Process, Perception and Power: Notes from ‘Participatory’ Research in a Zimbabwean Resettlement Area

Allison Goebel

ABSTRACT

The increased popularity of ‘participatory’ methods in research, development projects, and rural extension in developing countries, has not consistently been accompanied by a critical evaluation of the quality and reliability of knowledge created and extracted in the process. In this article, the author employs her own research using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) in a Zimbabwean Resettlement Area, to examine how knowledge is created through this type of research act, and how later research may be used to turn back and ‘make sense’ of PRA data. The article explores how power relations among participants are both revealed and concealed in PRA, focusing specifically on the implications for gendered perspectives. The paper also highlights the dynamic, contested and often contradictory nature of ‘local knowledge’ itself. Apparently transparent chunks of ‘local reality’ gleaned through PRA can turn out to be part of complex webs of multiple ideologies and practices. The author argues that while participatory methodologies may offer effective ways of beginning a research project, adoption of short PRA workshops in academic or project related research could lead to dangerously faulty representations of complex social worlds.

INTRODUCTION

‘Participatory’ methods in research, development projects, and rural extension in developing countries have been gaining popularity. Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), and Participatory Action Research (PAR), for example, have developed alongside the growing interest and respect for indigenous knowledge, and challenges to top–down approaches to development projects and extension (Chambers, 1994: xiii). Meanwhile, in the social sciences and humanities, theoreticians have destabilized the construction of the academic as ‘collector’ and ‘scientific’ analyst of knowledge, of ‘facts’. Instead, the researcher is pictured more as a facilitator of knowledge creation, a self-conscious interpreter of complex and often competing ‘stories’. For radical research, this shift demands the use of methodologies emphasizing the interaction between researcher and ‘research
subjects’, and interrogating the categories and biases imposed by the researcher.¹

Parallel to these largely progressive changes, is the desire, particularly in the world of donor-initiated development projects and rural extension bodies, to get quick social–cultural information to satisfy the requirements of a project document or a departmental decree. Conscious that many project failures in the past have been related to lack of attention to social and cultural factors, large development institutions such as the World Bank and FAO have adopted RRA and PRA with hopes of improving on this disappointing history (Cornwall et al., 1994: 109).² The ‘rapid’ aspect of the methods appeals especially to project efforts that are predominantly technical, and where project developers are largely foresters, soil scientists, agriculturalists, or biologists. In these efforts, there appears to be a desire to limit social investigation due to its ‘messiness’, and the way it detracts focus from more interesting and important technical issues.³ Thus, while expert literature on R/PRA sees the approach as a package of investigative techniques that would take repeated visits to complete,⁴ many technically-driven donor efforts seem to break off a discrete part of R/PRA from the package and make it stand for the ‘social dimension’ in the project process. Similarly, the concept of

¹. Feminist theory and research has been making these epistemological challenges for some time. See Geiger (1986); Harding (1987, 1992); Hawkesworth (1989); Jagger (1983); Personal Narratives Group (1989) for a few examples of a vast literature that seeks to destabilize the ‘neutral’ voice of scholarship, reveal silenced voices, and unearth hitherto uninvestigated relations of power. The growing influence of postmodernism and ‘Third World’ perspectives in development literature is also relevant: see Braidotti et al. (1994); Dubois (1991); Harcourt (1994); Kinnaird and Momsen (1993); Moghadam (1994); Mohanty (1991); Parpart (1993); Slater (1992); Spivak (1988) for some examples. The relevant point here is that disillusionment with ‘grand theories’ of either the Marxist or Liberal variety has promoted greater attention to the local, the specific, the individual. Many researchers are seeking more detail and complexity in fieldwork, rather than searching for ‘representativeness’, in general.

². In relation to social forestry and agroforestry projects, see Cook and Grut (1989, World Bank); Gregersen et al. (1989, World Bank); Raintree (1991, FAO).

³. For example (in agroforestry), from species selection and development, soil types, etc. In publications of the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF), the need to include social and cultural factors is expressed in the promotion of a ‘Diagnosis and Design’ approach, which emphasizes investigating indigenous knowledge, understanding local needs and uses for trees, links with markets, and so on. The dominant thrust in agroforestry, however, remains scientific research on tree species and forms of interaction between trees, soil, non-woody plants and animals, and so forth. See, for example, Steppler and Nair (1987) and Gholz (1987); both texts give only one chapter to social issues. There has been little success in achieving interdisciplinary research, resulting in the relative isolation of social researchers such as Fortmann and Bruce (1988); Hoskins (1987); Rocheleau (1987).

⁴. This cluster of methods could include: imaginative use of key informants; group interviews, and chain interviews; mapping and aerial photographs; diagrams; ethnohistories; ranking procedures; stratifying procedures; stories and portraits; secondary data review and others (Cernea, 1991: 514).
'participation' appears to be truncated. It comes to mean ‘a way to get people to do what we want’, rather than a means fundamentally to change the project idea or construction, or a way to involve and respect local knowledge on an equal footing with foreign, particularly scientific, expertise (Chambers, 1991: 516).5

In academia, some of these ‘shortcuts’ are also gaining some currency. For example, in natural resources research at the University of Zimbabwe, a ‘portfolio’ of PRA techniques consistently appears at methodology workshops and training exercises. While the Centre for Applied Social Sciences (CASS) has a long history of in-depth, longitudinal applied social research, some of its researchers are also becoming ‘PRA Experts’. There is a danger that as PRA techniques are absorbed into academia, social researchers, particularly in developing countries, could be called upon by donor institutions to ‘do PRA’ to satisfy the social requirements of a project cycle. Thus PRA could become a tool through which academic energy is made to serve an effort to simplify and minimize something that is, essentially, complex and contested: social worlds. This could compromise academic integrity, as well as aiding in the disempowerment of the ‘subjects’ of the donor project through the containment of their input to a set PRA package.6

The growing popularity of participatory methods is thus associated with two essentially contradictory approaches. The one seeks to reveal and validate local knowledges, destabilize the notion of the outside expert as the only true ‘knower’, and include communities on an equal footing in planning and implementation of rural improvement. The second approach adopts the language and some of the methods of RRA and PRA, without adequately acknowledging the complexity of social realities, or properly absorbing or practising the intended notions of ‘participation’.

This article argues that, even in cases where the intent of research lies with the first approach and the research is academic rather than ‘project driven’, the use of RRA and PRA can obscure rather than reveal social complexity, and validate dominant views which become portrayed as the common view, a monolithic ‘local knowledge’ (Chambers, 1994; Mosse, 1994). This is especially the case when R/PRA is used in an abbreviated form, such as in one- or two-day sessions, focused on group work. Furthermore, while the methodologies may indeed make it easier for people to express things to the researcher, there is little in the methodology that helps to interpret why people express what they do. The puzzle of meaning remains.

5. It is also true that the use of PRA by scientists such as soil scientists at the University of Zimbabwe has opened a channel for dialogue between biological scientists, social scientists and economists that could lead to interesting multidisciplinary research.

6. A measure of the current popularity of PRA in the Southern African region is the recently formed ‘PRA Network of Zimbabwe’, with members from the academic and NGO communities. Advertisements for ‘development experts’ in the local press in Zimbabwe frequently request knowledge of PRA.
The increased popularity of ‘participatory’ methods has not consistently been accompanied by a critical evaluation of the quality and reliability of knowledge created and extracted in the process (Scoones and Thompson, 1994: 4). In order to examine how knowledge is created through this particular type of research act, and how later research may be used to turn back and ‘make sense’ of PRA data, I utilize my own research using PRA in a Zimbabwean Resettlement Area. Part One explores how power relations among participants are both revealed and concealed in PRA, focusing specifically on the implications for gendered perspectives. My main concern here is to illustrate how knowledge is embedded in power relations, and the importance of investigating different views of ‘social reality’. Part Two considers the dynamic, contested and often contradictory nature of ‘local knowledge’ itself. Seemingly transparent chunks of ‘local reality’, such as rules for resource use generated in PRA exercises, can actually turn out to be part of complex webs of multiple ideologies and practices. This section explores effects of the social context of resettlement on something called ‘traditional’ rules in natural resource use. In this effort I wish to build a concept of ‘indigenous knowledge’ that considers historical process, contemporary social–structural–cultural conditions, and competing ideologies such as ‘traditional’ religion, Christianity and ‘modern’ farming and conservation concepts. Before turning to these two main sections, a brief sketch of PRA methodology is presented.

PRA METHODOLOGY: WHAT, HOW AND WHY?

PRA has grown out of the older RRA, which was developed to replace the ‘quick and dirty’ so-called ‘development tourism’ described and critiqued by Chambers. RRA was developed in the 1970s as a means to increase the efficiency of development processes by quickly establishing schemes on unused or abandoned land, upon which landless or destitute peasants were to be settled. The resettlement programme has remained central to the government’s rhetorical commitment to undoing the colonial domination of whites in most of the good agricultural land in the country. In practice, however, the government has consistently failed to meet its own targets for resettlement. While the government primarily blames lack of funds for land purchase and infrastructural development, other factors stalling the establishment of sufficient numbers of schemes to meet demand include the centrality of commercial agriculture to the Zimbabwean economy, pressure from multilateral institutions like the IMF and World Bank to protect commercial farming, government corruption through which acquired land is given to ministers and other government friends, and flagging commitment to the welfare of the poor masses on the part of the new black elite ensconced within the government. For analyses of resettlement since Independence, see Alexander (1994); Bratton (1994); Cliffe (1988); Drinkwater (1989); Elliott (1991); Moyo (1986, 1996); Munslow (1985); Nkala (1996); Weiner (1988); Wekwete (1991); Zinyama (1991).
quality of socio-cultural information gathered for project use, while respecting the time and budget constraints of donor efforts. RRA was designed to be essentially ‘extractive’ in nature. Project staff were to get information, which they would then take away and plug into already designed (or at least conceived) projects. During the 1980s and 1990s, however, awareness grew among scholars and practitioners that greater recipient involvement than was built into RRA was needed in both project design and implementation. Greater focus on participants’ knowledge, needs, circumstances, and the necessary elements required for their ongoing participation in the project effort was needed. PRA, which emphasizes recipient control of problem definition and solution design, gained popularity as a means of improving project performance.

In academic research, using PRA rather than RRA means increasing the space for participants to express and control the knowledge being created. The researcher tries to limit the imposition of analytical categories in data collection, and consciously to evaluate the impact of the categories or organizing ideas that are inevitably imposed.8 These categories could be any major organizing ideas from definitions of ‘development’, to ideas about what causes ‘deforestation’, to an imported understanding of what constitutes gender relations.9 While academic research will remain essentially extractive in nature (that is, there is no project/action to follow), the PRA researcher looks for ways to promote positive change (empowerment) through the research process. Examples may include providing training and employment for local people by hiring local assistants; providing people with information that is difficult for them to access, such as names and addresses of donors or government departments; validating and respecting local knowledges and realities; and facilitating local dialogue on problems.

PRA is commonly understood as a group of methods and activities designed to promote information gathering and sharing in rural settings in developing countries. Since significant portions of rural populations are often illiterate, the use of survey questionnaires and other formal methods involving paper and pens that are controlled by the researchers, are thought to be alienating, and afford little opportunity for people to express ideas in

8. The effects of a researcher’s bias on knowledge generation is a whole topic in itself, which I do not attempt to address in this paper. See the introduction in Moore and Vaughan (1994), for a particularly useful discussion of the ‘interested’ nature of all information sources, including the lens of the researcher’s own faculties.

9. On a faulty definition of ‘deforestation’ in Zimbabwe, see discussion of the World Bank funded Rural Afforestation Project in post-Independence Zimbabwe in McGregor (1991) and Brigham (1994). This large project, which consisted primarily of the development of eucalyptus woodlots, was based on a misunderstanding of deforestation in rural Zimbabwe as a ‘fuelwood crisis’. Subsequent research has shown deforestation in rural Zimbabwe as largely a result of land clearance for cultivation. Rural people for the most part do not yet perceive a fuelwood shortage.
In their place, PRA emphasizes control and definition of information by villagers, visualization and use of local materials. Some common exercises can achieve all of these. For example, a group of villagers could be asked, in their own language, to draw a map of their village and surrounding area on the ground, using a stick to draw, and rocks, twigs, leaves and so on to mark features on the map. The object of the exercise is not to produce an ‘accurate’ map of the area, which could be compared to a topographical map from a government survey department. Rather, the value is in seeing what people draw, in what order, in what detail, and with what accompanying comments. If groups are divided by gender, the exercises can be compared. Differences may reflect the different values placed by men and women on different areas, resources, or social spaces. Women, for example, are often seen to draw houses first, sometimes with great care and with labels for each family, whereas men emphasize roads, fields and pastures (Fortmann, 1995). A visual product, the map, is easy for people to discuss, argue about, add to or change.

Another common activity is the drawing of different types of matrices. To use an example from my research, which focuses on natural resource use and management, particularly trees and their products: part of the research investigates the extent to which these resources are commodified, and if there is any selling of products, who controls and benefits from the income gained. Thus in one exercise, people were asked to name woodland products which they gather, either for domestic use or for sale. These products were listed on a large piece of chart paper. The different uses for each product were then listed in a second column. Finally, people were asked to compare the portion of the product that is consumed to that sold, by dividing ten stones between the two last columns. The chart can be any size depending on how many products are named, and the column for ‘uses’ can also be as large as necessary. Because the chart is not pre-drawn, but produced in the process, it attempts to maximize the freedom of people to contribute information. A sample matrix of a women’s group from one of the study villages is shown in Table 1.

Another common exercise used is ‘wealth ranking’. The object of the exercise is to determine indicators of wealth as defined by the villagers. Participants are asked to group the names according to their well-being or standard of living. The group is told neither how many groups to use, nor

---

10. These ‘long and dirty’ methods, as Chambers calls them, are also often irrelevant, not cost-efficient, are rarely analysed or published, or if they are, are available too late to be of any ‘applied’ benefit (Chambers, 1991: 516–8).
11. This also happened in my own research.
12. An alternative perspective held by experienced PRA trainer and researcher Bev Sithole of the University of Zimbabwe, is that PRA methods are, in fact, often time-consuming, awkward and difficult to explain. They require tremendous patience and expertise to achieve the desired quality of results.
which criteria with which to sort the names. When the names are sorted, the

group is asked to say why individuals were placed in the groups they were.

Each group is discussed in turn. Through this questioning, the indicators are

noted. The list of indicators is then put on a matrix, and the indicators are

ranked through a pairwise ranking method. In this method, each indicator is

compared with each of the others in turn, and the group is asked to say which

of each pair is more important as an indication of wealth or well-being. In the

end, a list of indicators in order of rank is produced, as are wealth categories.

Finally, each individual household has been placed by name into a wealth

category, which may be useful later, either in testing the wealth ranking itself,
or in providing information for selective sampling for interviews. The

advantage of this exercise is that the values are elicited from people them-

selves, rather than imposed by the researcher.

This discussion does not give a full account either of the activities

completed in my own research, or of the full spectrum of methods commonly
described as ‘PRA’.\textsuperscript{13} However, it does give a sense of the types of activities

referred to, their purpose, and the underlying methodological arguments for

their use.

\textbf{PART ONE: INTERPRETING THE ‘FINDINGS’. POWER AND PROCESS}

\textbf{Power Relations: Revealing and Concealing Processes in PRA}

Scholars of development are increasingly aware that attention to ‘indigenous

knowledge’, to ‘farmer first’, is not enough. Knowledge is embedded in

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Products, Uses and Commodification. Women from Village 3}
\begin{tabular}{llll}
\hline
Product & Uses & Consumed & Sold \\
\hline
Firewood & cooking, warming, making fire & 10 & 0 \\
Poles & gardens, kraals, matur\textsuperscript{a} fencing & 10 & 0 \\
Thatching grass & thatching house, compost, selling & 2 & 8 \\
Herbs (medicine) & treatment of: backache, diarrhoea, eye problems, headache; for luck, abortion; concoction to make husband enjoy sex & 3 & 7 \\
Vegetables (garden) & eating, selling & 2 & 8 \\
Fruits & eating & 5 & 5 \\
Fish & eating, selling & 8 & 2 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textit{Note:}
\textsuperscript{a} A structure built of poles and thatch to store unthreshed maize cobs out of reach of goats and cattle.

\textsuperscript{13} For longer lists and discussions of methods, see Chambers (1991, 1992); Cornwall et al.
(1994); McCracken et al. (1988); and the journal \textit{RRA Notes}. 

power relations. There is thus no one ‘indigenous’ or ‘local’ knowledge, but competing perspectives. Some dominate, while others are marginalized (Chambers, 1994: xiv–v; Cornwall et al., 1994: 109; Mosse, 1994; Scoones and Thompson, 1994: 2).

PRA can provide an opportunity to observe some power relations in action, as people interact during the exercises. In my work, for example, when general village meetings were being held, women constantly had to be invited and reinvited for their views, while men regained control each time a woman had spoken. In discussions, dominant voices can be listened for. Whose views hold more weight? What positions do they hold in the village or area? In gender segregated groups, men’s groups tended to be very argumentative, even to the point of nearly capsizing the exercise: each man wanted his own view on the chart. Women tended to be much more agreeable about a common view. Is this because women share similar views? Or is it because the rules of interaction for men and women are different? Whatever the answer to these questions, this type of public exercise gives the researcher a privileged opportunity to observe villagers interacting, and hence to gather information on social dynamics. This is especially true if the researcher is fluent in the local language; assistants can also be trained to take notes of major arguments and differing viewpoints.

Notwithstanding these positive aspects, PRA can work to hide local relations of power. Emphasis on group work, on consensus in data expression and presentation, is particularly prone to the silencing of marginal or ‘dissident’ views. Awareness of this has led some researchers to divide participants into groups, such as men and women, ‘elites’ and ‘commoners’ (Fortmann, 1995). However, a researcher may not know enough about a community to know what forms local power relations take. My initial view, based on previous research in the region, experience of living in rural Zimbabwe, and a review of secondary literature, was that women would tend to be silenced, and their views marginalized in mixed groups. Since I wanted to hear the views of both men and women, I divided groups by gender. Whilst later research revealed that I had not been mistaken in this initial view

14. ‘Consensus’, by definition, means an agreement manufactured through the relative persuasive power of individuals or factions in a group. This type of process can also distort information about practices that are not general. An example from my research involved the extent to which natural resources are commodified. PRA data indicated a much higher level of commodification than later data collected through individual interviews. The interviews revealed that not all people were involved in selling the products, nor even in consuming all of them. Hence, in the PRA process, when people were asked what proportion of a product was consumed and what proportion was sold, the ‘group’ responses reflected the answers for the members of the group that were active, not an overall average for the village.

15. In an innovative move, ‘social biologist’ Alois Mandondo of the Institute of Environmental Studies at the University of Zimbabwe, plans to use PRA at the end of his research process, rather than at the beginning.
of gender relations, it also threw up other important divisions or clusters of power. Totem or clan, wealth, relationship to the ruling party, and witchcraft, all emerged as important. These other relations of power were hidden (to me) in the PRA process. My own interests and knowledge base meant I investigated gender with more vigour than other power relations, and this article confines itself to a consideration of gendered relations of power.16

Investigating power relations and clusters is part of an effort to challenge the construction of rural communities as harmonious and homogeneous places. This construction, common in ‘community development’ literature and project efforts, has long been challenged by gender and development critiques, which point out the differential power and perspectives of men and women in communities. Marxist scholars have also done much to uncover the extent to which many rural populations are differentiated by wealth and access to resources. Yet Marxism and feminism have their own essentializing and exoticizing tendencies. Against these, some scholars adopting a ‘Third World’ perspective have uncovered other power differentials and complexities hitherto unimagined by western scholars.17 Recent work in Zimbabwe by local scholars has made a big contribution in this area.18 Using PRA may obscure, rather than reveal, many locally specific relations of power and differentiation.

Interpreting Differences in Perception: Gender Differences in the PRA Data

If groups are formed along various ‘fault lines’ of power, there remains the task of interpreting the different group perspectives that emerge. The general topic of my own PRA exercises was natural resources: their availability, use, commodification, and rules for use. Following the drawing of a resource map, whereon participants indicated major resource areas for their village, a product list was developed. The first gender difference occurred here: men and women mentioned different resource products. For all four villages in the study, for example, only women mentioned fish, and in three villages only

16. My interest in gender does not preclude looking at other power relations. I accept the arguments increasingly found in gender and development literature, that gender and ‘woman’ as categories need to be problematized, localized, and detached from dominant western notions of gender relations (see Gerrard, 1991; Kinnaird and Momsen, 1993; Mohanty, 1991; Ong, 1988; Parpart, 1993; Spivak, 1988). Nevertheless, if used critically, gender is a useful and powerful analytical tool that can reveal fundamental power divisions. It is also at times breath-taking that, despite overwhelming evidence regarding the centrality of gender in, for example, farming systems in Southern Africa, or natural resource use regimes, major books and articles on these topics often make virtually no mention of gender. See, for example, Lopes (1996). Clearly, focusing on gender remains a challenge to dominant views.


18. See, for example, Mandondo (1996); Matose (1994); Matose and Mukamuri (1994); Mukamuri (1995); Nabane (1994); Nhira and Fortmann (1993).
women mentioned herbal medicines. Meanwhile it was only men — in all
four villages — that mentioned bush vegetables.

The product lists were used to develop ‘seasonality diagrams’. Groups were
given twenty stones and asked to distribute them by month for each product
to represent the relative amount used or collected over the calendar year. Gender differences appeared for the four products common to all groups:
poles, thatching grass, wild fruits, and firewood, but were most extreme for
poles and thatch. Differences are illustrated in Tables 2 and 3.

Gender differences also emerged when groups were asked to identify the
resource areas or sources for the different products. Men and women across
the different villages all mentioned the same types of resource areas, except

Table 2. Seasonality Diagrams for Poles
(Per month, January–December. Women’s scores appear above the line in
each cell, men’s below the line.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poles</th>
<th>J</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>J</th>
<th>J</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Village 1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village 2a</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village 3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village 4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
a Men in Village 2 included fibre as part of poles.

Table 3. Seasonality Diagrams for Thatching Grass
(Per month, January–December. Women’s scores appear above the line in
each cell, men’s below the line.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thatching Grass</th>
<th>J</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>J</th>
<th>J</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Village 1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village 2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village 3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village 4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

women mentioned herbal medicines. Meanwhile it was only men — in all
four villages — that mentioned bush vegetables.
for ‘bush’, identified by men’s groups only, and ‘dams’, identified by women’s groups only. In this exercise, people were given twenty stones and asked to place them for each product according to the relative amounts obtained from the different resources areas. Taking the example of firewood, Table 4 shows the gender differences in source areas for each village.

Table 4 shows that most of the same sources for firewood are mentioned both by the different villages and the two genders, but that the proportions are different. For example, Village 2 relies less on small hills (kopjes) and more heavily on fields; Village 4 relies less on fields and heavily on kopjes. In Village 1 there is almost no difference in perception between the men and the women; for Village 2, women emphasize fields much more, while men spread more out into other areas such as plantations, bush and wetlands. In Villages 3 and 4, women stress grazing or fields more heavily, whereas men’s scores are concentrated in the bush area. In three of the four villages, women perceive a greater reliance on fields as a source for firewood. When all products and areas are considered, there are slight differences in the relative importance of resource areas to men and women. The most important difference is in the relative significance of bush as an area where men gather high proportions of many products, and as an area where women do not venture at all.

Gender differences appeared again in an exercise that asked people to list the different uses for natural resource products. Table 5 illustrates this for Village 3 in the study. The interesting gender difference here is in the greater detail given for uses of different products by either of the two groups. Men say more about different uses for poles and thatch, while women give more detail for medicines. When asked what proportion of products was consumed
domestically, and what proportion sold, gender differences showed up again. Table 6 shows the proportion sold as given for all villages and groups. In Table 6, major gender differences appear for all of the products listed, the largest gaps appearing for thatching and herbs.

### Analysis

The PRA data indicate that significant differences of perception over natural resources and their use exist between women and men in the area. These differences are difficult to analyse without looking beyond the PRA exercises. In the course of my research, my investigations took various other forms. There were seven interview schedules, designed for individual interviews with

---

**Table 5. The Uses of Products, Village 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Uses (women)</th>
<th>Uses (men)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Firewood</td>
<td>cooking, warming, making fires</td>
<td>cooking, brick-making, selling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poles</td>
<td>gardens, cattle pens, <em>matara</em>, fencing</td>
<td>houses, fowl runs, cattle pens, granaries, selling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thatching Grass</td>
<td>thatching house, compost, selling</td>
<td>thatching, brooms, mats, compost, hay, selling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbs (Medicine)</td>
<td>backache, diarrhoea, <em>mupfulhvira</em> (husband taming), eyes, headache, abortion, luck, potion to make husband enjoy sex</td>
<td>curing, selling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6. The Commodification of Natural Resources by Village and Gender Data for four Villages on Proportions Sold**

(For proportions sold, women’s scores appear above the line in each cell, men’s below the line.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Village 1</th>
<th>Village 2</th>
<th>Village 3</th>
<th>Village 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Firewood</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poles</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thatching grass</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbs (medicine)</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruits&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
<sup>a</sup> Partial data only; missing groups did not give a score for these products.
villagers; most of these included questions related to gender such as divisions of labour and gender relations in the household, natural resource use, major agricultural activities, and income and expenditure and decisions connected to these. Questions were asked about women’s groups, inheritance, widowhood and succession to land, and divorce. Leaders of local women’s groups, such as a recently formed chapter of Women’s Action Group, were interviewed, as were local officials such as the Agritex worker and the Resettlement Officer; some of these issues were also raised with them. Field-based assistants keep diaries on local scandals and conflicts, which often involved husband–wife relationships. Local friends talked to me about marriage, divorce and family relationships. Personal observations included such incidents as witnessing the ‘healing’ of a ‘possessed’ teenage girl, and then hearing people comment that she was probably pregnant and the ‘possession’ was a result of the stress; watching a married mother coping with the illness and eventual death of her husband from AIDS; seeing a pregnant mother sleeping outside, chased away by her husband, whose parents had convinced him that she was the victim of witchcraft.

Emerging from these experiences is a picture of the study site as an area where a strictly gendered division of labour, gendered expenditure responsibilities, gendered income possibilities, gendered mobility patterns, and elements of marital tension and mistrust, are well-entrenched. These social patterns affect and reflect, to a certain extent, people’s relationships to natural resources. Men and women live in somewhat different ‘resource worlds’. For example, the fact that ‘bush’ was mentioned as a resource only by men (Table 4), reflects a gendered mobility pattern. Women’s close relationship to the homestead, their domestic duties of cooking and childcare, their dominant roles in the fields (where women do most of the weeding and harvesting, and even some of the ploughing), and their responsibility with market gardens, preclude women from wandering farther afield. By contrast, the involvement of men and boys with cattle herding and hunting, takes them into these ‘bush’ areas.

Differences in the Seasonality Diagrams (Tables 2 and 3) and Uses Matrices (Table 5), reflect the fact that men and women collect things separately, and sometimes use them for different purposes. For example, women dominate in collecting thatching, but then use it mostly for sale, whereas men use collected thatch to perform domestic building tasks. Some products are predominantly used and collected by only one gender: poles are largely the domain of men, while herbs are much more frequently known, gathered, administered and sold by women. For firewood, while men and older boys might be involved in transporting heavy loads by scotchcart, the gathering of firewood is still perceived as women’s work.19 This could mean

19. This was also found in the only other major study of wood products in Resettlement areas in Zimbabwe (Elliott, 1994: 26).
that if and when fuelwood becomes scarce in the area, women will be differentially affected by longer walks, which may in turn decrease their time and energy to cook nutritious food in the home (Chimedza, 1989). Divisions of labour are also reflected in differences in perception of the commodification of resources (Table 6): men and women are involved in the sale of different natural resource products. In all cases of gendered perception differences, the divisions of labour could mean that one group reports inaccurately on activities that are dominated by the other gender. In any event, the first major finding is that gendered divisions of labour figure strongly in resource use. This concurs with other writing that considers gender in the social forest in Zimbabwe (Fortmann and Nabane, 1992; Matose, 1994).

My data also support the contention that women’s access to natural resources is mediated through their relationship with men. Women in the resettlement site gain access to resettlement land primarily through marriage. Only the husband’s name appears on the permits, and hence upon divorce or widowhood, women have no legal right to remain in the resettlement. None the less, the dominant trend has been that widows do maintain occupancy of the land; a widow’s right to the homestead, fields and gardens is also extended to any trees planted in the homestead. In the case of divorce, however, a woman leaves the area, and with this move, loses access to tree products and other natural resources such as thatching grass, fish, wild fruit or herbs. This may be one reason why paying for tree seedlings to plant is predominantly constructed as male, and the authority over fruit trees planted in the homestead is said to belong to the father in the majority of cases.

**Gender in Commodification of Resources**

The findings from my study do not support the idea that men are more likely than women to have a commercial relationship with natural resources (Fortmann and Nabane, 1992). In the study site, both women and men are involved in selling natural resource products. It is almost exclusively women who sell thatching grass and herbs, while both women and men sell fish and wild vegetables. It is usually children who sell wild or exotic fruits, for example to fellow schoolchildren; men are the ones who sell poles and fibre, although these are rare activities. Men and boys are mainly involved in selling firewood to teachers, local businessmen or people in Communal Areas. Moreover, it is sometimes the case that women’s relationship to a particular resource is commercial, while men’s relationship to the same product is domestic: this is the case with thatching grass. Hence, it is not true to say that women’s relationship to natural resources is qualitatively different from men’s in terms of being less commercial and more subsistence based. Increased commodification of natural resources, therefore, may not mean a loss of access or control of resources for women.
There seems to be nothing essential about how women relate to natural resources in this resettlement site. The fact that this finding differs from other work in Communal Areas, may be related to the differing nature of prevailing gender relations in general in the study area. Women have other well-established and respected sources of income, such as market gardens and some ‘women’s crops’ such as groundnuts. These afford women control over a certain amount of income; although this is much less than that controlled by men, the fact that women’s sources of income are respected may explain why they also have a commercial relationship to some natural resource products. This relationship also throws doubt on the idea that increased commodification of natural resources will decrease the benefit derived from these products in the household, and by women and children specifically, as Chimedza (1989) suggests. This is not only because women control part of the commodification process, and hence the benefits are more likely to be used for household subsistence needs, but also because there is a greater tendency for men in this resettlement site, as compared to men in Communal Areas, to contribute income and labour to the household rather than using it for own consumption. The effects of commodification of resources on gendered access and control and the subsistence needs of the household must therefore be located within an analysis of the specific context of gender relations. It cannot be assumed that commodification will automatically mean loss of access for women, or negative effects on children’s nutrition.

The last point to be made on commodification is to note the relatively small role which the sale of natural resource products plays in the generation of income for either men or women. Crop production and livestock rearing are the main livelihood strategies for households in resettlement, and natural resources are largely ‘free’ goods used for domestic consumption. While some researchers attempt to put monetary values on domestically consumed natural resource products, people themselves perceive these products as secondary to their main sources of livelihood.

This discussion of gender relations is significant to the issues of natural resource use and the PRA data in two main ways. First, it is important to discourage an ‘equal but different’ approach to the gendered division of labour. Using gender segregated groups in PRA can reveal the importance of investigating the gendered division of labour, but only extensive inquiry into how this division of labour is embedded in unequal power relations will complete the picture of men and women’s relationship to resources. Gendered divisions of labour are entrenched in a system of gendered power relations that shape local social and economic systems. Hence, it is

20. This is not a point that can be generalized to all resettlement schemes. The formation of gender relations is dependent on many factors including the local culture concerning polygyny, the main types of cash crops, and the views of the local Resettlement Officer (see Chenaux-Repond, 1993; Jacobs, 1991).

21. See, for example, Campbell et al. (1991).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource or Area</th>
<th>Rules</th>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Enforcement/Compliance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Firewood</td>
<td>— don’t cut mobola plum tree (Shona <em>muhacha</em>)</td>
<td>— spirit mediums</td>
<td>— sometimes followed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbs</td>
<td>— first give praise to your ancestral spirits before you take the medicine</td>
<td>— spirit mediums</td>
<td>— praise to ancestors strictly followed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— fill in holes you dig</td>
<td>— other rules not strictly followed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— don’t cut tree, just use roots</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— test medicine before you give it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild fruits</td>
<td>— don’t cut fruit trees</td>
<td>— Chief</td>
<td>— sometimes followed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— don’t take unripe fruit</td>
<td>— spirit mediums</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— don’t sell wild fruits</td>
<td>(supported by NRB, VIDCO, Village Chairman)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— don’t throw stones at trees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— don’t scratch on trees (dries them out)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— don’t eat fruit from trees struck by lightning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— don’t make silly comments in places where you get fruits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fields</td>
<td><em>chisi</em>:<em>²²</em></td>
<td>— Chief</td>
<td>— rules mostly followed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— don’t work on Fridays</td>
<td>— spirit mediums</td>
<td>— pay a goat to the Chief for violation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— don’t work on Tuesdays and Fridays</td>
<td>— elders</td>
<td>— rules followed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kopjes/Wedza Mountain</td>
<td>— don’t chop down trees</td>
<td>— Chief</td>
<td>— pay goat to the Chief for violation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— don’t throw stones</td>
<td>— spirit mediums</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— don’t comment on anything or you won’t return</td>
<td>— elders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— don’t burn grass</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— don’t remove stones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— don’t kill snakes (pythons)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— don’t destroy the ruins or those things built by long ago people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— no washing in wells (mountain)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— don’t touch anything (e.g. things found lying around, pots, etc.) as you may go mad or have bad luck</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— no Christian praying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— no lovemaking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— don’t remove skulls of dead as some belong to the spirits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rivers/dams</td>
<td>— when a person is taken by a mermaid you should not cry because he will be killed</td>
<td>— Chief</td>
<td>— rules not thoroughly followed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— don’t use toilet soap (perfumed soap) or black tins, or you may disappear</td>
<td>— spirit mediums</td>
<td>— pay livestock or money to the Chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— in some pools no bathing or swimming as there are mermaids</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>— don’t make silly comments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

²². This practice is discussed below in the section on traditional practices.
important to know that women’s access to natural resources is mediated through their relationship to men.

Secondly, the broader picture of the socio-economy of households shows that while natural resources are important to household livelihoods, they provide only a small part of the major survival activities in resettlement, and only a tiny part of the cash economy. Topic-specific PRA exercises do not provide enough space to gather adequate contextual information. Specific topics of research must always be inserted in the wider socio-economic context.

PART TWO: WHAT IS ‘INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE’?

In this section, we shift our focus from the fact that groups of people with differential power, such as men and women, have different views of the social world, and turn instead to consider how an apparently generally accepted piece of the social world, as gathered through PRA, can turn out to be a doorway to a complex web of contradictions, competing ideologies and practices. To do this, we will look at the example of what people involved in the PRA exercises called the ‘traditional rules’ in natural resource use. These rules were consistently named in all villages and gender groups: Table 7 provides a list of rules compiled from all villages and groups in the study.

For those interested in ‘indigenous knowledge’ and subverting the hierarchy of the academic expert as ‘knower’, investigating ‘traditional rules’ is a perfect topic. Here is a chance to pursue what has been ignored or suppressed over the decades of colonial imposition and the intervention of foreign ‘expertise’. In the case of the social forest in Zimbabwe, some scholars have begun the task of drawing out ‘traditional practices’.23 However, in the excited rush to ‘give voice’ to the silenced peasant, it is important to realize that the way in which ‘traditional rules and practices’ are implicated in the dynamic social world is far from transparent.

To start with, while some ‘traditional’ practices may have beneficial ecological consequences, it would be dangerous to essentialize ‘indigenous knowledge’ and ‘traditional practices’ as some timeless environmental wisdom. Practices have been and are contested and embedded in struggles with colonial impositions and local politics. Historically, communities have often used claims to ‘sacred’ sites as part of a strategy to hold onto land encroached upon by whites. People in African ‘Reserves’ next to white commercial land would often tell the owner of certain sacred trees, groves or burial sites to which they must maintain access. The same is true in current

23. See Bruce et al. (1993); Matose (1994); Matose and Mukamuri (1994); Nhira (1995); Nhira and Fortmann (1993); and Wilson, 1989.
struggles over entitlement to resources in Resettlement Areas. In my study site, settlers described how, on arrival, they found that people from a neighbouring Communal Area village had already begun ploughing and protecting some trees ‘that belonged to them’ in the Resettlement, including a special tree for their rainmaking ceremonies. ‘Traditional’ or ‘sacred’ rules can also lend legitimacy to the control of scarce resources by traditional leaders, hence reflecting power relations and hierarchies within communities (Mukamuri, 1995; Nhira and Fortmann, 1993).

In investigating ‘traditional’ practices, therefore, it is important to locate these within their changing historical contexts, contested belief systems, local power dynamics and struggles over the control of resources. Furthermore, ‘indigenous knowledge’ or ‘traditional practices’ should not be constructed as part of a dichotomy, with ‘western ideas’ as the other half. It is more useful to investigate the outcome of the interaction of the ‘western’ and the ‘indigenous’ (Berry, 1989: 3–4). Further, the ‘western’ includes not only the ‘modern scientific’, but also the Christian. ‘Indigenous practices’ in Zimbabwe have been transformed under these pressures for over a century, with some aspects being resisted and others accepted.\(^24\) Hence there is very little called ‘indigenous’ that does not have something ‘western’ implicated in it. Rather than trying to locate the ‘truly indigenous’ or ‘really traditional’ practices and beliefs in the study site, therefore, I have instead used people’s own categorization to define what is considered to be linked to ‘tradition’, and how they see this ‘tradition’ as being threatened by Christianity, ‘modern ways’ and, more generally, the social–cultural change brought by the resettlement process itself.

Shona ‘Tradition’ in Natural Resource Use

A central plank of the Shona traditional belief system is the power of ancestors to bring or withhold rain. Ancestors must therefore be appeased and special rainmaking and other supplication ceremonies performed, or drought may ensue.\(^25\) The link between ancestors and rain is part of a larger social system that includes other aspects of ecological management through religion. Known as territorial cults, these systems, common to central Africa,

---

\(^24\) There is a tendency in some of the literature on ‘indigenous knowledge’ to imply that people always resist the imposition of ‘modern’ practices, and that this resistance is inherently to be championed and honoured. But not all ‘modern’ ideas are innately ‘bad’, just as ‘traditional practices’ are not necessarily imbued with timeless environmental wisdom. Contexts change; no one would argue, for example, that the ‘traditional’ agricultural method of shifting slash and burn is sustainable in the current Zimbabwean context, of much increased population and land use changes. I am less interested in placing comparative values on something called ‘modern’ versus something called ‘indigenous’, than in investigating the threads that make up the weave of how people relate to the social forest.

\(^25\) For ethnography of Shona culture see Bourdillon (1987).
link climatic and ecological processes to social cohesion and morality: ‘serious abuses in a community lead to ecological disaster which in turn threatens the life of the community’ (Schoffeleers, 1979: 5). Traditional belief systems emphasize interconnectedness and respect for nature:

The Europeans think the human mission is to conquer nature. The African mission was the opposite. We did conquer nature, but in a small way which didn’t injure it as we are doing now . . . Most of our proverbs have to do with animals, with birds, and trees. After all, what do we talk about? We talk about our environment, and what experience have we got without environment, without natural resources. (Mike Matsosha Hove, quoted in Hove and Trojanow, 1996: 53–4) 

Clearing the land for cultivation did not mean destroying forests. Huge trees had to be left alone. Herbs, shade, place of rest when a traveller is tired, all is provided by our vegetation. Every tree has a part to play in the life of human beings. (Sub-Chief Kadere, quoted in Hove and Trojanow, 1996: 102)

Besides the important link between human behaviour, ancestors and drought, Shona tradition holds other beliefs and practices relating to ‘natural resource management’. Wild fruit trees are not supposed to be cut, nor the fruit sold, and certain fruit trees may require special practices in order to be used. Sacred shrines, mountains, groves, wetlands and pools all figure in Shona tradition as places that must be approached in certain ways, being homes or resting places for ancestors. Tree cutting is often banned along with disrespectful behaviour in such places, linking ecological management with religious observance (Nhira and Fortmann, 1993).

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Christian missionaries contributed to the erosion of many belief systems. In Rhodesia, however, the missionary approach favoured coexistence with rather than eradication of traditional beliefs. Prayers for rain entered churches, and people were not prevented from flocking to traditional shrines in times of trouble (Schoffeleers, 1979: 37–9). Colonial states were even less opposed to territorial cults, and except for specific cases such as ritual murder, tended to leave them alone. Far more important to the weakening of the traditional systems were the alienation of land, the bureaucratization of the chiefs, and imposition of ‘rationalist’ conservation and farming practices (Schoffeleers, 1979: 36).

Despite these pressures, many ‘traditional’ practices in woodland and other natural resource management persist in present-day Zimbabwe, including in the resettlement study site of this research (see Table 7 above). In order to investigate the place of these ‘traditions’ in the current dynamic social

26. In this work, Guardians of the Soil, Hove and Trojanow interview eleven elders from across Zimbabwe on the soil, on history and on the problems of the present day leadership.
27. These pressures, particularly as embodied by the Native Land Husbandry Act (1951) and the policies and practices of the Forest Office in colonial times, are an important topic in themselves, too broad to be discussed at length here.
world, the rest of this section focuses on two main social dynamics: the effect of Christianity as a competing religious ideology; and the nature of settlement patterns in resettlement, which militates against the formation of the traditional institutions which underlie traditional rules and practices.

**Effects of a Competing Cosmology: Christianity in Resettlement**

Using competing analyses of drought reveals ideological and spiritual complexities among people in the resettlement. The following is a selection of responses to the question, ‘What do you think are main causes of drought?’:

‘I think people are not appeasing their ancestral spirits.’
‘People are no longer doing the rain ceremonies because most of them are Christians.’
‘People are now wicked, they are now too religious being Christians and abandoning their tradition.’
‘People are now wicked; they do abortion and have dangerous medicine to become rich. God is now angry.’

People in the study site overwhelmingly feel that although 1995/6 was a good rainy season, the occurrence of drought overall is becoming more frequent. One of the leading reasons given for this, and for the causes of drought more generally, is the failure of the people to perform the appropriate traditional ceremonies. Nevertheless, most people claimed to be Christians: at this level, it is difficult to understand why there is so much conflict about tradition if most people are Christian. Clearly, a meaningful analysis requires more than a simple dichotomy of Christianity versus traditionalism. The type of Christianity has an effect on people’s attitude to traditional religion. While the older denominations have historically tolerated and even encouraged aspects of traditional belief, many of the new churches, such as branches of the Seventh Day Adventist and Apostolic Faith, distinguish themselves by banning ancestral appeasement and other ceremonies. In the sample interviewed, about half said they believed only in Jesus and not ancestral spirits, while the other half said they believed in both or only in the ancestors. To make the situation even more complex, the people who say categorically that they believe only in Jesus and not in the ancestors may respond to other questions in the interview as if they do believe in the ancestors. For example, when asked about the causes of drought, these people might say it is because people have abandoned their tradition, and are not performing rain ceremonies or appeasing the spirits of the dead.

These overlapping and contradictory positions indicate that cultural life in the resettlement is in a state of flux. While many people are committed Christians, and the resettlement villages have not consistently practised traditional ceremonies such as rainmaking, they have not abandoned traditional analyses of drought. Furthermore, in many cases, the analyses coming out of the ‘new’ churches are transformations of traditional belief. As
outlined above, traditional Shona culture links social and moral behaviour to climatic conditions. In the study sample, while nearly half the sample said the main cause of drought was not practising traditional rules, many people mentioned social crimes such as abortion, incest, murder, baby dumping or witchcraft, or the more general observation that ‘God knows’ or ‘God is angry’. The consistency is the linking of people’s behaviours to the larger climatic forces that bring about drought.

The argument here, then, is that the alternative cosmology offered particularly by the ‘new’ Christian churches contributes to the erosion of traditional practices. When asked if they thought that people follow tradition less than people in the Communal Areas, more than half of the sample said yes, while about a third said the situation was about the same in both places. For those who said tradition was followed less in resettlement, the second most important reason stated was because people in the resettlement are more Christian.

Traditional Institutions: Lineage and Leadership

In Communal Areas, people settle in villages according to their lineages, and traditional ceremonies are conducted according to lineage membership. At the village level, a headman or kraalhead is named, who has some blood connection to the overall leader of the area, the Chief. Spirit mediums — people who can be possessed by ancestral spirits, and often have knowledge of herbal remedies — are also figures of importance in traditional custom. Mediums may or may not be members of the chiefly lineage of the area.²⁸ The headman and the Chief are responsible for traditional ceremonies, and advise on land allocation. Spirit mediums are often the ones to voice ‘traditional rules’ about resource use and management, and proper behaviour in sacred places.

In resettlement, people are not settled according to lineage, but come from many different villages and lineage groups. In the study site, while most people come from the district, there is great diversity in their original home villages. In each of the four study villages, most people come from villages not mentioned by other respondents. This fact of people coming from many different villages is the main reason given for the view that people in the resettlement areas follow tradition less than those in the Communal Areas.

In resettlement, state institutions do not compete with pre-existent traditional institutions as has happened in Communal Areas, but stand as the only local institutions. A Resettlement Officer (RO) is the ultimate local authority over all the villages in the resettlement. While people mention the Chief as the authority in certain traditional rules (see Table 7), the Chief has

²⁸ See Bourdillon (1987) for a detailed discussion of spirit mediums in various Shona groups.
no official role. At the village level, a Village Chairman is elected by democratic vote, and can be deposed if his performance is unsatisfactory. The job of the Chairman is to channel grievances or issues from the settlers to the Resettlement Officer, and to take information back to the settlers from the RO. In addition to this, there is the VIDCO structure (Village Development Committees). Based on socialist ideology of the early post-Independence government, VIDCOs were meant to stimulate grassroots self-help development in the rural areas by developing a local level ruling party presence and machinery. A VIDCO is formed by a committee of six members, one of whom is the VIDCO Chairman, with two members from each of three villages. Six VIDCOs make up a Ward, and a WADCO is made up of a Ward Chairman, or ‘Councillor’, plus VIDCO Chairmen from the six VIDCOs. VIDCOs are meant to assist the Village Chairman (who is not a VIDCO member) in his administration of the villages according to resettlement rules. This includes monitoring resource use and management.

In Communal Areas, the imposition of VIDCOs was a source of conflict with traditional leaders, who felt that their powers were being infringed. One of the key recommendations of the Land Tenure Commission of 1994 was the dissolution of VIDCOs on the grounds that they impeded traditional leadership structures in Communal Areas (Rukuni, 1994). In resettlement, the dynamic is different. When asked about their traditional leader, settlers name the leader from their original village, explaining that they have failed to name a village headman in the resettlement village. Since most of their original leaders stayed behind in the Communal Areas, there are no pre-existing traditional leadership structures at the village level with which VIDCOs can conflict.

In terms of resource management, traditional leaders appear to be virtually powerless in the resettlement, although many people feel they ‘should’ be involved. The dominant view is that traditional leaders are not effective in creating traditional rule adherence in the resettlement. People mention a variety of reasons for this, the most common being that ‘people are stubborn’ — that is, they refuse because they do not feel like complying. Other reasons mentioned are that people are Christians, or that people are ‘modern’, taking tradition to be ‘old-fashioned’; that the traditional leaders are lazy and never visit the resettlement; and that the VIDCOs have replaced their function. Hence in the resettlement context, there is a space left by traditional leadership into which the VIDCO and the Village Chairman step.

29. See Higgins and Mazula (1993) for a general discussion of the ideology, purpose and structure of the VIDCO system. These authors sketch an attractive portrait of the VIDCO system as a means to decentralize the political structure and promote equity, empowerment and economic development. My own work suggests that a critical perspective is important in examining how this structure acts as a means to ensure centralized party control rather than decentralized political power. See also Alexander (1994).
However, the legitimacy of these bodies derives from a very different source from that of the traditional leadership, and they do not necessarily uphold traditional rules in resource management. Rather, their mandate is to enforce the state rules of the Natural Resources Board.\textsuperscript{30}

As a result of the weakness of traditional institutions in resettlement, many ‘traditional’ practices are not seriously followed. These include the keeping of \textit{chisi}, or days off ploughing which are an important mark of respect to the ancestors, and the naming and respecting of sacred woodlands, groves, wetlands and pools. People are vague about sacred areas, although there is some indication that the ruling lineage of the nearby Communal Area is making some inroads in establishing sacred sites in the resettlement, inhabited by their ancestors. In general, the settlers know little about the original ancestral spirits of the area, the appeasement of whom forms a key aspect of traditional Shona religion. The lack of general underpinnings for traditional religion helps to explain the overall lack of compliance in the keeping of ‘traditional’ rules specific to natural resource use (see last column in Table 7).

The social upheaval and institutional characteristics of resettlement have also provided an environment conducive to the acceptance of modern ideas and practices, which are imposed with some force by the state in resettlement areas.\textsuperscript{31} Resettlement is nothing if not a ‘modern development project’ of the state, designed in part to redress past land injustice, but also to promote successful ‘modern’ small-scale farming among the African peasantry. Within this victory for modernity can be read the success of state power to ‘discipline’ the bodies and minds of settlers (Foucault, 1979). As such, settler compliance becomes an aspect of state power, rather than merely its effect. Settlers are not only ‘oppressed’ by the state-imposed rules and practices of modern farming in conservation, but they internalize the values, and become a part of the power/knowledge nexus of modern developmentalism. Individuals have become ‘criss-crossed by power relations and governed by self-monitoring technology’ (Dubois, 1991: 21).\textsuperscript{32} People have accepted the ‘experts’, here particularly in the form of Agritex, the extension body of the Department of Agriculture, as part of the natural order of things, and their analysis is virtually uncontested. This can be seen in convergent views of settlers and Agritex on things like soil erosion, the relationship between

\textsuperscript{30} There is no space here to go into these rules, or the history of the Natural Resources Board (NRB). It is enough to say that the NRB is part of the legacy of the colonial state, operating with western conservationist values. While the post-Independence NRB relies more on persuasion and education than its colonial predecessor, which favoured punitive policies against rule breakers, the analysis of environmental management remains largely the same.

\textsuperscript{31} Non-compliance with ‘modern’ farming practices as demonstrated by the local Agritex workers, for example, constitutes a basis for revoking of resettlement permits.

\textsuperscript{32} I am indebted to Dubois’s application of Foucault’s concept of power to developmentalism in my analysis here.
deforestation and drought, and the uses of contour ridging.\textsuperscript{33} In this context, ‘traditional’ or ‘indigenous’ forms of knowledge hold decreasing currency, and make decreasing sense. This is not to say that all state rules and all aspects of modern thinking are whole-heartedly accepted.\textsuperscript{34} However, the particular context of resettlement, wherein so many aspects of people’s cultural life have been disrupted and the presence of the state and modern rules and values is so strong, is a context conducive to widespread absorption of modern, ‘expert-driven’ ideas of ‘development’, farming practices and conservation.

CONCLUSIONS

For academic research, PRA methodologies have the potential to meet several positive research goals. PRA exercises create an opportunity for the researcher to observe some sets of power relations in the village; leaders or influential individuals can be identified; gender relations can also be observed. On the other hand, the public nature of PRA and the emphasis on group work can also hide power relations, and give a false sense of homogeneity in the group. Marginal or unpopular views can be suppressed. To counteract this, different perspectives may be produced by dividing participants into groups. This does provide a challenge to the notion of rural communities as harmonious places, containing something monolithic called ‘indigenous knowledge’. However, these differing perspectives cannot be usefully interpreted unless further research is done exploring the power relations in which these different views are embedded.

Further, seemingly uncontested data is often implicated in complex ways in broader historical, social and cultural dynamics. Information gathered in PRA is rarely transparent, but can be used as a set of clues and beginnings to guide further investigations. This article explored this possibility, using the example of ‘traditional’ rules of resource use named in PRA exercises. It was shown that while people mainly agreed about the nature of such rules, the way

\textsuperscript{33} This is especially interesting given the fascinating piece of local history by Wilson (1995). Wilson documents some profound gaps between older local people’s analyses of the causes of aspects of environmental degradation and the ‘modern/western’ analysis, in a semi-arid location in southern Zimbabwe. On the siltation of rivers, for example, local elders insist that it is not streambank cultivation that is the culprit, as NRB and Agritex assert, but effects of centralization, dating back to the 1920s, which reorganized land use in African areas. Centralization demarcated arable lands on high areas, hence denuding them of vegetation, and soil was able to slip down to the rivers. Originally, people had farmed in the low areas by rivers, and maintained vegetation in the high areas, effectively protecting the soils from erosion. No such profound gaps of environmental analysis exist in my resettlement study site.

\textsuperscript{34} The case of persistent sub-division of land in resettlement, despite state rules, is a case in point.
in which they fit into the overall social scene is complex. For project-driven research, the evidence from this analysis should make it clear that PRA, especially in a truncated form, should never be made to stand as the ‘social element’ of a project cycle. It might also be wise to keep a critical eye on the creation of ‘PRA Experts’ in academia, as they could be used to legitimate the sidelining of more in-depth social research in processes of planned change.

Acknowledgements

This paper is based on part of the fieldwork undertaken by the author in 1995–6 for her thesis on the social forest and developmentalism in a Zimbabwean Resettlement Area. The author would like to acknowledge the International Development Research Centre of Canada (IDRC) for support through the Value of Trees Project, and the Young Canadian Researchers Award. The research was also supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), and the University of Alberta. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1996 Learned Societies Conference held at Brock University, for the Canadian Association for Studies in International Development (CASID), 2 June 1996, and has been published in the Centre For Applied Social Science (CASS) working paper series at the University of Zimbabwe, and the working paper series in Rural Economy at the University of Alberta. Thanks are due to Marc Epprecht, James Murombedzi and Donald Moore for their useful editorial comments, and to the anonymous referees of Development and Change whose comments spurred the author to make extensive revisions to the original paper.

REFERENCES


Allison Goebel (Institute for Environmental Studies, University of Zimbabwe, PO Box MP 167, Mount Pleasant, Harare, Zimbabwe) has a PhD in Sociology from the University of Alberta, Canada. Her interests lie in gender, environmentalism, social forestry and methodologies in development issues in Southern Africa. She currently lives in Harare, Zimbabwe, where she undertakes consultative work.