

**A TRAINING MODULE ON**  
**PARTICIPATORY RURAL APPRAISAL (PRA)**

**DEVELOPED BY**

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## **PARTICIPATORY RURAL APPRAISAL (PRA)**

### **Concept**

PRA is a growing family of approaches and methods to enable local people to share enhance and analyze their knowledge of life of conditions, to plan to act (Chambers, 1997). PRA flows from and owes much to activist participatory research, agro-ecosystem analysis, applied anthropology, field research on farming systems, and rapid rural appraisal (RRA). Among many applications, PRA has been used for natural resource management (soil and water conservation, forestry, fisheries, wild life, village planning, etc), agriculture, programs for the poor, health and food security.

### **Application**

The approaches, methods and behaviours have proved applicable in many types of institutions. People in NGOs were the first main pioneers of PRA but many Government field organizations, training institutes, and universities are now using and evolving variants of PRA. All or almost all major funding (donor and lender) organizations and INGOs are promoting, supporting, and/or being challenged by, PRA. Applications are many including community- level (urban as well as rural) planning, women's programs, client ("stakeholder") selection and deselection, health programs, adult empowerment and literacy (REFLECT). Policy applications with PPAs (participatory poverty assessments) have become common, and can be part of PRSPs (poverty reduction strategy papers, in heavily indebted countries). Training institutes are interested in adopting and adapting PRA for the fieldwork and field experience of their probationers and students. Many university faculty have been slow to learn, but pressure from students has increasingly led to PRA approaches being "taught" in universities, and PRA methods being used in thesis research.

### **Scope of PRA**

PRA tools and techniques could be used at all levels of project formulation and implementation. It could be used by all communities, all experts, people at all levels and living conditions. It could be used to identify, formulate, implement, monitor and evaluate projects.

## **Types of PRA**

There are three types of PRA:

### **Exploratory**

PRA tools and techniques were widely used to diagnose the current situation such as farming system, health and health facilities, hygiene and sanitation, gender analysis livelihoods etc.

### **Topical**

Application of PRA to specific area of concern i.e. soil fertility survey, water, specific disease, diet, income sources etc.

### **Problem solving**

Diagnosis of problems and suggestions of solution with participation of people.

## **6. Important steps in PRA**

The most important step in the PRA process is “handing over the stick” to the people. The people analyze their own situation. Plan actions and implement. People are creative and capable, and can and should do much of their own investigation, analysis and planning. Outsiders have roles as convenors, catalysts and facilitators.

The second important part of a PRA is its techniques and methods innovated for field data collection and analysis. The data is collected and analyzed using a “basket of tools” which help representation of realities in unusual form. The tools help to observe facts on the diagrams lead to best estimates; indicate people’s preferences and priorities etc.

## **PRA METHODS & THEIR APPLICATIONS**

### **1. Time Line**

Is a chronology or sequence of events that have taken place in a particular village or area. These may pertain to the general history of the village, or to specify subjects or sectors such as health, education, agriculture, animal husbandry, etc.

## **Application**

The time line exercise can be applied to find out the background of a village or the evolution of specific activities or programs such as health, education, animal husbandry, fisheries, agriculture and other economic activities.

## **Process**

Select the issue as important. Arrange semi-structured interview with different stakeholders groups. Collect the information from past to present direction and organize in paper pieces. Mention year, resource name and factors influencing increase/decrease the resource.

## **2. Venn diagram**

The Venn diagram looks at how a community is organized, both in terms of its internal organization and its relationships with the larger community beyond its borders.

A Venn diagram offers another way to “map” a community, but this one focuses on social relationships rather than physical ones.

While a Venn diagram can be done on the ground, using natural markers such as stones and leaves, it is somewhat easier to use a large sheet of paper with shapes that are cut out of different colored card stock or paper. Alternatively, if the only paper available is white, markings can be made using different colored markers to distinguish between the different groups, associations, and individuals on the diagram.

These show relationships of various institutions, organizations, programs or individuals with each other and with the village as perceived by the villagers. The exercise is carried out with the use of different sizes of circles or paper contents, which indicate the relative importance or unimportance of a particular institution/ individual to that particular village.

## **Application**

In general terms this method could be used to establish the total picture in terms of the villages' relationships with different institutions (such as banks, cooperatives, dispensary, hospitals, market etc.)

### **Process**

In a Venn diagram, the size of the circle represent the importance of the respective factors and the distance from the community people represent the influence of that factor. As with the participatory map, the team should begin with a well thought-out checklist of the types of issues they wish to explore using the Venn diagram. However (as with the map), it is best to keep this list in the background until the villagers have completed the diagram. The facilitator begins by drawing a large circle on the paper or ground.

This circle represents the village; everything inside the circle is a village institution, while anything outside is an external source of power or influence.

It is best to start with internal organizations and individuals, asking the group to think of all the groups, committees, individuals, associations in the village.

As each one is listed off, a colored paper (oval) is placed on the diagram with the name of the group. These ovals may be cut in different sizes to reflect either: the size of the group or its influence on the life of the village. Which definition is used will depend on the way the team asks the question which will depend, in turn, on the type of information it seeks. The facilitator should continue to ask whether there are any other groups until the villagers have put ovals of different sizes for all the group they can think of.

### **Issues that can be addressed by Venn diagram**

- Role of organization in local decision making
- Role of external forces on the community
- Community leaders and decision maker
- Role of government and NGOs
- Relationships with other villagers

- Credit and marketing institutions
- Conflicts and conflicts resolution mechanisms
- Social safety nets
- Sharing of food and other resources
- Access to land and other resources

### **3. Seasonality diagramming (Seasonal calendar)**

Seasonal calendars are diagrams that focus on seasonal issues and how things change throughout a year. An extremely important and useful exercise which is used to determine seasonal patterns in rural areas as related to rainfall, farming practices, employment and so on. In seasonality an attempt is made to determine the seasonal calendar as understood and practiced by the villagers. This is adjusted to the English calendar and thus built upon using different lengths of sticks or numbers of stones or seeds to quantify items such as rainfall, employment etc.

Seasonal calendars have a particular importance in food security, agricultural, and health studies because these often involve important seasonal issues. It also helps the team to avoid the seasonality bias which is related to the time of year when the team conducts their study. The calendar allows the team to consider how the reality changes during different seasons as conditions change in the community.

#### **Application**

The seasonally exercises has a wide range of applications. It can be used to indicate rainfall, agricultural operations, employment, credit and fodder availability, grazing patterns, milk yields, breeding periods, animal and human health disease patterns, etc.

#### **Process**

##### **Before**

- Identify the type of seasonal pattern willing to learn.
- Find one or more people able and willing to share their knowledge and their views.
- Find a suitable space, enough space and shade.
- Explain the purpose of exercise carefully

## **During**

- Asking when their year starts
- Asking how they divide the year
- Use of local calendars
- Asking events (religious festivals, Agril. Operation)
- Marking the unit on the ground/floor/paper by the informant
- Comparing quantities
- Asking the participant to mark which month is or are the most extreme
- Continue comparing each month with extreme until the whole year is completed

## **After**

- Making a permanent record.
- Analyzing the information from different calendars.
- Comparing the months to identify periods of stress and comfort.

## **Issues that can be addressed in seasonal calendar**

- Significant events
- Income patterns
- Labor constraints
- Consumption patterns
- Agricultural calendar
- Forest product availability
- Incident of disease
- Land use patterns
- Seasonal rules and regulations
- Migration patterns

## **4. Matrix Ranking (Preference ranking)**

Matrix is the most sophisticated and analytic tools used in RRA and PRA, and hence among the most interesting. Once the chart is established, scoring is done

For eg. if a variety or breeding is extremely disease resistant, the farmer may give it a score of 4 or 5. If it is less resistant 2 or 3 points. If it is disease susceptible it may be given 1 or 0 points and so on.

## **Application**

Community action plans are developed on the basis of peoples preferences. The problems, solutions, technical inputs etc. are arranged on the interests of the users.

Matrix Ranking can be used to study a range of subjects: trees, Fodder, Types of Cattle and Breeds, Crops and Crop varieties, Soil types etc.

## **Process**

Matrix ranking is used to list items to be compared along horizontal line and criteria on the vertical line to rank choices from most important to least important (i.e. 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th etc). In this case frequency of the items valued as the 1st choice helps to make up a final decision.

Ranking could be done with individuals, households, community members deliberately selected and with mixed group of men, women, traditional leaders, local officials, extension workers etc.

## **Steps followed in case of farming system research**

1. It should be done for each component separately
2. Taking 3-5 farmers for ranking separately in each ranking
3. **Crop component**- preference for rice varieties in T. Aman and Boro season
4. **Livestock component**- (a) preference for cow, ox, goat, sheep and (b) preference for chicken and duck
5. **Fisheries component**- preference for different fish species under fish culture in pond, rice-fish culture (if any)
6. **Agroforestry component**- preference for different tree species in the farm to grow (arrange timber, fruit trees separately)
7. Under each ranking, carrying out discussion on criteria for ranking chosen by farmers and list them for ranking
8. Asking each farmer to rank from 1 (for lowest value) to 5 (for highest value) under each criteria to record. Repeating this process for another farmer.

## **5. Wealth ranking**



Wealth ranking is a method to understand relative wealth within a specific area and community. It is a method to learn about local criteria of well-being. Wealth ranking provides a way to identify information from different social and economic groups to produce a baseline against which future intervention impact can be measured. The PRA team differentiates community members between socio-economic classes. The team identifies problems and needs of each group. The discussion group provides parameters of differential for each entity, which helps as a baseline against which future intervention impact can be measured. The entities could have different patterns of livelihood systems and vulnerabilities. An early evaluation of dangers and opportunities will help to build up mitigation systems within the community. Wealth ranking is a sensitive issue to discuss with every member of the community. It should be done after a couple of days of other PRA field exercise in the community. The team should build up a close relationship with the people. Later in the survey, religious and traditional leaders, women representatives, extension staff and other elderly men get together in a quiet place and discuss on the categorization of the community members. The discussion group should be able to know the persons and their possessions to be ranked.

### **Application**

PRA team focuses on category of people (rich, middle level or rich), among wealth groups, and target them for intervention. Development plans should be geared towards a category of people who could similarly benefit from the efforts to be made. Some could be useful for research subjects, others for extension, the marginalized and the weak (women) for rehabilitation and / or subsidies and free gifts.

### **Process**

The discussion group follows different systems to categorize community members.

### **Method 1: Map method**

Draw a social map on the ground and locate every house using symbols. List their physical possessions and other sources of income to put together those with similar upon their similarities. You may find 4 to 6 different symbols or marks which indicates various entities.

## **Method 2: Card sorting method**

Make a list of all households to be ranked. Write the name and number of each household on a separate card. Find informants who know the community well. Informants put cards into piles of different categories. When sorting name cards, informants discuss on each individual livelihood and place households in different piles according to perceived wealth. Make as many piles as possible until all households are put into piles. Informants should list parameters for each pile and build up on wealth criteria for all communities. Make note of key parameter which is used for household differentiation. Repeat with two or more informants group the same households for accuracy.

### **Issues that can be explored in wealth ranking**

Access to/ use of services

Consumption patterns

Community sharing mechanism

Leadership/ wealth correlation

Wealth/ participation in activities

Distribution of project benefits

Extends to which wealth patterns are fixed over time

Intra-family wealth pattern and decision making

## **6. Mapping**

It is a method for collating and plotting information on the occurrence, distribution, access and use of resources within the economic and cultural domain of a specific community. In social mapping, community members themselves are asked to do the drawing.

- a) Social mapping: This is the construction of a map of the village living area using chalk on the ground or a cement floor. Through this exercise an understanding is found for the village layout showing the main features such as housing, temples, stones, and other infrastructure. Once the base map is established, it is possible to build on to it different types of information such as

animal and human status, land holding and economic status and many other such items of interest about which information is required for the purpose of planning. For this purpose different types of seeds can be used to indicate a specific category or item. For example if it is an animal husbandry census then, tamarind seeds to indicate bullocks, custard, apple seeds for buffaloes; castor seeds for cross bred cows, maize seeds for buffaloes, blackgram seeds for goats, green gram seeds for sheep and so on can be used to indicate the various populations of these animals in each household. Similarly markers of different columns of rangoli can be used - given to indicate irrigated land owners, brown for dry land owners, red for landless and so on.

### **Application**

Social maps can be used to identify different caste groups, cattle owners (particularly) crossbred owners, small animal owners, buffalo owners, etc. The exercise can also be done to find out the house hold wise status of animal or land holding. Animal and human census can also be done by this method using different types of seeds as described. Mapping can also be used to identify past and future IRDP beneficiaries, families which have undergone family planning, household educational status or health status such as identifying those households where chronic ailments or handicaps exist.

### **b) Resource mapping**

This method is used to locate the resources of an area such as village, forest, watershed etc. This helps us to establish the extent and locations of these resources, and analyze and understand them better. Like social mapping, resource mapping can be done using rangoli powders or colored chalk, or colored marker pens, either on the floor, on the plain ground or on paper.

### **Application**

Items such as dry land, irrigated land, grazing land, forest land, revenue and temple land, tank and other water bodies can be indicated through resource mapping. The resource mapping method can also be used to prepare treatment plans for soil & water conservation, forestry and other treatments.

### **Process**

Maps work well in groups since people can remind one another of things that are forgotten and correct errors as they arise. The facilitator should explain the exercise and start of the activity by drawing in one or two landmarks. These landmarks might be the road by which the team arrived in the village or a major building or tree. Whenever a landmark or specific location is mentioned, a marker should be put down to indicate its location. In this way, the map will be completed by the villagers. Draw the map in two large papers, leave one among the villagers and bring one

## **7. Transects**

Are observatory walks through the village living area or the area surrounding the village such as fields, forests, grazing lands etc. This exercise is done with farmers as guides. It helps not only to locate and pin-point various physical aspects of the village/watershed, but also to understand and discuss with the people the backgrounds of these items. For e.g., the cause of deforestation, the use of common lands, soil and water managements and other indigenous practices.

A transect walk takes the team on a mobile interview where team members walk through the community with “guides” from the village. As they go, they ask questions related to the things they are seeing, as well as others issues from the checklist they have prepared.

### **Application**

Transects are used as pre requisites for mapping, zoning of different areas into ecological zones, land use mapping, productivity zoning, locating indigenous technologies etc. can also be done transects are also used to locate areas in the village which need to be treated/developed.

### **Process**

If the team is large, it makes sense to divide into several sub-groups when doing a transect. Each sub-group will have its own guide(s). These people are generally chosen with the community as

“experts” in the area being studied. It is generally wise to walk rather directly to the furthest point of the transect and then to ask questions along the more leisurely return walk. The information from a transect walk can be organized and transferred to a diagram after each team returns to the village. This diagram will usually have the different areas of the territory on the horizontal axis. On the vertical axis will be categories relating to the types of information collected on the walk.

### **Issues that might be covered in transect walk**

- Food shortage
- Community resources
- Differences in households and their assets
- Credit sources
- Agriculture production and constraints
- Livestock management
- Health assets and hazard
- Water resources and hazards
- Village infra structure
- Land use patterns and seasonal variations
- Livelihood strategies
- Crops and others food production
- Gathered foods and medicines

### **8. Historical transects**

These indicate the trends that have taken place over a period of time. These show the changes that have taken place in terms of resource use, cropping patterns, livestock, population etc. Discussions (with farmers and internal) are considered as the basis for evaluation of document. Charts as recorded. A historical profile is little more than a semi-structured interview that focuses on historical information and attempts to organize that information into a systematic chronology of events.

### **Application**

Historical transects are useful to understand the changes that have taken place in livestock practices, nutrition, health care and education, customs and social practices, forests, land use and agricultural practices, productivity, populations and demography etc.

### **Process**

In most cases, this interview will be carried out with more elderly people, and particularly those who are known for their historical knowledge. Typically, a historical profile begins with the founding of the community and attempts to identify all the landmark dates that have had a significant impact on people's lives. Each time a significant event is mentioned. It will be written on a card. If the date (or approximate date) of the event is known, it will be noted as well. The cards will, in the course of the interview, then be organized in chronological fashion. It should be laid out so that everyone involved can see them and placed so that the respondent can reorder the cards during the interview if she or he wishes to correct the order. In this way, even events that are not associated with particular dates will be placed in at least approximate order.

### **9. Focus group discussion (FGD)**

A focus group discussion (FGD) is a good way to gather together people from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest. The group of participants is guided by a moderator (or group facilitator) who introduces topics for discussion and helps the group to participate in a lively and natural discussion.

The strength of FGD relies on allowing the participants to agree or disagree with each other so that it provides an insight into how a group thinks about an issue, about the range of opinion and ideas, and the inconsistencies and variation that exists in a particular community in terms of beliefs and their experiences and practices.

### **Application**

FGDs can be used to explore the meanings of survey findings that cannot be explained statistically, the range of opinions/views on a topic of interest and to collect a wide variety of local terms. In bridging research and policy, FGD can be useful in providing an insight into different opinions among different parties involved in the change process, thus enabling the process to be managed more smoothly. It is also a good method to employ prior to designing questionnaires.

### **Process**

FGD sessions need to be prepared carefully through identifying the main objective(s) of the meeting, developing key questions, developing an agenda, and planning how to record the session. The next step is to identify and invite suitable discussion participants; the ideal number is between six and eight. The crucial element of FGD is the facilitation. Some important points to bear in mind in facilitating FGDs are to ensure even participation, careful wording of the key questions, maintaining a neutral attitude and appearance, and summarizing the session to reflect the opinions evenly and fairly. A detailed report should be prepared after the session is finished. Any observations during the session should be noted and included in the report.