Participatory Rural Appraisal: Lessons for Countries in the North?

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This paper describes and analyses various perspectives on participatory rural appraisal and the relationship between its rhetoric and practice, particularly regarding its claims to give voice to the marginalised and contribution to development needs. Drawing on relevant literature that both critiques and provides examples of practice, the paper analyses two case studies to explore what lessons we can learn about the approach and its applicability as a methodology for marginalised social groups in European contexts.

Key words: Participatory, appraisal, research, methodology, ethics

1. Introduction

Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) … is a holistic, all encompassing data collection exercise about a whole community. The research process is put as far as possible into the hands of ordinary people. Although ‘experts’ (the community educators) are involved, their role is to facilitate, not take over, the investigation. It has very practical goals. The aim of the inquiry is to obtain a detailed understanding and analysis of a specific local context; then for local people to prioritise their needs based on this enhanced understanding. The outcome of this process is a community action plan, devised with a view to helping local communities solve their own problems through different local initiatives. The PRA embraces diversity. It can be applied in a range of adult education contexts, such as health, agriculture, biodiversity and urban planning. It is used to address specific Af-