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Using Rapid Rural Appraisal for project identification: Report on a training exercise in Jama'are local government area, Bauchi State, Northern Nigeria

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• Introduction

In April this year we co-operated with Ahmadu Bello University in running a pilot course on rural project identification for heads of local government departments of Agriculture and of Community Development of several states in Northern Nigeria. The course was based on fieldwork in five villages in the Jama'are local government area, Bauchi state. We focussed the fieldwork on applying Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) techniques, namely wealth ranking, community, group and household interviews, and various diagrammatic instruments (transects, seasonal calendars, historical profiles and village maps). The purpose was to provide the course participants with improved tools for assessing rural needs in relation to local government services.

Here are some of the high and low lights of the work and what we learned about trying out these RRA techniques in a training course.

• **Wealth ranking: selection of key informants in the small traditional village**

Done in consultation with the head of the village, to get a variety of occupations and degrees of wealth and any different cultural groups. But there was reluctance among the elders of these Fulani villages to name a woman as a key informant. In two cases the assessment by the woman key informant produced the most radically different wealth ranking classification producing larger wealthy groups than the other key informants. Not clear why.

Ideally we should have consulted others than the village head in making the selection of key informants. But this is very difficult, especially if the wealth ranking is done at the beginning of the work. Advance literature on the village or the area would be useful, particularly if there are any indications from this of any particular group (occupation, status, culture), which is thought to be particularly deprived. In our case we did not have such advance information. Our own findings suggested that among deprived groups are old couples whose children have grown up and left home and new immigrants who live on the edge of the villages. Others who may have been more specifically selected as key informants were: small scale traders, craftsmen and mat weavers (often people without resources for farming or without livestock).

• **The appearance of poverty and apparent wealth**

While the poverty identification exercise using the wealth ranking method proved successful on the whole, a number of practical problems were encountered, as follows:

- In some villages several households share the same surname. Hence it was necessary to distinguish clearly between them before asking the informants to rank households.
- Some informants, while most willing to help in the exercise, were not prepared to categorise some households as poor because they believed the families would not like to be so classified if they found out. Hence confidentiality was essential,

strengthened by interviewing in the privacy of informants' own houses.

- Conceptual problems arose concerning the definition of poverty itself. In these villages whether a person is thought to be wealthy or not depends on their ownership of land. Hence several informants stated that 'X is poor but may not be poor'. What they meant was that X owned little land and therefore had to buy food from the market - a sure sign of poverty. However since X in fact owns a cattle truck which is used to take produce to the market for other farmers he earns a reasonable income from this. According to an outsider's perception he is not poor. Yet since the social value placed on land is so high he is still regarded as poor within the village.
- A separate but related problem concerns sons who have not yet inherited wealth (land) from their father. According to the prevailing social structure young married sons mainly till the household farmlands (gandu arrangement) but later on they are also assigned separate plots by their father in order to feed their growing family. Until they obtain such land, they are nominally landless and hence classed by some informants as poor. Yet these same informants know full well that eventually they will inherit lands from the father. Hence the youngest son of one of the richest families in one village was classed among the poorest.
- The list of village households we worked from had been compiled by the head of the district. But there was some question (never really answered) as to whether this was the list used for tax collection purposes which might therefore not include names of evaders, and also as to how up to date the list was.
- **The problems with probing, using government officials easily suspected of tax interests**

Our course participants were local government officials. It was clear from comments made once we had established better communication

that some suspicions existed at first, even though we had emphasised the confidentiality of the information.

• **The questionnaire problem - checklists far better**

We made the mistake in preparing for the fieldwork of letting the participants prepare interview schedules in the form of questionnaires. This resulted from our wish to involve them as much as possible - but their experience was with closed type of questionnaires worked mechanically through, and it was difficult to free them from this once they had started, and to discourage them from analysing and generalising (even to decimal places!) the results of the untested, non-randomly applied questionnaires.

In future we will construct checklist (trying to build in easy-retention lists, in mnemonic form perhaps, or like the 'five I's' and the 'six helpers'¹ to provide a basic reference for interviews, and encourage a flexible, probing approach. A few specific, unambiguous questions on which comparable, quantifiable (or at least rankable) information is needed can be added.

• **A better introduction to RRA as a method needed**

With little time to prepare the participants for the fieldwork we concentrated on teaching the RRA techniques to be used and on preparing the interview schedules. With hindsight, a more thorough grounding in RRA as a method was needed (built around 'optimal ignorance' and 'triangulation') distinguishing it from traditional survey methods.

• **Using rapid nutrition assessment**

Upper arm measure seems designed for measuring more extreme malnutrition than the weight for age; weight for height results generally indicated stunting: children who were well below the 'path of health' on weight

¹ Six helpers: who, what, where, when, how, why.
Five I's (for farming): incentives, inputs, innovations, information, interventions

for age were OK on weight for height. Also there was a practical problem that most parents had only a vague idea of the birth date of infants - usually only to the nearest six months. This reduced the usefulness of the weight for age measure in particular.

- **Interviewing mistakes**

Firstly, in the community interview it was difficult to get much participation of ordinary people, rather than just the village elders. We felt that although reasons of suspicion and hierarchy were partly responsible here the sitting arrangements did not help - with the questioners sitting near the headman and elders. We hope to change this in future.

Secondly, some of the household interviews were conducted away from the informant's home, in the centre of village. Although obtaining privacy was not the problem (no shortage of isolated shade trees) these interviews were generally less successful than those conducted in homes.

- **Lack of an analytic tradition in the bureaucracy**

Many of the government officers still believe that their role is to 'enlighten' the village people about the 'importance' of education, health, water and community associations. They are also more used to descriptive reporting. Probing is essential to RRA, but many tended to accept what was said at face value, not look for linking points, and to be satisfied with poor information. Among some there was reluctance to remain long in the village and look for detail by consulting different informants.

It could be argued that RRA presupposes that its practitioners already possess a grasp of social processes. For this reason RRA may be easier with NGOs whose approach to rural development is often more oriented to poorer

people's needs. But such a grasp cannot be assumed with local government officers. This was well summed up by one participant, genuinely perplexed, who asked: *'This wealth ranking exercise is very interesting but why are we trying to identify the poorest?'*

Our response to this question was that besides the priority that the poor should receive in government social planning the access by the poor to government services is the best measure of the adequacy of those services - since the poor are invariably last in the queue.

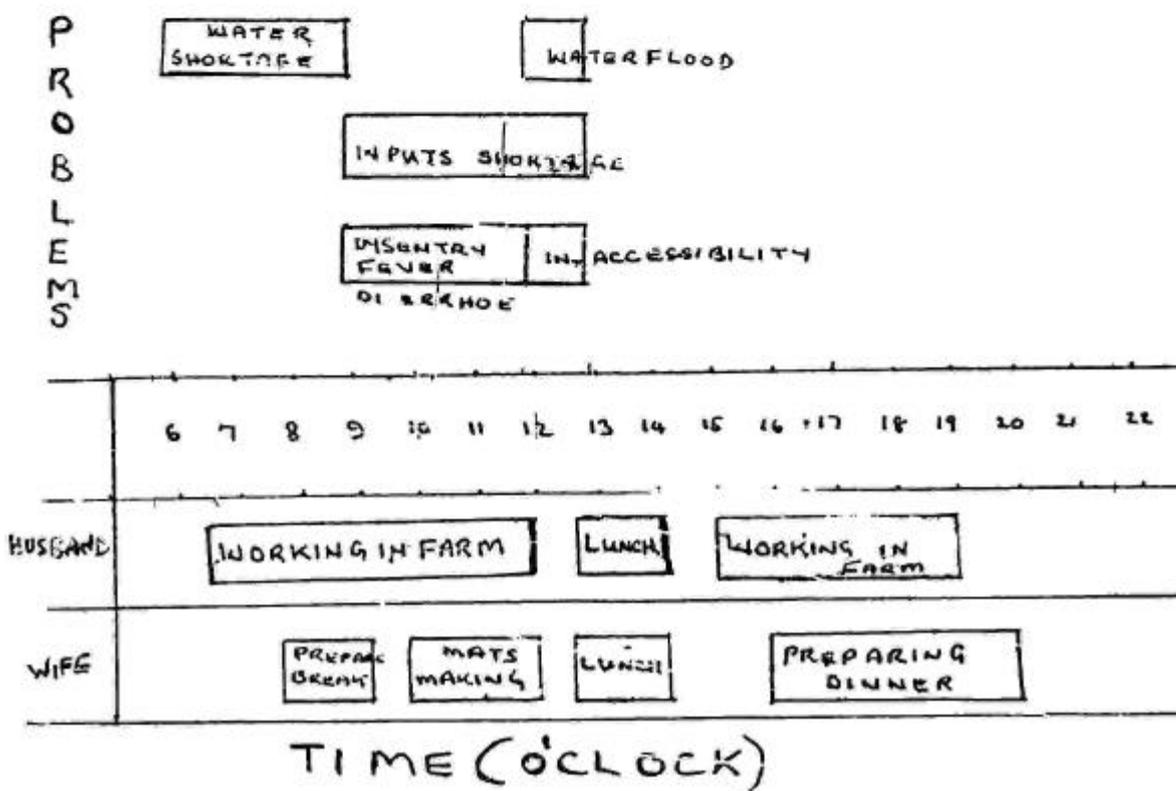
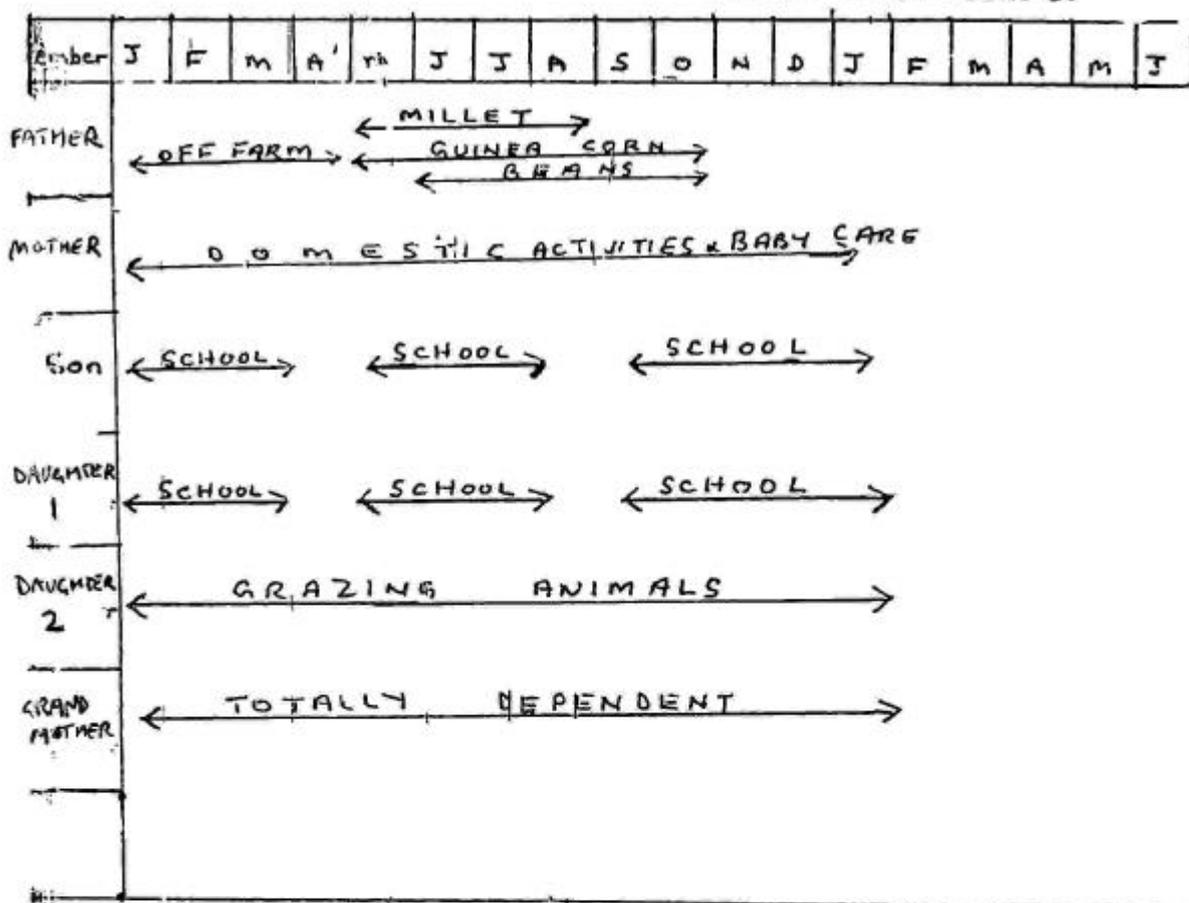
Perhaps at the back of some of these problems was a low level of formal education among the participants combined with lack of a consultative tradition in the bureaucracy. Supplying them with techniques to enable them to go into the villages to find out information with more confidence than before was a major benefit of the course, as cited by the participants in the course evaluation.

- **Poor performance on diagrammatic techniques**

Partly a training fault. Although the techniques were taught their relevance to project planning was not specified sufficiently. The result was that many were skimpily done in the field and hardly related to the analysis contained in the written report. Trainers should have taken more lead in carrying out themselves high quality transects. Seasonal calendars were generally better done but historical profiles were disappointing, perhaps because participants saw no relation to current policy.

A useful means in compiling the historical profile, tried successfully in one village, is to find out if there are village songs which tell its story, to listen to them and go over the events described in a community interview. This proved an excellent ice breaker and source of information.

TEGOYEL VILLAGE - BAUCHI STATE, NIGERIA
 SEASONAL LABOR SCHEDULE OF MEMBERS IN F/HOUSEHOLD.



HISTORICAL PROFILE CHART FOR SABON KAFI VILLAGE

DOGON DASI DISTRICT, JAMHAKI LOCAL GOVT
BAUCHI STATE OF NIGERIA

- 1869 - FIRST SETTLEMENT, KNOWN AS KAFIN MANOMI.
- 1939 - FIRST VILLAGE HEAD
- 1944 - DISEASE/DISASTER (SMALL POX AND LOCUST),
- 1948 - 2 CONCRETE WELLS CONSTRUCTED.
- 1954 - FIRST FEEDER ROAD FROM GAUNI BAHANI - SABON KAFI.
- 1964 - 1 CONCRETE WELL CONSTRUCTED.
- 1974 - PRIMARY SCHOOL BUILT.
- 1975 - DROUGHT WHICH CAUSED MIGRATION FROM SABON KAFI.
- 1977 - DISPENSARY BUILT.
- 1979 - VISIT BY MOHMED GIDADO, STATE ASSEMBLY MEMBER,
- 1980 - COMMUNITY FARM ESTABLISHED.
- 1982 - BORE HOLE SUNK.
- 1984 - MOSQUE BUILT
- 1987 - DROUGHT,

SOURCE:- FROM 6 ELDERS INTERVIEWED FROM
THE VILLAGE HOUSEHOLDS.

• Limitations of an open ended RRA for training RD officers

The focus was on teaching a variety of RRA techniques. No particular investment projects were in mind and the object of all the techniques was to produce a picture of how people of different wealth levels make their living in the villages, the access they have to local government's services and the use they make of them.

As such, the work was of the 'Exploratory RRA' type. The outcome was also general in nature, covering all the different sectors in which local government is involved (agriculture and livestock, education, health, water and community development). The strength of this approach from the training point of view was that many different RRA techniques were introduced, tried out and the many resulting issues discussed with local government and, at a still more general level, in the workshop at Ahmadu Bello university which ended the course. The disadvantage was that covering so many techniques and sectors limited the depth of enquiry and contributed to the superficial preparation and use of some of the RRA techniques. Further, the RRA techniques used were of a widely differing nature: the sketch map, the transect through the village and the seasonal calendar are aimed at resource potential and use. The historical profile and the different interviews (community, group, household) are aimed more at household and community problems.

The interviews require more skill to be done well but were more readily embarked upon in our work by the course participants than were the transect, map and seasonal calendar.

The alternative would be to have specific projects or services in focus, and to select the RRA techniques accordingly.

• Linking RRA to local government's project identification

Our reason for focussing on RRA techniques was to improve the participants' project identification skills. Since the project

executing body was in their case local government, we needed to develop an institutional rapid appraisal - to link RRA in the villages to local government planning. For this purpose we constructed a 'Use of Local Government Services' pro forma listing the services currently provided, with spaces next to them to fill in the use made of these services by village informants, and how they would like them to be changed. It provided us with a summary statement of issues by sector and department to take to local government.

This needs to be developed further. In future work we would like to add the following:

- During the fieldwork preparation: to work with councillors in the local government area where the fieldwork is to be done to get a good idea of the present project ID and management problems as they see them. This would be in addition to working with local government officers as we did. The excellent co-operation we received would have made this possible; there is a genuine interest in improving project performance.
- To trace through with councillors and officers the decision trees of particular projects - as part of the work done by course participants:
 - a) when and where the major decision on the inception and continuation of the activity are taken; what decisions are and are not in the hands of the council; and,
 - b) how the allocations of funds for recurrent costs are made, for each area of activity.

Together these two little investigations, when combined with the investigations in the villages regarding the use of services, services wanted and resource potential, provide a basis for a rapid appraisal of local government project ID.

• Too many participants

Carrying out the work with 30 course participants proved logistically horrendous, for transport, accommodation and communications (especially since phoning was

virtually impossible and petrol was scarce). In future we would want no more than could travel in two large estate cars (12 or so). This would also make local accommodation easier even increasing the possibility that we could stay in the villages, with all its attendant learning advantages.

This was the pilot course of a five year programme. Much was learnt - not only regarding the advantages of smaller numbers but also of the ways of linking RRA to project planning and management. Future courses will develop these ideas further.

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