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Beyond the good discussion: the issues matrix for analysing intra-communal difference in PRAP

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• **Introduction**

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) has the potential to facilitate a learning process in which power relations can shift not only between external development workers and local people, but also between local powerful people and marginalised groups. But what kind of 'participation' is needed for this to occur? 'Participation' describes, justifies, sells, and promotes what we do, how we do it, and with whom. A magic tool for its supporters, it is seen as an abdication of responsibility by the critics, and even manipulation by others who see that is makes local people **feel** important without **making** them important. And some do use it simply to convince donors that local people have a voice in decision-making, without this being the case.

For local people, opening up decision-making often means challenging the hitherto taken-for-granted gender and age relations of power - listening to those who are usually silent. For this to be possible, PRA must go beyond the short 'talking' and 'consultative' processes that are so common. With a systematic, consistent approach, in-depth analysis of the issues raised in initial discussions with outsiders becomes possible. Analysis by 'marginalised' groups (the young, the very poor, women, non-schooling children, and migrants) can then go beyond 'perceived' interests that are a result of socialisation, to a level where they pinpoint their 'real' interests. The outsider plays the role of the catalyst who facilitates but does not control the process.

Since it first embarked on its PRAP[1] journey, Redd Barna - Uganda has developed the use of the Issues Matrix to analyse intra-communal difference. By October 1997, we had used it in 14 of Uganda's 45 districts, in 30 villages and had trained up to 500 Ugandans[2] from community organisations, local community leaders, NGOs and government staff in its use.

The article explores how we use it in the facilitation of independent discussions of different gender and age groups, in order to arrive at communal conclusions. Using examples from different communities, it highlights the process of developing an Issues Matrix, showing its use as an analytical, planning and monitoring tool, and its benefits and challenges.

• **Developing the issues matrix**

The PRAP process is constructed around five sequential phases (Sewagudde et al 1997):

- Phase 1: Preparation (laying the groundwork);
- Phase 2: Initial Field Immersion (use of PRA methods, initial draft Matrix);
- Phase 3: Analysis of Intra-communal Difference (analysis of the Matrix);
- Phase 4: Planning of Community and/or Group Action Plan(s) (planning around priorities in the Matrix); and,
- Phase 5: Implementation and Monitoring (using the Matrix).

From Phase 2 on, local people work in five interest groups, deciding themselves where they feel comfortable: older women, young women, older men, young men, and children. The group composition varies between

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[1] Participatory Rural Appraisal and Planning

[2] We have also trained 36 Norwegian youth under a programme which uses learning experiences from Uganda to evolve participatory approaches suited for Norway.

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communities. They use criteria like marriage, age and activity status to choose the groups. Our starting point is that these broad groups represent relatively similar needs, interests and aspirations - much better than random groups or one large gathering. Once the groups start discussing and thinking, smaller interest groups emerge who work within the broad groups.

Each group discusses and analyses its situation, while facilitators capture the issues and record them in the matrix. The matrix is a visualised summary to make it easier to share the different issues in the wider community forum.

The Issues Matrix is a table, which captures, in a summary form, all the issues of concern that arise out of the initial application of PRA methods by interest groups (see Table 1). The facilitators fill it in, on a continuous basis, at the end of each day of the field immersion (Phase 2). The facilitator(s) capture the issues that arise during the community exercises and discussions. They share them with the group for agreement before filling in the matrix. At the end of the field immersion phase, the complete matrix then represents a sum total of all the issues raised during the immersion. It thus works as a summarised record of the situation analysis of the community *at that time*, and is developed in later phases.

• **Why develop an issues matrix?**

Any community consists of people who share some values, interests and problems, but also have differences and conflicts of interest. This is particularly true for 'poverty', which despite having the same characteristics is experienced by different people in unique ways. A cause-and-effect analysis of poverty by different groups will therefore yield different views that can form the basis for group-specific solutions. This type of analysis helps to partly overcome the problem of 'marginal' groups who cannot enjoy the benefits of generalised development, despite continual 'elimination' affecting community well-being.

The identification of marginalised groups' issues must also consider those issues of some 'supposedly' active members of dominant group who are, in reality, excluded from decision-making. We have noticed, for example, that younger men often complain that development practitioners exclude them on the assumption that they belong to the 'men's' group. Yet they rarely have a voice in community meetings. They are concerned about school dropout rates and resulting unemployment issues.

Table 1. Part of an issues matrix: Kyakatebe, Masaka District (Guijt et al 1994)

Issues	Children	Younger Women	Younger Men	Older Women	Older Men
Lack of clean water (poor sources)	x	x	x	x	x
Inadequate facilities at school	x	x	x	x	x
Lack of school fees	x	x	x	x	x
Orphans	x	x	x	x	x
Large families	x	x	x	x	x
High school fees	x		x	x	x
HIV/AIDS		x	x	x	x
High level of school drop-outs	x	x	x	x	
Inadequate health facilities		x	x	x	x
Lack of market for farm products/handicrafts	x	x	x	x	
Poor living conditions		x	x	x	x
Land shortage/fragmentation	x	x	x		x
Lack of fuel wood		x	x	x	
Unqualified teachers	x	x		x	

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They feel that local chiefs unfairly demand tax from them during the rainy planting season when they have little cash income. Yet they lack an avenue to communicate this to the chiefs as their parents do not allow them to speak in public fora. The simplified assumptions about who is and is not marginalised, hides the absolute power of parents over younger members, like children, younger women, younger men, in the community.

The matrix provides a good basis for including the analyses of such differences. Through independent analysis, the marginalised groups can advocate for their issues in the decision-making process. They use the opportunity to analyse, reflect, and gain confidence and present to the whole community. For example, in Oseera village, one older woman finally plucked up courage and took advantage of a general community meeting to air women's concern about AIDS, child marriage and bearing many children: "Now we shall break the gourd and let it all come out" (Chandler and Kisadha 1996). Her reference to the gourd, a local symbol that is revered and protected, was a passionate call for men to share in the discussion and in the responsibility for sexuality issues. The call was for the community to open up to discuss what it has hidden away and kept inside.

The Issues Matrix also develops trust and respect between facilitators and the community - as it demonstrates immediately whether facilitators are truly listening. It reinforces the interactive, learning and empowering process, by moving beyond data extraction, and enables group relations to improve and crystallise around a common understanding of their issues.

The issues matrix for situation analysis

In our community work, we have followed several steps with the community to reflect on why groups raise certain issues. At the beginning of Phase 3 and in a community meeting, the groups identify those issues that are shared by all groups. They also identify the partly shared issues, and recognise the unique group-specific issues. In separate sessions, thereafter, facilitators encourage each group to analyse why a particular group(s) raised an issue, and the impact of group-specific concerns on their own group and the wider community. This helps to stimulate greater appreciation of other people's concerns and, where possible, reach consensus on the issues.

This process occurs in many separate interest groups discussions (usually once or twice a week). Sometimes combined group meetings take place, for example one with younger and older women or younger women with younger men together. They try to resolve differences and seek joint solutions. The conclusions of the smaller groups are fed back to the wider community meeting on a regular basis (usually once a month). The groups use the community forum to justify and validate their specific issues. The others respond and clarify why they do or do not consider an issue raised by other group(s) to be relevant. In some instances they fail to reach consensus and agree to consult further amongst groups. Finally, each group/community has a final Matrix to use for planning.

In a community meeting, they categorise the issues on the Matrix by theme or sector (such as water, health, agriculture, family life, poverty). Back in the smaller groups they use diagrams to analyse each issue in terms of cause-and-effect and the linkages between sectors. Finally the groups prioritise the issues, using matrix scoring and pair-wise rankings. They prioritise according to issues and opportunities, based on local realities and choices and these are the ones they use in the next phase (Phase 4) of planning.

The issues matrix as a practical starting point

While the community undertakes this long analysis and planning process, it also scrutinises concerns that need immediate attention. We have found the issues matrix helped communities to identify issues that are:

1. life-threatening
2. within the means and ability of the community to solve (relatively cheap and limited time needed)
3. shared by the majority
4. important due to multiplier effects, i.e. solving it will solve other related issues (for example, boiling drinking water can

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solve diarrhoeal diseases, reduce health expenditure and school absenteeism, etc.)
5. intangible but have the potential to promote development (for example, unity).

The above criteria were used in Bulende-Bugosere village (Iganga District) to start implementing some activities on a small scale. Meanwhile, the unresolved issues were carried forward into the subsequent planning sessions.

The issues matrix as a benchmark for community-based planning

After group-specific ranking, each group chooses representatives for the community planning committee. Armed with a thorough analysis and therefore understanding of the groups' prioritised issues and solutions, the representatives are in a strong position to participate in the planning. Their role is to further the issues, lobby and advocate for their inclusion in the Community Action Plan. The specific groups also make their own parallel plans to deal with those on which they may never gain community consensus. Hence, Redd Barna's support for the Group Action Plans that develop in parallel to the Community Action Plan. The facilitators facilitate the use of a simplified version of the Logical Framework Approach in this planning stage (Sewagudde et al 1997).

The issues matrix for participatory monitoring and evaluation

At different stages in the process, community members and facilitators may want to know the patterns of change in the community. The Issues Matrix is an ideal, user friendly tool for the local people to monitor what they have done. They analyse their progress using five simple questions: Who, What, Where, When and How much? It represents the baseline situation at the immersion stage of the PRAP process. The local people systematically update, and develop a new Issues Matrix that confirms, amends and captures new issues.

We have noticed the deletion of:

- issues they have addressed;
- issues they have never addressed, after analysing why this is the case;

- issues that were 'smuggled' into the matrix by the facilitators (through facilitator biases and translation problems);
- issues that require outsider support to solve (very costly issues, political issues like insecurity and government policy);
- controversial issues that need much time for consensus building, such as polygamy and younger women's access to family planning;
- issues that need to be addressed continuously, such as road clearing, water sources clearing, improving agricultural practices; and,
- seasonal issues.

Through this monitoring process, we have seen the value of a long analysis phase (Phase 3) as it makes the community understand their community and the patterns of development better than before. Hence their ability to monitor the changes smoothly.

• The impact of the issues matrix

The benefits of the updated Issues Matrix accrue to local people and outside facilitators alike. In our different experiences, we have noticed the following impacts through using the Matrix:

- It illuminates the sector gaps in service delivery, and serves as a basis for the community to demand and put pressure on the government extension staff to deliver services.
- It promotes a common understanding of issues, ultimately increasing unity based on an appreciation of diversity.
- It promotes the continual, not just one-off, development of people's development plans based on their perceptions of their own realities.
- It mobilises the local people to seek solutions that are both internal and external to the community.
- The community recognises that the many issues that have been bedevilling their lives are within their means to solve without outside support. Many are cheap in terms of money and time, and do not rely on high educational skills. In some cases a solution lies within the ability and

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willingness of one group to support another.

Furthermore, the 'marginals' gain confidence by seeing that their problems are also faced by others. Even if issues are not resolved immediately, having a chance to share them openly with the rest of the community is important. When the smaller groups develop their own plans, the rest of the community is less resistant as it appreciates the background to the issue. The community meetings where issues are presented from each group act as a catalyst to the marginalised to experience a new lease of life. The community begins to respect them and appreciate their human worth - increasing self-confidence and participation.

The analysis helps group representatives (or 'Local Planners' as they are sometimes called) to conceptualise individual group issues and those of other groups. During planning sessions, they can argue for changes on the basis of having 'researched' these. By having demystified planning, normally considered a privileged skill of the elite, as something they have done often before in their lives (though more individualistic and less systematic than with the Matrix), they are in a better position to challenge dominant groups.

Children's interests

Children, as an interest group, amaze the community by their ability to perceive and understand their situation. They sometimes mention unique issues which the other groups 'dare' not mention. They highlight not only issues that affect them, but also those affecting the larger community. The Matrix highlights the fact that supposedly 'ignorant' children have identified many issues also identified by the 'knowledgeable' adults. The difference, however, between them and the adults arises when deeper analysis is done. The children's wording of issues and perception of the wider impacts on the community are usually different. For example, in the development of the Community Action Plan in Bulende-Bugosere, a children's representative gave his views on polygamy, which had generated passionate arguments between men (supporters) and women (critics). The child said: *"For us children it may not matter when our fathers marry more than one wife, if they can afford it. What is important to us is that we are not discriminated against, especially in matters of education, where the children of the youngest wife are usually favoured"* (Baliraine Charles, P5, Namagonjo Primary School).

Perhaps the response was due to 'perceived' interests, and a girl's view might have been different. However, it is important that the child pushed beyond the issue of marriage and focused on child-related impact. He very articulate because the children had raised and discussed the issue at length in their group. The older community members begin to *see and hear* the children through such interaction.

Women's interests

The Issues Matrix also serves as an advocacy tool for women's interests. The women and men compare and discuss issues more freely. The Matrix gives anonymity to individual women who mentioned sensitive issues, hence protecting them against possible abuse by husbands or parents. The topic of women's many roles often dominates the sharing sessions, and the community begins to look at it as an underlying factor for many other wrongs. Their workload is put within the social context within which they work, and has, for example, helped highlight multi-sector linkages, hence realising the importance of co-ordination between different extension services and activities to not overburden women.

As analysis deepens, the vulnerability of younger women, with virtually no power to influence the course of their lives, also appears. They have a very 'quiet voice' and display a deep lack of self-esteem during community meetings. They find it harder to consistently pursue their interests. For example, during the Community Action Plan development process in Kyakatebe village (Masaka district), the younger women's issues were virtually ignored in the local development plan. This happened despite the fact that they had had very animated and meaningful discussions in the initial immersion. They lacked the sustained will and ability to exert pressure on the larger community to appreciate their issues.

- **Challenges**

The development of an Issues Matrix does not guarantee the inclusion of all the issues from the interest groups into Community Action Plans. As the process unfolds, it is common that issues from younger women and children's groups are sidelined. The analysis must be accompanied by ongoing advocacy for vulnerable groups. The groups themselves need time to build confidence to articulate their concerns in public. Smaller group facilitation is crucial for them to gain the confidence before exposure to the larger community. Much depends on sensitive and patient facilitation.

The process of analysing intra-communal difference is time consuming, with few tangible benefits to show for the many hours of community labour. Therefore, facilitators face continuous mobilisation and must work on practical activities that yield some tangible results. Redd Barna Uganda's experiences in Masaka District are worth learning from because they combine analysis with mobilisation activities.

- **Conclusion**

The Issues Matrix is not only a tool for the analysis of intra-communal difference; it promotes consensus building and paves the way for long term community planning and action. However, its eventual outcome depends on the values, attitudes and behaviour of the facilitators and the general willingness of the community to embrace change.

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