

The chapter examines action and participatory research methods. There is seen to be a need for clarification of the link between these two methods and rural development approaches such as extension and community development. Firstly, an overview is given of social science research methods and development approaches. In order to provide a clearer understanding of action research, a conceptual framework is presented within which it can be conceived. This is followed by a discussion of its nature and various types of action research. In the discussion, the concept 'action' research is emphasized while 'participatory' research is shown to be an aspect of action research. It is concluded that in the field of rural development, the underlying assumptions of action research which emphasize understanding of reality from the perspective of the targets to research are not markedly different from those of development approaches which emphasize the important position of people as a key resource in development. By involving people in research into their living conditions and in practical development efforts, self-reliant development can be attained. In underdeveloped countries like Kenya, it has been noted that the involvement of an action researcher in work with field agencies, local leaders and people can help speed up the process of community development.