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Participative Rural Appraisal (PRA): a brief note on ActionAid's experience

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PRA is both an attitude and a methodology. It helps outsiders to understand village systems by using visual techniques of diagrams, models, counting/quantification devices, as well as techniques of direct observation and discussion. But it relies on a particular mind set.

Interviewers and field staff should be able to recognise sets of information based upon:

- Fact: a thing done, an actual occurrence, a piece of evidence presented as having objective reality.

- Opinion: a view or judgement formed in the mind about a particular matter; a belief stronger than impression and less strong than positive knowledge.

- Hearsay: something heard from another.

- Inference: the act of passing from one proposition, statement or judgement considered as true to another whose truth is believed to follow from that of the former.

- Assumption: a fact or statement taken for granted, or supposed to be true.

• We must understand the environment

Who are the experts at survival in a semi-arid region village: the villagers? or the outsider experts? The village system consists of groups of people; types of soil and terrain; water resources; cropping systems; trees; animals; flows of food, labour, credit; knowledge and experience in exploiting the agro-economic system; social organisation and rainfall.

The main PRA methods that help outsiders quickly understand the environment include village social maps, village resource maps/models, transects, time-lines, wealth rankings, social organisations - chapati diagrams and seasonal analyses.

In the process of understanding the environment, opportunities and problems usually emerge. These can be studied as sub-systems like a rainfed irrigation system; crop production; fruit production; milk production, fuelwood sale; seed; fodder; etc. PRA techniques to understand these types of subsystem include preference rankings, flow diagrams and systems diagrams

And the technique that is most always used by everyone - the semi-structured interview.

• Examples of diagrams

Figure 58 is a map showing the five areas covered by transects in the village of Veltoor, Andhra Pradesh. Figure 59 shows the details of the village resources as a result of the transects.

Figure 58. Five transect routes and the areas covered in Veltoor village, Andhra Pradesh
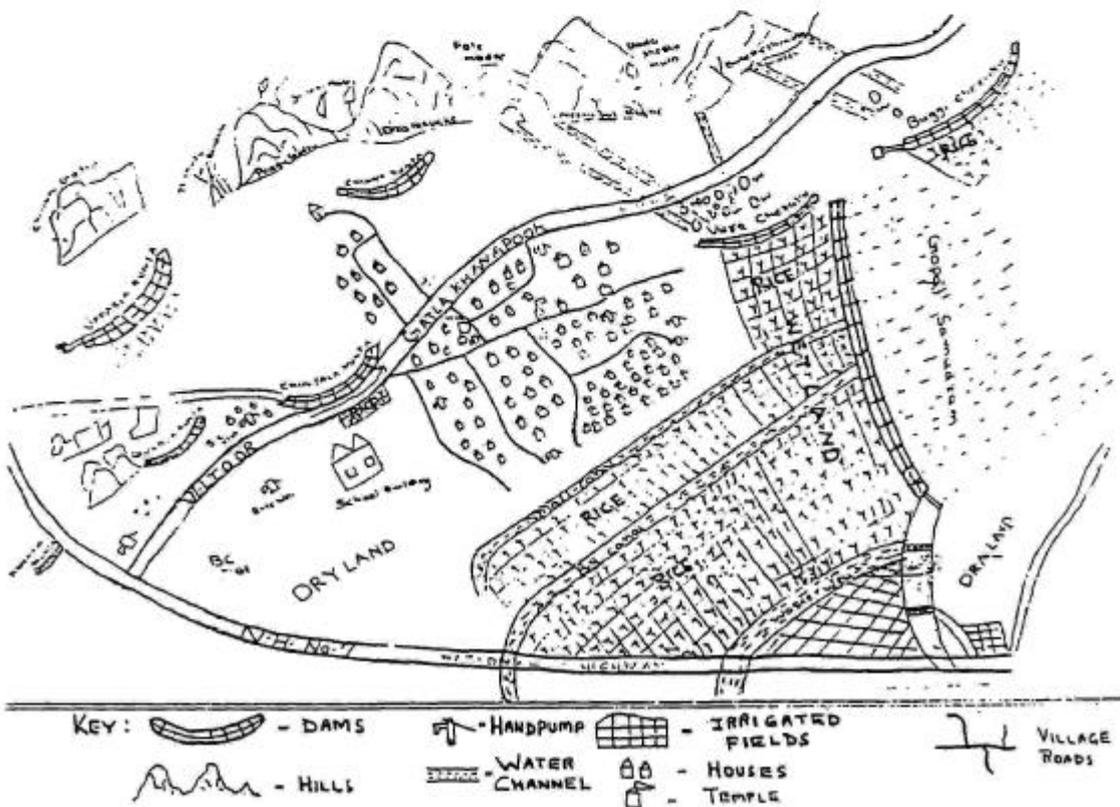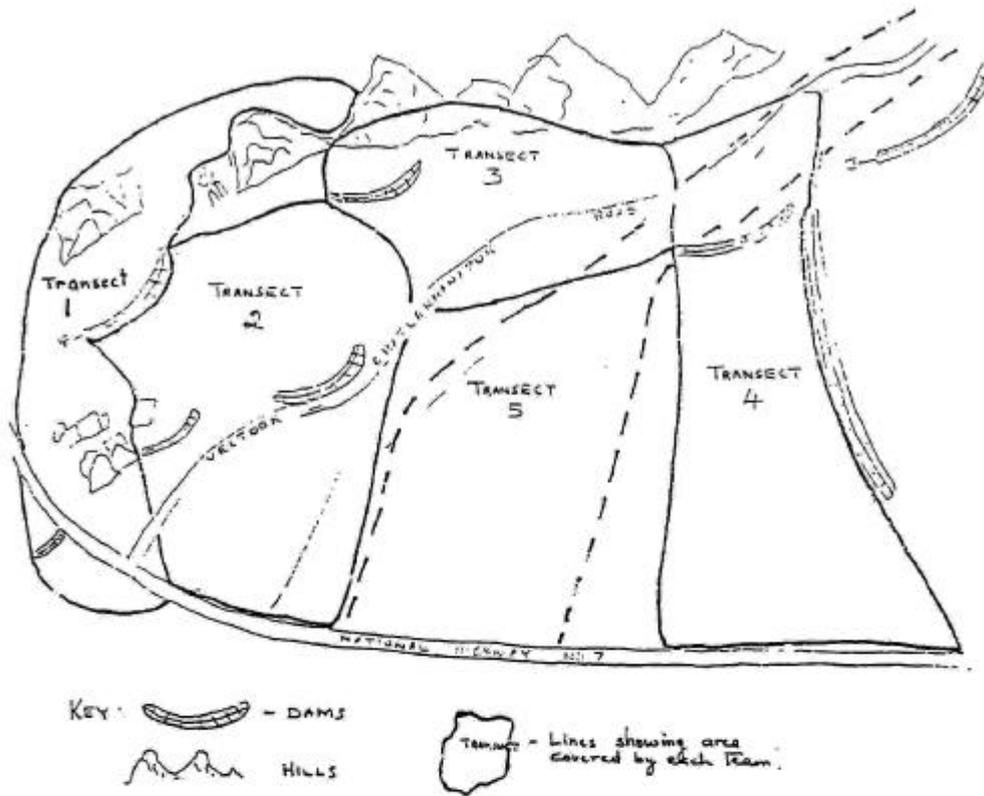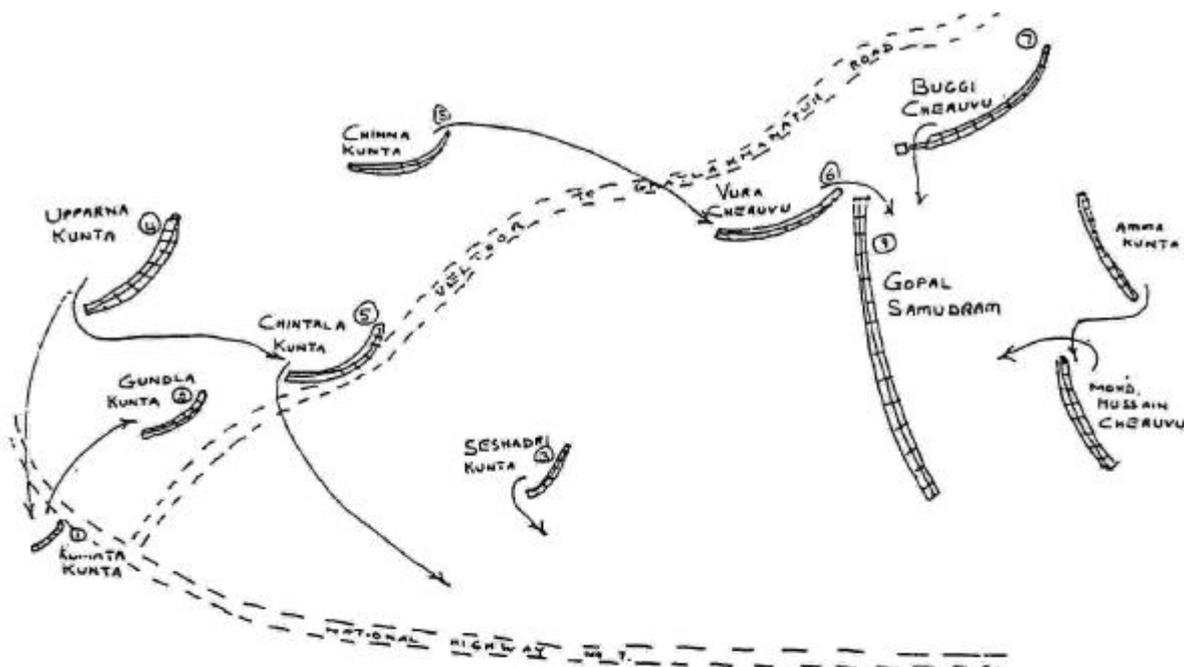

Figure 59. Village resources map of Veltoor village, Andhra Pradesh

Figure 60. Map showing location of dams in Veltoor, and the overflow from each dam

Name of tank/dam	1. Komata Kunta	2. Gundla Kunta	3. Seshadri Kunta	4. Upparna Kunta	5. Chintala Kunta	6. Vura Cheruvu	7. Buggi Cheruvu	8. Chinna Kunta	9. Gopal Samudram
Command area in acres	15	15	15	30	15	45	100	40	1350/2000
Number of farmers	30	20	5	25	4	15	100	1	600/800
Castes	GoTTA	SUNBALAM	VAPYA	B.C. S.T.	REDDY	REDDY	MIXED	REDDY	MIXED
Wells (Bed)	0	0	2	6	2	2	1	0	5
Wells (Command)	2	2	0	8	2	3	3	1	25
Age (Approx.) years	80	350	120	350	350	350	350	20	30
Tank-bed ownership *	P	P	P	P	P	P	P + G (10 + 70)	P	P,G (70 + 60)
No. of times that the tank/dam filled up in the last 10 yrs.	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Last silt removal	1984	1984	1984	1984	1984	1984	1984	1984	1984

* P = Private ; G = Goverment ; numbers indicate no. of acres.

Figure 61. Matrix of attributes of the nine dams shown above

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Figure 62. Social map with male literacy for each household marked by villagers of lyyanahalli village, Karnataka
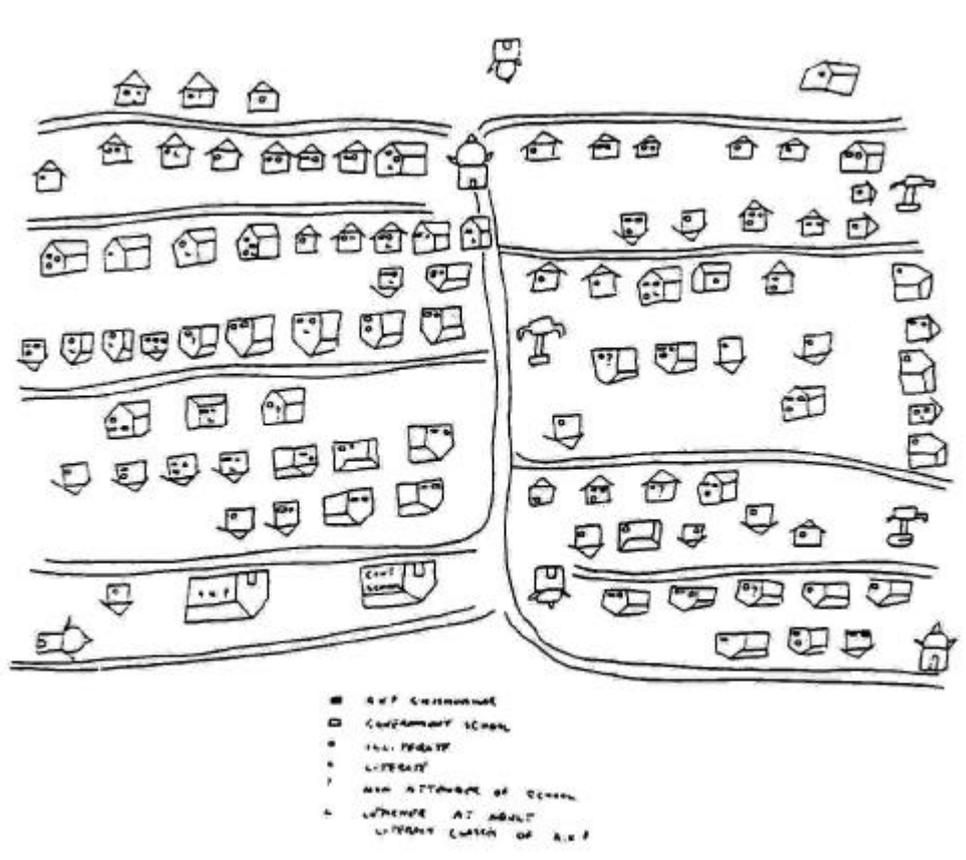

Figure 60 shows the water flows from dam to dam, and Figure 61 is a summary matrix of the qualities of each of these water catchment structures.

The final figure (Figure 62) is a social map showing literacy by household.

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