Editorial

· Theme issue

Welcome to this issue of *PLA Notes*, where the theme is 'analysis': how to make sense of the mountain of information derived from participatory approaches. The theme explores who is involved in analysing information at different stages and discusses how critical reflection can and should become part of any participatory process.

The guest editors for the theme section of this issue are Irene Guijt and Su Braden. After eight years at IIED, Irene recently left to start a PhD at Wageningen Agricultural University on the organisational challenges of participatory monitoring and evaluation. She has extensive experience with participatory research and planning processes within the natural resource sector, and has trained others in five continents. Dr. Su Braden has over 20 years of experience with development work in Europe and overseas, specialising in the use of participatory video. She created and co-ordinates a Master's degree course entitled 'Television and Video for Development' which is based at the University of Reading, UK.

· In this issue

This issue opens with a suite of more general articles. In the first article, Anton Simanowitz discusses the adoption of participatory approaches to poverty targeting through the work of the Small Enterprise Foundation, a micro-finance NGO working in the Northern Province of South Africa. He considers the benefits of participatory wealth ranking and finds the process to be more inclusive and transparent than the visual targeting methods previously used to identify levels of poverty.

In the following article, Gary Woller and James Mayfield describe a field test called The Twenty Points of Progress Programme, a participatory methodology for systematically measuring and assessing the impact of village development programmes. The communities rate their villages with regard to certain indicators and, through plenary evaluation, the results are used for community action planning, consciousness raising and resource mobilisation.

In the final article of the general section, Gary Jordan provides a brief report back of the Public Participation Geographic Information Systems (GIS) specialist meeting, held in Santa Barbara, USA in October 1998. He discusses that whilst truly participatory GIS is a relatively new issue, it has become an increasingly common subject in the participatory development community (see *PLA Notes 33*, p27-34). The aim of the meeting was to examine key issues, to look at existing case studies of participatory GIS with a particular emphasis on good practice, and to define research priorities. Whilst interesting cases of good practice were presented, he notes with some concern that some of the so-called participatory GIS case studies often did not involve active participation, and reflects that much remains to be done before reaching a comprehensive definition of participatory GIS.

Regular features

In the *Feedback* section, Marion Gibbons discusses barriers to the institutionalisation of PRA in NGOs in Nepal. She raises concerns about the quality and follow-up of PRA training in Nepal, emphasising that PRA is not being used on a systematic basis within organisations that have received PRA training. She identifies a possible cause of this to be the lack of process-orientation of many PRA trainers and suggests ways to improve this in order to ensure more effective use of PRA in Nepal. In a thoughtful response to Marion's article, Michel Pimbert stresses that mainstreaming the use of PRA approaches and methods in the NGO world is part of a larger process of institutionalising participation in development. He observes that the issue is not

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.2–3, IIED London

only confined to Nepal but is of wider relevance to the development debate. He feels that whilst good personal practice of trainers is essential, the process should be supported with affirmative action from the NGO and donor communities to institutionalise good practice.

For trainers in participatory learning, the serialisation of the *Trainer's Guide to Participatory Learning and Action* gives a range of examples of how to train in the use of participatory methods in a field setting. The *Tips for Trainers* section has been prepared by Andy Inglis and Susan Guy of Scottish Participatory Initiatives, and discusses a new tool, the H-form, to facilitate monitoring and evaluation exercises. This Tip for Trainers contributes to the theme of this issue on 'Learning from Analysis'.

The *In Touch* pages (at the back of the issue) share experiences and publicise new and relevant materials and training events. *The RCPLA Pages* in the *In Touch* section profile one of the RCPLA Network members, the Learning Resource Centre of the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR) - based in the Philippines, and gives some information about the annual meeting in June 1998 of UPD-Net, also an RCPLA partner, held in Uganda during the summer of 1998.

Happy reading!

COMMUNITY WATER MANAGEMENT: REMINDER

The June 1999 edition of *PLA Notes* will focus on issues of Community Water Management. If you have not already submitted an article but would like to do so, please contact *PLA Notes* at IIED (see inside cover).

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH: CALL FOR PAPERS

The October 1999 edition of *PLA Notes* will focus on participatory approaches to Sexual and Reproductive Health, including HIV and AIDS. We need new articles for this edition and would love to hear about any innovative approaches - such as drawing, role-play, radio shows, training workshops etc. - which you have used, and which focus especially on the value of experiential learning, rather than on the more conventional, top-down Information, Education and Communication approach.

Previous editions of *RRA Notes* and *PLA Notes*, especially numbers 16 (1992) and 23 (1995) have focused on Health and on HIV respectively. However, these are now several years old and we have received various requests for more recent material on these important issues.

Ten years ago, very little attention was paid to sexual and reproductive health issues by anyone outside the health sector. But we can now see how agricultural cycles and access to and control of money and other resources are closely related to sexual health issues, such as unwanted teenage pregnancies, domestic violence, untreated and undiagnosed sexually transmitted infections, gender issues and, of course, the spread of HIV. Thus, a growing number of development workers are recognising the need to learn about and face these deeply felt but difficult-to-address needs.

The theme issue will be guest edited by Andrea Cornwall and Alice Welbourn. If you would like to contribute to the theme issue, please send an abstract or article to *PLA Notes* at IIED (see inside cover for address) by the end of April 1999. The guidelines for authors (inside the back cover of *PLA Notes*), provides details of how articles should be presented. We look forward to hearing from you!

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.2–3, IIED London

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Pushing the limits of mapping and wealth ranking

Anton Simanowitz

· Participatory approaches to poverty targeting

The Small Enterprise Foundation, a micro-finance NGO, works with more than 7500 micro-entrepreneurs in the Northern Province of South Africa, 97% of whom are women. It provides savings and credit facilities to support business development of the poorest people[1].

The Small Enterprise Foundation was set up as a poverty alleviation programme. One of the poorest areas in the country was selected as the operational area. A credit methodology was designed which offered small loans through group-based lending, following the theory that small loans and high transaction costs (in terms of time spent to enter the programme and during the meetings) would deter all but the very poorest from joining.

In reality, the Small Enterprise Foundation found that the need for credit is so great that comparatively wealthy people would join and remain members for a long time in the hope of receiving larger future loans. This meant that the Foundation did not reach the poorest people. Further, it was found that membership of better-off people served as an active deterrent for very poor people, and the target population was thus not being helped. In response to this, the Tshomisano Programme was established, with the mandate to develop an active targeting system, which would identify those people in the community who were eligible for membership of the programme and its services. The Tshomisano Programme targeted the poorest 30 per cent of the population as beneficiaries of their micro-enterprise development loans.

The first targeting system that was designed used a visual indicator of poverty test. This required field workers to score the external conditions of people's houses according to a checklist. With this method, those people living in houses constructed from mud bricks, with poor quality thatch roofing, small windows and in a general state of disrepair, tend to be selected as the poorest. Those who are also poor but who have slightly better constructed houses with cement bricks, zinc roofing, larger windows and a pit latrine do not qualify to benefit from the Programme.

A pilot study to compare participatory wealth ranking with visual indicators of poverty demonstrated the inaccuracy of a system based on static, externally judged criteria, as opposed to local perceptions of poverty. Many instances were cited of people living in poverty whilst having reasonable housing conditions, constructed prior to the main earner dying or deserting the family. In addition, there are many people who are living in poor quality housing, constructing new homes or having their main home elsewhere who falsely qualify as amongst the poorest.

These results convinced the Small Enterprise Foundation of the need to operationalise participatory wealth ranking in place of visual indicators of poverty. The system used is a refinement of the approach in Barbara Grandin's[2] Wealth Ranking manual, but uses a

[1] Over the past 6 years, the Small Enterprise Foundation has disbursed more than South African Rand ZAR 17,238,700, with total defaults of just R1, 268. Exchange rate: US$1: ZAR6

[2] Grandin, B (1988) Wealth Ranking in Small holder Communities: A field manual; IT Publications, UK. See also *RRA Notes* Number 15 1992.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.4–8, IIED London

mapping process to generate the list of household names. It also establishes criteria for assessing the consistency of the results, so as to determine the number of reference groups needed and the reliability of the exercise.

The key difference encountered, however, is the scale of the process in the South African context. Wealth ranking literature commonly describes villages of 70 or 80 households. The South African context typically requires working in villages of 500-700 households (3-5000 people), and in some cases over 1000 households. Obviously, trying to sort this number of cards with a single reference group is impossible.

Adapting wealth ranking

The Small Enterprise Foundation is a rapidly growing organisation with over 7500 members. It therefore needs to have a targeting system which can be used by a large number of staff on a regular basis. Current plans include wealth ranking in more than 20 villages over the coming six months.

This article focuses on some of the challenges faced in designing a cost-effective system, based on participatory mapping and wealth ranking, that would be effective in large villages. The challenges lie both in the design of the methodology and in its operationalisation, including training and assessment to ensure that fundamental principles of participation are not compromised and quality is maintained.

The system is now fully in place and has been documented in an operational manual[3]. Training and assessment have been completed with around 20 staff, with three levels of qualification: facilitator, co-ordinator, and trainer/assessor. The pass rate has been around 50 per cent on each assessment, with staff being allowed a maximum of two attempts.

To date, about twenty villages (ranging from 500-1100 households) have been involved in the participatory wealth ranking process. In all cases, consistent results have been achieved and have been used in the identification of potential Tshomisano members.

The case-study below illustrates the application of the methodology. It is followed by a discussion of some of the wider issues of the relevance and use of wealth ranking in the context of a microfinance programme.

· Case-study: wealth ranking in Bhungeni

Faced with a village of almost 5,000 people and eight field workers expecting to be trained in wealth ranking, and to have the effectiveness of the method demonstrated to them, I realised the challenge facing us in using the method in South Africa. In the South African context, villages are rarely tightly knit communities, but sprawling areas with several hundred, if not thousand households, with high mobility and differentiation. Wealth ranking relies on people's knowledge of each other - could this be applied in South Africa?

Mapping

We started the task by mapping the village (on the floor of a church, using chalk) with about 30 people who arrived for an introductory meeting. After some discussion, it was agreed that people should divide themselves into groups according to the section[4] where they lived in the village. Initially three sections were formed, and the participants easily grasped the concept of mapping and began the task. Quickly it became apparent that there were 6 rather than 3 sections in the village. Some sections were under-represented in the meeting, and there was some difficulty experienced by these sections in drawing the map. Some participants therefore left to find people from the other sections to join in. Obtaining good representation from all sections of the village is critical to the successful mapping of a large village (see Box 1).

[3] Full details can be found in a forthcoming article in The Small Enterprise Development Journal, or from the author. Poverty-targeting methods in microfinance will be debated at the Microcredit Summit meeting of Councils in June this year. SEF's operational manual for participatory wealth ranking is available from the Summit at a cost of US$10.00 - contact microcredit@igc.apc.org

[4] A 'section' is defined by participants according to recognised informal divisions of the village.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.4–8, IIED London

BOX 1
SCALING-UP OF PARTICIPATORY WEALTH RANKING

The key learning in the application of mapping and wealth ranking in communities of such size is to break the task down into manageable sizes. A community of 6000 people is difficult to imagine (or to live in) without its sections, in the same way as a town is defined by neighbourhoods. It is therefore a straight forward matter to ask people to map and rank according to their well known sections. This immediately breaks both the mapping and ranking into manageable sizes. We also find that people's knowledge of the households living in their own section is generally very good.

Mapping proceeded easily (and noisily), and within three hours we had mapped and listed the names of 736 households. More importantly, by generating six rather than three sections, the number of households which had to be ranked per section was more or less 100 (approximately the sort of number of cards people can sort before becoming tired). Participants assisted with writing a list of household names (the facilitators checking that these were the names commonly used), copying these names onto cards and making a copy of the map onto flip chart paper (see Boxes 2 and 3).

The mapping was a great success, amazing the Small Enterprise Foundation staff (used to the idea that a map must be drawn by the field worker), and leaving me surprised and relieved

BOX 2
FACILITATION OF MAPPING

The handing over of tasks to the participants is essential to enable the facilitators to monitor and facilitate, rather than attempting to undertake three time-consuming tasks in each section. These tasks are copying the map onto paper, writing up the household list and writing out the cards. Provided one or two people can write, the group can do the three things at once and thus save a lot of time.

BOX 3
CHECKING THE ACCURACY OF THE MAPPING

There is a danger, when mapping large villages, that households will be forgotten, or areas missed off. It is important for the facilitator to ask participants to check for this. In our experience, however, people are seldom missed off, or if they are, then they are quickly identified in the first card-sorting and can be added.

that there were no problems in identifying and naming all of the households. In one section for example, six people managed to map and name 211 households. The map was compared with one previously done by the Small Enterprise Foundation under the visual indicators of poverty system and its accuracy was confirmed. Further experience of mapping even larger villages has shown that even 1000 households can be mapped and the names listed in 2-3 hours, provided there is good representation from all sections of the village.

Ranking

The next challenge was how to rank the 736 households. Ranking involves discussing concepts of poverty and wealth, so as to stimulate thinking and to gain a consensus for ranking. The cards are discussed in turn and then sorted into different piles depending on the wealth of the household. Reference groups of 4-6 people are set up during the mapping. These groups meet with the facilitator and rank the households in their section. The ranking is repeated for at least three different reference groups so as to ensure triangulation and consistency of the results. The process is time consuming and strenuous, and once people become tired, accuracy is rapidly lost. Thus attempting to sort more than 100 cards (ideally much less) is problematic.

Division of the village into sections achieved part of the solution - however one section numbered over 200 households. The card sorting therefore had to be carefully monitored so as to stop the process when participants became tired. In this case, where the sorting is not completed, the unsorted cards are kept separate and used as the first cards in the next reference group. In the case of a very large section, the section is divided into two for each

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.4–8, IIED London

ranking (the cards being divided randomly) and each half is treated separately. At the end of each session, all cards are carefully mixed so as to ensure that each reference group receives a mixture of cards.

· Analysis of the results

At the end of each reference group, the piles of cards are scored. Scoring is calculated according to the number of piles used by participants, using the formula:

100/(number of piles) x pile number

For example if there are four piles, then the poorest pile (number 4) will score 100 (100/4 x 4 = 100) and the richest pile will score 25 (100/4 x 1 = 25). After three rankings the scores for each household are averaged.

Criteria have been developed for defining 'consistent' results (see Box 4). Initially this was done in a logical way based on the situation where there are four piles, so that if two households are within an averaged score of 25 they are effectively in the same pile (consistent); if the difference in two scores is between 25 and 49 they are in piles next to each other (inconsistent, but within the same half); and if they are 50 or more apart they are in different halves of the ranking. Use of this definition has proved to make practical sense in the ranking exercises, and can be shown to be statistically significant[5].

If the differences in scores for a single household are more than 25, this is inconsistent, but may still be used. If the difference is 50 or greater, this is a gross inconsistency and may not be used, and more information is needed. If the total number of gross inconsistencies is 10 or more per cent of households ranked, then additional reference groups are added, up to a maximum of five. Where the number of reference groups approaches five, it becomes difficult to achieve results to the desired level of consistency - beyond five reference groups it would probably be impossible, and the ranking would have to be abandoned.

At the end of the ranking there will always be a certain number of households for which consistent results were not obtained. Often these can be placed by the coordinator and facilitator, using the notes made about households where the reference group has a long discussion or has problems placing the card.

BOX 4
ACHIEVING CONSISTENCY BETWEEN REFERENCE GROUPS

Our experience has shown that consistency is almost entirely dependant on good facilitation. Facilitators must ensure that the initial discussion allows participants to think clearly about how they define poverty; clarifications concerning the process at the beginning help the participants to understand how to sort the cards and differences of opinion are raised early on. The creation of a relaxed and open environment is also essential to the process and a core facilitation task. Our best facilitators achieved close to 100 % consistency between three reference groups. We have used their skills to refine our training to a point that a fourth reference group is seldom needed.

· Issues in the use of participatory wealth ranking

Using the findings for selecting the poor

There is a danger that dividing up villages may make it difficult to compare the results between sections. It is very common to find concentrations of wealth or poverty within a village, which mean that sections have different wealth levels. Consistency between the sections is achieved by triangulating two methods.

1) *Ranking of the village sections:* during the mapping exercise, a simple ranking exercise is performed with representatives from the village structures (i.e. the local government, civic committee and traditional authorities). Participants are asked to rank each section on a scale of one to five, with five being the richest. This gives a good indication of the relative wealth of each section.

2) *Comparing results within and between villages:* wealth ranking is by definition subjective. But by looking at the

[5] Using Kendall's W and standard error tests.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.4–8, IIED London

information generated during the ranking, an understanding of the characteristics of different levels of poverty is generated. In our experience, this is consistent within a single village, and in broad terms, very similar within the entire area where we are working.

Households from two different sections but with different scores may actually be at the same poverty level. For example, the characteristics of a household in one section with an average ranking score of 85 may be the same as one with an average score of 73 in another section. The qualitative understanding of how people define poverty (as gained during the ranking exercise) is thus used to achieve consistency between sections.

The Tshomisano project aims to work with the poorest people in the Province. Defining the cut-off point for inclusion in the project is always going to be arbitrary. The decision on who can or cannot be included in the programme - i.e. the absolute cut-off point - is based on an understanding of the poverty levels as they are described. In our experience, there is a fairly clear line drawn between those who are poor but get by (not included in the project) and those who fail to meet their basic needs (who are included).

High consistency between villages has allowed Tshomisano to use information given from a number of different rankings to define common characteristics of the very poor - our target group. During each ranking, much information is given about why people are sorted into each group and therefore the common characteristics for each pile. By using the generalised list, it is possible to select those piles which correspond to the target population, and the cut off point is drawn at this level, rather than at an arbitrary point.

Numbers of people qualifying in each section are cross-checked with the ranking of the different sections in terms of their wealth. To date there has been a good correlation between the poorest sections having the highest number of people qualifying.

Working with the people identified by participatory wealth ranking

The use of participatory wealth ranking has improved the relationship of Tshomisano with the communities in which it works. In the past, using visual targeting, initial contact was fairly secretive, with field workers moving around the village mapping and assessing each house. After this there would be a period of motivating qualifying households, with field workers visiting and encouraging people to join the project. Lack of community participation in the selection process, combined with the inherent weaknesses in the system, meant that there were many cases of dissatisfaction. There were many reports of women begging the field workers to come inside their homes to see for themselves that, although the house was good on the outside, there was nothing inside. It was this pressure that led to staff dissatisfaction and the initial piloting of participatory wealth ranking.

The participatory wealth ranking process is open and transparent and generates discussion and activity within the community. We have found that rather than having to motivate people to join, people are waiting to hear the results and hoping to join. Discussions with members following the participatory wealth ranking process demonstrate a high level of understanding of the process and satisfaction with the results.

It has been a difficult process to develop the method so that it can be operationalised on a wide scale in such large communities, whilst maintaining the quality and fundamentals of the approach. However, the result is an effective (and cost-effective) targeting process which is understood both by staff and members. The learning process continues, and the method continues to be refined, with small changes being made every few weeks.

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Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.4–8, IIED London

2

Participatory assessment and the twenty points of progress program: the experience from Mexico

Gary M. Woller and James B. Mayfield

· Introduction

This paper describes the field-test of the Twenty Points of Progress Program (20PPP) presently being implemented by an NGO called choiceHumanitarian in Guanajuato, Mexico. The 20PPP is a participatory methodology for systematically measuring and assessing the impact of village development programs. The 20PPP differs in a number of important ways from other methods of monitoring village development.

- It is participatory in nature, encouraging village communities to assess their own level of development and quality of life.
- Through an explicit commitment to community action planning, it encourages village communities to develop and implement strategies (action plans) to improve the quality of life in their communities and to measure the extent to which they are successful.
- It encourages network development and information sharing among rural communities and with outside government and non-government organisations.

· Developing the 20PPP

While billions of dollars have been allocated for village development by many different organisations over the past fifty years, there is no widely accepted methodology for measuring whether progress is in fact being made. Most methodologies aiming to measure village progress have failed either because they were too complicated for the villagers to understand and appreciate, so expensive that few government or non-government organisations were willing to fund them, or so time-consuming that villagers lost interest in participating. For all of the same reasons, most methodologies also have had little impact either on programme performance or village development.

One of us (JM) developed the 20PPP at the request of UNICEF. The purpose was to devise a village monitoring system that was short, simple, and inexpensive. After field-testing over 100 development indicators in nearly 50 villages in Bolivia, Mexico, Kenya, India, and Egypt, it was found that about 95 percent of villagers' concerns fell into five broad categories (Table 1):

- education and literacy;
- availability of health services;
- income generation and the alleviation of poverty;
- community environment and infrastructure; and,
- community unity and cultural enhancement.

Once these five categories were identified, and after reviewing the aggregate data on the different dimensions of each, it became fairly easy to select the most widely mentioned indicators in each category to make a total of twenty indicators. The 20PPP entails measuring village progress according to these twenty indicators. However, rather than relying on outsiders or 'experts' to carry out the evaluation, the 20PPP asks rural villagers to rate their village on each of the twenty indicators.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.9–15, IIED London

Table 1. The twenty points of progress survey

Indicator	How the Indicator is Defined
1. Attendance in village schools	The number of children 5-15 years of age who regularly attend school.
2. Adult literacy	The number of adults age 18 and over who possess basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills.
3. Diversification of the school curriculum and the % of children completing school	The number of children who actually graduate from the village school as one indication of the quality of teachers and relevancy of the curriculum.
4. Parent-teacher collaboration	The number of parents who meet on a regular basis with teachers to discuss student attendance and progress, curriculum, educational costs, etc.
5. Vaccination of children	The number of children immunised for the most common diseases in the village.
6. Health awareness of parents	The number of parents who understand and use oral rehydration techniques when their children have diarrhoea, who are aware of indicators of malnutrition, and who seek to provide their children with a nutritious diet.
7. Availability and use of family latrines	The number of families who have and use a properly constructed latrine.
8. Establishment of a sustainable system of village health care	The number of families willing to pay some fee for services or contribute to a village health fund to support village health workers.
9. Food security/family vegetable gardens	The number of families who have adequate food security (enough surplus to live through short-term food shortages) measured by number of families who have vegetable gardens and awareness of organic farming.
10. Existence of savings and loan-giving groups	The number of families who belong to and actively participate in savings and loan-giving groups.
11. Existence of non-farming sources of income	The number of families who participate in supplemental income-generating activities outside of their own farming.
12. Family income status	The number of families living close to the subsistence level of income (i.e., 70-80 percent of their income spent just on food or malnutrition among the children is common).
13. Quality of houses	The number of families who have permanent, quality homes.
14. Quality of sanitation	The number of families participating in some type of sanitation program to reduce the flies and mosquitoes, remove stagnant pools, remove human and animal waste from areas close to people's homes, and establish some type of garbage collection system.
15. Existence of a functioning environmental committee	The number of families aware of environmental problems (i.e., soil erosion, deforestation, and water and sewage pollution) and participating in a program to reduce them.
16. Village infrastructure (potable water systems, roads, marketing facility)	The number of families who have access to potable water, good access roads to nearby towns, and a good transportation system for marketing and travel.
17. Quality of local leadership measured by extent of local resource mobilisation.	The number of families who have donated money, labour, or materials to complete a number of village-level projects.
18. Community cultural activities	The number of families willing to organise and participate in cultural activities, such as dance and singing groups, traditional cultural and religious festivals, the preservation of traditional arts and crafts, etc.
19. Youth programs and activities (youth ages 15-25)	The number of families willing to support the youth in sports, cultural and social activities, employment training, and income-generating project development.
20 Level of community participation in the Twenty Points Program and a broader inter-village networking program	The number of families in the village who are aware of the Twenty Points Program and have participated in meetings to determine how their village might work with other nearby villages to improve the quality of life in all the villages in their area.

Scoring system: 1=few; 2=some; 3=roughly half; 4=most but not all; 5=all or nearly

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.9–15, IIED London

The evaluation results are then shared with the entire village to be used as a basis for community-consciousness raising, action planning, and resource mobilisation. Finally, the survey is to be repeated at least once a year over several years, and the scores of each indicator and the overall village score are to be tracked over this time to measure village progress, as perceived by the villagers themselves.

In order to keep the measurement instrument as simple and short as possible (no more than 40 to 60 minutes), a survey was developed in which each indicator was operationalised on an ordinal five point scale. Participants were asked to indicate how many villagers engage in different activities corresponding with the twenty indicators. A score of 1 means that only a few members of the community engage in the activity; a score of 2 means some, but less than half, of villagers; a score of 3 means roughly half of villagers; a score of 4 means most, but not all, villagers; and a score of 5 means all or nearly all villagers.

An initial field-test of the 20PPP in Egypt, found that two pairs of field-testers appeared to be much more successful in administering the survey than were the other field-testers. It was later learned that both pairs had received formal training in participatory methods, and in each case they had spent significant time explaining the importance and process of participation to the villagers before they introduced the 20PPP survey. As a result of this finding, choiceHumanitarian decided to develop and field-test a more participatory method for administering the 20PPP.

For the field-test site, choiceHumanitarian selected Guanajuato, Mexico, where it operates a village development program in a cluster of rural villages near the city of Irapuato. This site was chosen for two reasons. First, choiceHumanitarian employs a full-time Rural Development Facilitator in Mexico who is well-known, trusted, and widely respected in these villages. Because the 20PPP would be carried out by North Americans, it was essential that there be a contact in each village who could legitimise the exercise and help the outsiders gain rapid acceptance. Second, a PRA exercise had already been planned for these villages, and it was decided to piggyback the 20PPP on this exercise.

Implementation of the 20PPP in Mexico

The implementation team consisted of one of us (GW) and six graduate students from Brigham Young University. None of the students had experience in development fieldwork, but each had previously lived in Latin America and spoke Spanish well. Before leaving for Mexico, the students attended an intensive two-day training workshop conducted on the 20PPP and participatory evaluation methods. Once in Mexico, the students were divided into three teams of two (one male and one female), and each team was assigned to live and work in two villages for one week each. The students worked with little direct supervision.

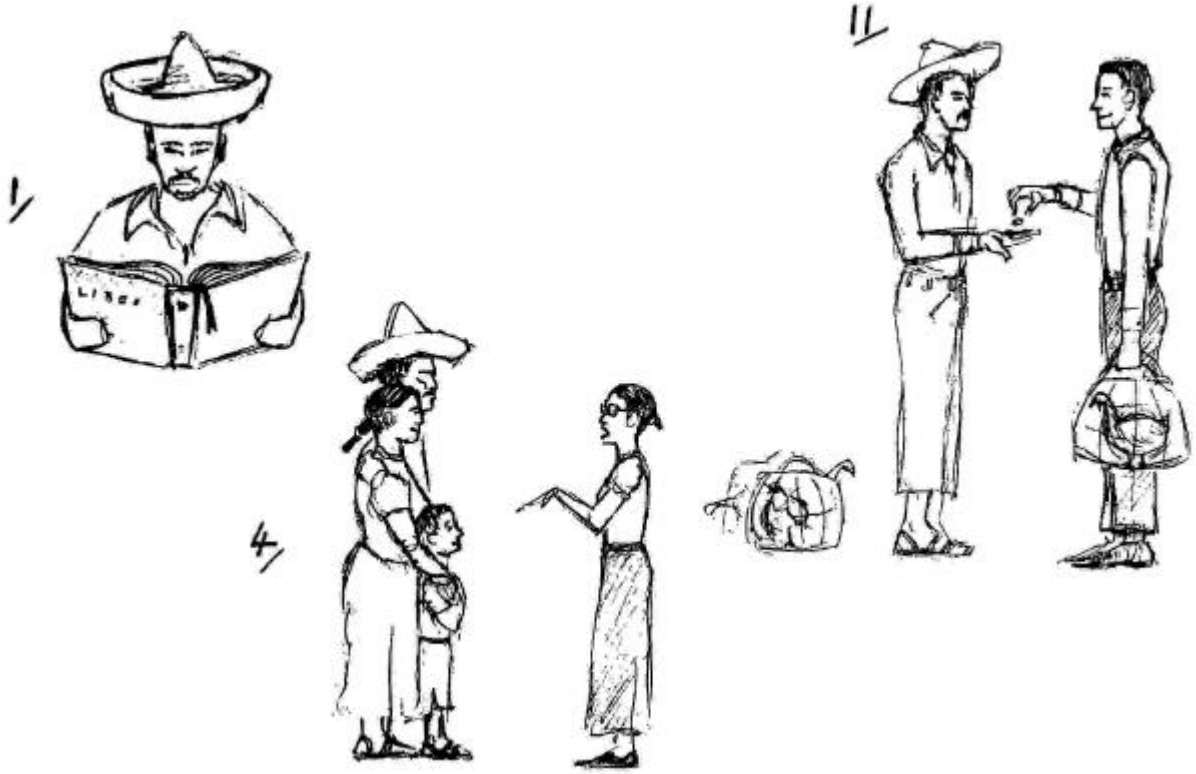
The first night in each village, the student teams facilitated a village-wide meeting, in which the students introduced themselves, explained the purpose for the visit, and fielded questions[1]. After completing this stage of the meeting, the students facilitated the drawing of village maps and arranged a transect walk for the following day. Over the next week, the students administered the 20PPP survey to the following individuals and groups:

- formal village leaders;
- informal village leaders as identified by the Rural Development Facilitator;
- women and women's groups;
- men;
- persons living on the periphery of the villages;
- persons from different socio-economic classes as identified by village members; and,
- randomly visited households.

[1] Before the students arrived in the village, the Rural Development Facilitator arranged the meeting with village leaders. On arriving in the village, the student teams visited residents to invite them to attend the meeting.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.9–15, IIED London

Figure 1. Examples of drawings illustrating indicators as shown to villagers: indicator 1 - adult literacy; indicator 4 - parent/teacher collaboration; and indicator 11 - non-farming sources of income



Given time constraints, it was not possible to survey all village members in each village[2]. Thus the selection of persons to interview was driven by the desire to provide a reasonably representative cross-section of all village members. In most cases, the students worked with focus groups (usually of 4 to 6 people), although they also conducted household interviews. Most focus groups were of a single gender. The focus groups were either arranged ahead of time by inviting persons to attend, or they were conducted on an informal basis with small groups that had congregated at different locations in the villages at different times during the day. The students also attended the weekly meeting of the women's savings group that existed in each village, at which they administered the survey to the women in attendance divided into small groups. To conduct household surveys, the students either arranged the interviews ahead of time, or they dropped by houses unannounced. The student facilitators began the survey by explaining to each participant the methods and purpose of the 20PPP. Only when they were certain that this was understood did they begin the survey.

For each question in the survey, the students displayed a small drawing[3] that represented the relevant indicator and depicted typical village life and dress (see Figure 1). While holding the drawing up for all to see, the students explained its meaning; then on placing the drawing on the ground or table, they asked the person or group to rate the village according to that indicator. To rate the village, the participants were asked to place on the card the number of rocks or beans (from a nearby pile) corresponding to their answer. Thus, if the answer to the question 'What is the percentage of children between the ages of 5 and 15 regularly attending village schools?'

[2] A couple of villages, however, were small enough that students were able to survey most village members.

[3] These drawings were done by an art student from Brigham Young University. He was requested to make very simple drawings that depicted each of the 20 indicators. Being Mexican, he based his drawings on his familiarity with rural life in Mexico, thus depicting 'typical' rural village dress, architecture, culture etc.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.9–15, IIED London

was 'Most, but not everybody,' the participants would place four rocks or beans on the drawing. The students then recorded each response on a separate sheet of paper.

The villagers frequently asked for help in deciding what score to assign, in which case the students reminded them that it was the villagers' knowledge that mattered. When working with groups, the students encouraged group members to discuss their answers and then place the beans or rocks on the card only after the group had reached a consensus. If the students observed that certain individuals were either unwilling to voice an opinion or their views were disregarded by other group members, they encouraged the group to consider all points of view before reaching their decision. In some cases, villagers gave hasty and unreflective answers, but in most cases, the villagers placed the beans or rocks on the card only after some reflection or discussion among group members. The survey typically took less than one hour to complete.

At the end of the week in each village, the students held a final village meeting, in which they shared the results of the 20PPP and the PRA exercise. To present the results of the 20PPP, the students arranged the drawings of the twenty indicators according to their score, taped them onto large sheets of flipchart paper, wrote a short description of each indicator and the average village score next to the drawing, and then hung the papers on the walls at the meeting site (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Children observing the presentation of the 20PPP at the final village meeting (Photo: Gary Woller)

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.9–15, IIED London

The students then briefly reviewed the village scores for each of the indicators and invited comments from those in attendance. After reviewing the results of the survey, the students discussed with the villagers those indicators in which the village gave itself the lowest scores. The students then encouraged the villagers to prioritise from among these indicators those that they would most like to resolve. Once these issues were identified, the students and the Rural Development Facilitator spent the remainder of the meeting facilitating the creation of village action plan to address the prioritised issues. At the conclusion of this meeting, the students formally presented the survey results to the delegado (mayor) of each village and secured a commitment from him that he would make the results of the 20PPP publicly available.

· Outcomes and lessons learned

Like many development programs, the 20PPP is long-term in nature. Raising villagers' consciousness, creating a desire to improve village scores on the 20PPP, establishing cause-effect linkages surrounding crucial issues, and mobilising communities' energy to address the many problems they face is a continual process. Thus it is not unexpected that repeated administration of the 20PPP may be necessary before it begins to yield progress in these areas and to produce higher survey scores. Nonetheless, from the field-test in Mexico and from subsequent field tests in Bolivia, Egypt, Kenya, and India, we have observed that the 20PPP can be an effective tool in raising community consciousness and in encouraging community action planning, resource mobilisation, and networking with external entities, as the following examples demonstrate.

In Mexico one village formulated an action plan to reconnect its potable water system (item 16 in the survey) and deal with saboteurs (someone in the village had been sabotaging the water system for fear of running out of water). In another village, the members formulated an action plan to build a new kindergarten (item 1 in the survey). Finally, in another village, the members committed to a plan to begin building, and to teach each other to build, family latrines (item 7 in the survey). In all three cases, the action plans were a direct outcome of the 20PPP. A follow-up evaluation is now being planned for Mexico with the intent to extend the program to other villages in the area.

Similar outcomes were observed in field-tests in other countries. In a village in Egypt that participated in the 20PPP, village leaders contacted the local director of health to ask that their children be vaccinated (item 5 in the survey). The director agreed to organise a medical team to vaccinate all of the village children after the village leaders offered to pay for the gas of the medical vehicle and to provide the health team with a full-course meal as payment. On seeing how their village scores on the 20PPP compared with another village in their area, one group of villagers in Egypt decided to visit the other village to see how it had been able to improve its scores during the previous year. In a village in India, villagers organised a health committee as a direct result of the 20PPP decision-making process, which then proceeded to raise the needed money to send a local midwife for a six-week training program in modern medicine at a nearby hospital (item 8 in the survey).

Regarding the implementation of the 20PPP, we learned the following from the field-test in Mexico:

- Both men and women are able to discuss and prioritise the twenty indicators with little difficulty.
- Most participants have little difficulty intuitively understanding the five-point scale used in the survey. In fact, in many cases, it becomes unnecessary part way through the survey to continue to prompt the participants on the scoring procedure. What we lost in preciseness using this scoring system we gained in understanding and ease of administration.
- The use of drawings to explain the indicator and beans or rocks to indicate responses is a highly effective method of eliciting active villager participation in the survey. This method enables the villagers to see what they have answered on each question and to reflect on their responses. Moreover, this method is effective in involving children in the survey, which helps in administering the survey in households where children are present.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.9–15, IIED London

- Focus groups need to be kept small (six or less) and, if possible, of a single gender. In large groups, participants tend to lose interest more quickly, allowing dominant personalities to take over. Also, in mixed gender groups, women tend to defer to the men.
- It is possible to implement the 20PPP even with relatively little training or field experience. (In a subsequent field-test in Bolivia, villagers were trained in the administration of the 20PPP, and they helped implement it in their villages).
- The presence of a Rural Development Facilitator or an in-country staff member who is well known and trusted by the villagers is crucial to the action planning stage of the 20PPP. The Rural Development Facilitator either did not attend or did not take an active role in the action planning stage in three of the Mexican villages. In each of these villages, the student teams were unable to get the villagers to commit to a plan of action. However, the Rural Development Facilitator took an active role in the action planning stage in the other villages. In these villages the villagers committed to an action plan to address crucial issues identified in the 20PPP.
- The administration of the 20PPP is not demanding of villagers' time. In Mexico, it involved two village meetings (on the first and last night) and one hour or less of a villager's time to respond to the survey. Working primarily with focus groups and women's organisations permitted the student teams to survey a relatively large sample of villagers in a short period of time.
- The action planning stage of the 20PPP, particularly in combination with the results of the PRA exercise, is effective in establishing the cause-effect linkages surrounding the important issues identified.

· Conclusion

While the 20PPP uses only twenty indicators, field-tests have shown that villagers can and often do raise additional issues (such as gender-related issues) and add their own indicators to the original twenty. This flexibility allows each community to develop additional (or delete other) measures of progress if they desire. The potential advantages of an approach to measure village progress and mobilise community action that is short, simple, inexpensive, and flexible are apparent to many organisations working in the developing world. Already, several NGOs in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, in addition to several international NGOs, have expressed an interest in incorporating the 20PPP into their development programs.

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3

Public participation and GIS: report back

Gavin Jordan

· Introduction

Participatory Geographic Information Systems (GIS) has become an increasingly common subject (see *PLA Notes* 33, October 1998, p27-34), and raises both interest and strong feelings in the GIS and participatory development communities. At the moment, the use of GIS in a truly participatory context is in its infancy, and many would argue that participatory GIS is not a realistic possibility. However, key issues were identified at a recent workshop at the University of Durham, which was discussed in PLA Notes 33. These included:

- Defining a role for participatory GIS;
- How best to achieve a participatory GIS;
- Identifying constraints (e.g. capturing power relations in a GIS); and,
- Determining the added value of participatory GIS.

Participatory GIS was also was also discussed at a workshop in the USA run by the National Centre of Geographic Information Analysis. The specialist meeting in Santa Barbara in October 1998 aimed to explore these issues in detail, determine research priorities, and examine existing case studies of using public participation GIS, identifying their strengths, weaknesses and best practice. The Santa Barbara meeting was chaired by two of the participants at the Durham workshop, allowing for progression in the debate rather than replication.

The meeting was attended by about forty delegates, with backgrounds in the social sciences, natural resource management, urban planning and community support. The delegates were a healthy mixture of academics, NGO representatives, planners and information services professionals. What was less healthy, and may be indicative of the problems associated with using this type of technology in a participatory capacity, was that virtually all delegates were from the north.

It was pleasing that most of the participants, including those who were from a GIS rather than participatory background, appreciated that the participatory process was of overwhelming importance, and that the technical GIS issues were secondary.

A number of case studies were presented, including natural resource management issues in Australia, Canada, Hawaii, Ghana, Nepal and South Africa. Additionally, a range of urban planning case studies were presented, principally from the USA, involving different types of community action groups. It was interesting to note both the commonalities and differences between the rural, natural resource and urban case studies. Commonalities included the challenges and possible solutions to developing community representation when using GIS. The scope for the process being hijacked by an elite appears particularly great. A key difference is access to information and resources, with the availability of GIS at a community level being a serious limiting factor in southern rural areas.

What was alarming, however, was the number of case studies which purportedly presented participatory applications of GIS but just used census information or secondary data sources in a standard GIS environment. In many of these cases there was *no* active participation. It became apparent that there is a long way to go before participatory GIS can be correctly defined, understood or implemented.

On a more positive note, the meeting provided an excellent forum for dialogue between 'GIS' and 'participatory' participants. There was more common ground than disputes and a number of key issues were identified:

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.16–17, IIED London

- the need to define, identify and adopt best practice. This will require an emphasis on the participatory process, and necessitates a detailed knowledge of participatory techniques, and considerations of how these can be used when spatial information is desired;
- an emphasis on detailed monitoring and evaluation of processes, methods, accuracy and outcomes. The use of GIS means that accuracy issues become important, which has profound implications for classic spatial participatory tools, such as participatory sketch mapping;
- the importance of determining the 'added value' of using GIS and the nature of participation; and,
- a questioning of whether frameworks for public participation GIS can be developed.

Additionally, a detailed research agenda was drawn up, and a number of these are now being examined, via projects initiated through seed grants and reflecting on existing projects. Projects initiated via the seed grants include: transferring knowledge obtained from work in South Africa to community work in inner cities in the USA and developing participatory GIS frameworks for community forestry based on previously separate work in Nepal in Ghana.

The papers presented at this meeting can be found at the following website: **http://www.ncgia.ucsb.edu/varenius/ppgis/papers/index.html**

Additionally, there is a list-server up and running, dealing with issues of public participation in GIS. To subscribe, send an e-mail to **maiser@scifac.indstate.edu** and include the following message: **Subscribe PPGIS-Conf** in the text section of the email.

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Learning from analysis

Ensuring reflection in participatory processes

Irene Guijt and Su Braden

· Introduction

This special issue of the *PLA Notes* looks at the tricky process of 'making sense of the information'. While it is easy to generate much interesting and unusual information through participatory processes, it is often very difficult to make sense of the mountain of 'data' with which we are left. Where does participation in analysis begin and end? When does it happen, and how and by whom is local learning represented? Critics of participatory development often point out the superficial and descriptive nature of such work, asking how conclusions were reached and whose conclusions they are. Facilitators can get carried away with visual methods while forgetting their main purpose - critical reflection. As Mukasa and Mugisha (this issue) write, this type of work can be: 'manipulation to make local people **feel** important without **making** them important'. How can serious analysis ensure that local people learn about the value of their lives and gain the confidence to represent their own choices?

Analysis is often a vague process in much participatory work, with steps that are rarely explicit. In these processes, some information is included but much is excluded; some people are involved while others are absent; conclusions are verified and local people recognise their own authorship of these conclusions, and sometimes they are not and local authorship is remote. Problems are prioritised, but how do we know if they are based on a thorough understanding of underlying causes? Plans are written but whose priorities are included?

The articles in this issue discuss what happens when data are 'collected', discussed, summarised and shared, when priorities are made, and action points are agreed. Insights are shared from community-based analysis of gender differences in Uganda, poverty assessment in the UK, and irrigation planning in Peru. Challenges are raised by experiences with the analysis of rural views for policy audiences in India and Malawi, and with municipal planning in Brazil. Facilitation-related questions are discussed by examining well-being assessment in London and training manual development in El Salvador.

· Analysis and its benefits

The Concise Oxford Dictionary describes analysis as 'resolution into simple elements'. But in participatory processes, far more is involved. An alternative definition was developed by PRA facilitators in Uganda: '*a critical look to deepen, clarify and structure information (ideas, facts, impressions), understand interconnections and examine cause-effect links, identify core elements, in order to arrive at conclusions that can lead to action/solutions to a given problem*' (Guijt 1996).

Thorough analysis, including by local participants, can make all the difference between a superficial descriptive report or simplistic feedback session, and one that is based on a deep understanding, with a broad ownership that motivates people to action, whether they are villagers, policy makers or professionals.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.18–24, IIED London

What other advantages does systematic and ongoing reflection bring? The articles suggest that the time and effort invested is rewarded by many significant benefits (see Box 1).

BOX 1
BENEFITS OF REFLECTION

- To uncover new information – by discussing basic information, people's memories can be triggered and new information and insights can emerge (see van Dijk, Braden and Nelson, Phnuyal, Guy and Inglis, Chase et al)
- To limit biases – ensuring a thorough discussion about views and information means it is cross-checked and people can point out when they feel an issue has been represented incorrectly (see Faria, Rengasamy et al, Mukasa and Mugisha)
- To build a clear picture of a situation/event/process and reach consensus – by discussing data, contradictions can emerge and be ironed out (see Cornwall, Rengasamy et al)
- To avoid a superficial action plan – simply knowing, for example, the number of people who experience food shortages does not help understand why this happens – further analysis can reveal the structural causes of problems and solutions (see Mukasa and Mugisha, Phnuyal, van Dijk, Faria)
- To facilitate action that has broad ownership - understanding the causes and extent of problems, and how solutions can benefit individuals and groups, can motivate people more to invest in making the change happen (see van Dijk, Cornwall, Mukasa and Mugisha).

These outcomes are not guaranteed for each situation - it depends on many factors, such as the purpose of analysis. As Faria describes in the case of Brazil, analysis had a different purpose at different moments: first secondary data analysis helped develop the research methodology, then analysis focused on the quality and reliability of the information and identified gaps, followed by clarity about core problems, and finally it focused on possible solutions. For van Dijk and Mukasa and Mugisha, analysis was essential to create support for women's needs - empowerment through reflection by women and men. This brings us back to an important root of participatory learning and action methods, Paulo Freire and his concern to focus on how participants benefit. Analysis can help ensure the *exchange* of learning between facilitators and participants.

Generally speaking though, irrespective of the purpose, analysis is using discussion and reflection as a 'filter' through which many ideas and fragments of information are funnelled and consolidated. It is a constant sifting and filtering of information, to create new insights.

· Different types of analysis

When it occurs

Analysis is often assumed to 'happen' automatically, during the construction of a map or the ranking of problems. But there are many smaller moments when information is filtered or changed and interpretations are made that influence the final outcome (see Box 2).

BOX 2
ANALYSIS HAPPENS WHEN...

- reviewing secondary data to identify a checklist (e.g. Faria, Rengasamy et al);
- noting down or including only part of what is heard or filmed (e.g. Braden and Nelson);
- copying diagrams from the ground onto paper, or from large onto small version (or vice versa);
- when synthesising information at community feedback meetings (e.g. Faria and van Dijk);
- when probing one part of the discussion and not another;
- when compiling the final report (e.g. Cornwall, Rengasamy et al);
- when using one method (e.g. a questionnaire) and not another (e.g. a flow diagram).

At each step, some judgement is made, conscious or not, about what bit of information is more important than another. While it is impossible to become conscious of every act of judging and filtering of information in a complex process, it is possible to become more aware of when it is happening. Particularly for participatory development, knowing what makes 'good analysis' happen, can help to

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.18–24, IIED London

structure the process and get the best out of the efforts.
The timing and sequence of analytical steps is also influenced by the level for which the final output is intended (see Box 3).

BOX 3
LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

- micro-level: local analysis for local solutions (e.g. van Dijk, Faria, Mukasa and Mugisha; Phnuyal)
- meso-level: local analysis with summarised conclusions that are used outside the community to secure support for local needs/solutions (e.g. Braden and Nelson, Cornwall)
- macro-level: local analysis for policy-level support and insights (e.g. Chase et al, Rengasamy et al).

The higher up the information moves, the more it will be filtered and presented in different ways to suit different audiences. Maintaining information that represents the opinions of the people becomes increasingly difficult, as Rengasamy et al warn. That is why in Brazil, many opportunities were planned to ensure that people recognised their views in the final conclusions (see Faria, this issue). So analysis becomes a continual cycle of 'construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction' of information, until it is ready for writing up as a plan.

· Who's involved?

For whom is the outcome of analysis in participatory processes intended? If it is local people and their lives, then how are they involved at each step in the analysis? If it is policy makers, then how are they linked into the learning process? Many important questions about who participates must be considered. Who sets the agenda? Who decides who to invite to meetings? Who is invited? Who is recording? Who checks the conclusions? Who writes the plan or report, or edits the video images? The articles offer different answers to these questions. They work with large community meetings or small groups of representatives, with many facilitators or with one, and with external or local facilitators.

Sometimes, the first step, the setting of the agenda, on which subsequent analysis is based, starts with community level input. Mukasa and Mugisha explain how a local agenda emerges through the use of an 'issues matrix', while in Brazil, the newly elected local council defined the core concern - a solid municipal plan. But agenda setting is not always in the hands of local people and can start with external organisations. For example, Braden and Nelson discuss how government departments and research institutes formulated the basic research problem. They explain how the research team then negotiated a broadening of this agenda to be more inclusive of local concerns. van Dijk describes a similar situation in Peru, with the external organisation initiating the contact and determining the broad natural resource management focus: '*Within the topics defined by the facilitators, the [irrigation water] users defined the bottlenecks and important issues and also decided when to have meetings and who would participate*.'

Some may jump to the hasty conclusion that this external agenda-setting is 'bad' practice. However, it is not precise agenda-setting that has taken place, but rather some limiting of the scope of the work to fit within the mandate of the external organisations that initiate the process. This offers great potential for influencing policy through participatory research and planning (see also *PLA Notes* 27, October 1996).

At the heart of participatory analysis, lies the question of who is making sense of the data. Often, work that may initially have been inclusive can shift towards analysis by facilitators or researchers. If this shift goes far, then concerns are justified. However, external people can play an important role. Rengasamy et al and Faria write that external researchers undertook the task of synthesising community information, that would have been too tedious or time-consuming for farmers. Cornwall describes another experience: '*In the first phase, with the listening survey, most of the analysis was* ***mine*** *and most of the learning was one-way* (original emphasis)', but as she continues '*… the knowledge I acquired helped me to facilitate better what was to follow*'. The notion that initial analysis by facilitators, be they local or external, can help to construct a

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.18–24, IIED London

better subsequent process for others is also illustrated clearly by Phnuyal. Therefore, analysis is rarely a process and product only of 'the people'. It inevitably involves a mix of community members, facilitators, community representatives, and others.

Three aspects of local participation in analysis require some attention. First is the question of who should be involved. The presence of some and the absence of others when agendas are set, cause and effect are analysed, and priorities determined, points out consideration of gender-balanced representation and that of the poor, the young, and the less mobile. Mukasa and Mugisha offer a powerful example of how a commitment to gender-balanced development motivated their organisation to find an approach for negotiating gender and age-related differences as part of community planning. Cornwall and van Dijk worked with separate community and interest groups.

Second, is the question of who wants to be involved in what can be quite a tedious task. External organisations often assume that there is a high degree of local desire and willingness to undertake analysis. But not everyone has the time or inclination, as Rengasamy et al note. Nor should this be considered a problem, as 100% participation is neither practical nor possible. Several contributions suggest using smaller groups to synthesise information or make initial suggestions for possible action plans (Faria, van Dijk, Cornwall, Braden and Nelson). What all stress, however, is giving the opportunity to as many as possible to voice their views on priority concerns or action points.

Third is the question of who has the capacity to analyse. In participatory development, there is a tendency to romanticise the existence of the 'village analyst'. Not all community members might have that capacity. One aspect of this limitation is highlighted by van Dijk, and Mukasa and Mugisha, when discussing the involvement of women. They stress that simply offering women the opportunity to debate and reflect did not mean they grabbed that chance. In Peru, exchange visits helped women to see '*that it is possible to tackle certain problems successfully, such as overcoming the fear of public speaking, and being able to express their ideas and points of view in assemblies*' (see van Dijk, this issue). Self-confidence is needed before participation is possible.

· Tools for analysis

If the findings from participatory research are important for local people, then by inference they should be involved in analysis, which brings us to the question of the choice of appropriate methods. A common criticism of PRA and similar approaches is that it imposes the use of certain tools and contexts (mainly groups), which are often culturally alien forms of analysis. Furthermore, as Rengasamy et al write: '*one of the very advantages of participatory methods is also a major drawback - the very wealth of information that is generated*'. How are the methods selected and applied to produce analysis? And which ones are effective at achieving the different purposes of analysis described above?

Two challenging insights about methods come from El Salvador and Peru. In El Salvador, the idea of finding good, analytical tools by opening a manual was rejected by a group of local facilitators (see Phnuyal, this issue). Instead, from their own understanding of local concerns and communication, they selected and created more appropriate methods and sequences. van Dijk takes an equally critical stance, stressing the valuing of local analytical methods: '*More important are the moments without the facilitators, when villagers are able to discuss in their own private or public space the issues raised … and reflect …..*'.

Unfortunately, few concrete examples exist about the link between such local forms of discussion and externally-facilitated moments and methods.

External methods are not, by definition, problematic. It lies more in how they are used. The H-form, for example, is a simple and effective tool for sharing views (see Guy and Inglis in Tips for Trainers, this issue), as are card-clusters (Schmidt, 1996). Video, too, as an external method offers potentially new ways of analysis, as shown by the 'Rivers of Life' work in Devonport (see Chase et al, this issue) and the video transect from Malawi (see Braden and Nelson, this issue). Capturing and transmitting local people's voices on film

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.18–24, IIED London

limits the interpretation and filtering of words that inevitably happens when writing notes. However, in the editing of video images still lies the power to filter and it is, therefore, an analytical step. As Sam Swaby notes (see Chase this issue), he enjoys *'picking a jewel from miles of tape'*. It is his perception, then, of a 'jewel' that stands as a summary of 'miles of tape'.

The articles reveal some striking similarities between the methods and sequences. In south London, Brazil, and India, PRA methods were used to elicit local views and information, which were then registered on cards and grouped per topic (see Cornwall, Faria, and Rengasamy et al, this issue). In both Brazil and India, a matrix-based analysis was combined with flow diagrams to structure the data and highlight cause-effect linkages. A third similarity is the use of synthesised reports for checking and probing further in London, Brazil, and Uganda (see Mukasa and Mughisa), although the form in which these reports are presented are, of course, distinct.

When planning which method to use, the different analytical purpose of each method needs to be considered. Which tools are used for opening up and exploring the range of local agendas? These can be seen as 'process tools', which introduce topics, and break down themes. And what are the tools for defining (narrowing and agreeing specific agendas)? These are designed to produce what we call 'data', which are used as the basis for action by participants and outsiders. In the Devonport example (see Chase et al, this issue), 'Rivers of Life' was used as the former and mapping as the latter. The maps were used for hard data about the agreed boundaries of 'our patch' (or neighbourhood) and about the resources that were available within 'our patch' and those that were not. In Malawi, maps were used to open agendas, and transects and drama to focus on key problems (see Braden and Nelson, this issue). In Brazil, mapping, seasonal calendar, 'dreams' and semi-structured interviews were used to open agendas, and card clustering and a linkage matrix to narrow the focus around action priorities (see Faria, this issue).

In each of these examples, the outputs from one method determine which method is most appropriate for the next step of analysis and synthesis. But for Rengasamy et al the tools proved multi-functional. Those that had been useful for collecting initial information, also '*proved to be useful tools to assist in disaggregating raw data, presenting it back to key informants, identifying key themes and finally identifying policy options*'.

Coming full-circle

In the quest for analytical methods, the purpose of participatory learning must remain central. How do we avoid ending up with a mass of material, which due to the sheer amount, may not get analysed either by insiders or outsiders (see Rengasamy et al)? This calls for a more careful choice of methods and planning of sequences to ensure that some meaning emerges. The use of methods should provide a series of building blocks for thinking and with which to discuss. Fewer tools, with more in-depth discussion, may be the way forward (see Braden and Nelson, this issue).

After a phase in the development of participatory methods when everyone was publishing handbooks and collecting games, tools, and diagrammatic evidence, this issue of the *PLA Notes* brings us back to the original idea - that the methods we use are only intended to help us think. Focusing on methods as carriers of information. from inside the community to the outsiders, was never the original idea behind participatory *learning*.

· The quality of analysis

The benefits that can, in theory, result from well-structured analytical processes - understanding, consensus and action - only happen after long and persistent efforts in discussing the meaning of collected data and uttered statements. Lengthy engagement is a striking feature of all the experiences described here. None happened in one session, a week or a month, stretching instead from six months to two years. Longer engagement also improved facilitation skills, and thus the depth and breadth of analysis (see van Dijk, Braden and Nelson). Perhaps then, one criterion of recognising participatory work that has been based on sound analysis is long term engagement?

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.18–24, IIED London

However, overdoing 'analysis' is easy, as Mukasa and Mugisha warn. Too much discussion and no action is a sure recipe for 'participation fatigue', with drooping motivation and dropping numbers. They stress the importance of supporting small local initiatives, while pursuing ongoing negotiation about intra-communal difference and consensus. It remains a tricky balance, though, to ensure that enough is discussed, deepened and understood, without it being stranded in a 'talk feast'.

Local motivation is also affected by the flexibility of the agenda to change as analysis progresses and new insights are gained. Fixed, externally-determined agendas from the onset may well narrow the discussions in such a way as to make it uninteresting for others. If the topics do not relate to their own lives and work, then participants, whether they are villagers or bureaucrats, will understandably be less willing to stay involved.

Not only the available time and flexibility affects the quality of analysis. The size of the area, distance between participants, and language are other practical considerations. Mukasa and Mugisha, and van Dijk, both worked in a limited number of communities, enabling them to invest much time in personal relationships and small group discussions. This would not be possible if participatory research or planning extends to cover a large geographic area. In El Salvador, however, development organisations managed to cover large areas as well as develop close relationships by working through trained local facilitators (see Phnuyal, this issue). Distance between different participating groups is another a factor. In Malawi, one village dropped out in the last stage of analysis about rural energy policies. Distance from the city, bad roads and poor weather conditions had thwarted its contribution to the last meeting (see Braden and Nelson).

Language is, of course, a well-known obstacle. It enters in the very first step. Alien concepts like 'sustainable agriculture' (Rengasamy et al) or 'well-being' (Cornwall) need to be (re)defined locally for them to be recognised and analysed. When translation is required, analysis can become particularly problematic as this creates at least two more filters through which words pass – from facilitators to translator to participants, and back. This can sometimes totally alter the meaning or original sense of urgency.

Careful selection and sequencing of steps and methods can sustain interest and participation, thus increasing the chances of meaningful analysis. Safe ways, based on local negotiation and decision-making structures, are needed to ensure that access can be gained by those that are normally excluded. Observation is vital to understand the culturally-specific avenues through which such challenges can be made, for example drama (Braden and Nelson), formalised speech opportunities (van Dijk), symbols (Mukasa and Mugisha), local themes (Phnuyal), or polished reports (Cornwall). And all this hinges on whether the attitudes and behaviour of facilitators make people simply *feel* important for a while or *make* them and their concerns important. Good analysis requires more than a good discussion (Mukasa and Mugisha).

· Learning for improvement

By revealing the purposes, sequence of methods, and participants in analysis, the articles here offer many ideas for improving analytical processes of change. Two other aspects require further attention, that of the match between good local analysis and outside expectations, and of facilitation for analysis.

Analysis and funding agencies

Several authors have written about the role of funding agencies, organisations or agencies involved. The irony is this: many organisations increasingly seek approaches that can improve the quality and outcome of analysis, yet the parameters within which they operate also, unwittingly at times, impose conditions that limit what is possible. As van Dijk points out, when discussing the importance of allowing locally-paced discussion: '*From an intervention point of view, it is crucial to include such moments of 'non-intervention'. But the consequence is a more time-consuming process than most development organisations are willing to allow.'*

But it is not only timing, it is also their models of analysis or the focus of attention. For

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.18–24, IIED London

example, the logframe that many funding agencies insist on for formulating projects and programmes, imposes a structure of cause-effect thinking that is quite alien in some contexts. Also, pre-determining a narrow research question that assumes certain concerns or definition of problems, will often need to be broadened to make it locally relevant and therefore, stimulate participation in analysis (see Rengasamy et al, Cornwall, and Braden and Nelson).

Does the Malawi case study (see Braden and Nelson) offer one way forward, despite taking much time? It was a participatory approach designed to find information on a predetermined agenda. Nevertheless by insisting on a multi-disciplinary approach and by including as many of the donors and partners in the process as possible, they became joint owners of the process. They began to understand 'time invested' in relation to 'benefits'.

Facilitation for analysis

Facilitators, be they local or external, also play a critical role in analysis. They suggest, they probe, they encourage, they redirect, they take notes. Yet their roles and how they learn to facilitate analytical processes are seldom documented and analysed in detail.

What is their role? As mentioned above, several authors note that the more skilled the facilitators, the more able to hand over and guide, and the more local the analysis became. Does, therefore the role shift from initiator and co-analyst to process guide? But sometimes facilitators need to help create the willingness to listen within organisations for whom these ways of working are new. *'My direct involvement helped create confidence in the methodology: … Having laid the groundwork, I was able to build capacity and shift control to community members and local workers in subsequent work …, limiting my input to training and advice on the process'* (see Cornwall, this issue). This implies perhaps that a much wider set of skills are needed, not only to make analysis possible within and between different groups, but also to create the space for the outcomes of analysis to be heard.

Second, how can facilitators be trained in the 'art of analysis'? Are facilitators being trained to perpetuate the use of a method, or should they understand the purpose of 'deconstructing and reconstructing' knowledge so that local people can critically review their own lives (see Phnuyal, this issue)? If it is the latter, then diagrams and videos are not so important for the descriptive outputs they produce, but rather to enable people to see choices. Facilitating analysis without sophisticated methods is possible, but not without insights about how analysis happens.

Analysis is a much more complex and culturally-specific skill than is often assumed. This raises a problematic contradiction for those organisations that expect rigorous results from facilitators of participatory processes. Fieldworkers are commonly on the bottom rung of the organisational career ladder. That is not usually a satisfying place for reflective, analytical people. If analysis through participatory process is to be scaled up into organisational learning, and into a better level of dialogue and response between the grassroots and policy makers, it is crucial that the role of the fieldwork is integrated into the career structure of organisations. Fieldworkers need to have on-going support, encouragement to publish, and to feel that what they experience in the field is integrated into organisational policy. There is a danger that, as long as fieldworkers and policy makers within development organisations are seen as working on different career scales or structures, there is little chance of upgrading and integrating critical learning from the field at the policy level of organisations. This raises the danger that the calibre of fieldworkers will be impoverished. In order to benefit fully from the potential of local level analysis, more understanding is needed about how to deal with the position of facilitators of analysis within organisations.

· Rethinking assumptions about analysis

What complexity is hidden in that one word 'analysis'! Many assumptions appear to be made that have been questioned in this issue of the *PLA Notes.* It does not happen automatically, it has to be structured; it is not contained within a method but in sequences

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.18–24, IIED London

and debates. It does not rely on 100% participation but can still be inclusive. It is not about listing priorities after a week of methods, but about consciously and publicly filtering information until a broad consensus for future action is reached.

By discussing the detailed processes 'inside' the participatory work, the experiences here show us that analysis does not have to be superficial. They encourage us to create meaning, in more conscious and critical ways, out of the mounds of information that emerge through diagramming, videos and discussion. Analysis becomes valuable when it helps local groups to take action or seek support. Information that is not useful for anyone is, after all, a waste of time. Participatory processes without prioritising analysis is a lost opportunity for external organisations and communities alike.

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Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.18–24, IIED London

5

Beyond the good discussion: the issues matrix for analysing intra-communal difference in PRAP

Grace Mukasa and Geoffrey Mugisha

Introduction

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) has the potential to facilitate a learning process in which power relations can shift not only between external development workers and local people, but also between local powerful people and marginalised groups. But what kind of 'participation' is needed for this to occur? 'Participation' describes, justifies, sells, and promotes what we do, how we do it, and with whom. A magic tool for its supporters, it is seen as an abdication of responsibility by the critics, and even manipulation by others who see that is makes local people **feel** important without **making** them important. And some do use it simply to convince donors that local people have a voice in decision-making, without this being the case.

For local people, opening up decision-making often means challenging the hitherto taken-for-granted gender and age relations of power - listening to those who are usually silent. For this to be possible, PRA must go beyond the short 'talking' and 'consultative' processes that are so common. With a systematic, consistent approach, in-depth analysis of the issues raised in initial discussions with outsiders becomes possible. Analysis by 'marginalised' groups (the young, the very poor, women, non-schooling children, and migrants) can then go beyond 'perceived' interests that are a result of socialisation, to a level where they pinpoint their 'real' interests. The outsider plays the role of the catalyst who facilitates but does not control the process.

Since it first embarked on its PRAP[1] journey, Redd Barna - Uganda has developed the use of the Issues Matrix to analyse intra-communal difference. By October 1997, we had used it in 14 of Uganda's 45 districts, in 30 villages and had trained up to 500 Ugandans[2] from community organisations, local community leaders, NGOs and government staff in its use.

The article explores how we use it in the facilitation of independent discussions of different gender and age groups, in order to arrive at communal conclusions. Using examples from different communities, it highlights the process of developing an Issues Matrix, showing its use as an analytical, planning and monitoring tool, and its benefits and challenges.

Developing the issues matrix

The PRAP process is constructed around five sequential phases (Sewagudde et al 1997):

- Phase 1: Preparation (laying the groundwork);
- Phase 2: Initial Field Immersion (use of PRA methods, initial draft Matrix);
- Phase 3: Analysis of Intra-communal Difference (analysis of the Matrix);
- Phase 4: Planning of Community and/or Group Action Plan(s) (planning around priorities in the Matrix); and,
- Phase 5: Implementation and Monitoring (using the Matrix).

From Phase 2 on, local people work in five interest groups, deciding themselves where they feel comfortable: older women, young women, older men, young men, and children. The group composition varies between

[1] Participatory Rural Appraisal and Planning

[2] We have also trained 36 Norwegian youth under a programme which uses learning experiences from Uganda to evolve participatory approaches suited for Norway.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.25–30, IIED London

communities. They use criteria like marriage, age and activity status to choose the groups. Our starting point is that these broad groups represent relatively similar needs, interests and aspirations - much better than random groups or one large gathering. Once the groups start discussing and thinking, smaller interest groups emerge who work within the broad groups.

Each group discusses and analyses its situation, while facilitators capture the issues and record them in the matrix. The matrix is a visualised summary to make it easier to share the different issues in the wider community forum.

The Issues Matrix is a table, which captures, in a summary form, all the issues of concern that arise out of the initial application of PRA methods by interest groups (see Table 1). The facilitators fill it in, on a continuous basis, at the end of each day of the field immersion (Phase 2). The facilitator(s) capture the issues that arise during the community exercises and discussions. They share them with the group for agreement before filling in the matrix. At the end of the field immersion phase, the complete matrix then represents a sum total of all the issues raised during the immersion. It thus works as a summarised record of the situation analysis of the community *at that time*, and is developed in later phases.

· Why develop an issues matrix?

Any community consists of people who share some values, interests and problems, but also have differences and conflicts of interest. This is particularly true for 'poverty', which despite having the same characteristics is experienced by different people in unique ways. A cause-and-effect analysis of poverty by different groups will therefore yield different views that can form the basis for group-specific solutions. This type of analysis helps to partly overcome the problem of 'marginal' groups who cannot enjoy the benefits of generalised development, despite continual 'elimination' affecting community well-being.

The identification of marginalised groups' issues must also consider those issues of some 'supposedly' active members of dominant group who are, in reality, excluded from decision-making. We have noticed, for example, that younger men often complain that development practitioners exclude them on the assumption that they belong to the 'men's' group. Yet they rarely have a voice in community meetings. They are concerned about school dropout rates and resulting unemployment issues.

Table 1. Part of an issues matrix: Kyakatebe, Masaka District (Guijt et al 1994)

Issues	*Children*	*Younger Women*	*Younger Men*	*Older Women*	*Older Men*
Lack of clean water (poor sources)	x	x	x	x	x
Inadequate facilities at school	x	x	x	x	x
Lack of school fees	x	x	x	x	x
Orphans	x	x	x	x	x
Large families	x	x	x	x	x
High school fees	x		x	x	x
HIV/AIDS		x	x	x	x
High level of school drop-outs	x	x	x	x	
Inadequate health facilities		x	x	x	x
Lack of market for farm products/handicrafts	x	x	x	x	
Poor living conditions		x	x	x	x
Land shortage/fragmentation	x	x	x		x
Lack of fuel wood		x	x	x	
Unqualified teachers	x	x		x	

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.25–30, IIED London

They feel that local chiefs unfairly demand tax from them during the rainy planting season when they have little cash income. Yet they lack an avenue to communicate this to the chiefs as their parents do not allow them to speak in public fora. The simplified assumptions about who is and is not marginalised, hides the absolute power of parents over younger members, like children, younger women, younger men, in the community.

The matrix provides a good basis for including the analyses of such differences. Through independent analysis, the marginalised groups can advocate for their issues in the decision-making process. They use the opportunity to analyse, reflect, and gain confidence and present to the whole community. For example, in Oseera village, one older woman finally plucked up courage and took advantage of a general community meeting to air women's concern about AIDS, child marriage and bearing many children: "Now we shall break the gourd and let it all come out" (Chandler and Kisadha 1996). Her reference to the gourd, a local symbol that is revered and protected, was a passionate call for men to share in the discussion and in the responsibility for sexuality issues. The call was for the community to open up to discuss what it has hidden away and kept inside.

The Issues Matrix also develops trust and respect between facilitators and the community - as it demonstrates immediately whether facilitators are truly listening. It reinforces the interactive, learning and empowering process, by moving beyond data extraction, and enables group relations to improve and crystallise around a common understanding of their issues.

The issues matrix for situation analysis

In our community work, we have followed several steps with the community to reflect on why groups raise certain issues. At the beginning of Phase 3 and in a community meeting, the groups identify those issues that are shared by all groups. They also identify the partly shared issues, and recognise the unique group-specific issues. In separate sessions, thereafter, facilitators encourage each group to analyse why a particular group(s) raised an issue, and the impact of group-specific concerns on their own group and the wider community. This helps to stimulate greater appreciation of other people's concerns and, where possible, reach consensus on the issues.

This process occurs in many separate interest groups discussions (usually once or twice a week). Sometimes combined group meetings take place, for example one with younger and older women or younger women with younger men together. They try to resolve differences and seek joint solutions. The conclusions of the smaller groups are fed back to the wider community meeting on a regular basis (usually once a month). The groups use the community forum to justify and validate their specific issues. The others respond and clarify why they do or do not consider an issue raised by other group(s) to be relevant. In some instances they fail to reach consensus and agree to consult further amongst groups. Finally, each group/community has a final Matrix to use for planning.

In a community meeting, they categorise the issues on the Matrix by theme or sector (such as water, health, agriculture, family life, poverty). Back in the smaller groups they use diagrams to analyse each issue in terms of cause-and-effect and the linkages between sectors. Finally the groups prioritise the issues, using matrix scoring and pair-wise rankings. They prioritise according to issues and opportunities, based on local realities and choices and these are the ones they use in the next phase (Phase 4) of planning.

The issues matrix as a practical starting point

While the community undertakes this long analysis and planning process, it also scrutinises concerns that need immediate attention. We have found the issues matrix helped communities to identify issues that are:

1. life-threatening
2. within the means and ability of the community to solve (relatively cheap and limited time needed)
3. shared by the majority
4. important due to multiplier effects, i.e. solving it will solve other related issues (for example, boiling drinking water can

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.25–30, IIED London

solve diarrhoeal diseases, reduce health expenditure and school absenteeism, etc.)
5. intangible but have the potential to promote development (for example, unity).

The above criteria were used in Bulende-Bugosere village (Iganga District) to start implementing some activities on a small scale. Meanwhile, the unresolved issues were carried forward into the subsequent planning sessions.

The issues matrix as a benchmark for community-based planning

After group-specific ranking, each group chooses representatives for the community planning committee. Armed with a thorough analysis and therefore understanding of the groups' prioritised issues and solutions, the representatives are in a strong position to participate in the planning. Their role is to further the issues, lobby and advocate for their inclusion in the Community Action Plan. The specific groups also make their own parallel plans to deal with those on which they may never gain community consensus. Hence, Redd Barna's support for the Group Action Plans that develop in parallel to the Community Action Plan. The facilitators facilitate the use of a simplified version of the Logical Framework Approach in this planning stage (Sewagudde et al 1997).

The issues matrix for participatory monitoring and evaluation

At different stages in the process, community members and facilitators may want to know the patterns of change in the community. The Issues Matrix is an ideal, user friendly tool for the local people to monitor what they have done. They analyse their progress using five simple questions: Who, What, Where, When and How much? It represents the baseline situation at the immersion stage of the PRAP process. The local people systematically update, and develop a new Issues Matrix that confirms, amends and captures new issues.

We have noticed the deletion of:

- issues they have addressed;
- issues they have never addressed, after analysing why this is the case;
- issues that were 'smuggled' into the matrix by the facilitators (through facilitator biases and translation problems);
- issues that require outsider support to solve (very costly issues, political issues like insecurity and government policy);
- controversial issues that need much time for consensus building, such as polygamy and younger women's access to family planning;
- issues that need to be addressed continuously, such as road clearing, water sources clearing, improving agricultural practices; and,
- seasonal issues.

Through this monitoring process, we have seen the value of a long analysis phase (Phase 3) as it makes the community understand their community and the patterns of development better than before. Hence their ability to monitor the changes smoothly.

· The impact of the issues matrix

The benefits of the updated Issues Matrix accrue to local people and outside facilitators alike. In our different experiences, we have noticed the following impacts through using the Matrix:

- It illuminates the sector gaps in service delivery, and serves as a basis for the community to demand and put pressure on the government extension staff to deliver services.
- It promotes a common understanding of issues, ultimately increasing unity based on an appreciation of diversity.
- It promotes the continual, not just one-off, development of people's development plans based on their perceptions of their own realities.
- It mobilises the local people to seek solutions that are both internal and external to the community.
- The community recognises that the many issues that have been bedevilling their lives are within their means to solve without outside support. Many are cheap in terms of money and time, and do not rely on high educational skills. In some cases a solution lies within the ability and

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.25–30, IIED London

willingness of one group to support another.

Furthermore, the 'marginals' gain confidence by seeing that their problems are also faced by others. Even if issues are not resolved immediately, having a chance to share them openly with the rest of the community is important. When the smaller groups develop their own plans, the rest of the community is less resistant as it appreciates the background to the issue. The community meetings where issues are presented from each group act as a catalyst to the marginalised to experience a new lease of life. The community begins to respect them and appreciate their human worth - increasing self-confidence and participation.

The analysis helps group representatives (or 'Local Planners' as they are sometimes called) to conceptualise individual group issues and those of other groups. During planning sessions, they can argue for changes on the basis of having 'researched' these. By having demystified planning, normally considered a privileged skill of the elite, as something they have done often before in their lives (though more individualistic and less systematic than with the Matrix), they are in a better position to challenge dominant groups.

Children's interests

Children, as an interest group, amaze the community by their ability to perceive and understand their situation. They sometimes mention unique issues which the other groups 'dare' not mention. They highlight not only issues that affect them, but also those affecting the larger community. The Matrix highlights the fact that supposedly 'ignorant' children have identified many issues also identified by the 'knowledgeable' adults. The difference, however, between them and the adults arises when deeper analysis is done. The children's wording of issues and perception of the wider impacts on the community are usually different. For example, in the development of the Community Action Plan in Bulende-Bugosere, a children's representative gave his views on polygamy, which had generated passionate arguments between men (supporters) and women (critics). The child said: *"For us children it may not matter when our fathers marry more than one wife, if they can afford it. What is important to us is that we are not discriminated against, especially in matters of education, where the children of the youngest wife are usually favoured" (Baliraine Charles, P5, Namagonjo Primary School).*

Perhaps the response was due to 'perceived' interests, and a girl's view might have been different. However, it is important that the child pushed beyond the issue of marriage and focused on child-related impact. He very articulate because the children had raised and discussed the issue at length in their group. The older community members begin to *see and hear* the children through such interaction.

Women's interests

The Issues Matrix also serves as an advocacy tool for women's interests. The women and men compare and discuss issues more freely. The Matrix gives anonymity to individual women who mentioned sensitive issues, hence protecting them against possible abuse by husbands or parents. The topic of women's many roles often dominates the sharing sessions, and the community begins to look at it as an underlying factor for many other wrongs. Their workload is put within the social context within which they work, and has, for example, helped highlight multi-sector linkages, hence realising the importance of co-ordination between different extension services and activities to not overburden women.

As analysis deepens, the vulnerability of younger women, with virtually no power to influence the course of their lives, also appears. They have a very 'quiet voice' and display a deep lack of self-esteem during community meetings. They find it harder to consistently pursue their interests. For example, during the Community Action Plan development process in Kyakatebe village (Masaka district), the younger women's issues were virtually ignored in the local development plan. This happened despite the fact that they had had very animated and meaningful discussions in the initial immersion. They lacked the sustained will and ability to exert pressure on the larger community to appreciate their issues.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.25–30, IIED London

· Challenges

The development of an Issues Matrix does not guarantee the inclusion of all the issues from the interest groups into Community Action Plans. As the process unfolds, it is common that issues from younger women and children's groups are sidelined. The analysis must be accompanied by ongoing advocacy for vulnerable groups. The groups themselves need time to build confidence to articulate their concerns in public. Smaller group facilitation is crucial for them to gain the confidence before exposure to the larger community. Much depends on sensitive and patient facilitation.

The process of analysing intra-communal difference is time consuming, with few tangible benefits to show for the many hours of community labour. Therefore, facilitators face continuous mobilisation and must work on practical activities that yield some tangible results. Redd Barna Uganda's experiences in Masaka District are worth learning from because they combine analysis with mobilisation activities.

· Conclusion

The Issues Matrix is not only a tool for the analysis of intra-communal difference; it promotes consensus building and paves the way for long term community planning and action. However, its eventual outcome depends on the values, attitudes and behaviour of the facilitators and the general willingness of the community to embrace change.

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Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.25–30, IIED London

6

Finding a voice through analysis of the everyday experience of poverty

Maria Chase, Joan Price and Sam Swaby, with Su Braden

Introduction

In 1998 Oxfam UKI[1] undertook a strategic review of their work in 15 countries, consulting partners, supporters, their own staff and the poor themselves. The questions being asked were:

- How is poverty changing?
- What is your perception of what Oxfam is doing about poverty?
- What should Oxfam be doing in the future?

Various methods were used: stakeholder survey in 15 countries, peer review and supporter surveys. This article discusses a method known as 'Global Voices', which aimed to bring the voices of the real experts on poverty – the poor themselves – to the strategic review. The process involved training Oxfam's local partners in the uses and processes of participatory video. The partners kept the video equipment, which they continue to use.

Each group was trained by students and staff of the University of Reading's Master's course 'Television and Video for Development' who accompanied the partners to the field and supported them during their first participatory video work with local people, including:

- street children and youths in Nairobi, Kenya;
- Maasai pastoralists and youth employment co-operatives in Tanzania;
- the inhabitants of Devonport, Plymouth in the UK.

The findings of the Global Voices contributions from all three countries revealed some surprising similarities in their considerations of Oxfam's three questions. For example, in each group the question of land and their sense of identity in relation to 'their patch' was analysed, but in each case a sense of growing insecurity about their right of access to 'their patch' was expressed. Each group also spoke of a strong desire to do things for themselves, despite facing increasing constraints; and all the groups expressed a sense of 'poverty of voice', a frustration at not being heard. Nowhere was this frustration expressed more strongly than by the Devonport group.

The account given here examines the Devonport experience, the training processes, the ways in which they were used by the local partners in Devonport, and the analysis that resulted. It is written through the voices of three team members.

Oxfam's partners in Devonport

Devonport is amongst the poorest regions in Britain which were granted money under the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB). This fund aims to rebuild such areas, not only in terms of physical infrastructure, but also access to education, health and jobs. Oxfam's partner in Devonport is Devonport Action Against Poverty (DAPS) which works in several of the SRB areas of the borough. The SRB funding represents the largest input of money to the area since the end of its days as a busy trading sea port and naval dockyard in the 1980s.

[1] Oxfam UKI (United Kingdom and Ireland) is one of the largest non-governmental development organisations.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.31–36, IIED London

DAPS is housed in a flat of a grey apartment block. The offices are occupied in the day time by staff and volunteers. In the evenings they are used by local residents. Residents also have the keys and at night busy parents can take it in turns to work in peace with access to telephones and computers for their community activities, such as organising local junior league football and the Credit Union. DAPS also share their office space and some of their aims and objectives with the Citizen's Advice Bureau (see Box 1).

BOX 1

The twin aims of the **Citizen's Advice Bureau** are:
to ensure that individuals do not suffer through lack of knowledge of their rights and responsibilities, or of the services available to them, or through an inability to express their needs effectively;
to exercise a responsible influence on the development of social policies and services, both locally and nationally.

Devonport Action Against Poverty has the additional following aim:
to alleviate and combat poverty in Devonport with the principle objectives of:
empowering people in Devonport to combat poverty on their own behalf
challenging policies and practices which keep people in poverty.

Training in participatory video

The participatory video team from DAPS was formed for the 'Global Voices' project from volunteers, workers and local residents. The original DAPS Video team[2] included:

- Joan Price: a Citizens Advice Bureau worker based at DAPS;
- Sam Swaby: a local resident and volunteer;
- Liz Brown: a part-time worker involved with youth and music projects
- Maria Chase: a local resident and single parent, volunteer at DAPS
- Maria Coles: a local resident and volunteer at DAPS.

Three of the original DAPS video team, Sam Swaby, Joan Price and Maria Chase, have written about their own learning around the analysis of poverty that arose from the initiative.

Sam Swaby, a father of teenage children, was perhaps the most sceptical member of the group who gathered for the initial participatory video training. He offers a frank account of his thoughts over the first three weeks:

"A group of individuals, all with their own reasons for taking part and from different backgrounds, working together for the first time with one link, DAPS. (My thoughts: *Chances of learning anything useful - nil, but we get to keep the equipment so who cares?*)

Then the pressure started. There were lots of other things I should have been doing. But we had a tight timetable to produce a film and someone was telling me how to use a video camera - when I'd had one for years. (My thoughts: *Chances of learning anything useful - nil, but we get to keep the equipment so who cares*?)

Then the process started, still under pressure, added to the inner pressure of trying to cope with working with each other, which was not easy. Trying to stay in control of myself, not to say something that would upset others, but seeing how effective this process was at making people contribute in different ways, using different skills, but all having to contribute. (My thoughts still: *Chances of learning anything useful - not high, but we get to keep the equipment so who cares*?)"

By now the training has graduated into field work practice and the team is passing their skills on to others. Sam's personal account continues:

"Out in the wide world of Devonport, the houses and the streets, using participation with people who are not part of our video group. We are ensuring that they have their say. We take pleasure in watching what we've taped and picking a jewel from miles of tape. We are realising the power not only of the video, but

[2] Clare O'Farrell helped as post-graduate student from the MA Television and Video for Development at Reading University. Additional training was offered by staff from the course.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.31–36, IIED London

more importantly of the process. We are observing as tongue-tied 'nothing worth saying', 'what do I know' people, flower and express their emotions, their desires, their fears. It's hard to believe what's going on, but we can watch it over and over again on the tape. So it is happening.

In one area of Devonport, Pottery Quay, down by the dockyard, we have to do something more to take the process forward. Can we use their video to encourage them to challenge what's happening them? They are an isolated group of local residents who feel 'no one listens' - but they have found a voice. The video was the key, but the process we learned has been the passport, enabling, empowering whatever the 'buzz' word is. It's working. (My thoughts again: *Chances of learning anything useful - in fifty plus years of living, this is probably the most important thing I have ever learned.)"*

Joan Price has lived in Devonport for most of her married life. She, too, became a founding member of DAPS video team. Joan looks back at the process known as 'Rivers of Life' which was used with the DAPS group in the initial training to open up discussions about broad issues, to get the group to know and to listen to each other, and to discuss issues around authorship.

The group worked in pairs, one facilitating the other to record their lives as a drawing of a river from its source to the sea. The source was seen as birth, the sea was where the person drawing saw their life at that moment, or where they hoped it might lead. The lives were then recounted on camera either by the person or the facilitator. In feedback after seeing the video recordings of these narratives, the group discussed what they felt about authorship, what they felt when someone else told their story, and about the content.

Joan writes: "I came to the Global Voices video project with a good insight of the problems that poverty causes . I felt I was aware of the main concerns of people who lived in Devonport. However, as part of our training we used some PRA techniques including 'Rivers of Life' and mapping. I have been a CAB [Citizens Advice Bureau] worker for several years and I am used to listening to the most intimate and private details of peoples lives. These PRA tools such as the 'Rivers of Life', in which the image of a river from its source to the sea is used as a metaphor for the story of someone's complete life-story, with all its twists and turns, sluggish moments and rapids, gave me new insights. It made me realise how people go in and out of poverty over their lifetime and also re-emphasised how decisions at a crucial moment in time effect … the rest of a person's life."

· Setting the boundary

Sam comments on the mapping process: "In this process we were asked to indicate resources within the area we thought of as Devonport and that we would describe as 'local', and then to list those resources for which we would have to leave the area. But just to identify an area which we could all agree as 'ours' was difficult and raised issues which led to good participation.

In the end, the mapping led us to identify which resources such as shops, doctors, or leisure facilities are present in the area we had finally defined as 'ours', and which were missing in the local community. From this we were able to identify gaps in provision and we went on to look at what was causing this lack of resources, or who might be able to influence the provision of these resources. When we later used this exercise in various parts of our community, working with a variety of local groups, it was interesting to see the common issues that were raised from the different areas.

We were now able to understand that our community in what we had defined as "our area" is loosely divided into three separately identifiable areas, each with a different relationship to funding [see Table 1].

It was interesting, nevertheless, to see common issues raised by local groups from the different areas, despite the very different amounts of money spent in the specific locations. Differences lay in the perceptions of causes and solutions."

Joan Price explains how she analysed her own learning during the process of using participatory video with other residents in the

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.31–36, IIED London

community. "Our present government says they want continual engagement with the people over the consequences of their laws and policies. If this is true, I believe that Participatory Video and the use of other participatory learning and action techniques could be a key to enabling local people to analyse and represent their experiences.

Until now we have been governed from above and the Government only engages with the people at the time of a general election. Local government at parish or ward, district and county council levels are mainly controlled by the imposition of the party 'whip'[3] or by individual concerns - councillors don't even seem to do any research on matters of public concern. There is much talk at the level of local government officers of consultation, but too often the right questions aren't asked, decisions are made elsewhere or the 'contract culture'[4] intervenes. Nowhere is this more true than in areas with a high level of deprivation and poverty and yet so many of the Government's policies are targeted on reducing inequality.

The mapping emphasised that what I had always considered to be the historical boundaries of Devonport were fundamentally still as real to the people living here, despite the changes that had been imposed and the limitations of access that now existed, and despite, importantly, the new boundaries that had been defined as the areas for the Single Regeneration Budget plans and programmes. This analysis shaped our Global Voices project and it was the old historically-defined Devonport that we looked at throughout the process. As a result, we realised that divisions and resentments were being created by the imposition of new boundaries which were defining the areas being targeted for Single Regeneration Budget funding, while other neighbouring areas were being left out. The most important of the newly imposed boundaries - the wall of the dockyard was seen by all the participants in the mapping as a symbol of the land that had been lost to 'their patch'. It became a theme for the final video.

I had read about the current methods of funding but my problem was to understand how the system worked. I was unaware of these new arguments put forward by the people who were intended to be the beneficiaries.

As our work progressed and we began to use the methods that we had learnt in our own training with other groups around the borough. I found that the research we did gave a name - 'structural adjustment' - to what I had seen as the exploitation of British people by the finance houses and financial institutions and put it in a global context.

Before taking part in the processes we learnt, using PLA methods to research and analysis with local people, and video to review with them, and to represent their findings, I hadn't been aware of their fears and I had rarely seen people in their home environment. Making the video gave me an insight into this and much else besides.

We developed our analysis outwards from the Rivers of Life and the maps, to filming with people from local groups throughout the Borough. I saw the problems of pollution and poor living conditions at first hand. I saw it at night and early in the morning. For the external sequences we trudged the streets and filmed to set the scene. Fortunately for us the weather was good but our audiences did not get the feeling of eternal greyness that can overwhelm the place for much of the year."

[3] Person who belongs to a political party and tries to get all party members voting the same way on an issue.

[4] The contract culture arises because no jobs are given for longer than a two year contract, even those created under in the community under the SRB.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.31–36, IIED London

Table 1. Three areas of Davenport and the impacts of SRB funding

	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3
Methods of funding	where large amounts of money have been made available through SRB funding	where no money has been made available apart from normal local government funding	where small amounts of money, placed almost directly into the hands of the local community , have been available
Effects of funding	Many local people stated that the process had empowered specific groups of residents but had left the vast majority with even less power, as the more powerful groups had become the power brokers for the entire area.	Amongst groups in this area, Pottery Quay, the local government was often identified as the Area Housing Office, which was seen as a major block on any progress towards better conditions. 'They don't care about us. They have the money but they don't want to give it to us because of where we live' . This was an often repeated theme.	More local people appeared to take a wider perspective on the causes and solutions to problems of funding. More people in this area attended meetings both in and beyond Devonport, and are often funded to do so by local community organisations. As a result they often stated that redress lay beyond local or even sometimes national authorities.

· Outcomes of the process - how did new analysis produce change?

Maria Chase, a single parent and volunteer at DAPS, writes about some of the outcomes of the Global Voices participatory video project from her point of view:

"The object of the video process was to give people living in poverty in Devonport a voice and forum to raise their issues, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to say what they thought would raise their quality of life, and therefore enter into the anti-poverty debate.

It was quickly evident that the community members had a far more astute knowledge of where money could be spent to improve their quality of life. Tragically, although a great deal of money has been sunk into the area, partly, perhaps, because for a time it was categorised as the 'most deprived Ward in England', these huge sums have had little positive impact on the community as a whole, especially on its most vulnerable members. The film that was finally made illustrated this point starkly, as well as raising a whole range of other issues." (see Box 2)

The processes motivated participants not only to explore issues but to work out strategies which can change their situation and take them forward. For example, the play back of the completed video to Pottery Quay residents, who had been involved in its making, motivated them to start a Tenants' Group. They had seen that they needed to build on the collective activity of the Global Voices project and try to address problems they had analysed around pollution from the nuclear submarine base, lack of safe play space for smaller children, and a club for the older ones. They decided to act, as well, to challenge the practices which adversely affect their community, such as their relationships with the housing office over repairs to their flats and houses.

The most empowering aspect of the process was the local ownership of material produced during the research, filming and the making of the final tape. This was reflected in the uses both DAPS and other participants made of the tapes.

The impact of the video and its introduction by one of the community members, at the Oxfam Assembly, showed how powerful and humbling the voice of real people living in poverty can be. It demonstrated the value and importance of their input into the anti-poverty debate.

Each time the film has been shown it has had much the same effect. It generated a high level

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.31–36, IIED London

of debate at the People's Summit, in Birmingham, during the European Anti-poverty Network's seminar. The DAPS video team also showed the tape at the Plymouth Community Health Council and raised debates around health issues and links with poverty. As a result, the Council have asked to learn to use PLA with video themselves in order to set up a dialogue with local residents around health issues.

BOX 2
LISTENING FOR A CHANGE

"...It is actually the land. This is the heart of Devonport and we are being denied that heart." (a resident speaking about the Ministry of Defence occupation of land for the naval dockyard and stores).

"It used to be a thriving community before the bloody dockyard wall got built and sort of divided the people."

"The wall stretches for three or four miles right to Pottery Quay and it's a bit like the Berlin Wall because it keeps the dockyard in and the people out."

"I'm sick, fed up of seeing hypodermic needles lying everywhere and my children actually picking them up."

"We elect our governments but it seems whoever gets in, they conveniently forget about the people who voted for them, unless you've got the money and can do something for them. Well, we did do something for them - we got them in in the first place."

Joan Price adds her thoughts on the outcomes of the project: "Later last summer we showed the video at the Oxfam International Assembly. It had a massive impact because it brought home to the audience the universality of the problems of all people who live in poverty. The problems of land, debt and ill thought-out public policies were shared with those in the third world. Our video was instrumental in changing the policy of Oxfam regarding their major concerns as being overseas. Their representatives from the third world welcomed this change and ending of the feeling of colonialism.

Now we have been asked to take part in an Interactive Exhibition on Health Action Zones and Local Involvement.[5] Both Health Action Zones and Our Healthier Nation have as their targets the reduction of health inequalities, particularly those related to poverty. Yet when I look at the list of those invited to attend I can see very few representatives of people living in poverty. Our video is the one way they can attend and have their views listened to. They have a captive audience and although the video may only give 30 people's views but it also shows the background of their living and their analysis of the problems and possible solutions".

Finally, **Sam Swaby**: "The people of Pottery Quay now operate without our support. Their group is struggling to retain a wide membership, but so is every other residents group in the area I guess.

I have become involved in a 'training project' funded by Social Services, ...working with other agencies to provide a training that local people could enjoy and want to take part in. It is based almost entirely on the participatory techniques of the Global Voices training. And our style is based on the principles: there are no experts, nobody has all the answers, and between us all we can make some good guesses at them.

We use open questions, all those 'Ws'[6] . We are planning our third session as I write. As none of the facilitators had 'teaching' experience, we worked out what felt good to us, around the participatory format, and there you go!

Looking back on our shared experience, I still haven't done any of the editing, in fact I've done very little actual video operating, but what a life changing event the 'video project' was. I wouldn't have missed it for the world."

- **Joan Price, Maria Chase** and **Sam Swaby,** DAPS, 69 Granby Street, Devonport, Plymouth, UK with **Su Braden,** who compiled this article.

[5] New government initiatives.

[6] What, where, when, why, who, how?

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.31–36, IIED London

7

Interaction for irrigation: how analysis guided a construction project in Peru

Natasha van Dijk

Introduction

Participatory techniques and approaches, such as PRA, are often only used in the planning phase of a project. Yet the information generated during the early stages may only become meaningful later in the development process. This article describes the analysis that took place during different stages in the rehabilitation of a small-scale irrigation system in the Peruvian Andes. The users analysed not only the issues related to the physical construction of the infrastructure but also the subsequent 'social construction' of their technical ideas. Initially hesitant in their dealings with external organisations, they became keen initiators of joint debate and analysis.

As an external organisation, we gained insights around two critical questions:

- Who defines what are the important issues?
- What is the role of intervening organisations in creating 'moments' that allow local people to generate and analyse information, and to introduce new perspectives in this process of analysis?

Our experiences show that if participation is consistently emphasised in *all* phases of the project - and not only in the appraisal and planning phases - local people will increasingly become the owners[1] of the changes they propose. They will be able to influence more strongly local development through their own decisions, taken on the basis of their own criteria, criteria which flow from a collective or individual process of analysis.

The process of participatory intervention

Early in 1997, the Institute of Water and Environmental Management (IMA), a governmental agency in the Peruvian Andes, received technical and financial assistance from the Dutch Development Organisation (SNV/Peru) to start a two year pilot project. It aimed to develop and apply participatory methodologies in which equal opportunities were created for men and women to improve their natural resource management capacities. The project arose because several internal and external evaluations concluded that more emphasis should be given to strengthening the social processes in villages and emphasising gender roles in intervention strategies. In short, it was felt that interventions should become less engineer-designed and imposed, and based more on the real needs of the local people involved.

Three villages are involved in the project, including the 47-family community of Huarancca, living on barren mountain slopes at 3200 metres, which is the focus of this study. The villages are located in one of the IMA's intervention areas and were selected according to a number of criteria, including local experience with technical assistance and the ecological zone. Permission to work in each village was requested only from the village council, as there is no higher level authority which co-ordinates development aid interventions.

Our work started with a participatory appraisal and planning phase that lasted 6 months. This

[1] Ownership refers to the feeling that the responsibility to manage and maintain the project lies with the users. This is important in that it makes people analyse and act more autonomously in problem solving and developing the system, a condition for sustainable development.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.37–42, IIED London

was followed by a process of interactive design, a construction phase, and the current stage of clarifying water management to enable effective use of the physical infrastructure. For each phase, I will explain when and what kind of analysis took place and describe who took what role.

· Laying the groundwork

At the outset, the objectives were discussed together with the participatory nature of the process proposed by IMA. Participatory techniques, such as mapping and visits to individual plots, were used to form a clear picture of the availability and use of natural resources. Venn diagrams and wealth ranking helped us understand how people were organised, how village institutions functioned, and how people viewed external support organisations.

The information was almost entirely generated in separate groups of women and men. The team[2] always tried to move beyond questions of 'Where?' and 'How many?', to more analytical questions, such as: 'What is your personal opinion?', 'Why do you like this or why not?', 'What could be an alternative?', 'What have you done to try and solve this problem?', 'What kind of leadership do you need, and why?'. This qualitative approach gave everyone better insights into how different factors influenced the local situation.

Periodically, the information generated was fed back at community council meetings. After villagers presented the results of their group work, discussions led to key conclusions and main bottlenecks.

The facilitators were crucial in guiding the process and asking questions so as to reach the desired results: an increased awareness among the villagers about the different type of intervention proposed by the IMA (with an emphasis on participation), and therefore a more active and more responsible role. Another outcome has been a better understanding for both insiders and outsiders of the village dynamics and the factors that influence local level management of communal resources. Organisational levels, individual leadership capabilities, local rules and regulations and the role of outsiders were some issues raised by local people.

During this first stage, the agenda for all the meetings and the methodology was defined by the facilitators. This included defining the main themes as the availability and local level management of natural resources. The team decided not to look at other subjects, such as health, which fall outside the scope of the expertise offered by the IMA. The team was aware of its steering role in this phase, but felt it was mythical to expect people, especially in the Sierra of Peru (where they are used to playing a passive role, waiting for the outsiders to come and bring services, whether needed or not), to take a leading role from the outset.

Thus the facilitators took up the role of guiding the analysis of the main topics to be discussed (including gender relations), and defining the methodology (separate women and men's groups, alternated with general assemblies for feedback sessions). Within the topics defined by the facilitators, the users defined the bottlenecks and important issues and also decided when to have meetings and who would participate.

Promoting analysis and reflection

The external steering of the process resulted in women participating for the first time in analysing village level dynamics, the daily work they do and the role they play within decision making processes. It was also one of the first occasions during which male farmers were encouraged to take on a more open attitude about the abilities and knowledge of women. This was achieved by working in segregated groups, followed by plenary sessions for collective reflection.

During the assessment phase, extension events were organised, using puppet theatre and video performances, to discuss topics such as women's roles in the family and the

[2] The project team consisted of a co-ordinator, a civil engineer, an agronomist or forest engineer, and an extensionist specialised in organisation, social dynamics and gender. We do not make a distinction between facilitators and engineers, as every person of the team has technical as well as facilitating functions.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.37–42, IIED London

functioning of community organisations. After each performance, we stimulated discussion about the local situation.

Farmer exchange visits with other villages were crucial for raising awareness on the technological innovations available locally (such as improved potato seed storage and glasshouses for vegetable production). For the women, exchange visits, particularly with other women's groups, 'opened their eyes to the outside world', as they expressed it themselves. They saw that it is possible to tackle certain problems successfully, such as overcoming the fear of public speaking, and being able to express their ideas and points of view in assemblies.

Each and every exchange visit consisted of a preparatory phase with the farmers: 'What would you like to learn about a certain topic?' and 'What would you like to present to the others about your village or your experience?'. This last question helped emphasise what was already happening in the village, and that people have valuable local knowledge. Each exchange was followed by a participatory evaluation, and a feedback session back home, where the villagers could inform others and discuss what they learned. In this way we tried to optimise the learning and analysis impact.

· Planning the intervention

The planning phase started with a summary of the work completed during the first four months. Again, we worked in separate groups of men and women, and again the facilitators dominated. Nevertheless, the list of local problems needing solutions clearly came from negotiations between men and women about priorities. It did not, for example, include soil conservation measures, which are part of the traditional package of services offered by the IMA. The final outcome was a village action plan defined by those who attended the assembly (95% of the villagers), using local criteria for priority setting: irrigation, drinking water, improved village rules and regulations, and organisational strengthening.

The village action plan included only short term activities. People first wanted to prove that they were able, with the help of the IMA to tackle some key issues. They felt that only by evaluating their capacity to lead and implement, would they be able to adjust and extend their plan according to further needs. This shows that people will reflect critically and analyse their possibilities and limits, *provided that they are given a chance to do so*. It also shows the rational nature of people's planning. In this case, their low level of self-confidence, their limited leadership skills, and the limited time available, encouraged them to start conservatively.

It was in the next phase that the importance of persistent participatory work and maintaining room for local level analysis was most clear.

· Interactive design of the irrigation system

Traditionally, the village of Huarancca was divided into four sections, each of which received water independently of each other. At the start of each growing season, the families in each section agreed on the sequence of who would irrigate when and on maintenance obligations. There was no formal organisation and no institutionalised rules or regulations.

The new project aimed to increase the availability of water, through the use of reservoirs and the piping of water to individual fields. But first it had to be designed. Normally, IMA engineers enter the village, collect data, and return to the office where the system is designed. In the best cases, the design will be presented to the users but this rarely happens.

Instead, in Huarancca, the project team conducted a two-day workshop as a first step in an interactive designing process that incorporated farmers' priorities. Technical aspects, such as location of canals and reservoirs, were discussed alongside social considerations, such as existing traditional organisations and water rights. The water sources and sections to be irrigated were also visited. This proved to be a valuable input to the participatory mapping, which followed the fieldwork.

The next step was to compare the alternative designs made by the engineer in charge and by a small group of men, who volunteered to take the lead in proposing an alternative lay-out.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.37–42, IIED London

They ended up with four layouts, which they compared, enabling increased analysis about the links between hydraulic properties of an irrigation system and the water use requirements. In other words, how does a certain design influence the operational requirements of the system?

After some debate, the users in Huarancca opted for a system with four reservoirs, mirroring the existing, informal organisation. They argued that any new system would need an overarching irrigation organisation for operational purposes, which would complicate the water management. Their conclusion was: 'Let's maintain the present social structure and adjust the physical infrastructure to it' (rather than the reverse which many engineers do). The fruitful interaction between the IMA field staff and the male farmers would not have come about without the prior phase of six month's introduction and analysis. Mapping alternative designs, and selecting the best amongst various options, showed IMA that farmers are capable of analysis.

After the workshop, the team asked the water-users to reflect on the outcome of the workshop and discuss it again, in their own space and time, with their families and other villagers. Although many women attended the two-day planning workshop, they did not participate actively, either in the technical sessions or subsequent discussions. Thus, the role of women was limited in the workshop. Large group and village sessions provided few opportunities for women to define their role in irrigation matters. Further, the perception of the technicians, as well the local people, was that irrigation is a male domain. Whereas, village men had clearly gained in confidence during the first months of the project, women were still reticent about taking a more active role when dealing with external organisations.

· Implementing and consolidating the irrigation system

Construction of the irrigation system also followed a participatory process. The farmers formed a management committee which was held responsible for organising the work - not only the provision of free labour but also managing the materials. This last aspect is new in IMA's process of construction. By giving more responsibility to the farmers, IMA assumed that a greater sense of ownership would be created. This resulted not only in delegation of power to the committee, but also in a better understanding of the complexities of implementing a project: what kind of materials are needed, at what moment, which quantities, how to control outflow from the storage, who will be held responsible for losses etc..

Evaluation showed that the users had taken their responsibilities seriously and this led to an important institutional decision: transferring a large amount of money to the users' bank account. The users now had to manage the finance and administration of the next (drinking water) project, planned by the villagers. They had shown they could manage and solve problems, and were thus given more responsibilities in a next phase.

On finalising the construction, the users moved on to analyse the implications of the work. They asked themselves how, at field level, they could irrigate with this new technology. Sprinkler systems are a relatively new technology in these dry steep areas. Though quickly adopted by farmers, they do not yet know how to use them optimally. Therefore, the team has planned more extension events, to bring together water users with different levels of experience to exchange their knowledge. In this way, those to whom the technology was new can develop their knowledge and skills.

The water-users also began to discuss: 'How can we organise ourselves so this system can function well and everybody will follow the rules?' They recognised that the situation had become more complex with the new system: more users and more maintenance meant more collective responsibility. Therefore, the users proposed to hold an assembly to discuss the organisational structure and propose the formation of a water-users' committee. They requested the assistance of the project team to orient them in analysing this complex issue. The team was invited to the assembly, with the facilitators' responsible for suggesting an approach for analysing the organisational challenge.

In the long plenary session, the team had no active involvement. They agreed on a structure, and the men even decided to ask one

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.37–42, IIED London

woman to join the committee, recognising the leadership abilities that some of the women had developed over the past 18 months. The outcome of the meeting had been the result of the people's process of analysis and debate. The villagers opted to create a body that could mediate relations with others outside the village, but which was not needed to manage irrigation water use.

· Process approach in interventions and analysis

If one defines an intervention as a process in which analysis should be carried out by local people, it is important to consider the following issues that emerged from our experiences in Huarancca.

Participatory analysis takes place not only in the planning phase of a project. *It is in the continuation of the process, in subsequent moments, that the information that has been generated and the analytical abilities strengthened take on meaning.* Sometimes, the concrete results of a participatory planning exercise are not immediately obvious. Much information is often gathered but how it is analysed, and with what effect, is not always clear, especially after the first stage of appraisal and planning. The value of *collective* analysis becomes visible in the initiatives and actions taken by the people in subsequent phases of a project.

It is not so much the data collection that is important but rather how it is collected and processed by the users themselves, and how the information is discussed and with what purpose. Our example shows that feedback sessions, at community level, are essential to come to meaningful conclusions that can be translated into decisions and action by the users themselves. The feedback sessions, PRA techniques, exchange visits, video and puppet sessions always provided room for *collective* analysis (crucial for collective action to develop communal management issues) and reflection. They provided crucial stimulus throughout our three-step learning sequence:

1. Improve understanding about the need to reflect upon certain issues ('Why do we explore this subject?').
2. Reflect about local situation ('How does my/our situation compare with the subject discussed?').
3. Act for improvement - from awareness about the need to change things in order to move ahead. Having the responsibility to act and to do creates a greater dynamic for analysis as to whether the correct decisions are being taken. Acting also raises levels of self-confidence, a precondition for further autonomous action.

Analysis is not only carried out in formal sessions that are initiated by external support organisations. More important are the moments without the facilitators, when villagers are able to discuss in their own private or public space the issues raised in previous sessions and reflect upon different or new options. From an intervention point of view, it is crucial to include such moments of 'non-intervention'. But the consequence is a more time-consuming process than most development organisations are willing to allow.

It is important to create a historical perspective, and retain earlier work to stimulate deeper analysis. For example, a Village Action Plan is a critical instrument for autonomous local level planning in the long term. It is important to reflect on the plan from time to time with the users: 'Where are we now?'; 'Where are we going?'. In the case of Huarancca, returning to the plan has helped the farmers to realise that constructing the irrigation system is only a first step in a long-term development process that is their own responsibility. Therefore the documentation of analysis is important.

· Role of the intervening agency

As an intervening, initiating agency, we have learnt much about how to adapt our role to one in which gender-equitable local analysis is encouraged, rather than imposing our terms and timing.

If we compare, on a sliding scale, the level of team involvement in the three phases, it is clear that the initial agenda was largely set by the team, who also steered some of the analysis by defining the broad topics. However, over time, the users increasingly

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.37–42, IIED London

undertook the analysis by themselves. After two years, and at the end of the project, the people now set the agenda, propose ways of tackling problems, and take the initiative to invite the team for specific purposes. This shift was made possible largely through:

- an increased level of self-esteem, amongst men and the women;
- a relation of mutual trust and respect between the 'intervener' and the local people, in which the latter were encouraged at *every step* to think from their perspective and to take a decision on their own criteria; and,
- stressing the value of mistakes as opportunities to learn and develop local management capabilities further.

Gender, confidence and information

Better analysis of the information generated during participatory intervention requires ways to include all groups in society in the process. This helps to create, for example, technologies that include the perceptions of those who use it, and not only the point of view of the committee, who may not always take into account what is best for the majority. It also results in better local information management, which is important for developing opinions and participation in decision-making moments. This was especially important for the women, who now have a voice *and* vote. As power accompanies access to information, analysis with a broad range of people is important. A final point relates to our goal of consensus: if many people support a decision, the better the system will function.

We focused on finding ways to encourage women's views to influence the activities. This was not easy, especially in relation to issues like men-dominated irrigation. Only later, when women had gained confidence because of explicit activities defined and they realised themselves, did they became more visible and vocal. One thing is clear in this case - it would have been inappropriate to force women to take a more active analytical role in the design phase when they were not ready (or willing) to assume this role. However, one year on, they helped design a drinking water project, bringing forward, in public, their points of view. Thus another important factor that affects whether women engage in analysis and decision-making is whether the topic relates to their day-to-day responsibilities.

Essential in the whole process is confidence-building. In a society where ideas persist such as 'farmers only have a short term vision with limited capacities', it is not difficult to imagine what self-image men and women have when dealing with the external service agencies who have always claimed to know 'what is good for the people'. Any intervention wanting to ensure shared analysis by local people, should acknowledge that confidence building is crucial. In the case of Huarancca, this was achieved not only by constantly motivating men and women to take an active role in the events, but also by teaching them practical skills such as management of inputs and financial resources, accounting, speaking in public, functioning as a committee member, etc. It is the combination of improving practical skills and motivating people to become the main actors in an autonomous process of analysis and decision making that is essential.

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NOTE

The author's role was primarily that of co-manager of project implementation and particularly of process designer.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.37–42, IIED London

8

Order from chaos? Making local data relevant for policy audiences

S. Rengasamy, P. Bala Murugan, John Devavaram and Simon Croxton

· Introduction

One of the greatest challenges facing anyone attempting to use information gained from large numbers of people is narrowing down a dauntingly broad amount of data. Participatory methods are frequently extremely good at helping us gather huge amounts of information but are often less helpful with the question of how to deal with this jumble. The task can appear both difficult and confusing. This article relates some methods that we used to try and deal with just this problem in India.

Our challenge

As part of a research project that sought to identify policy successes in supporting sustainable agricultural systems in rural India [1], SPEECH (Society for People's Education and Economic Change - a small field-based NGO) generated large amounts of information from a range of sources: farmers, traders, NGO staff members, and government agency officials. The objectives of the research were to identify 'success' stories in sustainable agriculture; to understand key factors in the broader policy environment that were supporting (or constraining) these 'islands of success'; and from these make policy recommendations. The primary audience was policy makers and decision makers in both government and NGOs, particularly in India.

Participatory methods were used extensively in this work because policy making is a process in which discussion plays a pivotal role. Such a process works well only for those groups whose perspectives are incorporated in the discussion - frequently the most politically powerful. Using participatory methods for investigation allows marginalised perspectives to be heard in the policy-making process, particularly when investigation is linked to opportunities for dialogue between these different interest groups - which was an integral part of our research process.

Collecting this information was itself a time-consuming and exhausting task. Yet it was only the beginning of the process of analysis. In the data collection processes, much analysis also took place but we will focus here on what happened once the basic data were available. Three major tasks had to be accomplished:

- transforming the raw data into a format that was easy to analyse;
- validating the information;and,
- drawing out the implications of the information for policy makers.

The process we followed is too long to describe here in detail. However, a simplified example illustrates how we unravelled a confusing bundle of data and opinions.

· Narrowing down

When looking at a topic as vast as 'sustainable agriculture', it is important to try to limit the fieldwork in some way from the start. Many PRA manuals will include a section on 'identifying your checklist'. We followed a different process.

At the beginning of the fieldwork, we used a list of criteria for sustainable agriculture that

[1] Policies that Work for Sustainable Agriculture and Regenerating Rural Economies, Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods Programme, IIED.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.43–48, IIED London

was drawn up by researchers at the outset of the research programme (see Table 1). This list was compiled at an initial planning workshop that did not draw on direct inputs from farmers. Thus, we knew that this definition would need to supplemented and elaborated by drawing on farmers' own perceptions. The list represents an important element of 'analysis' as we were determining the scope of the information that we would consider.

Table 1. Indicators of sustainable agriculture that guided the fieldwork

- incorporates biological processes such as nutrient cycling and pest-predator relationships
- optimises the use of external and non-renewable inputs
- encourages full participation of producers and consumers in problem solving and innovation
- ensures more equitable access to entitlements
- makes full use of local knowledge
- diversifies the production system
- increases self-reliance
- strong links to local rural economy

With this basis, the researchers set about obtaining the relevant information. However, while they were working they recognised that understanding farmers' own perceptions of what constitutes 'sustainable agriculture' was going to be one of the very first tasks. Participatory methods provide an excellent means of eliciting such information. We chose to focus on transect walks, semi-structured interviews and group discussions.

As we mentioned, one of the advantages of participatory methods is also a major drawback - the very wealth of information that is generated. Figure 1 shows the complex web of information that emerged from discussions with farmers on just one aspect of agricultural practice - ploughing with oxen. It is an example of the complexity of information that lies behind just one aspect of the sustainable agriculture indicators that we were researching - and we had many indicators.

Thus the initial framework - the list of criteria - had helped us focus the fieldwork around a limited set of questions. Nevertheless, early discussions with farmers soon showed that they described sustainable agriculture in a more practical way than the 'intellectual' researchers. In groups, farmers tended to talk about it in terms of the kind of activities that supported it. Much of this initial information was obtained by drawing up spider webs such as the one shown here on ploughing (Figure 1). This is just one of several similar webs that were constructed, on subjects such seeds, fertiliser, soil erosion, pesticides, etc..

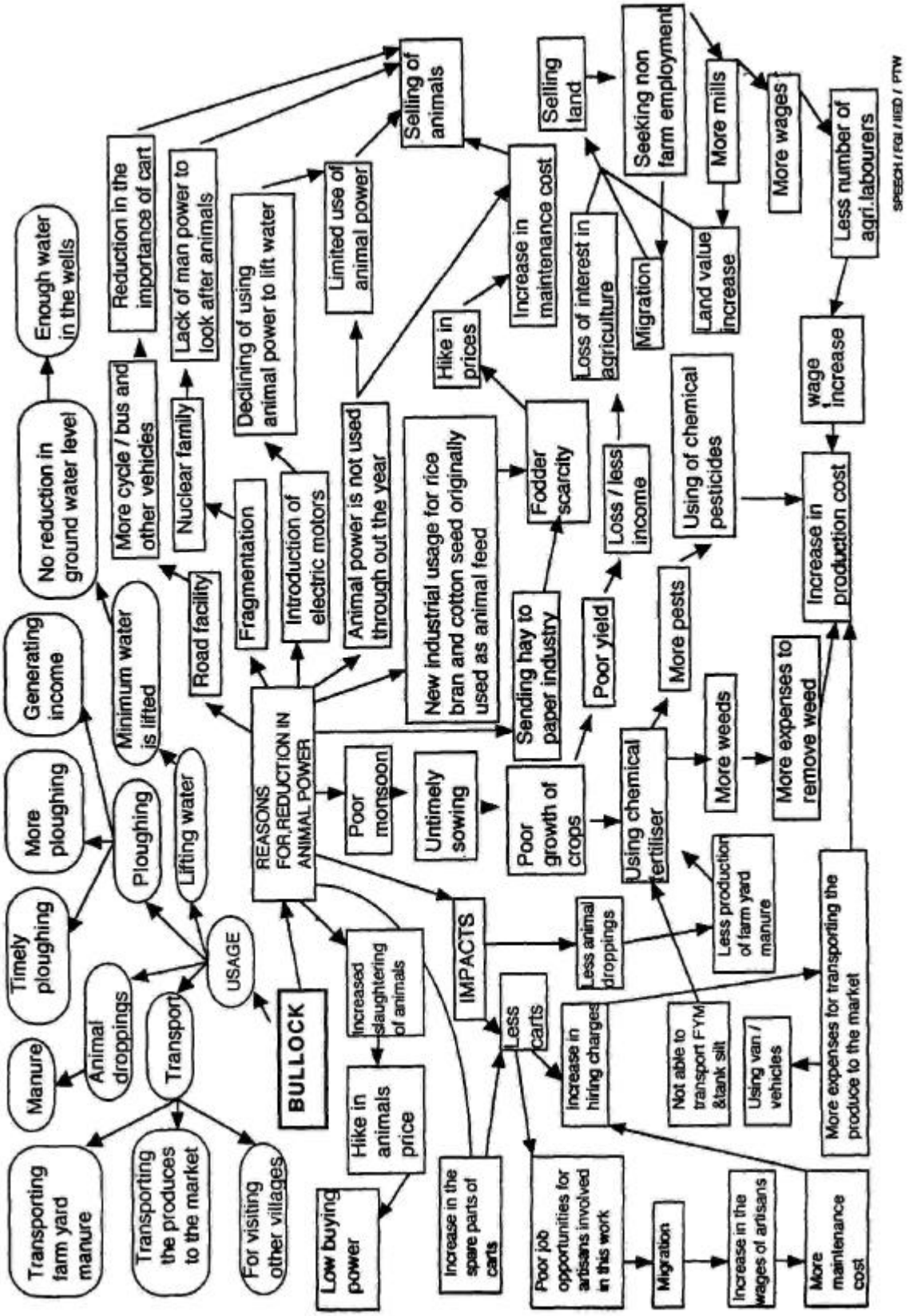
The total amount of information we ended up with was far more than the knowledge of any single informant or group of informants. Furthermore, we had interacted with many different stakeholders in the process. To what extent, then, was the information, such as that shown in Figure 1, a realistic impression of any single person's views, let alone a group opinion, or an overall consensus? Our next task, therefore, was to find a way to narrow down this mass of opinions to a smaller summary of the overall priority problems that could be used in discussion with policy makers and other researchers.

· Interpreting the information

In the interpretation stage, participation reduced to the core group of researchers. The raw `spider-web' data was not easy to use in widespread discussion. Presenting so much information to people who had not been directly involved in drawing up the spider-webs would have been difficult for them to digest. It also did not yet provide enough focus for further investigation, discussion and analysis. What was needed was a short, simpler list of key issues. Would it be possible for a smaller group of people to take this away, sort it, and make it more understandable?

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.43–48, IIED London

Figure 1. A spider's web: farmers' perceptions about oxen and tractor ploughing



Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.43–48, IIED London

At this stage farmers had little interest in the effort required, as the research agenda was still more the researchers' than the farmers'. If anyone was to attempt to present the information in a different way, the researchers had to do this. If they were successful, farmers might engage again in the interesting (and simpler) task of analysing key issues.

Armed with several spider-webs and copious notes, a small and motivated group of researchers set out to identify the 'key issues' that were emerging. They decided to attempt to produce a list of key indicators, by aggregating the multitude of varying opinions per topic into a smaller number of overarching factors.

Where possible, the research team collapsed a number of indicators into one indicator. This reduced the overall list of indicators while still capturing the key elements of the many indicators that appeared in the spider diagrams. As this was a process that did not include farmers, it was important that the analysis was verified with them. Through a series of meetings and interviews, the short list of indicators was presented back to farmers and other stakeholders for their comment. The end result was a list of eighteen indicators for sustainable agriculture with which farmers, including different classes of farmers, and researchers were happy (Table 2.)

Table 2. Farmers' indicators of sustainable agriculture

Indicators	**Ranking**[1]			**Expected adoption rate**[1]		
	Big	Med	Small	Big	Med	Small
Adhering to monsoonal cycles						
Summer ploughing						
Application of natural manure						
Selecting varieties suitable for a particular time						
Adhering to the timeliness of sowing						
Selecting varieties suitable for a particular soil type						
Following the production technique of a particular crop						
Storing and treatment of seeds						
Availability of labour and active participation of the entire household						
Keeping the land fertile by preventing soil erosion and levelling						
Crop rotation						
Getting good yields						
More income with less expenditure						
Good market and good prices						
Regular visit to the field/good supervision						
Not keeping the land as fallow						
Community control against grazing and theft						
Co-operation from other farmers						

[1] for big, medium and small farmers

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.43–48, IIED London

· Making it relevant for a policy audience

Our third task was to understand the local perceptions and definitions of sustainable agriculture with the policy initiatives of the government, and to analyse the extent to which they overlapped. The government programmes were first identified by researchers through investigation and discussions. Table 3 provides a simplified example of how the indictors were linked to government-sponsored programmes.

At feedback workshops and meetings, government officers from a range of agencies (agriculture, forestry, health, and education) were asked to think about both the sustainable agriculture indicators that farmers had identified and the programmes that may be relevant for each of these indicator areas. They were then asked to use their 'insider' knowledge to comment on how successful these programmes were at meeting their objectives of supporting more sustainable forms of agricultural practice.

Table 3. The impact of various programmes on farmer's indicators of sustainable agriculture

Available Support Programmes: ⇨ _____ **Farmers' Indicators of Sustainable Agriculture:** ⇩	**Seed provision**	**Tree seedling provision**	**Crop protection extension**	**Sub-sidised fertiliser**	**Tractor hire service**
Adhering to monsoon cycles	0	0	0	0	0
Summer ploughing	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	0
Application of natural manure	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A
Selecting varieties suitable for a particular time	0	N.A	X	0	N.A
Adhering to timeliness of sowing	X	N.A	X	0	0
Selecting varieties suitable for a particular soil type	X	X	XX	X	N.A
Following the production technique of a particular crop	X	X	XXX	XX	0
Correct storage and treatment of seeds	N.A	N.A	X	N.A	N.A
Availability of labour & active participation of the entire household	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A
Keeping the land fertile by preventing soil erosion	N.A	X	N.A	N.A	N.A
Crop rotation	X	N.A	X	X	N.A
Getting good yields	XX	X	XX	XX	N.A
More income with less expenditure	XX	X	X	XX	N.A
Good market and good prices	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A
Regular visits to the field/Direct Supervision	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A
Not keeping land as unmanaged fallow	N.A	X	N.A	N.A	N.A
Community control against grazing and theft	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A
Co-operation with other farmers	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A

Key: 0 = not supportive; x = a little support; xx = some support; xxx = very supportive; N. A. Not applicable

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.43–48, IIED London

For example, a programme that provided good quality seeds at subsidised prices may appear to support the following farmers' indicators:

- selecting varieties suitable for a particular time (4);
- adhering to the timeliness of sowing (5);
- selecting varieties suitable for a particular soil type (6);
- crop rotation (11);
- getting good yields (12); and,
- more income with less expenditure (13).

This would appear to be good news. However, their 'insider knowledge' allowed them to tell researchers that, in fact, this programme fails to match up to its promises. For example, due to funding problems, the seeds rarely arrive on time and even when they do, there are rarely sufficient seeds to meet demand. The matrix was a useful tool that helped participants, in this case the government officers, to visualise the relationships between farmers' indicators and government programmes. However even when completed, the matrix only really identified those programmes that had the potential to support some of the farmers' indicators. Anyone with a couple of hours, and a basic knowledge of agriculture, would probably have come up with similar scoring on the matrix. Was this the sole benefit of getting people together? Certainly not. The real benefit was that the matrix provided the opening for a broader discussion on the quality of the programmes. In this way it was possible to gain a real understanding of some of the dynamics of 'policy in practice', how existing policies are succeeding or failing in farmers fields. This information was then written up by researchers, and compared with information provided by farmers when they were asked to do a similar exercise. A see-saw of information creation and exchange was set up that allowed for comparison and refinement of ideas and data.

· Conclusions

A key step in our process was the phasing of a variety of methods, so that information from one source aided the interpretation of information from other sources. Diagrams (Venn diagrams for stakeholder analysis, spider-webs for structuring raw data, and matrices for presenting summaries and taking the analysis one stage further) had been useful tools for collecting the initial information. These also proved to be useful tools to assist in disaggregating raw data, presenting it back to key informants, identifying key themes and finally identifying policy options.

Through collapsing numerous categories into smaller numbers of indicators, order emerged from apparent chaos. In addition, making explicit plans for an iterative process of discussion and feedback/ review of the emerging results was critical for validating the research results. The researchers' key role was to develop an initial rough draft of the interpretation of the results - something farmers have little time or interest in doing - and then to present these back to farmers for their opinion. The type of analysis process that we followed has two advantages. First, it means that policy recommendations be made to improve existing policies/programmes. Second, it allows researchers to pose sensitive questions, such as the value of continuing/supporting such programmes when funding (or other) problems do not permit them to work as originally planned, and whether such programmes were useful ways to allocate scarce resources. Other evidence presented by the research had shown that some farmers were having considerable success with sustainable agricultural programmes but this now appears to be in spite of the programme designed to deliver seeds rather than because of it. What alternative programmes then could conceivably support farmers' efforts in more constructive ways?

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Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.43–48, IIED London

9

PRA that supports local development: the experience of developing a municipal rural development plan in Tombos, Brazil

Andréa Alice C. Faria

· Introduction

In recent years, there have been many discussions regarding the role of participatory methodology as a tool for popular emancipation and social transformation. Much emphasis has been placed on 'understanding reality'. Paulo Freire and his concept of Popular Education is fundamental for those of us working in Latin America with PRA. He revived the notion of 'knowing reality' as part of learning, which is a cornerstone of PRA. Today, applications of PRA are diverse indeed but many face common challenges. One of these relates to analysis of the information that emerges.

- How can we systematise great amounts of mainly qualitative information?
- How can we make sure that the information collected contributes to an educational process of analysing local realities?
- How can we ensure that the analysis of information contributes to or generates a process of transforming actions?

In quantitative research, statistics guide data compilation and analysis. The researcher is the 'reader' of the information and is often responsible for planning-related outputs. The local population is the 'target'. The problems of such situations are well known and widely discussed. However, qualitative research, particularly when also of a participatory nature, does not offer a magic formula. New ways of working have only been developed by trial and error. This article contributes to the ongoing rich methodological discussion by focusing on the particular challenges of the analytical process. It draws on experiences in Tombos (Minas Gerais, Brazil), where a PRA process was the foundation for elaborating a Municipal Rural Development Plan.

Context

Tombos is a small municipality (284 km^2) in Minas Gerais, with 10,400 inhabitants, of whom about 7000 live in the local municipal town of the same name. The local economy is based on the coffee and dairy production. In 1996, the municipal elections put a new popular-democratic administration into power, that strongly supported the rural sector. In 1998, the municipal agricultural department[1] initiated a partnership with a local NGO, *Centro de Tecnologias Alternativas da Zona da Mata* (CTA-ZM), to develop a Rural Development Plan. The methodology that was agreed was based on CTA-ZM's experience with PRA[2]. The work in Tombos lasted approximately 8 months and followed many steps (see Table 1).

[1] The local authorities contracted a professional facilitator from CTA-ZM (myself), and received voluntary input from 26 students and 4 professionals, besides the voluntary participation of more than 300 citizens of Tombos.

[2] It is based on 'strategic participatory planning' that was initially adapted by Professor Dr. Joel Souto Maior and used by CEPAGRO, another NGO.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.49–56, IIED London

Table 1. Analytical steps, participants and outputs

What?	Who?	Outputs
1. proposal discussion (2 meetings)	Municipal Secretary of Agriculture, EMATER[3], STR[4], APAT [5], CTA-ZM and consultant	formation of core team formation of a Committee[6] to co-ordinate the development of the plan
2.collecting/systematising secondary data about the municipality	Municipal Agriculture Department, CTA-ZM	synthesis of secondary data
3.*analysis* of secondary data (2 meetings)	Core team (Municipal Agriculture Department, EMATER, STR, APAT, CTA-ZM and consultants)	first checklist for the fieldwork
4.collecting information from Committee (2 day meeting)	Committee members (40-45 people)	information collected with: mapping, Venn diagrams, historical matrix and flow diagrams
5.systematising council information	UFV[7] students and other professionals in the Committee	synthesis of information gathered by Committee
6.correction and *analysis* of council information (2 day meeting)	Committee members (40 people)	correction of synthesis 'dreams' and typology matrix new checklist for the fieldwork
7.collecting information from 16 rural communities and town (2 weekends per community)	Research team: members of the Committee, consultants, students and professional volunteers (54 people)	information gathered with: mapping, seasonal calendar, 'dreams', semi-structured interviews selection of representatives to help Committee in drafting the municipal Plan
8.systematising information	part of the research team	synthesis of information gathered up to that point
9.general *analysis* of municipal reality based on the elaborate synthesis (2 day meeting)	committee expanded with community representatives (55 people)	'logical relations' matrix (see Table 2) definition of a mission statement for the future Municipal Rural Development Committee
10.deepening of municipal analysis and formulation of possible action proposals (2 meetings, totalling 3 days)	committee expanded with community representatives	proposals for action
11.presentation of the proposals for action (1 day meeting)	open participation (236 people)	suggestions and comments about proposed actions
12.identifying ideas for proposals (1 day meeting)	committee expanded with community representatives	formation of committees for the elaboration of an operational plan
13.elaboration of operational plan	9 commissions (total 20 people)	operational plan

[3] EMATER: Technical Assistance and Rural Extension (Goverment Agency)
[4] STR: Rural Worker's Union
[5] APAT: Association of Small Producers
[6] Committee composition = 45 people (9 not from Tombos residents): STR (8); APAT (5); group coordinators (7), Rural Union (2); Health Department (2); Education Department (2) ; Social Security Department (2); Agriculture Department (2); EMATER (2); CTA/ZM (4); UFV (6); Integrated Services of Tributes and Fiscal Assistence (1); Local Council (2).
[7] UFV: Federal University of Viçosa

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.49–56, IIED London

· Establishing and analysing the information process

As Table 1 shows, we had three core sources of information:

- secondary data;
- information from the Committee members; and,
- information from 16 communities and the town of Tombos.

After each step of data collection, data was systematised to enable further analysis.

First, the *secondary data* was analysed by the core team in order to develop an outline for the appraisal methodology. After each bit of information was read out, notes were made on a flipchart of those issues that needed clarification in the fieldwork (the checklist).

The *information given by the Committee members* was compiled into a document, which was read, corrected and adjusted in three small groups during committee meetings. While correcting and adding new information, analysis took place and the groups identified those points that should be included in the fieldwork. The three groups presented their new ideas to each other in plenary for approval. Up to this point, the only objective of analysis was to check the quality and reliability of the existing information and to identify the vague or missing points that would form the basis for the next data collection stage.

After *collecting information from 16 communities and the town*, the analysis took on a different character. It aimed to examine the existing problems in order to come to concrete ideas for possible action.

Wading through the pages…

The volume of information we faced was enormous! In front of us lay about 200 pages of community-level data and ideas, 23 pages of information from the Committee and 8 pages of secondary data. To systematise the data we followed five steps.

First, information was summarised and registered on cards according to the checklist topics. Three colours were used for each topic: black markers for descriptions, red for the most important problems, and blue for opportunities. This registering was carried out for each community by the students and professionals who had undertaken the fieldwork in those communities.

Then all the cards - identified with a community name - were placed on a board and grouped according to the checklist topics.

The next step was a synthesis of the synthesised checklist topics, retaining the three colours: description, problems and opportunities. Two groups were formed, both of which contained researchers that had visited the communities. One group discussed the topics of natural resources and production systems, while the other dealt with history of land tenure and labour relations, other economic activities, demography dynamics, access to information, education, health, social organisation and other information. The outcome of this work was a group of cards that summarised each topic from the checklist. Any information that was not generally applicable to all 16 communities was identified by the name of the community to which it related. This method became known amongst us as 'SSC': Synthesis of the Synthesised Compilation.

After the SSC process, the cards were presented to and discussed with the executive team in preparation for a meeting of the Committee. The Committee, meanwhile, had already been expanded with community representatives.

The facilitator (myself) and two other professionals then wrote a document that incorporated the synthesised community information and the information collected in the Committee meetings. We wrote down the most important problems (see Table 2) that had emerged on 24 separate cards.

The general analysis only started after this stage, in a meeting of the Committee that included community representatives (Step 9,

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.49–56, IIED London

Table 1). At this meeting, three groups were formed to read, correct and complement the document that synthesised the information. The suggestions from each group were presented and approved in plenary. To start the 'real' analysis, the 24 cards with the most important problems were presented. Two groups were formed to elaborate a 'logical relations' matrix. This method helps to establish the relationship between causes and consequences of a problem. One group analysed about half the problems and the other group the remainder. Both groups analysed six of the same problems, in order to be able to merge the analyses in a subsequent step.

Table 2: Simplified matrix of problems in Tombos

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	**T**
1			1					1			1														**3**
2					1	1																			**2**
3				1		1																			**2**
4										1															**1**
5								1																	**1**
6														1											**1**
7		1	1		1			1			1	1	1	1							1				**9**
8		1																							**1**
9			1					1																	**2**
10																									**0**
11			1	1																					**2**
12			1																						**1**
13														1											**1**
14							1										1		1	1			1		**5**
15														1											**1**
16						1																			**1**
17						1	1																	1	**3**
18																									**0**
19																									**0**
20																		1	1						**2**
21				1																					**1**
22						1																			**1**
23						1																			**1**
24						1																			**1**
T	**0**	**2**	**5**	**3**	**2**	**7**	**2**	**4**	**0**	**1**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**4**	**0**	**0**	**1**	**1**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**0**	**1**	**1**	**42**

See Box 1. for key to table.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.49–56, IIED London

BOX 1
KEY TO TABLE 2

1. lack of technical assistance and little knowledge of alternative techniques
2. marketing problems
3. erosion and land degradation
4. water contamination, river pollution, diminishing water supply
5. low prices and excess supply of handicrafts
6. migration plus consequences: lack of labour and rural ageing
7. lack of information about internal municipal affairs and external affairs
8. no diversification, over-dependence on coffee and milk production
9. low investment; no credit
10. tourism: polluted waterfalls, lack of infrastructure, no tourists
11. agrochemical use (plagues and diseases)
12. deforestation
13. lack of organisation and community divisiveness due to political/religious parties
14. little participation and lack of knowledge about entities and their activities
15. individualism
16. reduced numbers of farm workers
17. school problems: curriculum, meals and others
18. low level of vegetable consumption
19. problems with healthcare/hospital
20. 'biodigital': insufficient volunteers and not accepted by evangelical group
21. sanitation problems: rubbish collection and drains
22. lack of entertainment
23. infrastructure: no road maintenance, no electricity or telephone
24. unemployed youth with no study options

The two matrices were merged to form one large matrix (see Table 2) that summarised the cause-effect linkages[8]. The number 1 indicates where there is a cause-effect relationship. For each box in the matrix, we asked ourselves, to solve the problem at the top of the column. For example, number 1:'lack of technical assistance', is it necessary to solve the problem along the horizontal axis, for number 2 -'marketing problems', number 3 -'erosion and land degradation' etc.? If the answer was 'yes', it got 1 point; if 'no', then nothing. We discussed each problem per column, comparing it to the problems in each row. The total score at the bottom of each column indicates the number of problems that are caused by the problem listed at the top of the column. Thus the highest number causes the most problems (in this case, 6 or 'migration'). The opposite logic also helped us. The total score at the end of each row showed us the degree of dependency of problems, thus a high score indicates that it depended on the resolution of many other problems first. From the matrix, a flow diagram was created that shows the link between problems and their causes (see Figure 1). Every cause-effect link was represented with an arrow. Take for example, column 6, row 3. We analysed that problem 6 ('out-migration') was caused by problem 3 ('land degradation'), so an arrow was drawn from the card on which we wrote problem 3 to the card with problem 6.

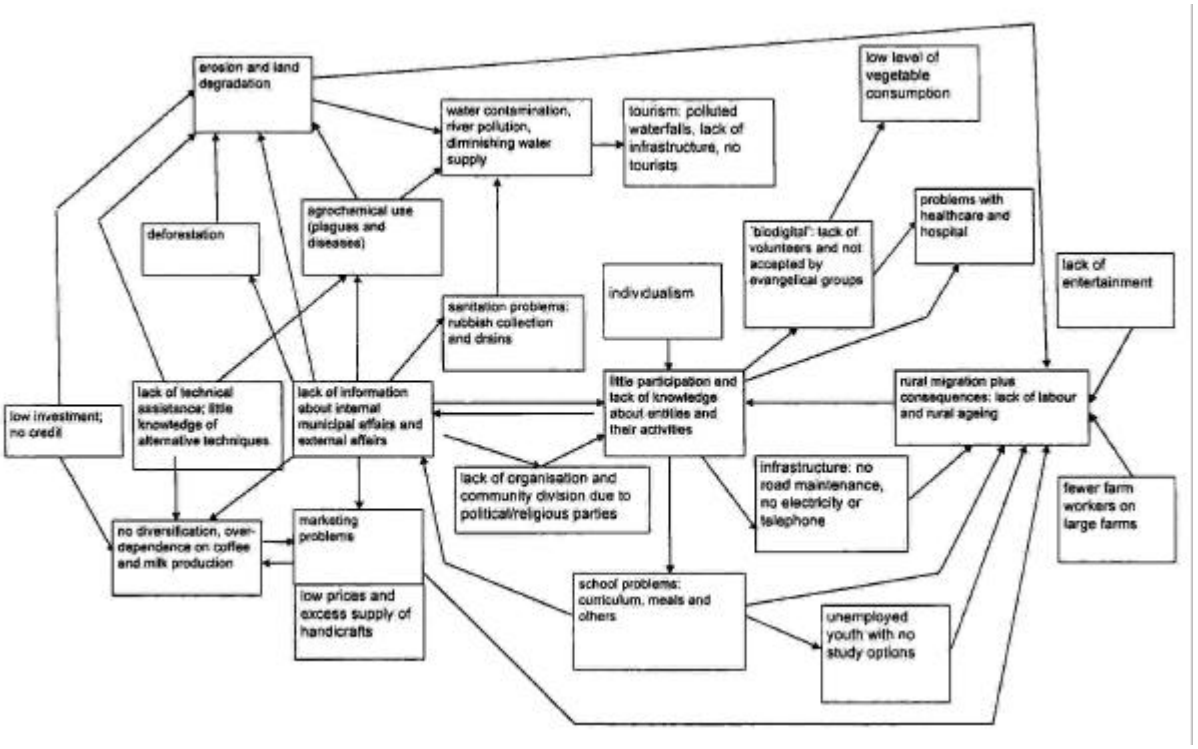
This flow diagram was presented in the next meeting of the expanded Committee. With the flow diagram and using the mission statement for the future 'Municipal Rural Development Committee', small groups analysed further in order to identify possible actions (Step 10, Table 1). First, two groups of men and one of women identified six strategic issues that they felt were priority areas around which to focus actions (and were later adjusted in a general meeting). Then interest groups were formed to analyse the problems related to that question. Each group worked as follows.

On the flow diagram, they identified the problems related to the issue they were discussing. A copy of the relevant parts of the flow diagram was made, and discussions followed in which further causes and consequences were identified. Then the group used the synthesis document to identify opportunities related to their issue. And only then were possible action proposals formulated.

[8] This method comes from: 'Cartilha de Planificacion Integral con Equidad en Genero – NUESTRO MUNICIPIO', published by Corponariño (Corporacion Autonoma Regional de Nariño), GTZ, PROEQUIDAD DINEM and Fundacion Social.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.49–56, IIED London

Figure 1. Causal flow diagram of key problems in Tombos



Proposal identification also followed several steps to ensure clarity and consensus. First, each person wrote down his/her ideas on paper. Then the ideas were presented and sorted on a board. Discussion followed, after which the final ideas were written on cards or flipcharts. In plenary, each group presented its clusters of ideas, and proposals were rejected, approved or expanded. The final list of proposals were then presented and discussed in a meeting that was open to any citizens of Tombos (Step 11, Table 1).

· Observations about the Tombos process

Differing levels of participation

A close look at the process in Tombos shows considerable variation in participation of different groups. The core team was responsible for guiding the process, and that was where analysis started, i.e. of secondary data. The Committee was given the responsibility to collect and analyse information from its members and to define the checklist of topics for the fieldwork. The expanded Committee, with community representatives, analysed the synthesised data and formulated potential action proposals. The largest numbers participated during the open meeting, when proposals were presented, discussed, and assessed.

We opted for this strategy in order to increase insights about the realities in Tombos, while simultaneously aiming to mobilise ever larger numbers of people. Our objective was not just the product – a Municipal Rural Development Plan – but to facilitate a process that attracts, involves, and mobilises people to undertake actions emerging from the plan.

The challenge of participatory 'systematisation'

In many research processes, there are sometimes moments when the volume of information is so enormous that some kind of systematisation is needed in order to make conclusions. Systematisation requires synthesis, reduction, standardising and grouping. At such moments, some information is lost, while some is carried forward. Who chooses and who cuts?

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.49–56, IIED London

In quantitative social research, a questionnaire is used to group responses, and the questions are based on choices made by the researchers. In qualitative research, multiple choice questions do not exist, so answers must be read, selected, and cut or retained. The information passes through the researcher, and the filter of his/her frame of reference and notions. It is always modified. Therefore, even though the synthesised output might be shared and adjusted by others, the people who synthesis greatly influence the final product.

In Tombos, most of the synthesising and clustering was undoubtedly conducted by the facilitator and students, without the citizen researchers. However this was subsequently read and amended by the extended Committee, which then tackled the logical relations matrix. Practical limitations, such as distance, made it impossible for 30 people from Viçosa and 22 people from Tombos (the field researchers) to meet with the necessary frequency for a truly shared synthesis.

A critical moment of analysis occurred in the synthesis of the huge volume of community-level information. If it had been possible to involve everyone and have unlimited time, then processing of such a vast amount of written material would still have been very tiring for those with limited literacy skills.

Nevertheless, to overcome the limitations of our strategy, several activities helped. After each community visit, the research group met to share impressions and information. Also, the students and professionals used the checklist to group the information, always making sure to identify the information source. Furthermore, after the first round in the communities, a group of the researchers met to revise the checklist on the basis of information gathered. Unfortunately, few researchers from Tombos attended. Finally, by organising the document around clusters of cards (description, problem, opportunity) instead of one long text, we were able to limit the extent to which we were influencing the interpretation of information. Overall, however, we feel that the challenge remains to find a more participatory approach for structuring and digesting the information.

The importance and limitations of a checklist

'Optimal ignorance' or 'adequate imprecision' are often referred to in PRA (see Chambers and Guijt 1995). One limits what is sought through a checklist. This guidance is fundamental and crucial - fundamental as it clarifies the purpose of the data collection and helps in systematising, and crucial because it defines what is not relevant.

In Tombos, we also followed the principle of progressive insight. The checklist questions were nothing more or less than questions that had not been answered in a previous stage. Therefore, its quality was directly related to the quality of the previous analysis stage. We worked with two checklists (see Table 1), the first being much broader than the second. The first emerged from a simple reading of existing data, and the second emerged after the use of some PRA techniques. So we ensured that the fieldwork was guided by questions from a relatively representative forum that was action oriented and not only from the researchers' questions.

Constructing, deconstructing, reconstructing

To ensure that collective analysis with 55 people would be possible, the sheer volume of information needed to be reduced. We transformed 200 pages of synthesised information into just 24 problems. Although our process certainly risked some distortion and information loss, the final flow diagram was an interesting output that enabled further valuable analysis. The flow diagram was used to stimulate deeper reflection about core issues that could be tackled through planning. However, planning requires more than just issue identification. To ensure action-oriented analysis, we probed even further with discussions about more structural causes and wider-reaching consequences. This broader, and deeper, analysis was critical for a more meaningful identification of action opportunities.

We found this process of 'construction - deconstruction - reconstruction' both effective and efficient. First a synthesis was *constructed* by some researchers. Then, the Committee

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.49–56, IIED London

with community representatives *deconstructed* the synthesis through problem analysis. Finally, synthesis and analysis *reconstructed* the information around strategic issues.

This dialectic process permitted a much more efficient appropriation of the information than what would have been possible through editing synthesised data. Through specific tasks, or 'analytic filters', people were able to revisit the information, clarifying and understanding in the process. There is always the risk of zooming in on and reinforcing personal opinions and not 'facts'. However many moments of correction allowed for biases to be adjusted. For example, the synthesis document proved to be very helpful in clarifying some polemic topics. The 'construction-deconstruction-reconstruction' process was fundamental to create an analysed consensus, from which action proposals were constructed.

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Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.49–56, IIED London

10

Communities meet policy-makers through video-supported analysis: rural energy issues in Malawi

Su Braden and Valerie Nelson

· Introduction

In March 1997, villagers contributed to the Malawi Government policy on rural energy and natural resource management by presenting their video-based research. This article discusses some of the steps in a progressive sequence of reflection involving different participants and audiences over a 14 month period.

The original research task had been written behind the desks of various international and Malawi Government partners. Their interests had led to a narrow research question that seemed to favour external technological solutions, such as energy-saving stoves. However, the research process showed that this would not sufficiently address the complexity of rural contexts and perceptions surrounding the use and conservation of natural resources. More importantly, to understand rural energy from the perspective of villagers and for solutions to be implemented locally, a more open approach was needed that would enable communities to understand and approve of the policies resulting from the research. Developing a coalition between communities and policy-makers would make it more likely for rural people's perspectives to inform or influence the policies. Therefore we[1] chose a participatory approach, using video as a tool with communities to research, reflect and analyse their own problems, and to represent themselves directly with policy-makers.

This action-research approach is an example for extending participation from the village level to national policy-making processes. This article describes the steps we took.

· Broadening the research question

Based on a literature review by one of the authors, we renegotiated the original research question from the specific issue of adopting fuel-efficient stoves to the more integrated question of how villagers access, use and conserve natural resources. Changing the research question to incorporate villagers' realities had crucial implications for the research methodology, how analysis was structured in that process, and presentation of the findings. If village research partnerships were to be honoured throughout:

- the research team would need to reflect the breadth of village experience;
- the process would need to include learning about facilitating participatory research and representation: village learning would need facilitation so that village participants could make new connections, share and analyse existing knowledge, and agree and make representations of their ideas and knowledge; and,
- the villagers' research and findings would need to be represented in the final reporting process, making inevitable the use of an appropriate non-written reporting medium.

[1] The research team included researchers from the Ministry of Energy and Mining, the Ministry of Information and the Department of Forestry, local NGOs, and two expatriate consultants (the authors). This article is based on 'Communities meet Policy-makers: from institutional research agendas to community research and representation' by Su Braden and Valerie Nelson.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.57–62, IIED London

· An evolving approach

The use of video in the research evolved slowly. The first step was a PRA training, followed by three weeks of PRA fieldwork in the first village, Pansuwo (Nsanje district). Several months later, a video training followed. Subsequent fieldwork took place in the two other villages, Chitimbe (Thyolo district) and, then, Chiling'oma (Rumphi District) – again after several months. The final phase in which the villagers took their findings in the form of video tapes to a meeting of Government policy makers, donors and NGOs, took place in August 1998 - 14 months after the first steps had been taken. Their tapes were accompanied by a technical report which includes transcripts of the tapes.

· Learning en route

The groups involved in the field work represented three main language groups and three broad cultural contexts: the villages, Malawian researchers, and expatriate consultants, not to mention differences within each of these groups. During the first steps of the work, we noticed some of the problems of using PRA in cultural contexts where learning is traditionally perceived as 'absorbing and repeating' (James 1996). This contrasts with PRA-based learning that does not seek repetition, but instead aims for reflection and innovation. Applying PRA methods in villages is frequently understood to form the beginning and end of the participatory approach. As PRA training often emphasises methods rather than the facilitation of sequences of learning and the representation of this learning, participation is diluted. The maps, rankings and other diagrams can mask the importance of group ownership and analysis of the findings - and can do damage by replacing ordinary dialogue, exchange and conversation. While the outcomes may produce information for written reports, they often lack a community voice and community understanding of the implications of the work in which they think they have 'participated'.

In the first village, Pansuwo, the Malawian researchers applied the full menu of PRA methods with painstaking rigour. How or whether these processes led the villagers to communicate any new understanding to each other, or to those beyond the village who might help or advise them in the future, is unclear. Nevertheless, the findings indicated considerable local knowledge about the causes of environmental degradation and possible solutions, not least of which was overcoming poverty.

The findings emphasised the need to consider cultural issues in researching rural contexts, and therefore, the limitations of a mechanical application of PRA methods. When PRA methods are used automatically, information about the causes and results of poverty may be elicited. But without facilitation of discussion and analysis by the 'participating' community, the meaning of this information and the kinds of actions that the different groups within a village might be able to take - or the help and advice they might be able to seek from outside - will be omitted. The villagers themselves are left with very little benefit.

As we gained confidence and saw problems, we adjusted our work in the next two villages. We moved from a fairly mechanical and extractive application of PRA methods in Pansuwo, to a more relaxed and creative approach using video and drama in Chitimbe, to a more thorough integration of villager learning and analysis at their own pace in Chiling'oma.

· Integrating video

After the PRA work in Pansuwo, we looked at how some of the tools and processes of PRA can be used with video to enable local groups to reflect and analyse their findings and to take over the processes of research (Braden 1998).

During the video training, the research team discussed, for example, how villagers could be enabled to distinguish problems that are due to external factors, from those that are affected by the part their own culture plays in creating a stalemate in resolving issues. For example, power relations within a village affect decision-making on land allocation and tenure. Such learning and debate can enable villagers to draw up action plans which help them decide the main issues they wish to resolve, the causes of these problems and their possible solutions (see Table 1). Video, used to record,

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.57–62, IIED London

review and analyse these discussions encourages thinking about communication: what needs to be communicated better between different groups within the village and what needs to be communicated beyond the village. In this way the village Action Plan leads into a village Communication Plan on which development activities rest.

By the end of the three-day video training, in which these and other aspects of participatory video-making and use were discussed, the research team revised the research objectives to include an aspect that was central to our analytical process: *'to facilitate villagers to communicate the findings of their research and their learning directly to policy-makers through the presentation of their video reports at the final research review workshop'*.

The additional tool of video produced more material and increased the workload for the research team. Logging (the transcription, translation and noting of shots and sequences of the tapes) was undertaken in the evenings by team members. The recordings of villagers' activities and discussions were edited roughly with the village editorial groups - portions that they chose to remove were taken out, debates were edited and organised to give emphasis to appropriate links. The rough edits were shown back and cross-checked with the participants in the villages. The village editorial groups spent evenings and several days reviewing tapes, listing the issues which had arisen and planning feed back sessions with other village participants.

The research team learnt by experience that too many new PRA methods introduced often confused village participants. Whereas using the methods selectively and sparingly and sequencing them carefully, with on-going reviewing of the recordings, enabled villagers to participate more fully in developing their own findings (see Box 1).

This process of research, learning, reviewing, and sharing information between the village participants, and their organisation of their own conclusions and plan, was all recorded and formed part of the final video production which the villagers showed to policy-makers in the capital Lilongwe. In each village the editorial groups acted as presenters on camera, introducing the processes as they occurred.

The rough edited versions of these tapes were put together by the research team using an edit suite in the Forestry Department in Lilongwe, and team members took the final versions back to the villages for checking during the time between the field-work and the presentations to policy-makers.

Table 1. An example of problems, causes, solutions, and communication required from Chiling'oma village

Problem	Causes	Solutions	Communication
Shortage of farming land	overpopulation	family planning and prevention of in-migration	villagers, headmen/chief
	increased number of estates	more controlled allocation of land to estates, education on problems of estates	villagers headmen/chief Ministry of Lands and Valuation
	allocating land carelessly	chief should not allocate land carelessly	villagers headmen/chief
	loss of land due to flooding	tree planting in catchment areas and along streams: making ridges across the slope: learning good agricultural methods	villagers, headmen/chief, Forestry, Rural Foundation for Afforestation (RUFA) farmers, Ministry of Agriculture, RUFA, World Vision villagers, headmen and chief, Ministry of Agriculture, ACTIONAID

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.57–62, IIED London

BOX 1.
A SEQUENCE OF LEARNING

In Chiling'oma, the issues of land shortages, levels of soil fertility and land degradation had been discussed as a result of village maps and matrices. The researchers suggested that the editorial team use the camera to record a transect walk along the river which was the cause of problems in recent years. The editorial group recorded on video their descriptions of various land use zones and the effects of deforestation on the flow of the river.

After reviewing the tapes with the researchers, the editorial group called a village meeting and mapped out on the ground the course of the river from the tea estates in the hills, down to the village. They divided this map according the environmental zones they had identified during the transect walk.

They then fed back what they had learnt about land degradation in an amusing drama which they had rehearsed that morning. Standing on the map with hoes in their hands, per zone, pairs of 'farmers' complained about the problems they found on their land, relating how problems were linked between zones. The drama ended with howls of laughter after release of a well-recognised truth about local bribery of chiefs for land rights, which `escaped' in dramatic form.

After this lively session, the editorial group unfurled a large sheet on which they had drawn a summary of problems and causes of land degradation, and explained the same information but now in a more serious way. The editorial team asked their fellow villagers to help find solutions to these problems. They asked: Which problems can we solve ourselves? Which require outside help or advice? And to whom do we need to communicate this?

· Initial outcomes

The research team made a comparative analysis of the findings from the three communities to inform and contribute to the policy-making process and to draw out the implications of the villagers' research for the key organisations and individuals involved (e.g. Forestry Department, Ministry of Energy and Mining, NGOs). The research confirmed that rural energy should not tackled through technological solutions that are isolated from local contexts and locally perceived needs, of which poverty, survival and environmental degradation were key in all three case studies.

The changes in the methodology used in the two later fieldwork sites in the villages of Chitimbe and Chiling'oma meant that the villagers were able to carry out their own research and analysis of their problems, and to better understand which problems are internally and externally determined. The Pansuwo information was produced by villagers in a problem-ranking exercise. In Chitimbe and Chiling'oma villages the information was produced by villagers in developing community 'Communication Plans'. These Communication Plans helped villagers to understand what needed to be communicated to different groups and authorities within the village, and to authorities outside the village (i.e. policy makers, national authorities, NGOs) for change to occur.

In the first round of analysis, this column was just labelled `authorities beyond the village'. In the second round of analysis, the villagers expanded it to analyse who was responsible and who would need to be addressed. For example, they were able to understand and separate the different responsibilities of the Forestry department and the Ministry of Energy and Mining. Some aspects were also moved back to the column of what they needed to communicate to each other.

· Finally … villagers meet policy-makers

In March 1998, villagers travelled from Chitimbe and Chiling'oma[2] to Lilongwe. The villagers from Chiling'oma arrived first and they showed their video to the Director of Forestry. This meeting provided an important opportunity for the village representatives to communicate the findings of their research and receive a direct response from policy makers. A few days later, the villager representatives from Chitimbe arrived. When the two groups of villagers met they presented their videos to each other and shared their experiences.

[2] Weather problems prevented villagers from Pansuwo attending the Lilongwe meeting.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.57–62, IIED London

The final workshop represented a key stage of the community learning and communication process, with villagers presenting their research findings through the village videos[3] to a range of representatives from different government Ministries, NGOs (Malawian and international) and donor agencies. Handouts were provided to all participants which highlighted the implications of the research for different government departments and NGOs.

The villagers were proud to be involved in a national policy-making process, to be listened to by senior staff in government and to be given an immediate and direct response. One Chiling'oma villager said *"we feel like MPs representing our villages"*. The analysis process had helped villagers to review critically their decisions about whom needed to be addressed about which issue and how their presentations were received and understood by policy makers, NGOs and donors.

During the workshop specific issues raised in the village videos were discussed by the participants, for example forestry corruption and control of trees on customary land. In the Chitimbe village, villagers complained that the government had taken away ownership and control of these trees, leading to increased degradation, and were keen that powers be restored to customary authorities. A senior Forestry Department official explained that recent changes in Forest Policy and legislation in Malawi were already addressing these issues, but difficulties in interpreting and implementing the new policies are being encountered and no information has yet reached the village level. The villagers were able to gain new information about government policy, but at the same time the forestry staff present may have recognised the need for greater communication and dialogue with communities. This type of analysis was possible because of the face-to-face encounter between representatives of all the players, and a carefully considered representation of their issues through the villagers' videos.

[3] The Chiling'oma video is entitled " Kulila Kwa Chiling'oma" which means "Chiling'oma Village Cries" and the Chitimbe video is called "Mudzi Wa Chitimbe" which is translated as "Chitimbe Village Speaks". Copyright belongs to the villagers.

In small groups, workshop participants responded in the form of specific suggestions to address village needs, and broad changes in approach, such as:

- the need for an integrated and holistic approach to rural problems and development;
- the need to establish lines of communication between village groups, local government and NGOs, with more direct representation; and,
- the need to support and strengthen existing village committees on health, education, agriculture (it was noted that this might require resource input in training, proposal writing, management, and transport to enable villagers to attend meetings beyond the village).

This list was a direct outcome of extending participation in analysis about local issues beyond the village boundaries.

· Conclusions

Influencing policy through layered analysis

It is still too early to know if the research process affected policy. But early indications include an agreement reached by workshop participants on the need for an integrated and non-sectoral approach to resolving rural development needs. This agreement was only possible through the sequential process of 'layered' participation, involving different groups at different moments in specific ways.

Participation by the Ministry of Energy and Mining indicated that the findings are more likely to inform new rural energy policies and programmes. The Forestry Department is taking forward the idea of participatory policy-making at different levels, for example, by using the village videos in extension training. Meanwhile, the international NGO, ACTIONAID are planning to support further village planning processes in Chiling'oma and Chitimbe. While not everyone was involved all the time, people and groups were engaged enough in the analysis or found enough in the villagers' analysis, to be motivated to act.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.57–62, IIED London

Sustained support

Villager representations to policy-makers should be an on-going process of communication, rather than a discrete event - indicating the importance of a strategy of progressive learning about analysis and using the outputs of analysis optimally. For example, we found that villagers initially needed to be accompanied in feeding back the outcomes of this kind of representational workshop to the village. But by the time the Lilongwe workshop took place, they had grasped the material and were able to explain the research process and findings clearly to others. To enable analysis that emerges from local processes to reach policy makers requires other practical support, such as training is in proposal writing and transport for villagers to attend meetings elsewhere.

We faced practical constraints that will limit ongoing impact. Our work was not linked directly to an ongoing development initiative, with no funds for follow-up. The wide organisational base, while good for influencing a broad base, does, however, means that there is no team that can continue facilitating village level analysis. This highlights the importance of a strategy of skill-building based on continuity of support.

Wider application?

A potential use of this approach is in attempts made to "combine institutional and people participation" (Warner 1997), where the focus is on building consensus and preventing conflict between stakeholders and where certain groups (such as poor rural communities) are marginalised from the negotiating process. Clearly strong analysis that can bridge different perspectives is critical in such situations.

Our approach, which uses video as a key method to facilitate participation, provides a non-literacy biased example for strengthening community involvement in policy-making and environmental management. Village use of video as a mediation tool (Braden 1998) can help to analyse sensitive issues, such as land allocation and tenure. Although, the approach was used only on a micro-scale within this project, the process if continued can be cumulative, with villagers who have participated in the process, taking the process to other neighbouring communities. However, analysis that spreads and 'scales up' would clearly need to be accompanied by other methods and strategies in which video could still play an interesting catalytic and provocative role.

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Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.57–62, IIED London

11

Making sense of community wellbeing: processes of analysis in participatory wellbeing assessments in South London

Andrea Cornwall

· Introduction

Conventional health needs assessment, in the UK as elsewhere, generally involves the collection and analysis of quantitative data by 'expert' researchers. Shifting the frame from analysis by health researchers to a process of co-learning with community members involves a number of challenges, which this article seeks to address. It draws on experience with Participatory Wellbeing Assessments in the London Boroughs of Sutton and Merton over the last few years.

Putting locally perceived needs on the agenda

Health needs assessments are routinely carried out by health authorities in the UK. Usually they focus exclusively on quantifiable measures of health status, deriving data from epidemiological surveys, admission records and other sources of secondary data. Causal analysis is based on indicators of health and wellbeing defined by those in the health authorities. Rarely do those who experience the health problems identified in such needs assessments have a chance to offer their analyses of what their needs might be, let alone how these analyses might best be communicated and acted on.

In recognition of the limited nature of conventional health needs assessment, Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth Specialist Health Promotion Service (MSW SPHS) embarked on an initial participatory wellbeing needs assessment on a low-income social housing estate[1] of around 6,000 people in the London Borough of Sutton in September 1996. It had a number of objectives.

First, it sought to engage residents in documenting and analysing their needs, as they themselves saw them. Secondly, by broadening the focus from 'needs' to 'wellbeing', it aimed to stimulate greater involvement and collaboration between a range of professionals dealing with a broad range of wellbeing-related needs. Thirdly, by involving residents at every stage, it aimed to catalyse a process that would build longer-term partnerships for action.

I played more of an active role in this than in previous PRA work, as a participatory researcher as well as a PRA facilitator. As a first step in a longer-term process of changing practice, I needed to create space in the authorities to respond to this kind of work. My direct involvement helped create confidence in the methodology: my 'expertise' helped legitimise a completely new approach. Having laid the groundwork, I was able to build capacity and shift control to community members and local workers in subsequent work with MSW SPHS, limiting my input to training and advice on the process.

[1] Housing estates are clusters of dwellings built by local government, and increasingly managed and owned by private housing associations, which are made available at a reasonable rent to low-income families.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.63–67, IIED London

· From participant observation to participatory planning

The participatory wellbeing assessment took six months from initial interactions to a final report. Two and a half years later, processes that were started then still continue[2]. The assessment itself involved a number of distinct stages. Each presented different opportunities and challenges for analysis.

Listening to local concerns

The first phase consisted of a 'listening survey'. I moved into a flat on the estate and spent a month getting to know people. My motives at the outset were partly practical: groundwork needed to be done with residents and local workers to get them involved in the PRA process. But living on the estate also provided a valuable opportunity for learning. I chatted to residents in everyday situations to find out what mattered to them. I got a sense of the different institutional perspectives of community representatives and local health, housing, social and education workers. I built up a network of contacts and the rapport that would prove crucial to both research and analysis.

Building a shared understanding

In the second stage, I trained a team of 30 residents and professionals from different sectors in PRA. We formed six research groups: five worked with particular age groups (children, young people, young adults, older adults and senior citizens) and one focused on asthma, a shared concern amongst residents and health professionals. Each group spent a month working with the community, fitting sessions into their everyday work time. They visited organised groups such as the Senior Citizens' Club, held opportunistic sessions with residents in public spaces and worked with residents' social networks in more private settings.

The PRA work aimed to facilitate a process of identification and analysis of issues, seeking to arrive at workable solutions to be taken up in action plans. Aware of how much of the process stays in people's heads after PRA sessions are over, I encouraged each group to note down key points and quotes during the sessions on coloured cards: orange for 'challenges', yellow for 'issues' and green for 'solutions'. The cards were useful in many ways, providing a much more accessible and direct source of information than notes. In subsequent work, we used only two kinds of cards - to indicate 'challenges' and 'solutions'. This also served to make note-taking transparent.

Groups convened informally once a week, and near the end of the fieldwork the entire team came together to share their findings. At this meeting, each research group displayed and reviewed the diagrams and cards that had been produced. Some concerns were common to all. Others were age-specific. Clustering cards and laying them out on the floor served to confirm widely felt concerns in a strikingly visual way.

Following this, the team prepared a public exhibition in the community centre. Over the course of most of a day, around a hundred people came along. Residents were invited to add to and comment on the diagrams and clusters of cards that were displayed. Team members encouraged residents to analyse what they saw and to add their own recommendations. We typed the 'solution' cards and circulated them to residents and the appropriate authorities, to spark engagement with the issues residents had raised.

Planning for action

In the third stage, residents and professionals took part in an action planning day workshop. Posters, leaflets and word of mouth were used to attract as many residents as possible. The team debated who in the authorities would have most interest and/or influence and targeted people from health, housing, education, social services, the police, the churches and the voluntary sector. Residents were invited for the whole day, professionals for the afternoon session. The workshop began by reviewing visual outputs. By creating opportunities to explore what had been learnt before considering what to do, we aimed to encourage shared understanding - not consensus, but an appreciation of others'

[2] See MSW SHPS (1997) for a more detailed account of this process.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.63–67, IIED London

concerns - amongst people with quite different perspectives and agendas.

To analyse the possibilities for action, participants sorted 'solution' cards into three categories: 'by us' (community-led), 'with us' (in partnership) and 'for us' (by the authorities)[3]. This stimulated analysis of responsibilities: important in a context where people look to the authorities to provide. Another dimension was then added, thus creating a matrix-like structure. Residents sorted the cards into 'low/no cost', 'medium cost' and 'high cost' to create a starting point for negotiation with the authorities - whose first question was expected to be about resource implications. This created a chance to reflect on what could be done at low or no cost, by the community themselves - as well as a list of things the authorities should be doing better. Votes were then cast on priorities for action and to highlight suggestions which were unfeasible or plain undesirable. These steps ensured that participants had reviewed all suggestions, through the two sorting activities, before they opted for priorities.

In the afternoon, a range of professionals joined the workshop. Rather than simply telling them which priorities mattered to the community, they were invited to view and analyse the display. Then they too voted on priorities for action. Before they arrived, the residents' stickers had been moved to the back of the cards, out of sight. Once the professionals had voted, the cards were turned over. A ripple of satisfaction ran through the room as surprisingly little disagreement emerged. Consensus was negotiated on a list of ten priority areas.

Working together, residents and professionals went on to create action plans. The room buzzed with energy. A memorable scene was the Director of Public Health sitting on the floor while a resident explained to her what she thought needed to be done.

· Documenting the process

Action plans, diagrams, quotes, process notes, interviews and recommendations ended up in a draft report, for which I took the responsibility of writing. The report was circulated widely on the estate and in the authorities for comment. Residents were surprised and delighted to see their words in print, correcting only a couple of factual errors. Team members spoke of how impressed they were with what they had produced. A health worker told me that she had never thought she could do 'research': reading the report made her realise that she could.

The report became a crucial way of sustaining the process. I heard a resident tell a very senior official about 'our book' with words to the effect that now residents' concerns have been put in print, they could not be ignored again. Another senior official who had opposed the whole assessment process, urged me to include one of the residents' recommendations that had been inadvertently missed out of the summary. Frontline health workers, whose voices had been silenced before, felt vindicated by what was written and emerged with newly found confidence. And the authorities began to take the outcomes much more seriously.

· Different perceptions, different analyses

Each phase involved different actors, with different perceptions, in processes of analysis; this gave me different opportunities for catalysing learning and action.

Enabling through 'extraction'?

In the first phase, with the listening survey, most of the analysis was **mine** and most of the learning was one-way. People appreciated having someone listening to them and take their concerns seriously, but it was not until later, that their potential role in bringing about the changes they talked about became evident to them. My 'outsider/insider' position as a temporary resident and consultant to the health authority lent insights - and opportunities for behind-the-scenes negotiations - that fed directly into the process. I moved between community members, local workers, health authority and local government officials. This gave me scope to mediate - sometimes directly, as an advocate - between their different perspectives and concerns. My

[3] The 'by us', 'with us' and 'for us' framework derives from Tony Gibson's (1994) work.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.63–67, IIED London

'outsider/insider' knowledge influenced how I guided the process, from my awareness of what people were not saying and who was not participating, to who needed to be involved to bring about change. Rather than simply being 'extractive', this phase was enabling: the knowledge I acquired helped me to better facilitate what was to follow.

Broadening ownership

The second phase created opportunities for broadening ownership over the process of learning and analysis. Learning together, residents and professionals created new relationships of understanding and respect. Residents talked of how they saw the estate with new eyes and how much they had learnt from these interactions. Professionals spoke of how they felt the process grounded them and what a difference listening to residents had made. For some, this was an empowering experience; for others, it was deeply humbling. It helped residents and professionals alike to see one another as *people* rather than 'officials', 'patients' or 'clients'. Most importantly, it helped create a shared concern and to open channels of communication. This was especially significant for decision-making. The direct involvement of residents, health service personnel and local authority workers planted seeds for action as part of the process.

Despite opportunities for learning from and about each other, residents had few opportunities to analyse the situation as a whole until the exhibition. Specific issues arose and were analysed in individual sessions. But only the team members had a broader picture of what was emerging. And they brought to the process their own, partial, perspectives. Their 'insider' knowledge, whether of the estate or their own organisations, was crucial in how they chose to facilitate their sessions and document what they learnt. Much of this analysis remained theirs: it was not shared with residents. Although the exhibition offered residents an overview, the team members shaped how it might be read by choosing categories of issues and displaying what they had learnt.

Building partnerships for change

The third stage sought to motivate residents and professionals to form partnerships for change. From a broad consultative stage in which hundreds of residents were involved, the process focused on those willing to get involved in making change happen. The twenty or so residents who came had their own agendas. Their priorities served as a proxy for 'the community', yet they all had their own perspectives either as representatives of particular interest groups, or as particular individuals. Equally, the professionals present influenced the analysis with perspectives shaped as much by personal experience as by institutional constraints on their capacity to act.

The action planning process generated shared commitment to tangible action. By broadening ownership over the synthesis of information and analysis of recommendations, the process also worked to create shared understanding. Allowing all participants to arrive at their own analyses of the evidence presented was important. Inviting the professionals to name what they saw as important gave them a chance to share ownership of the solutions. But the residents had set the agenda. Effectively, the professionals were responding to residents' expressed 'needs': analysing their concerns, voting on their priorities. This required more than facilitation. It relied on behind-the-scenes work by the team to engage key players and a process that would bridge different agendas. Analysis of a different kind was involved at this stage: it was more a case of working out what would work, and who should be involved.

Framing the 'results'

Bringing the bits of paper, cards and ideas together into a report gave me the responsibility for making it make sense. By the time it was finished, the information in it had been sifted and filtered by the many different people involved. At every stage, decisions based on analysis of what was appropriate shaped the process: from initiating a particular exercise, to probing people's views, to deciding what to note, to sorting cards into categories, to prioritising issues. And the

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.63–67, IIED London

analysis did not stop there: those who read the report made sense of it in their own terms.

No matter how hard a report writer tries to do justice to the wealth of material generated in PRA, the writer's interpretation shapes how it is presented: description is already analysis. Inevitably my interpretation of outputs and of how the report might be read determined how and whether particular issues and themes were represented. I could, and should, have discussed this with the team. But in the rush to finish, I went ahead and did what I thought best. I tried to convey the 'voices' of residents in quotes, diagrams and stories, but chose where to insert them. Despite this, there was a high degree of ownership from those who participated in the process: and residents were delighted because it looked authoritative.

In subsequent work, I encouraged group reports. But this provoked other dilemmas. One group presented lists of bullet-points with no idea where or how they had come by them. A draft report sent to a friendly commissioner returned with doubts about its credibility. I was hauled in to fix it. Building capacity for reporting, as for analysis, takes time; it also requires different kinds of tools, for thinking with rather than just for doing.

· Strengthening analysis in PRA: challenges and possibilities

The different layers and stages of analysis in a PRA process do not just happen. Most of the time, they are anticipated and actively facilitated. But a lot of implicit knowledge is involved in making judgements about what to do, how far to push certain issues, how and whether to record what is said and done, and how to catalyse action. Some of that knowledge forms part of people's everyday ways of doing things that they may not be able to explain to others. This implicit, everyday knowledge shapes how people interact with others and how they choose to represent their learning. What emerges is neither a neutral set of 'facts', nor a neutral process.

Making sense of those 'facts' and that process requires more of facilitation. Analysis is a complex, multi-faceted process that shapes every stage of PRA work. If much of the analysis that is taking place is influenced by thoughts and experiences that people do not, and sometimes cannot, share with others, how can we strengthen the process of analysis? How do we train people to reflect on the underlying assumptions they bring into analysis and that shape their work with communities?

The emphasis in PRA on attitudes and behaviour is an important starting point. By being aware of how our analysis of the 'realities' of others is shaped by our own attitudes, we can reflect better about the extent to which our behaviour affects how people represent their 'realities' in PRA. But we need to go beyond this to find ways to strengthen capacity to catalyse analysis with others, and to effectively document these processes. There is a wealth of relevant, but often obscurely written, work that could be used to build more reflective practice: from anthropological work on writing ethnography to philosophical reflections on knowledge and power. This work offers tools for thinking about what we are doing and for stimulating new insights into learning and action. One way forward is to make this work more accessible so that these conceptual tools can be more widely shared, to sharpen, deepen and broaden processes of analysis in PRA.

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Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.63–67, IIED London

12

Rejecting 'the manual' for more critical and participatory analysis: REFLECT's experience in El Salvador

Bimal Kumar Phnuyal

· Introduction

REFLECT is a structured, participatory learning process which facilitates people's critical analysis of their environment[1] (see *PLA Notes* 32). By constructing and interpreting locally generated texts, people build their own analysis of local and global reality, rethinking development and redefining power relationships. This process is guided by local facilitators, who in the early years of REFLECT, were trained by REFLECT trainers on the basis of the 'REFLECT Mother Manual'. This approach is now changing, away from the use of the original manual.

One of the most heated debates amongst REFLECT practitioners internationally concerns whether or not to use a 'manual' at all - and if so, what form it should take (see also Gautam in *PLA Notes* 32). Some say a manual is indispensable as a basic guide for local facilitators, particularly to ensure sequential learning about use of participatory techniques and promote thorough analysis. Others find the whole concept of a manual alien to PRA/REFLECT and focus their energies on developing the capacity of facilitators. Some have found a middle path, by developing semi-structured resource materials at a local level. The recent experience from El Salvador offers yet another option: at its heart lies a concern for a process that should allow critical and participatory analysis at all levels – including by facilitators.

[1] REFLECT initially focused on developing literacy skills but is now used more widely as a basic approach to community development.

· Evolution of REFLECT in El Salvador

El Salvador is one of the countries where REFLECT was first piloted and it is now a central reference point for Latin America-related work. One of the first organisations involved was CIAZO, which has taken up REFLECT as the axis of all their work. CIAZO is a democratically-structured specialist resource centre and national network of over 25 organisations involved in literacy and popular education work.

In the early 1990s, when El Salvador was still divided by a long running civil war, CIAZO launched a national programme 'Literacy For Peace' using a primer- (textbook-) based approach. In 1993 soon after the peace accords, CIAZO recognised some of the difficulties with primers and were keen to explore alternative methodologies. One of several experiments included supporting a pilot REFLECT programme in Usulutan. This proved very successful when evaluated against the original primer-based control group and so REFLECT became central in a new national strategy.

The main concern was that facilitators would find it difficult to adjust to a new approach. CIAZO also wanted a single national programme which could be managed easily, thus its first step was to produce a national manual. Themes were selected, based on an extensive knowledge of rural communities gained from many years of working with a primer-based programme - and learning was strictly sequenced following the same basic 'generative word' approach[2]. This manual was

[2] Use of a keyword which can be broken down into

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.68–72, IIED London

used through 1996 and into 1997 by all the member organisations of CIAZO in their literacy and adult education work.

An internal review process and various workshops in 1997 led to a decision to initiate some major changes. Fundamentally this involved moving away from a fixed national 'package' which was felt to be misguided and even contradictory to REFLECT. Instead of nationally produced materials, the emphasis would be on developing capacities and materials locally through an ambitious programme of training workshops. This involved CIAZO going far beyond what is recommended in the REFLECT Mother Manual and highlights the urgent need to either radically re-write or abolish that manual.

· Organising the training

Previously, trainers had been trained to then train local facilitators. To turn round and radically decentralise the national programme, involving over 500 facilitators working in 25 organisations, was a major challenge. This led to one key training innovation - fusing the 'training of trainers' with the 'training of local facilitators'.

Two external facilitators led the first two field-based training workshops which were time-tabled to overlap and interweave. Each of these workshops was attended by 15 facilitators from local organisations. In addition, key trainers from another 12 organisations attended. They would undergo an experiential learning process of learning how to train facilitators 'on the job', rather than being trained separately and theoretically. After the workshop they would return to their own organisation and run their own facilitator training (with one additional resource person). Each workshop also had a few national resource people from CIAZO. Once the workshop was underway, the separate profiles and roles of participants were rapidly forgotten as everyone jointly learnt and explored the potential of REFLECT.

The overall aim of the training was to create an environment in which all participants could internalise the basic principles and methods of REFLECT by using the approach for themselves. This involved taking an experiential learning approach at all stages and dividing the training into three phases.

Phase 1: Basic orientation on participatory techniques and processes

Following basic introductions and the sharing of objectives and expectations, participants started the workshop by mapping their respective communities in small groups. Each small group consisted of three to four local facilitators who came from the same area, and one or two trainers (who learnt how to facilitate a mapping exercise). There was no previous lecture on PRA or the mapping technique. Each group produced an elaborate map and displayed it on the wall for others to observe and comment on. Everyone seemed enthusiastic to explain their 'map' and only later realised that they were in practice explaining their perception of local reality.

Participants then produced a time-line identifying major events in local history. They then moved on to analyse key problems - such as deforestation, drug-addiction, delinquency, alcoholism and scarcity of water - using matrix ranking. Finally they constructed a gender workload calendar.

All of the tools and techniques used were ones which participants could construct drawing on their own lives, experiences, attitudes and passions. These were not simulations in which participants 'act out' the roles of villagers in a literacy circle[3]. They were fully immersed in the content of discussions and came to experience for themselves the meaningful ways in which different tools could structure and deepen a debate. Almost unwittingly they also learnt those techniques. When asked to reflect upon the techniques they focused on how and for what purpose each tool could be used. Discussions about the attitude and behaviour of facilitators flowed out quite naturally. Thus by first applying the method, and then analysing its purpose, learning took

syllables to generate new and similar words, but should also facilitiate discussion and assist in the learning of related words.

[3] A circle is the learning group or the REFLECT 'class'.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.68–72, IIED London

place. Most training is based on the reverse logic.

Participants were then asked to identify how each of these tools could be used for some practical field research which would help to set up a literacy programme. They identified everything from mapping of literacy levels to gender timetables and calendars of availability, as well as matrices on the use of literacy. They also discussed other tools such as problem ranking and focus group discussions with different sub-sections of their community. Again, rather than being told the purpose of the method in setting up a literacy programme, analysis of their own experiences with each of the methods started a self-design process.

Phase 2: Participatory analysis in communities

On returning to their communities each participant shared their learning with colleagues in their organisation. With help from others they spent one or two weeks organising meetings with community members and using participatory methods to structure discussions. Many came up with rich material and reported that communities were keen to do more. Most left the maps and matrices they produced with the groups, bringing copies back to the next phase of training.

Phase 3: Planning for a REFLECT process

On returning to the training centre, participants displayed the materials they had produced around the walls and toured the room to observe each other's work. They then each exchanged their major learnings from the process - including problems, confusions, and excitement. This was followed by a more focused discussion on 'literacy' - based on the observation, information and analysis from the field. The uses of literacy, forms of literacy, gender differences in literacy and links between literacy and power, became dominant themes that were discussed in pairs and small groups.

The second day of the workshop started with participants being asked how they felt PRA can be used in learning literacy and also how learning can be linked to political awareness and social action. This enabled participants to discover the essence of REFLECT for themselves - rather than listening to a presentation.

The discussion extended to how facilitators could design a REFLECT process for their own specific context - and what help they would need, for example in sequencing learning (planning the sequence of themes and the links to methods).

The conclusion was that no manual, even one produced locally, could ever capture the different realities, problems and challenges of each specific community. After rejecting the concept of a local manual (even one written by themselves), the participants then started making their own circle-specific manuals! This happened in the following stages:

Community profiles. Referring to maps and other existing graphics, each of the participants wrote a few paragraphs about the basic characteristics of the community with which they were going to work, e.g. location, resources, demographic features, social infrastructure, institutions, literacy situation. They made specific observations about the particular group of people who would join the REFLECT circle. Most took two hours to write two/ three pages on this.

Exchange and feedback. After this, they worked in pairs exchanging their write-ups, giving feedback to each other and improving the work accordingly.

Defining themes. Each facilitator brainstormed and then prioritised major themes or issues from their community. For this, they again referred to the community map, problem matrix and other PRA products - as well as reflecting on their own lives. For example the facilitators in Chirilagua identified the following as their key issues: crime and delinquency, drinking water, employment, co-operatives, illiteracy, deforestration, health and diseases, family breakdown, alcoholism, prostitution, schooling, etc. These themes are used as starting points for group reflection and analysis (and the literarcy work, if applicable).

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.68–72, IIED London

Elaborating each theme. A short paragraph was written on each major prioritised theme - identifying how it was relevant to the specific community. Some did this as a short timeline, by showing how the issue emerged and evolved (e.g. there was no delinquency during the civil war and before). This helped participants to explore each theme further and understand in what directions it might be taken in community discussions.

Establishing core contents. Individually and then in pairs (and later discussed with all participants), the key themes were then broken down into different aspects or key contents, for example: types of delinquency, history of delinquency in the area, effects of delinquency, prevention measures, role of police, etc.. This joint work helped local facilitators to see the issue from a broader perspective.

Defining objectives. Each facilitator set objectives about what they wanted to achieve with each selected theme - to ensure that there was a clear purpose and direction to introducing each theme.

Critical analysis. Each facilitator identified questions which would facilitate a critical analysis and avoid leading participants to any pre-set answers. This involved finding appropriate open-ended questions, such as:

- What type of delinquency or social crimes occur in our community ?
- Who in this group has directly suffered from the problem ? When? How ?
- What have been the effects of delinquency in the community?
- What type of people are involved in such crimes?
- Why do some people choose such a path?
- How do they get weapons?
- When did such problems start?
- How do people take preventive measures against this? What preventative methods are effective?
- What can we do at individual and collective level?
- What has been the role of police/local authority/ politicians?

Although they agreed that there would be no fixed rules for the sequence or number of questions, they did discuss the pros and cons of open and closed questions. Open questions help involve all the participants and explore on the theme, while closed or leading questions would block it.

Tools and techniques. The next stage was to define appropriate participatory tools or techniques which can be used to facilitate critical analysis on the theme. The following tools were identified for different issues: social mapping, resource mapping, mobility mapping, time-line/ time trend, problem matrix, tortilla diagram[4], calendars, ranking, problem tree, small group discussions, songs/poems, skits/drama.

Reading and writing. The local facilitators then worked on how they could link the construction of the graphic and critical analysis to learning literacy. Under every theme, they selected a list of words, phrases and short sentences which might arise and which participants could use to learn to read and write. They put these in sequence, from simple to complex.

Numeracy. The local facilitators then discussed how people might use their mental/ verbal numeracy skills in the course of discussion on a particular theme - and what written numeracy uses/formats might be learnt.

Preparation of facilitators. Finally, facilitators thought about what sort of preparation would be required of them to get all the above things done. They planned for resource materials to be used at different stages of learning and participatory exercises, and the use of different local materials and objects. They also thought about who could be resource persons from within their community to discuss particular themes.

Eventually every local facilitator produced her or his own REFLECT process manual, covering all the above stages for a range of critical issues in their own communities. This process lasted three days with participants spending time each day writing, sharing, discussing and revising their work. In the end each person constructed his or her own unique text.

[4] A more locally appropriate version of a 'Venn' or 'chapati' diagram!

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.68–72, IIED London

· Learning to facilitate through step-by-step analysis

This process shows clearly the potential for facilitators of participatory processes to learn by experiencing, rather than by being taught. It challenges the conventional way of training facilitators through standardised texts, sequences, and applications. Instead, the work in El Salvador shows how analysis of the personal experience of methods can be used for 'trainee facilitators' to develop their own, context-specific approaches to community development initiatives, whether or not they have a literacy focus. The step-by-step analysis that they undertook has embedded in them the value of specific methods and sequences more strongly than any 'taught knowledge' would have achieved. They have, after all, now designed their own programmes.

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NOTES

The REFLECT Mother Manual is available in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Bengali from the International Education Unit of ACTIONAID, UK£12 plus postage and packing

Participation, Literacy and Empowerment. PLA Notes 32, June 1998. Available from The Bookshop at IIED, £8 plus postage and packing.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.68–72, IIED London

Feedback.... Feedback.... Feedback....

13

Barriers to the institutionalisation of PRA in NGOs in Nepal

Marion Gibbon

with a response from Michel Pimbert

Feedback is a forum for discussion in PLA Notes. It features articles which raise common concerns or challenges in fieldwork or training, together with a response from another PRA practitioner. Letters and articles are welcomed for this section, as are your comments on any of the issues raised by ***Feedback***.

· Introduction

I have been working with local NGOs to try and support a capacity building process for the last two and a half years. As part of this process, I constantly reflect on what progress is being made. It was during one such reflection that I decided to write this paper on the barriers to acceptance of PRA in the NGO community.

PRA training has become a 'fad' in Nepal. There are many supposed PRA trainers organising PRA training for donor projects, International NGOs, NGOs and less frequently, for government offices. Recently the PANDA[1] team (a district level network in Dhankuta) carried out an evaluation of the use of PRA in local NGOs in Dhankuta (Gibbon et al. 1998). They found that many of the participants who had received training in PRA had used their new skills in their individual lives, but very few were using them within their organisations. I feel certain that this finding would be replicated elsewhere and therefore decided to consider why so few people who have received training are actually utilising it.

Many development organisations have either had people in their organisation trained internally or have sent people on training. Kahji Shrestha (pers. comm.) of Women Acting Together for Change said their workers had received PRA training, but they were not using the approach on a systematic basis. He thought the reason for this was that trainers are only teaching the tools and rarely consider the process of implementation.

The Medical Bachelor in Science programme of Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu, Nepal, is ensuring their medical students are trained in the use of PRA. They are not, however, implementing any programmes using a PRA process. The students are therefore learning the skills in their ten day course but do not have the opportunity to see the important part of PRA, namely the process whereby communities are able to make decisions and act together for change.

It seems, therefore, that PRA is not being put into practice because of the lack of process orientation that many PRA trainers have. Running a one-off workshop results in no follow-up by the participants and little thought to the importance of supporting a continuing process.

Recommendation: Both trainers and trainees need to be involved in a longer term training process. Training should not be of a one-off nature with no follow-up.

A further consideration that trainers have not taken into account sufficiently is that the training should be participant-centred. The

[1]Participatory Appraisal of Needs and the Development of Action

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.73–77, IIED London

needs of the participants are discussed during the expectation phase of training but insufficient thought is given to how a participatory approach could be put into action. The trainers do not ever consider the potential barriers to the implementation of PRA within the trainees' organisations.

Recommendation: Training needs to be more participant-centred and should consider how participants can put PRA into practice. They need to consider the potential barriers to implementation during the training.

Very often, training is not context specific. It is carried out in a classroom with a possible field visit. Instead trainers need to consider that training people should not simply be an exercise to sharpen technical skills. It should stimulate the transformation of staff into social animators and community mobilisers. To do this, training needs to take place where participants actually work or will be working. In this way, their learning process will be enriched by feedback from their environment. In the process of acquiring skills, the trainees will also be creating the beginning of a social change process.

Recommendation: PRA training needs to be context specific. The training should take place with the field staff in their working environment.

The time taken to put a PRA process into action is rarely taken into consideration. My work on a health analysis cycle took a ten month period to plan with the organisation who was interested in using a more participatory approach to look at the health needs of communities. Many local NGOs receive funding from donors who are looking for immediate results. The plea from organisations is that donors should realise that the process of development takes time and to allow them to use methods that will be lengthy but sustainable. Donors at the moment are requesting the use of PRA but not allowing for the time that a PRA process takes.

Recommendation: Donors need to be educated that a PRA process cannot be implemented overnight. Their concern for immediate results needs to be tempered to the local environment.

I have worked closely with two organisations who are putting PRA training into action. These are the Community Health Development Programme of the Britain Nepal Medical Trust which works in Sankhuwasabha district and the Nepal Anti-Addiction Society which works in Dhankuta district. The reasons PRA is actually put into practice in these organisation is, I feel, due to a consideration of process.

The Community Health Development Programme has developed the Health Analysis Cycle for use with women's groups to improve capacity and to develop an awareness of health issues within the community. This cycle has then been developed further for use with non-literate groups using a more pictorial method. The Health Analysis Cycle has evolved bearing each of the aforementioned recommendations in mind. The staff were involved with the design and made suggestions for improvements throughout the process. An on-going monitoring and evaluation of the approach has been put into place which enables the approach to be innovative and flexible. Tools are not static ways of doing things, but are continually changing to suit the local context.

PRA trainers in Nepal charge rates which often exceed what a local NGO can afford. PRA is supposed to serve the interests of the marginalised and disadvantaged sectors of society. At present in Nepal, PRA does not affect the status quo but has become mercenary. PRA practitioners need to consider their attitudes, behaviours and ethical practice and what motivates them as trainers.

Who is PRA in Nepal serving: is it the disadvantaged or advantaged in society?

For PRA to be more effectively institutionalised, it is necessary to take into consideration the following points. It should be:

- process-oriented;
- participant-centred;
- context specific;
- continuously evolving; and,
- aware of ethics and motivation.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.73–77, IIED London

If trainers would consider not being drawn into a one-off workshop situation where they simply teach tools, there is a chance that PRA could be more effectively used in Nepal.

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Barriers to the institutionalisation of PRA: a response from Michel Pimbert

Mainstreaming the use of PRA methods and approaches in NGOs is part of a larger process of institutionalising participation in development. But, as Marion Gibbon shows in her sobering article, many NGOs and consultants have mushroomed in recent years and have started using participatory methods in a manner which undermines local initiative, analysis and action. Whilst the paper focuses on the NGO community in Nepal, the author's observations and conclusions have much wider relevance.

Many attempts to spread and institutionalise the use of participatory methods and approaches are all too often reduced to exercises in which PRA and related methods are used as mere labels to make proposals and rhetoric attractive to donors. Tools, techniques and methods are often applied by insensitive and expensive training consultants in an extractive manner. PRA is also being used primarily for one-off training of staff members in organisations whose programmes reflect no real commitment and skills for participatory learning and action on a long term basis.

I agree with Marion Gibbon that PRA trainers need to give more emphasis on process, context, and participant-centred, evolving approaches, whilst nurturing respectful behaviour. All these factors are key conditions for institutionalising PRA in NGOs and they remind us of the importance of the personal and attitudinal dimensions of good PRA practice. However, to complement this emphasis on the personal attributes of PRA trainers, NGOs and donors could also take some affirmative action to keep sloppy or unscrupulous trainers at bay and institutionalise good practice. In my opinion, much of this affirmative action by NGOs and donors would start with a look at their own organisational structures, core values and goals, operational procedures, and relationships with the wider environment. Affirmative action to institutionalise PRA might be about creating enabling conditions for participation within NGOs, donor organisations and the external environment. Some of these dimensions of change are described below.

Creating supportive and flexible NGOs

Commitment to local institution building and handing over the stick. Some NGOs have been able to use PRA methods for effective training, programme implementation and management, but have found it difficult to sustain the participation after the training inputs have ended. Most of these NGOs generally lack adequate skills for the development of local institutions.

The necessary skills include: negotiation, bargaining, common interest group formation, development of procedures and rules for effective functioning of local institutions, evolving mechanisms to increase viability of institutions, incentives for institution development, leadership development, training of local people and development of linkages with external organisations. A very small number of NGOs engaged in PRA training have local institutional development as one of their primary objectives. These more enabling NGOs have realised that their capacity to strengthen or build local institutions requires internal changes in organisational structure, management style, decision-making, resource allocation mechanisms and power relationships within their own organisation. These NGOs make conscious efforts to improve their organisational culture to allow for flexibility, learning and innovation. They perceive the use of participatory methods as an input to organisational growth and are flexible in changing rules and procedures to develop dynamic support organisations.

Quality professionals. Participatory programmes require a higher degree of

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.73–77, IIED London

professionalism in the initial phases until local institutions develop indigenous management systems. This is contrary to the general perception that PRA-type methodologies do not require high quality facilitation and training skills. The initial process of capacity building, institution building, programme development and fostering linkages between these aspects, requires good facilitation and management skills. Local community members can learn to acquire these skills over time to reduce dependence on good quality external professionals. However, NGOs need to attract good quality professionals in the initial phases of training and implementation to be effective in the long-run.

Organisational culture and the need to focus on learning. The culture of NGOs should provide opportunities to learn from experiences and mistakes. It should also be flexible to allow for experimentation. In order to institutionalise participatory approaches, NGOs and other organisations need to place high value on learning. Not making enough room for learning usually leads to standardised training and project routines that are out of step with the needs of local communities and their dynamic, diverse local realities.

Organisational management and style. Participatory programmes require change in the management styles of many NGOs, with more emphasis placed on organic styles of management that encourage lateral communication, collegial authority, gender equity and flexible roles and procedures. Incentives and reward systems need to be developed to encourage honesty, transparency, accountability, work in the field with the communities and joint action between NGOs and villagers.

Developing linkages with external agencies and networks. Affirmative NGO action in this area could potentially enhance the quality, spread and relevance of participatory learning and action. Development of effective linkages with external organisations through training exchanges, cross visits, co-management of programmes and information flows often leads to lateral spread of the participatory approaches. This in turn helps to build alliances, networks and mutual support. This laterally expanding process can create opportunities to influence policies at various levels and thus remove some of the constraints on the institutionalisation of participatory approaches

Transforming donor organisations

Donors need to appreciate and act on the principle that participatory learning and action is not so much about tools, techniques and discrete, time-bound training but more about transformation, institutional renewal, rights, democracy, diversity and decentralisation. In that context, PRA and other related approaches are used as a part of a process of organisational growth and learning coupled with the use of PRA for long term local institution development involving appraisal, planning, negotiation, bargaining and conflict resolution. Spread, scaling up and institutionalisation of participation occurs primarily by the lateral expansion of people's organisations through farmer to farmer, village to village and institution to institution mechanisms.

Long term nature of support and commitment. Donors interested in supporting and promoting the institutionalisation of participation should commit themselves to long term partnerships with NGOs and community organisations. The donors need to look beyond projects to processes and institutions and devebp a long term perspective. Current time frames of donor programming cycles need to change from 2-3 years to 10-20 years.

Promoting learning organisations. Donors should invest in learning organisations and ensure that learning is an important objective of development programmes. Affirmative action to support learning organisations usually enhances adaptive programming skills among organisations and individuals resulting in better investments and cost effective impact.

Need for increased and phased investment in local institutional development.

Donors should make significant investments in the development of local institutions and organisations in the initial phase of their programming cycle. Training support cannot

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.73–77, IIED London

substitute for this process. The major elements of institutional development are:

- an open ended process of participatory appraisal and planning; allowing time for negotiation and bargaining between various stakeholders;
- a suite of short and long-term programmes, appraised and prioritised by various stakeholder groups; and,
- established transparent operational procedures for management of local institutions and trained village para-professionals selected by the local organisations and accountable to them.

Significant donor investments in programmes should be made only after an initial period of supporting and nurturing local institution development. Donors should not put pressure on support NGOs to take up trainings and programme development in the first year.

· Conclusion

In conclusion, overcoming barriers to institutionalising participation might require complementary and simultaneous changes in the personal practice of external PRA trainers and deeper structural transformations within the NGO and donor communities.

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14

A brief guide to training in participatory methods in the field

This section of the Notes provides training materials for participatory learning, exploring a different theme in each issue[1]. This article provides a range of examples of how to train in participatory methods in a field setting, which is where the most important learning takes places.

· Preparing for the field

Preparing thoroughly for fieldwork is vital as this is where participants will practice new methods and make mistakes. Good forward planning will ensure that their learning is not disrupted by other factors. If you are training for your own institution, then you should do the planning. If you have been commissioned by another institution, then you should give them a detailed checklist of issues to be acted on before the workshop starts (see Box 1). Uncertainties will never completely be removed nor avoided, but thorough preparation always increases the capacity to cope.

The host community

Fieldwork, which involves teams descending on and disrupting life in a community, may not always be a desirable part of training. This is particularly true if follow-up activities in the village sites cannot be guaranteed or are not possible. This raises ethical questions about doing training in the field and practising on local people, and is very likely to create problems at the village level, jeopardising the possibility of working there in future.

BOX 1
CHECKLIST: PREPARING FOR THE FIELD

The host community
- Does the community know when you will be arriving and how long you will be staying?
- Are the fieldwork dates convenient for local people? Are there important political or economic events or cultural ceremonies that will draw people away?
- Do they know why you are coming?
- If it is just for training, do they know there is no guaranteed follow-up? Will they still be interested in accommodating the teams?
- If it is part of the on-going activities of the trainees' institution(s), are there resources to follow up?
- When is it most convenient for women and for men to be involved in discussions?

Accommodation
- Are you planning to stay in the villages? If so, have full discussions been held on the practical arrangements?
- If not, how close to the community will you be staying?
- Is there electricity in the village? If so, you may be able to show slides or videos to people

Food and beverages
- What arrangements have been made to feed the team and/or the villagers?
- Will you buy food there or take it with you?

Transportation
- How will the team get to the village sites?
- Are there sufficient vehicles/petrol allocations?

Materials
- Do you have a full supply of charts, papers, pens etc. for the visualisations?
- Do you have small notebooks for each participant?

[1] Taken from a *Trainers Guide for Participatory Learning and Action*. Published by IIED. Price £18.95, plus p&p (20% UK, 25% Europe, Rest of world 40% airmail or 25% surface). See inside cover for details on how to order publications.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.78–83, IIED London

It may be preferable to train in a classroom setting and to practise methods with other participants at that session. When participants return to their work, they can try to introduce and experiment with the new methods in the course of their normal work. This avoids the problems of trainees feeling uneasy about 'experimenting' on people they do not know and will not be working with in the future. However, this approach can make it difficult to control the quality of the work, as participants are not trained in the reality of field situations.

Selecting field teams

In general, most fieldwork during training workshops is conducted by interdisciplinary teams of 3-8 people. If you are training more than eight, then there will be at least two field teams and team selection will be necessary. You can opt for self selection of teams or choose them yourself. Either way it will be important to ensure well-balanced groups.

- *Language* - who speaks the local language and/or dialect?
- *Gender* - ensure a balanced mix of women and men.
- *Professional experience* - mix people from different disciplines.
- *Hierarchy* - consider the normal working relationships of participants, and try to divide participants into groups with a mix of different statuses - if differences are too great, put similar people together into groups.
- *Experience with participatory methods* - appoint any participants with previous experiences, as resource people.
- *Knowledge of the field site* - try to spread those who know the field sites through the groups to act as resource people.
- *Personality* - consider some of the criteria for roles within groups (A brief guide to group dynamics and team building, *PLA Notes* 29, June 1997), and try to ensure a mix of roles to enhance team performance.

Ask the group to add other selection criteria that they might feel are relevant. One task that can create a shared understanding of the aims of the fieldwork is to ask each field team to formulate its own objectives. These can include learning objectives related to understanding the principles of participatory learning and action, but can also entail different aspects of understanding local livelihoods. These objectives can then be used during the daily review meetings in the field to assess and redirect the work. They will be helpful for final evaluations to assess what has been accomplished, and to discuss what was not realised and why this was the case.

Trainers' tasks and pitfalls

For the trainees, the fieldwork is a period of practice, mistakes and correction that reinforces the learning points identified during earlier points of the workshop. During the fieldwork, you as the trainer, are a guardian of the process, pointing trainees to issues developed in the workshop phase of the training. Box 2 shows tasks that are of particular importance during fieldwork.

There are dangers for trainers, too, particularly when they are encouraging groups to achieve a goal. Trainers sometimes strive towards a good outcome and may try to control events too much. This can be counterproductive, as groups cannot be forced to perform in a manner or at the exact moment that you think is ideal. Remember that it is just as important for trainers *to hand over the stick* as it is for participants.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.78–83, IIED London

BOX 2
TRAINERS' FIELDWORK TASKS

1. Reinforce the principles of participatory learning and action or of specific methods
2. Provide information on the process or methods when necessary
3. Remind participants about effective interviewing skills
4. Facilitate discussions in the review meeting, picking up on incidents that occurred during the day
5. Monitor continually that logistical arrangements operate smoothly
6. Remember that you are responsible for all participants - move between subgroups while in the field
7. Reshuffle groups to match people up

· Getting started in the field

You have a crucial role to play just after arrival at the field site. This is when participants generally feel most nervous. They may have been through extensive practice in the workshop but may still feel uncomfortable or unclear about using familiar methods. In many cases, such nervousness arises out of a belief that they are not capable of participating in these 'complex' analyses. The trainees will need to get used to new roles - *listening rather than telling the villagers, creating learning situations rather than dictating and facilitating rather than controlling the situation*.

The shift to visualisation

What has become very clear from past field-based training exercises is the importance of starting immediately with a diagramming-based method. If this is not done in the first discussions with local people, then it becomes progressively more difficult to switch off from familiar interviewing. Here are tips for starting the fieldwork off smoothly:

- Discuss the panic factor in advance.
- Ask each team to decide in advance the issue, method and local informants they hope to work with.
- Encourage the team to begin with a concrete activity that requires group inputs, has been practised before and is almost certain to lead to a concrete output.
- Organise a session to start off the fieldwork that will involve the team in trying their hand at everyday local activities. This breaks the ice and clearly establishes new roles, with local people as teachers and professionals as learners.
- Tell the team to relax.

Another aspect of visualisation that should be emphasised is the benefits for local people. An encounter between a team of facilitators and a group of local people may be a rare local opportunity, when both women and men are encouraged to think about their own livelihoods and conditions in a systematic way. Very often it is also an exceptional occasion for certain local groups (men/women, young/old, landed/landless etc.) to come together for joint analysis.

Emphasising sequences of methods

A great deal of the strength of participatory learning and action is derived from the way in which the process and outputs of one method can lead into another. This continuity enhances reliability of the discussions and allows for further probing of key issues. Doing a series of exercises with the same group of people allows for the development of openness and familiarity. However, sequencing can also have drawbacks that you must watch out for, especially when trainees become so comfortable with certain local people that they choose not to seek out others. Besides introducing biases in the results, this could place a heavy burden o the local analysts' time.

Sequences are an aspect that cannot usually be dealt with adequately in the workshop, where exercises are not sequenced but take place

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.78–83, IIED London

within a different session. One way to duplicate this sequencing of methods in the field is to take participants through a detailed case study or simulation. Alternatively, you can use a series of slides/overheads or a video to guide people through a real example and to discuss how and why various methods were applied sequentially.

One possible constraint to the use of sequences is a very rigid attitude to the field guide or checklist. Some field teams can become obsessed with each and every issue on their checklist before allowing exercises to flow and different issues to be discussed. it will not always be easy for you, the trainer, to encourage trainees to use their checklist flexibly, while giving them enough structure to overcome the initial panic that can set in at the start of fieldwork.

Dealing with senior visitors

It is rare for senior officials or staff to attend training courses from start to finish. However, often they do wish to participate for short periods. This can be very beneficial and/or extremely disruptive. When senior officials attend opening and closing ceremonies or listen to presentations, their presence can be a strong endorsement of the new approach. If senior staff are able to participate fully, then other work demands will still probably compete for their time. Be ready for them to be delayed regularly. They may also take longer to let go of status and hierarchy, and so are more likely to dominate certain discussions.

To ensure continued institutional support for the use of participatory approaches after the training workshop ends, it is essential that senior staff should be involved in the training at some point. Some way to encourage their positive involvement include:

- Recommending attendance at key points during the workshop;
- Organising a debriefing session run by trainees after the training;
- Holding a one-day workshop that brings together representatives from the community, the trainees and relevant senior staff and other authorities. Allow local people to make their presentations and trainees to describe the core concepts and methods. Give senior staff time to ask questions and consider the implications of the approach; and,
- Organising a meeting after the field reports have been prepared and circulated to senior officials. Invite certain key trainees and local people to meet with the interested officials to discuss the conclusions and follow-up.

· Review, feedback and presentation

Information collection, analysis and preparation is a continuous and iterative process during participatory learning and action. There is a regular need to review the process and assess information collected before planning the next stage. As a trainer, you should aim to facilitate this process at various stages during a field-based training course. Review sessions are a vital way for you to get feedback - you will not be able to follow each team but do try to sit in on some sessions of the different field teams. Here are a few suggestions for effective review sessions:

- Hold regular meetings, both in the morning and afternoon/evening, with the whole group to discuss individual feelings and group dynamics as well as substantive findings. Encourage participants to record their reactions and reflections in a field diary. Documenting the process of learning is vital for reflection at a later stage;
- Reflect during review meetings on how individuals felt before and after they had started a particular exercise. Ask the team: what they were thinking about, what they were finding difficult, how did they deal with problems and what suggestions they have for dealing with problems?;
- Encourage the groups to a appoint a ‘process observer’ to report on the group dynamics for each new discussion with local people; and,
- Try one minute role plays of problems encountered in the field during the reflection sessions.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.78–83, IIED London

Fieldwork feedback and presentations

An essential part of participatory learning and action is presenting findings and proposals for action or research. Feedback sessions may take place in the workshop with the field team or in the field with villagers. A number of key issues to consider when planning such session include the following:

- How? What is the appropriate presentation style to encourage group analysis and reflection on information collected?
- Who? Who presents and has a chance to analyse the information collected is a key issue. Information can be interpreted in many ways and it is important that diverse local perspectives are heard during presentations. It is good to encourage local women and men to present the findings of their joint analysis back to the field team and other villagers to initiate discussion. Breaking up into smaller discussion groups may offer the opportunity for more detailed and freer reflection.
- Where? The place where feedback and presentation takes place may influence the subsequent discussion.
- When? Allowing time for feedback in the field is a key component of participatory processes. This allows villagers to have a chance to comment on information and the analysis presented by the field team and other villagers.

If more than one site has been selected during the training, then presentations by participants of their findings to colleagues are also useful to:

- practise presentation skills;
- illustrate differences in methods and sequences used;
- describe innovations in methods; and,
- discuss issues of substance.

Processing information and writing-up

Producing a field study report is often an important objectives for a training workshop, but can be the most difficult part of the workshop. But while people always seem to find the time to do the fieldwork, they are almost always 'too busy' to write it up properly.

Although training should not focus unduly on the presentation of findings nor be evaluated on that basis, the report will be an important resource for a number of reasons:

- it provides baseline information on which future activities will be built and performance monitored;
- a detailed report can convince other organisations of the value of becoming involved in a new community or area;
- if good quality reports are made available within the same institution, then inter-village comparisons become possible; and,
- it contributes to maintaining a good institutional memory.

Analytical skills are essential in report production and it is often incorrectly assumed that all participants of training courses have them. Likewise, writing skills are needed for accurate and complete reporting (see Box 3).

There is no single correct way of facilitating the writing-up. But there are several ways to make this process as enjoyable and productive as possible.

- Analysis and writing up should be a continuous process. Make sure enough times is scheduled for this each day of the fieldwork and that it is not left to a last minute rush.
- Prepare a proforma or framework for documenting the process and key findings of each discussion that the participants fill in each day. If you read these as they are filled in, then you can ask participants to

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.78–83, IIED London

add further important information that has been left out or is too brief.

- Hold regular feedback meetings during which information gathered is also information shared.
- After extensive feedback on the process and findings, trainers can help groups with a structure for the report.

Assessing participants' progress

It is essential that you spend time finding out how well participants have progressed during the fieldwork. You will not have been able to accompany them all the time in the field, so you might consider reflecting on the following questions:

- Have they developed any bad habits?
- Have they come up with innovations?
- To what extent will they continue after the workshop with good habits?

BOX 3

A FIVE-STAGE PROCESS FOR REPORT WRITING

Step 1. Collect information by objective. This can best begin in the field when the team is preparing for the feedback session for the village. Write out each objective on a large sheet of paper, then brainstorm all the important things that have been learned under each objective and write them down, preferably on cards.

Step 2. Organise the information. Group the cards together around different issues or subject areas. Write an outline for the final report from the cards.

Step 3. Analyse the information. As a team, decide which information is the most important. What was surprising about what you learned in the field? Which parts do you want to treat in greater detail in the report because of their importance? What are the implications of what you have learned for future activities with the village or by your organisation?

Step 4. Write up the information in a report. This can be divided up so that each person writes a section.

Step 5. Review the report. All the members of the team should read the report to make sure that the information is correct from their perspective and that nothing of importance has been left out. One person can edit the report to make sure that there is no duplication between sections and to incorporate the diagrams into the text.

You might be able to find out these things by asking participants directly. But it is more likely that you will need to conduct some further workshop exercises and role plays. During these, observe participants and give feedback later. Another approach is to ask participants to write down the lessons learnt each day during the fieldwork about the principles and practice of participatory approaches, and how they relate to their own communication skills. These can then be shared, if appropriate, with the entire group, or just used by yourself to assess of what issues they are increasingly becoming aware.

TRAINERS' CHECKLIST: PARTICIPATORY METHODS IN THE FIELD

- Have you made full preparations for the field?
- Has there been close dialogue with the communities hosting the fieldwork?
- What arrangements have been made for accommodation, food, beverages and transport?
- Have you reached clear and commonly agreed division of tasks with other co-trainers for the fieldwork?
- How will the interdisciplinary teams for the field be selected: self-selecting or pre-selected?
- Have you thought about how to help participants make the transition in the field from the verbal to the visual?
- Are participants prepared to sequence the methods?
- Are you expecting senior visitors in the workshop or the field? How will you deal with their presence without it disrupting existing teams?
- Have arrangements been made to ensure all findings are presented back to villagers? Who will make the presentations?
- How will the writing-up process be managed? Will all the participants be involved? Who will get copies of the reports afterwards? Who will use the information?
- How will you assess whether participants have made any progress during the workshop?

Next issue: organising workshops for training, orientation and exposure

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.78–83, IIED London

15

Tips for trainers: Introducing the 'H-form' - a method for monitoring and evaluation

Introduction

Working in 1997 for IUCN with Veronica Muthui in Somalia, Andy Inglis developed a method to assist local people to monitor and evaluate local environmental management. He called this the 'H-Form' or 'Rugby Post form'. Since then it has been modified in other monitoring and evaluation exercises in Scotland, Wales, Austria, Northern Ireland, Egypt, England, India and Romania.

Examples of applications

- To assist local people to evaluate the performance of partnerships, programmes, agencies, initiatives, and a range of social and environmental topics;
- To identify local indicators for ongoing monitoring and evaluation;
- To assist agency staff to evaluate and monitor their activities related to smallholder farming, forestry, fisheries, public consultation process, etc.;
- To assist participatory appraisal (PA) workshop participants to evaluate their training and scenarios of good and bad practice for engaging with people; and,
- to facilitate and record semi-structured interviews with individuals and or groups of people young and old.

Materials

A large piece of paper (e.g. flipchart paper if working with a group, or smaller if working with an individual), enough markers so that everyone in the group has one each, and post-it notes[1] (about 12 per group member).

[1] 'Post-its' are small, self-adhesive pieces of paper, which are easy to stick on to charts. If they are not available, pieces of paper can also be written on and stuck on to the chart with tape.

Steps

1. As it is important to get the dimensions right at the beginning, fold the paper as follows: fold it in half length-wise, then fold it in half width-wise and half again width-wise. Now unfold the paper and with a marker, draw a large H using the folds as your guide lines (don't bother drawing in the centre vertical line).

2. Write the question being discussed in the top centre area of the H-form. This question must be simple and focused, such as 'How well does the local economy benefit from forestry in this area?' or 'How well do organisations work together in this area?' or 'How good are the services for your horse in this area?' At the left end of the horizontal centre line of the H write 0 or 'not at all well' or a sad face symbol, and at the right end of this line write 10 or 'extremely well' or a smiling face symbol.

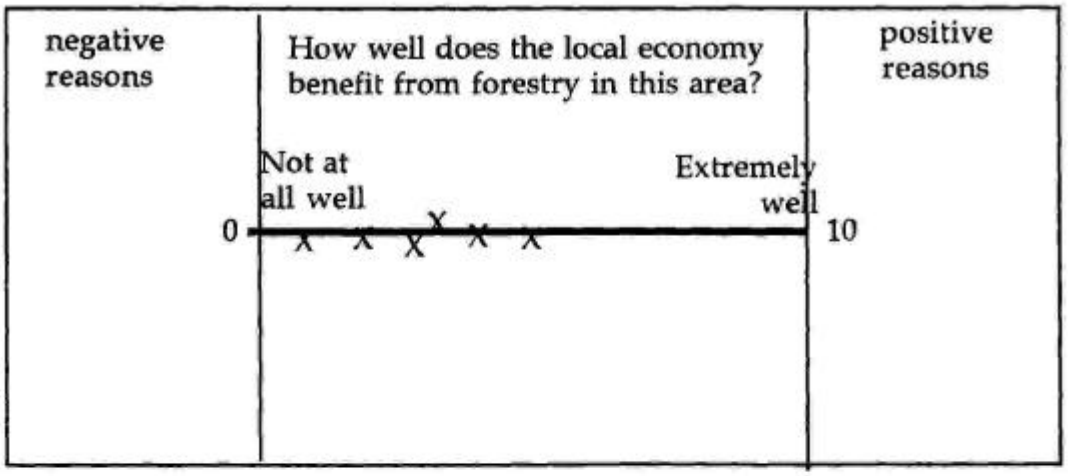
3. If you are working with a group of people, give each person a marker and ask them to place their individual score along the line between 0 and 10 (or 'not at all well'/'extremely well', or sad face/ happy face symbols). See Figure 1.

4. Give each person 3[2] 'post-its' and ask them to write (or draw) the negative reasons for their individual score, i.e. why did they not give it the maximum possible score. Write or draw one reason on one post-it.

[2] People are not limited to just 3 'post-its' if they need more they can use more nor do people have to use all 3 'post-its'. If they only have one reason that is OK.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.84–87, IIED London

Figure 1. Diagram of an H-form



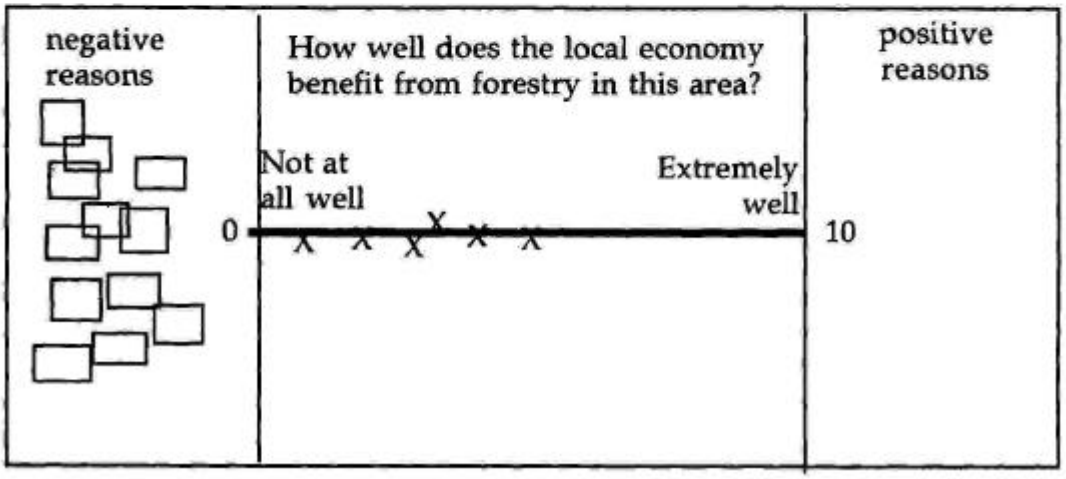


Figure 2. An H-form showing negative reasons for scores.

5. While participants are recording their own reasons, the facilitator can make a heading at the top left hand side of the H-form: 'Negative Reasons for Your Score'. Once everyone has written down their reasons, ask them to stick these up on the left-hand side of the H- form (See Figure 2.).

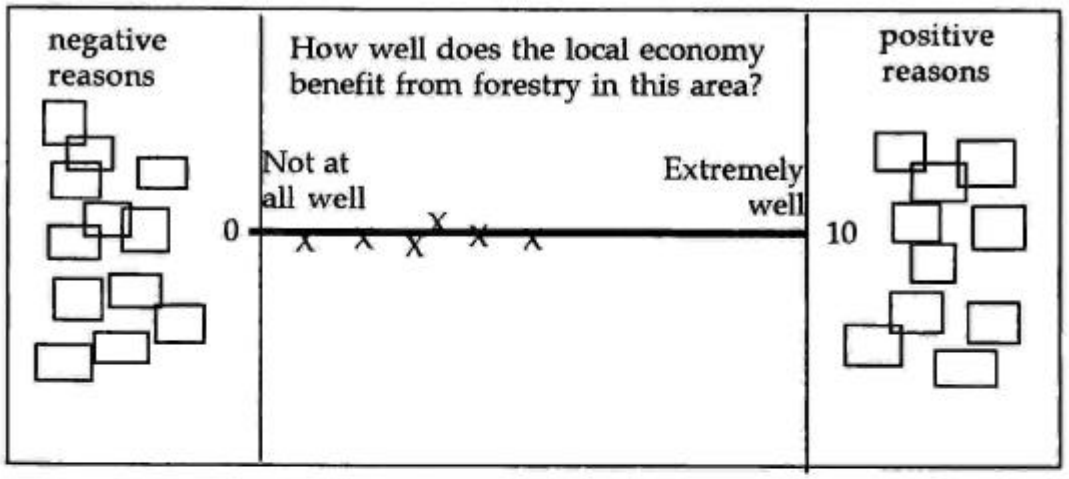
6. Then give each person another 3 'post-its' and ask them to record the positive reasons for their individual score, i.e. why they did not give a zero score. Once these are written on the 'post-its', participants stick these on the right-hand side of the form (see Figure 3).

7. Then each person reads out her/his negative and positive reasons for their score. Encourage people to simply read what they have written (or drawn) on their own 'post-it'-notes without going into lengthy discussion, with any clarification if necessary. The group does not have to agree or disagree with any of the reasons people have recorded. This is simply an opportunity for each person's views to be heard and understood.

8. The next steps depends on the objective of the exercise. In most of the uses of the H-form to date, one of the objectives has been to encourage the individuals in a group to record, share and understand each others' points of view. Asking them to agree to a group score provides the focus and impetus for the discussion of all the views expressed.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.84–87, IIED London

Figure 3. H-form showing positive and negative reasons for scores



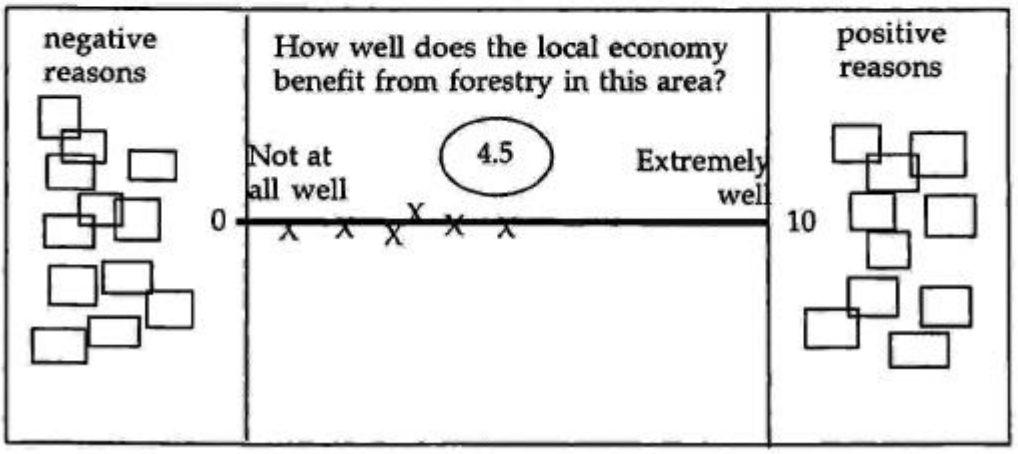


Figure 4. H-form showing group score

8. Once everyone has read out their negative and positive reasons for their individual score, the group can develop a group score. The facilitator asks the group to decide upon a score between 0 and 10 or whatever the scale is you are using. This group score is based on the negative and positive reasons people recorded on the 'post-its'. This is often a quick process because the group will have heard a wide range of reasons behind the individual scores and can therefore usually agree on the group score. Once the group has decided upon a score between 0 and 10 then that score can be marked as a large number (or number of beans) at the top centre section of the H-form.

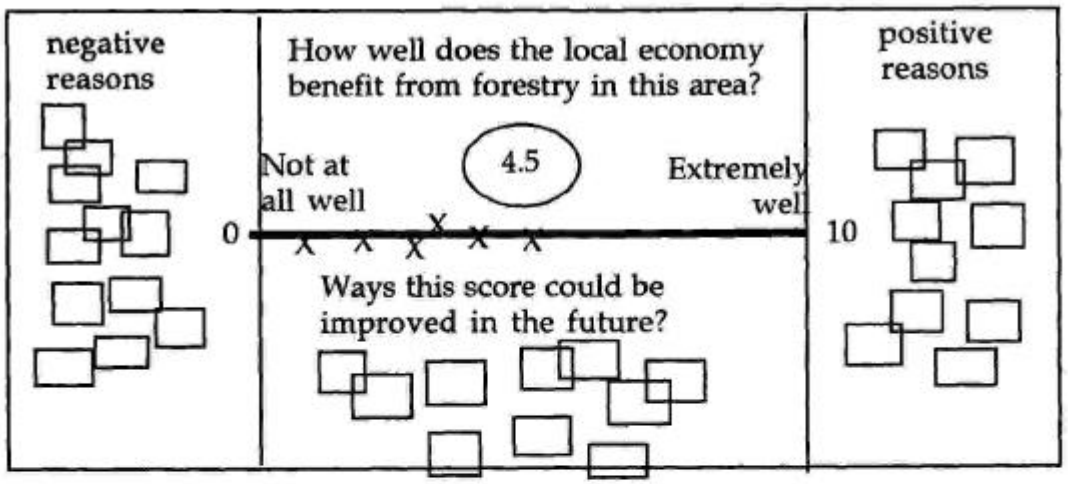
9. Again, depending on the objectives, the next step could be to ask the group to list ways in which the current situation as represented by all the positive and negative reasons could be improved. This is carried out by asking someone from the group to record everyone's ideas in the bottom centre half of the H-form. Alternatively, this step can also be done individually by giving each person 3 'post-its' (see Figure 5).

10. The outputs of this tool can be easily transferred into a report without losing any detail or changing any words or symbols people have used to record their own views and ideas (see Figure 6). This can be done by creating one H-form and marking on it all the individual marks from all the H-forms on the horizontal line and listing all the negative and positive reasons as well as all the ideas for improvement.

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.84–87, IIED London

Another way is by scanning or photocopying (and reducing to A4 if necessary) all the original H-forms and incorporating them in a report.

Figure 5. Completed H-form showing ways to improve the group score



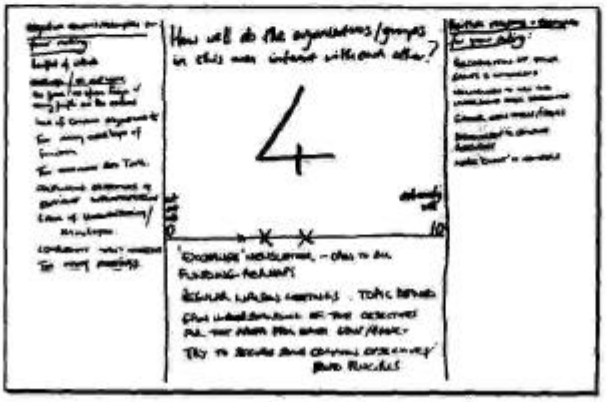


Figure 6. Example of an H-form transferred to report format

Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.84–87, IIED London

Notes

We have found that this tool helps individuals and/or groups to record their own views and ideas in a non-threatening and open, yet structured, way which fosters individual expression as well as common understanding and consensus. It can be used in meetings, workshops, conferences as well as on the streets, in pubs, etc. The sequence and clear framework that the H-form provides keeps discussion focused, specific, progressive and can easily lead to action points. This structured format helps to facilitate and record semi-structured interviews without introducing facilitator biases. We have found that H-forms can be used to enable people of all ages to participate in indicator identification, monitoring, evaluation and planning for improvement in many contexts. This method can also be used alongside other visual/recording tools such as mapping, timelines, Venn diagrams, etc. If written words or numbers are not appropriate then symbols and scoring units (e.g. beans) can be used.

H-forms have been used to evaluate:

- how well objectives are being met;
- how effectively money is being spent;
- what students think of language courses;
- how well the local economy benefits from forestry;
- how much people have heard about a particular programme/project;
- how important farming is in an area;
- how well agencies/organisations work together; and,
- how involved local people have been regarding the development of National Parks, strategic plans, local plans etc.

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Source: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 34, pp.84–87, IIED London