

3

The role of community participants in RRA methods in Ethiopia

Dessalegn Debebe

From May 30th to June 4th 1989 a group of 9 Ethiopians and 4 expatriates took part in an RRA in a Peasant Association (PA) named Bededo.

Bededo Peasant Association is located in the northern part of Ethiopia at a distance of about 417 km from the capital Addis Ababa. This PA has a total area of about 1300 hectares and has 919 male and 169 female headed households.

The majority of the area is hilly and crop cultivation is difficult due to the sloping farm land. Construction of field terraces to control soil erosion is essential. The rest of the PA, apart from the villages, is closed to allow rehabilitation of the natural vegetation and in some closures there has been enrichment planting of trees such as Eucalyptus and Junipers to speed up the revegetation.

One of the main objectives of the RRA work was to investigate the issues of:

- Hillside closure management;
- Tree planting on communal land; and,
- Tree planting and management in the field and around homesteads.

For the first day of field-work the group was divided into three sub-groups:

Group 1 was assigned the task of producing a sketch map of the area including the location of the main infrastructural components. The group was very successful in this, working with certain community participants from the area and was helped by air photo mosaics.

Group 2 was assigned the task of looking at the hillside closure and forest land particularly of:

- Tree species at present;
- Survival rate;
- Present use of forest and ownership distribution; and,
- Identification of the closed area and replanted areas.

The group was helped by site guards, PA leaders and field workers of that area.

Group 3 was the one which completed a transect through the PA noting in particular:

- Land use;
- Population;
- Livestock;
- Crop pattern; and,
- Soil type and productivity under present condition.

This group was also helped by collecting data from the agricultural development centre at Bededo and by talking with other community participants.

Next day the RRA group for Bededo was re-grouped to interview and discuss with different groups of community participants about the topical issues and other immediate problems of the area.

• **Group 1 - Hillside closure management**

There were seven community participants in this group, made up of:

- PA leaders;
- Site guards; and,
- Individual PA members.

I myself was with the hillside closure management group this day and we sat on the top of a hill for a three hour discussion on this topic. One of us from the group was assigned to ask the opinions of the participants about the hillside closure management in their PA area.

Truly speaking farmers in Bededo seem very much aware of the advantages of hillside closures and the importance of the erosion control measures.

I also remember one of the participants saying that *"If it was not for soil erosion control measures, it is not only the soil that we lose but also our life."* After he put it in this way, he continued to speak about the problems of grazing land and fuelwood shortages which were associated with the hillside closure in the PA. There are a lot of closed areas in the PA which belongs to the whole community. For the time being these sites have guards protecting them from intrusion of animals and people of the area.

In this area we can clearly observe that there is a shortage of grazing land and fuelwood. We can also see that there is grass in the closed area which can be used for animal feeding, and matured trees for construction and fuel.

What we learn from this is that the planted trees and closed hillsides should be for the benefit of the community and the community members must be fully involved in the general management and proper usage of it. Therefore from the discussion held there, we learnt many important lessons on the necessity of peoples' participation.

• **Group 2 - Tree planting on communal land**

In the case of planting trees on communal land, people have been practising this for many years. But to compare this with the management of individually owned trees, 11 old men and women aged between 55-70 participated in discussions about the

communal tree planting and management. These people also brought many important ideas that need to be considered in the development activities of the area.

• **Group 3 - Tree management around homesteads**

To discuss on this topic there were community participants from:

- Individual farmers not in the Producers Co-operative;
- Women association leaders;
- Youth association leaders; and,
- Producers Co-op members.

By using the above mentioned methods of interviewing and discussion each group collected information about the topical issues for Bededo.

Finally an afternoon was chosen for a final meeting together with some participants from each of these groups. This time there were 19 male and 3 female community participants. One of the RRA group members presented a short briefing about the objectives of the study and gave them the opportunity to put forward their opinions frankly and openly. One after another began to speak about their problems and the solutions that need to be undertaken in relation to their available natural resources, manpower and material. Someone from the community participants put the importance of openness in this way "one who hides his illness will not get medicine to cure it".

The majority problems were common to all community participants:

- Shortage of drinking water for human consumption and animals in the western part of the PA;
- Shortage of grazing land;
- Shortage of fuelwood;
- Shortage of farm land; and,
- The necessity of family planning education.

These problems were openly discussed, and ideas were put forward for how they could be addressed through self-help collective action and decision making by the community group

themselves, in discussion with outside agencies. Some agreements were also reached on the management of the hillside closures and the need for everyone to feel responsible for these closures.

It is clear from the above short activity report that it is very important to work with the different community groups for any RRA development programme, otherwise it will be a failure.

- **Dessalegn Debebe**, Ministry of Agriculture Office, PO Box 80, Dessie, Wollo Region, Ethiopia.