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**Women's PRA in Hindupur**

Eva Robinson

**• Introduction**

A new kind of PRA workshop was held at Kethagani Cheruvu village, near Hindupur on November 19-21, 1991. This was a first in the HIDA/MYRADA Agroforestry Network, and, I believe, a first in the PRA experience in South India for which only women participants were invited to attend. All, except one of the resource people were women as well.

The reason for calling an all-women PRA is because it has been difficult to get women participants from NGOs in previous workshops. Those women who did come, confessed that they were inhibited to interact freely in the presence of men, many of whom are actually their superiors from the same organization. They also did not have any previous opportunity to practice skills and guide the interviews. The other important reason for such a PRA is that it can create a chance to focus on issues of special interest to women, like health, nutrition, labour and migration, childbirth practices etc.

**• Short-term impact**

The PRA was a huge success from the point of view of numbers. Thirty seven village women attended for 3 days, with only 4 resource people. Several *sangha*<sup>1</sup> members also came, which was a new experience for the HIDA forestry NGOs. There was a great deal of resulting enthusiasm, participation and eagerness for further similar workshops. The workshop was also effective in spreading the methodology. The women seriously practised the skills involved in the different exercises

and learnt from each other. All participants were able to take an active part in some exercise and sharpen their skills. Issues specially related to women were discussed during the exercises, but due to lack of time and/or expertise of the participants, we could not explore all the topics adequately. Much more work needs to be done in this area.

**• Highlights**

Some observations were made about ways in which a PRA for and with women is different from our previous experiences when men were present.

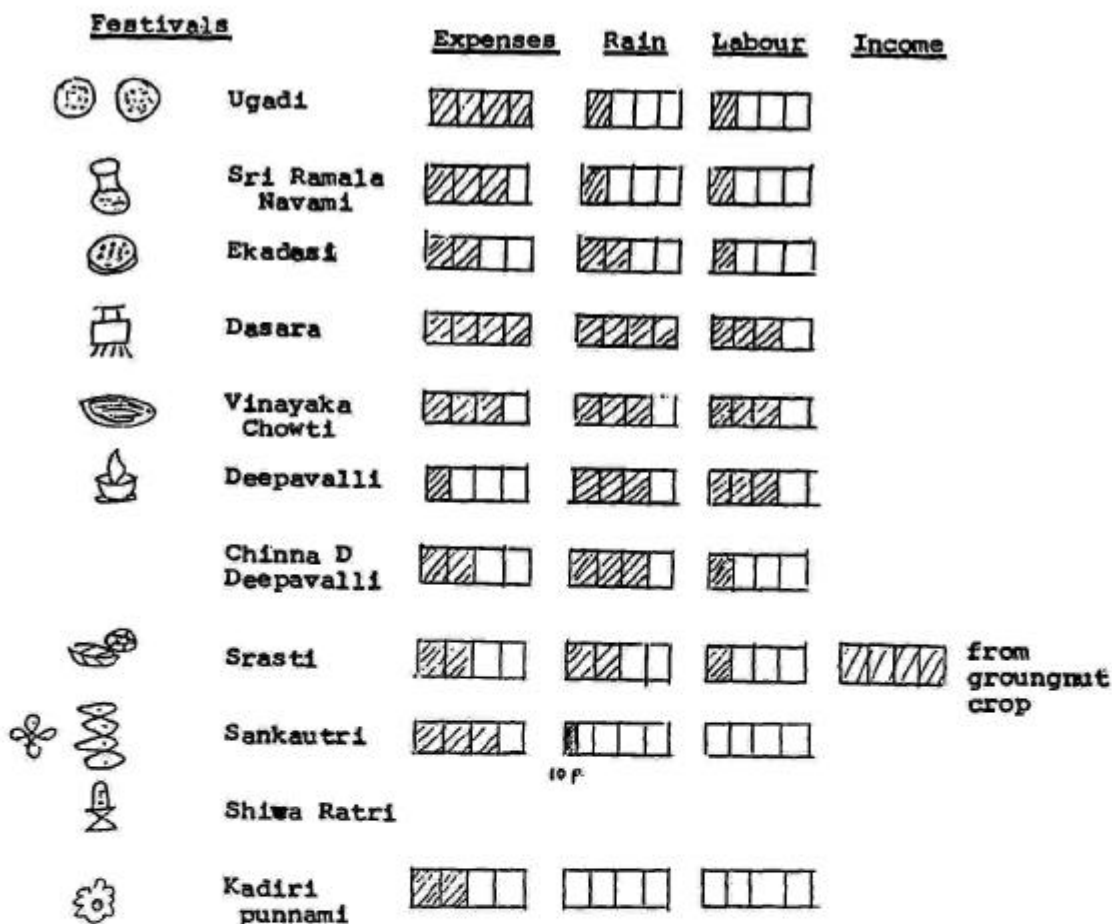
- Women embraced new ideas easily with fewer intellectual hangups. There were fewer sceptics and objections.
- There was generally less theorizing and arguing over useless points.
- There was more cooperation with the schedule and programme, with a corresponding seriousness.
- Women did not need as many tea and smoke breaks.
- There was an awareness that this is a special opportunity for them to get together with other women and they really took maximum advantage of it by talking about many other issues.
- The level of sharing was more personal and got to a deeper level quickly.
- Women tended to discuss method more than content. How the exercise was done was seen to be as important as the content or the information gathered.

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• <sup>1</sup>A *sangha* is a local group.

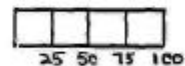
- Participants developed warmth and rapport with each other quickly and there was a good spirit of participation.

Figure 1



**Kethagani Cheruvu village**

The 60 year old woman suggested this way of measuring.



Her perception of the rainfall is related to the tank, good rains mean that the tank is full (100%), so-so rain means half (50%), three quarters (75%) or a quarter (25%). She expressed it in terms of one rupee, 75 paise, 50 paise etc. Full labour is measured by when everyone is employed. Full expenditure is measured by the highest expenditure month, which is for the festival of Ugadi.

- Group I
- S. Meenakshi
  - G. Devamma
  - Gangamma
  - D. Navareethamma

- The topics covered in the exercises had more subjects dealing with women's problems.
- Even though the interviewers were all women, both men and women from the village freely participated. However, we were able to draw out more women to be interviewed.
- Participants also discussed the strengths and weaknesses of women in general in a SWOT<sup>2</sup> exercise.
- Many of the women staff were community organizers and field workers, and they adapted to village conditions and tasks readily with much less of a barrier.

### • **New things tried**

Most of the villagers worked outside the village so the PRA exercises had to be done between 6 and 9 in the morning. On the first day, the trainees arrived at the village at 6 am and took part in the morning village tasks before doing the exercises.

Many diagrams and other methods were used because not all the women were literate and it was difficult to introduce anything which required reading, writing or pen and paper. For example:

- role plays were used to bring out the DO's and DONT's of interviewing;
- seasonality and daily work of a woman was done pictorially (see Figure 1);
- group discussions were used to review the previous day instead of writing a diary of reflections.

Insert Figure 1

Two sets of notes were made simultaneously, one in English and one in Telugu, and charts were transcribed on the same day. Presentations were done in the evening, once at the village, and once at a training centre a short distance away. Interested farmers could easily take part without the noise and confusion in the village. At both occasions, the presentations were followed by stick dancing.

- <sup>2</sup>Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

Due to the language problems (different kind of Telugu spoken by the resource people and participants), there were much fewer directives than in previous PRAs. Much of the learning was from each other and their own experience, with minimal direction from the resource people.

Although the food was cooked by a local family hired for the occasion, the women served each other, so no villagers were spending their time serving the participants.

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