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PRA training in the participants' workplace: an example from Kenya

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• Introduction

Training in participatory methods has become an important agenda for local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Kenya. This new emphasis is not only due to the fact that NGOs foster participation in their approach to development, but it is also because of the apparent failure of the blueprint approach to development, favoured in the first two development decades throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa. This article recounts experiences in a PRA training workshop for staff of Redd Barna-Kenya, held at the Homa Hill Centre on the eastern shores of Lake Victoria. The intention is not to give details about the training but to comment on how the training needs were determined and to share some useful lessons that the training experience has revealed.

Redd Barna is a voluntary humanitarian organisation whose aim is to improve living conditions for needy communities with special emphasis on disadvantaged children and women. Redd Barna implements integrated community development projects in more than ten countries. In Kenya the organisation operates the Homa Hills Community Development Programme (HHCDP) which is an integrated rural development programme covering Kendu Division of Homa Bay District in agriculture, health, technology, training and construction. Obviously, the training needs of the various staff, agricultural extension and health workers, would differ at least in detail if not in substance.

• Assessing training needs

The first task to be performed therefore was an assessment of training needs. Using group discussion, 'buzz' groups and story-telling methods for field experiences, workshop participants came up with six core areas they felt needed to be included in the training programme:

- evaluation methodology;
- participatory methodology;
- team building;
- communication skills, documentation and use of learning aids;
- credit in rural development; and,
- early childhood education.

I was the facilitator for the first two, i.e. evaluation and participatory methodologies, which are the ones I discuss here.

Having agreed upon the subjects to be covered, the next task was to decide upon a training schedule which would be suitable for each and every participant. This was very difficult to achieve. The various staff are involved in different programmes which run concurrently with some overlapping. Therefore allocating time was a rather complicated exercise. However, through open discussion it was decided that the training sessions for each of the two topics would be held separately, in January and February 1993.

An important omission in most PRA training workshops is the necessity of the trainees' participation in the process as opposed to merely being trained on farmers' participation. This is an important aspect especially as it bears upon the attitude of trainees and

facilitator, and has potentially a major role to play in shaping the behaviour of 'front-line' development workers. The now widely-held view that farmers know and are therefore better managers of their resources, and we don't know, at least not everything, does not do justice to the notion of 'we' and 'them'. The change of attitude demanded by the paradigm shift which participatory approaches have brought to development research and practice should apply in most, if not all situations. Paulo Freire (1970) applied it in an educational context in his seminal book "*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*". Planners are increasingly finding use of participatory methods in creating neighbourhoods of consensus. It is this broader meaning of participation that should be integrated in all actions if change of obsolete attitudes among development researcher and practitioners is expected.

• Training location

As already mentioned, the PRA training was for staff of Redd Barna-Kenya at the Homa Hill Centre (i.e. their place of work). This meant that the training sessions were often interrupted when participants were called to attend to one thing or another. This happened before the start of the training sessions and sometimes in the middle. The disruption caused by such interference cannot be overstated. The trainees expressed their displeasure and suggested that subsequent training be held at a venue preferably away from their work place so that they can concentrate. This generated quite a debate, with some people commenting, for example, that the interruptions were due to the failure of the participants to plan for training time within their work programmes. It was even suggested that a change of venue would not improve concentration as the participants could still find other things to do.

Place of training has not been a problem before. Generally, the village is considered the best setting for carrying out a PRA training exercise. However, a lot of PRA training exercises are still conducted in a classroom setting with one or two visits to the village to test some of the methods and techniques. Obviously, resource constraints and organisational logistics are important factors

that determine the venue of a training workshop. Evidence from this experience in PRA training suggests that whenever possible, training should be conducted away from the participants' immediate place of work. This is necessary in order to have effective participation and minimal disruption.

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