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Anantapur experiment in 'PRA' training

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• Introduction

Anantapur is a drought prone district of Andhra Pradesh in India. Here the remote sensing technology has been used to identify 16 priority watersheds, each extending to an area approximately 4,000 hectares. Each watershed is looked after by a team consisting of 9 members from various Line Departments such as Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Irrigation, Horticulture, Social Forestry, Fishery, Groundwater Department etc. Some of these teams have a few members overlapping. The watershed programme is implemented by these departments and monitored by the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), Anantapur. The DRDA has problems in implementation of the programme as well as maintenance of the assets created in already treated watersheds. It also has problems with the co-ordination of various departments involved in the programme to get better and quicker results. So it was decided to train the watershed teams in Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA).

The objectives of the training programme were as follows:

- Plan the watershed programmes with the people as per their needs;
- Involve the people in the implementation and maintenance of the works taken up;
- Development of team spirit amongst the members of the watershed teams; and,
- Better co-ordination and understanding amongst various departments working in a watershed.

Keeping the above objectives in view, a schedule of events was worked out as follows:

- Training (Briefing about PRA - 1 day)
- Exercise (Conducting the PRA in a village for 3 days and nights by the teams on their own)
- Debriefing (Experience sharing amongst the teams - 1 day)

• Training

The theoretical training was just for a day to orient the participants so they could conduct the PRA on their own. So the exercise was a kind of learning by doing oneself. The debriefing was given importance as a learning from others' successes and failures. The schedule was chalked out keeping in view the financial constraints which made long theoretical training and hiring of the PRA trainers from outside difficult. Hence we attempted to devise a training schedule of a brief period with local resource persons who know the requirements of the department better. Four local officials participated as trainers, of whom two had already been trained in the PRA, and the other two did not have any formal training but were practising PRA in spirit in their development related works.

A preliminary study carried out during watershed review meeting showed that officers sat as per their departmental affiliations rather than teamwise. So for the training the teams were made to sit together by displaying the placards with teams names. This was to foster interaction among the members by forced contact.

Figure 46. Whose plans and whose needs?

WHOSE PLANS AND WHOSE NEEDS ?



PLANNER



RESEARCHER



DONOR



COMMUNITY NEEDS

The one-day training capsule included the items as shown below:

- The NEED 10% of the day
- The METHOD 30% of the day
- The APPROACH 50% of the day
 - a) Breaking Barriers
 - b) Prejudices and Biases
- The CASE STUDIES 10% of the day

The need

Instead of starting with a formal speech, it was stated that it was only an interactive session in which everybody has to learn from others and contribute something to the group. Then we posed the teams a few questions as to:

- What do they think of the development programmes?
- Where does the system go wrong - whether at the formulation stage or implementation stage?

The members of each of the teams were to interact amongst themselves and write the points on a piece of paper. The exercise was to provoke the thought process in the minds of participants in the direction which would facilitate us to go ahead with PRA more easily and effectively and to develop a group feeling among the members of a team.

All the participants felt that developmental programmes are failing to bring out what they aim at and following reasons emerged:

- lack of co-operation from people;
- failure to generate interest among the people;
- non acceptance of schemes;

- schemes being thrust upon people (without properly checking whether they are wanted, not wanted);
- various departments working for cross purposes without having co-ordination/co-operation;
- complexity of rules and procedures; and,
- excess emphasis on meeting physical targets.

Here PRA approach was suggested as a way to do away with some of these problems (Figure 46). A brief history of PRA, its growth and applications were discussed.

The method

The following methods were explained to the participants and their applicability discussed.

- mapping;
- social mapping;
- transects;
- matrix;
- wealth ranking;
- seasonality analysis;
- group interactions and individual interviews; and,
- trend analysis.

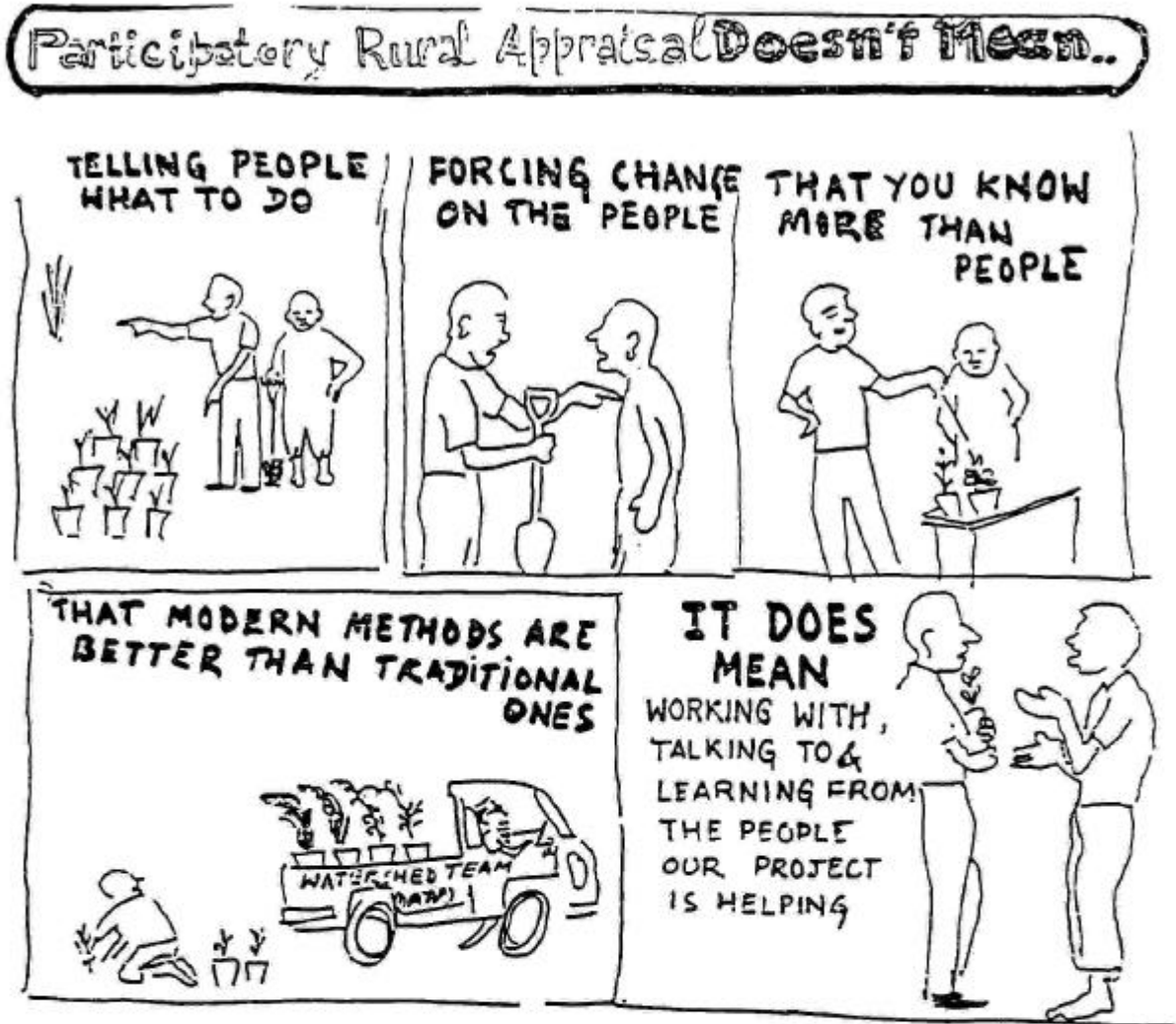
It was stated that these methods are not of universal application. They are like 'menu' from which teams are free to select. Teams can also formulate their own simple methods to suit their situations and problems. However, it was explained that these are only means to elicit and arrange the information scientifically and systematically and ensuring the participation of people.

Figure 47. Interpreting questions



Figure 48. Too many questions at once

Figure 49. What PRA does not and does mean



WELCOME
to
a new world!

PRA → 'PA' People's Approach

The approach

The approach was thought to be most important and allotted maximum time in the training capsule. It was based on the assumption that between the official line of functionaries and people many barriers operate which do not allow the actual interaction between them. Some of them as identified by the resource person and participants included the following:

- the official's 'ego'
- attitudes: villagers are: lazy
ignorant
we are: professional
better
thinking
- the interfering radicals: attenders
intermediaries
- the language
- the conduct: sitting, tone
of speech,
interruptions

Further, how even an officer who visits the villages in order to understand the problems and needs of the people, fails to do so most of the time was explained. The operation of rural development tourism and 5 biases never allow the visitors to get the real picture of the poverty and poor people. These are:

- spatial (visits to roadside accessible places);
- seasonal (visits during cool and dry seasons);
- project (some developmental show-pieces used time and again for different visitors);
- person (intermediaries better off heard and officials fail to reach the poorest); and,
- professional (not an holistic but departmental perspective).

The attempt was to facilitate the process of self exploration and examination which helps realise the barriers which come in between 'US' and 'THEM' to carry out effective communication. Simple technique of transactional analysis were used to make the process of communication easier. It was explained how the officials talk in a 'parent ego state' and how the villagers respond in a 'child ego state' and the ways of reaching

'adult-adult transaction' to get to know people better. Further attempt was to drive the point home that this exercise is to learn from people and not to teach them. The following tips were given to them as the items to guard against:

- questions to wrong persons etc. (Figure 47)
- excessive questioning (Figure 48)
- what PRA doesn't mean (Figure 49)

The entire explanation was extensively based on interesting cartoons, slides etc. a few of which have been shown here.

Case studies and materials

A few case studies of PRA conducted elsewhere and their experiences were shared with participants to make them aware of certain difficulties in PRA application in the real life situation. Making ourselves acceptable to people, ability to deal with local leaders, not getting drifted by few dominant vocalities were emphasised. The attempt was to explain them further that there is no single solution to a problem but one has to devise his own ways and means of facing it.

At the end of the training season, training material containing a brief description of various methods of PRA and their usages was distributed amongst the participants.

The exercise

The theoretical training was followed by a stay of 3 days and 3 nights by 16 teams in 16 villages. The logistics were left to the teams entirely and they were all requested not to carry the whole paraphernalia of vehicles, attenders etc. with them and not to leave the village even for a brief period. (This attempt is to bring an attitudinal change in the officers by forced contact with people). Further, the participants were encouraged to take photographs of all relevant interesting items in the village and requested that their reports should be based on the actual presentations made by the villagers and as far as possible prepared in the village only after the exercise.

• De-briefing

The debriefing session followed the 3 days of stay in the village. It was again an interactive session where each team presented their report covering both their experiences and action plan for the watershed and in particular and village development in general.

Advantages

The advantages as felt by the teams practising PRA were as follows:

- Better team spirit among them. Participants, who were sitting as per their parent department earlier, sat together for debriefing even when there were no placards indicating team names.
- Co-ordination among the departments.
- They were happy to agree and accept the traditional wisdom of villagers and their ability to device precise and simple answers to their problems.
- Now a lot of positive outlook is generated among them regarding villages and villagers.
- They also expressed that this understanding and approach has some important role to play improving their day-to-day relations in their houses, social circles and in their working places.
- The teams expressed their eagerness to conduct more exercises in more villages.
- Ability to seek more and more participation from the villages and easier implementation.

Constraints

A supportive leadership at the district level and the state level which is there at present continues. Further, the need of having team under the single line of control of the DRDA. Rigidity of rules is also another constraint.

The future

Based on this experience, it was decided to have following programme for the future:

- Constant training and experimentation and sharing of the experiences in the form of newsletter in the local language.
- Periodical stays in the villages and night halts to sharpen and diversify our 'think tank' and refresh ideas.
- Efforts to include PRA reports in the action plans. Future action plans to be generated by PRAs. All villages under the watersheds to be covered.
- Efforts to relax rules to implement the works by the people. Reviews of progress of works by people during the periodic night halts of the watershed teams in the village.

Though it is too early to judge the success of the training and the PRA for government departments, it has been an encouraging venture.

The economy of cost, manpower and time has been the major feature of this programme. Further, it has been devised to be carried out within the existing government rules and financial constraints.

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