Session Plan Eight
Participatory Rural Appraisal Tools and Techniques

1. Objectives

- To understand the philosophy of participatory approaches and their contribution to development
- To become familiar with the concept of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and its tools and techniques for understanding local situations in terms of the problems and the resources available to resolve those problems
- To recognise that rural people have vast knowledge, experience, and expertise of their resource base and hence can contribute to the development of plans and programmes suitable to their local contexts
- To emphasise the need to involve local people not only to identify their own monitoring and evaluating of development activities
- To become acquainted with PRA tools and techniques that are useful in the context of watershed management

2. Session Outline

- A critical review of development paradigms
- Understanding participatory approaches and the differences between participatory approaches and other research techniques
- Meaning, basic components and principles of PRA
- Strengths, weaknesses and challenges of PRA
- Suggested PRA tools and techniques in watershed management
- General training techniques
- Slide Show

3. Session Time: 2 hours

4. Assumptions

- Development should not be imposed from outside, but should flourish from within the concerned community itself.
- Development is possible only through bottom-up planning and should evolve around people's felt needs and aspirations.
- Local people know more than 'development experts', they should thus be considered as partners in the process of development rather than mere beneficiaries.

- There has to be a reversal of roles between local people and outsiders so as to empower the local people and increase the chances of development projects being successful.

5. Session Topics: Epilogue (Notes for Trainers)

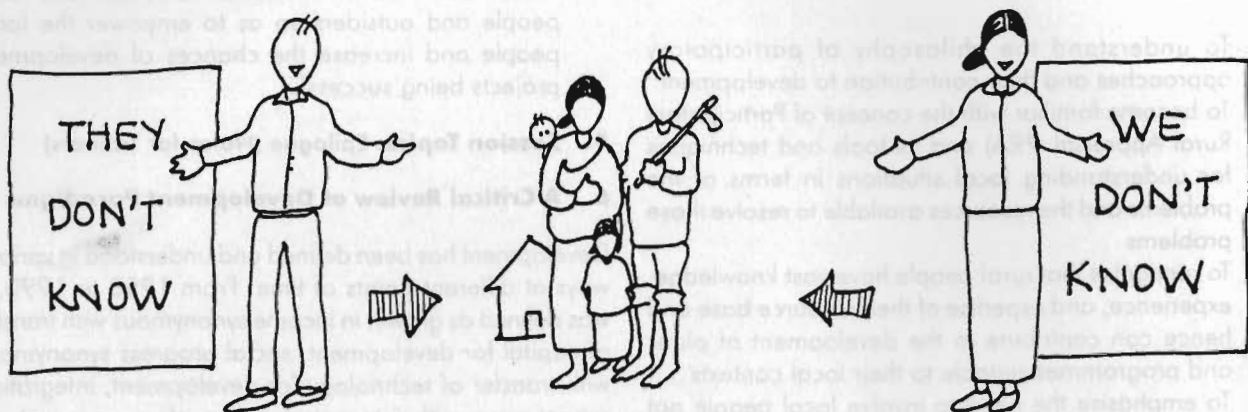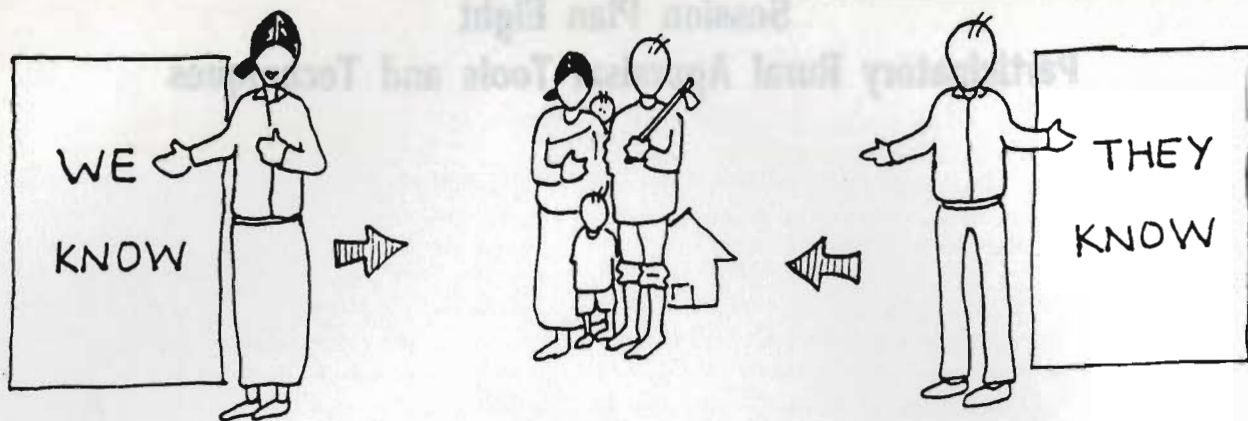## 6. A Critical Review of Development Paradigms

Development has been defined and understood in various ways at different points of time. From 1950 to 1990, it was defined as growth in income synonymous with transfer of capital for development, social progress synonymous with transfer of technology for development, integration synonymous with integrated approaches over sectoral approaches for development, liberation synonymous with bottom-up planning for development, and dialogue synonymous with participatory or people-centred approaches for development. The present development paradigm, which is based on participatory philosophy, revolves around people and strongly believes that unless and until local people are involved in decision-making at all project levels – need identification, planning, and designing, implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation – development cannot be achieved.

7. Understanding the Participatory Approach and Its Differences from Other Research Techniques

The assumptions presented in Section 5 highlight the basic principles of participatory approaches. In a nutshell, a participatory approach can be defined as one which deeply respects the knowledge of the local people and creates an environment where local people can understand their potential, their capacity, and their power and can develop their self-esteem.

Some basic differences between participatory approaches and other traditional extension practices are as follow.

- A participatory approach believes in a global approach rather than the sectoral approach of other techniques.
- A participatory approach believes that development initiatives should come from the community and not from outside, unlike the traditional approach where initiatives usually come from outside.

WE KNOW

THEY KNOW

THEY DON'T KNOW

WE DON'T KNOW

THEY KNOW THE PROBLEM

WE KNOW THE PROBLEM

THEY KNOW THE SOLUTION

WE KNOW THE SOLUTION

- A participatory approach follows a group approach of creating group dynamics and not an individual approach, which is mainly the focus of traditional extension practices.
- A participatory approach aims at reinforcing the capabilities of local populations rather than on the technology transfer of the traditional approach.

8. Meaning, Basic Components and Principles of PRA

A review of development history shows how the focus of development approaches prevalent at different times has changed. Recently, the focus has shifted from a centralized blueprint approach to a decentralized bottom-up planning process. In these changes, a major role has been played by two related families of approaches known as Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). While RRA, which emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, focussed more on quickly eliciting, analysing, and evaluating information and hypotheses about rural life and resources, PRA, and its further evolution, spread in the late 1980s and early 1990s and focussed more on ways to empower local people so that they themselves could appraise and analyse their problems and resources, and plan, act, and monitor and evaluate the programmes based on local capacity and knowledge.

The commonly-accepted meaning of PRA is that:

It is a way of enabling local people to analyse their living conditions, to share the outcomes, and to plan their activities. It involves "handing over the stick from outsider to insider" in methods and action. The outsiders' role is catalytic, as a facilitator and convenor of processes within a community that is prepared to alter its own situation.

The three basic components of PRA are:

- facilitation,
- attitude, and
- behaviour of outsiders and culture of sharing.

In PRA, outsiders act as facilitators and enable local people to do all or most of the investigation, mapping, modelling, diagramming, analysis, presentation, and planning. Similarly, the facilitators are expected to follow the local norms to the extent possible so that local people can feel they are part of their own community. This requires the outsiders or facilitators to pay attention to their every activity such as where to sit, how to listen to local people rather than lecturing, appropriate visiting time, respecting local people's knowledge, skills and expertise, taking an attitude of learning and embracing error. Finally, continuous sharing of information with local people, with other PRA team members, and with other institutions, NGOs and government, is another basic component of PRA that has to be considered by the PRA team members all the time.

Among the basic principles of PRA, the following are the major ones.

- Triangulation in the composition of the team, sources of information, and application of tools and techniques
- Flexibility and informality in the selection of key informants, sources of information, tools and techniques, and places and processes
- Iterative and progressive learning in the community as the PRA team stays in the community until a draft outline of what is to be done in the community is prepared
- Optimal ignorance about information that is not relevant and useful while being guided all the time by the programme objectives
- On the spot analysis takes place at different times and can help reach the best level of precision about the information collected. The first level of analysis takes place at the individual level through discussions with local people as individuals and in groups regarding the stated objectives of the exercise; another level of analysis takes place in groups with other team members and with smaller groups of local people again through the use of different tools and techniques; and the final analysis takes place while presenting the findings to a large group of local people in the community.
- Offsetting the biases usually seen in other research techniques called 'development tourism'. These biases include the spatial-visiting nearby sites, the project-based visiting to areas where special efforts are being undertaken to produce some tangible results, person-based meetings with educated people and elites, seasonal-visiting in the dry and cool seasons, daytime observation of the village with no visits in the morning or evening, and professional observation only of that which interests outsiders professionally.

9. Strengths, Weaknesses and Challenges of PRA

Strengths

- It **Raises Feeling of Ownership** of projects on the part of local people, as they are involved from the early stage of need identification through all other subsequent phases of project activities.
- The **Data Collected Represent All Segments of the Community** as the process involved in PRA tries to cover as much variation as applicable in a community.
- **Extensive Cross-checking Mechanisms** are used which can increase the reliability of the collected data.
- The whole PRA activity is so **Transparent** that local people will have no problem in understanding what

is going on. This saves the time of both the PRA team and local people in planning and implementing project activities.

- There is a lot of **Flexibility** involved in the PRA process as long as the facilitators are clear about their activities and aim for progressive learning.
- **Qualitative and Attitudinal Information** can be collected very well as the process followed in PRA gets into the heart of local people.
- **The Tools and Techniques Used in PRA are User-Friendly** and therefore local people, including those who are illiterate, should have no problem participating and contributing to PRA activities.
- Experience accumulated so far reveals that PRA is very **Effective for Micro-level Planning** since local people will have full knowledge of and control over local resources.
- As local people are given every opportunity to initiate the PRA process and to participate and contribute in every activity they feel deeply **Empowered**.
- The **Informality** involved in the PRA process, in terms of the use of tools and techniques, the selection of key informants, the location and the methods themselves, is always geared towards improving the quality of field work.
- As almost all activities used in PRA take place in the field itself, it helps **Build a Good Relationship** between the local people and outsiders, thereby increasing the chances of the project activities being **Sustainable**.

Weaknesses

- PRA does not aim at collecting **Hard/Quantified** data and is often criticised for this limitation.
- **PRA Practitioners Require Considerable Skills** and identifying people with such skills may be difficult.
- Many people become involved in the PRA process and this **Raises People's Expectations**.
- As the key informants participating in the PRA process are purposively selected, based on their understanding of a certain area, the **Findings Derived Thereafter Cannot be Easily Generalised**.
- **There is a Heavy Reliance on the Practitioners** in PRA. Thus, if the practitioners are not fully committed to and clear about the principles of PRA, the outcome of the exercise could be fruitless.
- The PRA process is also criticised for not being scientific in its process in terms of the number of informants being contacted and the selection of people and tools and techniques, and thus it is **Subjective**.
- PRA is used more in **Micro-level Planning** and its appropriateness in conducting macro-level research/ projects is yet to be seen.
- Accumulated experience shows the usefulness of PRA at the need identification, planning, and implementation stages, but **Its Relevance in Stages like Monitoring and Evaluation** is yet to be seen.

Challenges of PRA

- High demand is leading to mediocre PRA practice.
- PRA use has become fashionable, resulting in poor quality.
- Donors and governments have still not been able to move away from target-oriented programmes.
- Poor quality of training given by some individuals has failed to change the attitude and 'ehaviour of PRA practitioners.
- PRA use has been largely limited to individuals and has not been significantly institutionalised.
- There is sufficient experience of scattered PRA use but very limited use in thorough and rigorous research.
- Limited use has delayed its improvement.
- PRA use is generally limited to NGOs, but the time has come to spread it to government systems.
- Sharing of experiences is very limited, so there is a need to focus on networking.

10 Suggested PRA Tools and Techniques in Watershed Management

Time Line - A record of events and activities which occurred in the community in the past. This activity involves discussion with a group of local people (usually 4-8) regarding what they consider to be the most important past events in the community. This is a good ice-breaker for building rapport with local people as it shows an interest in their lives. The main purpose of the time line is to identify events in time to which local people can refer when discussing historical issues.

- **Social, Resource and Land Use Map** - A sketch of the community compiled in cooperation with a group of local men and women to identify physical and socio-economic details along with the infrastructure available in the community. Depending upon the purpose of the exercise, different names can be given to such sketches such as a social map, resource map, land-use map, etc. The aim of mapping is to allow local people to express their perceptions of location, usage patterns, and changes of local resources or facilities.

	upland	upland	upland	lowland
soil type	gravel/silt loam	gravel/silt loam	lime/silt coarse loam	silt/coarse loam
vegetation	teaki, gidari, herre	gidari,hasete, kutmire	hasete, kutmire, teaki	harre, badihar, hasete, kutmire
crop	maize, millet ghaiya, black gram	maize, millet, ghaiya, vegetable black gram,	maize, millet, mustard, vegetable black gram, ghaiya	maize, millet, ghaiya, vegetable wheat, paddy
problems	traditional cropping system, marginal land, fuelwood	traditional cropping system, marginal land, fuelwood	shadow, cast of trees, land/soil erosion	lack of irrigation soil erosion, traditional system
opportunities	improvement in cropping system, multipurpose forest, bee-keeping, biogas installation	improvement in cropping system, irrigation for vegetable training, income generating	improvement in cropping system, irrigation for vegetable training, tree plantation, gullies erosion control	improvement in cropping system, irrigation for vegetable training, multipurpose forest, activities, bee-keeping, improved breed of livestock

- **Transects** - A systematic walk with a few key informants through an area observing, asking, listening, discussing, identifying different zones, local technologies, seeking problems, solutions, opportunities, and mapping and diagramming resources and findings. This technique has the advantage of leading to field-based observations which can be discussed with local people.


- **Matrix Ranking** - Matrix ranking helps to elicit information about local people's preferences with regard to tree species, types of livestock, varieties of crops, etc and the criteria on which those preferences are based. While the criteria are listed to the left, the preferences that are to be compared with one another are listed on the top.

- **Wealth Ranking** - A method that helps categorise households according to wealth or well-being in the community. Key informants first develop the parameters they think are important to consider while ranking households and then keep placing

households into appropriate ranks based on those parameters.

- **Seasonal Calendar** - This important tool of PRA is applied to collect seasonal information such as intensity of rainfall or soil moisture, land use or cropping patterns, migration patterns food availability, income and expenditure patterns by month. Local people use different lengths of sticks or straw along with counters (e.g., seeds) to chart on the ground the relative quantities of some variables. Seasonal calendars also help record village views of problems and opportunities.

- **Trend Line/Diagramme** - Trend lines are developed according to village perspectives to show patterns of changes along with the causes of such changes in resource issues such as rainfall, crop production, soil loss, deforestation, livestock holding, and other topics of concern to the community. A group of local people knowledgeable about the topics to be explored is gathered for this exercise.

- **Venn or Circle Diagramme** - Venn or circle diagrams are used as a tool to discuss the relative importance or position of different factors, commonly
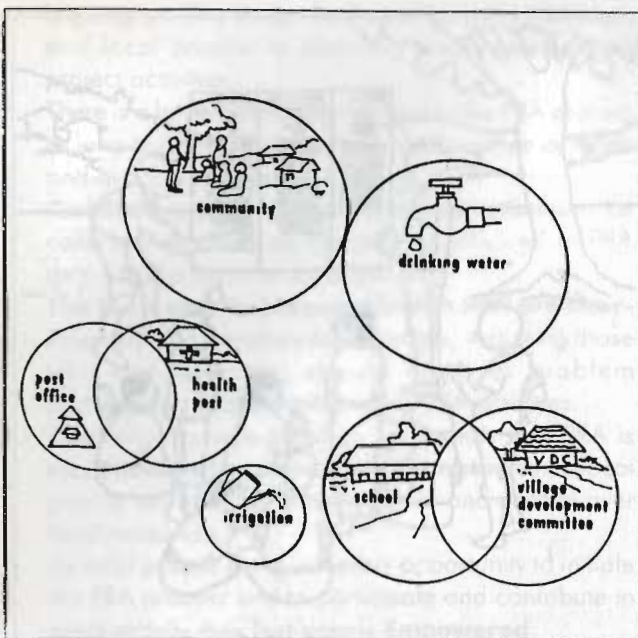
institutional or social structures, in a community. Key informants are asked to rank community institutions in order of importance and to construct diagrams that indicate the relationships between and among village units. Circle of different sizes and colours represent organizations, institutions, or prominent people. Their relationships to each other and relative importance in the community can be mapped out by placing these circles on the ground in relation to each other.
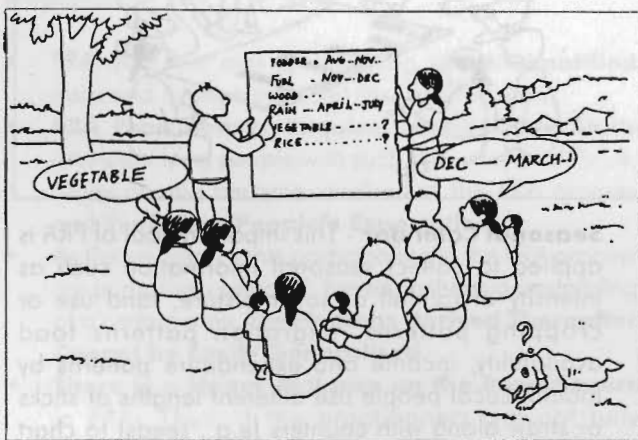
• **Semi-structured Interviewing** - This technique, also known as informal discussion, is considered the core of good PRA. It is a kind of open discussion with

open-ended questions which can take place anywhere in the community, either with individuals and/or groups of key informants. It can be done with mental or written checklists. These conversations can take place on the path while observing community activities, over the garden fence, and in fields or homes.

11. General Training Techniques

Much of the PRA technique is based on the concepts of embodied learning through social interaction, game playing, group dynamics, etc. Lectures, sharing experiences, simulation exercises, use of relevant energisers, slide shows, and field practices are the main bases of PRA training techniques.

Many PRA training techniques and exercises will be guided by the following principles

• Don't lecture, don't dominate, and don't interrupt
• Observe, listen, and learn
• Relax
• Embrace error
• Probe and cross-check as much as possible
• Always start discussion with open-ended questions
• Show interest and enthusiasm in learning from others
• Always use six helpers: what?, when?, why?, where?, who? and how?

12. Aids Required

Though the types of aid required to conduct PRA training depend upon the types of people to be trained and the venue of the training, some aids which are useful in an ideal situation are presented below.
• Posters/flip-charts
• Overhead transparent sheets
• Overhead projector
• Slide projector
• Video screen and deck
• Coloured powders
• Different kinds of seeds
• Other locally available materials such as counters, sticks, etc.