



PRA in agricultural development: Touches ground realities

Hiralal Jana

Department of Agricultural Extension, College of Agriculture (B.C.K.V.), Agricultural Farm, BURDWAN (W.B.) INDIA (Email: janahiralal@yahoo.in)

PRA indicates Participatory Rural Appraisal. The rich experience of the farmers generally do not get priority in planning, as the action plans for development of their areas are mostly prepared elsewhere, what is generally done is the incorporation of technologies which are developed and tested elsewhere for increasing production and productivity. The micro-environments by and large remain unobserved. While development plans contain quite a lot of improved technologies, they severely lack the local farmers' innovation and their experience in handling the nature and micro-environments. It has been increasingly felt that a more participatory approach may reduce the gap in unifying the farmers' choice and wisdom with development efforts made by the outside agencies. This gave rise to the concept of Participatory Rural Appraisal. PRA is the process of involving local people in the analysis and interpretation of a rural situation. The local people i.e. the participants take a leadership role in collecting, analyzing, interpreting and presenting information and the process convey knowledge and development insight to the specialists and extension agents.

Genesis : Action –Reflection Research (from 1940 onwards), here local people's knowledge and insight about their life and how it can be changed, motivates them to improve their socio-economic status to achieve the goal of empowerment. Field Research on Farming System (from 1970s), the complexity and diversity of the farmers' knowledge was given due prominence and their ability to conduct their own analysis was recognized. Rapid Rural Appraisal (late 1970s), in this approach information are collected by the outside experts on rural people as well as rural situation. But it is one way approach since beneficiaries derive only limited benefits from this type of interaction. Agro-Ecosystem Analysis (from 1978 onwards), here analysis of systems and properties through visual representation by transect walk and direct observation are focused. Participatory Rural Appraisal (between late 1980s and 1990s), it involves a variety of methodologies which entertain local people to analyze their situation, to share their knowledge, to make needs assessment and to take decision on their needs.

Principles of PRA :

Rapid and progressive learning : Emphasis is on flexible and innovative use of methods and providing opportunities for rapid and progressive learning.

Reversal learning : At the site, face to face learning takes place from the local people.

Optimal ignorance : The principle follows not going into unnecessary details but emphasizes usefulness of information.

Offsetting biases : Development tourism and antipoverty biases are consciously avoided by being relaxed and not rushed, listening and not lecturing, detail probing and not speeding indifferently and looking for participation of rural people.

Diversity : Looking for diverse rural events, different processes and forces explaining various relationships in rural communities.

Triangulation : Cross checking the data through different sources to improve accuracy.

Importance of PRA :

- Sustained change and need for accurate and timely information

- Reduces the normal time consuming long methods of survey.

- Method is cost effective.

- Cuts down the normal professional bias and antipoverty bias towards people.

- Advocates that the people themselves are solution agents for the problems.

- Understanding the local environment according to farmers' perception.

- Learns farmers' indigenous technologies.

- Achieves for triangulation means to check and recheck the findings.

- Develops self critical analysis.

- Opportunity to direct contact with communities and their needs.

Characteristics of PRA :

- PRA realizes human potential.

- Develops capacity to analyze and solve problems.

- Importance is given on people's knowledge.

– Collaborative between the researcher/development workers and beneficiaries.

– Researcher has a commitment for betterment of the community.

– Approach is problem centered and action oriented.

Types of PRA :

Explorative PRA : Understands broad patterns and trends in an agro-ecosystem where the output is usually a theme or a set of questions for further analysis.

Topical PRA : Investigates a specific topic in depth where the output is usually a detailed position that can use as a basis for research and development.

Deductive PRA : Have a basis for having information on themes not directly attempted through PRA where the output will be qualitative information on topics which require tact and can not be directly examined on account of their sensitive nature.

PRA for research and training : Undertakes research involving participation of rural people and to train different groups of professionals who are likely to use PRA in their field work.

PRA for planning and implementation : Designs projects and implement them where the output will be more adaptive to local needs, having greater participation of beneficiaries and thereby having more chances for success.

Monitoring and evaluation of PRA : Monitors progress in the implementation of projects and programmes as well as the problems of project implementation can be better understood and solved.

PRA tools :

Social map : It gives a picture of dwellings and other buildings indicating the location, size and extent of habitation and their socioeconomic characteristics.

Resource map : A village resource map can show different kinds of natural resources and micro environments.

Mobility map : This reveals the pattern of social mobility for different sections of communities, mobility can also be used for assessment of education, marketing, fetching drinking water etc.

Farm map : In case of individual household, a villager who owns a farm can be asked to draw a map of his farm in order to show what is grown on the farm and where.

Enterprise map : It provides information on the variety of enterprises and their location in the village.

Services and opportunities map : It is used to explore spatial realities of the local people with specific reference to local people's perception of the services and opportunities available.

Trend analysis : Trend analysis can provide a good idea

of the quantitative changes over time in different aspects of village life such as yield, population, livestock population, the number of trees, area under cultivation, rainfall etc.

Gap analysis : To measure the gap between what is and what could or should be gap analysis is a useful tool.

Force field analysis : It is a technique used to identify and analyze forces affecting a problem situation visually, so as to bring about a positive change.

Livelihood analysis : It is used to interpret the behaviour decisions and adjustment strategies of households with different socio-economic characteristics. It helps to understand existing and new livelihood opportunities.

Transect : It explores the spatial dimensions of people's realities. It has popularly been used for natural resource management. It provides a cross sectional representation of different agro-ecological parameters including topography, land type, land usage, access, ownership, soil type, soil fertility, vegetation, crops, problems, opportunities and solutions.

Historical transect : It has traditionally been used for depicting changes in different aspects of natural resources.

Seasonal diagram : It provides information on various aspects of farming and village situation during different seasons and months of the year.

Spider diagram : It is a visual method, often used to show the relative performance of a group or individual on a range of dimensions which are components of an overall issue.

Cause effect diagram : It focuses on the causal factors of an activity and the effects thereof.

Impact diagram : It is used to identify and depict the impact of an activity, intervention or event. Impact diagram not only captures the planned changes but also takes into account other types of changes as perceived by the local people.

Venn diagram : This visual method is to represent the role of individuals or institutions and the degree of their importance in decision making. In such diagrams, circles of different sizes represent an individual or institution whose size shows degree of its importance in decision making and the distance or closeness to the village that is how easily it can be approached.

Pair wise ranking method : In this method, two items, attributes, factors etc., are compared at a time.

Matrix ranking/ scoring method : It makes the comparison of various items on the basis of different criteria for assigning ranks or scores according to their relative importance for choosing best one or required one/ over other items.

Well being ranking method : Well being ranking method is commonly used for ranking and grouping households and communities on the basis of income, wealth and other perceivable well being criteria.

Time line : It captures the chronology of events as recalled by local people.

Observation : It encompasses any direct observation of field objects, events, processes, relationship or people that is recorded by the team.

Secondary data review : Collected secondary data from various sources are reviewed and summarized for sorting the PRA task.

Daily activity schedule : It explores the activities of an individual, group or community on a daily basis in respect of time spent in different activities, size of work and other considerations.

Steps in conducting PRA :

Site selection and situation analysis : Sites for PRA are chosen jointly by the community members and the development workers. After selection of site, the rural situation, natural resources and their interrelationships with the people are analyzed to gain basic knowledge about the study area.

Primary visits and discussion : A PRA team generally comprises of 4-6 specialists. The team meets the village leaders before starting a PRA to clarify what PRA will do as well as what it can not do. The team holds discussion to identify who have not yet been involved in PRA and seek to draw them, where appropriate.

Data collection : In addition to findings about existing projects, institutions and government services and examining secondary sources of information, PRA techniques may generate required data.

Data synthesis and analysis : The PRA team and villagers meet together to rank the listed problems. The outcome is a set of problems that village groups agree and ranked from the most to the least significant.

Ranking opportunities : Opportunities that can address each problem are identified. Opportunities that are available for the highest priority problems are then ranked.

Preparing the village resource management plan (VRMP) and community action plan (CAP): The highest priority solutions are organized into a VRMP, which takes the form of a contract between village groups, technical group officers, NGOs and sometimes external groups.

Implementation : Once the VRMP and CAP are completed, it is time to implement them. In general the actual work will be performed mainly by the community members only under the technical guidance of the

technical experts.

Follow-up and evaluation : Necessary follow-up action and evaluation of the on- going completed development works as planned earlier are done to seek for the continuity of purpose.

Hints for a successful PRA :

- Encourage correction and addition
- Choose a suitable place and materials for participants.
- Follow PRA tools
- Try not interfering or interrupting, except when needed.
- Do not suggest answers
- Allow to listen and learn, but stay away from lecturing
- Allow to communicate members to do it
- Show that you are interested in every aspect of the PRA.
- Do not impose your ideas
- Discuss and encourage the members for analysis of PRA
- Follow-up on points of interest
- Try to get different kinds of people to attend the PRA process
- Do not do anything without proper consideration
- Invent your own ways of doing things
- Allow the community to invent new ways of doing things.

Obstacles to people's participation :

Structural obstacles : The situation is typified by a "top down" development approach adopted by development initiatives.

Administrative obstacles : The administrative structures that are control oriented are operated by a set of guidelines and adopt a blue print approach, providing little significant space to local people to make their own decisions.

Social obstacles : The social obstacles are mentality of dependence, culture of silence, domination of the rural elite, or gender inequality, militate against people participation and others.

Conclusion : The concept of participatory rural appraisal emerged from the concept of rapid rural appraisal where the word 'Rapid' gave the impression that the appraisal should be done with great speed, which resulted in criticizing the method itself, whereas, the concept 'participatory' however, appears to be more appropriate and important, as in the whole process emphasis is on participation of the local people, rather than doing the job rapidly and saving some time. Among the various methods

of information gathering in social science research and development, participatory rural appraisal is one of effective and reliable techniques. Previously most of the development programmes were based on top to bottom approach, therefore, most of the programmes becomes failure due to lack of information about ground realities. The rich experience of the farmers generally do not get priority in planning, as the action plans for development of their areas are mostly prepared elsewhere. Considering this fact the government had started bottom to top approach and it was first introduced in ATMA (Agricultural Technology Management Agency) project in 1998 and it is now most successful agricultural programme where PRA is one of important pillars. Therefore, PRA is one of effective and reliable approach in information gathering in social science research and development no doubt, but

it will be more effective if the following measures are considered carefully:- (1) Development should be considered on the way which way rural people are expecting that. (2) Proper rapport building with villagers (3) Experts' availability must be ensured before starting of the process (4) People's realities and priorities should be understood properly (5) Strong linkage is essential among rural institutions (6) Rural people's sentiment and culture should not be hurt anyway (7) Dependency for external funds and outside agencies should be reduced as far as possible (8) Self interest of the rural people should be replaced by group interest through persuasion (9) Changing of attitude of rural people in order to ensure their participation in decision making.

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