Necessity of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) Utilization in rural research

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Abstract: PRA is intended to enable local communities to conduct their own analysis and to plan and take action . PRA involves project staff learning together with villagers about the village. Much of the spread of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) as an emerging family of approaches and methods has been lateral, South-South, through experiential learning and changes in behavior, with different local applications. Rapid spread has made quality assurance a concern, with dangers from "instant fashion", rushing, formalism and ruts. Promising potentials include farmers' own farming systems research, alternatives to questionnaire surveys, monitoring, evaluation and lateral spread by local people, empowerment of the poorer and weaker, and policy review. Changes in personal behavior and attitudes, and in organizational cultures, are implied. PRA parallels and resonates with paradigm shifts in the social and natural sciences, business management, and development thinking, supporting decentralization, local diversity, and personal responsibility.

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Introduction:

Robert Chambers (2004) describes PRA as "a growing family of approaches, methods, attitudes and behaviours to enable and empower people to share, analyze and enhance their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan, act, monitor, evaluate and reflect". While RRA focuses on data collection or extraction, PRA focuses on empowerment. It needs to be noted that although RRA and PRA carry the term 'rural', they can both be and have been applied in urban settings. To make it more inclusive and to emphasize the empowerment aspect, the term Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) is used interchangeably with PRA.

PRA has many sources. The most direct is rapid rural appraisal (RRA) from which it has evolved. RRA itself began as a response in the late 1970s and early 1980s to the biased perceptions derived from rural development tourism (the brief rural visit by the urban-based professional) and the many defects and high costs of large-scale questionnaire surveys. PRA has much in common with RRA but differs basically in the ownership of information, and the nature of the process: in RRA information is more elicited and extracted by outsiders as part of a process of data gathering; in PRA it is more generated, analyzed, owned and shared by local people as part of a process of their empowerment. The term Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is being used to describe a growing family of approaches and methods to enable local people to share, enhance and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act(Bhat and satish, 1993).

PRA flows from and owes much to the traditions and methods of participatory research , applied anthropology, and field research on farming systems and has evolved most directly from a synthesis of agroecosystem analysis and rapid rural appraisal (RRA) .

PRA TECHNIQUES:

There are six popular techniques/methods that are used to facilitate PRA exercise that enables the community to develop and compile a detailed profile of themselves and their situation.

• Venn Diagram

Venn Diagrams are drawn to help understand the current formal and informal institutions in the area under study and the nature of relationship between the communities and these existing institutions and structures. The community is led to identify their needs, analyze these needs and assess the **cause and effect** relationship. This process provides an opportunity for the community to arrive at the most pressing or priority need utilizing a logical format and this often culminates into a problems tree(Clayton, 1997).

• Time line

This technique describes chronologies of events, listing major remembered events in a village with approximate dates. The process involves elderly people in a village to narrate their life history, summarizing major events and changes that have taken place over a period of time. Major events and

political regimes including their significance and influence to the change in the lives of the community over time are recorded. Time line shows a broad movement of different aspects in a village during the community's lifetime(Chambers, 1994).

• **Time trend**

This is a technique where people given an opportunity to account about their past and discuss how things close to them have changed. Issues such as ecological history, changes in land-use, cropping patterns, changes in customs, practices & trends in population, migration, education, health, prices, yields, etc. This technique is more precise in giving indication of change (increase or decrease) about a particular item/activity(KGVK, 1991).

• **Mapping**

This is where people use ground, floor or flip charts to map and draw the different aspects of their village e.g. social issues, demographic, resources, health, wealth, literacy, livestock, economic activities, water resources, trees, housing layout etc. This technique portrays the image dwellings in a village(Hollandand and Blackburn, 1998).

• **Transect Walk**

This is a systematical walk with the Community members through the village observing, discussing, identifying different forms, local techniques, introduced technologies, seeking their uses, problems, solutions and opportunities. It is done to ensure that the team fully explores the spatial differences in the community, assessing the infrastructure that exists and any possible activities that might be taking place within the village.

• **Matrix**

Matrix is a ranking & scoring technique that is used to discover local attitudes and perceptions about a particular resource. This may be about the land use, water conservation measures, seasons, weather conditions, rainfall pattern or rainfall distribution, intensity and efficiency. These are assessed to determine the extent they affect and influence the way of life within the community. This helps to provide a better understanding of constraints and opportunities for possible development interventions. A graph is usually drawn in a matrix format displaying these constraints and opportunities.

Procedures for collecting spatial data

Who draws the maps?

The community members of their representatives together with the PRA team and the local extension field staff undertake this exercise. The various parties having different but complementary ideas to the process.

HOW?

The community members are the best experts of their area. While it is tempting for a team member to take charge and save time by drawing the map, it is advisable to let ordinary villagers draw the map on the ground. Literacy is not necessary in order to draw a map of one's place. The PRA team should explain the process clearly. The sketch map is drawn using their fingers, sticks and other locally available materials such as pebbles, leaves, and flowers. The community should be guided through questions to draw the map of their community territory of application(IUCN, 2001).

Community sketch map helps in defining micro-zones, knowing about disparities in wealth, differences in land use. This exercise provides to locate areas where particular problems are thought to be prevalent. The map is also used to lay the transect route. While the map is still on the ground the community members mark the most representative cross section of the community.

How should one proceed to sketch maps or models?

Before:

- Decide what type of map you want
- Bring people together who will have some knowledge about the area and can contribute
- Choose suitable time and place
- Bring materials with you on which you can copy a map drawn on the ground(Scoones, 1993).

During:

Try to minimize your own participation be an observer?

- Encourage by asking op0en questions
- Encourage the use of different materials, i.e. flowers, twigs, sticks etc
- Be patient!(Swift and Umar, 1991)

After:

- Maker a copy of the map or model, including mapper's names
- Try drawing the same type of map with different groups of people. i.e. one group of women, a group of old men and the young
- Keep it simple
- Orient it appropriately
- Cross-check the map, compare with what you see
- Draw it in the area of study with the local people.

PRA LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

There are limitations in PRA and it is not the answer to all rural development problems and these limitations must be acknowledged and caution should be exercised so as to avoid unrealistic expectations and disappointments.

- **(FORMALISM)-** the urge to standardize in-order to produce quality by keeping to strict manuals can do more harm than help.

Practitioners must take risks, experiment, improvise and be creative.

- **(FADDISM)** PRA could easily be discredited by misuse, i.e. calling every development intervention with local community a "PRA" especially when it is one that excludes them from active involvement in decision-making and planning.
- **(RUSHING)-**the rationale behind PRA is to make time to find the poorest and move at their own pace, to learn from them, and to empower them. Poorly conceived and rapid interventions, lack of commitment from officials to followup, compound errors and mean that the poor are, once again, neither seen, listened to, nor learnt from(Chambers, 1997).

Since PRA seeks to assist local people to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate their own action plans, in theory PRA should be used only during the implementation of a project. Since PRA aims at people taking action themselves it is most suited for the community level.

PRA presents a major step forward from RRA. Local people do the analysis and plan for the future. Their own values, needs and priorities are the point of departure. They themselves develop criteria to classify aspects of their life. This not only leads to a better understanding of the situation (for both the in- and the outsiders) and therefore increases the chance for realistic plans, it also generates a much higher commitment of the people to the planned activities(Scrimshaw, 1992).

The many different perspectives on daily reality and the visualisation offer good opportunities to go beyond the most obvious and dominant points of view in the community. The only warning here should be that too much attention to group discussions/ -activities might enable some groups to dominate the discussion(Cornwall, 2008).

The methodology is open to modification; everybody can develop new tools and new ways of organising things. This makes PRA applicable in a very wide range of situations. Indeed, it has been used in both rural and urban areas, both in developing countries and industrial countries, in agriculture, in health care and in social programmes. PRA can also be used to collect data; local people are able to generate and/or collect reliable data which they themselves analyze and use for planning(Mukherjee, 1992).

Steps in participatory planning

PRA has steps of planning:

1. Defining the objective of PRA

2. Site selection and clearance form local administrative officials. Fro programmed implantation (or) problem solving purpose. For site selection, use-ranking methods with local people and outsiders; then select the sites for intervention(Ekins, 1992).

3. Preliminary visit
- Survey team visit
- Extended discussion with local leaders
- Agreement to do a PRA
- Sharing responsibilities with the people

4. Data collection
- Local people and survey team collect information
- The data includes:
- Spatial data
- Time related information
- Data on institutions and social structures
- Technical information

5. Data analysis
- PRA team spends days organizing information
- Make large charts and tables of trends, maps transects etc
- Compile a list of all the problems mentioned
- Summarized the problems

6. Ranking problems
- Present to the community data collected in a large meeting
- Include line department staff DA s etc
- Rank the problems by discussion and voting

7. Formulate and rank opportunities
- From discussion groups on the solutions of the problems
- Obtain advise from the technical officers on:
- Feasibility
- Sustainability
- Productivity
- Equity of the solutions
- Rank opportunities
- Set an action plans

8. Adoption of action plans
- Look for technical information to develop a comprehensive plan
- Specific expert join PRA team
- Line ministry departments take part in the implementation

9. Implementation
- All partners in development contributes to activities as:
- Manpower allocation
- Materials needed
- Time needed
- Funds required(Pretty, 1993)

PREPARATIONS BEFORE THE PRA:

Proper preparations determine the success of PRA for it involves learning-by-doing and depends on team

contributions. In addition to selecting the site where PRA is to be conducted and collecting secondary information regarding the specific sites and their neighborhoods, it is necessary to:

- Establish a PRA Team;
- Establish a Kushet PRA Committee;
- Conduct Preliminary Visits to the Community;
- Developing PRA Schedule.

1. The PRA Team:

The PRA Team consists five faculty members of the faculty of business and economics.

Note that other member(s) already involved in development activities in or near the specified areas shall be included if found necessary, for in PRA, the Team is expected to have the necessary technical know how in different areas (agriculture, health, education, infrastructure, credit, marketing, culture, etc.). It also needs to have a fair gender composition.

Although every team member should be familiar with all aspects of the PRA, each team member is also designated for specific tasks which are described as follows(NCAER, 1993):

a. PRA team leader: One of the PRA Team members will be designated as a leader in each of the four PRAs. That is one team leader will be assigned for each of the four villages. The team leader will be selected in such a way that four members will alternatively serve as team leaders for each of the four PRAs. The role of the team leader is to(Scoones, 1993):

- Play the leading role in the formation of the village PRA committee;
- Ensure that all preparatory work has been done;
- Make sure that the objectives of each session are achieved;
- Coordinate preparation of the PRA report;
- Resolve any problems which may arise;
- Assign facilitators and note-takers for each session;
- Organize the reports from the note-taker/s into a coherent whole;
- Work as the principal editor of that particular PRA report.

Importantly, the PRA team leader is also responsible for ensuring that all technical areas are appropriately covered. Though not intended to do so, many PRA exercises may reflect the technical bias of the facilitators or note-takers as opposed to community needs and interests. This should be avoided at all costs, and the PRA team leader should ensure that.

b. Facilitator: For each PRA session, one individual should be designated as the lead facilitator (note that the team leader may also serve as a facilitator in some of the sessions). As a key objective of the PRA is to promote active community participation, the role of the facilitator is very important and includes:

Before the Session:

- Knowing the contents of their session very well in order that they rarely have to look at the manual for guidance
- Ensuring that the site is well prepared – that there are enough places to sit, that there is not too much noise close by, that the area is well shaded, etc.
- Ensuring that the seating arrangement is good – and that participants can be seated in a circle so that they can see the facilitator, other participants, as well as any flipchart or blackboard which may be used. Important: if participants are not properly seated, have everyone get up and rearrange the meeting place. During the Session
- Ensuring that all participants understand and contribute to the discussions.
    1. If one participant is talking too much, thank him/her for his/her comments and ask another opinion;
    2. If some participants are not contributing at all, ask them directly what they think;
    3. Do not let only one person or a small group of participants dominate the discussions;
    4. Pay special attention to women and the poor who may not feel comfortable contributing.
- Ensuring that team members share their ideas only after the community members have provided their own, and that the team members avoid influencing the community's decisions.
- Managing the time available for the session to ensure that all objectives are achieved.
- At the end of the session, thank participants for their contributions and explain to them the next activity(Drummond, 1992).

CONCLUSION:

As a result of the PRAs, the communities are expected to attain many benefits including:

• Expressing their own ideas and concerns;

• Organizing their knowledge about the past and present;

• Identifying as a community their problems, the causes of these problems and possible solutions;

• Developing a common plan to address these problems;
• Developing the ability to use their own resources more effectively and attract more resources from the outside.

The academicians/researchers involved in the PRAs are expected to get the following benefits:

• Developing better understanding of rural environments and social as well as economic dynamism taking place there;
• Appreciating the fact that communities are capable of analyzing their problems and outlining possible solutions to their problems;
• Participating in designing possible solutions to community problems;
• Utilizing the results of the PRA work as a research output for publications and presentations;
• Building their research and problem investigation capabilities;
• Supporting their classroom discussions to students with practical examples from the PRA findings.

The main objectives of the current PRA are:

1. empowerment of rural communities by assisting them to systematically utilize their local knowledge to identify problems and strengths, develop skills of analysis, and design appropriate mechanisms for intervention by themselves and/or by development agents;
2. advancement of understanding by academicians/researchers of local knowledge and acknowledgement of the capacity of communities to gather data, conduct analysis, and identify as well as prioritize problems and solutions;
3. utilization of the research questions/problems identified during the PRAs for further investigation;
4. documenting and presenting the outcomes of the PRAs to development agents (governmental and non-governmental) and other stakeholders so that they could undertake interventions in line with the findings.

PRA consists of a series of participatory exercises which help community members better assess their history, resources, and overall situation as concerns agriculture, health, marketing, credit, coping mechanisms, education, and other important areas. During the conduct of the PRAs, rural communities in the selected villages will gather information on the resources they already possess; organize their knowledge; share experience among themselves; learn from each other; identify and prioritize local development needs; and develop action plans which respond to these needs.

The many different perspectives on daily reality and the visualisation offer good opportunities to go beyond the most obvious and dominant points of view in the community. The only warning here should be that too much attention to group discussions/ -activities might enable some groups to dominate the discussion. The methodology is open to modification; everybody can develop new tools and new ways of organising things. This makes PRA applicable in a very wide range of situations. Indeed, it has been used in both rural and urban areas, both in developing countries and industrial countries, in agriculture, in health care and in social programmes. PRA can also be used to collect data; local people are able to generate and/or collect reliable data which they themselves analyze and use for planning.

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