

18

PRA learning methods in agricultural policy analysis: implications for training

Gerry Gill

Participatory learning methods have most frequently been used by NGOs engaged in development activities within a discrete, well-defined and geographically-concentrated area: a village, community, watershed or other relatively restricted geographical or socio-economic sphere. In our programme in Nepal we are attempting to adapt the participatory approach to the problems of information collection for purposes of policy analysis in agriculture and related natural resource management. Here the problems and issues are probably very different than for the above 'NGO-development' model, differences which are reflected in the type of training methods to be adopted. In terms of the purpose and modality of the exercise, the major points of distinction from the 'NGO mode' are that:

- Policy analysis must necessarily adopt a macro perspective, so that geographical concentration is neither possible nor desirable;
- Ideally, staff for information gathering for agricultural policy analysis should be government extension agents; and,
- It is true that if good policy analysis ultimately results in the implementation of more responsive and problem-orientated policies, rural communities will benefit. However, from the point of view of the rural communities there is no clear, demonstrable and direct beneficial linkage between providing information and receiving subsequent benefits.

The above points imply that training exercises for policy-oriented PRA must be custom-designed, with particular emphasis on the following points.

First, government staff typically have a more 'top-down' approach than NGO staff. It is

therefore even more necessary to stress the importance of the participatory approach and seek to reverse attitudes and thinking.

Secondly, the hierarchical structure of government extension systems make horizontal linkages difficult, especially across different administrative regions and different agencies. It is therefore essential to use training programmes to help foster cooperation and positive peer group pressure to facilitate research that will be both mutually compatible and consistently rigorous across the network.

The time requirements imposed by the above will restrict the time available for teaching PRA techniques, while the geographically scattered nature of the network and the absence of formal supervision of research (as would exist in an NGO) means that the teaching of techniques must be unusually thorough. This in turn argues for:

- Restricting the number of techniques handled in a single workshop;
- Paying particular attention to techniques likely to be useful in policy analysis (e.g. trend analysis);
- Having all groups practice the same technique at the same time on different groups of farmers (in order to facilitate discussion and mutual interchange of ideas, experiences and difficulties);
- Having a series of training workshops, preferably at different workshop sites, to further exchange experiences and to introduce or develop new techniques on the basis of the growing experience of the network members. Having a series of training exercises instead of just one will also help strengthen the network and

reinforce collegiality and positive peer group pressure; and,

- Since there is no direct linkage between information supplied by farmers and benefits they will receive, even more stress than usual has to be laid on building rapport with the farmers. Since this is something extension workers are supposed to do anyway, discussion of how to achieve this and a sharing of positive and negative experiences should be a major focal point of all training workshops.

The growing trend towards multi-party democracy in Nepal and many other developing countries should provide a strong stimulus for adopting such a focus.

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gerry Gill, Policy Analysis in Agriculture and Related Resource Management, Winrock International, PO Box 1312, Kathmandu, Nepal. |
|--|