21 PRA QUESTIONS TO ASK ONESELF

Self-critical awareness is one of the principles of PRA. In the spirit of "use your own best judgement at all times" each one of us might draw up our own list of questions for self-examination. If you wish to make your own list, it will surely serve you better than someone else’s; so please do not read on.

If you disregard that, and do read on, please treat this lightly as just one set of questions a PRA facilitator might wish to reflect on. The fact that I have reflected and recorded them does not mean that I actually use them, only that I have enjoyed dreaming them up. This is a personal list by one person at one time. Diversity rules! should be the motto. In a spirit of pluralism and debate, please criticise, disagree, and develop your own.

Questions have ended up as strings of questions. I did not expect this when I started. But one question often leads to another.

The danger with any list of questions is that they stop action. Remember - start, stumble, self-correct, share. Or the business executive's motto "Ready, fire, aim". We learn by doing, by making and recognising mistakes, by interacting, by gaining experience the hard way. We do not learn by endlessly torturing ourselves with critical introspection before we do anything. So these questions are not to inhibit. They are simply one person's checklist for reflection to guide action on the run.

1.* Shall I draw up my own questions? [Yes, yes, yes...much better...use your own best you-know-what...much better to make your own list...oh, later you could compare it with the one that follows if you wish...yours will probably be better...maybe when you have done it you could encourage others to draw up and share theirs too....?]

2* Why am I here? What is in it for others? What is in it for me?

3* Why here and not somewhere else? Why this community or group and not another? Why these people and not others?

4.* Why do people think I or we are here?

5* What are their expectations?

6* Who is participating in whose activity, programme, project? Who owns it? Who feels it is theirs? Are "they" participating in "ours"? Or are we participating in "theirs"?

7* What are the significant "axes of difference" in the community or group? Gender? Age? Wealth? Social, ethnic or religious group? Education? Or what? How do these combine?

8* Who are the uppers? Males? Older people? The relatively wealthy? Those of high social, ethnic or religious status? The educated?

9* Who are the lowers? Women? Children? The very old? The poor? Those of low social, ethnic or religious status? The disabled? The uneducated?
Who are the stakeholders - the people affected or who might be affected, well or badly, by the process? Who are the likely gainers? Who are the potential losers?

10* What is a good time and place for us to meet? When and where is convenient for them? Can we suit their convenience, not ours?

11* "Would you prefer to meet on your own? Have you things you need to discuss and work out on your own? How long would you like for that? Would you like us to go now, and come back later? And if so, when would suit you?"

12* Who am I/are we meeting, and who am I/are we not meeting? Who is being left out? Who is not here? Why not? Where are they? What are they doing? Would it be good to approach them and involve them? Are we meeting uppers or lowers? Those who are well, not the sick? The children in school, not those who do not come? The women and children who go to the clinic, not those who do not? The men, not the women? The boys, not the girls? Those who are not working, not those who are? Those who have been able to, or had to, stay, not those who have migrated?

13* What am I seeing and not seeing? Where am I going, and where not going? What am I being shown and what not being shown?

14* What am I being told, and what not told? How does the person I am and how I am seen affect what people tell me? Do they think I could bring benefits or penalties? Does this affect what they show and tell? Are people being polite, prudent, deferential...?

15* "How did I/we behave? How should I/we behave when we visit you? What should we do and not do?"

16* What am I/are we now going to do? What actions are needed? What are people now expecting? What commitments have I/we entered into? How can I/we fulfil these?

17 * What will happen after I/we leave? What sort of process is likely to go on in the community? Is anyone liable to be penalised?

18* What did I/we leave undone? What did we miss, leave out? What remains to be done?

19. "What questions would "you" [local people] like to ask "us"?"

20. What lessons can I/we learn from this experience? What would we do differently, knowing what we now know? What advice would we now give to others?

21. What other questions should we be asking ourselves?