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Applying PRA methods to participatory monitoring and evaluation: report on a course held in El Obeid, Sudan

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• Background

The idea for this course arose during a visit to Sudan in 1992 to discuss Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E) with staff in various forest projects. In some of the projects visited there was a lack of acquaintance with participatory methods, consequently it was difficult for them to consider embarking on participatory M&E.

There are many methods which could be useful for PM&E and it seemed that a PRA course could be an opportunity to explore some of the issues around PM&E and introduce a selection of possible methods. Looking through the PRA literature there was remarkably little discussion of its application and use for M&E, despite the fact that some tools in particular seem to have the potential for this type of application.

The course

Training was conducted largely in Arabic by Development Support Programme Khartoum, which is part of Community Development Services (CDS) in Cairo. They have conducted various PRA courses in Sudan over the last year and were themselves very keen to explore the use of PRA for PM&E. Due to the problems of communicating with Sudan and to the trainers being overworked there was not enough opportunity to discuss the course contents in advance. Their plan largely followed the SCF/IIED manual *PRA for Community Development* (1991).

I arrived in advance so as to have a couple of days pre-discussion with them which was very useful and we were able to re-orientate the

course to suit our specific needs. I had a small input during the actual training, particularly on the concept of PM&E and the application of various PRA tools to PM&E.

The course took place over two weeks in Kordofan. Field work was conducted in villages with varying involvement with SOS Sahel's Natural Forest Management Project, near to El Obeid. Eighteen participants came from NGOs and government organisations (some involved with UNSO). A large number of the participants were foresters and work was conducted in villages which were involved in forestry activities.

The course was entirely self-funded (apart from my input) and participants paid \$460 each. This could have been much less but they subsidised five people from government organisations who were given free places.

What follows are comments on the course and a summary of the methods we found most useful for M&E.

• Comments on the course

In general the course went very well. Participants and trainers worked extremely hard (and it was hot!) usually from 7.30am until 9.30pm. However several problem areas emerged which are worth sharing with other PRA trainers/users.

Attitude to villagers

The course was largely aimed at project manager and extension supervisor level, so many of the participants were not regular field workers. In some cases it proved difficult to

encourage the development of a 'suitable' PRA attitude in their approach in the villages. This may partly have been because the trainers concentrated on PRA methods rather than attitude (I had too short an amount of time within the course to cover this area adequately).

In addition it was felt by agency staff in the area that the arrival of such a large group would put too much of a financial strain on the villagers. We were therefore advised not to sleep in the villages and made a base camp in a central spot. This will inevitably have hindered the development of rapport with the villagers and a team feeling amongst trainees. It may account for the fact that one or two participants were unable to abandon their didactic tendencies and their apparent inability to appreciate the advantages of symbols for illiterate people (and for me!). It also reduced the amount of fieldwork we could do, being restricted to starting work after 10am because villagers were busy. If we had been staying in the villages it would probably have been possible to work with those who were free, particularly the women for whom it is harder to find free time.

Lack of confidence amongst participants

Most of the work was done inside meeting spaces for the men and inside houses with the women. It was noticeable that when starting the PRA work in the villages there was a general lack of confidence among the team members. This manifested itself in various ways. For example, the teams did not initially encourage villagers to leave enough space for their drawings. Someone would start a map and then find themselves bumping into the furniture and have to start again

Use of symbols

Another problem area, which we were still addressing right up until the end of the course, was the use of symbols. Team members were slow to encourage villagers to look for suitable symbols, sometimes they just wrote the word in the sand or else they used stones or matchboxes or whatever came easily to hand. The difficulties of this were immediately apparent to me, as an illiterate in Arabic. Yet

despite discussing this with the teams, many of them still failed to use symbols adequately. The drawbacks became even clearer during feedback with villagers when they were given paper copies of their drawings. In one village we asked a group of children to choose the diagrams they preferred - all the ones without writing! We also found that while it was very useful to use the leaves of particular species as symbols on the ground, it was difficult to reproduce these accurately enough to suggest the correct tree in the paper versions. It was also difficult to remember what the matchbox or stone had represented.

In an effort to address this problem the trainers asked people to give a personal evaluation of the course using symbols. One of the participants gave a presentation of the use of PRA tools in choosing a wife. He went through the secondary sources (identified with appropriate symbols) which he would consult to collect information about her (difficult in a segregated Muslim culture). He also used diagrams to make suppositions about her lifestyle before and after marriage. The course participants found this an amusing way of summarising and reviewing methods! The trainers presented a series of symbols and, amidst much laughter, the course was asked to choose which participants these symbols represented (particularly apt was the use of a picture of a microphone to describe the more inveterate talkers). Lastly we asked everyone to prepare and present a personal evaluation of the course's impact on them in the form of an impact diagram using only symbols.

Application of PRA methods to PM&E

Participants were slow to grasp the usefulness of PRA for PM&E. Even on the last field day when we had emphasised they were to concentrate on PM&E there were still groups wanting to complete their repertoire of PRA tools and do 'daily routines', for example. There were probably two reasons for this:

- This approach was new to the trainers and they had not put enough time into planning and amending their typical PRA format (partly because they were very busy, even overloaded); and,
- It was perhaps too ambitious to do a two-week course which included PRA

methods, psychological and personal techniques, and PM&E. Participants wanted to experiment with all of the techniques but ran out of time towards the end because we were asking them to focus

on evaluation. Not staying in the villages reduced the amount of fieldwork time (but it did make it easier for the trainers to monitor the work).

Figure 1. Impact Diagram: Contribution of Improved Stoves to Raising Income in Burbur Village

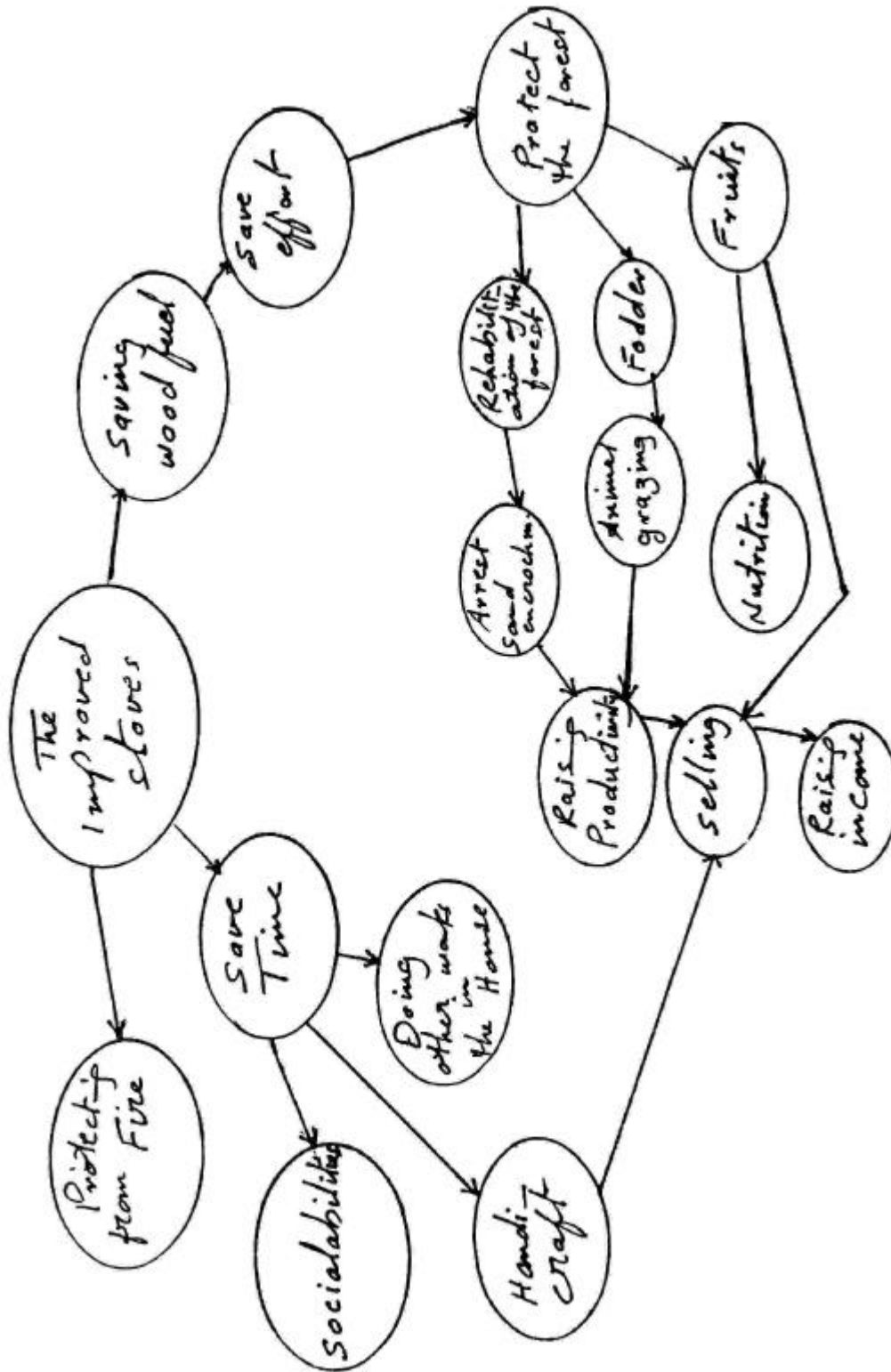




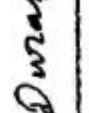



Figure 2. Impact Matrix for Types of Cooking Stoves, El Hujairat Village

Impression	Symbol used	STOVE CRITERIA	Improved Mud stove	Metal stove	Traditional stove
Red cloth		Heat Intensity	SSS		
Triangle		Smoke			
Zigzag line		Cooking speed			
Bone		Cooking quality			
stick		Fuel wood consumption			
stone		Durability			
		SCORE	 	 	
		RESULT	I	II	III

/ : symbol of small stick

Figure 4. Evaluation Matrix for Different Agricultural Activities, El Hujairat Village

	Symbolic Criteria	Benefit	Participation	Labour	Area	Comm. Involvement	SCORES	RESULT
MICRO-catchment	△	○○○	○ ○ ○ ○	□ □ □	→ → →	⊙ ⊙ ⊙ ⊙	15	I
Agricult. Project		○○	○ ○	□ □	→ ↑ →	⊙ ⊙ ⊙ ⊙	11	II
Nursery	▭		○	□	→	⊙ ⊙	5	IV
Home Garden 'Gubra.ka'	▭	○	○ ○	□	→	⊙ ⊙ ⊙	8	III

The tools found to be most useful for evaluation were:

- *Impact Diagrams* (Figure 1). However one problem which arose with these was the villagers' tendency to consider only positive impacts. The course participants did not facilitate enough consideration of the negative impacts. We addressed this on the final days of the course.
- *Impact Matrices* (Figure 2).
- *Evaluation Matrices* (Figures 3 and 4). This was developed from the Innovation Matrix in the SCF/IIED manual and participants used it on the last day. Its purpose was to generate a discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of different forestry activities. We specifically requested the teams to ask villagers to identify their own criteria, but in practice most of the teams were poor at facilitating this.

All in all it was a very useful experience - we are now waiting for the results of each participant's action plan to see if they have been able to apply any of it practically.

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