

**Assessing techniques in Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)**<sup>1</sup>Zahra Kaveie and <sup>2</sup>Fakhteh Ghahramani<sup>1,2</sup>Damavand Branch, Islamic Azad University, Damavand, Iran

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**Abstract:** PRA requires researchers / field workers to act as facilitators to help local people conduct their own analysis, plan and take action accordingly. It is based on the principle that local people are creative and capable and can do their own investigations, analysis, and planning. The basic concept of PRA is to learn from rural people. Chambers (1992) has defined PRA as an approach and methods for learning about rural life and conditions from, with and by rural people. He further stated that PRA extends into analysis, planning and action. PRA closely involve villagers and local officials in the process. Similarly, Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) reflects the new thinking about development, needs, and people oriented responsibilities. It is a process that is highly systematic and structured, relying on interdisciplinary teamwork and special strategies for data collection and analysis such as triangulation, probing, and iteration. Some critics consider RRA to be a quick and dirty technique. There are a wide range of participatory tools and techniques available. People can use these tools and techniques according to their situation or needs. Generally, the application of different tools may vary from one situation to another. However, the process for conducting RRA/PRA remains the same.

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**Keywords:** Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)

**Introduction:**

RRA is a social science approach that emerged in the late 1970s. The basic idea of RRA is to rather quickly collect, analyse and evaluate information on rural conditions and local knowledge. This information is generated in close co-operation with the local population in rural areas. Therefore, the research methods had to be adjusted to local conditions, i.e. they had to meet the communication needs of illiterate people or people who are not used to communicating in scientific terms. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) as a method falls under the qualitative and participatory group of research methods. PRA is intended to enable local communities to conduct their own analysis and to plan and take action. PRA involves project staff learning together with villagers about the village. The aim of PRA is to help strengthen the capacity of villagers to plan, make decisions, and to take action towards improving their own situation. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is considered one of the popular and effective approaches to gather information in rural areas. This approach was developed in early 1990s with considerable shift in paradigm from top-down to bottom-up approach, and from blueprint to the learning process.

The most common methods are the following:

- 1- Diagramming, Mapping and Modeling:
  - transects
  - maps (resource, social, farm)
  - venn diagrams
  - seasonally analysis

- historical analysis (time lines, trend lines, activity profiles)

## 2- Ranking and scoring

- pair wise ranking
- matrix ranking
- matrix scoring
- well-being analysis and wealth ranking
- proportional piling
- pie charts (injera charts)

## 3- Problem analysis

- identification and specification
- causal chaining
- prioritization

**Community Sketch Maps**

The purposes of community sketch map or a model: is a visual representation of what the community perceives as their community space. This include showing the shape (appearance) of the community, boundary and all the major features as understood and known by the community (Scrimshaw and Gleason, 1992).

The map shows where resources, activities, problems and opportunities are located, as well as the dimension and scope of issues to be investigated. It is critical to understanding the boundaries and characteristics of the community involved.

**Topographical data (elevation, slope, drainage etc.)**

Topographical data are basic when drawing a map of community, so is information on soils, vegetation, water availability, road, schools, health facilities etc.

There are different sketch maps known for different purposes. Some of them include(Dunn, 1992):

**A. Social maps:** Specific type of topical map representing households according to certain indicators.

- Indicates where people live and how many people live in an area
- Social and residential differences in status and wealth
- Buildings where people live or work, uses of space in a house

**B. Physical and resource maps:** drawn by the people to show natural resource of an area, location and use of natural resources.

- fields and land uses
- physical land features
- water location, quality and use
- soil types, uses, location

**C. Topical maps:** specific topic maps are drawn to draw attention to a particular type of information of the area, example:-

- location of forest resources
- soil types
- different crops grown
- houses and the number of people live in
- social & economic infrastructures etc.

**D. Farm sketch:** Making a farm or compound sketch highlight details that would otherwise be lost in a smaller scale maps.

#### **Gender daily calendar:**

##### **Purpose**

Most daily activities in traditional rural, societies are managed along gender lines. There are activities that are specifically performed by women, men or children. In some communities gender role divisions are still pronounced. In such cases it is necessary for the PRA team to be aware in order not to be seen as interfering with the community cultural norms specific gender roles so that new programmers are not introduced to overburden an already overworked group. Introducing gender awareness in PRA helps a community to begin examining itself(NCAER, 1993).

##### **Who**

Community members both men and women, young and old should be in attendance. PRA team members, men and women and local extension staff in the analysis of gender roles and responsibilities.

##### **How**

It is better if the community is allowed to lead gender related discussions. The PRA team facilitates discussions through a neutral process of mapping out a gender daily calendar. Men and women discuss on each daily activities on agreed season (raining or dry season). The groups on their timetable, from the time

they wake up in the morning to the time they got to sleep in the evening.

##### **Application**

Gender daily calendar provides a clear picture of who does what in the community. It will help in the formulation of the community Action Plan. The community will become aware that unless some changes in gender relations are effected rural development will not proceed as quickly as they would like it to be(Holland, 1998).

**\_ Daily-activity profiles --** Researchers can explore and compare the daily-activity patterns of men, women, youth, and elders by charting the amount of time taken to complete tasks.

**\_ Semi structured interviewing --** A semi structured interviewing and listening technique uses some predetermined questions and topics but allows new topics to be pursued as the interview develops. The interviews are informal and conversational but carefully controlled(Chambers, 1994).

##### **Semi structured interviews (SSI)**

SSI is a guided interview here the major topics and a few key questions are formulated before the interview. But many new additional are asked during the interview based on answers to the key question.

##### **Types of SSI:**

###### **1. The individual interview**

- Get representative information about the society form individual informants
- Ask individuals at a time

###### **2. The key informant interview**

- Get specialized information from one or group of persons about the community
- Informants with specialized knowledge

###### **3. Group interviews:**

- Useful for obtaining general information about the community
- Better for cross checking information
- Group interviews require very careful preparation
- The ideal group is 8 – 15 people

**\_ Types, sequencing, and chain interviews --** Individual, pair, and group interviews are combined in a sequence to take advantage of key informants and specialist groups.

##### **Using secondary sources**

- Secondary sources of information include previously written documents maps, diagrams, tables etc
- Review secondary sources before beginning field survey is census data, aerial photos, marketing reports, etc.

- In reviewing secondary sources, you should keep summary notes, in the form of short paragraphs, diagrams, charts, etc
- In reviewing secondary sources, you should keep summary notes, in the form of short paragraph, diagrams, charts, etc.
- Be as critical as possible in reviewing secondary sources
- To develop understanding of local livelihoods
- Short period of time

### **Venn Diagram (Institutional analysis)**

Venn diagramming is a method to find out who, what person or organizations are important in and for a community.

#### **Purpose**

To identify groups and institutions operating in the community and to show how they interact with each other To show the degree of their cooperation and involvement in development programs. To discover their important or influence on decision making in the community.

#### **What?**

Venn diagrams have been used with in PRA in institutional context to discuss:

- The role and significance of various institutions
  - Levels of communication between organizations
  - The role of project bodies and their intervention
- Improving missing links between existing organizations,
- Potential for working through existing organizations, which ones and with which links.
  - Potential roles for new organization
  - Formal and non-formal groups and their levels of cooperation
  - Communities perceptions of the institutions, always

#### **Who?**

The PRA team, key informants as elders, religious leaders, extension staff and other knowledgeable person take the responsibility of listing and evaluation of individuals and institutions influencing decision making of the community.

#### **How?**

List institutions in the community and discuss importance of each institution and what they do. Make different sized circles and not which circle represents each institution i.e. big circle very important and decision maker, small circle with little importance. During overlapping the circles, the size of the circle indicates the importance of the institution, the distance between the circles indicate the degree of contact between institutions. For instance a large overlap high interaction. No overlap distant relationship.

#### **Application**

Identify individuals, groups or institutions. Important in the lives of people and establish close relationship with them. Provide the necessary support and effectively utilize their skills and experiences.

– **Participatory diagramming** -- People are encouraged to display their knowledge on pie and bar charts and flow diagrams.

– **Wealth and well-being rankings** -- People are asked to sort cards (or slips of paper) representing individuals or households from rich to poor or from sick to healthy. This technique can be used for crosschecking information and for initiating discussions on a specific topic (for example, poverty). The technique can also be used to produce a benchmark against which future development interventions can be measured or evaluated(Blackburn, 1999).

### **CONCLUSION:**

As a result of the PRAs, the communities are expected to attain many benefits including:

- Expressing their own ideas and concerns;
- Organizing their knowledge about the past and present;
- Identifying as a community their problems, the causes of these problems and possible solutions;
- Developing a common plan to address these problems;
- Developing the ability to use their own resources more effectively and attract more resources from the outside.

The academicians/researchers involved in the PRAs are expected to get the following benefits:

- Developing better understanding of rural environments and social as well as economic dynamism taking place there;
- Appreciating the fact that communities are capable of analyzing their problems and outlining possible solutions to their problems;
- Participating in designing possible solutions to community problems;
- Utilizing the results of the PRA work as a research output for publications and presentations;
- Building their research and problem investigation capabilities;
- Supporting their classroom discussions to students with practical examples from the PRA findings.

The main objectives of the current PRA are:

1. empowerment of rural communities by assisting them to systematically utilize their local knowledge to identify problems and strengths, develop skills of analysis, and design appropriate mechanisms for intervention by themselves and/or by development agents;

2. advancement of understanding by academicians/researchers of local knowledge and acknowledgement of the capacity of communities to gather data, conduct analysis, and identify as well as prioritize problems and solutions;

3. utilization of the research questions/problems identified during the PRAs for further investigation;

4. documenting and presenting the outcomes of the PRAs to development agents (governmental and non-governmental) and other stakeholders so that they could undertake interventions in line with the findings.

PRA consists of a series of participatory exercises which help community members better assess their history, resources, and overall situation as concerns agriculture, health, marketing, credit, coping mechanisms, education, and other important areas.

During the conduct of the PRAs, rural communities in the selected villages will gather information on the resources they already possess; organize their knowledge; share experience among themselves; learn from each other; identify and prioritize local development needs; and develop action plans which respond to these needs.

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