

Mixing and matching methodologies in Redd Barna Uganda

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Introduction

Redd Barna Uganda is a child-centred organisation which is moving away from being an implementing organisation, to one which does all its work through partner organisations. Rather than having a direct link with communities and community groups, we work with local NGOs and CBOs, and build their capacity to act as the link. All our activities and methodologies focus on enhancing the development, survival, protection and participation rights of the children of Uganda, without whom there would be no sustainable future. Central to this is the importance of participatory approaches to development, which stimulate communities to want to learn more and increase their unity of purpose.

We started using PRA in February 1994¹, after recruiting a large number of new, District-based staff members to act as capacity-builders. Upon recruitment, all staff were, and continue to be, trained in several development-related methodologies besides PRA. These include: Basic Communication Skills, Mediated Learning Experience for improved interaction with children, and Logical Framework Approach (see Table 1).

Any methodology we learn, we pass on to our partners in training workshops. Initially, we thought that each methodology could be applied independently. However, two years of slow but

steady learning through experience have revealed that they are best used if consciously interlinked. At each stage we asked ourselves: 'What went wrong? Could we have done it better? Which other avenues exist?'. This article shares how we see the complementarity of six different methodologies, as PRA alone cannot stimulate all the desired changes in the community for more child-centred development.

RBU's approach to PRA

For us, PRA is not a rapid affair. Instead it is one which takes up to 18 months with some communities. Our approach is based on working with five groups in each community: younger women, younger men, older women, older men, and, of course, children. We aim to guide these groups, via local organisations that act as facilitators, to develop community action plans (CAPs) for those problems that must and can be resolved at the community level, and group action plans (GAPs) for more group-specific problems about which there is less need for or agreement on collective action.

It has taken us two years to develop an approach to PRA that recognises five crucial stages of the journey of child-centred community development which recognises intra-communal differences. These stages are essential to understanding the methodological complementarity that we have developed. Each stage has specific aims which requires specific skills or analytical tools that PRA cannot provide².

¹ Through a three year collaboration with IIED to institutionalise child-centred participatory planning.

² More details can be found in Guijt, forthcoming.

- Stage 1 Preparation: laying the groundwork, identifying and negotiating roles of stakeholders;
- Stage 2 Field Immersion: situation analysis that ensures multiple perspectives are equally represented;
- Stage 3 Analysis of Inter- and Intra-communal Difference: group-based analysis to identify shared/group-specific concerns and possible solutions;
- Stage 4 Planning of Community or Group Action Plan: final decision about community/group priority requires careful negotiation about group responsibilities and consensus on timing/inputs; and,
- Stage 5 Implementation: implementing community/group plans requires continual monitoring of progress and adjustment to sustain improvements, plus efforts to decrease dependency on external support.

PRA and BCS are inextricable

PRA concerns itself with facilitating the community to define its needs, prioritise its problems, probe for underlying social and economic causes, and develop strategies and action plans together. However, this process depends on how outsiders interact with the community, and build trust and respect. It is not easy for villagers to talk about their

situation, which can be sensitive or controversial to share with outsiders: “*Ebyomunju tebito Tolwa*” (Luganda proverb: Don’t wash your dirty linen in public.)

How we respond verbally or non-verbally determines whether the community will want to continue talking to us or not. The PRA process itself can scare the community. For example a transect walk is regularly mistaken as a survey of the village land for external confiscation by government. This calls for effective communication between the community and the outsiders, otherwise axes and machetes will be brought out by the people in protection of their precious asset - land.

Our partnerships hinge on mutual trust, respect and dialogue, all of which are good communication concepts. We have to enter the community as partners with the organisations we are trying to support. However, we need support from each other and to trust one another. So Basic Communication Skills (BCS) provides an opportunity for developing solid and sustainable partnerships, and achieving a good local PRA process.

Table 1. Fusing our many acronyms in the PRA process

Methodologies used	PRA stages in which methodology is used	Issues dealt with
Basic Communication Skills MLE Giving voice to children PRA	Stage 1: preparation Stage 2: community immersion	*The importance of communication in PRA *Accurate and widespread information dissemination
Conflict resolution and management PRA	Stage 2: community immersion Stage 3: analysis of intra-communal difference	*Information dissemination *The role of the outsider in PRA *Group dynamics
LFA	Stage 4: planning CAP/GAP	*Identification of different alternatives *Identification of partners *The need for a working document
Child-to-Child	Stage 3: analysis of intra-communal difference Stage 5: implementation of CAP/GAP	Support children’s participation in the PRA process
Mediated Learning Experience	Stages 2, 3 and 4: community immersion analysis of intra communal differences planning of GAP/CAP	Advocacy for children’s rights/capacities and values to be included in community development
Others	Stage 5: Implementation	Promotion of the family and community cohesion

We realised the need for BCS during the initial training of the PRA process in one village. Where there was no deliberate effort to impart communication skills to our partner organisations, we found it hard to communicate effectively about PRA. After we organised a follow-up workshop on communication skills, the process became much easier. Now we would recommend that before any form of serious commitment is made with a new organisation, a BCS training is arranged for the would-be partner. BCS should always proceed or be integrated into a PRA training.

PRA and mediated learning experience

Child-adult interaction generally creates an uneasy feeling amongst communities in Uganda. Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) is an approach, which aims to promote better interaction between the adult (mainly the caregiver) and the child. MLE teaches the adult how to mediate a learning experience between the child and its environment.

We use MLE training in the community in Stage 1 of our PRA approach to promote child participation and advocate for their issues. It helps the rest of the community understand the value and potential of children, thus prioritising children's issues in community action plans and group action plans (CAP and GAP respectively).

Giving voice to children: a child focused PRA approach

We have adapted PRA to work better with children. Creating a suitable model of PRA for children has several advantages for our work: it increases children's awareness about their world/surroundings; allows us a better understanding of children's everyday life; increases their participation in the PRA process.

We use the conventional methods of PRA in a simplified way and have added others, like 'Body Image' (which brings out how the child perceives itself) and use proverbs, poems and stories/folktales. All these are geared towards understanding how the child perceives the world, the positive and the negative in his/her life. This has helped us reach out to the worse-

off children in the community, for example the out-of-school children, those with disabilities, and orphans who would otherwise be ignored in most PRA work.

PRA and conflict resolution

When outsiders come to a community with participatory forms of planning, many conflicts can emerge due to the new interactions and issues being discussed. Some PRA methods can create tension or fear, for example, if wealth ranking is conceived as 'analysis for eventual taxation on the well-off households'.

Therefore, it is important to equip local leaders and the other PRA team members with skills in conflict resolution and management. At RBU, we have been discussing the nature of conflicts, their extent, and possible strategies to deal with them from the first review meetings of our PRA work. Recently we have started training each other in conflict resolution and we have plans to obtain more skills. However, we have not yet started training our partner organisations in conflict resolution as we first need to strengthen our own experiences, skills, and insights.

PRA and child-to-child

One of the fundamental principles of child rights is participation of children in matters affecting them. Redd Barna is keen to fully use any opportunity to achieve this, and Child-to-Child is another methodology we are integrating into our approach and what we offer our partners. Child to Child follows six steps to stimulate children to grow into active and responsible adults. These are as follows:

Step 1: choosing the right health idea and understanding it well; Step 2: finding out more about the chosen idea; Step 3: discussing what has been found out; Step 4: planning action; Step 5: taking action; and Step 6: discussion results.

By integrating these steps in PRA, the children are helped to address the issues affecting them, and help each other to grow, while contributing to community welfare. We are encouraging partner organisations to explore the rights of children and also the

responsibilities towards parents, elders, other children the community and the nation that go with them.

The merging of PRA and IFA

While BCS, MLE, conflict management, give a voice to children, and child-to-child is being merged fairly smoothly with PRA, integrating Logical Framework Approach (LFA) has challenged us most. The remainder of this article discusses our experiences to date.

In a PRA process, much emphasis is placed on developing a local situation analysis. But then the question arises, "You are in that situation, so what next?". To answer that, we have found that parts of LFA can complement PRA, particularly in the development of community and group action plans. PRA needs LFA to push forward the process of community discovery and innovation in stages 4 and 5. But LFA only becomes meaningful after the first three stages of PRA, which includes much local analysis of intra-communal differences of the issues raised in the immersion stage.

We use LFA, and its principle of participatory analysis, to impart planning skills to a broad spectrum of parties: community members, government field extension workers, and partner organisation staff. The results of a PRA process, especially the many issues raised and prioritised, would be less useful and perhaps confusing to the community if there was no analysis to help create a logical sequence and give a practical meaning to these issues. LFA can help lead to a CAP/GAP document that defines the direction of the communities development energies, at least for the period of the community action plan.

"Now it is for the village management committee to either uphold or frustrate the development process in our village. We should all work together ... and need to be patient because the task ahead is big. We need to be determined to be able to accomplish all the steps." (Mr. Kalende, Village Elder in Bulende Bugosere, course leader, at a recent training workshop on how to develop a CAP and GAPs).

When we use LFA to develop a community action plan, we follow several steps:

- Review and update the issues matrix³ developed during the immersion stage, monitoring its progress. This updating process gives the participants of the PRA planning workshop in stage 4, a good basis for using LFA.
- The relevant issues are then used to develop a problem tree, and to analyse the cause-effect links. As people build the tree, there is a great deal of explanation between the 5 interest groups to explain why they are perceived as issues. After this, creating the objectives tree is simple but realistic since its developed clearly from existing problems⁴.

Please explain what I am seeing

Visualising the problem and objective trees as part of the LFA approach rests comfortably with PRA's diagramming approach. The issues become more meaningful to everyone. Coming after the immersion stage of PRA, the participants are already very comfortable with the use of visualisation for analysis. Representatives of the five groups feel strongly about 'their' issues, leading to a spirited defence of what it represents to them.

Are we able to do all that?

The CAP development process makes participants reflect on the resources they had identified during PRA immersion by discussing: "What do we have locally? Who can we approach for assistance? But if nobody responds shall we remain with just a document - what alternatives are available for us?"

By trying to see the logic between planning and resources, participants are better able to identify and appreciate the locally available resources. By identifying and tagging a price to the most minimal item of their plan, they realise their potential. There is the pleasing but surprising revelation that actually they have all

³ The issues matrix is a way of collating all the issues raised by the five groups in one format, for all to discuss and use for planning (see Guijt, forthcoming for more details).

⁴ The quality of facilitation at this stage in the planning workshop can lead to realistic/unrealistic plans.

along been contributing greatly to their own development. Community labour, time and land then starts playing its true role in the community. This will eventually inspire them to utilise better all potential resources.

After passing through the different analytical stages of LFA, the CAP/GAP document has many advantages: it is realistic, acceptable and affordable, it increases accountability and offers sustained planning (not a one-off event as is often the case with PRA-based CAPs).

Inspiring challenges

Despite all its benefits to PRA, LFA has some limitations which need to be handled well if the PRA process is to make a difference.

- How do we sustain participation? Due to the long PRA process, by the time we start using LFA, the community wants to see some tangible benefits from all their efforts. However, this cannot be guaranteed by RBU.
- Who is chosen to learn planning skills? When the community tries to grapple with the different interest groups, balancing the different interests becomes a real nightmare which may deeply shake the PRA process.
By the time LFA is used, several PRA-provoked activities have usually started, either at a community level or within interest groups. Big questions start being asked: Were they the best priorities, or simply action which may now need to be changed as other priorities are agreed?
- Using LFA to develop a CAP takes time and calls for concentration, so we have opted for residential workshops. People must leave aside their daily chores/worries but they cannot stay away from home for too much time. We still face problems with encouraging parents of the chosen children's representatives to allow their children to participate, especially the girls.
- A good LFA outcome depends on consensus building. The facilitator must ensure an open, accepting and light atmosphere during the workshop. As issues are discussed, areas of conflict will arise. The facilitator needs to exercise much patience, have excellent moderation and conflict management skills.

Besides our current 'basket of methodologies', we are continually seeking other skills that can form an integral part of the PRA process, such as basic education life skills, preventative health, group dynamics, and family life education. We in Redd Barna will continue to find different approaches which are suitable to use alongside PRA to improve the lives of Uganda's children. Ours is a long term perspective to development planning so the few set-backs we meet are welcome and essential lessons that continue to help us consolidate the benefits of our integrated methodologies.

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