Participatory Rural Appraisal

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PARTICIPATORY RURAL APPRAISAL

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Introduction

Participation, empowerment and inclusion have become the new development buzzword. There has been a range of interpretations of the meaning of participation in development. Participation can be defined in several ways i.e.

'With regard to rural development . . . participation includes people's involvement in decision-making processes, in implementing programmes, their sharing in the benefits of development programmes and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programmes.' (Cohen and Uphoff, 1977. adapted from UNDP Empowering people – a guide to participation)

'Participation is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them.' (World Bank, 1994)

'Participation can be seen as a process of empowerment of the deprived and the excluded. This view is based on the recognition of differences in political and economic power among different social groups and classes. Participation in this sense necessitates the creation of organisations of the poor which are democratic, independent and self-reliant!' (Ghai, 1990)

The essence of participation is exercising voice and choice and developing the human, organizational and management capacity to solve problems as they arise in order to sustain the improvements (Saxena 1998).

The 1990s saw the concept of participation enjoying greater official legitimacy in the international development community than even before (Stiefel and Wolfe1994). Participatory approaches have been widely incorporated into the policies of non–governmental and state organisations involved in the development activities (Blackburn and Holland 1998). Participatory development starts from the premise that it is important to identify and build upon strengths already present in communities. Numerous research studies and practical projects have documented that the involvement of people helping
themselves is critical to the success of development strategies (Alamgir, 1988; Nelson and Wright, 1995; Mathur, 1997; Chambers, 1997; Ngunjiri, 1998). The advantages are extensive: inclusion of the innate wisdom and knowledge of those affected in decision-making can result in projects that are manageable, there is less reliance on imported technologies, the project expenses are usually lower, and the project often can be maintained by the participants after the project funding has ended (Alamgir, 1988). Participatory approaches facilitate training and skill diffusion, and contribute to the socio-economic development and strengthening of confidence of vulnerable groups such as poor women. Participatory processes are built on the idea of a multiplicity of world views about any given problem, as problem-situations are a matter of perspective and interpretation i.e. different actors within a given context, for example, women and men, make different evaluations of a situation, which lead to different actions. By seeking out and making divergent views on problem explicit, they become subject to dialogue, which in turn forms the basis for better informed negotiation that can lead to reaching consensus about what collective actions should be taken (Jiggins, 1997). But despite the claims of inclusiveness that come with the advocacy of participation in development, the language and practice of participation often obscures womwn worlds, needs and contribution to development, making equitable participatory development an elusive goal (Gujit & kaul shah, 1998).

Perhaps the most widespread appearance of participation in mainstream development has been seen in the form of participatory methodologies of research, intended to gather a wide range of information from local people at their livelihoods, needs, and strengths, at the same time as 'empowering' them through a process of collaborative analysis and learning. There is a profusion of acronyms and approaches. The principal approaches ainclude; Training for Transformation (Hope & Timmel 1984); Participatory Research and Participatory Action Research (Tandon 1988; Park et al. 1993; fals-Borda and rahman1991; Reason 1994); Participatory Rural appraisal ( Chambers 1992, 1997 and 2004) and Participatory Theatre (mda1993; Boal 1998). One of the most popular of these methodologies is Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), a form of participatory research used for planning, initiating, and evaluating development interventions. PRA draws on Freire’s legacy of critical reflection and other, earlier participatory research methods to develop a set of practices, tools and methodologies which facilitate critical reflection, analysis and action by marginalised groups. The aim is for local people to be able to represent and analyse information about their livelihoods or other issues, and make their own plans. This learning process is enhanced by the use of visual graphics and can motivate those involved – researchers, development practitioners, local people and policy makers, to behave differently and to undertake different kinds of action (Guijt and Cornwall, 1995:3). PRA represents a fusion and evolution of several different traditions, including agricultural and anthropological research, and PAR. Intended to effect a number of reversals in development practice, PRA has the potential to privilege local knowledge over that of outsiders by overcoming urban and technological biases, and inverting power relations in development interventions. PRA focuses on facilitating changes in attitudes and behaviours which will enable the 'empowerment' of local people (IDS, 1996:1).
Origin

By the late 1940s, the early initiatives of development assistance and of planned interventions in underdeveloped countries to promote development and change had commenced. However, it was in the 1950s, and particularly in the 1960s, that these initiatives, via the actions of processes of Community Development, sought to involve local people in efforts to improve their communities. Community development in the 1960s built the infrastructure of rural and urban communities; it also developed local skills and abilities and encouraged local people to play a part in and to take some responsibility for supporting and implementing a range of physical infrastructure works. Community development at this time also sought to build community-based organisations to serve as vehicles through which local people could get actively involved. It promoted literacy campaigns to enable people to better understand and relate to existing administrative bodies and it sought to generate a sense of cohesiveness and solidarity among community members.

The 1950s and 1960s saw the community development movement flourish and, particularly in Africa and Asia, national programmes sought to build community infrastructure and to break down communities' exclusion from development activities. Community development did promote communities' involvement but it was for an already agreed purpose. Control was usually exercised externally and communities were seen as contributing to and supporting the national development agenda and not necessarily as being instrumental in determining its content or direction.

While community development as a basic strategy of community involvement persisted into the 1970s, it has largely lost its predominance. Changing analyses and examinations of underdevelopment in the late 1970s and 1980s began to offer different explanations of the causes of people's poverty and to suggest different forms of project design. Poor people were seen as excluded and marginalised both from broader societal participation and also from direct involvement in development initiatives. Simultaneously, development policy makers and planners began to argue for societal level political participation and also to devise strategies whereby poor people could become more directly involved in development efforts.

Some of the methods of participatory approach come from social anthropology, some especially diagramming, were developed and spread in Southeast Asia, as part of agro ecosystem analysis originated in the University of Chiang Mai in 1978 with the work of Gordon Conway and colleagues. For RRA, the university of Khon kaen in Thailand was a major source of innovation and inspiration in 1980s. Other methods like matrix scoring seem to have been new in early 1990s. The term PRA was used early on in Kenya and India around 1988 and 1989. In India and Nepal from 1989 onwards there was an accelerated development and spread of PRA with many innovations and applications. Parallel developments took place in other countries around the world, with lateral sharing and an explosion in creativity and diversity (Chambers 2004). A very rough review of commonly used participatory methodologies suggest that the shift from conventional surveys onto rapid rural appraisals (RRA) was based on the realization that RRAs were
not very participatory, ("windshield survey"), and the accuracy of the information was low. This led to a shift towards participatory rural appraisals (PRA) with the aim of increasing the involvement of the respondents. PRA therefore made much emphasis on "hanging over the stick" (as participants drew maps or transects) to symbolize the shift in the control over the process (Chambers, 1997).

**Definition**

Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) Or participatory learning and action (PLA) is the fieldworkers use of participatory approach. The PRA continues to evolve so fast that no definitions can be final and has to be updated several times. PRA is defined and updated several times by Prof. Robert Chambers. PRA has been described as

- A family of approaches, methods and behaviour to enable poor people to express and analyse the realities of their lives and condition, and themselves to plan, monitor and evaluate their actions (chambers, 1994).
- A growing family of approaches, methods, attitudes and behaviours to enable and empower people to share, analyse and enhance their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan, act, monitor, evaluate and reflect (Chambers, 2004).

PRA is a flexible, low cost and time saving set of approaches and methods used to enable workers to collect and analyze information in terms of past, present and future situations to understand the rural populace and the condition that exists in rural areas which would provide a thorough and comprehensive idea regarding problems, potentials, resources and solutions to formulate realistic development practitioners to achieve the desired goals within specific time (Chambers1992). Participatory approaches like PRA are now becoming a basic approach in rural development and a wide range of examples can be found in the literature for natural resources and communally owned land: resource economics (Pretty and Scoones 1989), resource planning (Scoones and McCracken 1989), and community forestry (Molnar 1989 and Messerschmidt 1991). The use of the PRA also brought forth the adaptability of PRA tools and their use in the research process (Szymanski, et.al 1997). Locally, participatory processes create the possibility for creating linkages between survival strategies, knowledge systems, knowledge network and sustainable livelihoods (Gupta, 1997).

Three common element found in a PRA approach are

- **Self-aware responsibility**: Individual responsibility and judgment exercised by facilitators, with self-critical awareness, embracing error.
- **Equity and empowerment**: A commitment to equity. Empowering those who are marginalised, excluded, and deprived, often especially women.
- **Diversity**: Recognition and celebration of diversity

**Spread**

In development terms the last decade or so has been largely dominated by efforts to promote people's participation in development, which would involve a fundamental shift
- both in attitudes and in methodology - if it was to break decades of top-down, non-participatory practice. Since the early 1990s the major donor development agencies have put their weight behind and committed resources to promoting participatory development, recognising the problems caused by non-participatory development.

In the last decade (1990-2000) PRA has expanded and spread (Chambers 2004)
- From appraisal and analysis to planning, action and monitoring & evaluation
- From rural to urban
- From field application to application in organization
- From a few sectors and domains to many
- From a few countries to many
- From methods to professional and institutional change
- From behaviour and attitudes to personal change
- From action to policy influence
- From practice to theory

The sprit of inventiveness and improvisation (linked with optimal unprepared ness) which is the part of PRA is spreading, and helping people in different parts of the world to feel liberated and able to develop their own variety of approaches and methods.

**Why did Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) evolve for data collection (in the late 1970s and 1980s)?**

- Accelerating rural change, and the need for good and timely information and insights
- Recognizing "us" and our confidence in our knowledge as much of the problem, and "them" and their knowledge as much of the solution
- The anti-poverty biases (spatial, project, person, seasonal...) of rural development tourism. Being rapid and wrong
- The insulation, isolation and out-of-date experience of senior and powerful people, most of them men
- Survey slavery - questionnaire surveys which took long, misled, were wasteful, and were reported on, if at all, late
- The search for cost-effectiveness, recognising trade-offs between depth, breadth, accuracy, and timeliness, assessing actual beneficial use of information against costs of obtaining it

**What happened, leading to PRA for empowerment?**

- A confluence of approaches and methods - applied social anthropology, agroecosystem analysis, farming systems research, participatory action research, and RRA itself all coming together and evolving...
- A repertoire of new methods especially with visuals (mapping, matrices, diagramming.....) and of sequences of methods
• The discovery that "they can do it" (that .lowers. have far greater capabilities than most .uppers. recognize)
• The relative power and popularity of the open against the closed, the visual against the verbal, group against individual analysis, and comparing against measuring
• The search for practical approaches and methods for decentralisation, democracy, diversity, sustainability, community participation, empowerment....

Principles of PRA

• Offsetting biases (spatial, project, person-gender, elite etc, seasonal, professional, courtesy…)
• Rapid progressive learning- flexible, exploratory, interactive, inventive
• Reversals- learning from, with and by local people eliciting and using their criteria and categories
• Optimal ignorance and appropriate imprecision- not finding out more than is needed, not measuring more than the needed, and not trying to measure what does not to be measured.
• Triangulation- using different methods, sources and disciplines and a range of informants in a range of places and cross checking to get closer to the truth through successive approximations
• Direct contact, face to face, in the field
• Seeking diversity and differences
• Critical self awareness about attitudes and behaviour; doubt; embracing and learning from error; continuously trying to do better; building learning and improvement into every experience
• Changing behaviour and attitudes, from dominating to facilitating, empowering and enabling them to conduct their own analysis
• A culture of sharing- of information, of methods, of food, of field experience
• Commitment to equity

Approaches and Methods

PRA entails shift of emphasis from
• dominating to empowering
• closed to open
• individual to group
• verbal to visual
• measuring to comparing, ranking and scoring and of experience from
• reserve to rapport
• frustration to fun

Various approaches and methods applicable to PRA (Chambers, 2004) are given as under:
• **Offset:** the anti-poverty biases of rural development tourism (spatial, project, person, seasonal, courtesy...)

• **Find and review secondary data:** They can mend. They can also help a lot. At present, for the sake of a new balance, and of "our" reorientation and "their" participation, secondary data are not heavily stressed in PRA; but they can be very useful, especially in the earlier stages of e.g. deciding where to go

• **Observe directly:** (see for yourself) (It has been striking for me to begin to realise how much I do not see, or do not think to ask about. Does education deskill us? Am I alone, or do many of us have this problem?) Combine observation with self-critical awareness of personal biases that result from our specialised education and background, and consciously try to compensate for these.

• **Seek out the experts:** Ask: who are the experts? So obvious, and so often overlooked.


• **Semi-structured interviewing:** The Khon Kaen school of RRA has regarded this as the "core" of good RRA. Have a mental or written checklist, but be open to new aspects and to following up on the new and unexpected

• **Transect walks:** Systematically walking with key informants through an area, observing, meeting people, asking, listening, discussing, identifying different zones, local technologies, introduced technologies, seeking problems, solutions, opportunities, and mapping and/or diagramming resources and findings. Transects can take many forms - vertical, loop, along a watercourse, combing, even (in the Philippines) the sea-bottom.

• **Sequences of analysis:** From group to key informant, to other informants; or with a series of key informants, each expert on a different stage of a process (e.g. men on ploughing, women on weeding... etc)

• **Key probes:** Questions, which can lead direct to key issues such as - "What do you talk about when you are together?" "What new practices have you or others here experimented with in recent years?" "What happens when someone's hut burns down?"

• **Case studies and stories:** A household history and profile, a farm, coping with a crisis, how a conflict was resolved...

• **Groups:** (Casual or random encounter; focus or specialist; representative or structured for diversity; community/neighborhood; or formal). Group interactions and analysis are often powerful and efficient, especially with mapping and diagramming when group-visual synergy occurs with cross-checking, reminding, adding details, mutual reinforcement and visible enthusiasm to get it right.

• **Local people (and lowers generally) as investigators and researchers:** Women, children, school teachers, volunteers, students, farmers, village specialists, poor people. They do transects, observe and interview other local people. Beyond this, their own analysis, presentations, planning, action, monitoring and evaluation....

• **Do-it-yourself, supervised and taught by them:** (levelling a field, transplanting, weeding, lopping tree fodder, collecting common property resources, herding,
fishing, cutting and carrying fodder grass, milking animals, fetching water, fetching firewood, cooking, digging compost, sweeping and cleaning, washing clothes, lifting water, plastering a house, thatching, collecting refuse...). Roles are reversed. They are the experts. We are the clumsy novices. We learn from them. And learn their problems.

- **Time lines and trend and change analysis**: Chronologies of events, listing major remembered local events with approximate dates; people's accounts of the past, of how customs, practices and things close to them have changed; ethnobiographies - local histories of a crop, an animal, a tree, a pest, a weed...; diagrams, maps as matrices showing ecological histories, changes in land use and cropping patterns, population, migration, fuels used, education, health, credit, the roles of women and men...; and the causes of changes and trends, in a participatory mode often with estimation of relative magnitudes

- **Participatory mapping and modelling**: People's mapping, drawing and colouring on the ground with sticks, seeds, powders etc or on paper, to make social, health or demographic maps (of a residential village), resource maps or 3-D models of village lands or of forests, maps of fields, farms, home gardens, topic maps (for water, soils, trees etc etc), mobility, service and opportunity maps, etc. These popular methods can be combined with or lead into wealth or wellbeing ranking, watershed planning, health action planning etc. Census mapping can use seeds for people, cards for households...

- **Local analysis of secondary sources**: For example, participatory analysis of aerial photographs (a good scale is 1:5000) to identify, share knowledge of, and analyse soil types, land conditions, land tenure etc; also satellite imagery and GIS.

- **Counting, estimates and comparisons**: Often using local measures, judgements and/or pile sorting materials such as seeds, pellets, fruits, stones or sticks as counters or measures, sometimes combined with participatory maps and models

- **Seasonal calendars**: Distribution of days of rain, amount of rain or soil moisture, crops, agricultural labour, non-agricultural labour, diet, food consumption, sickness, prices, animal fodder, fuel, migration, income, expenditure, debt etc

- **Daily time use analysis**: Indicating relative amounts of time, degrees of drudgery etc of activities, sometimes indicating seasonal variations

- **Institutional or "chapati"/Venn diagramming**: identifying individuals and institutions important in and for a community or group, or within an organisation, and their relationships

- **Linkage diagrams**: Of flows, connections and causality. This has been used for marketing, nutrient flows on farms, migration, social contacts, impacts of interventions and trends, causes of poverty, hunger, violence etc

- **Wellbeing grouping**: (or wealth ranking) - grouping or ranking households according to wellbeing, including those considered poorest or worst off. A good lead into discussions of the livelihoods of the poor and how they cope, and widely used for the selection of poor and deprived households with whom to work

- **Matrix scoring and ranking**: Especially using matrices and seeds to compare through scoring, for example different trees, or soils, or methods of soil and water conservation, varieties of a crop or animal, fields on a farm, fish, weeds, conditions at different times, and to express preferences
• **Local indicators**: e.g. poor people's criteria of wellbeing and illbeing, and how they differ from those we assume for them. Local indicators can be a start or baseline for participatory monitoring and evaluation.

• **Team contracts and interactions**: Contracts drawn up by teams with agreed norms of behaviour; modes of interaction within teams, including changing pairs, evening discussions, mutual criticism and help; how to behave in the field, etc. (The team may be outsiders only, local people only, or local people and outsiders together)

• **Shared presentations and analysis**: Where maps, models, diagrams, and findings are presented by local people especially to village or community meetings, and checked, corrected and discussed. Brainstorming, especially joint sessions with villagers. But who talks? Who talks how much? Who interrupts whom? Whose ideas dominate? Who lectures?

• **Contrast comparisons**: Asking group A to analyze group B, and vice versa, as for gender awareness, asking men to analyse how women spend their time.

• **Role plays, theatre and participatory video** on key issues, to express realities and problems, and to explore solutions. Powerful and popular approaches.

• **Alternatives to questionnaires**: A new repertoire of participatory alternatives to the use of questionnaires, which generate shared numerical information. This has developed in an extraordinary way, still little recognized even in 2004.

• **Listing and card-sorting**: A super way of enabling many people to express their knowledge, views and preferences, and then sort them into categories or priorities, often using "the democracy of the ground".

**PRA tools Used by CIFRI**

The following PRA tools were utilized for space, time, flow and decision analyses for understanding the elements and properties of the village ecosystem at Chilika. (CIFRI 2004)

**Applications and Uses of PRA**

Participatory rural appraisal has become the new development buzzword in every aspect of community development around the world. These techniques are now being used in almost every field where people are involved. Some of the more important and common applications include:

**Natural resources and agriculture**

- Watersheds and soil and water conservation
- Forestry (especially joint forest management) and agro forestry
- Fisheries and aquaculture
- Biodiversity and wildlife reserve management
- Village resource management planning and action
- Integrated pest management
- Crops and animal husbandry, including farmer participatory research/ farming systems research and problem identification by farmers  
- Irrigation  
- Marketing

**Table: 1 PRA tools used by CIFRI**

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**Programmes for equity**

- Women’s empowerment, gender awareness etc  
- Children  
- Micro-finance  
- Selection: finding, selecting and deselecting people for poverty-oriented programmes  
- Income earning: identification and analysis of non-agricultural income- earning opportunities.  
- Analysis by poor people of livelihoods and coping, leading to household plans  
- Participation by communities and their members in complex political emergencies
Health and nutrition

- Health assessments and monitoring
- Food security and nutrition assessment and monitoring
- Water and sanitation, including Community-Led Total Sanitation (Kar 2003)
- Emergency assessment and management
- Sexual and reproductive health, including HIV/AIDS awareness and action
- Adolescent sexual behaviour

Urban

- Community planning and action
- Slum improvement
- Urban violence

Policy

- Impact on poor people of structural adjustment and other policies
- PPAs (participatory poverty assessments)
- Land policy

Institutional and personal change

- Organisational analysis
- Participatory learning groups in organisations
- Field experiential learning
- Reflection and developing self-critical awareness

References


