficult to discern exactly why this difference in perception persisted, one possible explanation may be the variable attendance during the research meetings. Although the overall attendance of PRA sessions was high, it was clear that the consistency of those who were attending was lower. Participants tended to show up and leave again sporadically, making it difficult to start and end a session with the same people (Jones et al., 1996:11). Follow-up interviews found that many people only attended one or two days of the research, thus making it difficult for them to understand the exact purpose for the team's presence. Variable participation also seemed to be a larger problem among women than men, mostly because women were engaged in daily activities (such as gathering water or preparing) which overlapped with the periods of research.

Another factor contributing to the misunderstanding surrounding the presence of the IEF team in the villages may simply be the extraordinary nature of the event. The impact of a five member research team, including two foreigners entering a community

with vehicles, tents, cooking accessories, and other odd artifacts should not be underestimated.⁶⁸ It is difficult to show such signs of wealth and remain credible while suggesting that people must do without external resources! In all villages (and especially Village C), the research team was constantly approached by community members asking for work and other forms of assistance. When people were told that IEF as an organization did not have the budget to hire extra assistants (which was indeed the case), people clearly did not believe the response. Community members did not believe that IEF was incapable of providing the village with substantial external funding for a variety of projects, perhaps due to the long legacy of development interventions in the village. Staying within the village demonstrates such a “visible commitment” to the community on the part of the outsider, it is not surprising that such impressions are conveyed (Mosse, 1994:506).⁶⁹

Anticipating some difficulties in bridging the gap between the researchers and the communities in which PRAs were conducted, the IEF had included one staff member who was very familiar with the area. His presence, although helpful in some instances, did not always seem to be effective in mitigating differences in perception. While he had indeed worked in the area for several years, he had not grown up in the area, nor was it

⁶⁸ According to Kaspin (1993:52), for many Malawian people in rural areas, motorized vehicles represent a form of “superlative wealth” associated only with Europeans and the ruling Malawian elite.

⁶⁹ The fact that the PRA team **was** surprised by such manoeuvres reflects perhaps the naivety of its members. Yet there was an expectation on the part of the team that by using a participatory approach, people would regard us as facilitators of “self” development, as opposed to sources of revenue for villagers. We were somewhat disappointed that we had not generated the good rapport that we had expected.

his home anymore. As Pottier (1991:20) suggests, the line between outsiders and insiders should be carefully drawn: “Even local government officials may not qualify for the label ‘insider’, since they are often comparatively wealthy, ethnically alien to the area they serve and ignorant about basic social and economic issues in the locality.”

Despite his wealth of information on other matters, at certain times in which the team was confused about relations with the communities, he was often similarly mystified. In the case of Village C, when the team was suddenly asked for a rental fee for the toilet and kitchen facilities which had been provided, the team member familiar with the area had no explanation for the action. For the team, the incident only served to illustrate the complex struggles taking place over our presence that were difficult to comprehend.⁷⁰

Public Events and Competing Agendas

The presence of outsiders in a community may also affect the nature and outcome of the research sessions themselves. Most PRA techniques avoid research involving only individuals in favour of collaborative techniques involving groups, in order to capture the “overlapping spread of knowledge which covers a wider field than that of any one member” (Chambers, 1994b:1263). During the IEF research, this was certainly visible, as a number of people could contribute to the information being generated, and share in its analysis. In the case of women’s focus groups on the health system, for example, generally the younger women present were generally more aware of maternal health activities, and were able to inform not only the facilitators, but also the older women

⁷⁰ See Chapter Four for a more complete description of the incident.

present of them. However, the public setting of the research, as well as the competing agendas of both the researchers and the participants, may have a profound effect on the information which is gathered.

PRA techniques, as already mentioned, strive to create informal environments for learning on the part of both outsiders and insiders. This is accomplished through the use of local materials, visualization techniques which do not discriminate against people who are non-literate, and reversals of attitude and behaviour on the part of the facilitators. As Mosse (1994:508) points out, however, there are different ideas of informality:

While from the point of view of 'outsider' development workers an organized PRA is an informal event, in social terms the PRA is often highly formal and public: PRAs are group or collective activities; they involve important and influential outsiders (even foreigners); they take place in public spaces (schools, temples, etc.); they involve the community representing itself to outsiders; and information is discussed publicly, recorded and preserved for use in planning. Such activities are far from informal, everyday life.

Moreover, sitting on the ground, entering into casual conversation with villagers, and using unfamiliar consultative approaches of facilitation may be suspicious for insiders (Mosse, 1994:505). Pottier (1991:21) similarly warns that informal interviewing situations may be misunderstood by both insiders and outsiders "since both sides work from implicit, potentially conflicting assumptions".

The implications of such notions are varied. PRA techniques, which (at least theoretically) seek a diversity of perceptions and opinions, may be negatively impacted by the generalizations of 'official' views of the community offered by those with more power, and the 'public transcripts' issued by subordinate groups (Scott, 1990).

Communities, through generalization and simplification, may find the outward expression of unity to be pragmatic. As Cohen (1985:35, emphasis in original) suggests:

When a group of people engages with some other, it has to simplify its message down to a form and generality with which each of the members can identify their personal interests. Otherwise, the message becomes impossibly convoluted and so heavily qualified as to be unintelligible to the outsider. Thus, when a position is stated 'on behalf of' a community - 'we want...' 'we think...' - it implies a generality of view tantamount to the expression of sameness, of equality...Such general statements of position, if not exactly fictions, are often sufficient distortions of individuals' aspirations that they would not pass *within* the community.

It is difficult to determine how the IEF PRAs were affected by different perceptions of informality and 'official' statements of the community. The pronouncement of the chief after the PRA in Village A that "we are one, you have united us" is perhaps indicative of an effort on the part of the community leader to present a strong common face in the presence of outsiders. It is possible that the chief, a very dynamic person with a great deal of influence in the region, felt it necessary to give his village (and his own leadership) an appearance of cohesiveness.

Another example comes in the form of the testimony of the elder in Village C who claimed to stay silent during the chief's official view of the village's history. Despite his vehement disagreement with what was said concerning the ancestry of the village, the man was afraid of speaking his mind, as publicly contradicting the chief on the matter may have indicated a challenge for the position of village leader. Thus the village headman was able to have his account of the historical events recorded for posterity, which could potentially be drawn upon to legitimate his lineage's claim over

the chieftaincy.⁷¹

Another form of community expression of homogeneity may be seen in the results of wealth ranking in Village C. As discussed in the narrative of the PRA process, wealth ranking was used only sporadically by the IEF, without generating results that were easily validated. In the case of Village C, however, the results became a virtual testimony to the attitude of the community members to the presence of the team. Despite the fact that over five households in the village would clearly be placed in the first category, during the initial ranking exercise, done by two male village elders, no households were shown in this class (organized by largely socio-economic criteria provided by key informants). When ranking was done a second time, with two different informants who were both women (but of unknown social status), only one household was placed in the category. Clearly there was a desire on the part of community members to demonstrate that all the villagers were basically the same. The IEF team drew the conclusion that this was perhaps due to the perception on the part of the villages that interventions in the community would be targeted to the poorest members, and the informants wanted to make sure that nearly all people would share in receiving assistance.

Exactly how well PRA techniques are able to penetrate such 'official' views and deal with opposing views remains open to question. In part, the matter is complicated by the fact that many PRA techniques are focussed on achieving a consensus among

⁷¹ Alternatively, the old man who informed the IEF facilitators of his views must have had his own reasons for doing so, perhaps hoping that the results of the timeline could be altered retroactively, or else the chief would be confronted by the researchers. The role that we played in this particular power struggle is still not clear.

participants, as a first step toward identifying common priorities and taking action. As Mosse (1994:509) suggests, there is perhaps a “tacit compliance” on the part of both outsiders and insiders in the generation of consensus views; outsiders, who need consensus as a means of building a village work plan, and insiders, who wish to present outwardly unified appearances. Cornwall and Fleming (1995:11) argue that such circumstances can “favour the almost inevitable co-option of the process in the interests of the powerful”.

PRA, as a point of interface between outsiders and insiders, can be seen as subject to the competing agendas of various actors in the process. The ‘space’ of participation created by the public events of PRA techniques, becomes a battleground for conflicting viewpoints and discourses. From the example of the chief in Village C, it is possible to speculate that PRA may represent a new mode of reinforcing or challenging dominance on the part of insiders who draw upon various discourses and use various strategies to stake their claims to authority.

Yet insiders are not the only actors competing for the ‘space’ of participation. Outsiders should also be considered as a part of ongoing struggles over what is being said, who is being listened to, and what decisions are taken. Magdalena Villareal (1992:262) warns that most forms of participatory development fail to take into account such contestations:

the activities and practice of interveners are often only conceptualized in normative terms that detail the procedures that should be followed, the attitudes to be assumed, and the targets to be tackled. The ‘outsider’ is hardly ever studied as an actor struggling to project particular images, to set boundaries that are constantly being challenged by the ‘beneficiary

population' or by colleagues and employers, or playing games to acquire leverage, even within the context of 'participatory' development approaches. Changes of plans, apparent weaknesses by the implementor, or what might appear to be losing grip, are in fact signs of the complexity of the dynamics taking place in local arenas.

Reflecting on the IEF experience, it is clear that the research team itself played a large part in determining the course of events and the information gathered. Although as part of the process of self-reflection, the team had discussed the objectives of the research, this did not precipitate into an analysis of personal agendas, and how they may be acted out in the course of the PRA process. Yet in retrospect, the timing of the meetings, the tools employed, and the style of facilitation used must have had a profound impact on the outcome of the research.

Due to the nature of the M4E research project, the ultimate outcome of the PRAs in Chapananga was out of the range of control of local people from the beginning regardless of the later process. The research resulting from the use of PRA was intended, primarily, to feed into an ongoing project. The secondary objective, the empowerment of local people to improve their own health situation, could really be considered a peripheral one. In either case, the research team had already made the assumption that the villagers would be interested in both objectives, and by entering the village without actually questioning that assumption, the agenda of the outsiders was already being imposed.⁷²

The selection of PRA tools and techniques and their interpretation can also represent a form of struggle on the part of the researchers. In some cases tools were

⁷² Some of the research results revealed to the team that the health care system was not necessarily their first priority, yet I do not think that we ever explicitly questioned our own presence in terms of an imposition of our agenda.

found to be inappropriate in form or implementation, despite the desire on the part of the team to see them used. This point can be illustrated by the women of Village A who complained about having to draw their map on the ground when paper was available. Yet as mapping with local materials is an important part of PRA, the facilitators were convinced that it was the proper method. Similarly, the use of pairwise ranking on a matrix was virtually forced upon the women's group in Village A, because I had been convinced that it would be the best tool to use for analysis and learning, and I was determined to see it through! In fact, it took longer to explain the chart being drawn than it did to collect the information, and any opportunity for deep analysis was lost.

The problem of 'technique-led' PRA has been analyzed by a number of practitioners (Cornwall and Fleming, 1995:9). The tendency on the part of PRA practitioners to favour mechanistic tools which lead to impressive outputs is common, due to their relative attractiveness, their ability (in some cases) to be quantified, and the ease with which they can be implemented. Carried out as a set of techniques, PRA can circumscribe learning which comes from sensitive facilitation and analysis of issues.

Indeed, perhaps the most difficult form of struggle to elucidate on the part of outsiders is the manner of facilitation. Depending on the style of the facilitation used during a PRA session, a process of learning may be engendered, or a chart may simply be drawn. As de Koning (1995:35) points out, the latter result is perhaps more common:

Many practitioners, such as health professionals, agriculturalists, evaluators and researchers, who learn about the methods, have no background or training in empowering education processes. For example, mapping of health and demographic information by community members has become a common method in the field of health. However, it is rare

for these maps to be used by the groups who produced them to discuss underlying factors that influence their health and lives, or to look at inequalities between families and between groups and what could be done about that.

In the case of the IEF experience, the shortage of time, inexperience of the facilitators, and the desire to generate good-looking data may have indeed reduced the amount of learning which occurred within the context of PRA sessions.

The role of personal interests and agendas should not be overlooked in a discussion of outsiders' struggles. Indeed, in my own case, it was important to observe PRA processes using a variety of tools, in order to test them out and gain experience. In contrast, the team leader may have been under different pressures, choosing to limit the number of tools for the sake of time and generating data appropriate to donors. To a certain extent, all members of the team were interested in the health information, possibly to the exclusion of other issues of interest to the participants. Thus differences between outsiders and insiders, and also within these groups, can profoundly affect the course of research and the interpretation of the results. As Mosse (1994:517) relates, "[i]n a sense, in PRA outsiders determine the 'ground rules'. Consciously or unconsciously, project workers impose ideas of 'relevance' and determine what is accepted as knowledge."

Social Context and PRA

As an approach, PRA arose in part as an attempt to improve local research methods which did not take adequate account of the complexity of local people's realities (Chapter Three). "People's values and aspirations are complex, diverse and dynamic".

writes Chambers (1997b:179), “and they cannot be known by outsiders without enquiry, without enabling local people freely to undertake and share their own analysis.” Most of the tools and techniques of PRA are intended to facilitate such enquiry and analysis, with the intention of differentiating the poorest of the poor, and empowering them.

Yet as the previous section has pointed out, the effectiveness of the communication between outsiders and insiders depends a great deal on the struggles which are waged by various actors with differing agendas during the research process. Depending on the shape of the ‘space’ of participation, different voices will be heard at different times. An ‘official’ view of a community, offered by a powerful insider, may not accurately describe the reality of others, and go unchallenged. Similarly, the interpretation of represented views by outsiders with their own interests and agendas may be problematic.

The following section takes a closer look at the ability of PRA processes to discover and manage the complexity of local contexts, in light of the IEF research experience. The questions of who participates in PRA, and how insiders’ responses are interpreted will be addressed.

Diversity and Representation

Many PRA tools and techniques are intended to expose diversity in local contexts, ensuring that voices of the least powerful are heard, including women, the poorest of the poor and other marginalized groups. In the case of the IEF PRAs, it is difficult to determine the extent to which this happened. Certainly much of the information gathered

pointed to differences in perception and opinion on the part of various community groups on issues such as daily/seasonal activities, general priorities, and the health system. For example, it was found that, generally speaking, women were more knowledgeable than men about activities of the government health care system in their villages. Men often listed different problems than women in terms of community priorities, and perceptions of the HSA and the PHC system also differed between men, women, and VHC members.

The variety of methods, such as diagramming, ranking, and semi-structured interviewing, aided in getting such results and facilitating analysis among group members. Diagramming which was done on the ground or large sheets of papers seemed to foster collaboration in gathering information from relatively large numbers of people. Bean voting exercises provided very visual indications of priorities chosen by the group members. The community maps, while not always directly relevant to the ultimate research objectives, afforded insight into different realities and perceptions between men and women.⁷³

Yet can it be assumed that diversity expressed in the context of PRA tools is

⁷³ This point can be illustrated with the maps generated in Village C. Even though the women's map never reached the point of completion, numerous differences can be seen between their map and the one generated by the men's group. One of the first features on the women's map was a very large cross, which represented a nearby graveyard. The men did not even mark the feature until some of them became aware that the women had, after which they followed suit, but with a much smaller cross. No explanation was found for this difference. In the case of water, women marked down only one source, the borehole, whereas men noted the several gravity-fed taps that were present in the village as well. When questioned by the facilitators about this point, the women responded by saying that the gravity-fed taps were ineffective for most of the dry season, and there was no reason that they should be counted as water supply, as they were unreliable.

representative of the community as a whole? While a wide range of people were present during the PRA meetings, it was unclear exactly how representative they were of the village as a whole. After fieldwork in Malawi, a number of RRA practitioners came to a some conclusions concerning participation of community members:

- on the whole, the richest people do not attend meetings, or show us around, because they have little to gain from us and have their own means of access to resources;
- the poorest people do not attend meetings or show us around because they think we are not relevant to their lives and they consider themselves inferior;
- people who do speak in meetings and show us around are those who have more respect and self-confidence. They present their own outlooks, problems and needs. They come from above-average socio-economic groups of the community and do not represent the needs of the poorest (Welbourn, 1991:16).

Although the statements are rather generalized, the comments are useful in that they indicate the variance of motivations behind attendance or non-attendance of RRA sessions. It should not be forgotten, however, that there may be a number of other reasons for attending or avoiding meetings, such as being pre-occupied with casual labour for others, gathering water (especially among women), or simply not wanting to interact with outsiders, for whatever reason.

During the IEF PRA process, it was difficult to determine whether or not a broad representation (in attendance) was achieved by the research. The facilitators often relied on the team member most familiar with the research area to gauge the composition of the groups that were gathered, although he did not always know himself the socio-economic backgrounds of the villagers. Village A, however, clearly did show signs of favouring a

more wealthy segment of the community for attendance at the meetings. This seemed to be largely a matter of geography, as the village headman's compound where meetings were held was not at the centre of the village itself. An entire segment of the community was located quite a long distance from the chief's house, and, as follow-up interviews indicated, most of these people had not bothered to attend the meeting, nor had some of them even heard of their occurrence. Attendance, then, was favoured by the chief's neighbours, whose houses were also located along the main road of the area. These also tended to be the families who were better off economically.⁷⁴

Although it is an important indicator, physical attendance at research sessions represents only one aspect of participation in a PRA process. A more elusive and difficult to answer question is how a PRA process deals with diversity within groups, and the expression of difference. As suggested in the previous section, within public events or group discussions, insiders may defer to more powerful voices within the community, in order to allow the outward appearance of unity, or out of fear of challenging others of a higher social status.

Struggles and conflicts were indeed visible to the IEF team during the course of the research. The women's group in Village A, in which answers to questions of general community priorities were dominated by a small cadre of older, influential women, is a case in point. Clearly there was a reluctance on the part of younger women, who made up the majority of the group, to challenge their elders. Although an effort was made to

⁷⁴ This was determined both by observation and wealth ranking. The results of wealth-ranking during the PRAs, however, were not able to be used as accurate indications of status, for reasons already discussed (see p. 140).

create groups that were more homogeneous in their composition, this proved difficult without knowing exactly who was present, and what their impact on group proceedings might be.⁷⁵ As Mayoux (1995:244) notes, in women's groups age may not be the only consideration, as the dimensions of difference among women are manifold:

There are...significant differences between women from different classes, age-groups and marital status in all aspects of gender inequality, particularly in their practical implications. Significantly, the continuance of structural gender inequality is often enforced in the first instance by female networks of social control. Certain categories of women, such as older women, mothers-in-law, first wives, richer women, benefit more than others and are often anxious to preserve their privileges within the system rather than challenge it. These women are often the leaders in the community, and are often those influencing the direction of participatory projects.

The extent to which women's voices are heard in PRA, even the strong ones, should also be examined. Some aspects of PRA tend to privilege certain types of knowledge usually assumed to be the domain of men. Reflecting on his experience in Western India, Mosse (1994:513) noted that the "representation of knowledge and experience in maps, tables, charts and so forth involved a formality which appeared to mark it out as the province of men."⁷⁶ Similarly, after undergoing a training in PRA techniques, a practitioner of "action research" commented that "it struck me that most of

⁷⁵ As Pottier (1991:20) notes, "[g]roup interviews can be very revealing, yet there are some fundamental conditions to be met. In particular, before they can appreciate what is being said, practitioners will need to understand the interface between local power and the control of local knowledge, they will need to understand 'Who's Who?' within the setting of the interview."

⁷⁶ The IEF team experienced similar situations, in which women were extremely reluctant to 'take the stick' in order to draw maps, create matrices, and do other tools. Often, an IEF facilitator would have to record the information him/herself.

the communication methods and aids used tended to be male-orientated....[t]here was a complete invisibility of other forms that people rely on to express or communicate knowledge, feelings, hopes, dreams, visions" (Srivastava, 1994:35). Thus women's voices may remain either unheard, or they are expressed in ways that are considered legitimate in the male-dominated, public domain. What is perhaps most important to keep in mind, however, is that the 'problem' of women's participation should not be regarded as "a practical problem, or even a problem of technique or researcher bias, but a manifestation of structural gender relations" (Mosse, 1994:514).

Understanding Local Contexts

Thus an understanding of the complexities of social contexts and their implications for research results may be difficult for a PRA process which only lasts a matter of days. Guided by principles such as 'optimal ignorance', PRA constantly engages in trade-offs between time, cost and other factors which are in opposition to an extended and elaborate research process, with the assumption that in-depth analysis is not always necessary. Naturally, questions arose among the IEF team concerning the ability of PRA techniques to account for the multiple 'axes of difference' and power interests engaged in contests in local settings, as well as achieving 'accurate' information on the health system. Two of these issues, listed below, are addressed thematically:

Gender Although investigations into gender relations were not a main aspect of the IEF project, it was clear that the research team did not really understand the full impact of this

variable on the information gathered. Gender divisions were apparent throughout the PRAs, as women consistently sat apart from men in plenary discussions, and research sessions, with a few exceptions, were done with groups divided by sex. Relations between men and women, however, were not problematized by the facilitators as having an effect on the research process. For example, group discussions with the VHC members did not raise the issue of how the relationships between the men of the committee (who comprised at least half of the VHC and usually occupied the executive positions) and the women affected the answers given.⁷⁷

Researchers also experienced difficulties in elucidating the impact of gender relations on the functioning of the health system. Women, as the main 'clients' of the M4E program, were involved in relationships with VHCs which were dominated in numbers and decision-making power by men, as well as interactions with HSAs, who were all men. What part gender relations played in these relationships was certainly not amenable to illustration in a linkage diagram, nor perhaps did women feel comfortable in discussing such issues with male facilitators.⁷⁸ Certainly, observable conflicts like the one during a plenary session in Village B revealed tensions between the male HSA and how he related to young mothers in the course of under-five clinics. Although it was

⁷⁷ While the issue was raised during the research process, the shortage of Chichewa-speaking facilitators meant that the VHC could not be divided by gender. In PRA practice generally, however, there is a growing recognition of the importance of gender, and several new methods and techniques have been developed to address the issue (see Humble, 1994). The existence of tools in the ideal, however, doesn't erase the very real constraints placed on the team during fieldwork.

⁷⁸ How the male IEF staff would have interpreted such statements would comprise another set of questions.

indeed common to witness men (especially in prominent positions) ‘lecturing’ women on what they should do or say⁷⁹, once again the role of gender is simply not known. As Mayoux (1995:241) suggests of development projects, however, the very complex nature of “[g]ender inequalities affect perceptions and actions at all levels from funding organizations and field staff to participants themselves.”

Although the IEF team may have indeed been limited by the lack of female facilitators, the ignorance of gender-related PRA tools, and inexperience (and perhaps dominating) facilitation, it would be difficult to imagine how, in the short time frame, the intricacies of local gender relations could have been grasped. This is due in part to the interconnectedness of profound gender inequalities with other systems of inequality, such as class, age, and ethnicity. The symbolic aspects of gender inequality are also crucial to consider:

A particularly important feature of gender inequalities is not only their material expression, but also the fact that they are generally supported by ideological, religious and cultural systems. They involve norms regarding emotional relationships... Many women have themselves often internalized ideas of appropriate types of behaviour towards men and other women... Women may use and manipulate gender stereotypes to obtain support for their own individual or group interests (Mayoux, 1995:243).

The symbolic characteristics of gender are certainly relevant in the Malawian context. Kaspin (1993:41) suggests, for example, that among the Chewa in central and southern Malawi a “gendered universe is the framework of rural life”. Gender is considered a defined part of the Chewa social universe, a world which revolves around

⁷⁹ In several instances, during plenary sessions in which suggestions were being elicited from women by IEF facilitators, a prominent man, such as the chief or the HSA, would speak up, ordering women to speak.

rituals of life such as initiation ceremonies and funerals. It is one element of “a single subliminal order, a hidden cosmology that defines the complementarities of gender, rank, and life status” (Kaspin, 1993:41).⁸⁰

Traditional Beliefs and Witchcraft From the experience of the IEF team, the ability of PRA processes to examine traditional belief systems and sensitive, non-tangible topics such as witchcraft deserves to be examined. As noted in the narratives of the research experience (Chapter Four), the limited efforts of the IEF facilitators to broach subjects such as the traditional health system did not meet with much success. In this case, the IEF team was not able to access and grasp the complex belief systems of local people due to a number of constraints.

In approaching the subject of health, the IEF team facilitated sessions such as disease ranking, disease calendars, and linkage diagrams to show the roles of various actors in the health system. While these methods proved interesting in terms of illustrating community knowledge surrounding health care, the information gathered focussed solely on a Western scientific model of health and disease. Indeed, this information is what the researchers were looking for, and they received it. When villagers were asked (admittedly in a very limited way) about traditional notions of health, villagers generally responded by laughing and dismissing the query, perhaps in the belief that staff members from an international health NGO would not be interested, and

⁸⁰ For a history and discussion of gender relations in the Lower Shire Valley, see Mandala (1990) and Davison (1995).

perhaps because of a reluctance to discuss such issues.

Traditional medical knowledge is of course not an unknown entity within IEF. In fact, a number of projects focussing on the treatment of eye diseases have been carried out in collaboration with traditional healers (Courtright, 1995). These projects, however, like the mindset of the IEF PRA practitioners, tend to be focussed on a Western scientific conception of health. Traditional health practices are judged scientifically and found either to be useful and accepted as legitimate or they are rejected as useless, and possibly labelled as ignorant (Chapter One).

Yet perhaps the more important issue at stake in traditional medical beliefs is that, similar to the symbolic aspects of gender relations, they point to a different cosmology than that of the researchers (at least in the case of the IEF team). This point becomes significant when the behavioural implications are considered. Friedson (1996:49), writing about the Tumbuka from Northern Malawi, explains:

From the viewpoint of Malawians and Europeans involved in delivering Western-style health care, there is an opposition between the empirically based biomedical approach of Western medicine and 'superstition riddled' indigenous healing practices. The majority of Tumbuka, however, still see Western medicine from the perspective of traditional medical praxis. They do not make an ideological distinction between Western and indigenous health care... When a Tumbuka utilizes Western medical facilities, he or she does so within a traditional framework.

The 'traditional framework' referred to here has profoundly different conceptions of health and illness than Western science. For a rural Malawian, as Kapapa (1981:7) explains, an "illness is conceived of as a disharmony in the interaction of supernatural forces, so also is the end of a severe illness (death) experienced as a defeat of a group of

forces by another.” Brian Morris (1986:367) admits further that such a belief system causes problems for programs of preventive medicine, as people may be reluctant to admit to an illness, because this could signify a moral transgression on the part of the individual or his family.

How does PRA address different cosmologies? Certainly PRA processes such as the one conducted by IEF, basically a ‘one-off’ event with limited time and facilitation skills, would find it difficult to penetrate such a dense layer of social beliefs possibly alien to those of the practitioner. As Pottier (1991:19) warns, one-off interviews “yield little more than standard answers, snippets from ‘polite conversation’ that have little or no bearing on actual living conditions.” While other creative PRA techniques such as “body mapping” (Cornwall, 1992) may provide glimpses into other perceptions, how can any conclusions be drawn from such limited (and often formal, as discussed above) interaction between insiders and outsiders?

Questions of this nature are not limited to the realm of health. Other parts of the complex and distinct social universes of the people of the IEF research area inevitably affect the motivations and understandings of insiders during a PRA process. People are guided by an intricate world of secret societies and secret knowledges that mark stages of life, determine relationships, and order the understanding of the world (Kaspin, 1993:45). In this sense, the “social tissue”⁸¹ of the villages in Chapananga was hardly touched in our research process.

⁸¹ I have adopted this term from Joachim Sagrado, the Country Director for Actionaid in Malawi. Dr. Sagrado is also a social anthropologist who carried out fieldwork among the Chewa.

The issue of witchcraft was raised several times over the course of the PRAs in Chapamananga, without achieving any understanding of what was occurring. Women in Village C no longer visited the closest health clinic because of problems with witchcraft. Men in Village B described the role of the traditional healer as curing illnesses caused by witchcraft. People, perhaps quite naturally, were unwilling to elaborate on these issues and seemed to be, in the words of one IEF facilitator, “hiding parts of their culture” because of the sensitive nature of the subject. Moreover, fears of witchcraft on the part of PRA participants may have been another barrier to noting diverse voices within sessions, as people with higher social status and more wealth are generally assumed to have stronger magical powers than those who are poor. As one social anthropologist in Malawi suggested in an interview:

[wealthy people] will be given priority...in the village community, you should all be even, but somehow, somebody who has got more wealth is believed to have also more medicine, and more witchcraft. [Others] don't believe that he has acquired wealth just because he is more successful - he must have other, hidden means which he will not reveal in public. So you may not trust him, but you may fear him, and therefore give him more priority” (Claude Boucher, pers. comm.).

Elements of the symbolic world may take on an added importance in the consideration of the way in which power functions locally. As Comaroff and Comaroff (1993:xxx) suggest, elements of traditional cosmologies such as rituals and witchcraft prove to be powerful indicators of power and shifting responses of local identity to the larger forces of modernity:

ritual, as an experimental technology intended to affect the flow of power in the universe, is an especially likely response to contradictions created and (literally) engendered by processes of social, material, and cultural

transformation, processes re-presented, rationalized, and authorized in the name of modernity and its various alibis ('civilization', 'social progress', 'economic development'...).

In order to understand the way in which power and local identity are manifested, then, it is necessary to investigate the role of ritual and symbolic struggle.

In the case of the Chewa of Central Malawi, and the Mang'anja of the South, the existence of 'secret societies' of men and women represent one such embodiment of identity and resistance. This may be true particularly in the case of the *nyau*, a particularly powerful society which historically, in a matrilineal and uxorilocal (where the man moves to the village of his wife after marriage) culture, provided the men of a village "with a possibility of reacting against pressures exercised by their in-laws and the local lineages" (Schoffeleers, 1992:40). However, the significance of the *nyau*, which involves secret meetings among men, who construct masks to represent ancestors or wild animals during ceremonial dances, goes much farther than an historical ritual. As Kaspin (1993:35) argues, "*nyau* is not an artifact of cultural nostalgia, nor a discrete feature of Chewa society, but part of a repertoire of conceptual categories with which the modern world(s) is continually imagined and revised." The society has played a tremendous role in the increasing contact of Chewa and Mang'anja with other cultures, and particularly modern systems. According to Matthew Schoffeleers (1992:40), the *nyau* "carry a considerable social and political load, which has made them important custodians of traditional culture and vehicles of opposition in situations of conquest." During the colonial period, in which Christian missionaries sought to set up schools and catechist classes, the *nyau* was able to draw on symbols of traditional culture and transform itself

to provide an effective opposition (Schoffeleers and Linden, 1972:252).⁸²

As a “totalizing frame of reference” (Kaspin, 1993:54), it would seem appropriate for any strategy based on the notion of ‘empowering’ local people to address the impact of the *nyau*. Pottier and Orone (1995:42) point to the need for practitioners interested in facilitating processes of empowerment to first understand power structures and organizing practices of various elements of the community before acting. If this is indeed the case, current conceptualizations of PRA as rapid and effective form of stimulating empowering learning must indeed be revisited.

Struggles in the Organizational Context

The preceding sections have discussed the struggles over the ‘space’ of participation in terms of the relationships between outsiders and insiders, and the ability for PRA processes to understand local contexts. Yet in reflection on the IEF experience it is also clear that contests also occur at an organizational level, affecting crucial factors to participatory approaches such as the amount of time allotted for PRA research, the number and skills of staff devoted to the project, and commitment of the organization to follow-up the research/empowerment process.

PRA within IEF

PRA, like the notion of participation itself, is subject to discursive struggles

⁸² As secret societies, the leaders of the *nyau* would remain unknown to all but other members of the society. One Malawian facilitator commented that if that person were to be present during a PRA session, there would be deference afforded to his views.

within mainstream development organizations (Chapters Two and Three). The IEF research in Chapananga is no exception, as the narratives in Chapter Four illustrate. Many of the constraints to the PRA process identified in the previous sections are related to logistical or institutional factors such as a lack of time and inexperienced facilitators. Although the correction of such problems may be considered a simple matter of allowing more time and resources for participatory approaches, a closer examination of the organizational context in which PRA was situated reveals a more complicated and profound set of issues.

The use of PRA by IEF can be viewed as taking place in a context of a variety of discourses and interests. IEF's work in Chikwawa district, including the research project on the M4E program, takes place within the discursive framework of a USAID Child Survival Grant (CSG) which seeks, through focussed interventions and activities, to reduce child mortality rates and improve maternal health care in the district. Although there is some provision within the CSG for activities in connection to the M4E program, there were no IEF funds available for the PRA research, other than the staff to make up the team, and some other logistical support (K. Jones, pers. comm.). Rather, the majority of the budget for the PRAs was supplied by the Monitoring and Evaluation unit of UNICEF, which saw the use of a participatory research approach as valuable in the context of M4E.

The actual adoption of PRA for the M4E project, however, can ultimately be attributed to struggles within each organization, by people advocating the implementation of what they see as appropriate measures to facilitate the overall process of development.

according to their own beliefs and the pressures with which they are faced. As Ferguson (1990:18) suggests, the discursive contexts in which development professionals exist feature an almost labyrinthine articulation of power and knowledge in which “what they do and do not do is a product not only of the interests of various nations, classes, or international agencies, but also, and at the same time, of a working out of this complex structure of knowledge.” In the same way, however, ‘development’ itself is not a homogeneous entity. The complex discursive pressures are dynamic in their modulations, allowing for differences of opinion and practices even within organizations. As Gardner and Lewis (1996:125) remind us:

development is far from monolithic. Although structured by relations of power in which particular countries, institutions and groups dominate, development practice and policy are increasingly heterogeneous, and are constantly challenged from more ‘radical’ positions by people working both within and outside of mainstream development institutions.

Within the organizational contexts of IEF and UNICEF, such struggles over the use of PRA were indeed in evidence. As the PRA team leader explained:

The PRAs were my idea; I was very keen to promote this...transformative process that I had learned about and that I and other staff members had received training in via CURE. I was hoping they could be used as some tool to put the power in empowerment. ... UNICEF supported them when I explained the process and [the UNICEF Monitoring and Evaluation Officer] actually allowed us to rent the car which got us down there. ... IEF didn't have any vehicles that could be made available.

Support for the PRAs, however, came along with limitations in terms of time and budget provisions. Fiscal accountability (to both organizations) and the restriction of IEF staff to a period of four days of research in each village inevitably reduced the flexibility of the

PRA schedules and agendas.⁸³

The circumstances of the adoption of PRA for the M4E also meant that it was limited to more or less a ‘one-off’ event, as opposed to the beginning of a longer process. IEF, however, bound by its own constraints, was not committed to using PRA as anything more than a ‘better baseline survey’, as the team leader noted in hindsight:

I had hoped it [the use of PRA] could be a springboard for communicating and moving a dialogue within the community, and with other health actors [to] catalyse a longer-term process. To some degree, this might have happened on one level with building a greater bond between IEF staff, HSAs and the community. Essentially, however, IEF's grant with USAID Health and [Population] is not a community-development, community-empowering project; no one is concerned with building relationships through the use of PRA.

Ultimately, then, these limitations of the organizational context in which the PRAs occurred frustrated the efforts of the team leader, who was trying to implement what she perceived to be an ‘empowering’ process. “[T]he overall approach of IEF’s donor (and also the ethos of the organization itself)”, she commented, “did not allow or promote the philosophies of participation in their work”.

Larger Discursive Forces

Thus the difficulties encountered by the research team in their effort to evaluate

⁸³ As an example, when the follow-up session of the last PRA conducted in Chikwawa district fell outside of the duration agreed upon with UNICEF for use of the four-wheel drive, there was no possibility of an extension. Only the fortunate availability of an IEF vehicle, and the proximity of the last village (a four-wheel drive was not an absolute necessity) made it possible to complete the research plan. On other occasions, the unavailability of Malawian staff limited the number of focus groups sessions the research team was able to conduct, as well as the translation of interviews and material from Chichewa to English.

the functioning of the M4E program at the same time as foster a process of empowerment must also be viewed in the context of the larger discourses which guide organizations such as UNICEF, IEF, and USAID, and which may work against principles of community participation and empowerment. Chambers (1997b:63) points out that the hegemony of professionalism found in "normal development bureaucracies" which seek to "centralize, control, conserve and standardize" in order to meet the needs of efficient administration, reinforces hierarchies and 'top-downism' within agencies. Moreover, these tendencies may be even more common in the health sector than in other fields. Eyben and Ladbury (1995:195-196) argue, for example, that the "traditionally hierarchical structures" found in health systems as well as the fact that "health professionals have traditionally tended to take a more top-down, authoritarian (doctor knows best) approach to their clients than have most other technical specialists" prove to be a barrier against a participatory framework of health projects.

Indeed, although both UNICEF and IEF (together with USAID) indicate that their approach to PHC relies on the fundamental principle of community participation, the nature of that participation may actually preclude longer-term processes of community development and empowerment.⁸⁴ Chiarelli (1996:38) has argued that the discourse of PHC as promoted by the "international health establishment" (international organizations such as UNICEF and WHO) tends to essentialize the social context, needs and priorities of communities in the South, masking the "political nature of both participation and

⁸⁴ For more information on UNICEF's approach to community development, see Racelis (1992).

health care”:

WHO and UNICEF advocate participation for reasons conceived of at the international level. Participation is seen as a means to improve the health of populations -- that is -- it is a component of an effective health intervention, one whose basis is PHC. In effect, WHO and UNICEF, through their universal promotion of PHC, have privileged health as a priority of the people and have defined a range of possible means of attaining it.

Moreover, in the context of structural adjustment programs in the South and the subsequent push for both economic efficiency and cost recovery in social service sectors such as health and education, participation is being used as a means to support community-based health efforts in the absence of outside resources. This tendency is enhanced by “selective PHC” programming, or that which pre-determines a “lead intervention” such as child survival or family planning which, given the scarcity of funding, should be addressed first as a means of establishing good health (Chiarelli, 1996:39). According to Chiarelli (1996:39), such pre-determined interventions support the supremacy of the international health establishment and their policies which “mirror dominant political and economic ideology”, as well as precluding the “possibility of participation as a slow, sustained process that empowers people to make choices they deem most relevant to their own lives.”

Adopted under such a discursive framework, PRA faces a number of limitations and pressures, which can have a profound impact on the outcome of local-level interventions. In the case of the IEF research project, this may have meant that the PRAs *necessarily* faced constraints such as limitations of time, budget, staff training, and others. A PRA process which would challenge the structures of the larger discourses of

international public health, would be virtually impossible, given these limits, as well as the inability of IEF to engage in longer-term efforts of community empowerment. PRA was used by IEF, but in a form far from ideal; it was made to 'fit' the larger discursive context of the Child Survival Grant, which meant that the primary purpose of the research became extractive, rather than empowering.⁸⁵ It could be argued that, ultimately, this form of PRA would be more desirable from an organizational perspective, because it conforms more closely to the bureaucratic and managerial needs of project-oriented development (Chapter Three).

Conclusion

Based on material presented in Chapter Four, this analysis has highlighted a number of critical issues which precipitated during the course of the PRA in southern Malawi. PRA has been shown to be a highly charged social event, in which various actors engage in symbolic and material struggles. At a local level, the practice of PRA was profoundly affected by the public nature of the research sessions, the impact of the outside facilitators as actors with their own agendas and strategies of power, and the complexity of social settings, including a realm of ritual, traditional belief, and symbolic struggle which was not easily discernible by the tools and techniques employed.

Moreover, the whole PRA process was guided by larger discourses of international public health and the managerial needs of development donors and

⁸⁵ At least it was not 'empowering' in the sense of a longer-term, educational process which would result in a form of autonomous action (see Chapter Three, footnote 8).

bureaucracies. It has been suggested that the impact of such discourses limits the efficacy of PRA in its portrayal of local settings and its effectiveness in fostering processes of empowerment. The concluding chapter elaborates further on this theme, and relates it to some of the theoretical notions raised in the previous chapters.

CHAPTER SIX - CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Chapter Five has highlighted the complex nature of the settings in which PRA takes place. PRA itself was shown to be a site of struggle in which both 'outsiders' and 'insiders' employ competing strategies over aspects of the process as visible and tangible as time restrictions and choice of techniques, and as elusive and invisible as secret societies and hidden cosmologies. Such contests are both symbolic and material in nature, and take place at a variety of levels, including inside local contexts, within organizations, and on the plane of policy.

This chapter concludes the present study by linking the notions illustrated by the case study with those raised in earlier chapters. By reconceptualizing the practice of PRA as taking place within the arena of struggle of international development interventions, a better understanding of *how* and *why* participatory approaches to development are co-opted and rendered non-empowering (at least for local people) can be achieved. The chapter will also suggest a number of strategies through which PRA practice may be strengthened in the face of threatening forces of co-optation. The fostering of forms of countervailing power against the hegemonic discourses of development depends on an improved understanding of how knowledge and power function within interventions, and how subjugated knowledges can be fortified.

PRA and Power Struggles

'Good' vs. 'Bad' PRA

In many ways, the IEF experience in Chikwawa district could be characterized as 'bad' PRA practice. Most of the constraints found by the IEF team, for example, have been noted by other PRA practitioners as common "dangers" which negatively affect the quality of the results which may be achieved by the approach. Chambers (1997b:212-214) analyzes "bad PRA" under three headings: "top-down fashion and spread", in which the "instant fad" of PRA and its incorporation into centralized bureaucracies has decreased the quality of practice; "behaviour, attitudes, and training", where practitioners have not adopted the proper personal stance in their practice and training, thus leading to facilitation which may be more didactic than participatory; and "field practice and ethics", where practitioners continue to dominate, fall into routines and ruts, do extractive research, and rush the process. Improving the practice and quality of PRA, argues Chambers (1997b:214-216), can be accomplished through focussing on the fundamental principles of PRA, such as the Three Pillars (Chapter Three), reflective and creative participatory trainings, and basic precepts and principles of PRA, which hopefully will act as "benign viruses, seeding change for the better as they spread" (Chambers, 1997b:216).⁸⁶

Although these notions of how PRA is co-opted and how it may be redeemed are

⁸⁶ These include: 'Sit down, listen, watch and learn', 'Use your own best judgement at all times', 'Unlearn', 'Be optimally unprepared', 'Embrace error', 'Relax', 'Hand over the stick', 'They can do it', 'Ask them', and 'Be nice to people'.

relatively straightforward and easy to convey, the case study analysis in Chapter Five has shown how it is important to take into consideration the dynamic nature of PRA as a site of struggle, and the limitations of the approach in how local contexts and outside influences are interpreted. The results of PRA are not simply explainable as a matter of correct attitudes and behaviours, but are better conceptualized as the outcome of multiple negotiations within local settings, between local people and facilitators, between facilitators themselves and among organizations and larger discourses of development . The tools and techniques of PRA play a part in these contests, rather than being set apart from them. It then becomes as important to examine why PRA takes place in the variety of forms that it does, rather than evaluate and polarize 'good' and 'bad' practice. Why is PRA often afforded only shortened time frames and small budgets? Why do facilitators behave the way they do? What interests does a 'bad' PRA, in its 'failure', serve?

Investigating such issues, which the majority of PRA literature (and practice) does not adequately address, requires a close examination of the research process itself, and the way in which power strategies are articulated at all levels. The case study, discussed in Chapter Four, noted the need to reconceptualize the range of interactions between outsiders and insiders in a PRA process. IEF facilitators found that simply 'handing over the stick' and 'being nice' were not sufficient to equalize power relations, as some would suggest. As Nelson and Wright (1995:57) argue, in PRA "the positioning of the researcher is not problematized, but tends to be thought of as neutral facilitation of change in the distribution of power." In the IEF case study, this notion was found to be deceiving, as the facilitators' own agendas, presuppositions, and interests tended to affect

the process. With a desire to generate suitable outputs for the research project on the M4E health program, as well as a variety of other forms of personal baggage, the IEF PRA team decided which tools to use, how long they would be undertaken for, and what the discussion concentrated upon. Although perhaps unconscious in their actions, PRA facilitators have a strong and hard-to-detect influence on the research process which may privilege some knowledges to the exclusion of others, an outcome ideally avoided in PRA.

The case study also demonstrated how PRA is not able to analyze adequately the complex local contexts in which research takes place. Mosse (1995:27) notes that PRA “has not proved particularly good for the kind of analysis of social relationships which projects need”. The public nature of the research sessions may prevent PRA techniques from penetrating the “public transcript” offered by dominant voices in the community as representative of the community (Scott, 1990). Moreover, in the case of the symbolic aspects of issues such as gender and rituals, as well as the hidden cosmologies which may give structure to people’s motivations, PRA was similarly unable to unravel the social tissue of multiple local realities. As Murphy (1990:27) notes, what is presented in the “public domain” of a village may only “merely reflect the tip of the social iceberg”.

Finally, the case study observed the battles which are waged at an organizational and institutional level. The use of PRA was largely the result of a struggle waged by parties within IEF itself who believed it to be an effective and empowering approach to community-based research. In its actual implementation, however, the PRA project was by no means ideal, partly as a consequence of limited time frames, inexperienced staff,

and the inability to initiate a long-term process of empowerment. The IEF project itself was limited by its donor-controlled mandate of Child Survival activities, which could not afford the space for a truly effective PRA process to occur. Thus the IEF PRAs were affected not simply by micro-level struggles, but also the wider power relations of the dominant discourses of development, which seek to harness participatory approaches for their own strategies (Chapter Two).

'Failure' and 'Success' of PRA

In the case of the IEF experience, it has been suggested that the PRA process was *necessarily* brief in nature, and did not represent the beginning of a transformative and emancipatory process, as an ideal situation would perhaps have been. Instead, PRA was forced to fit into the larger programming framework of the Child Survival Grant in Chikwawa District without challenging its form or the inequities of the international health establishment and its discourses (Chapter Five). Such discourses, it has been suggested, do not support participation and empowerment as a long-term process resulting in people's autonomy.

PRA, in this sense, is rather easily incorporated into the bureaucratic logic of development organizations and institutions, without posing a significant challenge to the *status quo* (Chapter Three). This characteristic undoubtedly accounts in part for the phenomenal spread of PRA not only among NGOs, but also government agencies and donor agencies. "With its emphasis on speed," argue Wright and Nelson (1995:58), "[PRA] has lost the radical theoretical underpinning of earlier participatory

development.” Moreover, by focussing on the attitudes and behaviours of individuals, PRA can easily neglect the analysis of larger political and economic systems, and how to influence them. While this may not have been the original intention of the approach’s pioneers, it is not surprising that when PRA “goes to scale” (Chambers, 1995b) it does so in a very apolitical form which does not pose structural challenges to the machinery of the development industry.

If this is the case, PRA, stripped of its radical nature, may actually prove to be an effective tool of legitimation for larger power interests. Similar to the way in which the notion of participation has been coopted into mainstream development discourse (Chapter Two), PRA can be adopted as a somewhat cynical “participatory ritual” in order to capitalize on the appeal of participatory development in the eyes of donors (Gardner and Lewis, 1996:114). In the case study presented in Chapter Five, it was observed that both IEF and UNICEF obtained the information on the M4E program which they required. Using PRA (whether it is empowering or not) may have provided a means for both organizations to acquire additional discursive leverage by re-asserting their commitment to participatory approaches (K. Jones, pers. comm.). In essence, UNICEF and IEF may be able to use the Chikwawa PRAs as a form of “symbolic capital” (Quarles van Ufford, 1993:140; see also Chapter Three). This continues at the local level, where PRA may prove an effective means for outside facilitators simply to “show support for pre-existing viewpoints”, and for powerful insiders to present and enforce their dominance (Chapter Five).

PRA, in its bad practice or failure, can serve other interests. As Ferguson

(1990:276) points out, “‘failure’...does not mean doing nothing; it means doing something else, and that something else always has its own logic.” The inability of PRA to analyze local power dynamics and social contexts, combined with the apoliticizing pressure placed on the approach by the bureaucratic logic of development institutions, renders it ineffectual in challenging the hierarchy and privileged knowledges of the hegemonic discourses of development. In this neutralized form, PRA may in fact exert a ‘depoliticizing’ force, which plays a role in the working out of larger, central strategies of power (Chapter Three). The operations of power in development interventions may be obfuscated by casting communities or outsiders in an apolitical light, facilitating local people’s further integration into larger economic and political systems, national governments or international market capitalism with little regard for local autonomy and determination (Chapter Two).

Examining the “side-effects” (Ferguson, 1990:254) of PRA may require more detailed analyses of local settings and how they correspond to wider power relations, beyond the short time-frames which characterize most PRA practice. “[H]owever reflexive an approach agency personnel take to their own practice,” Nelson and Wright (1995:18) argue, “it perhaps remains for researchers to view the political embeddedness of participatory development programmes from sufficient critical distance to help those involved to see whether their work is being transformative”. At the heart of this question is whether PRA is able to provide a space through which local and subordinated knowledges can present a viable challenge to larger regimes of truth, or whether it becomes simply another technology of normalization to maintain the silence of such

voices (Chapter One).

It must be emphasized here that PRA practitioners or development organizations do not (necessarily) deliberately employ the approach as a means of legitimating their own interests. Undoubtedly, as in the case of IEF PRA process, the practitioner's intentions and expectations are profoundly affected by a wide variety of factors which are not readily apparent or discernible. The ultimate side-effects of a PRA do not necessarily correspond directly to the intentions of the individual or agency which uses it. Ferguson (1990:276) suggests that the key to understanding this problem lies in the way intentions and interests are articulated through complex webs of other power structures and relations:

Intentions, even of powerful actors or interests, are only the visible part of a much larger mechanism through which structures are actually produced, reproduced, and transformed. Plans are explicit, easily seen and understood... But any intentional deployment only takes effect through a convoluted route involving unacknowledged structures and unpredictable outcomes.

Therefore, the intentionality of power (Chapter One) is not easily discernible. If a PRA process were to result in the end in an outcome undesirable or contrary to the best intentions of the facilitators, it is not likely to be the result of a conspiracy, but rather a function of the complex and contested nature of power negotiations.

Subjugated Knowledges and Discourses of Modernity

The larger mechanisms and unacknowledged structures referred to by Ferguson are aspects of the hegemonic discourses of development and modernity which have

profound impacts on the structure of any development intervention. As Chapter One argued, these discourses of modernity, reflected in development, have succeeded in colonizing reality, to the extent that in the latter part of the twentieth century it is close to impossible to imagine the world's problems such as poverty and environmental crisis in terms not supplied to us by the machinery of development (Escobar, 1995a; Peet and Watts, 1993). In its effort to capture social reality within the scientific and technocratic modes of modernity, the discourse of development constantly reinvents its theories and practices, but its core remains unchanged. "When it came into the English language in the eighteenth century with its root sense of unfolding," writes Michael Watts (1995:47), the word development "was readily granted a metaphorical extension by the new biology and by ideas of evolution."

Since that time, it may be argued that development has rarely broken free from organicist notions of growth, and teleological views of history, science and progress (Pieterse, 1991). European social scientists from Spencer to Comte to Marx sought to map and conceptualize social change, including processes of industrialization, urbanization, and the advance of Reason, using biological metaphors of growth or other linear, teleological stage theories; moving the primitive to the civilized (Cowen and Shenton, 1995). Economic rationalism (in particular neo-classical economics) of the nineteenth century, still an integral part of contemporary development, was based on a notion of universal rationality, the "optimizing nature of economic man in the allocation of scarce resources to optimum ends" (Porter, 1995:68).

Current discourses of development, for the most part, remain very much aligned

with the hegemonic power projects of modernization, of which development is one.

Moore (1995:5) illustrates the link between development and global capitalism:

International development agencies...have made no small contribution to the hegemony of capitalism on a global scale. Most of the people who work within them have promoted the 'moral and intellectual leadership,' of the classes who preside over the global political economy....They have also assisted the orchestration of often brutal political domination accompanying the protracted globalization process. It may well be that the simple insertion of the word 'development' into the lexicon of legitimacy for global capitalism is the single most important facet of its hegemonic project: the notion of development adds much luster to the dream pursued by most of the world today.

Thus development policy and practice is "informed by global strategies" of power, and, in its latest incarnation, seeks to promote neo-liberal economic and political orthodoxy throughout the South, as in the North (Moore, 1995:7). This corresponds to the project of modernity, which can be described as "strategy of conceptual encompassment of local life-worlds", the transcending of local identities and "concrete realities of place" with "supra-local structures" (Hornborg, 1994:259). Such a struggle for encompassment takes place at the level of power and knowledge, with very material ramifications. As Escobar (1995:33) suggests, "development can best be described as an apparatus that links forms of knowledge about the Third World with the deployment of forms of power and intervention, resulting in the mapping and production of Third World societies."

Participation, as Chapter Two argues, was introduced to development (in most instances) by challengers to the discourses of modernization, who sought to break the hegemony of these global power projects by privileging local, subjugated knowledges. Responding to these contests, dominant development discourses began to adopt the

language and to some extent the practice of their challengers, proposing versions of participatory development and empowerment which, in contrast to their original form, actually served to support discourses of modernization. Participation thus became, and remains, contested terrain within development practice, as individuals and organizations holding competing views wage discursive battles over the concept.

The space of participation in development, then, becomes a complex arena of struggle where, at the local level, meanings are negotiated among actors, while at the same time local identities confront global systems of modernity and their ideologies. Participatory development can provide an interface through which the plurality of local situations can be used to transform what is essentially an economically oriented enterprise, thereby humanizing development. Conversely, as already discussed in relation to PRA, participatory approaches in development may also result in the harnessing of local identities for larger power interests such as dominant economic and political ideologies, and their corresponding institutions. The shape of the participatory space in development interventions is determined by power relations and structures articulated in material and symbolic forms.

PRA is very much caught up in these struggles. A key issue for the approach is moving away from analysis of good and bad practice, toward a more complex understanding of social and discursive interactions. PRA which recognizes that all participatory processes are political and the site of negotiations among actors may be able to build on that base of understanding to construct carefully counter-hegemonic movements. Building upon the complexity and diversity of local contexts in order to

facilitate, as Mulenga (1994:260) suggests, the “articulation of a genuine, radical counter-discourse”, will require new skills and conceptual tools to inform participatory practice in the future. The following section outlines a number of recommendations to strengthen participatory practice and facilitate the articulation of local voices as a means to form significant challenges to the dominant practices and discourses of development.

Creating a Counter-Discourse: PRA and Challenges for the Future

Taking Advantage of Discursive Space

Despite the co-optation of participatory development into hegemonic discourses of development, recognizing the discursive struggles which occur both within development institutions and outside of them offers an opportunity to consider how subordinated discourses may be strengthened. The popularity of participatory approaches, for example, should be regarded as an opportunity for the assertion of local identities. “While participation may be encouraged for the purposes of legitimization of efficiency,” argues White (1996:12), “there is always the potential for it to be ‘co-opted from below’ and for a disadvantaged group to use it for leverage or empowerment.” If labels have been adopted without substance in the case of participatory development, there is still an opportunity for more radical forms of practice to adopt labels understood by the development establishment.

In other words, actors asserting local identity may be able to use aspects of dominant discourses to provide a form of resistance. Foucault (1978:101), in his study of sexuality, noted the formation of a “reverse” discourse of homosexuality which asserted

its normalcy in the face of hegemonic discourses in the nineteenth century which sought to cast it as perverse: “[H]omosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy...be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified”. By adopting tactical elements of hegemonic discourses, such as the language of participation accepted by major development agencies, local organizations and projects may be able to assert the legitimacy of subjugated knowledges.

By conceptualizing development as comprised of competing discourses, constant critical reflection on processes of co-optation and resistance is needed. This means challenging representations, interrogating rhetoric, and questioning forms of practice and policies. When participation in development is tied to efficiency rather than emancipation, it should be deconstructed to expose the power interests at work. Local interventions must be viewed in the context of much wider power relations which affect their outcomes. Additional research should be undertaken into the political nature of institutions of development and their actions. “The onus...is upon us to pull out the radical tensions within the buzzwords of development discourse in such a way that they cannot be re-incorporated into the hegemony of the status-quo”, suggests Moore (1995:29), “we must push the discourse of ‘participation’ to its extreme”.

Improving Practice at the Local Level

Using participatory approaches to facilitate the articulation of discourses of resistance will depend to a large extent on the ability to understand local contexts.

Perhaps the most important contribution of the present study to the field of participatory development is the analytical approach toward processes of participation, and in particular PRA, which is discussed. By reconceptualizing participatory development and PRA in terms of discourse and the dynamic articulation of power and knowledge, development practices are seen to be complex webs of meanings and identities, characterized by constant struggles and competing strategies. Thus although the regimes of truth propagated by dominant discourse may appear static and monolithic, it is clear that this is by no means the case.

In the case of PRA and participatory approaches in general, it is evident that struggles on multiple levels have very important implications for practice. Participation is not a simple process of asking people what they think, or having them draw a map. It also involves the clashing of agendas, between outsiders and insiders, and within local contexts, who struggle to enlist others in their strategies of power. These negotiations may be based on material resources, or they may focus on symbolic elements, such as ritual or identity.

For PRA practitioners, these findings have a number of important implications. PRA facilitators, for example, must become more aware of their own agendas and how their presence influences the process of participation. Outsiders (or insiders who become facilitators) need to problematize their own participation, as actors struggling to project their own views and interpreting information selectively according to their own interests. Struggles must also be recognized as taking place within communities over the public nature of the events which are occurring and over the material resources that outsiders

may represent. There are very significant implications to the axes of difference (gender, age, class, lineage) found among social groups which can profoundly affect a participatory process. Although much PRA literature is indeed becoming more sensitive to such issues, a more profound understanding of how difference is played out in local settings will be required to generate additional techniques (and frames of interpretation for their results) that are able to recognize the diversity and complexity of local life.

PRA also needs to find new ways to acknowledge the symbolic elements of people's livelihoods and how they impact on their expressions of community and the formulation of axes of difference among societal groups. It may not be possible to develop tools which uncover belief systems and cosmologies in a rapid fashion, yet ignoring these aspects of local people's lives can profoundly affect participatory processes, and development interventions generally. Longer-term studies or pre-existing ethnographies may be able to be employed to infuse a necessary level of critical depth in PRA tools.⁸⁷ A longer-term involvement of the PRA practitioners with local contexts will also inevitably shed light on the symbolic elements of local life which may illustrate how communities are engaged in the process of preserving local identities in the face of systems of modernity.

More generally, it is suggested here that PRA practice may be improved by

⁸⁷ Here, it may be useful to return to the practice of conducting a 'secondary data review' before engaging in PRA. Espoused by much early RRA and PRA literature, the notion of such a review seems to have declined in recent years. Most likely, this is because of the almost oppositional stance of PRA literature to academic elitism embodied by Northern-influenced systems of formal education. Yet an intelligent, critical, and sensitive use of ethnographies, histories, and geographical can contribute much to the PRA team's understanding of the context in which they are working.

encouraging a dialogue of reflection within a team of practitioners, informed by a variety of techniques, including non-participatory ones. As Mosse (1995:31) found, complementing “PRA-based planning methods with a form of participant observation, critical (and self-critical) reflection and constant information feedback” can aid in the analysis of social networks crucial to the functioning of development interventions. While these insights were “necessarily external and analytical, rather than participatory”, they were useful nonetheless (Mosse, 1995:31).

PRA trainings could explore such complementarities and teach basic skills of observation necessary to understanding the complexity of social contexts. PRA teams could ensure that one member, or another outside actor with critical skills of observation, is able to “reflect on the total context of the research process” (Pottier, 1997:223). Although fears of the hierarchical imposition of academic elitism (Chambers, 1997b:34) on PRA are valid, this does not negate the value of the contribution that sound skills of critical observation (which may indeed be learned, although not exclusively, through formal education) can make. It is important that local people engage in the use of PRA as facilitators, but the role of an outside observer in examining the research process critically should not be underestimated (Pottier, 1997:223). The key to implementing such suggestions is recognizing that one expression of knowledge or set of skills should not be privileged over another. Elitism, academic or otherwise, occurs when one knowledge system establishes the legitimacy to judge another. Acknowledging difference without privileging could lead to important new forms of collaboration between a variety of actors which can inform participatory practice and contribute to building strategies of resistance.

Re-Politicizing PRA

Although improving the ability of PRA to analyze local settings adequately is crucial, without linking the micro-level contexts with wider power relations, it is not likely to succeed in facilitating the articulation of subjugated knowledges in a meaningful way. The tendency of PRA to be spread and adopted in an apolitical form is an indication of the pressure placed on the approach by dominant discourses to ensure that it is not successful in empowering people to the extent that they will challenge larger structures which may be oppressive. Overcoming the apolitical stance of PRA will require that the approach is placed into perspective in terms of its strengths and limitations, as well as a clearer recognition of the role that explicit political claims can play in the process of empowerment.

Current PRA practice commonly occurs in the form of rapid, one-off interventions. In this form, it is unrealistic to expect that the approach will be able to have a transformative effect on people's lives, despite the interest in the process which the tools may generate (see Chambers, 1997b:216). Indeed, it has been argued in this study that the ability of PRA to be employed apolitically explains (at least in part) the rapid spread of PRA and its adoption by major development agencies (Chapter Five).

Empowerment, in the sense of local discourses of resistance being able to mount an effective opposition to global economic and political system, must be seen as an extended strategy to which PRA, in a more 'politicized' form, can contribute.

"Challenging inequalities is a long-term process", writes de Koning (1995:34), "[and] [f]or PRA to live up to its aims, it must be part of this longer term process and go beyond

the moments of data collection, visual documentation and instant analysis.”

The explicit association of PRA techniques with educational processes which do not shy away from political questions and discussions of macro-level structures may be one way of addressing this issue. More space must be devoted to such discussions in the practice of PRA (as well as in trainings), rather than relying solely on the construction of diagrams or ranking to convey learning.⁸⁸ As Wright and Nelson (1995:58-59) argue, PRA must overcome its “limited conceptualization of change” by investigating how “people’s multiple dimensions of difference are constructed, infused with hierarchies of power, and how they variously intersect in different contexts and are linked to processes of domination”.

The linking of micro struggles to macro-level forms of domination will require new sensitivities and skills on the part of practitioners. The current emphasis in PRA literature on changing attitudes and behaviours may provide useful guidelines for the actions of the facilitator in the field, but does not necessarily translate into an increased consciousness of the patterns of inequity which pervade the global context. The ability to facilitate collaborative analyses of those structures can be fostered by addressing political issues more overtly, in trainings and in practice. PRA practitioners do not need to become fervent activists with the intention of converting local people to particular causes.

⁸⁸ A recent shift in language from PRA to PLA (Participatory Learning and Action) has taken place in some circles (Pretty et al., 1995). This is certainly a step in the right direction, in that it views participatory tools with more flexibility of use and scope than a traditional notion of ‘a’ PRA would. Recent PRA literature (Chambers 1997a, Chambers 1997b) advocates the same principles, but the common practice of ‘doing’ PRA tools in certain sequences and in certain ways persists.

but they must learn to carry out more sophisticated economic and political critiques, and share that information as a participant in the process. Thus practitioners can relate their experiences and analyses in the same way in which local people are expected to share their knowledge concerning their livelihood, environment, beliefs and values in a PRA process.

PRA facilitators may also serve to connect like-minded individuals and movements, in order to generate momentum for change in local, regional, national, or international settings. Crafting identity or value-based coalitions from diverse local elements (identified by the process of PRA) may indeed prove to be challenging, but a practitioner sensitive to local identities and social struggles (ie. one that has a longer-term commitment to working in one locale) might be able to help facilitate the emergence of such viable political movements.⁸⁹ Although it remains to be examined further by other analyses, it may be these types of movements which can exert the political pressure necessary to challenge ultimately dominant global discourses.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ The practice of politicized PRA will mean that trainings, workshops, and networking activities will take on an even more important role in sharing experiences and joining together like-minded practitioners to form a critical mass of change *within* the institutions of development. Information communications technologies such as the Internet make the exchange of experiences between practitioners very easy, and should continue to be encouraged as a forum to discuss explicitly the politics of PRA.

⁹⁰ It is informative here to examine the emergence of 'new social movements' in Latin America and other places. According to Escobar (1995a:227), these movements, which are often seemingly spontaneous and based on identity or values, may provide "new ways of seeing, new social and cultural self-descriptions" which are able to "displace the categories with which Third World groups have been constructed by dominant forces." Similarly, a number of feminist scholars have recognized the difficulty in forging postmodern political alliances without resorting to essentialism (Butler and Scott, 1992; Nzomo, 1995; Udayagiri, 1995).

It is likely that there are already a number of practitioners who have adapted PRA to take a more politicized stance. Yet the more common application of PRA in an apolitical, mechanistic form is likely to continue as well. Countering this trend will depend on the ability of the next generation of PRA practitioners to employ sensitive social analyses and good facilitation skills in order to expose the workings of power in both local and global contexts, and discuss overtly their political implications. PRA must be seen as a site of struggle, in which strategies of power at many levels are at work. Many different actors, including PRA facilitators and development organizations, are actively engaged in these contests. It is only when such relations of power are laid bare that hegemonic discourses can be deconstructed and the regimes of truth which they have established are able to be dismantled.

Appendix 1

Participatory Rural Appraisal Schedule

Day 1

• Morning hours:

1. Introductions - in plenary (with icebreakers: songs or dances)

- a. Introduction: Exchange of names
- b. Purpose: Purpose of stay in village and use, purpose and process of PRA
- c. Expectations: Exchange of expectations and questions between villagers and PRA team
- d. Time: Daily activities, schedule exchange and time requirements

2. Village mapping - Physical map drawn by two groups (by gender)

The maps will be drawn on the ground; in each group, one person will be asked to volunteer to record the map afterward on a flip chart. Can include:

- a. Location of households
- b. Traditional authorities
- c. Health committee members
- d. Land use
- e. Natural resources
- f. Water sources
- g. Nearest health centre

• LUNCH and observatory walk

• Afternoon hours:

1. Maps completed by small groups of women and/or men

2. Wealth Ranking with key informants

3. Historical timeline - key informants, male and female village elders

- a. General History - droughts, bumper harvests
- b. What and when development interventions have taken place in village
- c. Development of local civic institution, such as health committee

4. Seasonal and cultural calendar - men's group

- a. Food/consumption patterns - which foods available when
- b. Disease/illness patterns
- c. Work patterns - planting, harvesting
- d. Weather patterns

5. Daily calendar - women's group

- a. Daily work patterns by season
- b. Work and leisure patterns

6. Household income and expenditure

Day 2

• Morning hours:

1. Focus group 1: Women - two groups

Group 1:

- a. Social mapping using physical maps from yesterday
 - social makeup - families, female-headed households
 - types of houses - iron sheeting
 - members of local institutions (VHC) by hhld
 - female-headed hhlds

Group 2:

- b. Ranking of problems in village using bean-voting methods
 - causes, effects and solutions
- c. Listing/discussion of **strengths** and **capacities** of the village, both physical and human

Time permitting before lunch, women's groups should meet together to share what was discussed. Women can be asked to return for the afternoon session.

2. Focus group 2: Village Health Committee

The VHC members should be reminded to attend as a group on Monday.

- a. Makeup of the VHC using names written on index cards
 - How members are selected for the VHC and VHV
- b. Purpose of the VHC
 - Activities of the VHC/VHV
 - Frequency of meetings - who attends
 - Active members/inactive members
 - Activities of each member
 - Use of the register system of commodities - who understands it, uses it
- c. Linking of the VHC using index cards and linking diagrams
 - To community
 - To HSA
 - To village headman
 - To health centre staff
 - To VHV's

3. Focus group 3: Men

- a. Ranking of problems in village using bean counting method
 - Cause, effect & possible solutions; discuss feasible solutions to most pressing
 - Then target health related problems - seek linkages of causes/effects to processes for solving

- b. Local relationships related to above identified problems
 - with the HSA
 - with the village health volunteer
 - with the village health committee

• **LUNCH**

Afternoon hours:

1. Focus group 1: Women - one group

- a. Local relationships using linking diagrams
 - with the HSA - how often in village
 - with the village health volunteer
 - within the village health committee itself
 - with the general community
- b. Linking with Monitoring for Empowerment and the HSA
 - who knows of it & why
 - how was M4E explained to women
 - who has been selected for M4E interviews
 - who has attended an M4E feedback session - how is information communicated by HSA
 - how is information used by women
 - how it can be improved/made accessible

At the end of the session, women should chose which activities they want to present to the community in the group the next day.

2. Focus group 2: Village Health Committee

- a. Ranking of health problems using bean voting method
 - Causes, effects & solutions
- b. Listing/discussion of **strengths** and **capacities** of both the community and the VHC, in relation to stated health problems
- c. Linking problems solving of (a.) to Monitoring for Empowerment
 - who knows of it & why
 - how was M4E explained to VHC
 - who assists HSA to collect info
 - who has attended an M4E feedback session - how is information communicated by HSA
 - how is information used by the VHC
 - how it can be improved/made accessible

At the end of the session, VHC should chose which activities they want to present to the community in the group the next day.

3. Focus group 3: Men

- a. Listing/discussion of **strengths** and **capacities** of the village, both physical and human
- b. Problem solving and solution building through discussion of problems and capacities
 - Concrete PLAN OF ACTION
- c. Linking health needs with Monitoring for Empowerment
 - who knows of it & why
 - how was M4E explained to men
 - who has been selected for M4E interviews
 - who has attended an M4E feedback session - how is information communicated by HSA
 - how is information used by family
 - how it can be improved/made accessible

At the end of the session, men should chose which activities they want to present to the community in the group the next day.

• Evening hours:

- 1. Visit to selected households during wealth ranking: poor, middle class, rich - 1-2 team members per household**
 - a. Health problems
 - b. Access to services
 - c. Attendance to meetings

Day 3

• Morning hours:

- 1. Presentation & discussion of information gathered as chosen by groups - in plenary**
 - 2. Triangulation of focus group information - in plenary**
 - a. Health problem ranking
 - b. Action planning & use of M4E
 - c. Group discussion of M4E
 - 3. Role plays, songs based upon triangulation**
- LUNCH with village participants**

Appendix 2

Summary of PRA Tools

Community Mapping. Villagers construct diagrams and models of their community which show the position of households, location of roads, wells, individual field plots and other major features. The maps can be produced on different surfaces, including paper, the floor, or the ground. Different materials are used for outlining the features, such as chalk, pens, or locally gathered substances, including beans, leaves and stones. Mapping exercises can last from twenty minutes to three hours, with several different diagrams being constructed at the same time. Once the model of the village is produced, it can be added to, discussed, and transferred to a more permanent format.

Historical Timeline. Major events in the history of the village are recorded during group discussions, usually with elders. Past development interventions, changes in infrastructure and social services, drought and coping strategies in time of crisis can be discussed.

Seasonal Calendar. A chart or matrix can be constructed on the ground with local materials, or transferred directly on paper, to show disease, weather, hunger, and work patterns over the course of the year. Temporal divisions should be generated by participants in the tool, rather than dictated by facilitators. Lines can be drawn or stones placed on the ground to indicate quantities.

Daily Calendar. Similar to a seasonal calendar, a daily calendar shows activities over the course of the day. Usually constructed by women and men separately, it is interesting to show contrasts in perception between the groups in a plenary discussion.

Problem Ranking (Bean Voting). Focus groups discuss major concerns or problems of the village, which are listed on paper or drawn on the ground. An equal number of beans are given to three or four people to rank the problems from most important to least, with the number of beans placed indicating priority. The results of the exercise are discussed to see if there is a consensus on the ranking which emerges.

Problem Ranking (Pairwise Ranking). Focus groups list village problems or other preferences, which are then systematically presented in pairs, each problem against every other one, and participants are asked to choose which item is of greatest priority. The results of the pairwise comparison are then placed in a matrix diagram and the number of times each item was preferred comprises its rank. The results can then be discussed by participants.

Linking Diagrams. Focus group discussions on relationships between people, organisations, the causes and effects of certain issues can be illustrated by connecting words or symbols with lines to show their interrelatedness. Diagrams can be used to stimulate debate effect learning.

Wealth Ranking. Two or three key informants are chosen by facilitators to determine criteria of wealth (not restricted to the economic definition), then proceed to list each household of the village and place them into categories. A useful tool for determining village perceptions of wealth.

Household Income and Expenditure Diagrams. A simple flow diagram which shows patterns of exchange and commerce at the household level. The extent to which a household is dependent on the cash economy can be determined with this tool.

Appendix 3
Men's Map - Village A

[illegible]

Appendix 5 Historical Timeline - Village A

Nthawi ya Atsamunda: During the Colonial time (British 1914-1964)

- **Nkhanza za malimidwe:** Cruel agricultural methods
- **Mr. Bornfat (azungu), Kakoma (anthu kuchotsa magobo), ntchito yayikulu malipiro wo chepa:** Poor payment for hard land preparation
- **Osakhoma msonkho, kumangidwa:** Refusing to pay tax, people were arrested
- **Ana opita kusukulu anali ochepa:** Few children went to school
- **Zipatala zinali patali, e.g. Chikwawa District Hospital - Anthu amadalira zitsamba:** Hospital was very far away & people depended on herbs/traditional healers
- **Misika kunalibe:** There were no markets

Nthawi ya Ufulu (1964-1993): Time of freedom

- **Misika inalipo FMB:** Farmers Marketing Boards opened
- **Sukulu Zambiri/ ma ADMARC:** More schools & ADMARCs
- **Chipatala chimodzi chinapeleka boma:** One health centre opened
- **Matransport anayamba kupezeka/ mabasi anali kufika:** Transport became available, buses came
- **Ufulu wolima momwe ungafunire:** Freedom of cultivation
- **Feteleza waulere/ mbeu zaulere:** Free fertiliser and seeds

Nthawi ya Ufulu ya Chibadidwe (1994-1996)

Time of human rights & free expression

- **Feteleza waulere kumalibe mpakana:** No free fertiliser

Zochita chita Zomwe Zachitika M'mudzi Muno

Development interventions in the village

- **Kukhazikitsa gulu la uzamba (Amayi azamba TBA):** Introduction of traditional birth attendants
- **Kukhazikitsa mabungwe a zaumoyo (VHC); Kenaka kukhazikitsa ma VHV - N.B. Zaka zisanu zapitazi:** Formation of the VHC & VHV
- **Chokudya cha Ntchito (Food for work) 1995/96 N.B. Ntchitoyi yathandiza munjira zambiri monga:** Food for Work which has helped:
 - 1) **Nseu:** Roads
 - 2) **Kubzala mitengo/ kufetsa mitengo:** Sowing & planting of trees
 - 3) **Madilau adakhazikitsidwa koma amaphwera mnsanga:** Protected shallow wells (with no water)
 - 4) **Kupatsidwa chakudya:** Distribution of maize

Appendix 6 Women's Daily Calendar - Village A

	April		May		June
	5 am to 7 am	7 am to 12 pm	12 pm to 2 pm	2 pm to 4 pm	4 pm to 6 pm	6 pm to 9 pm	9 pm to 5 am
Collect water Madzi
Cook Kuphika
Cultivate Hoe Kulima
Eat Kudya
Wash clothes Kuchapa
Pound maize Kusinja
Collect firewood Kuthyol a Nkhuni
Bathe children Kusamb -itsa Ana
Sleep Kugona
Harvest crops Kukolola Mbewu

Appendix 8

Seasonal Disease Calendar (Men) - Village A

[illegible]

Appendix 9
Cause-Effect Disease Chart (Men) - Village A

Mathenda Diseases	Zimene Zimapangitsa Causes	Zotsatira Zake Effects
1. Mmimba Stomach pains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Madzi atzilombo toyambitsa matenda obwera kuchokera ku mudzi kupi ta kutsinje: Water is contaminated with germs • Chifukwa cha ubve: Being untidy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ntchito zapakhomo zimayima: work is not done • Ntchito zammudzi zimayima: Gardens are not cared for • Umphawi umabwa pa khomo mmudzi: poverty • Mapeto ache anthu amafa, ndipo anthu amapita ndi luso lawo: Village loses talent
2. Malungo Malaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Udzudzu Mosquitos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zotsatira zake zilingana ndi zapoyambazi: Same as before
3. Chifuwa Coughing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tikapuma mpweya omwe uli ndi tizilombo toyambitsa nthenda: Breathing the air which contains germs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zotsatira zake ntchito zimayima: Work is not done
4. Maso Eyes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ntchentche: House flies • Mphepo ya nkhucho: • Kusakhala ndi dzenje ndi chimbudzi: Not using a pit latrine or rubbish pit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kusawona: blindness • Ntchito zonse zimayima: Work is not done • Omusunga amabvutika: Guardian suffers alot
5. Mutu Headache	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dzuwa likatencha kwambiri: Too much sun • Kuzizira kwambiri: Too much cold 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ntchito zapakhomo zimayima: House duties stop • Munthu amafa: Death

Appendix 10
Pairwise Matrix Ranking (Women) - Village A

Nseu Road	X							
Madzi Water	Madzi	X						
Sukulu School	Nseu	Madzi	X					
Ana Amasiye Orphans	Nseu	Madzi	Ana Ama.	X				
Chipatala Health Center	Chipa.	Chipa.	Chipa.	Chipa.	X			
Amayi Okhala Female-headed HH	Nseu	Madzi	Amayi	Ana Amasiye	Chipa.	X		
Sukulu Ya Nkomya Home-Craft School	Nseu	Madzi	S. Ya Nkhom	Ana Amasiye	Chipa.	Amayi	X	
Bizinezi Income-generating Activities	Nseu	Madzi	Sukulu	Ana Amasiye	Chipa.	Bizinezi	Bizinezi	X
	Nseu	Madzi	Sukulu	Ana Amasiye	Chipatala	Amayi	Sukulu Ya Nk.	Bizinezi

CHULANI KANGATI

Frequency of appearance in ranking

Chipatala.....	7
Hospital	
Madzi.....	6
Water	
Nseu.....	5
Road	
Ana Amasiye.....	4
Orphans	
Amayi Okhala Okha.....	2
Female headed households	
Sukulu Ya Nkomya.....	2
Home-craft school	
Bizinezi.....	2
Income generating activity	
Sukulu.....	0
School	

Zosawonjezeredwa - Njala

Not added - hunger

Appendix 11
Women's Problem Ranking (Bean Voting) - Village B

Mavuto Problem	Limayamba Bwanji? Cause	Chomwe Chimaneka Effect	Njira Zogonjetsera Vutolo Solution
1. Njala Hunger	• Dzuwa Sun	• Kuyamba kudwala: sickness • Kufookanso weakness • Chakudya chimasowa no food	• Kufima Kwambiri: extensive farming
2. Madzi Water	• Dzuwa Sun	• Kuyamba kudwala malungo/ m'mimba: fever & diarrhoea • Kusachapa: not able to wash clothes	• Osadula mitengo mphepete mwa mtsinje: stop cutting trees by river • Wosalima mphepete mwa mtsinje: stop cultivating on river banks • Boma lithyikile mjiro: dig a borehole
3. Kolela Cholera	• Kusowa chimburzi: lack of toilet	• Amatsegula madzi: watery diarrhoea • Kumwalira: death	• Ukhondo wapakhomo: keep a sanitary home • Kusamalira madzi akumwa: clean water • Kusasa pakhomo: sweep yard • Kukhala ndi chimburzi komanso: build a toilet • Kugwiritsa madzi: use water
4. Kutsegula m'mimba Diarrhoea	• Ntchentshe: flies	• Madzi amatha: dehydration • Mase amalowa akati: sunken eyes • Khungu limakwi nyika: wrinkled skin	• Kusamalira pakhomo: look after the house • Kuphita madzi: boil water • Kusamalira zakudza: good food
5. M'mimba mwa Kamwazi: Dysentery	• Madzi: Water	• Kutsegula magari: watery diarrhoea • Munchu amafoka: weakness • Kumwalira: death	• Kupita kuchipatala: go to hospital • Tikhala ndi zimburzi: Build toilets • Kuphita madzi akumwa: boil water
6. Malungo: Malaria	• Udzuzu: Mosquitoes	• Thupi limayamba: body aches • Kusanza: vomiting	• Pakhoma ngadi pali zithaphwi kukwirira: cover stagnant water • Kufima pakhomo: weed the yard • Kukhala ndi dzenje lotaya zinyalala: have a rubbish pit
7. Chipatala: Hospital	• Boma kusauka: poor district	• Kufa pafupipafupi: frequent death	• Kuumba njerwa zomangila Chipatala: mould bricks to build hospital
8. Michini: Maize mill	• Kusauka: poverty	• Kusinja pamanja: pound by hand • Kutibula: pound	• Kupempha bungwe ili yonse: ask for help • Azadyikire chigayo kwa Dzimphonje: village requires a maize mill

Appendix 12
Men's Problem Ranking (Bean Voting) - Village B

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IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)

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