

## 3

## Resources flow – Venn diagrams: a two-in-one approach

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### • Introduction

Farmers' flow diagrams are good descriptions of important patterns of flow and transformation of resources - money, materials, energy, information, etc. A farmer's strategic choices is best understood by means of decision trees, whilst circles of different sizes and colours have become popular in representing individuals, groups and institutions that have significant bearing on farmer's critical decisions (Ed. commonly known as Venn or chapatti diagrams). In this brief note we describe a recent innovation in method by Rama Gounder, a farmer collaborator, to help researchers learn about mediating variables influencing his decisions on crop selection, decision to purchase or use home grown inputs, and resource allocation decisions (see Figure 1).

In a recently concluded PRA workshop<sup>1</sup> at Regional Research Station of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University at Paiyur, Rama Gounder and several other farmers - both men and women - acted as village teachers. They were involved in transect walks, mapping/modelling exercises, seasonal analysis, ranking and scoring, and resource flow diagramming - the tools that outsiders have found useful in learning about the villagers' perception and analysis of their environment.

On the fourth day, while we were probing farmers' critical decisions on crop selection

and resource allocation, Rama Gounder proceeded, after his initial explanation, to show his ingenuity in analysing and explaining his decision-making process. Besides using the cards and chapatti circles of different sizes and colours that the researchers had carried to the village, Rama Gounder involved the children to collect specimen of crop plants, leaves, seeds, etc. He also used samples of gypsum block, fertilizer farm yard manure (FYM), currency bills of different denominations, cartons of Azospirillum, pesticide cans and package of recommendation booklets to symbolically represent resources, their flows and transformation in different plots, his resource allocation decisions, and institutions having a significant impact on his decisions.

<sup>1</sup> Full report in *Participatory Rural Appraisal for Agricultural Research, at Paiyur, Tamil Nadu*, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore and IIED, held in 1992.



listen to and allow them to teach us what they know and practice best. It was evident that a farmer's decisions on enterprises selection is influenced by the micro-ecological niches available to him and the access to and the assurance of institutional support. Instead of requesting villagers to name the institutions they interact with regularly and then try to understand their spheres of influence, the process we followed starts with farmers mapping out critical decisions and then identifying departments/agencies bearing on such decisions. In the present case, crop enterprise selection and resource allocation decisions were the focal interest. However, the exercise may be relevant for other areas too, such as health, credit, education, etc.

Once the basis of farmers' interactions with different institutions is established, different scenarios of resource management and the required institutional support can also be explored. It will be interesting to examine how a group will handle open-ended exploration.

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