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PRA approach and strategy: the HIDA/MYRADA Agro-Forestry Programme in Andhra Pradesh

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• Introduction

The Hope International Development Agency (HIDA) Social Forestry Program is a five year program in Andhra Pradesh with two objectives:

1. To help alleviate poverty in rural Andhra Pradesh, through educating and motivating villagers to plant trees and raise nurseries, thereby creating assets for themselves; and,
2. To help improve the environment in rural Andhra Pradesh as a result of tree planting and related activities such as soil and water conservation techniques.

There are 24 NGO groups in the HIDA Social Forestry Program and they are located throughout Andhra Pradesh. These groups are involved in organizing village groups for a variety of tree planting activities - community block plantations of forestry and horticultural tree species, homestead plots, village and backyard nurseries, and regeneration of degraded lands. This five year program is an extension and expansion of a previous three year program, which was very successful in meeting some of the above objectives. MYRADA, who was involved in the first phase, is also the co-ordinating agency for the second phase of this program.

All the forestry projects of the 24 NGOs in the HIDA/MYRADA Agroforestry Network are at a crucial point in terms of project planning and management. This is a strategic time to introduce the PRA methodology in order for them quickly and accurately to assess the forestry needs of the small marginal farmers and landless in their target groups. This will

enable them to formulate programmes which are relevant to these needs. The PRA method will also have implications on the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of these programmes.

We were faced with the difficult task of introducing the PRA concept to a wide range of voluntary agencies, both in terms of philosophy and capacity, with staff from varied educational backgrounds, spread out over a large geographic area. We have adopted the 'Broadcast Sowing' approach, which means that we personally hold a series of PRA workshops, one each month in one out of seven cluster locations with different participants each time. Since the beginning of this process in March 1990, 5 out of 7 clusters have been exposed to PRA, with a total of 15 workshops conducted and 588 staff and farmers experiencing this methodology.

In order to spread the PRA culture quickly, we have also encouraged a number of individuals who have attended several PRAs to take on leadership roles in conducting workshops. Staff from NGOs in the same cluster visit each other's PRA programmes and a second line of trainers using only the local language, Telugu, is being developed.

• Highlights

Some additions and expansions of existing PRA techniques:

- The HIDA forestry PRAs have made staying in the village a prerequisite. All workshops have been conducted entirely in the village - with briefings, discussions, preparation of charts and debriefing all

done in full view of the villagers. This encourages more participation from the people. The participants stay either in various village houses or in the open. Families are contracted to cook simple meals with ingredients supplied by the outsiders. This means a small amount of additional income for them.

- The village tasks for icebreaking have been expanded to take up at least an hour, including activities which form parts of the daily tasks and livelihood of the people. Any tokenism is discouraged. Participants must seriously attempt to perform these tasks as part of their 'unlearning'.
- Cultural action is increasingly a part of these programmes with villagers taking a lead in providing songs, dances, etc.
- Participatory mapping is an important tool to use both in gaining an introduction to the village and in providing a focal point for subsequent discussions. It has been used to gain an understanding of the health issues, wealth ranking, forestry assets and land use problems in a village.
- A workshop for women participants was held on 19-21 November 1990 at Hindupur. Some 37 women attended from Anantapur, Kurnool and Cuddapah districts, together with several sangha members. There were many interesting lessons learnt from this experience. Two more workshops for women field staff were conducted in January and February, 1991.
- An emphasis is placed on training field level workers and sangha members and local language instructional materials are being produced, as well as some adaptations for training illiterate participants.
- **Outputs**
- A film, produced by MYRADA, has been partly funded from training funds for this programme. This is intended to introduce the PRA process and experience and has created a good deal of interest. A Telugu

translation of the film is being planned for the Andhra forestry groups.

- A slide collection has been built up from the 15 workshops conducted. This is valuable in terms of documentation and teaching materials and generates enthusiasm when colleagues see each other taking part in the different exercises.
- Local language documentation and training materials are being developed. Since most of the participants are more comfortable in Telugu than in English, a priority has been made to work in their local language as much as possible.
- **Future directions**
- Government officials will be included in future PRAs. MYRADA is starting to work with several Andhra government departments to conduct workshops in PRA. After an initial introduction, the government officials and NGO people can participate together in PRA exercises at various villages where they plan to work cooperatively. Both the Andhra Forest Department and the Drought Prone Area Program staff have been enthusiastic about this possibility.
- The PRA method will be used as a tool to plan, monitor and evaluate the forestry programmes. Some work has already been started on using participatory mapping for plantation planning. A PRA workshop in the target areas has become a required exercise before submitting any additional proposals.
- Documentation of traditional technologies, medicinal uses of village common herbs and tree usage and ranking will be focused upon. The goal is to produce a few 'people's' handbooks for use in training villagers.

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