



## Whose Reality Counts?: Putting the First Last

*Robert Chambers*

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In this sequel to *Rural Development: Putting the last first* Robert Chambers argues that central issues in development have been overlooked, and that many past errors have flowed from domination by those with power. Development professionals now need new approaches and methods for interacting, learning and knowing. Through analysing experience - of past mistakes and myths, and of the continuing methodological revolution of PRA (participatory rural appraisal) - the author points towards solutions. In many countries, urban and rural people alike have shown an astonishing ability to express and analyse their local, complex and diverse realities which are often at odds with the top-down realities imposed by professionals. The author argues that personal, professional and institutional change is essential if the realities of the poor are to receive greater recognition. Self-critical awareness and changes in concepts, values, methods and behaviour must be developed to explore the new high ground of participation and empowerment. *Whose Reality Counts?* presents a radical challenge to all concerned with development, whether practitioners, researchers or policy-makers, in all organizations and disciplines, and at all levels from fieldworkers to the heads of agencies. With its thrust of putting the first last it presents a new, exciting and above all practical agenda for future development which cannot be ignored. BAI Catalogue: The methods and approaches of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) comprise the core of this book. But PRA has evolved and spread in many directions and into many areas. The author argues that PRA has come to affect much development practice, professionalism, research, education, training, management and many institutions. The PRA experience has led into wider questions about development and about the human condition. It has pointed towards a gap in the writing about development - the lack of analysis of how error, professionalism, power and personal interaction interlink - a gap which the author tries to fill with this book. The argument runs that reflective and self-critical PRA practitioners are evolving a philosophy and behaviour which seem to promise better performance. This new approach combined with other trends are part of a deep shift in ways of thinking, seeing, acting and being in the world. So the book is about more than PRA and more than just development. The author contends that, as a term, participatory rural appraisal no longer describes what is happening. Participatory fits but rural is wrong because of innumerable applications in urban areas, organisations, adult literacy, policy and so on; and appraisal implies only finding out and assessment, when many want PRA to describe a much longer process. PRA has become fashionable but the author contends that bad practice is widespread and asks whether PRA can be self-improving as it spreads. This is a thought-provoking book and it would interest all those concerned with the realities of the poor in the developing world.

## Whose Reality Counts?: Putting the First Last Details

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## From Reader Review Whose Reality Counts?: Putting the First Last for online ebook

### Emilie says

When I first was assigned this book a little over a year ago I found it revolutionary good. I was like "wow!" and it helped my view towards future-planned field work. But, I never had time to finish it during the course (since not the whole book was required). I've now taken care of that...

... And the magic feeling is gone. Since that course there is no measure on how much I have grown as a person and I have found my for this time real true passion in developing work: International health. Want me to be even more specific? Epidemiology. Neglected Tropical Diseases. Dracunculiasis (dont google that if you are sensitive). I can go on.

I felt this book was like old news. And sooo repetitive. I got his message after about twenty pages and then it all went on and on and on basically about the same thing. Plus I found the language a little well... disappointing. Dont get me wrong, I loved his colloquial tone and easy way of putting things, but the way he kept using "them"... "them"... "them"... "them"... and "uppers" and "lowers", I get it it is so superdamn hard (especially when the book is relatively old) to come with a good term for people but after a while it just got too much. Like the Justin Bieber song I keep getting annoyed at (note: my sister is a fan, yes I hear his music all the time because of it". He sings "All around the world, they're no different than us" and I keep on thinking "You just established there's a "they" and an "us". Why don't you just sing "there's no difference in us" or something. But oh well. Just had to get that of my chest it's been bugging me for quite a while now.

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### Fany Wedahuditama says

Start to change how you think.. Understand the field.. The realities.. Don't just imagine what is going on. Great book..

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### Tinea says

Robert Chambers is one of my favorite thinkers, the Wendell Berry of international development. He is a slow-thought listener, a feminist anti-colonial centerer of marginalized and poor and vulnerable people, an uplifter of quiet voices in the back of the room. He tinkers with facilitation and methodology to find ways to bring diverse people to engage with diverse ideas.

I gave my dog-eared and underlined copy away to people I hope will read and pass it on. Unfortunately that means I don't have it with me to quote and summarize, some year-plus since I read it. In this book, Chambers tries to summarize the main principles of a few decades of participatory methodologies for community and agriculture research and action. I remember this as a big book, that had me shouting yes! and scribbling yes! in margins: this, this, this. I'll have to find it and read it again, write out the principles for reference this time.

I read this at just the right moment of life. I found Paolo Freire when I was writing workshop scripts with facilitators, and Chambers came to me when I was helping lead them in villages. Thank you, universe, for

the serendipitous call to pick up the volumes kicking around at the moments they're ready to be used.

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**Lucy says**

Interesting book on participatory development. I remember thinking Chambers was a little condescending, but the overall idea behind the book was good, and it wasn't overly dry.

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**Leanne says**

Yes!

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