**Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)**

**Introduction**

Participation is widely encouraged and documented as philosophy and a technique in community development (Cemea, 1985). Participatory rural appraisal evolved and spread in the early 1990s. It is the most commonly used set of participatory assessment tools. PRA is a growing family of approaches and methods for collecting information about the community needs and resources to develop that community with the active participation of the local people. The philosophy behind PRA is that community members are the best experts about their own situations. It enables the local people to make their own appraisal, analyses and plan to shape information to act, monitor and evaluate actions in the program. PRA is one of the tools that helps the outsiders/experts to understand the village system, dynamics and politics by using various techniques as well as methods of direct observations and discussions. It helps the facilitators to guide and enable the community members in identification of their own knowledge and resources and its effective utilization for the development of their community.

**Definition**

Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) is the fieldworkers use of participatory approach. The PRA continues to evolve so fast that no definitions can be final and has to be updated several times. PRA is defined and updated several times by Prof. Robert Chambers. PRA has been described as

1. PRA is a family of approaches, methods and behaviours to enable poor people to express and analyses the realities of their lives and condition, and themselves to plan, monitor and evaluate their actions (chambers, 1994).
2. A growing family of approaches, methods, attitudes and behaviours to enable and empower people to share, analyses and enhance their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan, act, monitor, evaluate and reflect (Chambers, 2004).

**PRA Techniques/Methods**

There are various techniques/methods of participatory rural appraisal. The more developed and tested methods of PRA include secondary data, rapport building, community mapping, transect walk, semi-structured interview, direct observation, focused group discussion and wealth ranking ect, all undertaken by local people. These techniques/methods often produce detailed and authentic information of the village’s natural resources, agriculture, health, nutrition, food security and programs for the marginalized people. The techniques are as follow:

1. **Secondary Data:** They can mislead. They can also help a lot. At present, for the sake of a new balance, and of "our" reorientation and "their" participation, secondary data are not heavily stressed in PRA; but they can be very useful, especially in the earlier stages of e.g. deciding where to go or the total number of households in an area, or the foundation date of a school or health facility etc.
2. **Rapport Building:** The experts/researchers identify key-informants/activists/CRPs (community resource persons) and extend his/her relationships to them for the purpose to
3. **Community Mapping:** Community members make a physical map of their community that identifies all the resources available in it. This can be used to start a discussion about the community needs and the locally available resources. Community map tells us about the socio-cultural features of the people. It also helps us by developing different projects for the marginalized communities within a village.
4. **Transect walks**: Often done following the mapping activity(ies), the PRA team walks around the community with local leaders/key informants/activists to confirm the data on the map and any additional information needed. Systematically walking with key informants through an area, observing, meeting people, asking, listening, discussing, identifying different zones, local technologies, introduced technologies, seeking problems, solutions, opportunities, and mapping and/or diagramming resources and findings.
5. **Semi-structured Interview:** The Khon Kaen school of RRA has regarded this as the "core" of good RRA. Have a mental or written checklist but be open to new aspects and to following up on the new and unexpected. Usually done one-on-one with key community members to get more information about specific elements of the issues and resources discussed during mapping activities.
6. **Direct Observation:** In participatory rural appraisal, the researchers/experts himself/herself observe the people in their natural environments. So, in this way information is collected about the issues and resources available in the community.
7. **Focused Group Discussion:** Group interactions and analysis are often powerful and efficient. To get detailed information and to cross-check the already collected information through other tools, the experts/researcher often conduct group discussions with the community members. In group discussions, consensus is developed among the community members on ambiguous community matters.
8. **Wealth Ranking:** Grouping or ranking households according to wealth i.e. wealthy and poor, ultra-poor and vulnerable etc. Discussions about the livelihoods of the poor and how they cope, and widely used for the selection of poor and deprived households with whom to work. For example, the expert usually arranges a group discussion and ask the participants to categorize their community into ranks i.e. wealthy, poor, ultra-poor and vulnerable.
9. **Time lines and trend and change analysis**: Chronologies of events, listing major remembered local events with approximate dates; people's accounts of the past, of how customs, practices and things close to them have changed; ethno-biographies - local histories of a crop, an animal, a tree, a pest, a weed...; diagrams, maps as matrices showing ecological histories, changes in land use and cropping patterns, population, migration, fuels used, education, health, credit, the roles of women and men...; and the causes of changes and trends, in a participatory mode often with estimation of relative magnitudes
10. **Participatory mapping and modelling**: People's mapping, drawing and colouring on the ground with sticks, seeds, powders etc or on paper, to make social, health or demographic maps (of a residential village), resource maps or 3-D models of village lands or of forests, maps of fields, farms, home gardens, topic maps (for water, soils, trees etc etc), mobility, service and opportunity maps, etc. These popular methods can be combined with or lead into wealth or wellbeing ranking, watershed planning, health action planning etc. Census mapping can use seeds for people, cards for households...
11. **Seasonal calendars**: Distribution of days of rain, amount of rain or soil moisture, crops, agricultural labour, non-agricultural labour, diet, food consumption, sickness, prices, animal fodder, fuel, migration, income, expenditure, debt etc