

Doing Development Research: PRA a Useful Method

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Introduction:

Sociology started studying changes in society which occur after industrial revolution. And development was the major factor in social change at every stage of society. In contemporary world Development becomes predominant in post world war period. 'Different development agendas reflect different political, economic, social, cultural, ethical, moral and religious goals (Cowan and Shenton, 1996; Power, 2003; Raply, 1996; Desai and Potter, 2006)'. Over the time different sets of thoughts about development have been associated with different philosophies of science and associated epistemologies. In the post community development period 'development research' become central theme in social sciences. Every discipline was studying one or many dimensions of development. Broadly speaking early approaches stressed development as economic growth and therefore emphasized quantitative approaches. Later more humanistic approach to development saw the rise of participatory and qualitative lines of investigation. Hence PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) become best among participatory methods in social sciences. Present paper focuses on origin and evolution in first part, meaning and definition in second part and technique of PRA in last part. This paper avoids debate on principles of PRA, its classification, types of PRA method, theoretical and conceptual framework due to given limitations.

Origins and evolutions of PRA:

The past few decades has witnessed more shifts in the rhetoric of rural development than in its practice. These shifts include the new familiar reversals from top-down to bottom-up, from centralized standardization to local diversity, and from blueprint to learning process. Linked with these, changes have begun in modes of learning. In these changes, a part has been played by two closely related families of approaches and of methods, often referred to as rapid rural appraisal (RRA) which developed and spread especially in the 1980s, and its further evolution into participatory rural appraisal (PRA) which has developed and spread in the 1990s.

PRA as it exists in the early to mid-1990s has several sources. It has evolved from, draws on, and resonates with, several traditions. Some of its methods do appear to be new; but some have been rediscoveries. In understanding what has happened, it makes no sense to try to separate out causes, effects, innovations, influences and diffusion as though they fallow straight lines. In a world of continuously quicker and closer communication, the transfer and sharing of idea have become more rapid and untraceable. So these source and traditions have, like flows in a braided stream, intermingled more and more over the past decade and each also continues in several forms; but directly or indirectly all have contributed to a confluence in PRA; and as with other confluences, the flow has speed up, and innovation and change have accelerated. Five streams which stand out as sources and parallels to PRA are, Activist participatory research, Agro ecosystem analysis, applied anthropology, Field research on farming system, Rapid rural appraisal. (Chambers Robert, 1994:953-957)

From RRA TO PRA:

In the mid-1980s, the words "participation" and "participatory" entered the RRA vocabulary. They already had a long history in rural development. To take two examples for same year in the 1970s and early 1980s, under the leadership of Norman Uphoff and others, Cornell University published the *Rural Development Participation Review* until US Agency for International Development (USAID) terminated its support, perhaps because the review was ahead of its time; and participation was a recurrent theme in the contributions to Michaels Cernea's book, edited for the World Bank, *Putting People First* (1985, second edition 1991) which drew on experience from earlier year. It was at the

1985 Khon Kaen International Conference that the word participatory began, albeit modestly, to be used in connection with RRA. Discussion at the conference generated a typology of seven types of RRA (KKU, 1987, p.17) of which “participatory RRA” was one.

In 1988, there were parallel development in Kenya and India. In Kenya, the National Environment Secretariat, in association with Clark University in Machakos District which led to the adoption in September of a Village Resource Management Plan. This was subsequently described in two Handbooks (PID and NES, 1989; NES, 1990) around the same time in 1988, Aga Khan Rural Support Program (India) (AKRSP) was interested in developing participatory RRA, and invited IIED to help. Jennifer McCracken carried out a four-week consultancy with AKRSP in Gujarat in September and October 1988 during which participatory rapid rural appraisals were conducted by and with villagers and AKRSP staff in two villages (McCracken, 1988). In different ways, both the Kenya and Indian experiences were seminal for understanding and for the development of PRA.

Subsequently there was an explosion of innovation in India mainly in the NGO sector but also in some government organization. MYRADA, based in Bangalore, trained its senior staff in PRA in early 1990, came to play a role in training for other NGOs and for government, and started a series of papers. AKRSP continue to innovate and broke ground in showing how well village volunteers could themselves be facilitators of PRA. Action Aid, Bangalore under took a networking role.

Meaning and definitions:

The approaches and methods described as PRA are evolving so fast that to propose one secure and final definition would be unhelpful. As PRA further develops, there will be changes in what the label can use fully refer to, and perhaps in the label itself. PRA has been called “*an approach and methods for learning about rural life and conditions from, with and by rural people*” Chambers, 1994. The prepositions have sometimes been reversed in order to read ‘by, with and from.’ The phenomenon described is, though more than just learning. It is a process which extends into analysis, planning and action. PRA as a term is also use to describe a variety of approaches. To cover these, a recent description of PRA is “*a family of approaches and methods to enable rural people to share, enhances, and analyzes their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act*” Chambers, 1994. Further Martin 1995 says “*PRA is an approach and set of methods that have been developed, tested, and used in a variety of disciplines because they engage local populations and promote reflective learning on topics of mutual interest and relevance for the researcher and study participants.*” Although participatory methods vary, most participatory approaches demand a triangulation of sources, intense engagement with the community, and an iterative study design and data analysis and interpretation.(Almedom, 1997) in short in PRA information is generated, analyzed, owned, and shared by local people as a part of an empowerment process. PRA is a process whereby the researcher encourages local people to determine much of the research agenda. The researcher acts much like a facilitator; molding discussion sessions are usually semi-structured with both groups and individuals and allow for the consideration of many themes relating to central research questions. This approach is understood to be more flexible and participatory than traditional survey research methods, and it allows for the incorporation of information which at the onset may seem unimportant, but in the end becomes central to the research.

Using PRA in development research:

While using PRA method in development research we have to go through following methods

1) Review of Secondary Sources:

No matter what our research topic is, there is almost always a wealth of information hidden in a variety of sources. Many references are accessible in libraries, in reports and in databases, and many documents may be downloaded from the interest. It is a crime in research and development work to not allocate time for prior documentary studies. It gives better start and saves time-not only your own, but more importantly valuable time for respondent. There are two major types of sources: **Documents:** Research and other official and unofficial studies and report on socio-cultural, political, ecological conditions, national and area-**statistical**, topical and area-specific arties from journal and newspaper, aerial and photos and map. **Folklore:** Mythology, oral tradition, local and topic stories, proverbs and

poetry (e.g., Hanghe, 1998; Vansina, 1985). To either of these categories belong films, videos and other relevant audio-visual documentation. The use of images and sound which were exotic anthropological studies has been revitalized (Bauer and Gaskell, 2002). Development studies make frequent use of secondary data in the form of statistics. Who doesn't make use of the data made available in a variety of UN and World Bank reports on an annual basis? Figures on human development and poverty, on woman's participation in education, access to health services, etc., are convincingly presented for groups of more or less development countries. Statistics are powerful. They look objective, but are seductive and often highly unreliable.

2) Direct Observation:

Observation of physical structures, social differences, behaviour, action and symbols, in solitude or with others with whom observation are discussed, provides important information for posing central questions. Observation during all phases of study contributes information on persistence and change. The shift in development cooperation from 'top-down' intervention towards 'grassroots' participatory perspectives provides a great demand for up-to-date approaches to appreciate indigenous knowledge in a globalizing world. Participant observation –the classical method of anthropology for understanding indigenous knowledge and symbols- is putting on new gowns, as 'the time has come for anthropology to consolidate its place in development practice.'

3) Key Indicators:

An indicator is a qualitative or quantitative factor or 'unite of information' that provides a basis for assessing importance, achievement, change or performance. *Local indicator*: local stakeholder's criteria for what are more and less significant, e.g., criteria for priority crops, of poverty or well-being, of gender role, of illness etc., are vital in problem analysis and for posing relevant questions. *National and global indicators*: since development studies are set in context where social groups, geographical areas, environmental zones, etc., are analysed, ranked, and compared, it is necessary to be familiar with the indicators that are applied at national and global levels. The globally agreed Millennium Development Goals are providing key indicators on a long list of global and national conditions relating to human development, poverty and ecological sensitivity, etc., in the United Nations annual Human Development Report. *Indicators for objectives, for achievement, outputs and performance* are integral tools when logical framework is applied in planning and monitoring development interventions. Most development agencies attach much importance to indicators without necessarily being able to advice on many indicators to use.

4) Semi-structured Interviews:

Increasingly interviews based on written or memorized checklist are taking the place of or supplementing large-scale structured questionnaire surveys in development studies. In semi-structured interview questions are open-ended. Unexpected, relevant issue are followed up with further questions or probing. Interviewees are typically key individuals, focus groups, or mixed groups.

Key individuals are people anticipated to have particular insight into or opinions about the topic under study. They may be ordinary people not necessarily professional specialists, the better educated, those in power, or the officials. In participatory poverty studies poor people themselves are key people- though not without practical and ethical problems. Issues to be highlighted must determine who the relevant key persons are. Who the key people are is best identified by enquiring from different sources to avoid biased view.

Focus groups, homogeneous or mixed groups are relevant when the dynamics of the group situation is considered to provide additional information. A homogeneous group of farmers may be optimal for in-depth information about farming systems. A group interview with specialists may provide more and better information than could be obtained through a much more time-consuming exercise of individual interviews with the same people. A mixed group of young, middle-aged and elderly women will provide more information about knowledge, attitudes, and practices of family planning, for example, than a homogeneous group. Care must be taken not to combine mixed groups with in-built breaks on open discussion, e.g., by mixing caste or ethnic groups in non appropriate ways. *Chains of interviews* between the different key individuals, groups and specialists can be a useful sequencing of data collection. *Probing questions* or asking direct question that lead to key issues without beating around the bush can make an interview

more dynamic. *Simple questionnaires*, possibly to be managed by selected participants themselves in connection with self-surveys and *self-evaluations*, can be designed to permit *continuous data analysis* in the field. The questionnaires should be short and easy to code.

5) Ranking and Scoring:

In development studies knowledge of difference and inequality is the often required, whether in socio-economic conditions or in people's attitudes. The overarching objective of development work is to combat unequal social relations and exploitation, and to reduce poverty through the promotion of economic and social development. People's perception of the most detrimental cause of poverty and inequalities is an important basis for remedial interventions to combat poverty whether at the policy, sector or community level. Had there been consensus between all concerned stakeholders about the causes and remedies of poverty, the world would have looked different than what is does! Ranking and scoring of problems and remedial action reflect different interests between deferent people; power relations, whether in small or large forums, in wealth ranking of communities or in national elections, influence the outcome. Attributes such as wealth or economic status, class, caste, race and ethnic group-interlinked with age and gender are often the bases of social and economic inequality and influence people's perceptions of problems and remedies.

Ranking and scoring have long been used to assess people's expectations, beliefs, judgments, attitudes, preferences, and opinions. Ranking and scoring mean placing something in order. Social marketing research uses ranking and scoring to develop strategies for changing public behavior (Kotler and Roberto, 1989). Action-oriented development studies use comparative data and ranking for prioritizing actions. Ranking and scoring are the central tools in what is called the *possible future workshop approach*, practiced by many participatory-oriented physical planners and social workers.

6) Constructions and Analysis of Maps and Models:

Participatory mapping is used for providing distribution information relating to limited physical spaces and settlement, e.g., information on population distribution, demographic data, infrastructure, natural resources, and social services distributions. Maps are drawn collectively on the sand or on paper if the map is to be saved for later monitoring, for example. The mapping method is quick and reliable as communication between participating group members has a corrective function. *Construction of models* i.e. three-dimensional models of villages, housing and water sources, etc., may be preferred if the exercise, besides providing collective information, has the objective of longer lasting demonstration. Joint analysis of *aerial maps* and photographs is a different method for obtaining local knowledge of physical space and natural resources. With the expansion of Remote Sensing and Geographical Information systems, GIS, development planners in cooperation with anthropologists are starting to see the prospects embedded in the GIS tool for participatory planning, e.g., for Natural Resource Management. *Transects* are cross-sectional maps or diagrams of an area. They are constructed as a joint exercise with local information during walks through the area for observing, discussing and registering the endowments and problems of the area.

7) Diagramming:

Participatory diagramming is used for (i) summarizing empirical information, for example, in time lines, as well as for (ii) summarizing analysed information, for example in bar charts and pie charts. The idea is to let people make their own diagrams. They are more likely to use other measures than the outsiders. *Time lines* are rough overview of event of significance for the history of the group or the area in question. They are simpler than diagrams showing changes over time. *Force field analysis* is a simple visual technique used to identify and analyze on the one side 'driving forces', and on the other side 'restraining forces' which affect a problem or situation (e.g., gender equality). *Trend analysis* emphasizes changes in local resources endowments, cropping patterns, ecology, climate, physical and social infrastructure, settlements, population distribution, migration, wealth, 'quality of life', etc. Causes of changes are registered or kept open for future inquiry. *Seasonal diagrams* indicate annual variations or variations during other relevant periods for vital factors of production and reproduction- e.g., rain, labour availability, food availability, or prices. *Activity profile and daily routines* are made to summarize major activity trends for individuals or group on a

daily basis or longer time periods. *Venn diagrams*, sometimes called '*chapatti*' diagrams after Indian pancake-shaped bread, place circles of different sizes in symbolic relationships to each other. Venn diagrams are used to depict the participants' sense of relations between local group and organizations. The size of *chapattis* symbolizes the different weights allocated to the groups or organizations by the participants.

8) Case Studies and Stories:

Case studies, as the name indicates, concentrate on special cases. Generalizations from case stories must be handled with care. To serve as a foundation for generalizations, case studies should be related to a theoretical framework, which in turn may be adjusted as case study results provide new evidence. The 'generalizability' of case studies can be increased by strategic selection of *critical cases*. A selection of critical case can be defined as having strategic importance in relation to the general problem. In development studies a critical case should be a 'flag-ship' intervention, e.g., regarding poverty reduction, promotion of gender equality, or successful micro-credit and decentralization programmes, etc., and the focus should be on learning the maximum lessons about intervention parameter, their relations, context, etc., from in-depth analysis.

Case studies often contain a substantial element of *narrative*. Asking 'How?' and carrying out narrative analysis are closely linked activities. Narrative inquiries develop descriptions and interpretations of a phenomenon from the perspective of participants, researchers, and others. Narratives not only give meaningful form to experiences already lived through, they can also provide a forward glance, helping us to anticipate situations even before we encounter them, allowing us to envision alternative futures (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 137). *Life histories, oral or written stories told by key people, e.g., by school-children*, function as supplementary information or as in-depth case studies of households, of groups and of events. The social analysis gives clear guidance to the story teller or informants on how to structure the story, if structuring is at all desired.

9) Drama, Games and role plays:

Games and role plays direct or recorded on video or film, are sometimes the optimal methods for bringing sensitive issues into the open. Professional actors can play sensitive topics for others or join with ordinary people. In many cultures drama is deeply ingrained and used to act out sensitive issues often relating to violation of rights of minorities, poor people, Dalits, the landless, women, widows, HIV/AIDS victims, etc., and on how to defend and reclaim rights. Motivating people, to act sometimes requires skilled facilitators. A number of NGOs are specialized in dramatizing development issues. *Games* may be designed in accordance with social marketing principles if the objective of the game is to motivate participant for an idea, a product, an aid package, etc. Speaking in images and proverbs can sometimes bring one closer to the truth, while doing *role plays* can enrich communication and be useful as training exercises.

10) Triangulation:

Triangulation—looking at things from different points of view—or multiple strategies, is a method to overcome the problem that stems from studies relying upon a single theory, a single method, a single set of data from a limited sample, and from a single investigator. Triangulation helps to validate observations and information. In cross-disciplinary teams in particular, the presence of people with different experiences should be optimized through triangulation; i.e., listening and learning from each member's observations and findings.

There are at least five types of triangulation. First *Data triangulation* which can be divided into *Time triangulation* where the influence of time is considered in study design, e.g., using longitudinal research design; *Space triangulation*, a typical form of comparative study; *Person triangulation*, for example comparisons of reactions at three levels of analysis, (a) the individual level, (b) the interactive level among groups, and (c) the collective level. Second, *Investigator triangulation* means that more than one person examines the same situation. Third, *Discipline triangulation* means that a problem is studied by different disciplines. It optimizes the experience of the different perspective if combined with investigator triangulation, i.e., having at least two people of different disciplines study the same problem together. Fourth, *Theory triangulation*, in which alternative or competing theories are used in any

one situation. And last, *Methodological triangulation* involves ‘within-method’ triangulation when different methods are used in relation to the same object of study.

11) Continuous Analysis and Reporting:

Participatory methods mean potential participation of selected stakeholder in all stages of a study or a project, from identification of the problem to evaluation-possibly with different degrees of intensity. The processes of data analysis and interpretation are no exceptions. Continuous data analysis in the field and reporting on the spot can be done in concert with local people, if not *by* and *for* local people themselves. The advantage of early or continuous data analysis is that data gaps, surprising perspectives worth pursuing, etc., are discovered at an early stage. The analyst, who also needs to report to authorities, can start analyzing data in the field.

Conclusion:

In nutshell PRA can increase local people's understanding of their problems and opportunities; increase their control over development choices and plans; and initiate a process of community participation that can continue through programme implementation-either in terms of community management of local initiatives, or at least in terms of community monitoring of government schemes. But the important point is that approaches to data collection in development studies remain as diverse as philosophies and theories of development themselves. And this is even more so today, in an era associated with what may be refer to as post structuralism and post modernity the world is significantly more global and more complex than ever before and it is argued that singular theories and conceptualizations are too limiting by far. Meta-theories and metanarratives have been replaced by a multiplicity of conceptualization and approaches. Hence PRA gives opportunity to researchers, policy makers, and development activists to bring wide variety of approaches, methods, tools and techniques together.

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