Editorial

In this issue

Welcome to this issue of PLA Notes. First, the special theme issue, which we had planned for this issue concerning Sexual and Reproductive Health, has been postponed to February 2000 (issue 37). This means that there is still time to submit articles for this edition, so please do forward any experiences which you would like to share with the Readership of the Notes to us for consideration. Issue 36 provides a selection of general articles across different subject and sector areas. We hope you will enjoy reading them.

The articles start with an interesting account of a participatory evaluation of a CARE International project in Harare, Zimbabwe, (Harmmeijer, this issue), where the predefined terms of reference for evaluating the project were changed into 10 positive hypotheses/statements which the evaluation team, in conjunction with the community, then had to either support, refine or refute. The article raises some very interesting learnings for how to approach participatory evaluations. The next article looks at the evaluation of a participatory training workshop for GTZ staff, in an attempt to institutionalise participatory approaches within the organisation, and poses some challenging questions for consideration (See Gassner Keita and Forster, this issue).

Next is an interesting account by Jeremy Cox, considering the many dilemmas faced by social scientists when conducting interviews with communities and suggests ways to overcome them. This is followed by a fascinating presentation of the Force Field Analysis, a visual tool enabling communities to approach and analyse problems (Kumar, this issue).

Next is a report of participatory self-assessment with the case of a dairy sector support project in Tanzania (see Forrester-Kibuga and Power, this issue). The self-assessment was conducted, using 54 picture postcards as a visual stimulus for identifying issues, prioritising through voting and then, ranking the outcomes and mobilising a community for action. This is followed by an account from Nepal, where social networks of communities were mapped to analyse the strength of existing social networks within 3 communities in the context of a health improvement scheme (see Gibbon and Pokhrel, this issue).

The articles conclude with a case study from Zimbabwe, in which Richards et al. consider the extent to which PRA methods can be used to collect economic data, and provide a comparative analysis of PRA methods and the formal household survey. An extra addition to this issue is a review of the recent conference in Ottawa, Canada, ‘Deepening our Understanding and Practice – a conference on participatory development and beyond’. It provides a taste of the key themes, outcomes and issues for furthering the debate around the future of participation.

Regular features

The Tips for Trainers contribution is provided by John Rowley, in which a participatory tool, a matrix, is used to evaluate a PRA training workshop.

In the In-Touch section, (at the back of the issue) experiences are shared and new relevant materials, training courses and events are published. Remember that the information for this section is provided by the Readership of the Notes for the Readership, so do keep it coming. The RCPLA Pages in the In Touch section discuss the latest developments of the RCPLA Network, concentrating on the IIED Resource Centre and some funding news. You will also find some information on the activities of other network partners.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 36, pp.2, IIED London
We hope that you enjoy this issue and please send any feedback you may have on the series to the Editorial Team at IIED. Happy Reading!
1

From terms of reference to participatory learning: using an evaluation’s creative space

Joanne Harnmeijer

Introduction

Conventional evaluations of development projects are generally carried out by external experts, who largely use documented information, interviews and short field visits to gather their information. They are usually guided by terms of reference which leave them with little scope for flexibility or creativity. In this article we describe how a project evaluation in Zimbabwe used the original terms of reference as a basis for a flexible and participatory approach to evaluation.

Converting terms of reference to hypotheses

The Small Dam Rehabilitation Project (SDRP) implemented by CARE International aims to improve food security for drought-prone communities in Masvingo and Midland Provinces in Zimbabwe. It helps communities protect small reservoirs and catchment areas and to optimise their use. Part of the project, the rehabilitation of twelve small dams, is funded by the Dutch government, and was due for evaluation in early 1998. Remarkably, both CARE and the Dutch Embassy requested a focused in-depth review rather than a conventional broad-sweep evaluation, and felt that a participatory approach would suit the Terms of Reference (ToRs). CARE’s Programme Officer urged the evaluators to use the fullest possible range of participatory methods and to explore beyond well-known techniques such as focus group discussions. CARE then assisted the team leader in finding two local consultants with experience in participatory research. The evaluation team thus assembled consisted of two Zimbabwean consultants and one Dutch consultant based in Zimbabwe.

The explicit request for innovative participatory methods encouraged the evaluators to take some bold steps. First, they ‘translated’ the ToRs into a set of ten hypothetical statements (see Box 1), all of which were phrased in the positive. The evaluators’ task was to support, refine or reject these statements.

Designing a participatory learning methodology

The next step was the challenging one: for each of the first seven of the ten statements, the team conceived a sequence of methods, chosen both for their potential to address the specific issue and for their participatory potential. They also spent two days touring the twelve Dutch-funded dams, guided by senior CARE staff. This helped the evaluators gain an overview of the entire project and identify suitable sites for inclusion in the study.

BOX 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEN STATEMENTS ABOUT THE CARE SMALL DAM REHABILITATION PROJECT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The evaluators excluded four of the twelve dams from the sampling frame, mostly because rehabilitation measures were incomplete. Of the remaining eight dams, three were randomly selected, while a fourth served as a pilot. A fifth dam belonging to an older CARE project served as a control.
Community level

1. **Numbers of beneficiaries:** Those benefiting from each small dam in the project area fall into two categories: (1) direct beneficiaries numbering some 1,000 people per dam; and, (2) indirect beneficiaries of about 1,500 people per dam.

2. **Equality of access to project benefits:** Equitable access to a dam’s potential benefits is secured by by-laws generated and reinforced at community level (user fees, committees etc.).

3. **Equality of distribution of benefits:** Women, especially poor women, are the main beneficiaries of the project’s efforts.

4. **Sustainable management of common property natural resources:** Improved income is a vital incentive to ensure community management and environmental rehabilitation of common property natural resources.

5. **Sustainable management of common property natural resources (institutional aspects):** The project’s approach of community management with the local authority is sufficient for dealing with conflict over land allocation and access, etc.

6. **Perceived impacts:** Improved nutrition and income security are the main benefits perceived by users of the project dams.

7. **Exploiting potential benefits:** The project’s intention to explore and encourage utilisation of a wider range of economic benefits of the dam and its catchment area is justified given the current under-exploitation of the multiple potential benefits of small dams in the region.

District level

8. **Accountability of local authorities:** The project’s approach of promoting the role of Rural District Councils (RDCs) as the main agents of change through training and involvement in a project co-ordinating committee is successful.

9. **Capacity development of local authorities:** Project efforts at RDC level complement the national RDC Capacity Building Programme.

Project model

10. The project provides an appropriate and cost-effective model for achieving community based common property resource management which merits replication in its current form.

CARE field staff were keen to be involved in the evaluation. They commented on the proposed methodology in a one-day workshop and assisted in the pilot workshop at one dam site and in the subsequent workshops at the other four sites.

All 20 or so community members of the dam related committees (such as the Dam Rehabilitation Committee and the Irrigation Committee) and about 30 other dam users were invited to these workshops. In order to ensure a good representation of income groups and gender amongst the participants, the review team had asked that the 30 ‘other dam users’ would be a representative sample of all users. However the team was not in a position to ensure this, as invitations for the meetings were arranged through project staff. It is thus likely that those living nearby the dams were over-represented and, as is usual in such meetings, women outnumbered men – on average 50 people attended of whom some 60% were women. The participants were divided into two groups - committee members and other users. Each group had its own programme of three to four issues and was guided by one review team member. The workshops took between four and five hours per site. The (expatriate) team leader was present, but confined her role to taking pictures.

Below is a description of some of the methodologies used in the workshops to explore the first seven statements.
Statement 6: perceived impact

The methodology used here was based on a set of picture posters. This exercise was an ‘ice breaker’, setting the tone of the meeting with the group of community members not selected in committees. A set of 54 pictures was spread on a mat at the centre of the meeting. These pictures were both ‘open’ (i.e. multiple interpretations) and ‘closed’ (e.g. a woman tending a garden; a family having a meal etc.). Participants were then invited to each select the picture that best represented the project’s benefits, as they saw them. After a brief initial hesitation, participants started to move and talk and crowd around the mat. After making a choice, they explained it to the rest of the group. By that time, the meeting was lively and full of laughter. The group as a whole then decided which pictures they all agreed represented the project’s main benefits. This generated much heated discussion, but eventually this selection was put up for a vote. A helper stuck the pictures on a rock wall or on the back of the car in a way that enabled people to vote in private. The ballots were colour-coded: black for men and white for women. Each short-listed picture had its own ballot box - a small card box with a hole in the lid. After voting, the pictures were put back on the mat and a participant then emptied the corresponding ballot boxes on them. This gave a strong visual image of the voting results. Since the discussions preceding the vote had been extensive, the results were no surprise and discussion at that point was mostly brief. A helper noted down the results while the meeting turned to the next issue.

Communities’ perceptions of project benefits were surprisingly consistent in all five study sites. Of the 54 pictures, only 29 were selected in the initial rounds. These 29 posters represented 12 sorts of benefits. However, once it came to voting, participants in the five study sites consistently shortlisted the same seven issues as the main benefits.

The methodology only allowed one vote per participant. In view of the outcome, it might have been interesting to refine the vote by allowing a second ballot for another perceived benefit. As it is, the vote was overwhelmingly for ‘the security of having water nearby’ which was depicted in a simple black and white picture of a dam (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. ‘Having the security of water nearby’ – the main project benefit for most of the voters
Statement 1: number and classification of beneficiaries

The flat rock surfaces near the dams proved ideal for mapping the dams’ social catchment areas, which was done with chalk, seed and chips of different colours. After the outline by an elder, virtually all of the twenty or so committee members took part in mapping the homesteads, each sub-group working on its own cluster of homesteads. Elderly and tired people now and again withdrew to the shade, but kept coming back to check the results. If there was no physical boundary, the maps turned out very large, up to 160 square metres. The mapping took about one hour of dedicated work. The results appeared very reliable and have indeed changed CARE’s assumptions about project beneficiaries - both in terms of numbers and in the way beneficiaries should be classified. For example, the numbers – nearly 4000 users per dam – far exceeded earlier estimates. The 1500 or so seasonal users (earlier classified as ‘indirect users’) did not contribute to maintenance works and yet were, for a large part, those with livestock – wealth, in other words. This gave new impetus to the discussion on animal use and its effects and on charging user fees. The mapping was followed by discussions about the next statement - access and reasons for lack of access to project activities. This was now a straightforward activity as participants indicated homesteads on the map and explained why some households have less access than others.

Statement 3: perceived equality of benefits

Community members not holding posts in any of the committees dealt with these issues as it was felt the group of committee members might have a biased view. The methodology worked towards a vote answering the question ‘who has benefited most?’. Ballots were colour-coded for men and women and were cast in private on three sets of three drawings depicting:

- equity in general: a few houses; a moderate number of houses; a lot of houses;
- gender: a group of men only; a group of women; a mixed group (see Figure 2);
- poverty: posters were first assembled and agreed by participants, using attributes of wealth such as a picture of a car, a banknote, a full store, cattle etc. Participants attached selected attributes to three identical pictures of a basic house, thus indicating if it was a poor, average or wealthy household. This took about ten minutes to work out and agree on, but gave a satisfactory result without stigmatising labels of poverty. Poor people were correctly depicted as having few or no attributes of wealth but at least were not portrayed in shabby houses or dressed in rags.

Figure 2. Set of three drawings depicting gender used for voting
The three ballots took place one after another, with discussion before and after on each issue. As in the earlier example, participants emptied ballot boxes on the corresponding pictures on the mat in the centre of the meeting, thus making the outcome clearly visible for all participants. The facilitator then would gently probe unexpected outcomes, if any.

Statement 4: sustainable management of common property natural resources

This topic was a challenge, not least because it concerns an assumption about people’s future behaviour. Participants started drawing a time series of three surfaces of their dam at full water level - one as they remembered it from the past; one as it was now; and one as they expected it to be in five to ten years time. Each drawing was done on identical A3 size cardboard, on a scale participants agreed amongst themselves. Participants then cut out the three drawings and stuck them wide apart on a big rock or a wall in full view of the group. This is a so-called ‘story with a gap’, or, in this case, 2 gaps. The space in between the drawings (or photos or pictures) makes people think about past, present and future of, in this case, their dam.

The discussion started with the first gap: What had happened to bring about the current situation? In some meetings, picture posters induced this discussion, with participants each selecting and explaining uses which had led to siltation, thus making the surface area smaller and differently shaped.

Then, individually or in pairs, they drew action they felt was needed to sustain the dam’s life span and water holding capacity - the second gap. The next step was to present the drawings and sort them by issue. This was followed by a vote, using pebbles, on which measures would be most difficult for the community to do by itself. At that time, the facilitator probed the point made in the hypothesis leading to fresh discussions and sometimes even to a second ballot.

The outcome of the community level workshops was colourful. It included numerous pictures of the proceedings, drawings, maps and Venn diagrams. The workshops also generated data in conventional tables, the formats of which had been designed beforehand. All these were taken to district-level workshops, during which district staff interpreted the tabulated data. This helped the evaluators address those statements that could not be addressed at community level.

Reflections

The main challenge for this review was to satisfy the demands posed by an evaluation whilst keeping the positive aspects of a participatory exercise. This challenge was fulfilled. However, there are pre-conditions for this approach to be successful.

At design stage

- Focus on a limited number of issues of common interest (see below)
- Meticulous preparation; funding is required to enable proper preparation
- Availability of skilled facilitators with analytical minds and an eye for detail

At community level

- Content issues of high and common interest (both common within the community and common between the community and the study team).
- Sizeable attendance, but not more than, say, 60 people. Participants should ideally be a representative selection of the target group, but this is difficult to secure.
- Informal, but comfortable settings with plenty of space so that people can spread out and sit in groups. Meetings outside can be spoilt by (the threat of) rain, wind and lack of shade. Crowding and heavy furniture make for an uneasy start of meetings inside.
- Reasonable time demands and respect for people’s situation. For example, providing a meal for workshop participants is appropriate as people are hungry after four to five hours of intense discussion.
- Work on issues that can be visualised, or at least have a visual outcome (as in the votes described above).

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1 The method can be used for other issues that can be depicted, such as malnutrition, malfunctioning water points, etc.
• Work with issues that are relevant at all levels so that community level results feed into higher level meetings.

**Conclusion**

Having to find evidence to support or refute hypothetical statements can promote creative thinking around clearly defined issues. It makes the evaluators think hard to come up with the best possible methodology using the full range of methods available. Participatory approaches are quite demanding in terms of preparation and thus in terms of fees. Their use in evaluations must be justified. They are particularly suitable for the following types of data.

- Weighed and gender-specific community opinions on benefits and impacts of activities, on access to and use of benefits, and on sensitive issues such as equity and gender.
- Approximate information on local living conditions such as numbers and quality of physical infrastructure and facilities; location and use of resources; number of users.
- Community opinion on project performance and other institutions meant to serve them.
- Community opinion on factors determining common property management.
- Implicitly, the likelihood of continuation of project activities after withdrawal of the implementing agency.

In joint evaluations, participatory approaches stimulate follow-up by the implementing agency. As K. Stevenson, Programme Officer of CARE, Zimbabwe, commented some 18 months after the evaluation:

> “Unlike preceding evaluations, this evaluation tackled only a limited number of issues. However, it was designed to speak with authority on these. The review gave CARE insight into the validity of key assumptions underlying project design. This eventually led to thorough revision of routine approaches where the participatory review proved the assumptions untenable. For example, the outcome of the community vote on perceived benefits made CARE more determined to give priority to dams where project assistance could make a long term difference for water security”.

CARE’S readiness to draw such lessons was to a large extent a result of staff involvement in the evaluation’s design and implementation. CARE also followed up on the practical lessons that staff had appreciated in the review. For example, methods such as social mapping are now routinely incorporated in the planning and extension process at all dam sites, including those of CARE projects funded by other donors.

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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

With thanks to Kelly Stevenson, CARE International and to co-evaluators Clever Ndlovu (now Kumalo) and Vice Nyamanzi.

Funding of this assignment was kindly approved by the Royal Netherlands Embassy, Harare.

Ink drawings by Juliet Waterkeyn, Zimbabwe Ahead, Harare, are examples of visual tools used in this evaluation. Other visuals were mostly pictures cut out from calendars and promotion materials.

For more details of the methodology, contact the author. A more in-depth analysis of the approach taken is available in Joanne Harnmeijer, Ann Waters-Bayer and Wolfgang Bayer, 1999. *Dimensions of participation in evaluation: experiences in Zimbabwe and the Sudan*. Gatekeeper Series No. 83, IIED, UK. Available from the IIED Bookshop: Email: bookshop@iied.org
Experience with PRA training and hands-on implementation: results of an ex-post-study of PRA training courses

Gunde Gassner-Keita, Reiner Forster

• Introduction

Special efforts to promote participatory approaches within the GTZ, the German Agency for Technical Co-operation, started at the end of the 1980s and have accelerated since the early 1990s. They comprise training and other forms of capacity development, learning from experiences in the field, as well as assessing and adapting processes and methods.

Between 1993 and 1996, the GTZ conducted six training courses on the approach and methodology of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) in Germany and Austria as part of its staff upgrading programme. In this paper, we assess the findings of a survey into the effectiveness of this training.

The central component of these six-day courses was the actual implementation or simulation of a PRA. In addition to interviews and field observation, the participants spent two days with a host family and finally organised a community meeting where they presented their insights and discussed jointly with community members, areas for possible future action. All of this was framed by an approximately ½ day introduction with trial runs in selected methods, culminating in a session in which the participants reflected on all their experiences in the course.

In 1996 the courses were evaluated through a written survey¹. The survey aimed to determine the quality of these training events, and especially their practical relevance from the point of view of the course participants. It also aimed to gain an insight into the participants’ subsequent practical experience with PRA. The evaluation took place between six months and three and a half years after the respective training course. 62 out of 98 course participants responded to the questionnaire, which contained both open and closed questions.

The course in retrospect

On the whole, the course can be described as very successful. In retrospect, the large majority of participants (80%) found that the quite considerable time and money invested in the course had been worthwhile. What is more, nearly all the participants (97%) have since recommended the approach and methods to colleagues both within GTZ and elsewhere.

They felt the PRA course was especially relevant to two areas of their professional activities:

• in their own practical applications in their field of work (52%); and,

¹ The study was conducted by Ms. Gunde Gassner-Keita, in co-operation with Mr. Reiner Forster, GTZ, Unit 04, within the scope of her MA-level dissertation at Kassel University on ‘Training Workshops on the Approach and Methodology of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and its Implementation in Practice’ (document available in German language only).

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 36, pp.9–13, IIED London
• as an orientation; course participation facilitated better orientation and judgement skills when it came to implementing participatory approaches (48%).

According to those surveyed, the seminar was very successful in achieving its objectives, especially in introducing the PRA approach and methodology and in providing first practical experience (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Achievement of seminar objectives

![Achievement of Seminar Objectives](image1)

Participants felt the seminar was less successful in helping them to plan and organise PRA in their own work.

To most participants, the most important aspects were the methods and practical tools and instruments, as well as the experience of applying PRA in general and in their own projects (90% and 78% respectively). In contrast, other aspects such as the philosophy and principles of PRA, reviewing one’s own role and behaviour, as well as PRA’s place in management approaches and its interfaces with objectives-oriented project planning (ZOPP), were perceived to be less important (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Key aspects of the course

![Key Aspects of the Course](image2)

Practical implementation of course contents

The majority of the participants (79%) have since gained first-hand practical experience with PRA. However, some of those questioned attended the course just six months before the survey (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Practical experience with PRA

![Practical Experience with PRA](image3)

Of the 41 participants reporting practical experience after the training, most have initiated or commissioned a PRA and/or implemented one themselves in their own work. About a third in each case have passed on PRA techniques as a trainer and/or took part in another PRA session (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Scope of experience

![Scope of Experience](image4)
PRA was mainly used in situation and target-group analyses, and to support participatory planning processes; each counting for 39% of the responses.

In addition, participants report using PRA in organisational development (10%), awareness-raising/target-group mobilisation (10%), training (8%), participatory consultancy inputs (8%) and research (6%). Some of those interviewed stated that they adapted certain aspects of the methods whilst implementing PRA in their own work, particularly when:

- combining PRA with other instruments and methodological approaches, such as aerial photography and GPS\(^2\), theatre, participatory action research, SWPO/SEPO\(^3\);
- awareness-raising of decision-makers by involving them in a PRA; and,
- combining PRA with objectives-oriented project planning (ZOPP).

**Applications experience**

In most cases, applying PRA resulted in tangible improvements in the projects on which course participants worked after the training (82%; 32 projects). The participants were able to identify improvements in the following areas:

- confidence and self-organisation of target groups in relation to project activities;
- planning; and,
- relationships between target groups and advisors/extension officers (see Figure 5).

Various problems manifested themselves during PRA implementation. Participants that had just had their first practical experience with PRA named the inadequate application of the approach as the prime source of difficulty (54% of those questioned). Other difficulties included problems with the political situation in the partner country, a lack of support by the project team and the considerable inputs of time and human resources involved in PRA (see Figure 6).

The participants’ comments about the limitations and risks of PRA (see Figure 7) echo the application difficulties and reflect the debate on participatory approaches in

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\(^2\) GPS- Geographical Positioning System

\(^3\) SWPO – Strengths-Weaknesses-Potentials-Obstacles, a simple method for (self-) evaluation and planning (in French: SEPO)
Development Co-operation. Key limitations included:

- the poor level of process orientation in project planning and management,
- the unsatisfactory institutionalisation of the PRA approach in the political context of partner countries; and,
- the errors made in application, the high level of inputs (human resources, facilitation skills etc.) required and the methodological restrictions.

According to the participants, the main risks of PRA lie in the potential for misusing and also instrumentalising the PRA approach, as well as in the users’ exaggerated and/or false expectations.

**Figure 7. PRA limitations and risks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRA Limitations and Risks</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor Level of Process Orientation</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Following analysis and planning, PRA does not offer any assistance for further action</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Process orientation versus operations planning</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient Integration in Institutions and Political Processes</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of acceptance of the PRA approach on the part of decision-makers in DC organisations and in the partner countries</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No changes in the power structures in autocratic societies</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User Errors</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Incorrect application and use of instruments</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Level of Inputs</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Time and human resources</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• High level of facilitator qualifications required</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method, Limitations as Analytical Instrument</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focus on specific points; does not allow for generalisation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>False Expectations, Instrumentalisation</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exaggerated/false expectations</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Misuse of the term PRA; Danger of instrumentalising PRA</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One course alone is not enough to establish firmly a participatory approach in project structures. This requires much more far-reaching institutional changes. According to those participants who had implemented PRA, these include selecting the ‘right’ staff (18%) and ensuring participation is accepted by the decision-makers (17%). Incorporating participatory methods into process-oriented approaches (11%) and linking them with other methodological approaches and instruments used in project management are also regarded as important (20%).

**Data base and persons surveyed**

The 63% response rate to the 98 questionnaires distributed was comparatively high. This applies especially to women, 73% of whom replied, in contrast to just 57% of the male participants. The majority of those questioned were GTZ field-staff employees (51%), followed by freelancers, university staff (26%) and GTZ Head Office staff (19%). Most of those interviewed were actively involved in the rural development sector, particularly regional rural development and natural resource management (see Figure 8).

**Figure 8. Professional occupations of people surveyed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Occupations of People Surveyed</th>
<th>all</th>
<th>men</th>
<th>women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Field staff</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Office staff</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fre-lancers and/or university employees</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not employed in DC sector</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No details</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One look at the birth dates reveals that most of the people surveyed are under the age of 40, and there are more women than men among the younger persons surveyed (Figure 9).

**Figure 9. Age of those surveyed**
Summary

The course concept Introduction – Hands-on Application – Reflection has obviously proved its worth. The course was given top marks by the participants; the seminar objectives have been achieved in most cases and its practical relevance is very high. The course offers an excellent initiation into the workings of the PRA approach and should continue with this same objective.

Furthermore, feedback on the experience gained with the PRA approach can be used to develop the course concept further. Although the participants were mainly interested in learning about practical tools and instruments, and less in reflecting upon their role and behaviour, the approach’s political content and its process dynamics soon become apparent to them when they came to apply the methods in their own work. This confirms the limitations of applying PRA in a purely ‘instrumental’ way. The course has since been amended to focus more on the entire process of institutional change and the role the seconded experts have to play in this, as well as the aspect of facilitation.

There is also a need for further measures to address the identified need for a wider process of change, and the political resistance to participation at the level of target-group decision-makers and in higher echelons of administration.

This highlights the need to improve consultancy and process-design skills; something that can only be achieved to a very limited extent through training courses. On-the-job learning opportunities, such as quality circles, learning workshops, coaching etc., which facilitate an intensive exchange of experience and case-by-case analyses are better suited to this.

Training and upgrading alone are undoubtedly not enough to institutionalise participation; not without a major overhaul of the framework conditions in many partner countries and much further-reaching changes in the headquarters of Development Co-operation organisations. The course participants consider the following pre-requisites and changes necessary:

• the ‘right’ staff;
• acceptance at decision-making level; and,
• integration in the political process in partner countries and in the management instruments employed by GTZ and other Development Co-operation organisations.

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Tackling difficult issues: lessons from research in Ecuador

Jeremy Cox

Introduction

Sociological studies of communities living within or close to areas of exceptional biodiversity play an integral role in any conservation strategy because they can identify impacts to the environment and highlight less harmful means of production. However, such studies are difficult to conduct as they are often perceived by local communities as threatening to their way of life. The need to generate the community’s confidence is essential in nurturing co-operation. This involves choosing approaches that facilitate good relations with local communities, even if it means sacrificing the potential of obtaining impeccable data. This article summarises some lessons learnt from a research project in Ecuador.

Project background

Project Eakehei was an international award winning conservation effort that conducted biological and socio-economic studies in and around Podocarpus National Park in southern Ecuador. The project had Australian and English scientists working alongside Ecuadorian scientists from a local NGO, Fundacion Arcoiris, which is actively involved in improving the long term management of the park.

In the last 15 years, a massive downturn in Ecuador’s economy, combined with rapid population growth (the highest in Latin America), has resulted in a dramatic increase in the colonisation of Amazon Ecuador. Most colonists are in search of an income from cattle farming and subsequently, the national park has come under increasing pressure from them. In order to understand these pressures, a team spent three months in 1998 working in a ‘colonist community’, Las Orquideas, in the isolated Rio Nangartiza Valley which borders the eastern edge of the park. The information gained will contribute to a long term management strategy of the area for the Instituto Ecuatoriano Forestal y de Areas Naturales y Vida Silvestre (INEFAN), the national government body responsible for the management of Ecuador’s national parks and wildlife. There were two aims of this research:

- to assist Fundacion Arcoiris in understanding the park’s biological value; and,
- to assist in understanding the major threats by local communities to the park and surrounding ecosystems.

Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) was used to generate a body of qualitative information on various aspects of the community. It was felt that the qualitative nature of PRA would allow a more in-depth understanding of the complex nature of the community’s relations to the surrounding environment.

Generating confidence from the community

The community at Las Orquideas is engaged in a number of illegal activities, most notably illegal selling of wood and hunting endangered species of animals. Over two thirds of the farms cannot afford legal ownership, and are

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1 The project was funded by BirdLife International, the Royal Geographical Society and a number of private sponsors from Latin America, the United Kingdom and Australia.
wary of outsiders being government officials seeking financial obligations. It was therefore very important to overcome community suspicions about the project, particularly in the light of increasing local government pressure on the community concerning their illegitimacy. The first step was to gain the trust of the community. A very effective way of achieving this was by employing a local anthropologist, Eliana Vivanco, who had previously worked and established confidence with a number of residents at Las Orquideas. This link was infinitely important for a number of reasons. First, the fact that Eliana has previously established trust meant that community suspicions toward the project were immediately softened through our association with somebody they already knew and respected. Second, as Eliana was known not to be associated with INEFAN, we were able to distance ourselves from local government officials whom community members approached with suspicion and reticence. The goodwill established early in the study was maintained by employing a number of local residents to help with the sociological and biological research. The trust gained from the community from their employment and the insights gained from working alongside them improved our understanding of the community and its interactions with the environment, and also provided the opportunity to build networks for future conservation work in the area. To increase the confidence of the community further, community meetings were held on our arrival and throughout our stay. This involved explaining the nature of the research, who we were and the reasons we were interested. Meetings were held frequently to update the community on developments and to allow for feedback. Another important way of getting to know the community was encouraging them to get to know us. This involved spending as much time as possible engaging in community activities such as fishing and preparing meals with various families. It was also very useful showing photos of Australia. This allowed them to place us in a context that was more than just ‘outsiders’.

- **Interviewing: overcoming a ‘methodological dilemma’**

To gain a more thorough understanding of local resource use, we used semi-structured farm household interviews. However, we initially found that most respondents were nervous and often evasive when discussing issues related to the illegal wood trade, the legal status of their farm and the hunting of local animals. This led to a methodological dilemma: was it worth pushing the interview in order to gain more information, given the discomfort it caused to the respondents? We decided that the best approach was to maintain confidence and trust within the community. When it came to dealing with difficult issues in the interview, we maintained discretion and no priority was given to obtaining impeccable data if it placed a community member in an uncomfortable position.

The reasoning behind our decision was based entirely on attempting to extinguish any sense of threat imposed by the interview situation. A similar situation was summed up by Brand when interviewing Palestinians; “I sometimes wonder if my questions were at times too benign, if I should have pushed harder for additional information. Perhaps. But I was keenly aware of the value of trust people had placed in me: preserving that trust was ultimately more important than asking for more sensitive information, however it might have strengthened the study” (Brand, 1988).

Moreover, we found that where community members remained reluctant to answer particular questions, in some instances this reflected broader issues about their understanding of how their activities affected the environment. When discussing the wood trade, for example, respondents were usually happy to provide details on aspects such as market prices, costs, access to markets etc but initially shied away from questions on their own involvement. Similar sentiments were suggested by Ibrahim: “one can take the field experience as a source of data in itself” (Ibrahim 1987).

An extra step was taken however to reduce the threat arising from interview questions. We initially conducted a pilot interview with a number of community members and then
made changes resulting from suggestions and comments from respondents. In some instances, changes to the interview questions included unobtrusive measures such as asking “How do you think most other community members feel...?” rather than “How do you feel?”. This was particularly useful when dealing with issues of the illegal wood trade, as well as hunting. We also found that conducting interviews at respondents' homes, during their daily routines, over meals and beside local football games, maintained a low key environment and therefore allowed respondents to feel relaxed.

By paying attention to minimising any sense of threat from an interview situation, we discovered that it actually became a very effective way of gaining insight into the community’s activities. In this sense we would entirely agree with Helen Garners’ observation concerning how to approach interviews; “Interviewing is not what people imagine. Before you try it, you think it must be like pulling teeth. You approach each interview fearing that you will not get enough. But what you learn is that you must humble yourself before the other. You have to let go of your anxious desire to control and direct the encounter. You have to live for a while in the uncertainty of not knowing where it’s heading. You don’t lead. You learn to follow. And then you are amazed at what people are willing to tell you” (Garner, 1995).

We discovered that once local residents felt comfortable, they were far from reticent, many insisting that the interview continued beyond the time they had allowed for it in order to ensure that we gained as much valuable information as possible.

**Conclusion**

When it comes to discussing difficult issues with local communities, the chances of obtaining a thorough understanding of the issues will increase so long as you have taken as many steps as possible to generate confidence among the community. Through being clear about our intentions and by nurturing community relations, we were able to successfully tackle the difficult issues. Once we had established trust, many local people embraced the opportunity to explain their circumstances, often bringing up the difficult issues without prompting and in doing so, providing insight into the influences that affect their decisions to engage in activities such as the illegal wood trade and hunting. Consequently, by understanding such influences, we found ourselves in a better position to suggest practical management recommendations.

One example is hunting, where respondents expressed negative perceptions toward local wildlife. This lack of understanding of the importance of the native fauna needs to be addressed. An education programme is desperately needed to change such attitudes and to establish responsibility among local residents. The success of an environmental education strategy will depend on co-ordinating efforts between the community and organisations such as Fundacion Arcoiris and INEFAN. Co-operation. Project Eakehei has helped communicate potential conservation strategies with the residents of Las Orquideas (such as a buffer zone around the park). For this to be successful, the local communities, such as Las Orquideas must be involved in its management along with groups such as INEFAN, Fundacion Arcoiris and local conservation groups. Without local community support, management plans cannot be achieved. Las Orquideas has a community structure which could provide a foundation for planning community involvement in future conservation projects. Therefore the importance of maintaining a positive relationship with Las Orquideas cannot be underestimated if future conservation strategies are to succeed.

**NOTES & REFERENCES**

The full project report will be available later on this year. Contact the author for further details.


Force field analysis: applications in PRA

Somesh Kumar

Introduction

Force Field Analysis is a technique to visually identify and analyse forces affecting a problem situation so as to plan a positive change. It has been used in diverse fields ranging from organisational change to self-development. Its visual character, simplicity, suitability for group work and applicability in planning for change makes it a potential tool with wide application in PRA. This article traces the background and origin of Force Field Analysis, enumerates steps for using it and gives examples of its use in PRA.

Background

Kurt Lewin is credited with the development of Force Field Analysis (FFA) (Lewin, 1951). According to Lewin, any situation or performance can be viewed as a state of temporary equilibrium. This equilibrium is caused by two sets of opposing forces (see Figure 1):

- those which try to bring change: driving, facilitating or positive forces; and,
- those which try to maintain the status quo: restraining, resisting or negative forces.

The length of the arrow in Figure 1 denotes the strength of the force depicted. For every force there need not be an opposing force. In FFA, the forces affecting a problem situation are assigned weights according to their perceived impact on the problem. FFA makes it easy, therefore, to pinpoint the forces which need to be further strengthened and the ones which need to be weakened.

Figure 1. Force field analysis
Whilst there are some limitations to Lewin’s assumption that any problem situation can be viewed as a state of equilibrium, since it is too simplistic to take into account the complexities involved, FFA has proven to be helpful in analysing problems and identifying solutions.

Because it is based on visual depiction, FFA provides people with opportunities to think of forces that are affecting the problem in question. Even problems that look quite vague start becoming clear. The forces are quantified and their strength represented visually. This makes it easier for the participants to think of how to grapple with them in order to bring about change. It becomes obvious that the magnitude of the driving forces has to be increased and that of restraining forces has to be decreased. These decisions are taken jointly in the light of resources available, other constraints etc. Often solutions start to emerge to seemingly insurmountable problems.

**FFA in PRA**

FFA is most effective in small groups and therefore fits well with the basic tenets of PRA, where the methods are supposed to ‘enable local people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions to plan and act.’ (Chambers, 1992).

Despite being a useful tool to use for facilitating participatory discussion and planning, it has not been widely used as yet (although there is one notable exception – See Montgomery, 1995).

**The process**

Here I describe the steps which can be taken to use FFA effectively. These steps are suggestions only; they are not prescriptive. The circumstances, location, profile of the participants, time available, problem etc. will determine the exact nature of the process. You are the best judge.

- Write or draw the problem which the group of participants wants to discuss on a sheet of paper. Try to make the problem as quantifiable as possible.
- Keep the sheet of paper with the problem written/depicted on it in front of the participants and ask them to concentrate on the problem. Ask them to visualise the problem situation in a state of temporary equilibrium maintained by two sets of opposing forces - one favouring change (driving forces) and the other opposing them (restraining forces). Using the diagram in Figure 1 can be helpful.
- Ask participants to list one set of forces first followed by the other. Each of these can be written/depicted on small cards. Different colour cards can be used for driving and restraining forces. Clarify that if a force seems to be made of multiple elements, each component should be listed separately as a force. The use of cards is more flexible than simply listing forces on a sheet of paper. They can also create a more participatory discussion, as with cards, writing/drawing can be done by many, and control is not in the hands of one person.
- Keep the sheet of paper with the problem written on it in the centre and draw a line across it. Spread the cards with restraining forces below the line and those with driving forces above the line.
- Ask them to look at the cards and see if they would like to make any changes.
- Next ask the participants to assign weights to each of the forces. They should position each force card at varying distances from the problem line/present status line in such a way that the distance denotes the strength of the force. The greater the distance, the greater the perceived effect of the force on the problem.
- Brainstorming techniques can be used here. Smaller cards preferably of different colours can be used to write down possible interventions for each of the driving/restraining force so as to increase/reduce its magnitude. Each of the possible interventions can be further weighed in light of various factors e.g.
resources available, time, ideology of the organisation etc. The idea is generally to capitalise on those that would bring greatest change.

• Copy the diagram onto a piece of paper.

If the number of participants is large, one common way is to divide them into smaller groups and then ask them to work on the FFA separately. The findings are later shared amongst the different groups. The frequency method described elsewhere in the article can be used with large number of participants.

FFA also provides ample scope for improvisation (for example, see Figure 3, and the case studies below).

• Some practical applications of FFA

Case Study 1: Using FFA to analyse the status of primary education

Bihar State is one of the least developed states in India, a fact which contributes significantly to the numbers of children out of school in the country. Various programmes, such as the Bihar Education Project and District Primary Education Projects, have been started to improve enrolment and retention of children in education and the quality of schooling at primary level. With this in mind, a workshop was organised to design the training curriculum for the education managers. The author facilitated the session and FFA was employed to help identify those forces responsible for the poor state of primary education in the state.

Figure 2 depicts a force-field diagram of primary education in Bihar, created by the group of education managers during the workshop. The participants first prepared a list of forces, both driving and restraining, affecting primary education. They were asked to write the forces on small cards - only one force on each card. Separate colour cards were used for the two different types of forces. Once the cards were written, cards with similar forces were clubbed together and counted. The number of cards denoting the frequency of the force was an indicator of its strength.

The cards were placed at different distances in such a way that the larger the distance, the greater the effect of the force on the status of primary education. Then the group looked at the forces from the point of view of training. They identified driving forces that could be further strengthened by training. Similarly restricting forces that could be weakened by training were also listed. FFA thus, helped in designing a training programme for education managers aimed at improving status of primary education in Bihar.

When the group had previously discussed this issue without using the FFA tool, they could only identify a few causes and very few interventions. However, the use of FFA stimulated discussion and brought new points to light.

FFA can be explained nicely using the analogy of gas balloons and stones (see Figure 3). Balloons represent driving forces, which are acting to bring about a desired change.
Figure 2. Force field analysis: primary education in Bihar

Figure 3. The balloons and stones method
Stones depict restricting forces thwarting it. The present situation is deemed to be represented by a state of temporary equilibrium as the balloons balance the stones. The length of the strings attached to the balloons and stones can reflect the effect on the problem situation. The larger the string, the stronger the effect. Or else the size of the balloons and stones can denote their relative strengths. Planning for change amounts to identification and finalisation of the process of strengthening of the forces represented by balloons and weakening the forces represented by stones.

Case Study 2: use of scoring techniques with illiterate participants

As part of fieldwork of the 2nd International PRA Thematic Training Workshop, a group of participants visited Gumpuru village of the Ranchi district in Bihar. One of the concerns of the host NGO, Nav Bharat Jagriti Kendra, in the village was how to make the women’s group more effective and FFA was used to further this aim. The session was facilitated by Anindo Banerjee of PRAXIS. Figure 4 shows the results of a FFA created by a group of women who were assessing the factors influencing their participation in a local group.

Earlier attempts to get villagers to discuss how to strengthen the women’s group had proved difficult. The FFA process really helped the women to identify issues, as well as ways to improve the situation. Lively discussion followed and the participants were able to list possible measures to strengthen the local group.

The women identified the inhibiting and inducing forces, and these were written and drawn on small pieces of cards of two different colours. The cards on inducing forces were placed above this line while those on inhibiting forces were kept below the line. Women then assigned scores to each of the forces by placing seeds on the cards. The number of seeds denoted the extent of the effect of the given force on women’s participation in local women’s group. The maximum score for a force was 10. The depiction of the problems and use of seeds made it possible for the women who could not read and write to participate meaningfully in the FFA. Seeds also provided ample scope to the participants for modifications.

Case study 3: analysing migration in Orissa

As part of a DFID sponsored participatory poverty profiling in Bolangir, a drought prone district in Western Orissa, India, (see PRAXIS report, 1998) a team of facilitators from PRAXIS used various participatory tools to conduct a study of the poverty profile of the district. Seasonal migration poses a serious problem with the rural poor and a FFA was conducted with a group of villagers to study the factors leading to migration (see Figure 5).

This time, the forces inducing and inhibiting migration have been ranked separately. The number written in the circle represents the rank of the force. Drought and lack of land emerged as the most important factors contributing to migration. Among the forces inhibiting migration were emotional attachment to the village and excessive work during migration. The information generated from the FFA has been useful in that it has led to designing a livelihood project, to be implemented by the Government of Orissa, supported by DFID, India.
Figure 4. Force field analysis showing participation in local women’s group: inducing and inhibiting forces

Figure 5. Migration: force field analysis

• **Conclusion**

With increasing emphasis on decentralisation and participatory approaches to development, there is a tremendous scope for application of FFA in PRA. At present its potential is only partially utilised.

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‘Say it with pictures’:
an account of a self assessment process in a dairy sector support project in Tanzania

Kate Forrester Kibuga and Steve Power

**Introduction**

The Southern Highlands Dairy Development Project (SHDDP) has been working in Tanzania since 1979 to strengthen the private dairy sector, with the specific goal of ‘contributing to the family income of dairy farmers and the nutritional status amongst their communities’. Initially the project focus was on distributing in-calf heifers to small-scale farmers in order to increase the dairy herd in two regions of Tanzania. However, in the latest phase of the project (1996-99), SHDDP has taken a new approach, moving away from supporting dairy production towards a more holistic dairy sector support approach. New activity lines - dairy farmer groups and dairy business - have been established and the extension line has been reoriented towards a demand-driven approach based on the needs of dairying households. SHDDP’s focus now is on working with dairying households in a participatory manner throughout its activities.

This commitment to a participatory approach even includes project evaluation. Although the conventional form of evaluation will be retained (i.e. a short-term evaluation conducted by an outsider), a new formula has also been tried, which has met with considerable success. This consists of a series of self-assessment days. It was decided that if the project was really to be participatory and demand driven, it was vital to hear what farmers were saying about it *directly* themselves, and in their own words.

These self-assessment (SA) days would be a chance for project clients\(^1\) to assess the new project approach as well as evaluate the implementation of project activities. It was also intended that the SA should be a learning exercise for all those involved, and subsequently take its place amongst the standard management tools of the project. To this end, a number of different methods and tools were designed by the authors and tested during the self-assessment process. A separate SA was also carried out for staff.

**Selection of clients**

In order to have an unstructured but representative sample of clients, a random selection of the areas in which SHDDP works was made, then a randomly stratified sample of households\(^2\) was taken from those areas. One male and one female member from each selected household were invited to attend the SA days. In the past, extension was largely directed towards the husband in a household, and the vast majority of the cows were registered in the name of the husband. However, in the present phase, SHDDP has realised that women are heavily involved in a household dairy enterprise, being responsible for much of the work of caring for the cow and also for household nutrition. Thus, there has been a recent emphasis on seeing the whole household as a unit of production, and it was

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\(^{1}\)SHDDP refers to all those taking part in project activities (farmers and dairy business people) as ‘clients’.

\(^{2}\)SHDDP uses the ‘cooking pot’ definition of household, i.e. all those who are regularly present and living/working within the same enterprise.
for this reason that both husband and wife\textsuperscript{3} from a household were selected. In addition, gender issues are also a priority concern; therefore it was important that both men and women were equally represented. In total there were eight client SA days, two all male, two all female and four mixed.

There were two central priorities in developing a methodology suitable for clients’ SA:

- to give clients scope to express their own opinions and thoughts freely without leading questions coming from the facilitators. Facilitators can unwittingly influence the type of answers received, and what is not said is often as informative as what is said; and,

- to create a non-threatening atmosphere in which farmers could talk freely about their dairy farming/business lives.

These two criteria ruled out the use of more conventional approaches such as written lists of questions with space to fill in answers, since some farmers, particularly women, are not fully literate, or do not have an adequate command of Swahili. Therefore, as a basis for discussion it was decided to use a series of pictures representing most of the activities in which clients of the SHDDP project would be involved. The GRAAP techniques used in Francophone West Africa were a source of inspiration in developing these SA methods.

**Pictures**

The participants of each self-assessment day were divided into small groups, and each group received an envelope containing about 50 small pictures. The pictures represented as many things connected with dairy farming as we could think of. They were simply drawn and represented one point/thing/activity only; e.g. a cow, money, grass, milking, an injection, a group seminar, selling milk etc. (see Figure 1). The groups were then asked to arrange these pictures on the floor into a larger picture which explained the day-to-day/month-to-month activities involved with dairy cow keeping, dairy farmer group activities or dairy business activities, depending on which ‘activity line’\textsuperscript{4} was present that day. They were invited to reject any pictures they did not find useful and to draw extra pictures if they were needed. Each group presented its picture to the others, and this formed the basis for discussion and questions.

The pictures proved to be a powerful stimulus to provoke discussion, and many clients seized the opportunity to ask questions of their fellow farmers and to exchange ideas on a variety of subjects. At the same time, they provided a natural way for the facilitator to ask more specific questions, such as:

“\textit{You explained with this picture that you prepare compost from manure - how exactly do you do this?}”  “\textit{Who taught you how to do it?}”  “\textit{When?}”  “\textit{Do you find it useful?}”  “\textit{Why?}” etc..

Our initial aim was not to be directive; however, we found that sometimes we had to ask more specific questions in order to fulfil our brief, since we found that certain issues of importance to SHDDP never came up when left to the clients. We tried to keep these questions as open as possible, so that the participants had to explain their own experiences and opinions, rather than just answering ‘yes’ or ‘no’. We also found that when all the participants were clustered around a collection of pictures on the floor, the discussion was generally much freer and more lively. When we sat on chairs in a big circle, the flow of discussion tended to become more stilted and formal. None of the participants had any problems in interpreting the pictures - one old man exclaimed “\textit{When I saw the pictures, I saw my life exactly as it is!}”. Most participants also had no worries about drawing extra pictures (e.g. someone sweeping out the cow stall, milk quality measuring equipment, even a bull mounting a cow!) and those that said they couldn’t possibly draw were easily persuaded to have a try.

\textsuperscript{3} For the purposes of evaluation, etc. SHDDP treats each wife in a polygamous marriage as a separate household.

\textsuperscript{4} SHDDP divides itself into four ‘activity lines’: extension, farmer group, dairy business, monitoring.
We wanted to keep the format as open as possible in order to provoke spontaneous comments on SHDDP, but to some extent, the presence or absence of pictures inevitably imposes the facilitator’s preconceptions on the participants. For example, would farmers have mentioned record keeping so often if we had not included a picture of someone writing numbers in a notebook? We always emphasised that the pictures had no intrinsic meaning - they were to mean what the participants wanted them to represent. In many cases people would adapt a picture to their own needs: for example, one group used a picture depicting a group meeting to show their contented family sitting together in the evening after another profitable day of drinking and selling milk.

At the end of the day, depending on time, the number of topics already covered, etc., the session was usually rounded off by a general discussion on changes perceived in the service of the organisation in the last year and a half.

To facilitate this, the participants formed new groups and were asked to list the services (as dairy farmers, dairy farmer groups or dairy business clients) they had received (or not...) from SHDDP. Each person was provided with 10-15 beans (depending on the length of the list) with which they were to score the various services, according to whether they had received the service and the value placed on it. Each group presented its list and explained the scoring. This provided another opportunity for questions to be asked. Although this method involved some writing, it was kept to a minimum, and each group appointed a secretary to write and read out the headings when it came to scoring. In this way, levels of literacy did not constrain full participation in the exercise.

- **Problems**

Inevitably, we faced some problems during these self-assessment days.

Group size and the desire to leave the format open often meant that the group went the way it wanted to. Many of the participants (particularly in the dairy business and farmer group days) seized the opportunity to exchange ideas with their fellow farmers/business colleagues; these lively discussions were not always directly relevant to the task of assessing SHDDP. However, it was obviously a felt need, and since they had all made the effort to attend, we gave them space for their discussions. We noted down the
points they were particularly keen to talk about, as possible useful feedback for SHDDP. On several occasions there were nearly 30 people in a group, which was too large when we were all together in one big group (and this was inevitable, although we did try to do as much as possible in small groups). When the group consisted of some confident vociferous people and some quieter shyer ones, the latter were drowned out; when the group consisted entirely of confident vociferous people, then it was impossible to hear everyone’s views in the time allotted. A maximum group size of 24 people would have been more manageable.

The most serious problem encountered was where groups consisted of both women and men. In the first set of assessment days there was strict division, with men on one day, women on the next. This worked well and on both days, the clients contributed their ideas and opinions freely. In the last set, however, because of transport problems, husbands and wives attended together. This meant that the women were mostly silent, since they were constrained by the presence of their husbands. When asked to comment on a point, they would unanimously agree with the men. In a discussion about co-operation within the household between husband and wife, everyone swore that nowadays there was a great deal of co-operation and things were a lot better. However, during the lunchbreak, one woman came up to us, and although no one was remotely within hearing distance, she whispered “It’s all lies. Maybe for one or two of the women that is how it is, but for most of us, it’s nothing like that”. This inevitably cast doubt on almost everything that the women said. Since we only had one room, we couldn’t take the women away and, although we did try to chat informally with them in the tea and lunchbreaks, they were not giving anything away while their husbands were nearby. But although unsatisfactory for assessment purposes, this situation offered interesting insights about gender relations.

We also noticed that whereas on one women’s day, most women were prepared to admit that there was very little co-operation between them and their husbands, on another, once one or two women started to explain how their husbands shared everything with them these days, the other women followed suit, although it seemed likely that this was not the case. The others got round it eventually by talking about the bad situation of ‘other women, of course not the ones here today’ but it does highlight the difficulty of gaining reliable information, particularly on sensitive issues or those perceived as somehow shameful, from a large non-homogenous group. However in the end, because we did the self-assessment with several different groups, we heard enough about such questions from enough people to realise what the problems were and why some groups would prefer not to admit to them.

This methodology brought out a great range of findings, including the following:

- in general, the clients were happy with the services provided by SHDDP, and were very aware of the recent changes taking place in the organisation;
- clients had an impressive level of knowledge about how to care for their cows;
- some dairy farmer groups were well established and functioning, but most still needed much support and assistance;
- clients appreciated the work SHDDP had done through the business line; however, more needs to be done to stimulate the milk market in order to dispose of a milk surplus in some areas; and,
- gender issues were a major topic of discussion and came out as a key constraint to the smooth running of a household dairy enterprise, i.e. men go to seminars and enjoy the financial benefits of having a cow, whereas women are further burdened by extra tasks without seeing any benefits, and often in the end have little incentive to care for the cow properly.

Some clear points for follow-up were highlighted by this study, especially the question of gender. SHDDP now has a comprehensive and extremely effective gender policy in place, which has begun to alleviate many of the problems cited by the women. Much work clearly needs to be done to strengthen dairy farmer groups, and there is also plenty of scope for looking further at the milk market and developing strategies to build up small milk selling businesses, as well as local input outlets.
• **Conclusion**

We adapted the methodology continuously as we went along until we felt satisfied with the way it worked and its results. As well as bringing out a range of findings, this methodology was a medium which the farmers themselves could control and use to express their concerns in their own terms. Some of the SHDDP staff had been sceptical about the methodology, particularly the pictures, but afterwards one was heard to say that he had never before seen farmers talk so much and produce so much information!

**Recommendations**

- In cultures where it is difficult for women to speak in public in front of their husbands, and where having husbands and wives in the same session is unavoidable, a possible technique would be to divide the group into two smaller groups of men and women and talk to them separately from the beginning. This might give the women the confidence to speak out, despite being in the same room as their husbands. If gender related problems are brought up, the groups could be brought together and a discussion facilitated (if the women agree). However, this would require considerable gender-facilitating skills, and would also be beyond the scope of the self-assessment.

- The pictures should be specific to each group - e.g. the dairy business group should have had a different set of business oriented pictures so that they could better explain their activities.

- Groups need to be smaller so that whole group discussions are coherent and not too threatening.

- Although we were using these self-assessment days to evaluate the project, the clients found them a valuable opportunity to exchange ideas with other clients whom they would rarely meet. This came out very strongly in the grateful and enthusiastic votes of thanks from the clients at the end of each session. Therefore, rather than trying to keep participants strictly to the predetermined agenda, there is no harm in giving them a certain amount of latitude, partly because interesting points do come out, and partly because it makes it a really good day out for everyone!

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Social network analysis, social capital and their policy implications

Marion Gibbon and Durga Pokhrel

Introduction

The quality of relationships among and between people is an important factor to consider when working to promote strong and resilient neighbourhoods or communities. The quality of these relationships is known as ‘social capital’. This paper describes how the relatively new participatory approach of social network analysis (SNA) can be used to understand social capital, and considers how strong social capital and social networks can influence policy at a local level.

The importance of social capital

Social capital is an important concept, as it has the potential to improve neighbourhoods or communities and the lives of families. Considering the concept of capital leads to an understanding of inter-relationships and social networks within a community or neighbourhood. Social capital refers to the quality of relationships among and between people. Turnbough Lockwood (1996) said that:

Social capital adheres in the set of relationships among people -- and those relationships are productive to the extent that they are based on a common set of expectations, a shared set of values, and a sense of trust among people. Where social capital is weak, there are conflicting values and a significant lack of trust.

In addition to their social capital, communities can be categorised by four other types of capital (Butler Flora, 1997):

- **Community financial capital**: money or instruments of credit for investment and speculation. It can be public or private.
- **Manufactured community capital**: the physical infrastructure of a community. Financial capital is turned into manufactured capital by the public or private sector.
- **Human capital**: ‘Human capital includes individual capacity, training, human health, values and leadership.... Human capital includes non-formal skills associated with experience carrying out a particular task and indigenous knowledge about an area. Health status and commitment are other aspects of human capital important for communities’ (Butler Flora, 1997).
- **Environmental capital**: Environmental capital consists of air quality, water (including quantity and quality), soil, biodiversity and landscape.

Each of these forms of capital enhances each other. Therefore overemphasising the value of a single form of capital can reduce the levels of other forms of capital. Allowing one form of capital to dominate over another results in medium-term decline in community well-being, despite possible short-term gains.
One of the authors (Marion Gibbon) has been involved in a participatory action research project as part of her doctorate. She has been working in ward number 3 of Dhankuta district, Eastern Nepal in conjunction with Durga Pokhrel of the Women’s Empowerment Strengthening Team (WEST).

The research project started in January 1997 with a PRA training (Gibbon and Shrestha, 1997). Following the workshop, a local Dhankuta NGO carried out a needs assessment. One of the tools used during this process was social network analysis (see Box 1).

**BOX 1**

**AN EXAMPLE OF SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS**

Social network analysis involves asking a group about the places they visit and why they visit them. During a group interaction, women (in Khalde village) mapped where they go to seek different forms of support: financial, social and health advice (see Figure 1). The diagrams that result from social network analysis appear complex at first. However, the discussion results in a very visual articulation of the networks within a community and allows everyone to be involved. Social network analysis is useful as it allows relationships to be understood more fully. Venn diagrams do not show so well whether a relationship is one-way or multi-dimensional, whereas social network analysis does.

The findings showed women were visiting each other for social support, the Dhami Jankri (local healer) for health advice and key households for financial support (Gibbon, 1998). The networks are all within the village and none of the women venture out of their village to seek advice from other sources. House 21 is that of the local Dhami Jankri whom all the women mentioned as their source of health advice. No linkages with any external agencies were mentioned.

In January 1998 WEST carried out two three-day workshops in ward number 3. The aim of the workshops was to allow women to:

- define their own health needs;
- prioritise their health needs and consider the resources they had available to them through social network analysis; and,
- plan activities to solve their problems.

One of the workshops was carried out in Khalde hamlet and the other in Pangsing hamlet. They used an approach called the Health Analysis and Action Cycle (HAAC) that was first used in Sankhuwasabha district with women’s groups (Gibbon and Cazottes, 1998). The HAAC is a cyclical process that allows the group to identify health-related concerns, prioritise those concerns, identify the causes and plan strategies to overcome their problems. Two women’s community health groups were formed during the six days as a result of the health analysis cycle workshops.

These community health groups now meet on a monthly basis to discuss progress and plan new activities. These groups have been involved in a literacy programme, have started a latrine building programme and a community health education initiative. They have been very successful and now have completed building 19 latrines in their community; there were only four prior to WEST’s involvement, and there were no women’s groups. They have also initiated savings and credit schemes within their groups. Each group has decided how much each member should contribute on a monthly basis and the money is then banked and used according to group decisions. Interest from other women in the community resulted in a third women’s health group being formed.

During September 1998, WEST were involved in a follow-up meeting with the three groups and decided to look at the social networks prevailing in the hamlets where they are working; Khalde, Pangsing and Tallo Pangsing (see Figure 2).

**Figure 1: Map to show Khalde women’s social networks (source: Gibbon 1998)**
The Tallo Pangsing group was formed as a result of some of the members of this hamlet requesting support from WEST after they observed the work taking place in Pangsing. Figure 1 includes the Khalde group with only the Dhami Jankri being outside as she resides within a different hamlet.

The social networks within the community are now much more complex: linkages with external agencies as well as links with the ward chairman, the forest user group and different NGO committees are now indicated. The Dhami Jankri continues to be a focal point within the community (see Figure 2), although she is no longer the sole source for health related advice. The groups have strong links with each other, the ward chairman and WEST who sometimes acts as an intermediary with other organisations. The groups were able to get support from the Nepal United Kingdom Community Forestry Programme for their literacy initiative in the form of stationery. They have also sought advice from the Institute of Health Science and District Public Health Office about running a clinic in their community.

Through increased unity they have gained more influence over the policy process. Discussions with the ward chairman have led to the municipality giving cement for their latrine building programme. In next year’s development budget, finance for six latrines has been incorporated for their community.

The following quotations are indicative of the changes that have occurred in ward 3:

“Before no-one ever heard us, now we get together and discuss our plans, talk to the ward chairman and our community is changing, we now have a voice” (community member, September 1998).

“Things have changed in our community, before we had no latrines and our environment was dirty, now we can cut our fodder close to our houses as people now use latrines” (community member, September 1998).
Four of the five forms of capital have increased as a result of the approach:

- **Human capital**: The groups are now able to carry out community projects using resources from within and external to the community thereby increasing social and human capital.
- **Social capital**: The increases in networks within the community have increased the social capital of the community.
- **Environmental capital**: Through the latrine building activity community members have mentioned improvements in their environment with a decrease in faeces along the paths, making fodder collection easier and more hygienic.
- **Financial capital**: This has increased through the initiation of savings and credit groups.

The increased networks mean that there are more opportunities for the community. The group members are able to draw on more resources to benefit themselves and their community. The women have gained from their involvement in participatory groups, however, they also mention that there are time constraints to greater involvement due to their heavy workloads. A mutually reinforcing network has arisen that will hopefully be sustained once the research is completed.

In December, the three women’s groups held a dissemination workshop in the council offices and invited other non-governmental organisations working in Dhankuta district. As a result of this workshop, the village development committee and the municipality have decided to use more participatory approaches in their work. The women have managed to influence the way the committees will work in the future and to consider policies that will include the needs of poor rural women and not only those articulated by more influential people. The district development committee has agreed to use a more participatory policy in its development programmes.

**Conclusion**

Social network analysis is a potential tool for participatory monitoring and evaluation as it is able to show the relationships that develop between individuals, groups and organisations over time. As the number of networks increase there are more resources available to communities, which will hopefully lead to an improvement in the well-being of rural
It is necessary to decide on a timeframe for its use. This piece of research involved a social network analysis at the start and a further analysis after eighteen months. This time gap enabled several changes in the relationships and linkages to be seen: a shorter gap would not have allowed such changes to be so clearly seen.

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REFERENCES


NOTES

Marion Gibbon has been working in Nepal for four years, three of which have been for a doctoral degree with South Bank University, London. Her research is concerned with women’s health and empowerment.

Durga Pokhrel has worked for 17 years as a nutritionist for Save the Children Fund UK and is now involved with running a local NGO called Women’s Empowerment Strengthening Team which works in Dhankuta district of eastern Nepal.
Can PRA methods be used to collect economic data? A non-timber forest product case study from Zimbabwe

Michael Richards, Jonathan Davies and William Cavendish

- **Introduction**

In the past few years, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques have become ubiquitous and are almost an obligatory element in project design and implementation. But can they, as some PRA practitioners claim, generate quantitative economic data which is better (or at least comparable) and more cost-effective than that derived from ‘traditional’ neo-classical methods like household surveys? The Mabalauta Workshop¹ in south-east Zimbabwe tried to answer this question, among others. In the workshop, a direct comparison was made between PRA methods and a household sample survey for eliciting economic data on the use of the Ilala palm (*Hyphaene petersiana*), an important non-timber forest product (NTFP) for livelihoods in this very arid area (mean annual rainfall of less than 450 mm.). This paper considers two main issues. First, can PRA produce similar economic data than traditional economic tools? Second, are PRA techniques really more ‘cost-effective’, especially when considering the time requirements of the participants?

- **Methods**

The two main approaches were compared by assessing the data sets for a range of variables, including the production and economic returns of the main palm products - a variety of baskets and other craft products, and palm wine.

**PRA**

On the first fieldwork day, a group composed of local researchers, government employees and community members identified the main uses of the palm. This led to five possible PRA stakeholder groups: craftswomen; craftsmen; male wine tappers; female wine tappers; and non-users. An invitation was made through community representatives to palm users to meet the following day. The response by the craftswomen in particular was very good since this was seen as a market opportunity (see Figure 1). However the much smaller number of wine tappers were busy with the palms, and it proved impractical to form PRA groups. The non-user PRA group was composed of people available at the time.

Next, with the large craftswomen group (varying from 30 to 50 participants over two days), a small craftsmen group (seven participants) and non-user groups, some conventional PRA exercises were carried out, including activity calendars and a pairwise ranking of livelihood or income sources, followed by estimates by each group of average labour requirements, household production (including annual variation), end uses, costs, prices, etc. In the case of the wine

¹ The workshop was a collaborative effort between the Institute of Environmental Studies of the University of Zimbabwe, the UK Overseas Development Institute and the University of Alberta, Canada, bringing together economists, ecologists and sociologists from these and other institutions in a two-week ‘research workshop’ in September 1998.

Figure 1. Singing craftswomen hoping to sell their produce to the research team
[Photo: Michael Richards]

producers, the ‘key informant’ approach was used. Key informants were producers known to be knowledgeable about a particular product, or who just happened to be available at the time (this was important in the case of the wine tappers who were hard to locate).

Household survey

Sixty-nine households were selected using a systematic random sample survey approach (one per nine households), the sample being drawn from a food aid list of households from the same five Village Development Committee (VIDCO) areas as the PRA participants came from. An additional 16 wine-producing households were deliberately over-sampled to generate a reasonable data set which could be compared to the key informant data. Five enumerators from the area with some level of higher education were trained. The questionnaire was pre-tested and modified, and the enumerators were also monitored in the field.

• Results

Differences between the data sets

Table 1 compares the quantitative variables recorded by the two methodologies, including any noted advantages or disadvantages of the methods. While fairly similar results were obtained for some variables, there were some major differences. The main area of discrepancy was in the production and sales of craft products. The PRA-based estimates were unrealistically high when household budgets based on the PRA data were compared to normal household incomes in the area. Possible reasons for this were:

• specialist producers of craft items were more dominant in the discussions;
• the strategic reason of wanting to show production potential, in case a marketing project was ‘in the offing’; and,
• possible confusion between production and unsold stocks. The survey produced income data much more in line with secondary data sources of incomes in rural Zimbabwe (Cavendish, 1997).

The scoring and ranking of income sources also revealed an inconsistency in PRA data. This exercise was carried out with the craftswomen on two successive days and was facilitated by the same female PRA facilitators. The only obvious difference between the days was in the size of the group which swelled from 33 on the first day to over 50 on the second. Most of the women who

2 Strategic bias is possible in a survey setting, but the fact that the PRA group was composed of palm producers, the tendency for expectations to rise when people talk in groups plus the visibility of foreigners in this case made the setting more conducive to strategic response.
Table 1. Comparative summary of methodologies for measuring quantitative variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>General comment on differences and similarities</th>
<th>Advantages of PRA and disadvantages of survey</th>
<th>Advantages of survey and disadvantages of PRA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder group as proportion of population</td>
<td>Similar results obtained from the two methods</td>
<td>PRA: better able to pick up minor or ‘niche’ sources of cash income, e.g., revenue from CAMPFIRE; PRA exercise carried out for good and bad years</td>
<td>Statistical representativeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranking of cash income sources, and proportion of total household income from each source</td>
<td>Some similarities (e.g., livestock, hired labour) but PRA gave much greater share to palm products</td>
<td></td>
<td>Survey: Distribution of income could be assessed PRA: problem of averaging out PRA groups with wide livelihood diversity; contradictory ranking by 2 craftswomen PRA groups; PRA respondents less willing to reveal remittances from illegal employment in South Africa (less anonymity?); PRA might include potential income sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production levels of craft products (main determinant of economic returns)</td>
<td>Major differences: PRA production levels very high; survey data more realistic, possibly underestimates</td>
<td>PRA: Clearer understanding of range of craft products (some confusion of basket types in survey) Survey: missed temporal variation; craftsperson in household often not interviewed</td>
<td>Survey: easier to identify specialist producers, who were given too much weight PRA: more prone to strategic response (hoping for a project)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour requirements</td>
<td>Higher labour inputs recorded by PRA; probable underestimation by survey</td>
<td>PRA: different processing stages carefully considered, and consensus reached</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale prices</td>
<td>Prices recorded in PRA were generally higher</td>
<td>PRA: prices could be discussed, including seasonal/annual variation; mathematical derivation of prices in survey meant scope for error</td>
<td>PRA: Presence of foreigners might have resulted in inflated prices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End uses (% sold, consumed, barter, gifts, etc)</td>
<td>Similar results</td>
<td>PRA: differentiated between good and bad years (more sold in bad agricultural year)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: Blank cells: No observation
attended the first day also came the second day. Table 2 compares the two PRA groups with the results of the household survey (using income recorded as the score). The results of the two PRA groups varied dramatically, despite the groups’ similarity. The survey data was closer to the first PRA group, but there were still major differences, e.g. the importance of petty business. Also the ranking given to palm products, especially by PRA group 1, contradicted the production data revealed by these same groups.

For some quantitative aspects, however, the PRA exercise produced more reliable parameters, e.g., the labour requirements of the various craft products. The craftswomen PRA group very carefully deliberated the time required, going through each harvesting and processing stage and reaching a consensus.

The survey did not have this flexibility; and enumerators reported that respondents experienced considerable difficulty with the concept of ‘hours’. While this was also problematic for the PRA groups, it was possible to reach a common understanding through more extended discussion. PRA methods proved more effective in terms of differentiating and understanding the complex range of baskets and other craft products, and were also better able to pick up temporal differentiation. There were important differences in craft and wine production in good and bad (drought) agricultural years; in difficult years people fall back more on Ilala palm products, so they act (as do many non-timber forest products) as a safety net.

Perhaps surprisingly, the household survey proved more revealing in terms of gender differences; for example, it was easier to assess and compare returns to male and female craft producers. But the survey was not without its problems. For example, there was some confusion over the different types of basket. Where the (normally female) craft producer was not the (normally male) survey respondent, under-estimation was more likely. It was felt that the use of key informants to complement the main methodologies was more reliable than either the PRA or survey data for obtaining detailed economic data. This was because of its flexibility and the greater possibilities of building up trust with the respondent. However the key informant

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Table 2. Ranking of cash income sources by craftswomen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income source</th>
<th>PRA Group 1 Score</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>PRA Group 2 Score</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Survey Score</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Petty business</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livestock sales</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crop sales</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beer brewing</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal employment</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palm wine production</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palm craft sales</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thatching grass</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual labour</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brick sales</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nut sales</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clay pot sales</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knitting, etc.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


3 It would have been interesting to conduct 2 household surveys to see if they produced similar results, yet it is more expected that 2 statistically correctly selected samples of the same population would do so. With PRA groups, the dynamic is often very different and it only takes the presence or absence of one dominant participant to make a difference in the ‘consensus’ response. This factor makes PRA quantitative data less reliable.

4 This was because inter-craftsperson variation was much less for labour inputs. A PRA estimate is fine when everyone takes roughly the same time to make a basket, but not so good when people make very different numbers of baskets, so extreme values distort the group ‘average’. Also see comments in Table 1.
approach has to be combined with another research method, like a survey, in order to aggregate economic data for a larger area or population.

**Difficulties in implementing research methods**

Best practice proved most difficult to sustain in the PRA exercises; for example, the size of the study team and their diverse interests, combining research and training objectives, proved distracting; and the objectives and methodologies for the field work needed fuller discussion. But in a PRA exercise the methodological difficulties are more transparent than in a survey, since the analyst is more directly involved in data collection.

The household survey was not without its problems. There was little time to train the enumerators and pre-test the questionnaire, and an unreliable sample frame (some households were missing) may have resulted in biased estimates.

**Cost-effectiveness**

Time is one of the main factors in an analysis of ‘cost-effectiveness’. Researcher and facilitator time for the survey was about 60 hours, including the time spent designing the forms, testing, enumerator training and monitoring enumerators (but excluding the enumerators themselves) - about one and a half times that involved in preparing and facilitating the PRA exercises. But this narrow view of cost-effectiveness ignores the cost to the ‘beneficiaries’. It was estimated that community time spent in PRA exercises and community meetings was about 500 hours; about five times more than that spent on the household survey. Combining researcher/facilitator and community time reveals that the PRA absorbed approximately 240% more of everyone’s time than the survey.

- **Discussion**

**Strengths and weaknesses of research methods**

The wider study (Mabalauta Working Group, forthcoming) confirms that PRA methods can provide good qualitative information, particularly on tenure and sociological aspects. The great strength of PRA tools is their ability to facilitate discussions, rather than being simply tools to collect data. But asking for detailed quantification in group situations can tax the patience of all concerned, and is subject to several forms of bias, especially that of more assertive individuals. Here it resulted in unrealistic production and income data. This experience indicates that PRA practitioners need to face up to the same issues of group randomness (or non-randomness), question design and consistency, and response bias which have long exercised users of household surveys. Other major weaknesses of PRA methods include the difficulty of investigating differentiation within PRA groups, and aggregating information (the results of different PRA groups cannot be added together).

The survey generated much more realistic production and income data. It is worth noting that the design of the survey benefited enormously from the understanding obtained from the PRA and key informant exercises; a possible conclusion of this is that good survey data is dependent on the previous application of other research methods. There are obvious statistical advantages of household surveys; for example, with a sufficient sample size they provide a means of evaluating the reliability of imperfect data from respondents. Household surveys are clearly superior for differentiating between households and the data can be aggregated, for example for a project area. The various disadvantages of surveys have been well documented (for example, by IIED, 1997) and include coping with intra-household differentiation, inflexibility, the scope for misunderstanding, lack of trust between the researcher and informant, gender bias, etc.

There are of course difficulties with any single-visit approach, whether using a survey or PRA methods. For example, PRA and survey participants’ memories are imperfect and offer a selective viewpoint of local opinions and facts of the (even recent) past, and neither is reliable for generating accurate longer-term data. Both tools are susceptible to bias: enumerator and respondent bias in
surveys, representativeness of groups in PRA approaches. It is also suspected that the kinds of problems experienced in this research exercise are more common than researchers tend to admit, especially when it comes to publications. PRA methods are often used when time is limited. Here the Mabalauta Working Group was over-ambitious in trying to understand and quantify in a fortnight the range of biological, technical, economic and social relationships involving a multiple NTFP resource.

Where production technologies are reasonably uniform, and production time, type and cost of inputs are similar across producers, it can be argued that a few key informants can generate most of the information required more reliably than PRA groups or surveys. The use of key informants or focus groups is common to both household survey design and participatory approaches. Bishop and Scoones (1994) effectively used key informants to explore the economics of producing just one kind of palm-based basket. The main drawback of using key informants is their unrepresentativeness; other tools are necessary to obtain average household production levels for the area.

**Complementarity of research methods: getting the right mix and sequence**

The three methodologies discussed here all have their particular strengths and weaknesses, and could thus be combined to create a ‘portfolio’ of choices. Thus Ellis (1998) points out that “for local and project purposes, a combination of participatory methods and small-scale sample surveys is likely to be the most cost-effective means of determining the livelihood strategies of rural households. The two methods serve different and complementary purposes.”

One research method can often be used to increase confidence in another; for example using a random sample survey to assess the degree of representation of key informants. Or if a survey were carried out first, researchers could look for key informants with typical characteristics. In this study, PRA and key informant data helped reduce the cost (by reducing the sample size) and improve the accuracy of a survey. A logical sequence combining the three research methods discussed here might be:

- PRA and key informant discussions to gain a sound understanding of livelihood issues, and the underlying economic, social and ecological relationships.
- Role plays, wealth ranking and other PRA exercises to define and select stakeholder groups where appropriate.
- Primary stakeholder group PRA exercises to explore user group objectives, trade-offs and conflicts; to consider control and access to forest and other local resources; and to define the limiting (or scarce) factor or resource facing that group.
- Key informants to generate the main technical and economic parameters, complemented by, wherever possible, physical observation and time recording of key activities.
- A small but statistically representative household survey for establishing household income and production levels, as well as to collect more finely-tuned data on household characteristics, wealth status, and the degree of representation of stakeholder groups or key informants.
- Verification and modification of the data by comparing data from the three sources, and taking back the survey and key informant data for discussion with PRA stakeholder groups.

**Whose cost-effectiveness counts?**

From the researcher point of view, PRA is apparently very cost-effective because the research team had at its disposal several hundred hours more community members’ time than, for example, a household survey. But PRA is ‘cost-effective’ only when no compensation is offered. Some form of remuneration previously negotiated with the community (e.g., a donation to the school, provision of medical services, etc.) might encourage increased participation and greater interest by the community, not to mention improved ‘efficiency’ of the research team if the ‘costs’ of participation are more apparent. Any discussion of cost-effectiveness is also dependent on the objectives: are the tools being used in a research context or to provide baseline data for a proposed project design, or for other community purposes? The higher
The cost of a participatory approach can be justified if it leads to improved participation in the project cycle.

The trade-offs between the methods in terms of research objectives and cost are inherent in the need to balance the requirements of accuracy or quantification with the degree of participation. There is a continuum from more informal PRA tools and key informant discussions to more formal PRA tools (which can be quite inflexible and tedious for villagers) and sample surveys. Finally we argue that short-cut data collection methods like those discussed here are no substitute for longitudinal research methods (including multiple visits, household recording, participatory monitoring, physical measurement, anthropological observation, etc.) for more reliable analysis of economic incentives and project design purposes. But donors tend to consider short-cut data collection methods more ‘cost-effective’, especially in view of the normal time frame at the beginning of the project cycle. Such a view does not consider the high cost of poorly designed project interventions and weak participation by primary beneficiaries.

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Snapshots from
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• Introduction

Over 425 participants from 48 countries converged on Ottawa, Canada to deepen their understanding and practice of participatory development. The conference, organised and hosted by the Participatory Development (PD) Forum, brought together a diversity of actors: popular educators, grassroots activists, development professionals, donors, academics and youth from the North and the South. This three day international conference was meant to inspire critical reflections on the successes and failures of participatory development, as well as share experiences and skills for advancing the practice of participatory development.

The conference revolved around three themes: the Past, the Present and the Future.

• The Past: Revisiting the radical roots of participatory action to remind ourselves why we choose to use participatory approaches. For example, what has been the contribution of adult education, participatory research, feminist research and indigenous knowledge to the field of participation? How has past experience shaped the present state of participatory development?

• The Present: Critically assessing how far participatory concepts and practice have fallen short of expectations. For example, what is the link between participation, poverty alleviation, empowerment and equity? What are the key links between gender and participation and how effectively has social analysis been integrated into participatory approaches? What innovative approaches, tools or techniques have been tried and what have been the results? What are the current and potential limitations facing organisations seeking to institutionalise participation in their organisation.

• The Future: What is beyond participatory development? How can we assess the new dynamics of a globalising world and the opportunities and constraints for people’s increased participation? What might the next generation of practice and scholarship of Participatory Development look like? How can future programmes, projects and initiatives reflect these changes? What lies beyond Action Research, PRA and PLA methodologies? How can development professionals and organisations be agents of true social change attempting to create the necessary conditions for people to achieve a better way of life using their resources in the context of their own social values?

These and other questions were explored through a variety of channels: keynote presentations in the mornings, 35 paper panels, 35 capacity-building workshops, 30 roundtable discussions, and popular theatre. In all, over 120 of the conference participants were
presenters and facilitators, sharing their experiences with other conference participants. In a plenary session on the future of participatory development, participants presented virtual slides of Participatory Development for the year 2020. Some of these virtual slides included:

- ‘A Northern context where civil servants are doing their jobs and serving the poor’;
- ‘People from the rich North no longer put themselves in the place of saving the world. Being facilitators and helping others is replaced with the notion that everyone is a facilitator and everyone has something to contribute to what we people need to survive’;
- ‘My rural people solving their own problems without outsiders’;
- ‘See political discourse and reports filled with more dance, poetry and music and less words’;
- ‘Thousands and thousands of facilitators from global South teaching Northerners how to build communities and communicate with one another’;
- ‘Corporations and government taking enthusiasm, ideas and notions and starting to walk the talk and not simply talking the talk’; and,
- ‘Blank slide representing space to use the best resources that we have which is perhaps within us’.

Conference participants also discussed in small groups the question: ‘What Would I do Differently’? and shared their answers in plenary. Some of the many responses included the following:

- Get away from pre-set agendas
- Acknowledge differences
- Revisit and review the value of participation
- Do not try to define the problem for them - it must be their initiative
- Need to get NGOs, Government and Beneficiaries working together;
- Openness to view ideas and change rooted in accountability and ethics;
- Listening with commitment and engagement balanced with leadership and passion;
- Level power structure;
- Understand and respect local decision-making;
- Disempower yourself;
- Improve worldwide social movements; and,
- Factor in the possibility of failure.

Highlights of various keynote presentations include the following:

- ‘Maintaining our sense of outrage over continued social injustices and how to have the freedom to act outrageously’ (Ted Jackson);
- ‘In order to be successful agents of change in the present and future, we need to learn how to really listen to each other’ (Budd Hall);
- ‘Participation and not having enough time. Have you ever read a tombstone that said: “I had enough time”’ (Patricia Maguire);
- ‘Today the only constant is change. Despite a return to our traditional roles, ruling elites afford participation to only a few and on value-laden bases’ (Madeline Dion Stout);
- ‘Participation must be seen as a dynamic process where initiatives are taken by the local population, guided by its own experience and using the means and resources (institutional and mechanisms) over which it can exercise effective control’ (Bara Gueye);
- ‘In the next 10 or 20 years, there is a potential for a higher increment to well-being by improving gender relations rather than through economic development and, if this is the case, it raises major questions about what we do as development professionals’ (Robert Chambers);
- ‘Our belief system is based too much on problems’. We need to look at people’s strengths, opportunities and what works and build from there - the basis of Appreciative Inquiry. (Malcolm Odell);
- ‘There is a need for two interlinking core elements in participatory development practitioners: doubt and critical reflection.’ (Irene Guijitt); and,
- ‘How do we advance unless we face what stares back at our collective selves in the mirror, unless we look with courage and honesty at what we have accomplished, and most important of all, WHY we
haven’t accomplished what was promised’ (Pablo Leal).

Various initiatives emanating from the conference include a potential network of Participatory Development practitioners from Africa; a conference in Asia in the year 2001, a special edition of the Canadian Journal of Development Studies dedicated to participatory development, and a handbook of various workshops facilitated at the conference.

In their evaluation of the conference, participants noted some of the following highlights:

• ‘I’ve realised that we are not alone in our work.
• The conference ‘confirmed the global dimension of participatory development’;
• ‘I was able to meet others working in similar situations and learn’;
• ‘I learned a lot more about the way I should start thinking about participatory development, and have learned some hands-on techniques’;
• ‘Careful about creating a bandwagon--the issues are complex to resolve’;
• ‘Participation is not an end in itself’;
• ‘The search for a breakthrough of what works continues’; and,
• ‘We have begun a dialogue that should/must continue’.

With regards to organising another conference, participants had many ideas for improvement of proceedings, such as, for example, replacing keynote presentations with popular theatre, encouraging more participation from community leaders, making a childcare nursery available on-site for mothers and fathers, having fewer sessions, and a larger auditorium. As one participant noted, the main auditorium did have ‘the crowded Indian bus feeling’. Some others would have liked more opportunities for critical thought to discuss issues of ‘power, globalisation and transnationals as it relates to participatory practice’ or to simply critique where we are and where we are going.

For the closing plenary, participants took part in an experiential exercise which aimed to reinforce the idea that changes we may initiate or facilitate, in our communities, organisations and institutions, will have an impact on the systems within which we live and work (see the training tip by Shaw and Patterson to follow).

The conference closed with the following quote from Margaret Mead: ‘Never doubt that a small group of people can make a difference, in fact it is the only thing that ever does’.

Any net revenues generated by the PD Conference will be placed in a PD Trust Fund that will support and encourage participatory initiatives in Canada and internationally.

**NOTES**

Conference review compiled by Françoise Coupal et al. Email: coupal@mosaic-net-intl.ca

Readers interested in downloading copies of papers, abstracts or keynote speeches can consult the PD Forum web site at http://www.web.net/pdforum. Please consult periodically for updates to the web site.

**Training tip from the PD conference**

Organisers of the conference were looking for an exercise that would close the conference on a positive note, one that would demonstrate to participants that they do have an impact in the systems and organisations in which they live and work, no matter how small the initiated change might be. We chose to use an exercise that has been developed in the corporate world and that illustrates the impact of change within systems. Participants were asked to form a large circle and then to silently select any 2 individuals within the circle, not letting those individuals know in any way that they had been chosen. To begin the exercise, everyone was asked to form an equal sized triangle with their two chosen persons, where they were one point on that triangle, and their two chosen individuals were the other two points. The size and placement of the triangles constantly changed, since there was little chance that participants had chosen the same individuals from the group of approximately 150.

The activity continued for several minutes, and when it was stopped, participants were asked to reflect on the following questions:
• what happened within the ‘system’ (the larger group)?
• what did you notice?
• how might this relate to our work as practitioners of participatory development?

For many, it was an excellent visual representation of the impact that any movement they made had on the larger group or ‘system’. Only a small step in any direction would cause the entire group to shift and reorganise. This exercise has been used with groups ranging in size from 15 to 350! It is fun and energising, with a lot of movement and attention required to maintain any chosen triangle.

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• Walking the talk: reflections and directions

On the second day of the conference, organisers scheduled a plenary session called Reflections and Directions. We wanted to create a session that would be somewhat experimental in nature, would create an opportunity to harvest some of the experience and knowledge in the room and would encourage participants to think of future directions for participatory practice.

The plenary group was asked to form breakout groups of no more than 6 people and to spend some time reflecting on the following question: ‘What would you do differently in your participatory practice?’ The programme committee of the conference organisers had discussed this question at length. It was deliberately ambiguous, in the hope that it would encourage discussion from a wide range of perspectives and experience. We hoped that policy makers, students, academics and practitioners, from both North and South, would find the space within the context of that question to express their views. After one hour, the groups of 6 were asked to join together in groups of 18, and to share the results of their discussion. Each group of 18 was asked to nominate one person who would represent this larger group’s views at a workshop the following morning, where feedback for the closing plenary would be prepared.

Friday morning’s session began with approximately 20 representatives from the afternoon breakout groups. The objectives of the workshop were established: to prepare a creative presentation of the output of the previous afternoon for the closing plenary of the conference. Participants debated among themselves whether a presentation that used a metaphor (a skit/group sculpture/etc.) would adequately represent the richness of the data produced, while recognising that it was logistically impossible to present back to the plenary the full output of the previous day’s work.

The plenary session, where the output was reported, was chaired by one of the workshop participants. Each participant took a minute or so to talk about the feedback from the breakout sessions, and to give some impressions of the process used during the morning. These were tough sessions to facilitate. Many people had difficulty understanding the process. Evaluations of the session attributed their frustration with the task to our lack of specific direction and their lack of commitment to the process. Were our expectations too high? Were the numbers too great to enable meaningful participation in the short time available? In the end, we feel that it was a very informative and useful learning situation, both in terms of the output produced, and the process used. Would we try it again? Absolutely. It was an opportunity for both the facilitators, and the conference participants, to enter the ‘learning zone’ and to experience the confusion and uncertainty that many of the participants in our participatory programmes and projects know all too well.

Full transcription of the conference proceedings and output from the breakout session can be found on the PD Forum website (http://www.web.net/pdforum).

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Feedback from some conference participants

We have saved this final section to include some points and comments from some participants who attended the workshop, and who would like to share these with the Readership of the PLA Notes. We start this section with some comments from Tag Elkhazin from the Subsahara Centre for Consultancy, Canada, in which interesting points concerning development and South/North dynamics are raised.

• It became evident to me that the North has realised the failure of its 30 years approach to development in the South. Not only that, but something needs to be done immediately, and something different.
• It also became clear to me that the South is now so well enlightened that they would have their say one way or the other. An example of this was in a circle meeting under a tree, on the last day of the Forum. Over 20 African practitioners in the Participatory field decided to form an African network. The number has since grown. The ideas and energy so far generated are admirable. South Africa is coordinating the network. We intend to have the founding conference next June 2000.
• In spite of the representation from 40 odd countries, it was not enough. This is a forum that should have had stronger southern representation.
• There was a priceless wealth of knowledge assembled for the 3 days.

Maritha Snyman of the University of Pretoria talks about the conference, which, by bringing people together, has led to opportunities that could be fundamentally important in the development of the African continent.

As a South African, the most enriching personal experience of the conference was the way in which I was embraced and accepted by the African delegates, as well as the realisation that although Africa is a big and diverse continent, there are many problems that we share. Almost from the first day of the conference, the African delegates formed a group in which their own problems and visions were discussed. This type of discussion resulted in a meeting of all the African delegates on the last day of the conference with the purpose to establish a Participatory Development Forum for Africa. It is envisaged that within this forum, specific development needs pertaining to Africa could be discussed. The very positive and enthusiastic spirit of this meeting might perhaps be a small step on the road towards the African Renaissance.

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Next, Robert Verbruggen of Medecins Sans Frontières, Belgium, states that a strength of participation is that it has relevance across many sectors, regions and different situations. He states that interesting learnings can be drawn by uniting such experiences, through fora such as the PD conference, from both the North and the South.

On the conference

This Conference was without any doubt the most enriching and inspiring experience I have enjoyed since I temporarily left fieldwork for a study-break. What a relief from the dismal careerism and ‘technical fix’ thinking we are often exposed to, both within agencies and academia! The most encouraging aspect for me was the conscious celebration of ‘equality in diversity’ across disciplines, backgrounds, hierarchies, continents, gender and ages. I consider this an important test for the movement’s capacity to effectively foster a new
type of mutual learning relationship based on respect, away from the usual domination of power, money and hierarchy.

On the political relevance of Participatory Development

This was the one worry I had upon leaving Ottawa: how will we handle the evident political dimension of PD across individuals and organisations as diverse as a religious NGO and the Zapatista movement? I had the feeling that the political message, though very present in the keynote speeches, was ‘covered with the blanket of love’ in a lot of the sessions and group discussions - and did cause tension. Yet I remain optimistic because the movement for participation has:

- ‘history’ on its side - reading as a gradual process of emancipation of people from power;- and,
- a major strategic strength in that it is profoundly non-confrontational - which I believe is the only way to hollow out the current dominant world order - from within.

Next, Shyam K. Bhurtel of The Association of District Development Committees of Nepal (ADDC/N) says that the conference experience showed a strong degree of unity with other colleagues working in different contexts and regions, sharing similar issues around participation.

On a personal level, the interaction reinforced my own conviction on what I am doing in the area of decentralised local governance and development in Nepal. It was also interesting to find so many colleagues from different parts of the world, sharing the same dilemma and collectively trying to develop a vision and mission, or in a way trying to reinvent themselves. Many debates revolved around the North and South, but what matters the most to make them meet each other is critical and appreciative inquiry.

- **Shyam K. Bhurtel**, Executive Secretary General, Association of District Development Committees of Nepal (ADDC/N), Home email: sr@bhur.wlink.com.np.

Carlton Sulwe of Care International in Zambia raises the question of ethics and good practice in participatory development and reinforces the importance of critically assessing why participatory approaches are being adopted and to constantly be aware of the consequences of participatory development at all levels.

The PD conference came at the right time as we approach the new millennium. As the themes focused on the past, present and future, it was a moment to reflect, learn and share our experiences and current development.

- **The Present**: there is need to practice our practice ethically as the danger of abusing participatory development processes is eminent especially when everyone is becoming an ‘expert’. This may be due to popularity of PD approaches and the ‘interest’ shown by donors in them. The questions that we need to constantly ask ourselves include: participation for whom?; Why participatory approaches?; and what do we need to achieve that cannot be achieved in any other way? What are the unintended consequences of empowerment? If we are empowering the community, who are we disempowering and how are we doing it?

- **The Future**: there is need for Universities and other PD NGOs/institutions to network closely and not perceive each other as rivalry (‘Toxic universities’). There is also need to have sustainable institutions if participatory approaches are to sustained, institutionalised and internalised.

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If you have any feedback to any of the issues raised in the above commentaries or indeed, attended the conference yourself and would like the opportunity to raise some other issues in the debate around Participatory Development and future directions, please forward them to the Editorial Team at IIED. We look forward to hearing from you.
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Tips for trainers: matrix ranking of PRA tools

John Rowley

Introduction

The use of a PRA tool to assess PRA tools within the context of a training course provides an opportunity to look at the effects of a tool on an insider and to assess the learning of the trainees during the training course. It also emphasises that PRA tools can be used in almost any situation and need not be confined to appraisal interviews in rural situations. The exercise should be done when the trainees have some experience of using a range of tools in a number of different situations. This may normally fall at the end of the training course, but ideally, it would occur when there was still some time to use the tools again.

Objectives

• To share ideas on the usefulness of different PRA tools
• To obtain feedback on a training course
• To explore ideas on being an insider asked to carry out a PRA exercise

Preparation

There is no particular preparation required for this exercise, other than reminding yourself of the tools that have been covered in the training course. Ask one or two trainees to act as facilitators if the group is large.

Time

Allow about 2 hours, as for matrix ranking exercises.

Procedure

1. Start as if facilitating a matrix ranking exercise with the entire group. Brainstorm a list of all the PRA tools that have been used in the training course and during practice sessions. Arrange these in a vertical column.
2. Get the group to start to produce a list of criteria. Use questions such as: ‘How do you choose between the different tools?’ ‘What are the differences between the tools that you consider when deciding what to do next?’ Set out the criteria in a horizontal line above the list of tools.
3. Some trainees will recognise that you are setting up a matrix ranking exercise and, at some point, you will be able to stop running the exercise and either hand it over to a group to complete or hand it over to one of the chosen facilitators to continue.
4. Allow the group or groups to carry out the matrix ranking. Observe the process and the quality of discussion that goes into deciding on the rankings. Ask the group (directly or via the facilitator) which tool they would use if they could have only one. Call a halt to the process when things have gone as far as they usefully can.
5. Take feedback from the facilitator(s) on the process. Was the participation good? Was the discussion good? Did the participants explore their ideas on the tools or were there times that they just assigned ranks to the tools without much exchange of views?
6. Ask participants if they learned about what others in the group felt about the tools. Ask if they learned something about what they themselves think about the tools. Take general comments from participants.

7. Then ask the participants if they would have given the same rankings as the group finally decided on if they had worked on their own. Ask those who say that they would not have given the same rankings whether or not they agree with the group’s final rankings. Ask those who now agree with the group’s rankings how they changed their opinion.

The precise reasoning is not important. What is important is the realisation that people can share ideas and change their opinion whilst doing a PRA exercise.

The feedback on ranking tools should also give the trainer some idea of how well they have done in the training. Where a tool is ranked very poorly against other tools for a range of criteria, it may be that some more work is required. One would expect mapping tools to be ranked highly as being easy to use and tools like Venn Diagrams as more difficult to use. Where a tool is ranked badly, due to some quality that strikes the trainer as unusual, some more explanation may be required. For example, a mapping tool that is ranked as providing very little information might raise your suspicions.

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**Comments**

The final bit of feedback from people who admit to changing their minds is a crucial element of any participatory exercise. The interviewees are not simply a source of information but are people with differing ideas that can change; just like us!

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