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A NOTE FOR WORLD BANK STAFF ON PARTICIPATORY RURAL APPRAISAL (PRA)

The purpose of this note is to outline essentials of PRA, and to give guidance and advice to Bank staff. The questions asked and answered are:

1. What is PRA?
2. Where is it to be found?
3. How has it been applied?
4. What are its dangers and shortcomings?
5. How can and should Bank staff use it? Do's and don'ts
6. How can you follow up and find out more about PRA?

1. What is PRA?

PRA is the label which has been attached to a growing family of relaxed approaches and methods which enable rural (or urban) people to make their own appraisal, analysis and plans, to share information, and to act.

PRA has evolved from and draws on many sources, including participatory research, applied social anthropology, agroecosystem analysis, field research on farming systems, and rapid rural appraisal (RRA). RRA developed and spread in the late 1970s and 1980s as a reaction against the biases of rural development tourism (the brief rural visit of the urban-based professional) and the distortions, costs and inefficiencies of questionnaire surveys. RRA continues to be widely practised, but the word "rapid" has encouraged and allowed some sloppy and unselfcritical work by consultants and others. The first R of RRA is better "relaxed".

RRA and PRA share the principles of learning from and with people, directly, on site and face-to-face; learning rapidly and progressively; offsetting biases; optimising trade-offs between quantity, relevance, accuracy and timeliness of information; triangulating (cross-checking, judgemental sampling, etc); and seeking diversity.

In addition, PRA adds facilitating appraisal and analysis by rural (or urban) people themselves- we enable them to do many of the things we thought only we could do; self-critical awareness and responsibility; using one's own best judgement at all times rather than relying on a manual; and sharing.

PRA derives much of its strength from emphasising:

- * "our" changed behaviour and attitudes (sitting down, "handing over the stick", listening, learning, not interrupting...)
- * open-ended enquiry
- * "they can do it" ("our" confidence in "their" ability)
- * visualisation (maps, matrices, models, diagrams...by them)
- * comparisons
- * analysis by groups

RRA methods such as semi-structured interviewing are also used in PRA. In addition, much PRA facilitates the use of relatively new methods in a participatory mode such as:

participatory mapping and modelling
transect walks and observation
seasonal calendars
time lines, and trend and change diagramming

matrix scoring and ranking
wealth and wellbeing ranking and grouping
analytical diagramming

and others. RRA and PRA are different. RRA is mainly extractive, eliciting information from villagers. PRA methods can also be used extractively in an RRA mode, for us to gain information from them; but PRA as a family of approaches is more empowering, enabling villagers to conduct their own analysis and to own the information generated.

2. Where is PRA to be found?

PRA is quite strongly established or rapidly evolving and spreading in various organisations and areas in:

Bangladesh, Botswana, Ethiopia, francophone West Africa, India, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe

and starts have been or are being made in

Afghanistan, Australia, Benin, Canada, Cap Verde, Colombia, Ecuador, the Gambia, Ghana, Indonesia, Lesotho, Malaysia, Norway, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Thailand, Zambia and the UK. (This listing is surely incomplete and already out-of-date).

There is less PRA in Latin America than in any other continent.

3. How has PRA been applied?

PRA has been used especially in the following fields. This listing is illustrative, and far from complete:

natural resources management:

- soil and water conservation (Kenya, India, Vietnam...)
- rural development forestry (India, Nepal, Tanzania, Uganda...)
- fisheries (India, Philippines...)
- participatory monitoring and evaluation (Kenya, India, Nepal, Bangladesh...)
- community-level planning (francophone West Africa, India, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Vietnam, Zimbabwe...)

agriculture:

- agricultural research priorities (Botswana, India, Malawi, Zambia...)
- crop-specific programmes (India, Nigeria, Pakistan...)
- irrigation (India, Sri Lanka...)

health:

- health mapping (Bangladesh, India, Tanzania...)
- monitoring and evaluation (Bangladesh, India, Nepal...)

poverty programmes, food security, livelihoods:

- selection and deselection of poor people for programmes (Bangladesh (education), India, Sri Lanka...)
- identification of people's own criteria of wellbeing (India...)
- livelihood analysis (India...)
- participatory poverty assessment (Ghana, in process...)

policy assessments:

- impact of structural adjustment (Zimbabwe...)
- land tenure (Tanzania...)

4. What are PRA's dangers and shortcomings?

The main dangers are bad PRA through:

- faddism: over-enthusiastic pushing (beware the fate of FSR)
- rushing: rapid and wrong again
- routine ruts: standardisation, rigidity, set sequences, didactic teaching instead of experiential learning...
- one-offs: "I've done a PRA", "They used PRA" and putting a tick against a box, without internalising and sustaining PRA as culture and process
- PRA by command: "PRA will be used"

Good PRA cannot be commanded. The head of an organisation cannot order staff to "use PRA". Good PRA is sensitive to personal behaviour, attitudes, beliefs and commitment. It requires, often, changes in the culture and management of an organisation before it can be used widely. This means that any introduction of PRA has to start slowly and proceed incrementally, and needs to be associated with participatory management.

The main shortcomings are:

takes time and patience to establish: PRA may be rapid in a village, but it takes time and patience for many outsiders to learn to facilitate it

threats to power and self-esteem: Normal professionals, especially university statisticians, are threatened. Also, villagers usually make better facilitators than outsiders, including NGO staff, who may then feel threatened. Villagers are known to have written to an NGO "We are going to carry out a PRA. You do not need to come."

changing our behaviour and attitudes may be difficult

It is commonly supposed that PRA methods cannot generate commensurable quantitative data. This has been challenged by experience, and PRA methods used well can replace questionnaires for several purposes.

5. How can and should Bank staff use PRA? Do's and Don'ts

Do not: * feel you have to go with this as one of the latest fashions.

- * expect to be promoted in the Bank because you support PRA.
- * expect PRA to work well where field staff gain big rents from corruption. They cannot be expected to take sharp drops in income for the sake of participation
- * expect PRA to be a big spender. Done well, it will slow and reduce disbursements, and spend less for more
- * require consultants, researchers, government agencies, NGOs to "use PRA" and expect that to do the trick
- * sponsor or support routinised or classroom training, with fixed timetables, set sequences or rigid manuals
- * expect the normal staff of training institutes to be any good as trainer/facilitators
- * be taken in by consultants who use the label without the substance

Do:

- * consider the opportunity cost of recruiting scarce good trainer/facilitators. Is your project a good use of their time? Is anything they do likely to be sustainable in your project context? If yes, then
- * employ experienced trainer/facilitators from the South, both within their home countries and internationally. Support South-South sharing. A mixture of two or three trainers for the same field learning experience is often good.
- * try to ensure sustained high-level commitment to PRA
- * ensure careful selection of participants in field learning. The best are usually self-selected - people who want to do PRA, and want and are able to help others to start
- * start slow and small on a pilot basis, and provide consistent support for steady development and spread. Don't go fast, and Don't give up easily. Hang in there. It may take time.
- * arrange for lateral sharing and learning within and between countries, projects, organisations and departments
- * involve villagers as consultants and trainer/facilitators as and when feasible.
- * check trustworthiness. What is the process? Are there presentations by, with, to villagers? Do they share, check and amend? Do an outside team and local people triangulate, crosscheck?

* ask would-be trainer/facilitators five questions:

1. where would you wish the learning to take place? (If mainly classroom, reject. If opposed to sleeping in villages, reject. If mainly or entirely village or very rural or poor urban.. OK so far)
2. what do you consider most important in the learning experience? (If the teaching and correct learning of methods, reject. If behaviour, attitudes, do-it-yourself, being taught by villagers, learning to unlearn, learning not to interrupt, spending overnights in villages...OK so far)
3. what do you feel about others sharing in the training, as resource persons and co-trainers from other organisations, and as participants from other organisations? (If they want to keep it to themselves, reject, unless they are known to be highly experienced already and have a good reputation. If others are welcomed, OK so far)
4. what hours would you expect to work? (If 0900 to 1700, reject. If starting early, and all hours and into the night, OK so far)
5. what is your view of the participation of women and of the poorer people? (If considered secondary, reject. If given priority, OK)

Try to assess would-be trainers' own behaviour and attitudes. A good trainer is likely to be relaxed, sensitive, democratic, a good listener, with a sense of humour and fun, and blessed with physical stamina.

Do not recruit a. middle-aged men who wear suits and polished shoes in the field, b. fashionable radicals who spout about sustainability but are scared of sleeping in villages, or c. people who take themselves more seriously than their work.

6. How can you follow up and find out more about PRA?

A. trainer/facilitators

If you want to follow up, your major need is likely to be good trainer/facilitators. They are few and demand exceeds supply. No one in the world knows who they all are. Probably demand will create its own supply, and some will now claim to be trainers who lack experience, and whose behaviour and attitudes are not right for the job. There will surely be some bad experiences and disillusion.

The largest numbers of experienced and capable trainer/facilitators currently are in India, Kenya and the UK (including nationals from the South in the UK). India is the single largest source. Indian trainers already have experience and an impressive record in SubSaharan African and Southeast Asia, as have Kenyan trainers in other SSA countries.

The national-level contacts listed in the appendix (to follow) may be able to help. At IDS Sussex we have lists of trainers and can try to help with advice. The Sustainable Agriculture Programme at the International Institute for Environment and Development has the strongest UK-based training team and is also a source of information.

If you want contacts, phone IDS (44) 273 606261 (switchboard) or
 (44) 273 678490 (direct to Helen McLaren)
 or fax to (44) 273 621202 (attn Helen McLaren)

You can also phone me at home on (44) 273 483038
 (I Don't mind calls from Washington at home in (our) evening as it
 impresses my family).

The IIED numbers are phone (44) 71 388 2117
 fax (44) 71 388 2826

B. reading.

For introductions to PRA:

James Mascarenhas "Participatory rural appraisal and participatory learning
 methods: recent experiences from MYRADA in South India/2, Forests, Trees
 and People Newsletter 15/16 February 1992 pp 10-17 (practical and to the
 point) (Probably free, from Forests, Trees and People Newsletter, IRDC,
 Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Box 7005, S-750 07 Uppsala,
 Sweden)

Robert Chambers Rural Appraisal: Rapid, Relaxed and Participatory,
 Discussion Paper 311, IDS, University of Sussex, October 1992 (a long-
 winded overview, trying to cover everything) (available from Publications
 Office, IDS, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RE; cost £2.95 + 45p
 postage and packing)

"Relaxed and Participatory Rural Appraisal: Notes on Practical Approaches
 and Methods" (periodically updated, about 12 pages) available from Helen
 McLaren, IDS, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RE.

The best way to keep up is to receive RRA Notes (1-17 continuing) from the
 Sustainable Agriculture Programme, International Institute for Environment
 and Development, 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H 0DD. This is free, and
 you can request two backcopies free (I recommend including Number 13 which
 reports on Indian experience). Requests for more than 2 copies are charged
 at £2.50 an issue, with a full set of backcopies for £33.00.

For subject areas and for further sources see "Some Sources on Rapid,
 Relaxed and Participatory Rural Appraisal", periodically updated, and
 available from Helen McLaren, IDS, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RE,
 UK.

C. personal experience

For people working in international organisations it is quite difficult to
 gain good personal experience in the field in the South. I do recommend
 it, all the same. My priority is promoting and supporting South-South
 sharing, so please do not ask me to arrange this for you. If you are able
 to join a field experience, let me urge you a. to stay for the full
 period and take part fully as a participant, b. to stay in the same place
 as everyone else, c. to be as insignificant as you can make yourself, and
 d. to enjoy it!

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