HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation | AFGHANISTAN

Participatory Rural Appraisal

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) builds on Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), but moves much further towards a more holistic approach to participatory development. PRA, the term we will use in this note, subsequently developed into ”Participatory Learning and Action” (PLA). Both are approaches and tools that are designed to enable local people to formulate and analyse their situation in order to plan, act, monitor and evaluate their actions (Chambers, 1994). The underlying concept is that local people are capable of analysing their own realities and that the outsiders e.g. extensionists “do not dominate and lecture”. They facilitate, listen and learn; they provide methods, which local people can use in their own appraisal, analysis and planning. The purpose of PRA is to 1) understand problems and opportunities of female and male farmers; 2) plan and implement extension activities that respond to their needs and demands; and 3) put female and male farmers in the centre. PRA methods are thus well suited for planning and initiating extension activities. Extensionists who use PRA methods play a facilitating role in the development process.

Some guiding principles of PRA are:

- **The “3i” principles**: PRA is ***i***nterdisciplinary, ***i***terative and relies on ***i***ndigenous knowledge.
- **Triangulation,** or the use of multiple methods: combining different perspectives and various methods helps to ensure that the information that has been collected is reliable and reasonably comprehensive. This approach is also called “triangulation”, which means that one looks at an issue from three different perspectives.
- **Utilisation of results**: PRA is not applied for the sake of research. Information collected through PRA is always used to initiate action. Information gathered in PRA processes is always validated with the concerned people before it is used.
- **Capacity building**: PRA is a way to empower local communities to take their own decisions and to decide on their own development. Local people are seen as experts on their own context, and their interests, abilities, preferences and knowledge need to be acknowledged and used accordingly.
- **Optimal ignorance**: In the application of PRA, as much information as necessary is collected, but not more. This is called reaching “optimal ignorance”. PRA methods are – as the name suggests – participatory in nature, rapid and relatively cheap. They therefore yield reliable and relevant information under time and financial constraints.
- **Common sense**: Ultimately, PRA is about “common sense”. It combines a set of principles - as mentioned above - with a tool-box of participatory methods.

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is regarded as one of the most popular and effective approaches for gathering information in rural areas. The approach was developed in the early 1990s in the context of a significant paradigm shift from a top-down to a bottom-up approach. PRA is based on village experiences in situations where communities effectively manage their natural resources (Cavestro, 2003).

Box 1: Scope of PRA

1. To identify a community’s problems ***and*** opportunities, including conflicting interests (gender!);
2. To jointly establish priorities for development activities, e.g. extension interventions;
3. To make extension interventions relevant to the community. PRA methods may be applied at any stage of an extension intervention, e.g. for planning, during implementation, but also for monitoring and evaluation.

PRA is intended to enable local communities to conduct their own analysis, plan and take action. PRA involves project staff learning together with villagers about their village. The aim of PRA is to help strengthen the capacity of villagers to plan, make decisions and take action towards improving their own situation. It requires field workers to act as facilitators to help local people conduct their own analysis plan and take action accordingly (Cavestro, 2003).

A properly implemented PRA pays particular attention to the inclusion of marginal and vulnerable groups – women, youths, the elderly and other disadvantaged people – and ensures their effective participation in development planning and implementation.

The basic method used in PRA is the “**semi-structured interview**”. Based on a grid of questions prepared in advance, the PRA team or extensionist enters into discussion with individuals or groups

For the following PRA tools, which are introduced in this concept note, semi-structured interviews are also the primary means of interaction with the communities:

- Resource map
- Transect walk
- Historical timeline
- Wealth ranking
- Food path/market path
- Simple ranking/pair-wise ranking

Box 2: Basic methods in PRA

A semi-structured interview is open interview that allows new ideas to be brought up as a result of what the interviewee says. The interviewer will generally have a framework of themes he/she wishes to explore.

Focus group: a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a product, service, concept, advertisement, idea, etc. Questions are asked in an interactive group setting where participants are free to talk with other group members.

(Wikipedia, 2015)

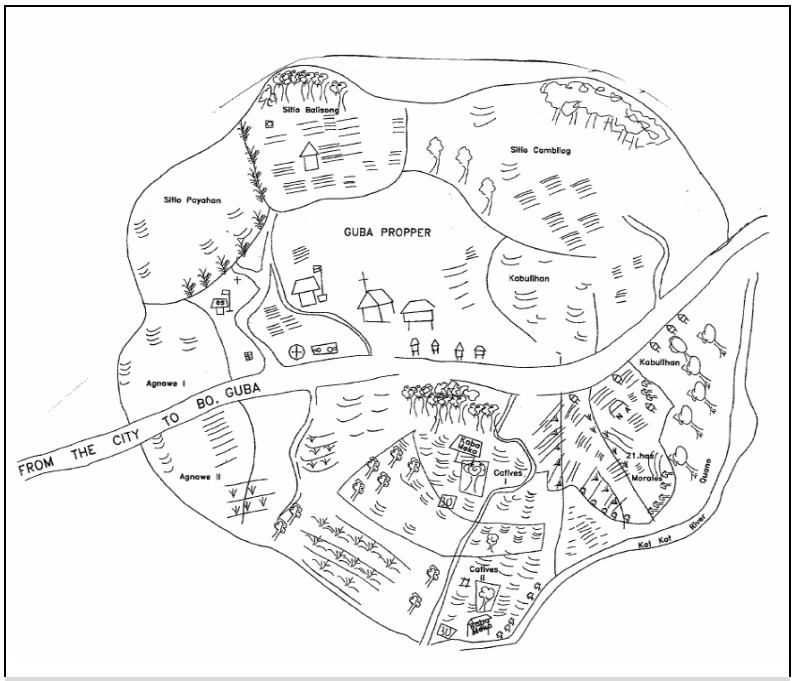


Figure 1: Example of a resource map (Asia Forest Network, 2002)

Resource map

A resource map provides a rapid visual representation of the resources in a community or village. Resource maps are a means by which villagers can identify resources within their community or village and gain a better understanding of their conditions, use patterns, access rights and related problems, as well as their potential. A jointly elaborated resource map shows how the community perceives the resources, and it therefore complements other information sources (cartographic maps, satellite pictures, Google maps, etc.).

Resource maps helps people to learn about the community's environmental, economic and social resources. The primary concern is not with cartographic precision, but to collect useful information about local people's perceptions of resources. Participants should determine the contents of the map by focusing on what is important to them.

Maps may include:

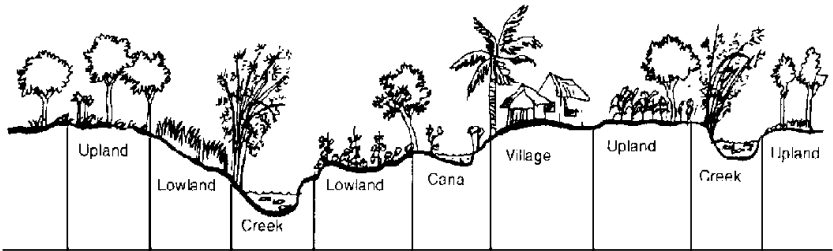
- Infrastructure (roads, houses, buildings)
- Health clinics, schools and religious facilities
- Special places (bus stops, cemeteries, shrines)
- Markets, processing plants, shops
- Water resources and sources
- Agricultural lands (crop, orchards, nurseries etc.)
- Agro-ecological zones (soils, slopes, elevations etc.)
- Common pool resources (forests, rangeland etc.)

A resource map can be prepared with a relatively small group of experienced and knowledgeable community members/villagers and then validated with a larger group. Special attention needs to be paid to the participation of women in resource mapping, as they might perceive resources differently than men. Sometimes it is advisable to draw separate resource maps with women and men, and then get each group to validate the other's map.

Moreover, the facilitator could also ask who generally uses these resources and who has control over them (i.e. men, women?). This information can be very useful during the implementation of an extension activity, too.
It is advisable to plan half a day for resource mapping, including its validation by a larger group.

Box 3: How to facilitate resource mapping

1. Spend some time thinking about why a resource map should be prepared, how it is going to be done, and where it will be conducted.
2. Choose your resource persons (gender!).
3. Explain the purpose of preparing a resource map. Decide jointly what information should be shown on the map.
4. Choose an appropriate place and medium like:
   - Ground (using sticks, stones, ash, sawdust),
   - Floor or flat surface (using chalk, stones, sticks),
   - Paper (using crayons, pens or chalk).
5. Enhance participation by handing round a stick, pen or whatever. Work on one item at a time, e.g. finishing the land resources first before tackling water resources.
6. Observe how things are taking place. If some things appear to have been left out, ask the members about it. Encourage corrections and/or additions.
7. Encourage discussion and analysis to highlight key issues. Ask "why" is it so. Let the members identify problems based on the map, thus generating a list of problems and opportunities.
8. Take notes on the processes. Copy the map on paper, especially if it was done on the floor or the ground, or take a picture. Indicate the mappers' names to give them credit.



	Upland	Lowland	Creek	Lowland	Cana	Village	Upland	Creek	Upland
Water source	Rain	Rain Irrigation	Rain Runoff/ seepage	Rain Irrigation		Rain Well	Rain	Rain	Rain
Soil	Sandy Loam		Rocky	Clay	Rocky	Sandy Clay loam	Sandy Clay loam		Clay
Crops	Rice Sugar-cane Eggplant Beans Corn	Rice Sesbania Pepper Beans Tomato	Bamboo	Rice Sesbania Pepper Garlic Tomato	Bamboo	Okra Horseradish Grapes Beans	Peanuts Cassava Rice Corn Beans	Bam-boo	Rice Bean Sugar-cane
Fo-rages	Grass-land for grazing	Gliricidia	Grass	Azolla	Grass		Weeds in plots	Guinea grass	Grass land
Trees	Gliricidia Mango Leucaena Guava Banana Tamarind	Gliricidia	Banana Gliricidia Leucaena	Gliricidia Banana Leucaena Acacia Neem	Gliricidia Leucaena	Acacia Mango Guava Coconut Leucaena Jackfruit	Mango		Mango Tamarind Star-apple
Ani-mals	Cow Carabao Goat		Catfish Mudfish Carp Frog Crab	Golden snails Pig Fish Duck Frog	Catfish Frog Snail	Dog Cat Pig Goat Cattle Turkey	Goat Carabao Cattle	Snail Catfish	Cattle Carabao Goat
Prob-lems	Erosion Lack of water	Pest and disease				Lack of cohesiveness among local officials	Erosion Lack of water		Erosion Lack of water
Oppur-tunities						Accessibility to road			

Figure 2: Example of a transect walk (IIRR; 1996)

Transect walk

The transect is a tool that directly builds upon the resource map and which helps one to learn in detail about the environmental, economic and social resources in a community or village. A transect is a sort of one-dimensional map of a line cut through a village. It depicts a cross-section of an area, along which a number of issues are recorded. The purpose of a transect walk is to organise and refine spatial information, and to summarise local conditions in the area. The information is gathered from direct observation while walking in a straight line through the community. The items to be observed are selected jointly with the villagers; often this selection is based on the problems and opportunities identified in a resource map.

A transect walk can be performed with the help of one or two local guides. This group then purposefully seeks interaction with the villagers they meet on their way. A transect walk typically takes a full day.

In the context of Afghanistan, transect walks need to be adjusted to adequately integrate the perspectives of women: 1) one is more likely to meet men and no or very few women outside the compounds; and 2) male groups have limited opportunities to interact with women.

A way forward, as practised by HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, is to send male groups for transect walks, and female groups to visit the women in their homes on so-called "**court yard visit**". The female group does a short transect walk in the courtyard and discusses with the women about their work in the garden, with backyard poultry, dairy, etc.

Box 4: How to facilitate a transect walk

1. Review the resource map to estimate the line of greatest diversity/interest. Discuss with the villagers which parts of the area to visit.
2. Discuss the transect line or approximate route to be taken and the items to be observed (e.g. crops, trees and other vegetation, soil types, availability of water, conflicts, etc.). Assign tasks to the team: for example, one should take notes on the crops and vegetation, and the others are to take notes on the soil types and water, and so on. Use local terms when identifying trees and vegetation or classifying soil types.
3. Start the exercise as early as possible. Walk along the agreed route and observe the diverse conditions. Discuss your observations with the team, focusing particularly on resource issues such as soil management, water availability and other related issues, so that you can arrive at a common understanding.
4. Make a transect diagram on paper and note down the observations under the corresponding headings. Be ready to identify contrasts and changes as you move along. Take your time and do not rush.
5. Identify problems and opportunities. Talking with the farmers along the way to get their views is also helpful.
6. At the end of each transect exercise, the team is to make a transect diagram on paper or on a blackboard so as to encourage further discussion. Allow the team to identify possible solutions to problems discovered during the walk.
7. Add the identified problems, and their possible solutions, to the list of problems and opportunities.

Historical timeline

This tool assists with the documentation of the history of a community or beneficiary group. It can be done either in pictures, writing or symbols. A timeline (e.g. in intervals of ten years) is established, going back as far as people can remember. Another way to establish the timeline is to ask the respondents to recall important events for the village or for themselves. Together, three to four events are selected and shown on a time axis. The timeline is focused on a specific subject such as natural or communal resource management, or village growth and its effect on the surrounding environment. The aspects to be discussed depend on the interest of the community and/or of the extensionist; e.g. a veterinarian may want to learn about changes in the number of livestock or the occurrence of diseases.

Box 5: How to facilitate a historical timeline

1. Timelines are listings of events according to date (often approximate).
2. Invite 2-3 village elders, preferably also women.
3. Enquire about major events in the past.
4. Probe further if there are wide gaps between events by recalling events like war, occurrence of natural calamities, etc.
5. Discuss the topic of interest (e.g. population, resource use, water availability, access to land…) at the selected points in time
6. Use a large sheet of paper or blackboard or whatever is available to visualise the timeline.
7. Show the results/entries to others to validate. Make sure that women also validate the results.

Historical timelines help to identify important past events, for example drought, flash floods, violent events etc. This information helps the PRA team to be better informed about the area and the potential risks posed to natural resources. Understanding how the community dealt with past events may help the team to facilitate discussion and select suitable extension activities. Timelines also help one to understand and analyse current problems and opportunities by searching for their roots in the past.

Recording a historical timeline takes around two hours for the discussion with the village elders. If one includes the validation by other community members, the historical timeline will take around half a day.

Wealth ranking

Wealth ranking is a PRA tool that determines the relative wealth and well-being of households in a community. Wealth ranking is carried out by the villagers themselves; it therefore also provides insight into how a community defines wealth. The result of a wealth ranking makes it possible to assign households to a specific wealth category and therefore to target extension activities in particular and development initiatives in general to those who are most in need. The result of a wealth ranking can also be used to ensure that members of all wealth categories are adequately represented in extension activities. This is a measure to avoid "elite capture", a well-known phenomenon in extension whereby extensionists often prefer to work with the more wealthy members of a community.

Box 6: How to facilitate wealth ranking

1. A numbered list is made of all the households in the village, and the name of each household head and corresponding household number is written on a separate card. Alternatively, prepare a map of the inhabited area of the village, number the houses and note the household heads.
2. Some key informants who are very familiar with the village and its inhabitants are asked to sort the cards into as many piles as there are wealth categories in the community, using their own criteria, or else to mark the houses on the map (e.g. one colour for one wealth category).
3. While the households are being assigned to a wealth category, ask the informants for the wealth criteria they are using. Assure the informants of confidentiality, and do not discuss the ranks of individual families so as not to cause bad feelings within the community.
4. List the local criteria for wealth derived from the ranking discussion. Note down for each household the category number (on household list / or on the map).

Table 1: Fictive example of wealth-ranking in Afghanistan

Criterion	Rich household	Average household	Poor household
Family composition	Male breadwinners at home, at least one family member with external employment supports the family	Male breadwinners active in agriculture / livestock keeping	Widow with children
Size of sheep / goat flock	More than 200 heads	More than 50 heads	Less than 20 heads
Food gap (months)	None	1-2 months	5 months

Wealth rankings are best done with, and by, a small group of key informants who know the community well. Watch out for gender aspects: women may define wealth differently from men. It may be the case that people do not like to be categorised as "poor". Therefore, you may keep the individual attribution of a household confidential, while a larger group of men and women should validate the total number of households in a category and, more importantly, the criteria for defining wealth. The time required for a wealth ranking depends on the size of the population. Two hours is the minimum time that should be reserved, plus sufficient time for validation.

The table below provides a fictitious example of a wealth ranking in the context of Afghanistan. Possible other wealth indicators include (non-exhaustive list): buildings (e.g. size, windows or not); land ownership (e.g. size of the person's own land, size of leased land); assets (e.g. TV set, radio, agricultural machinery); transport means (e.g. vehicle, motorcycle, draft animals); and others.

Food path/Market path

The "food path" follows an agricultural product from the required inputs for production (seed, breeding stock) to the final product (bread, cheese). In a discussion with a group of local experts (e.g. wheat growers, poultry raisers) the steps from inputs to the product are listed, visualised and discussed. This allows one to identify any problems and opportunities along the food path, such as requirements for labour, capital, equipment, or constraints in production such as pests and diseases; and also opportunities to improve the situation. This tool makes it possible, therefore, to identify very well-targeted extension interventions.

“Market path” takes up this idea and is a further development of the PRA tool “food path”. The “market path” is one tool among several from the “Rapid Market Appraisal” tool kit. It follows a product from the farm gate to the customer. As above, on this journey the Rapid Market Appraisal team identifies problems and opportunities related to the processing and marketing of an agricultural product in order to identify well-targeted interventions. The most important resource persons are processors, transporters and traders; they are the people with the best knowledge of the quantities and prices of a product (refer, for example, to Helvetas, 2003: Clients first!)

Typically, the information gathered in the frame of a Rapid Market Appraisal includes:

- Quantities and prices of a product, including long-term trends and seasonality,
- Transport and trade routes, market places, end-consumers and prices,
- Quality requirements including bulking, grading, packing, labelling and the influence on the product’s price,
- Transport, storage and processing including value addition and margins.

As with every PRA tool, market path/Rapid Market Appraisal aims at identifying interventions that ultimately benefit the target population, e.g. disadvantaged farmers in remote areas. In a Rapid Market Appraisal a team of practitioners follows the product physically from the farm gate to the consumer. Depending on the length of the value chain this may take anything from a few hours (direct sale of eggs on a local market) to several days (e.g. exported cashmere wool).

Ranking

Ranking is used in everyday life whenever somebody needs to make a choice. PRA systematises ranking tools to help villagers to set priorities (i.e. problems, needs, actions, etc.) or to understand the importance of problems and opportunities. Ranking means comparing two or more options and placing them in order. Ranking tools are also useful to learn about categories, criteria, choices and priorities of villagers.

The question will determine with whom ranking is undertaken! You don’t ask a herder in rural Afghanistan to compare sophisticated laptop models, nor do you discuss the characteristics of different sheep breeds with a city girl. Ranking can be conducted separately for women and men or different wealth groups to determine distinct preferences.

Box 7: How to facilitate pair-wise ranking (based on Cavestro, 2003)

1. Look for key informants or other knowledgeable villagers (resource persons) who are willing and able to participate in the ranking exercise.
2. Explain and agree on the purpose and objectives of the ranking before starting. Brief the resource persons on how to conduct the exercise. Discuss expected outcome and its usage.
3. Define with the resource persons the options, problems and opportunities to be ranked.
4. Write the issues on cards.
5. Facilitate the comparison of the issues (“Do you like option A more than option B? Why is that?” Or: “Is problem X more important than problem Y? Why is that?”). Continue by comparing option B with option C, and so on.
6. Place the cards with the issues in the priority order according to the resource persons’ view. Take note of disagreements and try to understand them.
7. Note carefully the arguments the resource persons use. You may prioritise them through a simple ranking, too.
8. Encourage discussions while the exercise is going on to enhance probing and cross checking of information. The most important question is “why?”
9. At the end of the exercise, briefly discuss, analyse and summarise the results together with resource persons, and later validate them with a larger group.

Simple ranking

This is used to compare a small number of easily comparable options. The typical question the facilitator asks is “Which option do you prefer?” And the next, even more important question is: “Why is that?” This increases the understanding of the reasoning of an indvidual or a group.

Pair-wise ranking

In pair-wise ranking, items of interest (trees, food, solutions, etc.) are compared pair by pair. This is appropriate when there is a larger number of options, and it is more stuctured than simple ranking. The options are compared in pairs one after the other. Again, the resource persons are asked which of the two options they prefer and why. Pair-wise ranking produces not only a prioritised list, but also a list with the reasons mentioned by the resource persons. This list can be ranked too. The preferences and reasons are likely to vary between groups (young and old, men and women, etc.).

Further reading and references

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