9

PRA in a health education, water and sanitation project in Kenya

David Adriance

• Introduction

CARE International is an NGO dedicated to assisting the poor in over 40 developing countries around the world. CARE has been working in Kenya since 1968, and in Siaya District since 1980. This case study describes the Siaya Health Education, Water and Sanitation (SHEWAS) project, first implemented in 1990, and focuses particularly on its use of PRA as a means of stimulating community participation in the identification and planning of water and sanitation micro-projects.

Siaya District was selected as an intervention area for three main reasons. First, the District is one of Kenya's poorest and has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the country. Secondly, in 1989 over 85 per cent of the District's residents did not have access to clean water. Finally, CARE had been working for 10 years in Siaya and had established good relations with the government and many communities. Within Siaya District, Boro Division was selected because there were only 18 improved communal water points serving a population of nearly 180 000 people (compared with neighbouring Ukwala Division where there were 241 improved water points for a population of the same size).

The initial focus of the project was on eight sub-Locations of Boro Division (a sub-Location is a small administrative unit) selected using indicators such as incidence of water-borne diseases, presence (or rather absence) of health facilities and personnel and accessibility to protected water supplies. This level of focus was innovative, in that most PRAs concentrate on a single village or 'community'. The teired approach presented here, first selecting a cluster of sub-Locations, then moving to a single sub-Location, then on to a single village, generates some interesting lessons.

• The SHEWAS approach

PRA is used by SHEWAS as the initial point of interaction with target group communities, specifically at the sub-location level. Identification of actual sites for project intervention, as well as the specific nature of the interventions themselves (albeit with a predetermined range of possibilities), is determined by the target groups themselves as outlined below. Typical interventions include the construction of roof catchment tanks (mostly at schools), hand-dug wells with hand pumps, spring protections and ventilated improved pit latrines.

When entering a sub-Location for the first time, SHEWAS staff meet with the Divisional Officer, Locational Chief and sub-Locational assistant Chief to introduce themselves and discuss the project. Next, the SHEWAS extension worker (who lives and works in the sub-Location concerned) addresses a community meeting to discuss the project and PRA in general terms. If the community members present agree to being involved they are asked to choose between five and ten people to represent them on the PRA team. They are encouraged to select a diverse team of men, women and youths whom they have confidence in, who are respected and who represent a majority of (if not all) the villages in the sub-Location. Representatives are chosen by voting (with the candidates' backs turned to the gathering), a process that invariably elicits a good deal of talking and

excitement. Civil servants from relevant Ministries are also requested to participate as PRA team members.

A two-day orientation is held on-site to discuss the PRA methodology and techniques with the team members. Emphasis is placed on breaking down inhibitions and barriers between locals and outsiders, and on the fact that the PRA should be a learning experience for everyone. Dancing is one good way of breaking the ice and is used extensively. At the beginning of a PRA, SHEWAS staff also try DIY - Do it Yourself - in which we, as outsiders, try to do some of the tasks that local people do, such as thatching and ploughing. The value of this is in our learning that there are many skills the community members have which we do not, and demonstrating to people that we are there to learn as well as to share our knowledge.

PRA techniques used by the project include mapping, transects, household discussions (instead of interviews - and no questionnaires!), timelines, collection of technical data, institutions analysis, problem ranking and decision matrices (for selecting water systems technology). As SHEWAS staff become more experienced with PRA, increased efforts have been made to reduce the use of markers and newsprint which many of the community members may not be comfortable with, and use instead locally available materials such as seeds and stones.

During the two or three weeks that the PRA is conducted, feedback on the results obtained is given by the PRA team at weekly meetings with the Assistant Chief. Presentations are given by community representatives and inevitably provoke discussion and often revisions.

The process culminates in 'site selection day', the selection of a number of sites where CARE will assist villages or institutions to construct water and/or sanitation systems. Proposals are made by the PRA team and then a consensus is reached by the participants at the meeting. Detailed planning on project implementation, including the respective contributions to be made by CARE and the villages concerned, is deferred to village-level consultations with the CARE extension worker.

Despite attempts to encourage village representatives to share their experiences and findings with others, SHEWAS has found that awareness of what occurs during the PRA process does not filter down to the village level. Thus, when it comes to actual project implementation at the village level, the feeling may persist that the project is imposed from the outside.

To address this gap, SHEWAS now conducts a number of PRA exercises at the village level (called PRAV - more jargon!), after the sub-Locational PRA. These exercises include mapping, mini-transects and seasonal calendars (including gender task analysis). In addition, SHEWAS has begun incorporating other tools, especially those adapted from the PROWESS (UNDP) programme, eg. pocket chart voting, three-pile sorting and so on. All fit well into the PRA approach as they are visually-oriented and participatory methods, controlled for the most part by the participants themselves.

- **Achievements and results**

The results of the PRAV have been quite exciting for all concerned. Extension agents find that it opens up new vistas of understanding in the villages where they work. Community members appreciate having a say in a project which will directly affect them. It is notable that the turnouts for the PRAV meetings are frequently larger than for the sub-Locational PRA. It seems that PRA is truly appreciated by community members for the simple reason that local viewpoints, ideas and decisions are incorporated into project identification and planning. Not surprisingly PRA was most appreciated by those who were involved most, ie. the members of the community who were actual team members. PRA team members also proved to be the most vociferous in ensuring that projects are implemented as planned.

The use of PRA helps to incorporate the project target group into the planning stage of the micro-projects in a meaningful and important way. From the perspective of the implementing agency, a great deal of valuable information is gained in a comparatively short period of time. Sub-Location mapping

2

exercises for example, have provided detailed maps showing population density, water points, siting of construction materials and so on in the space of just two hours.

PRA appears to be a significant step towards involving the community in decisions concerning the identification of problems and opportunities for addressing them (within the scope of the implementing agency). A successful PRA assists tremendously in establishing trust and credibility with the target groups. It is useful for avoiding the top-down syndrome which usually accompanies the introduction of a new project or agency. Nevertheless there is at times a lack of understanding, on the part of leaders especially, about why the PRA process should even be gone through. The attitude is one of: *"you are the experts - tell us what you are going to bring us and then do it"*. Often it is those very same leaders who become the most enthusiastic supporters of the PRA approach when they see that their viewpoints are taken seriously.

In terms of cost-sharing, PRA helps communities to recognise the resources which they have access to and are able to mobilise with a bit of organisation. From the point of view of the implementing agency, it becomes easier to talk about realistic cost-sharing when PRA exercises have been done hand-in-hand with community members.

Finally, in discussing achievements it is important to remember that the point of view expressed here is that of the 'outsider much as we may feel that we have overcome the barriers inherent in being outsiders, we still remain outsiders and it would be valuable (and intellectually honest) to look at the issue from the point of view of the community themselves.

• **Lessons learned**

The lessons learned by the SHEWAS experience are many and constitute the most important part of this case study:

- *Successful PRA must be innovative and encourage creativity*. SHEWAS found that it was sometimes using certain PRA methods *"because they were in the book"*.

Occasionally information gathered was left unused. Information should only be gathered when the PRA team feels that it will be useful and the implications can be seen by everyone. Furthermore, the PRA process, while usually fun and enjoyable, should not take up more of people's time than is necessary - people have their own lives to lead!

- *The inherent bias of the implementing agency is an issue that must be addressed.* As a water and sanitation project, SHEWAS tends to look at situations from the point of view of water and sanitation. The bias is further enhanced by the community members themselves in that they already know of SHEWAS as the project which will *"bring us water"*. If PRA is viewed as an approach to incorporate the community in project planning, this bias is not necessarily negative, as long as the community is under no illusions that PRA will address *all* their problems (or even the most important ones). We were concerned that PRA's full potential for assisting a community to address the range of its problems was being underutilised; CARE is thus in the process of incorporating staff from the Agroforestry Extension and Women's Economic Development projects in a pilot PRA to see how a multi-sectoral approach might work.

- *PRA team members from the community should be recognised as valuable allies following the PRA exercise.* The insights gained during PRA, as well as the camaraderie and team spirit, make the team members potential allies during the implementation stage and beyond. They make excellent facilitators for PRA work in other sub-Locations and can also form a team for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the projects which were identified.

- *Giving communities power to choose their own PRA team representatives is vital.* This is true not only in terms of team credibility, but also because the people whom outsiders would assume should be representatives (leaders) are

3

sometimes not viewed that way by locals. On the other hand, by including formal local leaders in the process from the beginning, an outside agency can minimise the risk that the process will be subjugated for one reason or another. Being selected is not only perceived as an honour for the chosen team members, but also as a responsibility. Despite the significant demand on team members' time, most participated fully during the two to three weeks the process takes. This is also testimony to the fact that PRA is enjoyable and exciting.

- *Some development professionals are reticent and even actively resist participation in PRA.* The core of a good PRA is the attitude and behaviour of the people. Especially the 'outsiders'. It requires self-awareness, self-criticism and the ability to listen and learn. If barriers are not lowered between outsiders and locals than the flow of information will be distorted, with outsiders being told what locals think they want to hear.

- *PRA is useful for promoting community ownership but introduces an element of uncertainty into project planning at the macro level.* If PRA is not going to have a totally predetermined outcome, the implementing agency must build an element of uncertainty into their project proposals. One cannot know in advance that x number of wells will be dug or y number of trees planted. This requires donors to be willing to accept that community participation is critical for project sustainability and is usually at odds with the blueprint approach to project planning.

- **Future challenges**

There are a number of challenges which must be addressed if PRA is to become more useful to both implementing agencies and communities:

- *Setting the agenda* PRA as it is currently being practised by SHEWAS is still basically an approach for encouraging meaningful participation by community members in an agenda already set by

outsiders. Is PRA capable of being more than a tool for implementing agencies? Are we ready, and willing, to let the community control the agenda?

- *PRA for PRA's sake.* We must be careful that we don't fall into the trap of practising PRA as an end rather than as a means to an end. This requires honest self-criticism and relentless innovation and creativity. PRA must not become the latest development fad or just a series of steps to follow.

- *Moving beyond the planning stage.* It is easy to fall into the trap of implementing PRA, arriving at a set of plans on which all parties agree and then falling back into the same top-down approach for the follow-up. We need to find ways to sustain the participatory learning that takes place in the planning stages into implementation and beyond.

- **David Adriance,** CARE International Indonesia, PO Box 4123, Jakarta 12041, Indonesia.