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# About this Manual

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**Intended Audience:** CRS field staff, partners, and those who support them at headquarters.

**Purpose:** To familiarize users with RRA and PRA methods, to demonstrate the applicability of these methods to CRS funded projects, and to encourage the rigorous application of the methods in order to obtain the best results.

**Organization of the Manual:** This manual is organized into two volumes. Each volume is then divided into several parts.

## Volume I

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Volume I addresses the generic use of RRA and PRA in development projects. The information here is relevant to people working in any sector. It is divided into three parts as follows:

- Part I** offers a brief introduction to these participatory, qualitative methods and how they fit into the spectrum of research methodologies.
- Part II** discusses how RRA and PRA are used in practice, looking first at the methodological principles and then outlining each step in carrying out an RRA or PRA.
- Part III** introduces a sample of the tools and techniques that are used to gather information in these methods.

## Volume II

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Volume II focuses on the use of these methods to address specific sectoral concerns. It is divided into two parts.

- Part I** focuses on five sectors (Agricultural/NRM, Microfinance, Health, Education and Food Security) in which CRS anticipates using RRA or PRA, discussing how these methods might be adapted to specific sectoral needs. Each section outlines the types of information that typically need to be addressed in projects working in that sector and gives examples of the ways that RRA or PRA tools would be used to get that information.
- Part II** will eventually offer sample case studies of how RRA or PRA has been used in different sectors. This part of the manual will grow as relevant case studies are produced in your projects. The first case study is from a food security study in Kenya.

**Caveats:** The reader should be aware that a manual such as this one cannot make you an expert in RRA or PRA. That can only happen by actually using the methods in the field, ideally after working with an experienced practitioner on one or more cases. One characteristic of these methods is that they are flexible and creative. A standard recipe for implementation simply does not work. Therefore, while the methodological principles outlined here should be accorded considerable respect, the examples of tools and their applications are just that: examples to stimulate your thinking and ideas. They should not be treated as specific recommendations for how you should use the tools.



# Volume I:

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**Introduction,  
Field Research and  
Methodology**

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# Part I:

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## **An Introduction to Project Information Needs, Participatory Research, and RRA and PRA**

### **Information in Development Projects**

The Need for Information in Projects

There are Many Ways to Gather Information

- Qualitative vs. Quantitative Methods
- Participatory vs. Top-Down Methods
- RRA and PRA in the Spectrum of Research Methods

### **An Introduction to RRA and PRA**

RRA

PRA

### **Anticipated Use of These Methods in CRS Projects**

# Information in Development Projects

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## The Need for Information in Projects

Information is a valuable commodity. The more experience that development agencies gain in project implementation, the more we become aware of the vast amount of information that is needed in order to carry out projects well. These information needs include:

- **Information about the communities** where the project will intervene, the social structures of those communities and the families who live there, their social safety nets, etc.;
- **Information about livelihoods**, economic structures, and how people assure their basic human needs;
- **Information about beliefs** and cultural identities that affect people's decisions and choices;
- **Information about physical environments**, resources, and the places in which people conduct their activities;

### **Good Information: an Ethical Imperative**

Nowhere is the need for good quality information greater than in development projects. By definition, development interventions are oriented to changing people's lives. Furthermore, they often attempt to target those who are at the margin and therefore particularly vulnerable to disruptions of any sort. Projects do this based on information that they have about the people in question, their needs, conditions, and concerns.

When projects base their actions on insufficient or faulty information, the result is (at best) a misplaced intervention that little corresponds to the needs of the population, that is therefore probably ignored, and that wastes the resources of the donor and the donor's donors. At worst, such projects may actually have a negative effect on populations as they undermine traditional practices or cause local communities to invest their scarce resources in unviable activities.

Vulnerable populations may actually become more destitute as a result of such poorly informed interventions.

**and many other things** depending on the nature of the project or intervention. While at one point information may have been seen as a "documentary" aspect of projects there is now widespread agreement that information gathering is a necessary prerequisite to carrying out successful project activities, and must continue throughout the time that a project is in place... and perhaps even beyond.

As noted in the box to the right, projects that intervene without adequate and accurate information about the situation risk wasting resources (both their own and the communities) and may end up doing harm to people who have little margin of security. This can happen even when the funders and project implementors start out with the very best of intentions.

This manual looks at information collection in the context of Catholic Relief Services' development projects. It focuses on two closely related

research methods: RRA (Rapid Rural Appraisal) and PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal). As noted in the sections that follow, these methods are participatory and qualitative and are especially valuable in gathering information that will provide insights about people and the communities in which they live. These insights will, in turn, enable projects to:

1. customize their interventions according to the needs and circumstances of the particular communities where they work,
2. better focus questions for quantitative surveys that may be carried out to complement the qualitative research,
3. refine their approach and activities mid-stream as information is gathered for monitoring purposes,
4. improve follow-on activities and inform future projects as a result of what is learned in evaluations.

### There are Many Ways to Gather Information

There are many different ways that the information needed by development agencies can be collected. While this manual looks at just two ways (and these two are closely related) , the reader should also contemplate other strategies that might be used to collect information since, as we shall see below, the use of multiple methods often gathers better and more complete information than what can be gathered by one method alone.

- Satellites taking pictures from outer space can provide some information (GIS).
- Enumerators asking questions from a survey can provide another type of information.
- Health workers (or mothers) measuring the circumference of their childrens arms are the source of yet another type of information.
- Foresters taking inventories of plant species add new information.
- And villagers drawing maps on the ground in an RRA or PRA can provide information from yet another perspective.

Each of these types of information has its own comparative advantage. That is, it is especially good at getting certain kinds of information and not so good at getting other types.

These different information gathering methodologies can be characterized along two dimensions. The first of these dimensions is the **qualitative/quantitative dimension**. The second is the **participatory/top-down dimension**. Let us look at each of these in turn in order to understand how RRA and PRA, the methods to be discussed in this manual, fit into the wider context of research methods.

## Qualitative vs. Quantitative Methods

1. **Quantitative methods** generate information that can be captured numerically. These methods yield summary statistics such as frequency distributions, means, medians, ranges and other measures of variation which describe a population in an aggregate way. They are thus particularly useful for describing the scope of a problem. Examples of quantitative methods include: surveys, anthropometric measures, some types of spatial analysis (such as analysis of Landsat GIS images), etc.
2. **Qualitative methods**, on the other hand, generally do not generate specific numbers. They concern themselves with exploring meanings, processes, reasons, and explanations. This is then captured in text or diagrams, but generally not in numbers. Examples of qualitative methods include: RRA, PRA, RAP (Rapid Assessment Procedures), focus groups, etc.

Whereas quantitative methods help us to describe “what” is going on in a population by looking at the frequency of certain events or characteristics, qualitative methods enable us to describe the reasons “why” this is so. Hence a quantitative survey might inform us that only 20% of children have been fully vaccinated by age one. We could then use qualitative methods to tell us why this is so, what are the constraints to greater vaccination, etc.

Practitioners of qualitative and quantitative methods sometimes appear to be at odds with one another and seem to disparage one another's methods. This type of debate is counterproductive, however, especially when one considers the general lack of good information from all sources. Qualitative and quantitative methods are different both in their approach and in the kinds of information they are best suited to collecting. ***The key, therefore, is to match the type of methodology with the kind of information that is needed. In many cases, the best approach will involve combining several different methods in order to put together the most complete picture of a given situation.*** This approach will result in the most effective and efficient gathering of good quality information.

Surveys, for example, are often best for gathering straightforward, non-sensitive information from large numbers of people in a way that permits broad comparisons across a large sample. A survey could be used in several regions of a country, for example, to find out basic differences in consumption patterns, activities carried out, household social structure, etc. Surveys are less effective at getting information about more sensitive or complex issues, however. This is where a qualitative method like RRA can be more effective because it can create a rapport that encourages people to respond more frankly, can probe to find out why people make certain decisions or engage in certain behaviors, and can use a variety of tools to cross-check sensitive information. A project would use RRA when it wanted to capture the complexity of a situation by looking at a few cases in considerably greater depth than what is possible on most surveys. In short, rather

than competing, these two methods are really very complementary.

### **Participatory vs. Top-Down Methods**

Another way of categorizing research methodologies is to assess whether they are more “top-down” or more “participatory.” **Top-down methods** are those in which most of the essential decisions about what issues will be addressed and how the information will be used are made by “specialists” (as opposed to community members). The local people’s role is generally limited to answering questions that are designed by outsiders. In the extreme example of what is, literally, a top-down methodology (satellite imagery), local people may not be involved in any way and will not even know that they are being observed.

Methods become more **participatory** as local people play a greater and more active role in the information gathering process. Responding to a questionnaire is one of the most limited forms of “passive” participation. A more active type of participation might involve map drawing or participating in more open ended discussions. Both of these types of interaction allow local people to express their own concerns rather than merely responding to what someone else asks. A still higher level of participation is attained when villagers set the agenda for the study, define the questions, gather the information, and are integrally involved in the analysis and use of the information.

A project’s decision to use a more participatory or a more top-down approach will depend on what it is trying to accomplish. If the purpose of the research is purely to gather information, there may be no particular reason to push for greater participation. Indeed, there may be a reason not to go the participatory route since this will impose a considerable burden of time and effort on the community members who are involved. If, however, the objective of the research is some combination of information gathering and getting the local population to “buy into” the process or to become more involved in decision making, then the participatory aspect becomes vitally important. The more that community members are active participants in the research (as opposed to passive participants who merely respond to initiatives taken by the outsiders), the more likely that they will feel a stake in the process. And, the more they feel a stake in the process, the more they will be motivated to take on greater responsibilities in decision making and leadership.

Both the qualitative/quantitative and participatory/top-down characteristics are best represented as continuums. It is hard to state categorically that a given methodology is or isn’t participatory or is or isn’t quantitative. It makes more sense to think of a method as being applied in a more or less participatory way, or gathering more of less quantitative information.

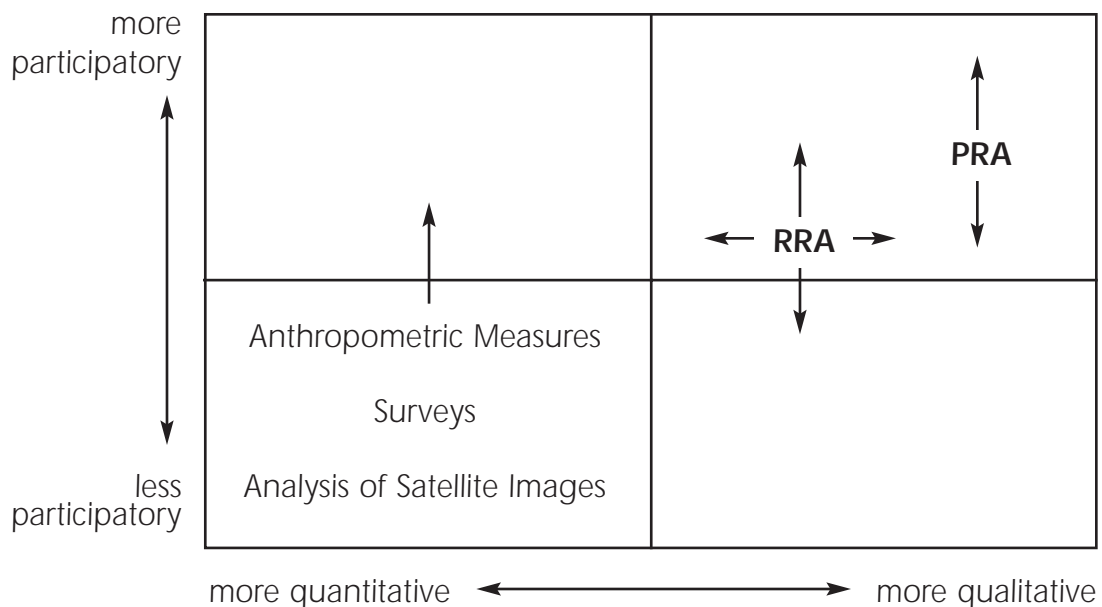
In assessing the qualitative/quantitative criteria, we can say that

methodologies are inherently more or less quantitative depending on how they gather the information and treat it afterwards. Some are set up so that they generate statistics (like surveys and anthropometric studies), while others make little or no attempt to quantify information (nearly all PRAs and most RRAs). In contrast, whether a method is participatory or top-down depends not so much on the method itself as the way in which it is applied. While quantitative methods are more often associated with top-down approaches and qualitative methods are sometimes assumed to be participatory, this is not necessarily the case. Take the example of anthropometric measures, such as arm circumference, which are highly quantitative. A top-down approach would bring in “experts” to measure children’s arms and to analyze and compile the information, usually for a report that never gets back to the village. The same methodology could be used in a participatory approach, however, if village mothers learn how to measure their own children’s arms and records are kept locally in the community.

Methods that are more qualitative in their approach tend to be more participatory in their orientation but this is not always true. We can compare, for example, the case of an RRA in which the research team is comprised entirely of outsiders and the report is to be used for academic purposes with one that includes representatives of the local population on the team and puts an emphasis on making sure the information is shared with the community. These distinctions serve to remind us that if we want to employ a qualitative, participatory methodology, we must first choose a method that is qualitative but then take systematic steps to ensure that it is employed in a participatory way.

**RRA and PRA in the Spectrum of Research Methods**

The methods that are explored in this manual (RRA and PRA) fall on the qualitative side of the spectrum. That is, they are not suited to



gathering statistics and precise numerical information. To the extent that they deal with issues in a quantitative way, it is to gather information about orders of magnitude (e.g. "The vast majority of the population does x" rather than "83% of the population does x") and trends (e.g. "While only a small proportion of the population grows x, it is important to realize that this number is increasing.") Most important, however, they can gather the qualitative information that will help us understand the reasons why the vast majority behaves in a given way or what is causing something to change in a certain direction.

On the participatory dimension, both RRA and PRA can be applied in ways that are more or less participatory. PRAs in which community members take full control of the process are at one extreme of the participatory continuum. Many PRAs fall short of this participation "ideal," however, and involve a more limited form of community participation. In RRAs, there is generally little expectation that the community will be in charge of the process but they too may be carried out in a way that is more or less participatory depending on how the study is set up, the information is used, etc.

PRA, in particular, puts a high premium on the active participation of the population and good PRAs will seek to maximize this participation and the empowerment or ownership that goes along with this. We shall see later that they often must put less emphasis on other goals (such as the collection of complete and accurate information) in order to achieve this. RRAs, on the other hand, put the higher premium on the collection of quality information and, while they seek participation, will be willing to settle for somewhat less participation in order to assure that they meet their information gathering objectives.

# An Introduction to RRA and PRA

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We have seen above that RRA and PRA both tend to fall on the qualitative, more participatory side of the research methods matrix. We have also alluded to the fact that there are some differences between the methods. Let us turn now to clarifying the distinction between these two closely related research methods, both of which are used to gather information from local communities.

At this point, we find ourselves in something of a dilemma because while many people use RRA and PRA to describe what they do, unfortunately, there is no commonly agreed upon definition to distinguish between what is RRA and PRA. Since the author of this manual believes that the failure to adequately distinguish between the two methods is one reason why they are used so sloppily by many people, we will introduce some definitions that will be used — at least in this manual — to clarify the differences between the methods. Do not be surprised, though, if you find people using these terms interchangeably or in ways quite different from how they are being used here.

## RRA

The term RRA is used here to refer to a discrete study (or series of



## PRA

PRA will be used here to refer to a more extended process that involves not only the collection of information but also its eventual use by the community as it plans further activities. The emphasis in PRA is often not so much on the information as it is on the process and seeking ways to involve the community in planning and decision making. If an RRA is a discrete study, a PRA is an extended process that can last for months or years as communities develop their own skills needed to address issues, analyze options, and carry out activities.

In its emphasis on participatory decision making, PRA (in particular) is consistent with two core CRS principles related to justice — respect for human dignity and subsidiarity. Participatory decision making reflects respect for human dignity by affirming the right of each person to “participate in the making of all decisions which affect [his or her] life and the life of the community<sup>1</sup>” and by creating the opportunity for individuals to fulfill their responsibility to exercise that right.

PRA also reflects the core principle of subsidiarity which includes the value of participation by encouraging and supporting individual, family, and community initiatives. However, subsidiarity goes further to protect the common good by recognizing that higher-level or outside interventions are necessary when (and only when) the demands of the common good cannot be met at the lowest level.

In its focus on communities and its involvement of individual members of those communities, the use of PRA by CRS (or its partners) is a process of mutual discovery of community needs and of the capacities, limitations, and appropriate roles of the community, CRS, and other partners.

Hence, PRA provides a mechanism for CRS and CRS partners to engage communities in a process of learning and planning that involves local decision making on key issues in project implementation.

The table below offers a brief comparison of RRA and PRA as the terms are used in this manual. The various issues that are presented here in summary form will be addressed in much greater in Part II which discusses how RRA and PRA studies will be organized and carried out in the field.

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<sup>1</sup> Dorr, Donal. *The Social Justice Agenda* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), p 85.

## A Comparison of RRA and PRA

RRA		PRA
Inform project design, gather baseline information, monitor and evaluate	<b>Purpose</b>	Capacity building for improved decision making at community level, situational analysis, planning and monitoring by community
Multi-disciplinary team of CRS staff and specialists	<b>Team</b>	Team composed of villagers, sometimes facilitated by CRS staff person, that works with larger community
Limited number of representative sites	<b>Sites</b>	Communities where project activities will take place
Discrete studies, usually lasting 5-7 days	<b>Time Period</b>	Ongoing throughout the life of project. Usually begins with training and initial situational analysis (appx 10 days) leading to Community Action Plan
The range of tools and techniques presented below (and others as appropriate)	<b>Tools and Techniques</b>	The range of tools and techniques presented below (and others as appropriate)
Comprehensive, well written report that captures the depth and complexity of information obtained in the study	<b>Documentation</b>	Village Log Book with notes of principal findings, activities, and Community Action Plan

## Anticipated Use of These Methods in CRS projects

At different stages in a project, there will be different needs to use RRA or PRA. In the very early phases of project planning where basic information is being gathered to inform the project approach and to identify the types of concerns that need to be addressed, RRA will probably be more appropriate. At this point the project will probably not yet have decided exactly where it plans to work and will want to avoid raising the expectations of the local populations where the studies are carried out.

Once the project gets underway, some combination of RRA and PRA will most likely be appropriate. RRAs might be used, for example, to monitor and evaluate progress in a select number of communities. Several discrete monitoring studies would be carried out over time in order to assess the impact of the project, any significant implementation problems, etc. PRAs, on the other hand, might be carried out in each site where the project intervenes. This would be a way to involve the population much more integrally in the project process. They could use the PRAs to customize project activities in light of their own analysis of the situation. The idea of such PRAs is both to make the project more effective in each site, but also to ensure that there are benefits that outlive the actual presence of the project in the community. This is more likely to happen if villagers have been involved in all stages of project planning and implementation and view themselves as active participants rather than passive beneficiaries.

Effective use of these methods is very much related to the scale on which they will be used. PRAs involve long and reasonably complex processes in each village in which they are carried out. It is unrealistic to think that this type of process can be carried out simultaneously in hundreds of villages at the same time. Projects which take PRA seriously will count their numbers of sites in the tens...or fewer, at least as the project gets underway. Most CRS activities take place on a scale considerably larger than this. As the agency considers the practicality of implementing participation intensive approaches, it will need to think about where these approaches will be the most effective, where they will be appropriate, and where they will make the best use of scarce resources.

PRA (or some comparable) approach complements and supports projects where capacity building, subsidiarity, social justice, and fundamental issues of community development are the principal objectives. Without community commitment, participation, and engagement, these projects have less chance of achieving their goals. The PRA approach is the most logical in such cases but it may require both a scaling down and a slowing down of the pace of project implementation in order to accommodate the challenges of participatory development.

Projects with other primary objectives (such as reducing the incidence of a certain disease or increasing the percentage of mothers who breast feed their children for at least a year) may find that there are more varied possibilities for project implementation. They might choose to (1) take a very participative approach in fewer villages or (2) moderate the level of participation in order to be able to work in a larger number of communities. In the latter case, a set of RRAs carried out as the project is being designed as well as regular RRAs once the project is underway (so that the design can be fine-tuned as the project progresses) may do a lot to enhance the appropriateness of the intervention while still permitting implementation on a larger scale.

There are many ways in which RRA and PRA can be used in CRS projects. The box that follows offers some illustrative examples.

## Uses of RRA

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### **I. Pre-project**

RRAs are particularly useful in gathering information that will help agencies to orient their programs. By conducting several RRAs in an area that is new to the agency, they will get a sense of the range of issues that need to be addressed, and be better informed on the context (social, economic, political, environmental, etc.) in which the projects will intervene.

### **II. Project Design**

RRAs are essential in the design phase to ensuring that the project is appropriate to the realities in the area where it will be working. There is ample experience now to suggest that standardized, off the shelf projects are of limited effectiveness. The more that projects can be customized to the peculiar circumstances where they will intervene, the greater their chance of success. CRS/Kenya has used RRA to plan its food security interventions (see case study in Vol. II).

### **III. Early project intervention**

RRAs early in the project can help the project further refine its objectives and activities. If RRAs have not been done in the project design phase, these studies will be essential to correcting any design flaws. In some cases, these RRAs will logically lead into PRAs that draw the communities more deeply into the planning process. Several CRS health projects have or are planning to use RRA to refine their development of health education messages by studying community perceptions of health problems, barriers, and enabling factors, e.g. Madagascar.

### **IV. Mid-project**

As the project gets underway, the staff may choose a select number of communities in which to do regular RRA studies to monitor implementation, and to assess the effectiveness of the approach. This will enable corrections to be made as problems are identified. RRA is also a very useful method to use in mid-term evaluations of project activities in selected sites. CRS/The Gambia used some RRA tools for a mid-term review of its Sesame Growers Association project with its counterpart, GAFNA, in order to find ways that the project might be improved during the second phase of its implementation.

### **V. End of project**

The end of project evaluation will almost certainly wish to include an RRA assessment of strengths and weaknesses. This evaluation will look at who was affected by the project and the impact on those who participated...as well as those who did not. A CRS project in Senegal used RRA techniques to evaluate the impact of its seed cereal banks.

## Uses of PRA

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As noted above, PRA is not really about discrete studies in the way that RRA is. Instead, it offers an approach to project planning and implementation that integrally involves the community throughout the length of the process. Hence, the PRA process will involve the community, and CRS support, through all the stages outlined above. The village will first use PRA to assess their needs and to customize the project interventions to their priority concerns and the peculiar circumstances of their community. As the project advances, they will monitor their own progress and engage in rolling planning in which new activities and strategies are planned as previous ones take off. Over the course of this process, we expect that communities will build their skills in analysis and planning so that there will be sustained benefits that outlive the projects interventions. CRS has used PRA very effectively with communities in Cambodia as they address local sanitation needs. In Benin, CRS has adapted these methods for planning in its emergency response program.

Part II of this manual now looks at the practical aspects of actually getting an RRA or PRA underway. It begins by addressing the methodological underpinnings of each methodology. These are the fundamentals that ensure that the method will be carried out in the way that produces the best results. It goes on to address the practicalities of putting together a field study, from choosing the team and sites and setting the objectives to carrying out the work in the field and documenting the results.

# Part II:

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## How to Put Together an RRA or PRA to do Field Research

### **Methodological Principles**

Triangulation

How to Triangulate

Monitoring Bias During the Study

Behavior and Attitudes

### **The Mechanics of Preparing the Study**

Putting Together the Team

Setting the Study Objectives

Site Selection

### **Carrying out the Field Study**

RRA

- Managing the Time in the Field (The Whole Field Study)
- Managing the Time in the Field (One Day of the Study)

PRA

- Maintaining a Participatory Process
- The PRA Process

### **Analysis and Report Writing**

Analysis

Documenting the Results

The RRA Report

Oral Presentations

Village Log Books

# Methodological Principles

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Every research method has certain fundamental principles. These principles guide the user in how the method should be used in order to obtain the best results. The guiding principles of most research methods focus on increasing the accuracy of the information collected. In the case of RRA and PRA, which are qualitative methods, the principles are oriented to getting accurate information, but also to getting information that is as rich as it can be, since capturing complexity is one of the principal attributes of these methods.

Any method can be used well or it can be used poorly. There are good surveys and there are poor surveys; there are good RRAs and there are bad RRAs. In order to get the most out of any information gathering method, the user must first be convinced of the need for good information. This will motivate him/her to put in the extra bit of effort that is needed to carry out the methods properly. Once the researcher is committed to gathering good information (as opposed to merely fulfilling some external requirement for the sake of checking off another step in the process), she or he needs to understand the key methodological principles that must be followed in order to ensure that the method yields the best possible results. (In a survey, for example, this would involve selecting a sufficiently large sample using rigorous random sampling techniques. In an RRA or PRA, as we shall see below, the core methodological principle is triangulation.) And finally, once the principles are well understood and a design has been drawn up based on those principles, it is essential that the necessary resources be brought together to carry out the research according to the “best practices” design.

Mobilizing the resources needed to carry out good research is often a problem for RRA and PRA practitioners since people who do not fully understand the methods tend to see them as infinitely adaptable. In fact, while they are flexible, they are not infinitely adaptable. There are many examples of these methods being used sloppily and not following the principles required to get good results. If a statistician designing a quantitative survey tells us that 3,000 households are needed to get statistically significant results, most agencies will not try to argue that he should get by with a sample of 500. And yet not infrequently, the same agency will try to suggest that RRAs can be carried out in two days (when the proposal is for six) or with a single researcher (when the methodology calls for a team). In short, the flexibility that is so important to carrying out good qualitative research should not be mistaken for a license to use the method in a haphazard or slovenly fashion. Rigorous use of the methods is essential to gathering good quality information and quality information is indispensable to carrying out successful development interventions.



## Triangulation: the Core Methodological Principle in RRA and PRA

The core principle that must be understood by RRA and PRA practitioners is called triangulation. Triangulation refers to the diversification of perspectives that comes about when a set of issues is

The key to carrying out good RRA and PRA is constant and unwavering attention to the principle of triangulation.

investigated by a **diverse, multi-disciplinary team, using multiple tools and techniques, with individuals and groups of people who represent the diversity of the community.** In order to understand the

importance of triangulation, it is necessary to think about the issue of **bias**. Bias poses the biggest impediment to collecting information that accurately reflects the local reality. When biases are present in the collection of information, the results will reflect a distorted image of reality. Interventions that are based on that distorted image are likely to be inappropriate to whatever the real situation turns out to be. There are four ways in which bias can enter a study:

1. **Researcher Bias**
2. **Informant Bias**
3. **Bias related to the tools and techniques used to gather the information.**
4. **Bias related to the way the study is designed and implemented**

### The Problem of Bias

Let us look first at researcher and informant biases since they operate in similar fashions. Behind both researcher and informant bias lies the fundamental truth that every human being is biased. That is, he or she sees the world through his/her own particular set of lenses. He or she will see things differently depending on such factors as gender, age, ethnic group, educational level and experience, wealth standing, caste, etc. All those factors combine to make the individual experience life and

observe and report things in different ways.

#### **People experience the world through their own biases**

Imagine a hypothetical situation in which John (a 64 year old American grandfather from New York) and Priya (a 22 year old newly married Indian woman from rural Andhra Pradesh) are somehow removed from their familiar surroundings and placed on a cruise ship in the Caribbean for a week. Afterwards, they are interviewed independently about their experiences: what they saw, what the people were like on and off the ship, how they liked the food, etc. They have, in some sense, had identical experiences. But would their reports be the same? In what ways might they differ?

**1. Researcher Bias.** Each person on the RRA or PRA study team will absorb information differently depending on his or her prior experiences and perspectives. They will be more sensitive to certain types of

information and tend not to pay attention to other things. A medical professional looking at food security issues is likely to pay attention to things quite differently from a sociologist or a crop scientist, for example. A woman is likely to ask different questions and absorb different types of information than a man will. This type of bias is at once a strength and a weakness. Our biases make us more effective researchers in one sense because they increase our sensitivities in certain areas. Biases can also act as blinders, however, reducing our ability to absorb information in other areas. The key in RRA and PRA, as discussed below, is to acknowledge the biases that each person carries with him/her and to manage them so that the quality of information obtained is as high as possible. We shall see below how this is done in

practice in the section dealing with triangulation.

**It is useful to explain the concept of bias to villagers too.**

If bias is explained to villagers in the initial meeting when the team is introduced to the community, it can dispel concerns people might have about why the team is asking questions of different people in the community.

Robb Davis suggests that one way to do this is to put a person or object in the middle of the circle where people are sitting. Ask people to describe what they see from where they are sitting. They should not say a person or a flashlight but rather describe what they see of that object. This can then lead to a discussion of how people see things and/or issues from different perspectives. In order to understand the whole situation, one has to put many perspectives together.

**2. Informant Bias.**

Just as the researchers on the team bring their biases to bear as they gather information, so each individual who provides information does so in a way that is biased by his or her experiences. A relatively wealthy person in a village who is used to a diet of rice and meat may describe a gruel

made of millet and leaves as a severe hardship diet. A poor person who compares the gruel meal to a day when there is nothing to eat may find such a diet to be extraordinarily good. A man whose main dealings with water involve drinking it and bathing in it may have very different opinions about how much is adequate from a woman who is responsible for fetching the family water supply each day. Here again, **the key is not to smooth over differences (since this is what gives the study its richness) but rather to manage the biases and to ensure that the views of a certain group are not mistakenly believed to represent the situation or opinion of the whole population.** This, too, is accomplished by triangulation.

Informant and Researcher biases take many forms, some of the most common of which are listed below.

**Gender Bias**

More emphasis is put on the point of view of either men or women; the other perspective is underrepresented

### **Spatial Bias**

One area is favored in collecting information and the views of people who live in or frequent that area may be given more weight. This may take place if some places are more accessible (areas near good roads, near the center of the village versus the periphery) or more pleasant;

### **Wealth Bias**

Often the views of people who are wealthier or who hold positions of authority are given greater weight over the course of a study. The poor are frequently underrepresented unless specific actions are taken to include them;

### **Education Bias**

The views of those with more formal education are often solicited and considered more carefully than those with less education. This often coincides with a language bias since educated people may be better able to communicate with the research team;

### **Expectation Bias**

The village's expectations of what the outside organization may bring them often causes villagers to favor certain types of information in their discussions. Similarly, the researchers' expectations of what they will find in the community acts as a filter for the information that is received by the team.

**Information gathering tools and techniques have their own biases.** In order to see what this means in practice, we can take the example of differences between individual and group interviews. Imagine that the people doing the interviewing are the same and that they ask the exact same questions of the exact same informant. But, in one case, the informant is by herself in the privacy of her kitchen and in the other case she is in a large group of men and women. The questioner, the respondent, and the questions are all the same. The only difference is the tool being used (group vs. individual interview).

Imagine a topic like, "What do you do when there is not enough food to eat in your family?" Do you think that the information collected will be the same using these two tools? What factors might be influencing the way the person answers in each case?

### **3. Bias Related to the Tools and Techniques Used to Gather Information.**

A third type of bias enters the study through the tools and techniques that are used to gather information. The box presents an example of differences that may arise in using two very similar tools: group and individual interviews. The differences in the biases introduced by

various tools are likely to be even greater when the tools are more different (such as the difference between doing an interview and using a visualization technique like mapping or a quantification technique like matrices). Once again, triangulation (in this case the use of multiple tools) is key to reducing the systematic bias that would be introduced if only one tool were used to collect all the information.

- 4. Bias Related to the Way the Study is Designed and Implemented.** Other biases arise from the way the study is carried out. These biases are often related to issues of timing. Studies that take place during a particular season may be subject to seasonal bias if the team unconsciously assumes that the conditions they observe are typical throughout the year. Teams that stay in the village for a fixed period of hours (e.g. 9:00-5:00) may find that their results are biased by the types of activities they observe and the people who are available to talk with them during those hours. Those that stay only a very short time may not have time to overcome the first impressions bias which will invariably affect the way both the researchers and the informants interpret issues. Care must also be taken to avoid biases related to site selection which will be discussed further on page 36.

### How to Triangulate

In RRA and PRA, the principal strategy to reduce bias and enhance the quality of information collected in the study is called triangulation. Triangulation refers to the diversification of perspectives in order to offset the biases that may result from looking at an issue from a limited viewpoint. The process of identifying and offsetting biases is both explicit and systematic in RRA and PRA. The team is responsible for monitoring the way the study is designed and implemented so as to reduce bias as much as possible.

The approach taken by RRA and PRA is to seek out bias and deal with it explicitly. The first step, then, is to identify the biases that may be creeping into a study. Once this has been done, the next step is to deliberately and systematically take steps to offset the bias using triangulation as described in the following sections.

### Triangulating the Research Team

Triangulation generally begins with the selection of the team. Because each member of the team will bring his/her own biases (positive and negative) to the study, it is essential that the team be composed of several different members who bring different types of experiences and perspectives to the study. This helps to ensure that no one bias will dominate resulting in a misrepresentation of information. Triangulation of the team will be done rather differently depending whether we are doing an RRA or a PRA.

- 1. Triangulation of the RRA team.** In RRA, as noted above, a team of specialists is put together to carry out the study and to document the information in a well-written report. Triangulation of such a research team takes numerous factors into consideration. Three that are of particular importance are ***discipline, gender,*** and whether the person is an ***insider or an “outsider”*** to the situation being studied.

**Disciplinary bias** refers to the persons academic and professional experience. It is often useful, at a minimum, to ensure that both social and natural science backgrounds are represented on the team. It

would not be good to have three sociologists on the team, for example. A less biased team might have one sociologist, a medical professional of some type, and an agronomist.

It is critical that the team include both men and women since there are many **gender related biases**. In some cultures it is difficult for people to communicate across gender lines. Certainly gender is an overriding lens that has a profound impact on the way humans perceive issues and experiences.

The **insider/outsider factor** refers to how close an individual is to the situation being studied. Proximity has both advantages and disadvantages in terms of information collection. In either case, it is a bias that must be managed. The insider may have better access to information about the project, village, etc. But often the person is so close to the situation that s/he takes certain things for granted or fails to notice things that might strike the outsider as interesting. The outsider may be given license to ask questions that are too sensitive or too "dumb" for a local person to ask. Triangulation simply reminds us to ensure that the team includes both people with an insider and those with an outsider perspective to ensure that information is collected and analyzed in the most complete and unbiased way possible.

While these three biases are fairly universal and should be considered when putting together just about any RRA team, there are others that may surface in particular circumstances. It is up to the team leader and the project staff to reflect on other researcher biases that should be managed as they recruit team members. In some places, for example, having a team composed of people from only one ethnic group or religion may make it harder to communicate with people who have a different ethnic or religious background. Issues of caste and race may pose similar constraints. In such a case, the team should include people representing diverse backgrounds. Socio-economic differences on the team, particularly of country nationals, can also be very important and illuminating.

Because of the problem of bias and the need for triangulation at the researcher level, one person cannot do a good RRA. RRA requires a team of people who represent different perspectives. At a minimum, the team should include two people. It is preferable to have three or more people on the team to ensure adequate triangulation at this level.

**2. Triangulation of the PRA team** To the extent that PRA is an ongoing process that is used by communities to set priorities, make decisions, and plan, it is critically important that diverse interests in the community are represented on the “team.” A danger that is always

**A danger in the participatory process is that it can be coopted to serve the interests of a particular group.** Men may exclude the interests of women; the wealthy or a certain ethnic group may attempt to capture project benefits. While a donor organization has little say in how a community organizes its internal affairs, it does have a right (and some would say, responsibility) to see that interventions carried out with its support do not neglect the concerns of poor, vulnerable, and generally marginal populations.

In an RRA in Mauritania that was trying to find out the needs of the poor black Maure population, a more educated white Maure offered to help by helping to recruit people to participate in various study activities. As the study progressed, the team realized that his selection of informants had a strong bias toward his personal concerns and the participants, while themselves very poor, were too afraid to vent their real concerns since they had been hand-picked by their patron.

lurking behind the participatory process is that a minority group within the population will coopt the process and purposefully and systematically bias the results to favor their own interests. The team for a PRA is really everyone in the community who takes an active role in the PRA process.

Realistically, however, everyone cannot be involved at the same level without the process become extremely unwieldy. This

manual therefore recommends that a “steering committee” be established for the PRA activities. A steering committee might be composed of, for example, twelve members, four from each of three quarters in a community. The four people might be comprised of an older woman and older man and a younger woman and younger man. Within the group of twelve, then, it would be important to ensure that the different ethnic and religious groups present in the village be represented, as well as families who are richer, poorer, and about average. This steering committee should, ideally, be selected in a village plenary meeting where the various criteria are discussed and decided upon as a group.

This committee (which essentially becomes the core PRA team) then mobilizes the population as needed for various activities and planning sessions. While this smaller committee may do much of the information gathering and analysis, the actual prioritization of issues, planning for solutions, and drawing up of the CAP should generally take place in plenary sessions where all those who wish to be involved are invited.

What is the role of the CRS or counterpart facilitator in this team? The role will change depending on how far along the community is in the process. At the beginning, the staff person will probably act as a leader of the steering committee, guiding the process, overseeing that triangulation is taking place, and generally playing an active role on the

team in assuring that critical issues are brought up and addressed. Over time, however, as the villagers learn the techniques and principles of the methodology, the facilitator will take more of a back seat, supporting the process, but not leading it. An important role throughout will be to continue to promote the principle of triangulation and the participation of diverse groups.

The broad participation of different interest groups should be a key factor that is used in monitoring and, eventually, evaluating the PRA process.

**Triangulating at the Respondent Level** Whether in RRA or PRA, attention must be paid to triangulation at the respondent level. Fortunately, this is fairly straightforward. Since different people and groups within the community have different perceptions and points of view, it is important that the full range of perspectives be considered as information is being gathered. Thus, it is important to gather information from

- men and women,
- people who are older and younger,
- those who are poorer as well as those who are richer,
- and people from different ethnic groups, castes, or professions.

In an RRA, where the team is composed of outsiders who will not necessarily know the composition of the community before they go to the village, use of tools such as wealth ranking and social mapping that explore differences in the community will be useful in identifying different groups that can then be sampled to ensure a good mix of respondents.

**Triangulating Tools and Techniques** Since each tool introduces a particular bias, it is important that the study diversify the tools that are used. A sampling of potential tools is presented in Part III of this manual. RRA and PRA tools include diagramming, quantification techniques, various modes of interviewing, participant observations, etc. When information is collected using only one tool, all that information is subject to the same biases.

We introduced the notion of bias as related to tools and techniques in the box comparing individual and group interviews on page 19. Individual interviews may encourage people to confide more fully on sensitive issues, but the information is not subject to public accountability. Group interviews, on the other hand, may put pressure on people to report only "acceptable" behaviors. Often an apparent consensus quickly emerges in a group and people who have different experiences may be reluctant to discuss them. On the other hand, the presence of the group may make a person cautious about misreporting a situation when other people know the truth. In short, neither tool is

inherently better. Each is biased in terms of the types of information it is likely to produce.

Therefore, the key to reducing bias in the study results is to use different tools at different times. By the end of the study, you should have used a good mix of tools that approach the issues from different angles. Where differences emerge in the types of responses gathered using different tools, the researchers will know that they have to probe further. During the course of the study, the team should be thinking carefully about its choice of tools, both to increase the effectiveness of the information gathering process but also to ensure the diversification of the information gathering techniques and, hence, the reduction of bias.

### Monitoring Bias During the Study

The process of identifying biases and triangulating to reduce those biases should be systematic and deliberate during the course of the study. At the end of each day, the team should take the time to sit down together and reflect not only on the substance of the information that has been gathered, but also on the process. In this review meeting, the team will ask itself the following questions:

**1. Have we noticed any biases at the respondent level?**

If the team finds that information is being dominated by one or more groups (men or wealthier people, for example), it will develop a strategy for meeting women and poorer people in the days to come.

**2. Is there bias that we can discern from the tools that we have been using?**

If one tool is being used predominantly, it is time to begin thinking about other ways that information might be gathered.

**3. Are there any other biases creeping into our study that we have not yet accounted for?**

Other examples of biases include asking leading questions, inappropriate comportment of team members that makes villagers adjust their responses, holding all activities in the same place, etc.

This process of triangulation is critical in terms of gathering information that is as unbiased as possible and thus as accurate and, ultimately, useful as it can be. A side benefit of this practice is that it will also result in much richer information as many diverse perspectives are brought to bear on the issue at hand.

### Behavior and Attitudes

Triangulation may be the nuts and bolts of carrying out good RRA or PRA but the whole process depends on the appropriate behavior and attitudes of the research team and each member of that team. Among the critical elements needed to successfully carry out these methods are the following:



- willingness to work together in a group
- respect for local people and practices
- ability to listen
- willingness to be self-critical
- interest in others and curiosity to learn more

These attributes are essential not just to RRA and PRA, but to carrying out participatory approaches in general. For CRS, they take on a

### Answering/Acting in Place of Local People

RRA/PRA practitioners often try to control activities by, for example, drawing the map in place of the villagers, or holding the beans in a matrix exercise and placing them on the diagram in response to the villagers' instructions. Wherever possible, the outsiders should "hand over the stick" (or beans, or whatever) in order to promote the most active participation of local people.

### Confirming Pre-conceived Results

One of the worst sins committed by RRA/PRA practitioners is to come into a community with the results of the study already in mind and then to use the so called "participatory experience" merely to confirm or justify these views. This practice is abusive of not only the methods, but also of the populations who contribute their time to an empty exercise.

Dealing with these types of problems occurs at several points in the study:

1. Personality issues should be carefully considered **as the team is being selected**. People who are not interested in participatory approaches, who are not willing to be self-critical, or do not have a genuine respect for the knowledge of local people are best excluded from the outset.
2. **Once the team has been selected but before it leaves for the field** it will be important to have an orientation that deals with these issues. Role plays are one way to anticipate tricky situations and work through appropriate responses. Team contracts are another way to ensure that all members agree to certain basic principles and will accept criticisms in a spirit of team self improvement.<sup>2</sup>
3. **During the field work**, part of the team interaction each day should be devoted to assessing behavioral issues and thinking about strategies and behaviors that might enhance mutually respectful relationships with the community.

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<sup>2</sup> Techniques for working with people to identify behavior patterns that are not appropriate in participatory research and to help them modify their approaches can be found in [Participatory Learning and Action, A Trainers Guide](#) by Jules Pretty et al. IIED: London, 1995. The manual can be obtained from IIED at 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H 0DD, UK.

# The Mechanics of Preparing the Study

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The principles outlined above are essential elements that need to be taken into consideration at each stage in the planning and implementation of the research. In the following sections we will look at some of the nuts and bolts of putting a study together, starting with the selection of the team and moving on to issues involved in defining the study objectives and choosing the site(s) where the study will take place.

## Putting Together the Team

One of the first steps when preparing to do an RRA or a PRA is to determine who will be on the research team. In the case of an RRA, the research team may involve principally people from outside the community. In the case of a CRS project, this would typically mean several CRS staff people and/or partners as well as any “specialists” in different fields who are needed to triangulate researcher perspectives. In the case of PRA, the team may include some CRS staff, partners, or specialists, but it is also critical that it include people from the community and that those people also represent diverse perspectives.

### Selecting a Consultant

Nowadays, it is not hard to find someone willing to offer their services as an RRA/PRA consultant. How, then, can you be sure that you hire someone who will get you started on the right foot and will not introduce you to mediocre practice of the methods?

Part of the purpose of this manual is to give you enough understanding of the methodological principles so that you will be able to assess the work of RRA/PRA practitioners and to hire someone who uses the methods well. Some things to look out for:

- Does the person understand and can s/he clearly convey the principles of triangulation?
- Can they explain bias, tell you why it's a problem, and give examples from their own experience?
- Have they fallen into the trap of doing 2 hour or 2-3 day RRA/PRA? On what basis do they justify this?
- Can they describe a typical RRA or PRA that they have conducted?
- Can they provide you with reports that have been prepared from work they have done? Do the reports seem to capture the depth of information that interests you?
- Does the person have a personality that you would feel comfortable with during an intense multi-week field training course?

Given CRS' substantial experience with these methods around the world, one useful place to start would be to see whether an experienced staff person from another project might be available on a TDY basis to mentor a project that is just beginning to use these methods.

See Appendix for illustrative scope of work.

If the project is only beginning to gain experience in RRA and PRA methods, it will almost certainly want to bring in a consultant to help with the initial activities. Typically, this person would train a core team of CRS and counterpart staff in a “classroom” type setting in which the principles outlined here are covered, tools are introduced, and behavioral issues are considered. He or she would then lead a field experience in actually doing an RRA or PRA with a community. This training will be especially effective if the consultant/trainer has a counterpart who is on the project team. The outsider will then work especially carefully with this person to ensure that s/he develops the confidence needed to lead teams in future. While logistical constraints often make this difficult, it is also useful if follow-up by the consultant is built into the contract. After several months, for example, she or he might come back to work with the team again, to review what has been going well and poorly and to make recommendations to improve the approach. This is particularly helpful for ensuring quality control and encouraging the thoughtful use of the methods. Experience suggests that without this follow-up, inexperienced practitioners often fall into bad habits and get more sloppy when one would really prefer that they augment the rigor with which they use the techniques over time.

**Selecting an RRA team** As described above, the principal purpose of an RRA is to collect quality information in a rigorous systematic way. The RRA team must be selected with this objective in mind. There are two types of skills that are critical in doing RRA:

1. rapport building skills and
2. analytic skills

Rapport building skills are those “people skills” that are needed both to work well in the team and to create the rapport with community members that is needed to get good quality information. You will know a person who has these skills as soon as you meet him/her. S/he will

be friendly, outgoing, genuinely interested in other people. S/he will also have a good sense of humor and the ability to laugh at him/herself.

**When a series of studies are planned, there may be a need to change team members as the team moves to new villages.**

Often in such cases, it is useful to keep a core of team members who are familiar with the issues and can compare information from the different sites. New members can be brought in if specific knowledge and/or background is needed, or if a given person is developing research fatigue. In a series of food security RRAs in Kenya, for example, the team started out with someone who had knowledge of herding issues as they worked in a Maasai community. When they moved to an agricultural village, this person was replaced by a crop specialist.

Analytic people may be harder to identify by initial impressions. You will probably have to inquire about their backgrounds, their level of academic and research experience, and talk with them about the issues that they will be studying. If they have any written reports

that you can review this will also be helpful in making an assessment of their analytic skills.

You may be fortunate enough to find people who have both analytic and people skills but this is unlikely. If so, at least ensure that the team has at least some people with each type of skill. The people skills are critical to getting the information, whereas the analytic skills are important to understanding the information and its implications. Both are essential to a good RRA study. You will also need a team leader who (ideally) has a solid understanding of the methodological principles, has experience using a broad range of tools, and is good at managing people and mediating conflicts.

The RRA team is typically composed of three to five people. Three people are usually sufficient to assure the triangulation of perspectives, while more than five can quickly become unwieldy from a personnel management point of view. These team members should be selected to ensure that various perspectives are represented. As noted above, this will at a minimum, include:

- men and women
- people with different disciplinary backgrounds and experiences and
- insiders and outsiders.

The relevant disciplinary backgrounds will entirely depend on the objectives of the study. A food security study might include a nutritionist, public health worker, agronomist and economist. A natural resource management study would perhaps involve an agronomist, a livestock specialist, a forester, and an economist. In most cases, CRS teams will include people from both the CRS project office and any partners who are involved in the project.

**Selecting a PRA team** In selecting the PRA team it is important to remember that information collection is just one of several objectives of the activity. Equally important in PRA is the notion of community ownership and the full involvement of community members in all stages of the process including, especially, the use of the information that results from any studies that are carried out. This implies a considerably different approach to team selection than that which takes

place in an RRA where outsiders take on most of the research roles.

**The composition of a PRA team will change over time.** In a World Vision project in Mauritania, the initial project team was comprised of a half dozen World Vision staff members and a dozen or so community members. In a following exercise, only one World Vision staff participated to facilitate the exercise. Later the villagers carried out their own PRA activities without any outsiders being involved and even sent some of their practitioners to neighboring villages to initiate similar processes there.

In PRA, the team may be comprised entirely of community members, with or without an outside

facilitator. Early in the process, it is likely that one or several outside facilitators will be involved. Later on, the village may be able to do some or all of the activities without much outside intervention; indeed, this should be one of the goals of the process. At an intermediary stage, perhaps people trained in PRA from a neighboring community can help with the PRA. In this way proximate villages can share their expertise while reducing the dependence on outside development workers.

Typically, in CRS projects where there is a tripartite partnership between CRS, their partners, and the communities, the team is likely (at least at the beginning) to include:

- CRS staff,
- representatives of the partner agency, and
- a “steering committee” (see page 22) of local community members.

It may also include specialists representing particular disciplines (such as nutrition) or even staff of other agencies implementing complementary projects who are brought in to add an additional perspective to the team. Just as the outsiders are selected to represent diverse perspectives, the same principle should apply in the selection of community members. The community might be asked to select twelve team members, for example, including some men, some women, some from wealthier and some from poorer families, and people from different ethnic groups. These people, along with any outsiders, would then comprise the PRA team.

The PRA core team will carry out some of the PRA information gathering activities and will, as needed, call plenary meetings in the community to carry out prioritization and planning activities where everyone needs to feel a part of the process. (If the village is a very large one, these meetings may have to take place at the quartier level which then brings its findings to a larger meeting where they are negotiated in public.)

### Setting Study Objectives

One of the first steps in preparing an RRA or a PRA is setting the study objectives. The general focus of the study (sometimes called the “theme”) will have to be clear even before the team is selected since this will determine what kinds of people should be on the team. A study to evaluate a nutrition oriented intervention would have to have a nutritionist on the team, for example, whereas a study looking in depth at production and storage losses would require that an agronomist be part of the team. Other team members would have social or economic expertise. This team will be selected according to the subjects that will be studied.

Once the team is in place, its first task is usually to refine the study

objectives. **Objectives are, quite simply, what the team wants to learn during the study.** The more that team members are clear on what they are trying to find out, the more they can focus their inquiry on relevant issues, and the more likely that the information gained will be coherent and useful.

There are two dangers in setting objectives that can be illustrated by the puzzle example in the box:

**Danger 1: setting objectives that are too broad for the time available to do the study.**

In this case, the frame is a large one. Even if a lot of information is collected, it is likely to be scattered, with one piece here and another there. At the end of the study, there will be so many blank areas remaining that it will be hard to make any sense of the picture and to see the significance of the information.

**Danger 2: setting objectives that are too narrow.**

In this case the frame is very small and it is easy to get enough information to fill in the whole frame. The picture may be too small to make much sense, though, and the most interesting information may fall outside the frame around the study. (For example, the

Setting good objectives may be one of the most difficult parts of an RRA or a PRA. In an RRA, the whole team should participate. Other CRS and counterpart staff who will eventually use the information from the study may also be involved to ensure that their information needs will be met by the study. This is the time to ensure that the different perspectives of all these people who will be using the information are represented in the objectives of the study. If this step is omitted, the different team members will get to the field with their own agendas to follow, leading to a very chaotic situation. The objectives set the team's agenda and it is essential that there be agreement before the team moves into the field.

In the case of a PRA, the local community will be actively involved in setting the objectives. Objective setting will take place as a first step of the field work to ensure that the whole community has a chance to participate.

In setting objectives, a common ground must be found so that the team will work comfortably together in the field. As noted above, it is dangerous to set objectives that are either too broad or too narrow; a middle course should be found that meets information needs and is compatible with the time available for the study. In most cases, you will find it useful to define a theme for the study and three or four main objectives. Each objective can then have several sub-objectives to further focus the teams attention on particular aspects of the problem. One way to organize your objectives is as follows:

1. **A Profile Objective** Often it is useful to make the first objective a “profile” objective since every study needs a certain amount of background information to set the context for the rest of the information to be gathered.
2. **One or more descriptive objectives** The next objectives may be largely descriptive, reporting on peoples practices in a given arena. A food security study might look at different food consumption patterns by different categories of families at different times of the year. A natural resource study might want to discuss the definition of territory, the natural resources that exist there, and peoples patterns of exploitation and use.
3. **One or more analytic objectives** The analytic objectives will go beyond the descriptive to focus on the reasons why a given situation exists. Often by this time you will be thinking along the lines of constraints, interrelationships between various factors, etc.
4. **The synthesis objective(s)** In most cases the final objective should be a synthesis objective that pulls together the findings in the form of conclusions or recommendations.

Sample objectives for a baseline RRA are outlined next. (These should NOT be used “as is” for the objectives of your project since they need to be customized to the issues that are of concern to you. They are presented here only to give an idea of the general format that objectives might follow.)



## **Sample Objectives for an Initial Food Security RRA**

### **I. Profile the Community**

- History
- Geography
- Family and Community Social Structure
- Economy

### **II. Describe food acquisition strategies of different socio-economic groups**

- Food production
- Income generation
- Characteristics of good/average/poor years

### **III. Describe food consumption patterns for different household members by different socio-economic groups**

- Sources of food (grown, purchased, gathered, other)
- Price variation for foodstuffs
- Consumption variation throughout year
- Typical meals by season, food security level, role in household
- Intra- and inter-household food sharing

### **IV. Identify principal constraints to adequate food availability, access, and utilization of foods**

- Weak or missing components of production system
- Weak or missing components of income generation
- Weak or missing health and nutrition knowledge/services
- Other weak links to assuring adequate food consumption

### **V. Identify:**

- a) principal threats to sustained food security now and in the future and
- b) safety net strategies and their effectiveness

### **VI. Identify and prioritize strategies to help households reduce their vulnerability to food security and maximize their ability to cope with crises. Identify CRS and counterpart roles in implementing these strategies.**

The objectives above are fairly broad reaching, looking at the general food security situation. Objectives such as these would be particularly appropriate in a baseline study. Objectives can also be written to focus the inquiry on a specific aspect of a problem. These are sometimes called ***thematic*** objectives. This might happen if, for example, the initial general inquiry had determined that the principal food security issue in the community was related to market problems and the lack of foodstuffs in local markets during particular times of the year. The objectives of a more focused follow-up study (which might take place both in this community and surrounding areas since market issues touch various communities) would then focus on marketing issues, identifying constraints at different levels, demand for different types of products, etc. At this point, it may also be effective to use other methodologies to gather complementary information (e.g. Landsat images of flooding patterns in order to determine the feasibility of road construction, analysis of regional market data, surveys of vendors, etc.)

Different objectives will be needed if the study is to be used for evaluation at the mid-term or end of project. An example of evaluation objectives follows.

## **Example of Objectives for an Evaluation RRA that is used to assess a PRA process**

### **I. Profile community X (if not already carried out in an earlier study; if already done, identify any significant changes)**

- History
- Geographic context (markets, access, etc.)
- Economic Context
- Population
- Production systems
- Family Social Structure
- Community Social Structure

### **II. Describe the PRA process as implemented in the community**

- Who participated, who didn't
- What happened, when
- Results

### **III. Assess the community's progress in increasing its planning capacity**

- Mastering the tools and techniques
- Using the tools and techniques for information collection and analysis
- Using the information gathered for independent problem solving, decision making, and planning

### **IV. Describe the development interventions carried out in the community as a result of the Community Action Plan**

- Type of intervention and objective
- Operation/how implemented
- Management
- Participants/non-participants

### **V. Assess the impact of each intervention on the individual, household, and community**

### **VI. Make recommendations for future improvements to activities in this community or others where similar activities may be carried out**

PRA objectives will generally have both a problem identification component and a planning aspect to them. Some of the problem identification issues would be very similar to what is outlined in the RRA objectives above.

### Sample Objectives for a PRA Study of Food Security

1. Identify the principal food security problems in Community X
2. Determine what part of the population is affected by each problem identified in Objective 1
3. Determine the severity of the impact on the population
4. Determine the frequency of the problem and its seasonality, if relevant
5. Prioritize the problems into a list that can be used for planning purposes
6. Draw up a Community Action Plan outlining the population's strategies for improving their food security situation

In most cases, the study objectives will not change significantly during the course of the field study. They should have been defined with sufficient care and sufficient advance understanding of the issues so that they are workable, realistic, and relevant. And, they should allow enough latitude for exploration so that the team can make at least minor modifications to their approach in the field without necessitating a complete overhaul of the objectives.

Occasionally things turn out to be dramatically different from what was

anticipated for one reason or another and the objectives have to change mid-stream. Perhaps the initial objectives were to study the overall, long-term food security situation in the community but for some reason that village turns out to face a critical and urgent problem (e.g. a fire a few days before burned down most of the village granaries). In such cases, it makes no sense to follow the initial objectives. Instead, the team will have to react quickly to the situation at hand and revamp their objectives to take the immediate situation into consideration. In other cases, the general thrust of the objectives may be valid, but the team will have to put more emphasis on one area, or perhaps add an additional area of inquiry in order to follow a priority concern that is raised during the course of the fieldwork.

### Site Selection

**RRA Site Selection** Site selection is of critical importance because of the small number of sites that, realistically, can be visited given the time and labor intensity of these methods. In selecting the number of RRA sites, the team will need to consider what type of information is needed, how it will be used, the diversity of the region, and logistical matters.

The key question that needs to be asked in setting up the site selection process is: "how do we set up this study in order to get the most useful information about the topics that interest us and reduce the likelihood that bias will distort our understanding local realities?"

Before beginning the site selection process it is useful to review what type of information can and cannot

be gathered using participatory, qualitative methods like RRA. These methods **cannot** gather information that can be used for statistical inference in which the results of the study are generalized to a larger population. If you're doing a tenure study in three villages, for example, you can't extrapolate the results to say that just because you found a certain tenure arrangement in one community (or even all the communities) that means that those arrangements will be found throughout the region.

While you can't generalize specific findings, RRAs **can** be extremely useful in pointing out significant issues that will have to be considered by a project or policy. In the example above, while it would be inappropriate to generalize from the specific finding to the larger population, it would be most appropriate to point out that if strong local/indigenous tenure arrangements were found in three communities selected in a random sample, this suggests that any project or policy should take local tenure arrangements into consideration. The studies would also point to the types of issues that arise due to these local tenure arrangements.

The site selection procedure should be carefully thought out in advance and then followed systematically to ensure that unwanted bias does not creep into the selection process. It should be noted that some bias may be introduced on purpose if the team consciously decides that it wants to favor certain characteristics (such as, perhaps, focusing on communities with acute food security problems or innovative resource management strategies) and deliberately chooses sites with those characteristics. In site selection you need to think about, first, how many sites you will study and then how you will go about selecting the required number of villages.

## 1. Choosing How Many Sites Will be Studied

Begin by thinking about how many studies you'd **like** to do and, then, realistically, how many you **can** do given logistical and labor constraints. The number of sites that you'd like to do will probably depend on the diversity of the region. If the region is quite homogeneous, with one ethnic group, a similar geographic situation across the zone, comparable production patterns, etc, only a few sites may be needed. After a couple of sites, it will be evident that the same type of information is being repeated and it will be pointless to go further. If, however, the project zone is very heterogeneous in terms of the factors listed above, far more sites will be needed since different situations will probably be encountered under different circumstances.

The number of sites that, realistically, can be studied will depend on the availability of competent team members and the amount of time that they can spend in the field. If there are several good teams available to do the studies, it will be possible to visit more sites than if one group will have to do the studies sequentially. Keep in mind that the labor intensity of RRA work means that there are very real constraints to the

number of sites that one team can visit. In most cases, ***a stay of at least four or five days will be needed to gather sufficient information and to ensure that it is adequately triangulated.*** In areas where the situation is complicated, or people are reluctant to share information and rapport building is more challenging, as much as a week may be needed in each site. Furthermore, it is simply not practical given the demands of the methodology to think that a team can conduct research in several sites in a row without a break. Break time is needed to analyze information after each site and to take a rest from the intensive pace of the work. Otherwise, burnout is inevitable. Realistically, a team can not be expected to carry out more than two, or at most three good RRAs over the course of a month...and they will probably want to take a good rest after that before embarking on another round.

## 2. Selecting the Sites

Once you have the number of sites in mind, you can begin the process of selecting the sites. In most cases this is best accomplished by using a combination of **purposive** and **random sampling**. Purposive sampling means that you are making sure that some characteristic is included in your sample...you are selecting it on purpose. Random sampling means that you are choosing by chance without favoring any particular characteristic.

The purposive part of the sample ensures that the diversity of conditions present in the zone are present in the final sample. The random selection reduces the likelihood that someone will introduce a bias in order to favor their own agenda (e.g. a project person encourages you to select a certain site in an evaluation because they know that the project has worked particularly well there). We use purposive sampling to come up with a group of villages sharing a certain characteristic that interests us, and then random sample within that group to choose the particular village or villages that will be studied in the RRA(s).

### **Step 1: Determining the set of villages from which you will choose those to be studied**

In the case of a pre-project RRA, this might be all the villages in a particular zone. If the project plans to intervene only in villages which have a high rate of malnutrition, then this might be all the villages where more than 20% of the children have been determined to suffer from malnutrition. In the case of an evaluation RRA, this might be all the villages where the project has undertaken activities.

### **Step 2: Discarding the “outliers”**

The number of villages that will be selected from the set you have defined in Step 1 will be quite small (perhaps three to ten) due to the constraints outlined above. If you want this sample to be as representative as possible of the villages in the whole set, at this point you will want to disqualify villages which for some reason are very different. You do this to avoid spending a lot of time gathering

information from communities where you know that for some reason the situation is very different from the norm.

If, for example, you know that most villages in the set have a population of 250-1,000 people you may choose to discard villages that are very much larger or smaller than this norm. If most of the villages fall into one of three principal ethnic groups, you may choose to discard those that are from very small minority groups. If some villages are very near to urban areas and therefore behave differently from a "typical" village in the zone, you might want to remove them from the pile. Please note that you would only discard these "outlying" villages if you were trying to get a picture of the dominant situation in the area. If you are especially interested in what happens in particular situations and plan to design interventions that respond to those particular circumstances, then you might want to leave those villages in the set and, indeed, perhaps decide to purposively sample for that characteristic (e.g. very small villages) in the next step.

How do you identify the outliers? Usually the best way is to discuss the situation with several people who know the area and particular villages well. Together, you can decide what criteria will be used to remove a village from consideration and then your informants can tell you what villages have (or don't have) that characteristic. Local extension agents, government officials, and representatives of NGOs who have been in the area for a long time are often good sources for this type of information. Secondary materials such as maps and census data can also provide useful information.

### **Step 3: Place the villages into categories to ensure that you sample certain characteristics of interest**

This step insures that you cover as much diversity as is important to you, given the purpose of the study you are undertaking. In order to create these groups, you will need to think carefully about the conditions that are likely to have a major impact on the situation you are studying. If for example, the two ethnic groups in the region have very different food production and management strategies, then you would take one group of villages from one ethnic group and another from the second ethnic group. If you think that a key determinant to food and nutritional security is the proximity to markets, you might want to create groups according to their proximity to markets. At this point you want to avoid using many different characteristics to create the piles and focus on the one or two that you think will make the most difference in terms of the study results. By dividing the whole set into subsets of this type (sometimes called stratification) you are ensuring that even though your sample is small that you will be sure that villages with certain characteristics fall in the sample (e.g. that you have at least one village from ethnic or livelihood group "x" and another from group "y.") This is similar to the concept of purposive sampling for reasons of triangulation described earlier.

As in Step 2 above, the information needed to assign villages to the different groups will be obtained from secondary sources and key informants.

**Step 4: Random sample the desired number of sites (and backup sites) from each pile**

To random sample, simply put all the cards from a given group in a hat and then select the required number of sites. It is recommended to choose one principal site and one alternate in case for some reason the principal site does not work out. Each site will be visited before the team begins the study to make sure that the conditions are appropriate and that the village wants to participate. After these visits it may sometimes be necessary to deselect a site if, for some reason, it turns out to be non-representative, the logistics will not work out, or the villagers don't want to be involved. The alternate site will then be visited to make sure that it qualifies. This process should be carefully documented.

There are many possible variations on this system. One variation that allows a few more sites to be visited is to do "principal" and "secondary" sites. In the principal site, an in-depth study of perhaps six days is carried out and then carefully analyzed. These results become the hypotheses that will then be tested in the secondary sites where shorter studies are carried out. In these secondary sites, fewer tools will be used, focusing on those activities that proved to be the most illuminating in the principal sites. The team will be able to move a bit faster in their questioning because they will have a good sense of what the major issues are. In a sense they will be trying to find out if the findings from the principal site apply to the secondary site, and if not, what the differences are and why. One way to do this in practice is for the whole team of, say, six people to visit the principal site. Then, the team can break into two subgroups, each of which visits a secondary site for, perhaps, three days. In this way, three villages can be studied in the time it would otherwise take to do two.

**PRA Site Selection** In many projects that use PRA, the purpose is to customize the project approach to the needs of individual communities and, often, to build capacity in needs assessment and planning. In such cases, PRAs are generally carried out by each community that participates in the project. The issue, then, is not so much which sites to do the PRA in, but which sites will be part of the project and the schedule on which the PRAs will be implemented. At this point, it is critical to recognize the **labor intensity of the participatory process, particularly in terms of the project's staff time.** Training and facilitating a PRA exercise with a community is a time and energy consuming process and there are few ways to short-cut the process. Projects that choose this approach will, necessarily, need to limit the number of sites in which they can intervene. The results should be more appropriate interventions that lead to more sustainable results but, at a cost of fewer project sites.



What is realistic in terms of implementation? It is hard to say in advance, given the vast differences in experience across countries and regions. Experience suggests, however, that working with clusters of villages works better than working with isolated communities because this way neighboring villages can reinforce one another's efforts, training resources can be shared, the facilitator can more easily be in contact with different communities, and there is a general synergy of efforts that increases the impact. Such a cluster might involve three to five villages within easy access of one another (by the villagers using whatever transport they have available). These villages might attend an initial training and send representatives to participate in the first PRA exercise which would be held in one of the villages. The facilitator would then follow up with the other villages in the cluster.

Given the need for the facilitator be involved in each of the initial PRA exercises, it is unrealistic to expect that person to work with more than two clusters, at most, during the first year. If the clusters are as large as five villages, then she or he will probably be busy enough with just one cluster. In the second year, then, she or he might add another cluster of villages and continue to support the first group while getting the process underway with the second.

The number of clusters with which the project can work at a time depends on many factors such as administrative back-up, adequate transportation, prior understanding of the process (or, conversely the need to train staff in the methods), and the number of qualified facilitators who are available. When in doubt, start slowly and then build up as the project gains confidence and experience. It may make sense to start in three or four clusters the first year, and then add a like number the second year. How long this expansion can take place will depend on the number of years that funding is available. It is critical that villages that enter the process have an opportunity to implement their plans and that resources are available for them to do so. This means that new communities should not be brought on in Year three if all the funding will run out at the end of that year and there will be no chance of responding to needs that are identified in the Community Action Plan.

# Carrying Out the Field Study

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## RRA

### Matching Research Objectives and Tools

With the team selected, objectives outlined, and sites determined, the project is now well underway in the RRA process. The next step is to start thinking through what will happen during the field study. The better prepared the team can be, the more efficiently it will use the precious time available in the field. There is a caveat here, however. The team wants to be informed on the issues to be researched and to be clear on the general procedures it will follow in the field. It does NOT want to predetermine the details of its schedule, however, since the day to day program will evolve in light of the information gathered, and circumstances in the community. You will not set out with a schedule that tells you that you will do a map that takes two hours on Day 1 morning, a 3 hours transect in the afternoon, a Venn diagram the following morning, etc. ***Studies that are rigid and overly determined tend merely to confirm the team's previous assumptions and biases, rather than discovering new and potentially far more interesting pieces of information.*** This will only surface when the team allows time to listen to what local people are telling them and to adjust their program and line of inquiry accordingly.

A useful step at this point is to prepare a matrix (for the team's use...not for use with the community as is the case with the matrices described in the tools section) that outlines the types of information that are needed and the tools that may be appropriate for getting that information. As we shall see below in the tools section, different tools have different strengths and are better at getting certain types of information. Going through this exercise as a team will help to ensure that everyone is on the same wavelength about the issues to be studied and will help, especially, novice RRA practitioners to better understand how tools can be most effectively used in the field.

The first step in putting together this matrix is to brainstorm the issues that will be addressed in the study. To do this, it is useful to post the objectives where everyone can see them. Then, read off each objective and ask people to think about what they would need to know to satisfy the information requested by that objective. List all the ideas before proceeding to the next objective. Once all the ideas have been gathered, organize them in a coherent list and place this along the vertical axis of the matrix. Along the horizontal axis of the matrix, list the various tools that can be used to gather information. Then, for each tool, go down the list and note down what information will be gathered using that tool. It may be useful to use Xs (as in the example below) to show which tools will gather a lot of information on a particular subject, or os for those that will gather some information, but less. Xs of different colors could be used for the same purpose.

## Use of RRA Tools to Collect Types of Information Needed in Baseline

(For illustrative Purposes Only)

	Map	Social Map	Transect	Venn Diagram	FS Calendar	FS Time Trend	Historical Profile	Historical Matrix	SSI Consumption Unit	SSI Production Unit
History						O	X	X		
Geographic Context	X		X							
Social Context	X	X		X			X	X		
Economic Context	X	X	X			X		X		
Food Acquisition Strategies	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Food Consumption Pattern		X			X	X	X	X	X	
Price Variation of Foods					X	X		X	X	
Food Sharing		X			X			X	X	
Food Availability Constraints	O	X	X		X	X		X		
Household/indiv strategies		O			O				X	

If, after completing this exercise, you find that there are some subjects that will not be covered using the tools on the list, then brainstorm some other ways that you might be able to get this information. You may have to adapt a tool, or create a new one. Similarly, if there are tools on the list that appear to have limited utility in terms of the information you are trying to get, then you will quickly see that it may not be worth the time to use this particular tool for this particular study. One advantage of doing a matrix like this is that it will be the starting point for creating the checklist for each tool.

***This matrix is not set in stone, it is merely the starting point that will help you effectively organize your time in the field.*** As you proceed, new topics — and possibly new tools — will be added to your matrix. You may decide to forego using some of the tools, or gathering some of the information, as you pursue new and interesting leads.

It is also important in preparation for field work, to confirm terms used with those doing field translation. Key terms and concepts should be translated into the local language(s), back into English/French/Spanish

(etc.) and then back into the local language(s). At least three native speakers need to participate in this exchange.

### Managing the Time in the Field: What Happens Over the Course of the Field Study

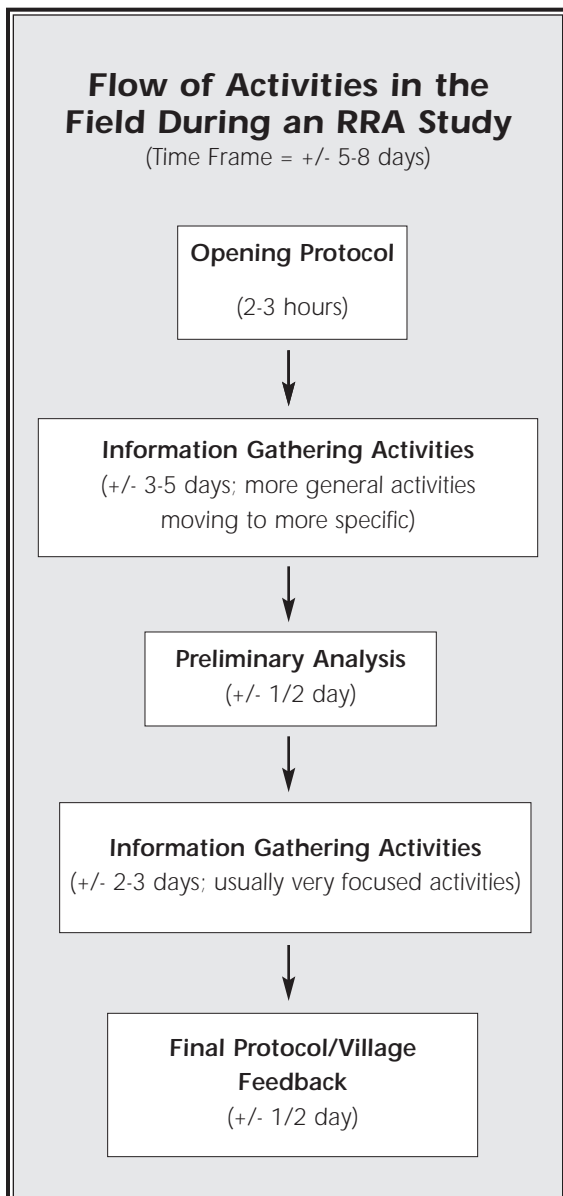
RRA studies are typically (though not necessarily) carried out during a discrete period of field work typically lasting from four to seven days. The studies will be longer when the information to be collected is more complicated or more sensitive, when the outsiders have less background information on the community or the issue being studied, when the community social structure is more complex, or when people are for some reason reticent to share information with outsiders and more time is needed to build rapport.

While, as noted above, it is impossible to predict the exact program of

activities in the field, there are certain patterns that are typical of most RRAs. We begin, then, by looking at the general flow of activities during the time the team is in the field. We will then address the issue of what happens during one typical day of a field study.

Before going to the community to begin the study, the team (or selected members) will want to visit the village at least once. During this preliminary visit the team will want to explain the purpose of the study and ascertain whether the community is interested in participating or not. At this time, it will be important to be very honest about how any information gathered will be used and what mechanisms will be put in place to ensure the confidentiality of particular informants.

This visit will also prepare the logistics of where the team will sleep and how food preparation will take place. Whenever possible (and it is possible more often than many outsiders think!), RRA teams should stay in the villages where they are doing their study for the duration of the field work. ***Living in the village (as opposed to coming and going only during regular “work hours”) can help to reduce many otherwise intractable biases by creating a better rapport with the local population, increasing mutual respect between outsiders and community members, and allowing team members to more***



***systematically observe and experience life in the community.*** Unless there are security concerns that would threaten the well-being of the team, it is worth the trouble to try to arrange for the team to stay in the village.

Once the team arrives in the community, the field studies generally begin and end with protocol sessions. In the **Opening Protocol** the team will, among other things:

- introduce the team members and why they are in the community,
- explain how the community was selected,
- explain what will happen during the study,
- discuss why the information is being gathered and how it will be used,
- preview the closing protocol and set a time for the final feedback of information to the community.

The better these issues are explained from the outset, the fewer problems are likely to be encountered as the work progresses in the community. In some cases it may be necessary to repeat the explanations several times if all groups do not come to the meeting.

Following the initial protocols, the **Information Gathering** part of the study can begin. There are several issues to keep in mind while organizing this period of field work.

- 1. Appropriate Sequencing of Activities** In programming the various activities that will take place during the field study it is important to think carefully about sequencing and the order in which different events will take place. There are three things to think about in terms of sequencing activities:

- moving from more general to more specific information,
- moving from less sensitive to more sensitive issues, and
- building on the information you have already collected in order to increase your knowledge as you move further into the study.

Usually it makes sense to gather whatever general, contextual, background information is needed toward the beginning of the study and to focus progressively on more specific information as well as that which may be more sensitive. Early activities might focus on understanding the physical layout of the community (with mapping), the social structure (through Venn diagrams), the general agricultural system (if relevant), etc. It would be more appropriate to save issues like household budgets, consumption patterns, illicit behaviors, and so on, until later in the study. This strategy will help the team to better understand the context for the detailed information, will make it more likely that villagers will understand why information is being requested, and will increase the likelihood that people will be honest with the

team since rapport usually increases as the study advances.

Information collection is like building a wall, where you put down the foundations first and then build upon them, with each row getting you to new levels of knowledge. You may go back to cross-check information that has been gathered, but your general orientation will be to gather new information that builds on the old, rather than merely confirming and reconfirming what you already know.

- 2. Dividing time between Community and Household Level Activities** Most studies will get the most complete and accurate information if they use an approach that includes gathering information at both the community and the household levels. A certain amount of information can be obtained in large groups, looking at general patterns in the community and better understanding broad phenomena that affect large numbers of people. At a certain point, however, it is critical to move to the household and individual level to gather more specific information, to verify the broader trends, and to explore deviations from the dominant patterns of behavior. The time in the field must be allocated accordingly. It often makes sense to gather the general background information first, and then to sample several families from different socio-economic groups to gather similar types of information, but in greater depth.

- 3. Dividing Time Between Information Gathering and Analysis** Most of the time spent in the community will be devoted to collecting information. Continuous gathering of information without periods of reflection and analysis will result in little more than a hodge podge of unrelated and probably irrelevant data, however. It is essential that the team take time during the study to digest what it is learning and to use this knowledge to make strategic choices about what further information will be sought. Some part of this analysis takes place during daily team interaction sessions, which will be addressed further below. In addition to these short and usually fairly superficial daily sessions, it is essential that the team take a longer break from information gathering to do what is called **preliminary analysis**.

The preliminary analysis usually is most effective if it takes places approximately 2/3 of the way through the field work, when a lot of information has been gathered, but there is still time remaining to fill gaps in information and to clarify issues which prove to be confusing. ***During the preliminary analysis, the team will take about half a day (more if time permits) to review the objectives of the study and to reflect on the information that has been gathered and the gaps that remain.*** If information is found to be puzzling, or contradictory, these issues should be placed on the agenda to be verified in the last days of the study. The team should also consider bias issues so that any biases that are identified can be rectified before the study ends. Often, once the preliminary analysis is over, the team will begin to focus on much more specific issues and focus their attention during the last days on particular questions that remain to be answered. Very focused semi-structured

interviews that are oriented toward specific people and issues often become useful at this stage of things.

The **final protocol/feedback session** is usually the last activity before the RRA team leaves the village. Ideally, the time for this session should have been set right from the outset, as part of the opening protocol meeting. If the villagers know that this will take place, it will allay some of their concerns about information being extracted without their having the “last word.” The **feedback session** has several purposes:

- 1. The ethical imperative to leave information behind** In participatory research of this type, the team has the responsibility to leave information in the community and not simply to extract it for its own purposes. While there are other ways that information can be left in the community, this is the most immediate and guarantees that this critical step will not be forgotten as the team gets distracted later on. The team will probably want to make copies of most of the diagrams that have been done as part of the study and leave a set with the community. During this feedback meeting it is useful to spend time with the community thinking through how they might use the information that has come out of the study and what, if any, follow up will take place. If follow-up PRA activities are anticipated, this is the time to set the stage for that work.
- 2. A last triangulation of information** The feedback session is an important last opportunity to triangulate the information that has been gathered. All information will not have been gathered with the whole population; some interviews will have been with small groups or with individuals. In the feedback session, the team will take all the information that has been gathered and weave it into a story about the situation in that community. This is the opportunity for the villagers to give feedback on whether they think that the story accurately reflects their reality. They may point out, for example, that something you thought was a typical pattern is, in fact, only representative of a small minority of families. Or perhaps something you thought happened on a regular basis is really only an occasional event. As the team presents the story they will want to encourage people to correct any misperceptions or to add important information that has been omitted.

### Managing the Time in the Field: What Happens During One Day in the Field Study

There are two types of activities that take place during an RRA day:

1. information gathering activities and
2. team interaction activities.

Roughly 75% of time in the field will be devoted to gathering information and working directly with the local population. The other 25% of the time will be used by the team for planning, analysis, and methodological review. Guidelines for using various tools and

**One common pitfall of novice RRA teams is to spend so much time on information gathering that they are too exhausted to hold adequate team interaction meetings.** These are absolutely essential for methodological rigor, progressive analysis of information, and careful planning needed to make optimal use of the time in the field. They should be programmed daily.

techniques to gather information will be presented in the section on Tools that follows. Here we will limit ourselves to discussing the team interaction meetings.

**Team Interaction Meetings** should be scheduled every day and generally take at least two hours. There are several things that need to take place during these meetings:

- 1. Reviewing information gathered that day** The team needs to continuously digest the information that it gathers. Information that has been even minimally analyzed becomes more useful for planning and enables team members to ask more pertinent questions. One of the best ways to digest information is to do an activity synthesis for each tool that is carried out. ***Any team members who were involved in that activity should sit down and brainstorm the most important information that was learned and write up the key elements (bullet style) on a flip chart.*** Questions or contradictions can also be noted for future follow-up.

When the team subdivides to carry out activities, it is essential that they debrief the other team members (presenting the activity synthesis is a good way to do this) so that everyone shares the same information.

- 2. Planning the next days activities** Once the team has reviewed the information gathered that day, it is time to plan the next days activities. In planning activities, team members will consider what information needs to be gathered next, what tool is best suited for gathering that information, and with whom they will use the tool. Triangulation needs to be taken into consideration in selecting the tool and the people with whom it will be used to ensure that there is adequate diversification of perspectives.
- 3. Preparing checklists** An important step in preparing the use of each tool is preparing a checklist that lists the issues that will be addressed using that tool. Tools can be used in many different ways. A map that is used to gather information for a food security study will not ask the same types of questions as one that is being used in a land tenure study (though there may well be some overlap of issues in these two cases). The checklist serves as a reminder to team members of what issues they will discuss during the course of the activity. It need not be followed in order, as long as the topics are all eventually covered, and should not preclude the team from following up any other interesting leads that arise during the course of the discussion.
- 4. Methodological review** The rigorous application of RRA methods requires a daily methodological review in order to ensure that biases are identified and corrected as early in the process as possible. The



team leader should ask everyone to think about what has happened in the study up until that point and to look for any unintentional biases (either in tool use or the selection of informants) that may have crept into the study. After identifying the biases, the team will explicitly think through what strategy it will employ to diminish the bias. This part of the meeting should also encourage a self-critical review of behavioral issues. Are there any ways that team members can improve their approach to improve rapport with the community or otherwise reduce biases introduced by team members' behavior?

## PRA

### **Maintaining a Participatory Process**

PRA studies are much more difficult to describe in any prescriptive way because in a good PRA the process evolves out of the community's participation. The outsider has only limited input into what happens during the time in the field. In RRA, quality information is the principal objective; in PRA, the process which leads to that information is as (and sometimes more) important. Among the principle objectives is strengthening the community's capacity to generate and analyze information and, ultimately, to use it for their own purposes.

The key, then, to carrying out as successful PRA is to set up the study in such a way as to maximize the likelihood that the community and community members will participate as fully as possible and will develop a sense of ownership over the process. Since community needs and circumstances will vary from place to place, it is next to impossible to suggest a blueprint for how this process will develop. There are, however, several factors that should be taken into consideration in implementing the field study of the PRA. And, it should be noted here that, unlike RRA, the field study in a PRA really comprises the entire process. There is very little in a PRA that does not happen in the community since the objective is to include the community in the process.

#### **1. Role of the Facilitator**

The facilitator plays a key but very delicate role in PRA. On one hand, she or he is likely to be the principal inspiration for the process and the person who is central to mobilizing the community's interest at the outset. His or her enthusiasm, encouragement, and concern are critical to getting things off the ground. On the other hand, the facilitator also poses the greatest dangers to the process since the very exuberance that acts as inspiration to get things underway may smother the villagers' own sense of initiative once the process begins.

It is essential, then, that the facilitator's role change over the course of the PRA process.

**In the early stages**, the facilitator's role will include some or all of the following tasks:

- explaining the whys and hows of PRAs
- facilitating village visits to sites where PRAs are already ongoing
- discussing the problem of bias and the principle of triangulation
- helping the village to identify steering committee members for the study

**As things get underway**, the facilitator may turn his/her energies more to:

- training community members in the tools and techniques
- asking key questions to keep the methodology on track
- gently orienting the process toward greater inclusiveness
- mentoring the community members who will become the on-site facilitators of the process

**As the process advances**, the facilitator will need to think about:

- pulling back from the process to leave room for community initiative
- doing less within the village and perhaps more to link the villagers to external resources
- responding to community demands for help rather than initiating
- encouraging villagers to make progressively more decisions
- spending less time on site

**Transferring PRA skills** One way to teach PRA techniques is for the facilitator to carry out an activity (such as mapping the village) using the steering committee as informants. After the activity, the facilitator can process the exercise, discussing how it is done and why. Then, s/he may ask the steering committee, now acting as the PRA team, to go out and do a map on a particular topic (say issues related specifically to food security) with other members of the community. In this second exercise, the villagers do the map with their fellow community members and the facilitator is merely there as a bystander to observe the process and help as needed to keep things going. The same pattern might then be followed with the other tools of PRA.

The facilitator should always keep in mind that one of the objectives of the process is for the community to take greater responsibility over time...he or she should be actively working him/herself out of a job (at least in that particular community!) as, over time, s/he intervenes less directly and villagers take increasing initiative in the process. Indeed, the evaluation of this portion of the project should look explicitly at whether over time the outsiders are doing

less and the villagers are doing more in terms of leadership in using PRA tools for planning and implementing their action plans.

The initial PRA exercise, which will involve training, as well as information gathering and planning, will probably be carried out as a fairly intensive process over, say, a couple of weeks (though this is not necessarily the case). Later activities, however, will be carried out as needed over time and are unlikely to involve the same intensive commitment of time by the facilitator and community members. Instead, as a decision needs to be made during implementation (for example) a specific tool might be used in a meeting to help people to analyze the issue and come up with an appropriate decision. Or, in monitoring, a matrix might be carried out at the end of the first year to see who is participating in project activities and what benefits they are getting. The facilitator will "accompany" the community along the process but, increasingly, encourage the villagers to think about how they might use the tools at their disposal to resolve a given issue so that they take ever greater lead in decision making and implementation.

As time passes, the facilitator will move into a role where she/he is "on call" to help the village as assistance is requested and will help the community to identify technical expertise as needed to answer questions that arise.

## 2. Scheduling of Activities

The key to scheduling activities during a PRA is to make the process as accessible as possible to as many people as possible. Scheduling can be a factor that either encourages or discourages participation and may introduce significant biases if it ends up, either by accident or design, excluding certain segments of the community.

Scheduling refers to both the time of year that the activity takes place and the time of day.

**Scheduling the PRA activity during the year** Usually, the early stages of the PRA involve fairly intensive activities. This is needed, in part, to galvanize community attention since if things start off too slowly (see below) people will lose interest. Often the constraints of the facilitator also mean that the training and first PRA steps will be done in a fairly concentrated period of time. It is essential then, that this period of two to three weeks when there will be many activities going on does not conflict with other important village activities, and especially any which are linked to people's livelihood. Peak periods in the agricultural season should be avoided, for example. But if the community includes herders, for instance, it will also be important to choose a period when they are not on transhumance, and so on.

Careful consideration should be given to the best "pacing" of activities. Some communities may wish to work intensively over two or three weekends to get the process underway; others may prefer to do PRA activities every morning or every evening for two weeks. The two considerations are (1) people's availability and (2) maintaining enough momentum and being able to show enough progress to keep people's interest.

**Scheduling of activities during the day** Once the time of year and the general intensity of the program has been determined, selecting the time of day to work on the PRA requires similar thought. If all the activities are carried out in the morning when women have water collection responsibilities, their participation will almost certainly fall off. If all the activities are in the afternoon when men need to tether the animals for the night, they are not likely to participate in any great numbers. Often it will be necessary to vary the time of day when activities take place over the course of the study to make sure that everyone who wishes gets an opportunity to be involved.

**How the work gets done** The community and the facilitator together will have to work out the mechanics of conducting the study since here too there is considerable latitude. The key in deciding whether one option is better than another is to remember the principles of triangulation. It is important that various viewpoints be represented and that a variety of tools be used. Some communities may want to conduct the entire study in plenary meetings where everyone can have their say. Others may find this impractical, and prefer to nominate a smaller — but still representative — group to carry out the information gathering activities and then report back to the community before beginning the planning exercises. This group becomes the local "steering committee" for the PRA and coordinates with any outsiders who are involved in the process. In any case, the planning exercises that develop from the information gathering part of the study should be as open and transparent as possible since this is the only way to build support for the activities that will eventually be implemented under the community plan.

### 3. Maintaining Community Interest

One of the challenges in participatory research is maintaining the community's interest. These activities take time and people need to see that this investment is having — or is likely to have — some tangible benefit. It is critical that CRS (or others initiating PRAs) **anticipate how community concerns will be addressed from the outset**. At some point in the process (probably fairly near the beginning), the process will produce a Community Action Plan with specific activities that have been selected to address community concerns. While some part of these activities can be accomplished by mobilizing village resources, undoubtedly some other portion will require an outside contribution.

Villages that go through the trouble of getting to this stage of the process and then find no outlet for their concerns become quickly disillusioned. In some cases the agency initiating the PRA is prepared to respond to requests for assistance that follow. In other cases, however, a decision about whether to invest has not yet been made.

Transparency and consistency in working with communities and not unduly raising expectations are key. There should be a direct relationship between our level of effort in doing a PRA/RRA and the extent of the community's efforts. The likelihood of resources being invested there should be considered even before the community invests much time and resources into the PRA.

It may also make sense to begin collaboration early on with other agencies who are prepared to work with the communities to implement their plans. All such arrangements must be made well in advance so that funding is available when it is needed and the momentum to accomplish priority activities is not dissipated.

### 4. Communities supporting communities

For most of the reasons outlined above, it makes sense for communities beginning the PRA process to work in conjunction with other communities who have either already begun or are ready to undertake PRA work.

**Promoting Mutual Assistance** The cluster approach, where CRS begins to work with four or five villages that are within easy "commuting" distance of one another (by bicycle or whatever form of local transport is most common) makes a lot of sense. Representatives of all five villages can attend an initial orientation workshop together. The initial "training" PRA might then be carried out in one of the villages, with one or more representatives of the other villages participating to get a better sense of what the process involves. Later in the process, instead of always turning to the outside facilitator when questions arise, the villagers will be more likely to turn to a local resource, thus increasing their self-reliance.

**Keeping the Momentum** It is much more likely that villagers will maintain interest in the process if they see others carrying out similar activities. Villagers that are reluctant to invest time in the process may be inspired when they see that tangible progress is occurring at a neighboring site. It may be possible to carry out some activities (such as certain training or monitoring events) together and to create a festive atmosphere around the events. PRA should be productive, but it should also be fun and engage the population in a lively, creative way.

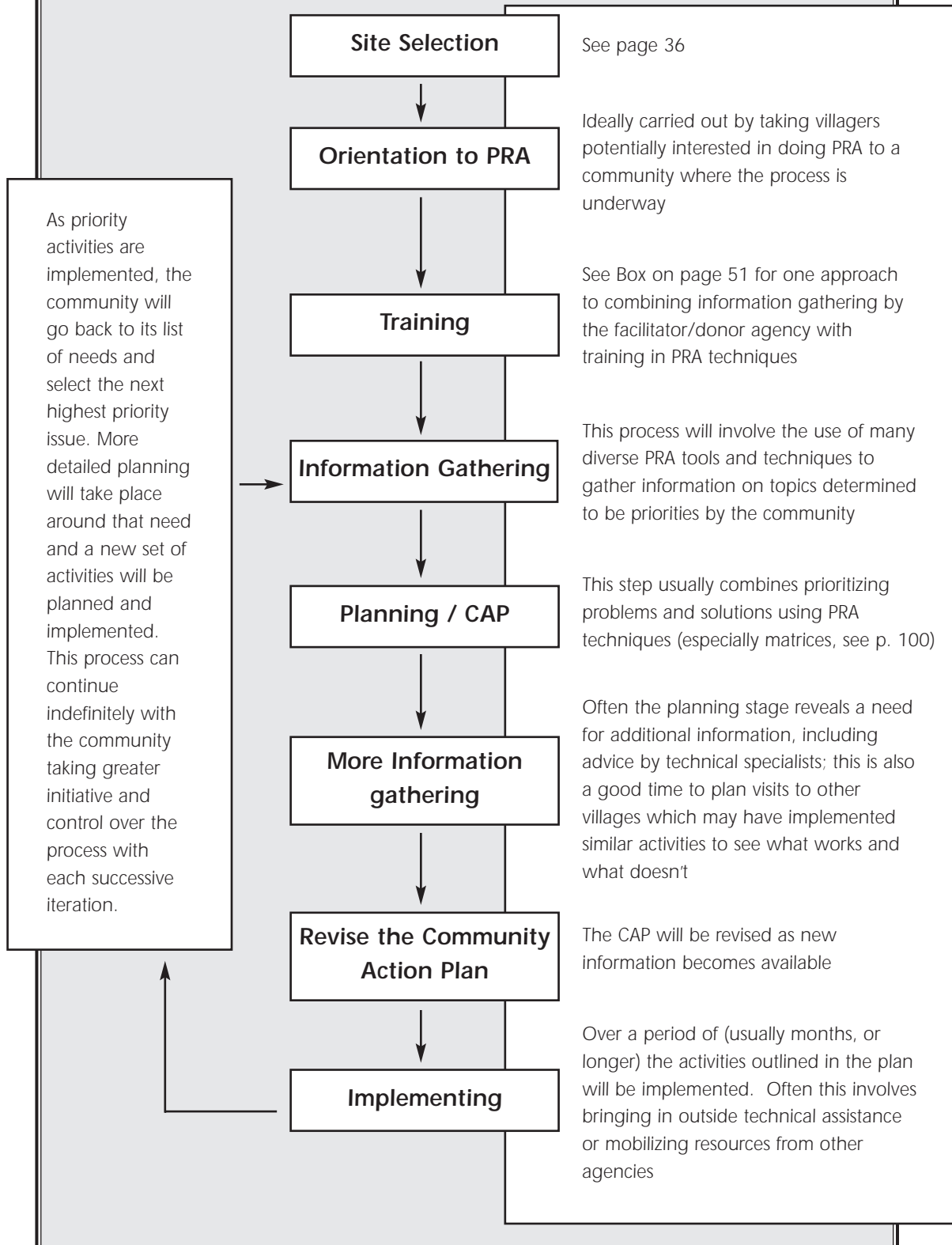
**Keeping Several Eggs in the Donor Basket** From a donor prospective, one of the problems with working with a single village is that the expectations for success are unduly high. The donor desperately wants to show results, especially from their "showcase" use of a participatory approach. Given the stakes involved, the facilitator (and everyone above him or her in the project line-up) is unlikely to allow the village to go at its own pace, especially if that pace is "unacceptably" slow or has few tangible benefits. The temptation for the donor to be pushy instead of playing the appropriate responsive role is great indeed.

### **The PRA Process**

Difficult as it may be to suggest a prescription for carrying out PRAs, there is a general sequence of events which is likely to be followed in a similar way in many sites where these activities are carried out.

## Flow of Activities in the Field During an RRA Study

(Time Frame = +/- 5-8 days)



As community members become more familiar with the methods, they will take increasing control over the shape of the process, perhaps changing it significantly from what is proposed here. In most cases, however, the PRA will, over time, involve a combination of problem analysis and planning with each set of activities leading to another level of more complex analysis as the community builds up skills needed to address its own development concerns.



# Analysis and Report Writing

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## Analysis

Collecting information takes patience and persistence. But the real challenge often comes in analyzing the information. Analysis is a multi-step process. It requires **organizing** the information so that it is coherent and makes sense. It requires **sifting** the information to separate that which is important from that which is less so. And it requires **thinking hard** in order to figure out why some of the information is so important and what it means for local planning, project activities, policy recommendations, etc.

While the process is not very different in RRA and PRA, it does not involve the same people in the two cases:

1. In **RRA** the principal analysis is carried out by the RRA team, which in most cases is composed primarily of outsiders. The analysis usually takes place after the team leaves the village.
2. In **PRA**, the analysis is carried out locally by team members who are, primarily, local residents. Indeed, if the community is carrying out the PRA, it is the community who will analyze the information.

In either case, analysis is an ongoing process. This contrasts with conventional survey methods in which the collection and analysis of information are two distinct phases in the research process. Analysis begins when the information is actually collected, is further digested during daily team interaction sessions, moves further during a break for preliminary analysis, and is completed during the final analysis stage of the research process.

### **Analysis During (and immediately after) Information Collection.**

In RRA and PRA, analysis begins to take place as soon as information collection begins. Most of the techniques used in these methods facilitate analysis by organizing material in visual ways. Some, like matrices and flow charts, help local people to work through relationships between different variables, a critical step in analysis.

It can be very helpful to make this stage of analysis both explicit and deliberate by doing **activity summaries** immediately after completing each exercise. If the team members are literate, the activity summaries should be done on flip chart paper. The team (or the members who were involved in the activity if the team split up) will ask itself: ***“what are the most important things we learned during this activity?”*** This question will be the basis for a brainstorming and the principal points of the discussion should be written down in bullet form on the flip chart. These sheets can be annotated as you go along to show, for example, which points reconfirm information already gathered, and which ones contradict other information, requiring further inquiry. If the team or

population is not literate, the same purpose can be achieved by having an oral brainstorming of the most important issues raised during the activity. If possible, one person can then record the summary.

**Analysis During Team Interaction Meetings** The team uses its interaction sessions to review the information it has gathered during that day and to fit it into the larger picture that is emerging out of the study. This will enable them to identify gaps in information and inconsistencies that can then be followed up in later activities. The daily analysis is essential because it permits rapid learning as new knowledge builds on the basis of prior information. In doing the daily analysis the team will ask itself questions like:

- what new information did we learn today?
- does this confirm or contradict what we learned before?
- what might be the reason for the contradictions?
- what do we want to learn tomorrow in order to clarify these issues or add to the information we have?

**Preliminary Analysis During a Break in Field Work** The daily analysis is necessarily cursory due to the shortness of time during interaction meetings and the teams inevitable eagerness to move ahead in information collection. The Preliminary Analysis, when the team actually stops doing information collection activities for a few hours to focus on what it has learned is a chance to do a more systematic and thorough review. This break for analysis should be programmed approximately two thirds of the way through the field work (the morning of day 4, perhaps in a six day study).

A break to do preliminary analysis is especially important in RRA because the final analysis will be done after the team leaves the community. If it finds out at that point that some critical information has been omitted, it will be very difficult to go back and fill in the gaps. ***In this preliminary analysis (as well as in the final analysis that takes place after the information collection phase is completed) it helps to physically organize the information by objectives.*** Team members should write each objective at the top of a large sheet of paper. Then, the team (or participants in the case of a PRA) can brainstorm all the important information learned under each objective. At this point the team will be asking itself questions like:

- what have we learned so far about Objective I, II, III, IV etc.?
- which objectives have we fairly well satisfied?
- where are the remaining gaps in information?

- what are the significant contradictions or confusions we still need to sort out?
- are there any new issues that we hadn't anticipated in our objectives that we need to understand in order to make sense of these questions?

**The Final Analysis** In the preliminary analysis, it is sufficient simply to organize the information on flip charts in order to think about missing pieces and possible activities to gather that information. In the final analysis the team (or participants) will go further in "massaging" the information and trying to make sense of what it means. ***It is impossible to write a good report until the information gathered in the study has been fully analyzed.*** The analysis of information should include everyone who was involved in the field study. This helps to avoid biases that result from one person's interpretation of information.

The final analysis looks at the information that has been gathered through several different lenses. If you have followed the general recommendations above for setting objectives, you will find that the analysis roughly parallels the objectives that you established at the beginning, which will make the whole process very much easier.

**1. Telling the Story.** The first step is really to tell the story. This step is largely descriptive, laying out the situation in the community and focusing on the issues that comprise the core objectives of the study. As you describe the situation, you will want to be sure, on one hand, to pull out the most important and/or predominant patterns that were uncovered during the study so that the reader is not lost in a mass of undigested details. You need to be careful, on the other hand however, not to overgeneralize. You want to capture significant variations within the community that are based on differences due to factors such as gender, wealth, ethnicity, etc.

- what is the situation?
- how do local people define the issues?
- how is the same or different from the way outsiders see the situation?
- what is the dominant pattern and what are notable variations?
- where does the situation come from (some history)?
- who is involved and who is not? why?
- when does the situation occur (seasonal issues, if relevant)?
- and so on!

**2. Exploring Causes, Consequences, and Constraints** The next step is often, (depending on the objectives and the overall purpose of the study), to look at causes and consequences of the situation and to trace the various forward and backward linkages.

- what explains the situation that you uncovered?
- what is the historical background?
- what other factors affect the situation and how (e.g. the national economy, weather patterns, etc.)?
- how is this tied into other areas of community concern?
- what are the consequences on the local population in terms of peoples well-being?
- what are the constraints to improving the situation?
- and so on!

**3. Figuring out how the Information Can be Used** The third, and vitally important step, is to figure out how the information can be used. At this step, the team should be asking itself questions like:

- what implications do these findings have for the well-being of people in this community?
- how can this information be used to make things better?
- what have we learned that can make our projects interventions more effective?

In an RRA, the analysis feeds into a written report, as described below. In the case of PRA, it will probably lead directly into a planning process, often using planning matrices such as those presented at the end of the tools section. It is critical that the person who is facilitating the planning continuously makes the linkage between decisions about future actions and the information that has been gathered. There is always the danger that, when it comes to interventions, the community will revert to a “wish list” mentality, based principally on prior donor activities in the village or the area. The facilitator can help to avoid this by asking questions like, ***“what did we learn about nutrition issues in this community that can help us decide what needs to be done?” or “what did we learn about the population affected by problem X that can help us better focus our Action Plan?”***

## Documenting the Results

**How to Document the Results?** It is important that the results of the study be captured in a way that makes information available to those who could use it to improve a situation. In the case of RRA, this will necessarily involve writing a **report** since, along with the feedback

session in the village, the report is the main vehicle for recording and sharing the information from the study. It is important that such a report be well written and that it record the richness and complexity of the information obtained in the study. Otherwise the results will be of no use to anyone and the study will have done little but waste the time that the team and the villagers spent on the study. **Oral presentations** to policy makers and project staff should also be organized if these will increase the chances that the information will be used.

Whether a report is an important part of the PRA process will depend on the purpose of the study. If the results of the study are to be used by the villagers alone and written communication is not particularly

useful to them, then there may not be a need for a formal report. Instead, the results may be captured by other means, whether oral or using other visual forms of communication such as diagrams or drawings. At a minimum, the results should be recorded in at least a summary fashion in a **Village Log Book**. If the PRA needs to inform others where written communication is more effective, then it will probably be worth the trouble to write a full

**Writing a good report helps to avoid one of the most dangerous biases which is the "memory bias".** Over time, team members will tend to remember and perpetuate those ideas that reinforce their prior conceptions (or misconceptions). Writing a report where all contribute their views will help to neutralize individual biases and serve as a reminder to team members and others of the reality they confronted in the field.

report so that information will not be lost...or distorted. Even if the village does not see a need for a written report, CRS staff members will probably want to record the results of at least one or two of the PRAs so that they can share the process more fully with donors and other people who may be interested in the approach.

## The RRA Report

**Who Writes the Report?** The first step in writing the report (see below) is preparing a detailed outline of everything that will be addressed in the report. All team members should be involved in this process since it is crucial that the outline (and hence the final report) reflect the concerns of everyone who participated in the study. Once this has been done, however, the actual writing of the report can be delegated to a smaller number of people. How many people will be involved will depend on whether people enjoy writing and want to participate, on people's writing skills, and who has the time. If several people participate in the writing, one person should be designated as principal author, or editor. This person is responsible for making sure that all the sections fit together and that nothing has been left out or duplicated in the parts various people have written. Everyone on the team should have an opportunity to review the completed draft report and should offer corrections and additions as needed. This is another aspect of triangulation and the authors should try not to take such

corrections as personal affronts or criticisms of their work. The goal of this process is to end up with a report that is as accurate and complete as possible.

**What Goes into the Report?** The report should attempt to capture the richness of information that was collected in the study but it should not be just a massive compilation of every piece of information obtained in the field. This is why a careful analysis is necessary before starting to write. One step of the analysis is the “sifting” in which the information that is really relevant to this particular study is separated from that which is of little consequence. As the report is written, another sifting is done, putting more emphasis and detail in parts which can be considered to be really important.

The diagrams and tools used in the research should be used as supporting evidence for the arguments being made. Where they are relevant, they should be inserted into the report as illustrations of what is being discussed. Whenever a diagram is put into the report, something should be written that connects the diagram to what is being explained. The whole diagram need not be summarized; instead, the one or two things that are the most salient to the argument you are making should be pointed out to the readers.

In some cases it is best to leave a diagram out of the report if it will not illuminate or clarify an issue. This may be the case with a diagram that gets a lot of information but is hard to understand if you were not part of the exercise. (This is frequently the case with Venn Diagrams, for example.) In such a situation it is fine to report that “ discussions during the Venn Diagram activity revealed that...” while not actually including the diagram in the report.

The question of how to deal with sensitive issues often arises in writing RRA reports since the nature of the methodology means that it often gathers information that is more intimate and deeper than other research methods and therefore potentially more controversial. In places where communities are concerned about the information that will be reported and the possible consequences on them, this issue should be discussed openly. ***In cases where information about sensitive or illicit activities is gathered, the report authors may decide either (1) to leave out certain particularly controversial information or (2) to write up everything that has been learned but camouflage the name and location of the community so as to reduce the likelihood of sanctions on the village or individuals.***

**Organizing the Report** There are many ways to organize the report. The outline suggested here follows the objectives of the study. This is one possibility and may be adapted depending on the purpose and results of the study. What is important is that the report follow a logical flow of information and be organized according to themes. What it should not be is a chronological summary of field activities or a simple compilation of the diagrams done in the field. Volume III of this

## Sample Report Outline

### I. Introduction/Context

### II. Methodology

1. Objectives
2. Team members
3. Site selection
4. Program of activities
5. Limits of the study

### III. General/background information

### IV. Objective I

### V. Objective II

### VI. Objective III

### VII. Conclusions/Recommendations

manual will eventually include examples of good RRA reports that result from studies done in CRS projects. Please send in examples from your fieldwork.

**1. Introduction/Context** The first section of the report, usually called the introduction or context section, often is used to explain why the study was done and for whom. A brief explanation is given regarding the projects goals and where this study comes in the cycle of project activities.

**2. Methodology** The methodology section helps the reader to understand how the information was collected. This is very important, especially where qualitative methods such as RRA and PRA are being used. Many people continue to be skeptical of these methods and it is important to reassure them that they were carried out carefully and systematically with a full

understanding of the methodological principles. This section should include information on:

- team selection,
- site selection,
- the objectives of the study,
- the tools used in the field,
- and any particular problems that were encountered.

At some point in the report there needs to be a complete listing of all the activities carried out in the study. This may be either in the methodology section, or in an appendix at the end of the report.

The methodology section should take care to explain how triangulation was assured in the study. This will increase the credibility of the findings. If for some reason, the team suspects that there were some biases that they were not successful in overcoming, this should be noted as well. Readers will be more likely to take what is being said seriously if they see that an effort was made to control the quality of the work and feel that the authors are aware of its limitations.

**3. The Body of the Report.** Once the introduction and methodology sections are out of the way, the report can begin to focus on the substance of the information that has been gathered. The first

of these chapters will generally provide overview information about the community (sometimes called the **village profile**) that discusses such issues as geography, social structure, history, economic activities, etc. This type of information is often needed to situate the more specific and detailed information that follows.

The following chapters then treat the issues that were addressed in the study. If the objectives were well thought out at the beginning, it often makes sense to treat each objective in turn. In some cases, however, the author may find a better way to organize the information once she or he has it all in front of her/him. In many cases, the report will begin (as discussed in the analysis section above) with more descriptive information and move into increasingly analytical information as it progresses.

**4. Conclusions/Recommendations** The last section of the report is often the most important since this is where the conclusions and recommendations appear. (They should also be put into an “executive summary” which is a short (2-3 page) summary of findings that precedes the body of the report.) The last chapter is like the “sauce” that pulls together all the “ingredients” that were laid out in the earlier chapters. In writing a coherent report, it is important that all the ingredients needed for the sauce have been put forth and adequately explained in the descriptive chapters. Conversely, in the earlier chapters it is important to avoid spending a lot of time presenting and discussing ingredients that will not be used in the sauce. If this has been done well, the “sauce” chapter can avoid a lot of description and instead focus on the big picture...how the pieces all fit together and what the final picture means.

The conclusions should identify recommendations at several levels including, at a minimum, those that are relevant for future CRS activities, for the counterpart agency, and for the community involved. Depending on the objectives of the study, there may also be recommendations for policy makers, other NGOs, etc.

**5. Annexes** Annexes provide useful information that may not fit logically into the main argument of the paper. This might be related information, information that is more detailed than what you wish to put in the main document, references to other sources of information, etc.

The report should convey the information in as clear and interesting a fashion as possible since this will increase the likelihood that people will take the trouble to read it. If difficulties arise as a section of the report is being written, it sometimes helps to discuss the problematic issues orally with a colleague. As you explain things to someone else, the issues often become clearer, and this makes it much easier to write about them.



## Oral Presentations

While oral presentations do not replace reports, they are often very useful complements. Some people absorb information from written documents most effectively; others are better at grasping information that they hear. If you want people to pay attention to what you are saying, you may have to use a variety of approaches to getting your message across, particularly for those not on the RRA/PRA Team, e.g. local NGOs, decision makers, government or donor staff.

It is often very effective to include villagers from the communities studied in the oral debriefings that you conduct. The RRA experience, in which information is gathered and analyzed in a systematic way, can help villagers to express their concerns in a way that is convincing to outsiders. They are often the most persuasive and eloquent conveyors of the message. It can be effective to organize the presentation so that they discuss their situation or concerns and then other team members fit those into the larger context and pull out relevant conclusions for the policy makers or project administrators who are present.

Oral presentations are most effective if they make use of visuals to illustrate the points of the presentation. It is also easier to keep your presentation on track if you have the main points outlined on flip charts and merely have to work your way through those points rather than trying to remember everything or keep referring to a paper you have written. It is often useful to have large colorful copies of the diagrams used in the RRA so that you can refer to them as you make your presentation.

## Village Log Books

In some PRAs, as noted above, a full-scale report may not be necessary, or even possible if the study has been carried out by villagers and they are not familiar with report writing. It is important, however, that the village document the process and have a record of the information that they have collected. This is the purpose of the village log book.

The Village Log Book is a booklet, binder, or scrapbook, that the community uses to record key information from its PRA activities. It may include some or all of the following:

- copies of diagrams that are done as part of the exercise
- the Community Action Plan
- a notation of key decisions that result from the study
- descriptions of follow-up activities that take place
- records of activities that are implemented as a result of the CAP
- financial records
- observations from visitors present during the exercise.

If other information gathering activities occur (such as weighing or measuring children, price monitoring, etc.) the results should also be recorded in the log book. This will enable villagers to analyze the change in their situation by recording information that can be used to identify trends and to make comparisons over time.

A note should be made in the log book each time an activity associated with the project takes place. The note should include the date and time, as well as who was involved (both from the community and from outside) and what happened. In short, the log book provides the village a mechanism for monitoring their progress in implementing the Action Plan and other project activities.

# Part III:

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## **The Tools and Techniques Used to Gather Information in RRA and PRA**

### **An Introduction to the Use of RRA/PRA Tools and Techniques**

Adapting the Tools

Interviewing the Diagram

Preparing the Checklist

Using the Tools in an RRA or a PRA mode

Sequencing of Tools and Techniques

Selecting Participants

Conducting the Activity

Note Taking

### **Semi-Structured Interviewing**

### **Participatory Mapping**

**Transect Walk**

**Venn Diagram**

**Calendars**

**Wealth Ranking**

**Historical Profile**

**Matrices**

**Tools Specifically Useful in Planning**

**The Community Action Plan**

# An Introduction to the Use of RRA/PRA Tools and Techniques

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There are many different ways to get information in RRA and PRA. This variety of techniques is sometimes called the RRA/PRA "Toolkit." While there are a certain number of core techniques that are regularly used by most practitioners, the list continues to expand as people devise their own ways to get information in a more participatory and more interesting fashion. In this manual, we present a set of the most commonly used tools. You will undoubtedly want to experiment with other that you invent or see other people using with success.

## Adapting the Tools

Keep in mind that the tools as they are presented here are generic; that is, they can be applied to any subject. Volume II of this manual offers suggestions for how they can be adapted to the particular needs of different sectors, but even these are just suggestions to stimulate your own creative thinking. Realistically, each of these tools will have to be adapted to the circumstances in which you will be using them. You may use different materials from those that are suggested here, you may set up the exercise somewhat differently, and you will certainly change the activity depending on the objectives of your study. To do this, you will need to create a checklist for each tool that outlines the issues you would like to gather information on as you conduct the exercise.

## Interviewing the Diagram

It is important to remember when using any of these techniques that the tools are not the end product. That is, the purpose is not to end up with a pretty map or a well drawn Venn diagram. The purpose is to obtain information using these techniques. This means that it is not enough to get something down on paper or sketched out on the ground. The next step is invariably to **"interview the diagram."** When you interview the diagram, you use the picture or the activity as a mechanism for provoking discussion around the issues on your checklist. A map which details the existence of certain markets may be used to launch a discussion of marketing constraints. A matrix or calendar that shows when the hungry season is can be used to discuss people's strategies to try to avoid hunger...or their coping strategies once hunger strikes. The piles of beans that are created during a wealth ranking can lead to a discussion of the particular constraints faced by poorer families, or the sharing mechanisms that exist within the community.

## Preparing the Checklist

One of the team's primary tasks in preparing to use a tool is to draw up a checklist of the topics that need to be covered during the activity. If

you want to use a map to find out about conflicts over resources, you need to put that on the checklist to remind the team that before the activity is over, they want to be sure to address that issue. The checklist for the map might also include issues such as: management of fallows, seasonal land use changes, commons vs privately held lands, rules of access to common lands, use of the territory by outsiders, etc.

Checklists may be more or less detailed, depending on how skilled team members are at remembering issues they want to pursue and making up questions “on the fly.” Some people prefer to have quite detailed checklists so that they do not forget what they want to ask, while other people feel comfortable noting only the very broad outlines and then devising a lot of questions during the interview. In either case, the interview should be as relaxed and friendly as possible and the interviewer should leave plenty of room to pursue topics that are brought up by the informants during the course of the activity.

The checklist will remind the team of the essential topics it wants to cover, but it cannot possibly include all the questions that will be asked during an interview. The box below gives an example of a checklist for an interview and the types of questions that might actually be asked:

**Example of a Checklist (for a health mapping activity)  
and the Interview Questions that Might Develop**

The bold, bulleted points on the left are the checklist items that you might note down before beginning the activity. The questions on the right are examples of the types of issues that might follow from just one of these checklist items (regarding medicinal plants) when you actually start asking questions during the interview of the map. Each checklist item would be followed up in this way.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Health infrastructures</li><li>• Where health providers live/work</li><li>• Presence of medicinal plants in the territory</li><li>• Areas which cause health/sanitation problems</li><li>• Families that have acute health problems and why</li><li>• How things were different before the hospital was built</li></ul>	→	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• types of plants?</li><li>• who has access?</li><li>• what are the rules?</li><li>• who uses them?</li><li>• why do some people use them and others not?</li><li>• what are they used for?</li><li>• how are they processed/prepared?</li></ul>
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## Using the Tools in an RRA or a PRA Mode

The tools outlined here can all be used in either an RRA or a PRA mode. That is, they can be done:

1. by outsiders who facilitate the activities and use the tools to elicit information sharing and analysis by community members (RRA mode) or
2. by villagers themselves to analyze their own situation and generate information that they then use for their own planning purposes (PRA mode).

When training villagers to use the methods for PRA purposes, it is particularly important that only locally available materials be used. That is, avoid the use of flipcharts and markers if the villagers don't have these materials. Instead use a stick to draw on the bare ground or chalk to draw on a cement floor.

## Sequencing of Tools and Techniques

There is no fixed order for using these tools. The team needs to think through what makes the most sense, given the information that is needed and the situation it finds in the community. The program will undoubtedly evolve and change as the study gets underway. In general, toward the beginning of the study, tools will be used that provide general information and that raise fewer sensitive questions for the population. As the study progresses and the team gathers more information, it will begin to use some of the more complex techniques. These are ones (like calendars and matrices) that require more information to do them well. As we shall see below, matrices have a set of hypotheses embedded in them and to be used well, require the team to have a fair bit of information already in hand. As a result they are most effective when used several days into the study. Other tools (such as wealth ranking and social mapping) may be sensitive because they deal with more private information. Generally this type of tool should only be used once the team has developed a rapport with the community or, at least, with some community members, and attained a certain level of confidence with them.

## Selecting Participants

Each time you use a tool, you need to think through, in advance, who will participate. In some cases, you will want to leave it entirely open to anyone who wants to come and join the activity. This is a particularly good approach for ice breaking exercises (such as the initial community map). More often, however, you will want to be somewhat selective in order to address bias concerns. You may wish to open the exercise to everyone, but ask that at least certain groups be represented (men, women, older, younger, etc.). Or, if you fear that certain groups will dominate and others will not be heard in such a mixed setting, you may decide to orient the activity to one group (only

women, only poorer people, etc.). This is usually best done by taking the activity to the group in question. If you wish to work with women, for example, you will probably want to do the activity when and where they naturally congregate...at the river on clothes washing day, for example.

Keep in mind, as well, that not all activities will be carried out in large group settings. At times you may wish to sample particular families (two poor families and two average families, for example). You might select these by random sampling the piles in a wealth ranking or you might purposively sample a specific person or family because of some particular information you wish to obtain. Perhaps only a few families in the village engage in a certain practice (e.g. composting or family planning). You may wish to interview these families to better understand what motivates this behavior. The key in deciding who will participate is to remember the principles of triangulation (especially in RRA) and maximizing participation and the feeling of ownership over the process (especially in PRA).

### Conducting the Activity

1. The first step in doing any activity with a group or an individual is to introduce the activity. This involves:
  - introducing the team members and getting to know your respondent(s)
  - reminding the respondent(s) about the overall objectives of the study and how the information will be used
  - telling the respondent about this activity and why you are interested in the information
  - reminding the respondent about the confidentiality of any information that is gathered.
  
2. The next step is to **conduct the activity**. This will involve
  - one person acting as facilitator to get the activity underway
  - "handing over the stick" once the activity gets going so that the respondents take greater control over the exercise
  - interviewing the activity to cover all the issues on the checklist
  - following up on interesting comments made by the respondent even if they are not on the checklist
  - probing (see section on SSIs below) topics of particular interest on the checklist
  - keeping the activity/interview as relaxed and interactive as possible
  - taking notes that capture all the key points made by the respondent(s).

3. As the activity draws to a close, you will **close the activity** by:
  - asking the respondent(s) if they have anything to add, or to ask of the team
  - thanking the respondent(s)
  - reminding them of the utility of the information and its confidentiality
  - reminding the respondent(s) of the feedback session and inviting them to attend.
4. Following the activity, you will want to be sure to take the time to:
  - clarify any notes that you may not have had time to record in the interview
  - do an activity summary with the other team members who were present
  - share the results of the activity with other team members who did not participate
  - review the process of the activity and note anything you might want to improve on in the future.

## Note Taking

The general principle is that all team members present should take notes at all times. This is to avoid the **memory bias** that will cause you to remember only what you consider to be important at that moment, rather than everything that is reported to you. The exceptions to everyone note taking on everything are the following:

1. The person who is facilitating the activity, or actually asking questions at any given point in time, will probably not take notes. Instead, he or she will concentrate on the task at hand which is developing a rapport with the respondent(s) (by careful eye contact, body language, etc.) and asking key questions. As the questioner "passes the interview" to the next person who will be asking questions, he or she will resume taking notes.
2. In some cases the issues being addressed may be so sensitive that it is awkward to take notes during the activity, or during some particularly delicate part of an activity. In this case, the team should take time immediately after the interview to note down everything that was said.

The key thing in note taking is to jot an entry for everything that the respondent says. These can be very quick phrases to remind you of the comments that are made; you should not attempt to write down exactly what is said, except in cases where the person's exact words are particularly illuminating for some reason.



Tape recorders are of limited use in RRA/PRA because of the time that it takes to transcribe the information. There may be occasional interviews that are for some reason particularly important or (the case of historical interviews with very elderly people) where the information is very hard to follow the first time it is heard. In such cases it may be worthwhile to record the information so as to be able to listen to it several times or to save it for historical reasons. In general, however, people do not find it very useful to have hours and hours of tapes from an RRA study and, except for some academic purposes, the tapes are rarely transcribed or fully used.

The pages that follow present some of the tools that might be useful in whatever RRA or PRA you will be doing. Not all the tools will be used in all studies, and you may come up with others that are more appropriate to the questions you wish to ask. Similarly, the descriptions of how the tools may be used are purely illustrative to give you an idea of the utility of different tools in different circumstances.

# Semi-structured Interviewing

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In each of the techniques presented below, the concept of interviewing the activity to draw out more information than what can be demonstrated visually will be emphasized. The various “hands-on” activities outlined in the tools that follow provide the mechanism for drawing out information, making people feel more comfortable with participating, and facilitating the analysis as information is organized visually. Ultimately, however, the most effective use of these techniques requires the user to ask questions and to use his/her best judgement in probing beyond the superficial to get at key information that will be of use in project design and implementation. This is why we speak of “interviewing the diagrams” and that is why Semi-Structured Interviewing (SSI) is presented first in this manual: SSIs will be a part of every activity that you do.

In most cases the interview plays the subsidiary role to the diagram or activity which holds center court. Sometimes, however, the semi-structured interview (SSI) is the activity. That is, the team conducts an interview without using any other visual or manipulative tool. This is often true further along in the study when large amounts of background information have already been gathered. At this point the team may find it necessary to narrow in on specific types of information which are more efficiently gathered by a carefully focused SSI. Such an interview might narrow in on a precise topic such as weaning methods or immigrants’ access to land.

Another use of semi-structured interviewing is to verify information that was obtained in a group activity with individuals or specific families. These families might be chosen from different socio-economic groups as defined by a wealth or food security ranking. In some cases it will be useful to use a tool or diagram as part of these interviews (such as doing a land holdings map with an individual family). In other cases a straight interview may be a faster way to get the information.

Straight interviewing (without the use of another participatory/visual tool) should be used sparingly. It is the technique that is perhaps the most subject to bias (because of the limitations of words as a means of communication and because it does little to build rapport with the interviewee) and it is by far the least interesting of the tools to the people who participate.

Interviews, as with all other tools used in RRA/PRA should always use a prepared checklist.

## **Probing in Interviews**

One of the attributes of qualitative research is that it can be used to probe issues and come to a deeper level of understanding than what is sometimes possible using more quantitative approaches. The

qualitative researcher has the advantage of being able to ask “why?” and to follow up until she or he understands the response that has been given. This doesn’t happen automatically, however! It is up to the team, and the researchers on that team, to want to dig a little bit deeper, to try to understand a little bit more, and to use their interviewing skills to get the information that will illuminate and clarify the topic under discussion.

There are several techniques that can be used during an interview to move beyond the most superficial response in order to get richer and more complete information.

### **Silence**

Often team members are hasty in moving on to the next question. Silence gives the respondents time to think through what they want to say and encourages them to say more.

### **Re-question**

Comments like: “That’s really interesting, can you tell me more about that?” encourage the respondent to go further with the explanation.

### **Echo**

Repeat the last thing the respondent said with a slight rise in the voice.  
Respondent: “Malaria is a real problem around here.”  
Questioner: “Malaria is a problem around here?”

### **Recap**

“Could you explain to me again about X?” In many cases the respondent will add information to what s/he said before.

### **Encouragement**

Use body language (e.g. head nodding, leaning forward in attentive position, smile, click) or verbal cues (e.g. “mmm”, “uh-huh”, “I see”, “really?”) to show your interest and encourage more information.

### **Sympathetic listening**

Always appear to sympathize with the respondents point of view (even if you find it outlandish, immoral or otherwise unpleasant!) if you want the person to open up more: “Well, I can see that X is a real problem for you.”

### **Don’t be afraid to admit confusion**

If people say something that confuses you or appears to contradict something they (or someone else) said earlier, explain your confusion and ask for an explanation: “I’m a little confused here and I’m wondering if you could help me understand better...before I thought you were saying X, but now I think I’m hearing you say Y...”

### **Act knowledgeable**

When people are talking about something controversial or sensitive, it helps if you act as though you already know what they’re talking about (“Yes, I heard about something like that the other day” or “Yes, that’s a

problem I come across often in my work") so people don't feel like they're the only ones divulging such information.

***Just ask open-ended questions such as: "Why?" "Why is that?" "Why do you think that happens?"***

## **Things to Avoid While Interviewing**

Asking questions is an art. A good interviewer is genuinely interested in the respondent and what s/he has to say, asks questions in a way that encourages the person to speak freely and openly, and follows up on the respondent's concerns while covering most, if not all, of the issues on the checklist by the end of the interview. There are also some potential pitfalls that a good interviewer will try to avoid:

### **Closed end questions**

Closed ended questions are those ("Do you eat millet?") that can be answered by yes or no. These questions should be avoided whenever possible because they result in very stilted interviews. It is better to ask open ended questions (e.g. "What grains does your family eat?") which encourage the respondent to answer more expansively and lead more naturally to follow up questions.

### **Oriented questions**

Oriented questions ("Corn is a better crop than peanuts, isn't it?" "Why do people burden their lives by having so many children in this village?") introduce bias by encouraging the respondent to answer in a certain fashion.

### **Inappropriate Assumptions**

Questions that have built in assumptions are also problematic because of the bias they introduce. "Do you market your rice in Tana or Fina?" It is possible that people do not sell any rice, or use a different market altogether. To avoid contradicting the team and appearing impolite, they may not point out the error and instead choose the answer that they believe will be most pleasing to the team.

### **Unknown Units of Measure**

Local communities almost always have local units of measure for weights, areas, distances, etc. It is important to use these measures rather than western concepts (lbs, kgs, miles, kms, etc). If necessary, actually measure a sample weight or area so that you can translate the local measure into a comparable western unit.

# Participatory Mapping

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Participatory mapping is an exercise that uses spatial analysis to gather information about a range of issues and concerns. In conventional mapping, the trained outsider draws a map of the village or territory. In participatory mapping, community members themselves are asked to do the drawing. Outsiders who have not tried the participatory method are often surprised to find that people with no formal education can draw maps that are both quite accurate and very illuminating.

In drawing participatory maps, the primary concern is not with cartographic accuracy, but rather with gathering useful information that sheds lights on whatever situation you are studying in the community. It is often one of the first activities that is carried out when the team arrives in the village because it is a lively "ice breaker" that helps to put both the team and the community in a participatory mode. It also provides information that the team (especially if it is not very familiar with the community) needs in order to be functional and to find its way about.

## How to do a Participatory Map

Before beginning the mapping activity, the team should brainstorm its checklist of the issues that team members would like to see covered in the map and discussion that follows. This checklist should remain in the background as the activity gets underway, however, and the team should begin by asking the villagers present to indicate the important landmarks that they feel are important to show on a map. It is important to begin with the villagers' own priorities since these will be

revealing of their perspectives and priorities. Only when the villagers have completed the map as they would like to see it, should the team intervene and ask about its issues.

To begin the map, clear a large open area, ideally outside where there is plenty of space to expand as needed. Mapping on paper is often an exercise in frustration since it is hard to erase and redraw.

Furthermore, the edge of the paper restricts the size and scope of the drawing. The best medium for mapping is a large space of open ground,

### **Types of issues that might be explored using a participatory map:**

- Village landmarks
- Village infrastructures: water, health, education, food storage, community buildings
- Village social structure (e.g. the organization of quarters)
- Settlement patterns
- Information on livelihoods and places that are important to livelihoods
- Markets
- Relations with other villages
- Dwelling places of village authorities or specialists (e.g. chief, midwife, health worker, etc.)

using sticks, shells, rocks, leaves and other objects as markers. If this is not possible or appropriate, chalk on a cement floor or masking tape on carpet also work fairly well.

Maps work well in groups since people can remind one another of things that are forgotten and correct errors as they arise. The facilitator should explain the exercise and start off the activity by drawing in one or two landmarks (usually those that are immediately evident from the spot where everyone is standing). These landmarks might be the road by which the team arrived in the village, or a major building or tree. Whenever a landmark or specific location is mentioned, a marker should be put down (e.g. stone, shell, leaf) to indicate its location.

As the activity gets underway, the team should be careful to stand back and leave the drawing and placement of markers to the villagers. The outsiders should, initially, limit their questions to asking, "Is there anything else?" "Has anything been forgotten?" Only when the villagers have completed the map as they would like it to be should team members ask about other questions they might have, or issues that appear on the checklist (See an example of a village map below).

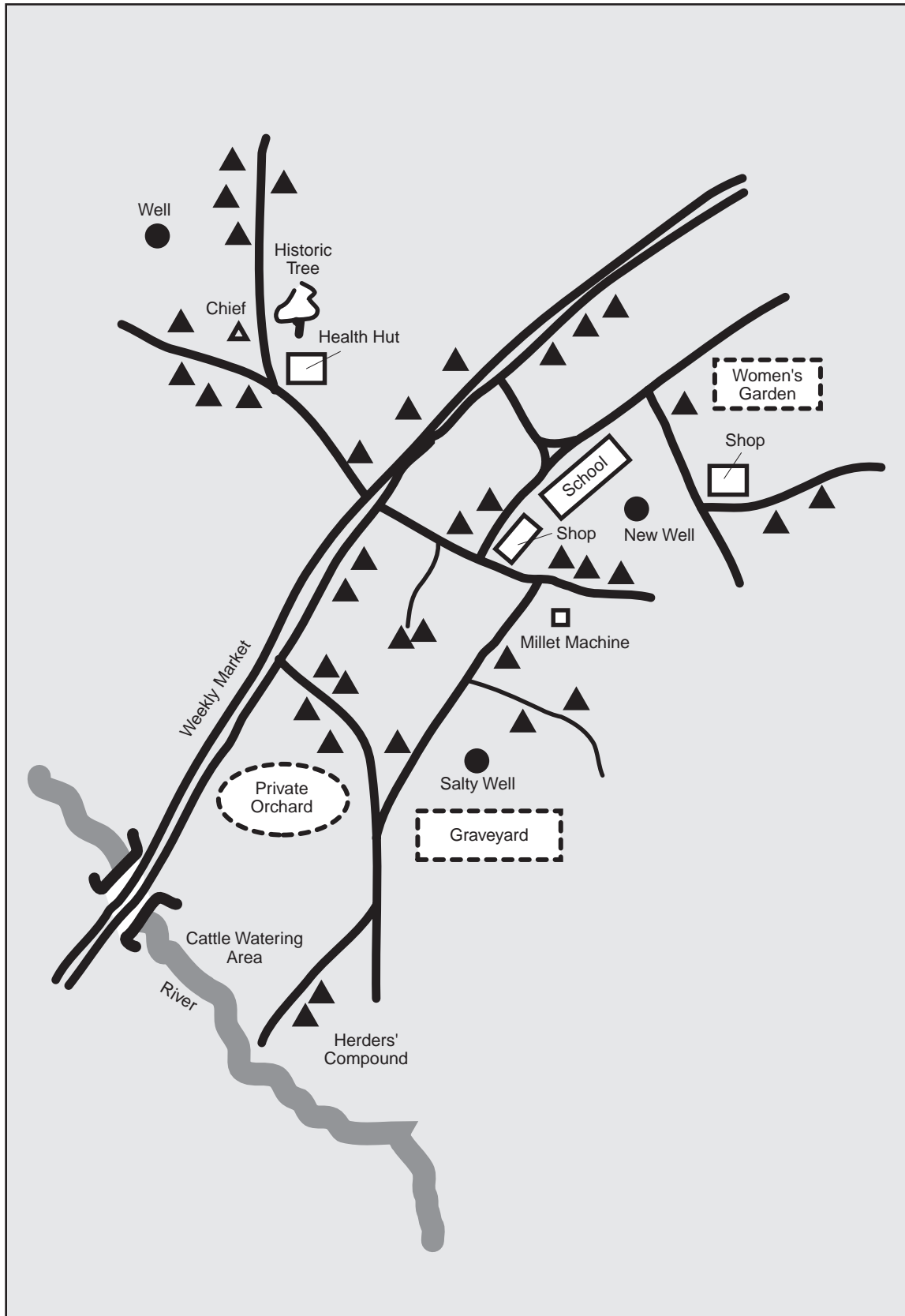
**Variations on participatory mapping** The most common type of a village map focuses on the inhabited part of the village, as in the example above. There are many ways that this technique can be adapted to get at specific types of information that may be of interest to a particular study.

One variation changes the scope of the map. A map can look at a larger area, such as the whole village territory, or even the larger region. A **territorial map** would include the boundaries around the village lands and could explore the resources in the territory and how they are managed. A **regional map** might include neighboring villages and areas used by villagers. This type of map could be used to explore such issues as marketing practices, uses of health facilities or other services in the larger area, sources of credit, etc.

Maps can also look at smaller units, such as the lands owned and used by an individual family. **Family resource maps** can show the resources that a family controls, including land that they own, rent, or otherwise use, the number of animals they keep (shown, for example, by placing a goat dropping in a corral made of sticks for each goat the family owns), the location of family members not physically present in the compound, etc. By doing these types of maps with families in different socio-economic groups, it is possible to get information on livelihood patterns and constraints faced by families of different incomes.

**Historical mapping** can provide a useful way of understanding changes that have taken place over time in a community. After doing the first map of the current situation, the community can be asked to draw another map, or revise the first map, to show how things were at

Example of a Village Map:



a given time in the past. The time selected will depend on the nature of the study. It might be before a specific historical event that changed the community in some specific way (e.g. a war or drought) or it might be at a time in the distant past such as “when the elders of this community were young children.” This type of paired mapping allows for exploration of many issues such as the impact of in- or out-migration, changes brought about by the building of infrastructure such as roads or health facilities, the impact of changes in livelihoods, etc.

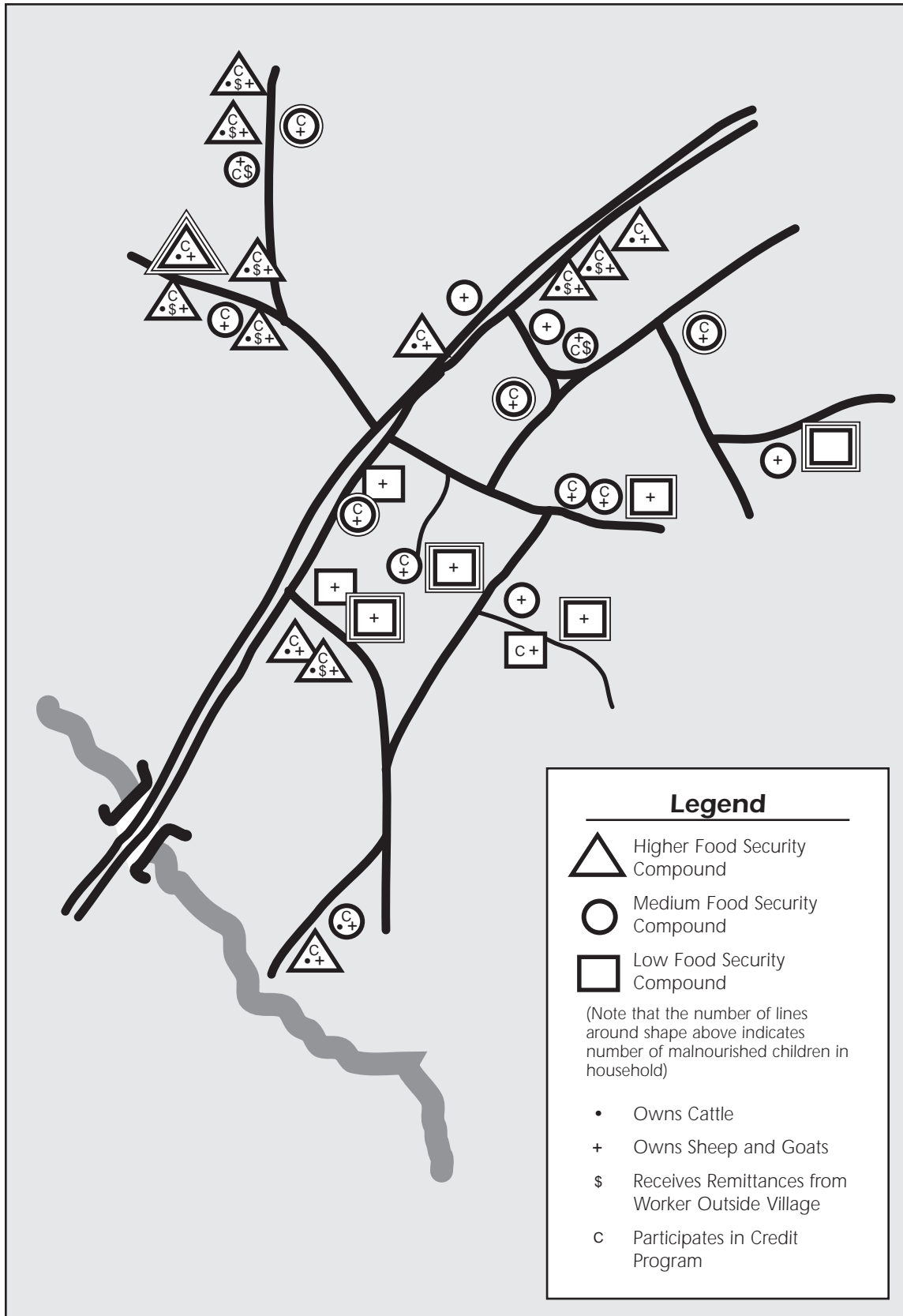
**Interest group mapping** acknowledges that maps reflect not some “objective” reality, but rather the perspectives of the people who draw them. When a heterogeneous group draws a map, it will reflect multiple views and perspectives. Another use of mapping attempts to capture diverse views held by different people by asking them to map in groups. Group membership may be determined by gender, ethnicity, age, profession, etc. depending on the purpose of the map. Thus, for example, the team might ask men to do a map of the village while women do their own map separately. It is likely that the two maps will reflect different concerns and preoccupations depending on the gender of the people involved. In a PRA, especially, it can be interesting to have each group present their results to the other in order to illuminate and provoke discussion on different perspectives in the community and the implications for planning.

**Social maps** combine spatial analysis with ranking. In a social map, the various households in the community are noted on the map. Information about those families is then indicated using various symbols or markers. Families might be categorized according to their food security level, for example, so that those who are relatively more food secure are indicated by a certain type of stone, while those who have “average” or low food security are indicated by another object. Other information such as ethnicity, families who have malnourished children, families who participate in project activities, or those that grow a certain crop can also be shown on the map. While most mapping activities are not very sensitive, social mapping can sometimes be a bit more delicate. In an RRA, depending on what information is being requested and the sensibilities over discussing such issues in public, it may be better to do a social map with a small group of informants later in the study with whom the team has developed a certain rapport rather than with the whole community in public.

When maps are done in an RRA context, the team members will generally draw the map into their notebooks as it is being drawn by the villagers. These maps will then later be transferred onto flip chart paper so that they can be used for analysis in large groups. The village often appreciates it if a copy of the map is left behind for their use when the team departs the village. In a PRA it is also good if there is some way to capture the results of the map so that the community can save it for their own future planning purposes.



Example of a Social Map:



# Transect Walk

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A transect walk takes the team on a mobile interview where team members walk through the community with “guides” from the village. As they go, they ask questions related to the things they are seeing, as well as others issues from the checklist they have prepared.

## **Types of issues that might be covered in a transect:**

- Food storage
- Community resources
- Differences in households and their assets
- Credit sources
- Agriculture production and constraints
- Livestock management
- Health assets and hazards
- Water resources and hazards
- Village infrastructure
- Land use patterns and seasonal variations
- Livelihood strategies
- Crops and other food production
- Gathered foods and medicines

The idea of a transect is to get the team out of the usual interview setting and to make use of people's powers of observation. Most often, the transect walk will take the team through different areas of the community (often defined after studying the participatory map) and make a point of reaching the outer limits of the territory. The purpose of going to the territorial limit is to reduce the spatial bias that often results because the bulk of activities are likely to be carried out in the central, inhabited part of the community. Things are frequently different at the periphery where more marginal populations may live or farm, land use patterns may be different, access to resources may change, etc.

If the team is large, it makes sense to divide into several subgroups when doing a transect. Each subgroup will

have its own guide(s). These people are generally chosen with the community as “experts” in the area being studied. Hence, a transect that was looking at health issues might ask the traditional medicine practitioner to serve as the guide/informant for the walk. A transect focusing on agriculture might rely on information from someone considered to be a “master farmer” or the herding expert in the area. It will be often useful to have one or two guides with different characteristics for each group (e.g. a man and a women, people from two different ethnic groups or livelihoods). By walking in different directions, the team can ensure that more area is covered and thus further reduce spatial biases.

It is generally wise to walk rather directly to the furthest point of the transect and then to ask questions along the more leisurely return walk. This increases the chances of actually reaching the outermost point of the walk. As the group progresses, it will observe its surroundings and team members will ask questions about things they see that might be related to issues on the checklist. As they come upon a group of granaries, for example, the opportunity arises to ask about food stock

## Example of a Transect Focused on Food Security and Nutrition Issues



Zone	Central Village	Inner Fields	Outer Fields	Forest
<b>Food production / gathering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Household vegetable gardens, chickens, papaya, mango, and orange trees;</li> <li>Goats fenced in during rainy season</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Groundnuts, corn, some hibiscus in womens garden,</li> <li>Some tree products,</li> <li>Small ruminant grazing during dry season</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Millet, sorghum, some rice;</li> <li>Watering holes for animals;</li> <li>Karite trees;</li> <li>Cattle grazing during dry season</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fruit from baobab, wild date, fig and other wild trees, honey,</li> <li>Cattle grazing during rainy season</li> </ul>
<b>Food processing and storage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dried vegetables and fruits;</li> <li>Groundnuts in womens fields</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family granaries in or near fields</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oil processed from karite nuts</li> </ul>	
<b>Health issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some wells unkempt, not sanitary;</li> <li>Health unit lacks trained nurse;</li> <li>No use of mosquito nets</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many medicinal plants harvested from forest area,</li> <li>River at forest edge is source of XXXXXX</li> </ul>
<b>Food security and nutrition observations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many mangos rot ...possibility for processing?</li> <li>Lots of insect damage to groundnuts in storage...possibility for improved storage?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conflict over goats and gardens leading to reduction in number of goats;</li> <li>Family and individual granaries managed so as to secure food supply during agricultural season</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Serious striga problem reduces millet harvest significantly;</li> <li>Water holes dry up before rains...lack of water reduces milk production</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conflicts between neighboring villagers over harvest of baobab fruit which is an important hungry season food;</li> <li>Collection of fruits by young boys adds important nutrients to diet...girls working at home have less access.</li> <li>Theft of cattle common during rainy season</li> </ul>

management. A stream crossing might suggest questions about water quality, water borne illnesses. A fence raises questions about land tenure, etc.

The information from a transect walk can be organized and transferred to a diagram after each team returns to the village. This diagram will usually have the different areas of the territory on the horizontal axis. On the vertical axis will be categories relating to the types of information collected on the walk. In the case of a food security transect this might include, for example, health related information (such as health hazards or assets), food related information (production/storage), and livelihood/income related information (local resources used by different trades). In addition to gathering information about these various subjects, the transect is a good way to verify and expand on information that was obtained in the mapping exercise.

# Venn Diagram

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A participatory map represents the community's analysis of its space. It focuses principally on physical landmarks. A Venn diagram offers another way to "map" a community, but this one focuses on social relationships rather than physical ones. The Venn diagram looks at how a community is organized, both in terms of its internal organization and its relationships with the larger community beyond its borders.

## **Types of issues that can be addressed in a Venn Diagram:**

- Role of organizations in local decision making
- Role of external forces on the community
- Community leaders and decision makers
- Decision making processes
- Role of government and NGOs
- Relationship with other villages
- Credit and marketing institutions
- Conflicts and conflict resolution mechanisms
- Social safety nets
- Sharing of food and other resources
- Access to land and other resources

While a Venn Diagram can be done on the ground, using natural markers such as stones and leaves, it is somewhat easier to use a large sheet of paper with shapes that are cut out of different colored card stock or paper. Alternatively, if the only paper available is white, markings can be made using different colored markers to distinguish between the different groups, associations, and individuals on the diagram.

As with the participatory map, the team should begin with a well thought-out checklist of the types of issues they wish to explore using the Venn diagram. However (as with the map), it is best to keep this list in the background until the villagers have completed the diagram.

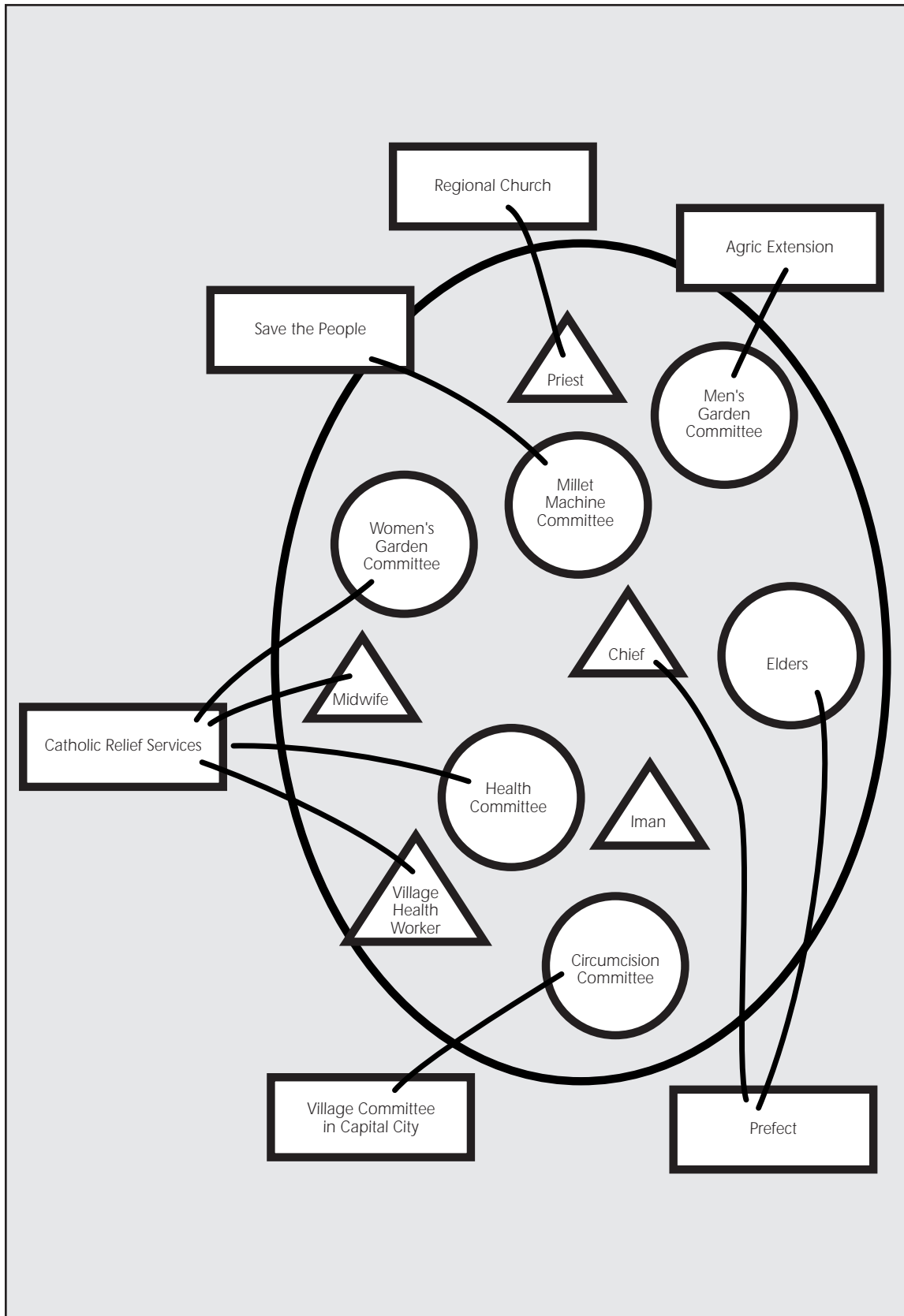
The facilitator begins by drawing a large circle on the paper or ground.

This circle represents the village; everything inside the circle is a village institution, while anything outside is an external source of power or influence. It is best to start with internal organizations and individuals, asking the group to think of all the groups, committees, individuals, associations in the village. As each one is listed off, a colored paper (oval) is placed on the diagram with the name of the group. These ovals may be cut in different sizes to reflect either:

- 1. the size of the group or**
- 2. its influence on the life of the village.**

Which definition is used will depend on the way the team asks the question which will depend, in turn, on the type of information it seeks. The facilitator should continue to ask whether there are any other groups until the villagers have put ovals of different sizes for all

Example of a Venn Diagram



the group they can think of.

The next question will address individuals who have a particular role in the community. These may be represented by triangles, generally using only one size to avoid controversy. The team should be careful to ask about both men and women who play important roles in the community. Different colored triangles may be used to show men and women who have a particular influence in the village. Once all the insiders have been identified, the facilitator will direct attention to the outside of the circle and ask about external organizations that have an influence, whether positive or negative, on the community. Here again, it can be useful to begin with groups and organizations and then finish with individuals.

As the external organizations are placed on the diagram, you may wish to show the mechanism by which they intervene in the village. If they work with the whole village, a line would be drawn to the inside of the circle. If they work through a particular committee or individual, a line would be drawn from the outside group to the person or committee with whom they most often work.

It is particularly important with the Venn Diagram to “interview” the diagram once the picture is completed since there is much information that can be gained by probing the relationships which are visualized in the diagram. The Venn diagram provides a vehicle for getting at information that can otherwise be quite difficult to access, such as intra-community decision making and mutual assistance.

**Variations on the Venn Diagram** The Venn Diagram can and should be adapted for the purposes of the study. One adaptation is quite simple and requires nothing more than changing the types of questions that are asked. In addition to (or instead of) asking about people and institutions, for example, the diagram might focus on economic relationships, making notes of goods and services that are produced in the community and those that are exported or imported from outside.

Another adaptation is sometimes called a “**polarization**” diagram. It might include not only the village where the study is taking place, but also circles representing other places that have an impact on the community, whether other villages in the vicinity or more distant locales such as the capital city or even a foreign country that provides, say, employment opportunities for people from the village. The diagram can then be used to show the flow of resources between various communities, whether labor, goods, or money.

# Calendars

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Calendars are diagrams that focus on seasonal issues and how things change throughout a year. Calendars have a particular importance in food security, agricultural, and health studies because these often involve important seasonal issues. Calendars also help the team to avoid the seasonality bias which is related to the time of year when the team conducts their study. The calendar allows the team to consider how the reality changes during different seasons as conditions change in the community.

## **Types of issues that can be addressed in a Calendar:**

- Significant events
- Income patterns
- Labor constraints
- Income patterns
- Consumption patterns
- Agricultural calendar
- Forest product availability
- Incidence of disease
- Land use patterns
- Seasonal rules and regulations
- Migration patterns
- Livestock management
- Attendance at school

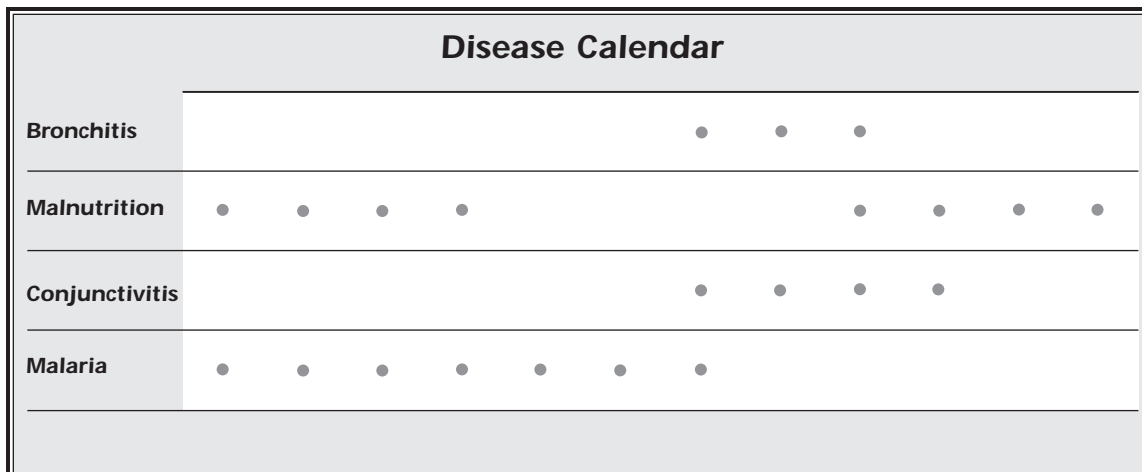
The horizontal axis of a calendar is the time axis. One of the first steps in doing a calendar is to figure out (with the community) the unit of time that makes the most sense to them. In some places, people are familiar with the western, twelve month calendar. In other places they will prefer to use other time intervals such as a religious calendar or seasons. The calendar that is carried out with the villagers should use the time frame that is most familiar to them. Afterwards, the team may choose to transpose the time scale to something that is more recognizable to outsiders who use the report.

There are many ways to do a calendar. It is often useful to do it on paper or on the ground in a large open area where everyone can see clearly what is being done. The time axis should begin at a time that makes sense in terms of the questions that are to be asked. For example, a calendar that focuses on food security issues will probably want to start the time axis at

harvest time since that is, in some sense, the “beginning” of the year. An agricultural calendar might begin with the first rains since that is likely to be considered the start of the agricultural year.

A simple calendar will include just one variable, such as when different fruits are collected or labor patterns at different times of year. The simplest type of calendar just asks when something happens without adding a quantification element: when do you collect the fruits of a certain tree? Or when do people fall sick with a particular illness (like malaria). The example below shows a simple health calendar showing when various illnesses occur by placing a stone in each month that the illness poses a problem in the community.





Calendars can be used to gather more complex information by adding a quantitative aspect and asking not just what happens when but how much happens when. The variables can be represented using columns drawn to different heights (like a bar graph) or using local materials, such as sticks that are broken to be longer or shorter, or smaller or larger piles of stones.

The example below is a women's labor calendar that shows when women have more or less work during the year. This type of calendar is particularly useful for planning the implementation of project activities since it is important not to add additional responsibilities at the time of year when women are already fully occupied. Labor calendars usually begin by asking people about the busiest time of the year, when they are the most tired and/or have the least amount of free time. Ask the informants to put ten stones on months that are extremely busy (or put a long stick on those months, compared to shorter sticks that will be used in months where the labor demand is less). Ask the informant to tell you what makes that month so busy.

Continue by asking about other months that may also be busy but not quite as bad as the worst month. Place fewer beans, or a shorter stick

in those months. When you have finished asking about the relatively more busy months, then go to the other extreme: the months which are easiest for people in terms of the amount of labor they exert. Ask about the three or four least busy months, starting with the easiest and moving up from there. Complete the diagram by asking about the months that have not yet been filled in with a stone or a stick, comparing them to the most or least busy.

Calendars can be used for analysis of a problem or situation when several variables are considered in the same calendar. The vertical axis of the calendar will include a number of variables of interest to the study being carried out. Anything that has a seasonal aspect to it and varies throughout the year can be considered as a variable for a

seasonal calendar. For each variable, consider whether the variable is to be evaluated simply in terms of when it happens (a dot to indicate that people consume millet during that season) or whether it will be useful to add a ranking dimension to show how much of something happens during a given season (several dots if more millet is consumed, fewer if less is consumed). (See an example of a composite calendar below.)

**Types of issues that can be explored in a Calendar:**

- Food insecurity
- Agricultural production
- Migration
- Income patterns
- Use of credit
- Incidence of disease
- Livestock management
- Consumption levels
- Labor intensity
- Patterns of wild foods availability

### Example of a Composite Calendar

	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May			
Severe Hunger ("Levleika")															
Hardest Work Period for Men															
Hardest Work Period for Women															
Management of Chickens and Goats	Kill For Food							Sell at Low Price							
Health Problems	Malnutrition							Malnutrition							
	Malaria		Respiratory Problems												
Population Staying in Village at Night	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓			
Indebtedness	•••	•••	•												
Source of Food	Credit	Gathering, Credit			Begin Harvest	Reimburse Debts		Eat From Harvest					Salary Labor, Garden, Date Palms		
Work in Garden (Women)															
Fieldwork															
	Rainy Season			Cold Season			Spring			Dry Season					
	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May			

# Wealth Ranking

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Understanding wealth and the distribution of resources within communities is an issue of great concern when it comes to the implementation of development activities. Who will have the assets needed to participate? Who will be excluded due to their resource

constraints? How will the poor be affected by any activity that is to be carried out? Ranking techniques in which the community itself ranks families in terms of their relative wealth offers a way to get at this information that can otherwise be sensitive and difficult to attain.

There are numerous ways to do wealth ranking. Two methods will be described here, one using counters to rank families and the other using social mapping techniques.

**Bean Ranking** The first step in bean ranking is to discuss the concept of wealth. You may have to think carefully about what term you wish to use to describe “wealth” in the local language since there are usually several possibilities with slightly different connotations. Then, to get everyone thinking along the same lines, ask people what they mean by wealth, or what types of things a wealthy person would have.

You also need to think about the most appropriate unit to rank. This will depend

on how access to resources is organized in that particular society. Perhaps people share food, income, and other resources in extended families, in which case the larger family unit becomes the relevant one for ranking purposes. Perhaps people eat, cultivate, and store their crops in nuclear family groups, or households. This then becomes the relevant ranking unit.

Begin by counting out a number of stones or beans equal to the number of families to be ranked. Then ask the informants to divide the stones so that all the stones (families) who have similar wealth are in the same pile. Leave it to the people doing the ranking to decide how many piles they want to have. (Note: If the village is a very large one and there are many families to be ranked, it may be impractical to have one stone for each family. In this case, say that the pile of stones represents all the families in the village and then ask the informants to rank proportionally: that is, if about 1/2 the families fall in the same

## **Types of Issues that can be Explored in Wealth Ranking:**

- Access to/use of services
- Consumption patterns
- Community sharing mechanisms
- Leadership/wealth correlations
- Wealth/participation in activities
- Distribution of project benefits
- Extent to which wealth patterns are fixed over time
- Changing composition of wealth over time
- Intra-family wealth patterns and decision-making

wealth group, put half the stones in that pile, etc.).

In doing the ranking, it can be useful to divide up the villagers doing the exercise so that women rank together and men rank together, comparing the results afterward and discussing any significant differences. Once the stones have been divided, the team should follow up by "interviewing the piles." You can begin by asking, systematically, what the wealthiest pile has that the others do not. Then, what are the characteristics of families in the second pile, and so on. Then, continue to interview the activity by asking questions related to the issues you are studying:

- what factors make people more or less vulnerable?
- does peoples wealth status changes from year to year?
- do ethnicity, religion, or livelihood patterns affect wealth levels?
- are there family, community, or other sharing systems that help in times of crisis?
- and so on.

**Map Ranking** A more specific mechanism for ranking is to use the social map technique described earlier. This tends to be more sensitive because information is being provided about specific families and so in some cultural contexts it will be better to do this privately rather than in a large public gathering. Such an activity would take place a bit later in the process, once the team has had a chance to develop a rapport with one or several potential informants.

The map ranking can use a map that has already been prepared by the villagers (if it has each compound clearly indicated) or a map can be drawn as the ranking takes place. In either case, at least three symbols should be available (whether papers of three different colors or items such as leaves, shells, and stones). The person or people doing the ranking then indicate on the map the wealth level of each family, indicating families with higher wealth standing by green papers, average with yellow, and low with red, for example. It is important to associate each paper that is put on the map with name of the family if this activity is to be used for sampling purposes, as will often be the case.

Variations of the ranking techniques described here can also be used to explore intra-familial distribution issues to find out how, for example, resources are allocated among various people within a family: Who owns the animals? Who has access to fertilizer? Who eats more? And so on. In this case, you would begin by mapping out the family, perhaps showing each house and who lives there.

## Historical Profile

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A historical profile is little more than a semi-structured interview that focuses on historical information and attempts to organize that information into a systematic chronology of events. In most cases, this interview will be carried out with more elderly people, and particularly those who are known for their historical knowledge. Typically, a historical profile begins with the founding of the community and attempts to identify all the landmark dates that have had a significant impact on people's lives. Each time a significant event is mentioned, it will be written on a card. If the date (or approximate date) of the event is known, it will be noted as well. The cards will, in the course of the interview, then be organized in chronological fashion. The cards should be laid out so that everyone involved can see them and placed so that the respondent can reorder the cards during the interview if she or he wishes to correct the order. In this way, even events that are not associated with particular dates will be placed in at least approximative order.

The historical profile is often carried out as a preliminary step to doing the historical matrix, described below.

# Matrices

---

Matrices are among the most sophisticated and analytic tools used in RRA and PRA, and hence among the most interesting. They permit the exploration of issues from multiple angles and tend to push peoples thinking beyond the most superficial levels. In this section, we discuss the use of classification matrices and in the next we look at an adaptation that focuses on historical information.

**Classification Matrices.** Classification matrices explore the interaction of two sets of variables. Hence we might look at

1. what categories of people get
2. what types of diseases - or -
  
1. what categories of people eat
2. what types of food - or -
  
1. what types of food are eaten
2. in different times (seasons) - or -
  
1. what type of impact a project has had on
2. what types of people.

Or any of a myriad of other situations, depending on the nature of the study. In each of these cases, one set of variables would be placed on the horizontal axis and the second set of variables would be lined up vertically as shown in the examples below.

<b>Use of Health Facilities by Different Groups</b>					
	Children	Men	Women	Old Men	Old Women
Traditional Medicine Man					
Village Health Worker					
Government Doctor					
Hospital					
Self-treat					

The next step, after laying out the variables is to decide whether the matrix should be completed horizontally or vertically. In some cases it is possible to do it either way (though the results will be somewhat

different) while in other cases only one way makes sense. In the example above, if the health matrix were to be ranked vertically, the interviewer would be asking, “when children need health care, which of these options would they be most likely to use?” If the matrix were to be done horizontally, she would be asking, “what kind of people frequent the traditional medicine practitioner more often?” In either case, more beans or stones would be placed in the box where there is greater use of services and fewer in the box where use is less.

It generally works best to suggest, at the outset, that people place from zero to ten beans in each square. Should they later decide to increase the number of beans because they need to emphasize a certain variable, that is fine. But limiting the beans to ten at the beginning avoids the situation where mountains of beans are piled on each square, making it difficult to evaluate what people mean.

The matrix below is somewhat more complicated. It is really a compilation of three mini- matrices. First the interview would ask about differences in consumption between men and women: who, for example, consumes more rice? The interviewer would continue to ask about other consumption differences between men and women (how much fruit they eat, etc.) before moving on to the next set of comparisons which will be between people of different wealth rankings. Now, she or he will ask about whether people who are rich, average, or poor eat more rice, and then continue down the column for each food type.

In explaining these exercises and interpreting the results, it is important to remember that the number of beans will, in most cases, have no absolute meaning. That is, five beans does not mean that someone eats five kg of meat. It merely means that the group in question eats somewhat more meat than the group which has only three beans in its column and considerably less than another group that has ten beans.

<b>Example of a Consumption Matrix by Group</b>								
	Men	Women	Rich	Average	Poor	Children	Adults	Old People
Rice								
Millet								
Meat								
Eggs								
Fruit								
Vegetables								



Bean counting of this type is valid for establishing trends and may in some cases be useful for estimating orders of magnitude but it should not be pushed to levels of precision where it is not appropriate.

As the matrix is being completed, each time a number of beans is being put down, the interviewer will gently probe to find out why that number of beans, especially in relationship to previous boxes that may have had another amount. Hence, if men consume more meat than women, the interviewer can ask why to get a better understanding of consumption patterns in different groups.

**Historical Matrices** Historical matrices are carried out in a very similar way but one axis is reserved for a time variable. Typically, the time dimension is placed along the horizontal axis. The time increments to be used depend on the type of information that is being sought. If a longer view of things is desired, it makes sense to start at the earliest time period in the memory of villagers participating in the activity. If the elders are in their 70s and 80s, they can probably remember the situation up to 60 years previous. Then, significant landmark dates would be chosen during the 60 year period in order to evaluate changes that had taken place.

The choice of dates that will be placed on the horizontal axis depends on the type of information being sought. The study may wish to understand, for example, consumption patterns in typical years. In that case they might choose landmark dates that are not particularly related to specific events that affected food security. They might, for example, ask people about how things were in the year of a certain election or when a particular tree fell down. In other cases, it may be more interesting to see the impact on food security of a particular event. In this case, the years will be chosen according to their likely significance on food security. This might be the year of a major drought, or the year after fertilizer prices changed or a new crop was introduced. It is recommended to limit the time variables to four or (at most) five categories to avoid getting bogged down in minutiae and dragging out the process to the point where it becomes boring.

The vertical axis then attempts to capture variables that will be most illuminating about the situation in general or whatever topic is being studied. The example below suggests some of the types of variables that might be of interest. This list will, of course, vary depending on the issues being studied and the questions that would be most relevant in a given situation. ***When using variables like “food secure” in such a matrix it is, of course, important to agree on a definition of what is meant so that everyone gives the same meaning to the term.***

It is generally better to complete the historical matrix vertically, completing one period in time before proceeding to the next. The first column acts as a baseline, against which all the other columns will be compared. In the first square, for example, the informants will be asked to place one to ten beans to show whether the population of

the village was large or small fifty years ago. The rest of the column will be completed in the same way. When you go back to the top to discuss what the situation was like in 1973, you can now ask the informant to compare the population in 1973 with how it was fifty years ago.

<b>Example of a Historical Matrix Used to Look at Food Security Issues</b>				
	Appx. 50 Years Ago	When the School Was Built (1973)	When the Dam Was Completed (1985)	Present
<b>Population of the Village</b>				
<b>Number of Months the Average Family's Harvest Lasted in an Average year</b>				
<b>Consumption Of Meat</b>				
<b>Consumption of Oil</b>				
<b>Amount of Harvest Devoted to Ceremonial Purposes</b>				
<b>Number of Food Insecure Households in the Village</b>				

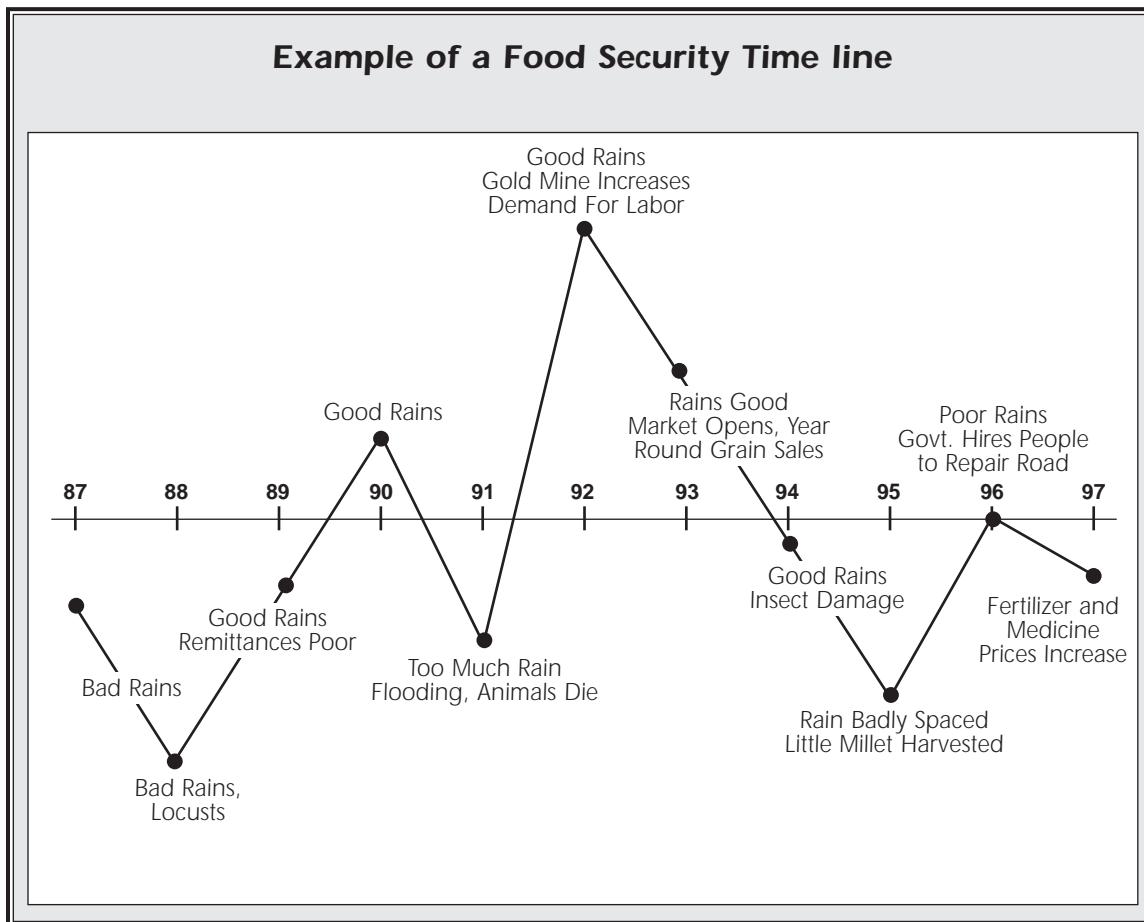
As with the explanation of matrices above, keep in mind that the beans express trends and the relative importance of various variables and do not express absolute quantities (unless you expressly ask people to be exact, as in the number of months the harvest would last).

When you analyze this matrix, you will do it horizontally. That is, take a given variable such as meat consumption and look at how it has changed over time. Ask people to explain any significant changes in the number of beans over time. Notice which variables seem to change in parallel ways, and which work in opposite directions. Ask about any interesting patterns that you see.

A variation on the historical matrix is to take much shorter time intervals, such as last five years and explore in greater depth how things changed in each of the five years. This type of matrix can be particularly useful in exploring the impact of a project and how things

have changed as a result of project interventions. How many people participated each year? How great was the benefit that people got each year? How many people defaulted on their credit?

**Time Trend Lines** A technique that is similar to the historical matrix uses a line graph to plot changes over time. This will help you to put a given year in the larger context. How does food security (or the harvest, or the incidence of malaria, or whatever) this year compare to the last ten years? Begin by drawing a line in the sand that represents an “average year” for whatever variable you are discussing. Ask people to specify which of the last ten years was most like an average year so that everyone has the same definition in mind. Then begin with the most recent year, and ask whether it was better or worse than average. Ask your informants to place a stone above or below the “average” line to indicate how much better or worse. Discuss briefly what factors contributed to the year being either good or bad. Then, go back through each of the previous ten years showing whether it was above or below average and discussing why. The result will be a time trend line as displayed in the example below.



# Tools Specifically Useful in Planning

All of the tools outlined above gather information that will feed into the planning process of a community that wishes to use the PRA for planning purposes. Good planning requires good information and the more a community can understand about the problems it wishes to address, the more likely that its solutions will be appropriate and feasible.

There are several tools that can help the community to prioritize its problems and then analyze the potential solutions in order to find those that make the best sense. A common problem with community planning exercises has been that villages tend to model their desires on what looks good in another community where a development project has intervened. If an agency has put millet grinding machines into a number of villages in the area, many other villages may well consider that their priority, regardless of whether it meets a priority need or is a feasible solution in their community. The goal of a serious community planning process is to move beyond what is commonly referred to in America (where this phenomenon is also a problem!) as “keeping up with the Joneses [neighbors]” and instead to ensure that planning is based on a thorough and reflective analysis of the problems.

The two matrices proposed below (or adaptations of these tools based on the situation at hand) are useful in facilitating the community's analysis and ensuring that the full range of relevant issues are

Example of a Problem Ranking Matrix								
	Number of People Affected			Gravity of Impact on Affected Population	Causes Other Problems in Village	Solution Depends on Solving Other Problems First	Likelihood We Can Solve the Problem Ourselves	Chance We Can Find Outside Help With the Problem
	Men	Women	Children					
Problem #1								
Problem #2								
Problem #3								

considered in the planning process. The first matrix helps the community to prioritize the problems that have been identified while the second serves to think through issues in order to come up with the best solution(s) for addressing the problem. In each case, the criteria used to evaluate either the problem or the solution are indicative. Each community, with the PRA facilitator, will have to come up with the criteria that they feel are the most relevant to their situation. In the problem ranking matrix, the problems will come out of the study that the community has just completed. When it comes to solutions, both the community and outside specialists may have ideas about how the problems can be solved.

Based on this discussion, the village will then rank their problems in the order in which they think they should be addressed. Once this has been done, each problem will be looked at in turn, to determine the possible solutions to that problem. The following matrix facilitates this activity.

<b>Intervention Ranking Matrix for Problem X:</b>					
	Sustainability	Equitability	Productivity	Stability	Overall Assessment
Solution #1					
Solution #2					
Solution #3					

In this case, the criteria used to rank the solutions that are proposed are the following:

- 1. Sustainability:**  
the likelihood that the solution will continue to work as long as it is needed
- 2. Equitability:**  
the extent to which a solution is "fair" and accessible to all who face the problem: e.g. a solution that can only be afforded by the fewest richest families is not equitable.
- 3. Productivity:**  
the extent to which the solution fully addresses the problem: e.g. a credit program may be expected to increase women's incomes by 3,000 francs a year but this may be insignificant relative to their needs. Perhaps introducing an oil press would provide greater benefits.

**4. Stability:**

this refers to the reliability of a solution, not so much in the long term (addressed by sustainability) but from day to day. Some technologies may be subject to intermittent breakdown and thus not provide a stable solution to a given problem.

While these criteria address issues that are often important to consider in analyzing potential solutions, as noted above, they should be discussed with the community and amended as appropriate in any given setting.

# The Community Action Plan

Based on a systematic analysis of its situation using the tools and techniques outlined above, the community will then come up with its Action Plan. This Action Plan will be an evolving document that will begin by focusing on the issues that are a priority for the community. While some communities may be able to develop a complex multi-year plan at the outset, this level of planning and analysis will probably not be possible for most villages. Instead, they will get an idea from the PRA of the principal problems they wish to address. They will then focus on a few strategies for meeting these concerns and begin to plan specific interventions.

The initial plan should specify the tasks to be accomplished, the anticipated time frame for each action, and the person responsible. It should also make note of any special materials needed or logistical support that would be required. Keep in mind that, especially in the

<b>Intervention Ranking Matrix for Problem X:</b>				
	Action	Person Responsible	Date to be Completed	Materials Needed
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

early phases of the planning process, several of the tasks to be accomplished may involve searching for more information. The community may not know all the options that are available to it and may need to consult specialists to gather more information.

One village, for example, might focus on developing market gardens. As a part of its plan, it may note that this will require (1) particular attention to ensuring that it has enough water during the dry season and (2) looking further into marketing issues. A first step of the plan, then, might be to carry out more detailed studies of these two issues. Women might decide to visit other villages that have active gardens to see what works in those communities, for example. They might also go to local markets and talk to people there in order to assess what products sell the best. Once this information has been gathered, additional details would be added to the plan. These would outline specific interventions for deciding where to place the garden and the wells (or other water source), determining what crops would be grown, etc. At this point, then, they might contact a water technician

to determine where they are most likely to find abundant water in their territory, decide together how big the garden will be, negotiate use rights to the land with the chief and elders, recruit men to assist in fencing the garden area, etc.

Another village may decide to focus their efforts on food processing activities such as drying of fruits and vegetables. Such a plan might address the needs of various concerns in the community including improving gardening practices, enhanced water conservation, construction of drying racks, and research on marketing outlets.

In both cases, while the plans would anticipate the general areas where the villagers see a need for intervention, the most specific planning would take place around the most immediate interventions with the others being planned through a rolling process as some activities get underway and people feel comfortable in taking on additional responsibilities. In short, the Action Plan is not a rigid, completed document that sits on a shelf somewhere. It will evolve as the community moves through the process and gathers additional information.



# POSTSCRIPT:

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## Maintaining Flexibility, Creativity, and Your Sense of Adventure

### **Appendix**

Scope of Work

Where to Go for More Information

## Maintaining Flexibility, Creativity, and Your Sense of Adventure

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One of the greatest opportunities in RRA/PRA, as well as one of the greatest challenges, is the chance to use these methods in creative, reflective, and innovative ways. This manual could have provided you with a blueprint for carrying out an RRA or a PRA, telling you day by day or hour by hour what to do and how. This would probably have made things easier both for you and for the people who are supervising the implementation of the project, creating budgets, preparing quarterly and annual reports, etc. The problem with such an approach is that recipes contradict the core principles of these methodologies which strongly discourage their use as rote exercises. The tools lose much of their effectiveness when they are applied in a standardized fashion and you would almost certainly end up with lackluster, uninteresting, and superficial findings from such a routinized process. You can do better than that!

As you work through the process, you will undoubtedly develop a set of tools that work well for you and the types of issues that commonly surface in the area where you are working and the type of project you are doing. That's O.K. You need not feel guilty if certain patterns develop in your studies and you find yourself reusing tools because they prove themselves to be highly effective in your location. Be careful, however, if you find that you are exactly replicating previous exercises and have lost your capacity to be surprised or your curiosity to follow up on the unexpected. This may be the time to bring an outsider onto the team to challenge your assumptions and to offer some new perspectives.

Take the openness of the advice that is offered here not as a prescription for frustration, but as an invitation to use your own experiences, creativity, and good sense to come up with a study that is more appropriate to your milieu than anything I could have proposed from a distance. Review the principles of the methodology regularly to keep yourself on track and then innovate...innovate...innovate! If you do so, it will be rewarding, it will be fun, and your project will have a much greater likelihood of contributing in significant ways to the well-being of disadvantaged populations wherever you may be.

## Appendix:

# Illustrative SCOPE OF WORK — Health Sector Country X — RRA Technical Assessment

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### I. Introduction

CRS opened up a program office in Country X in 199\_. CRS has managed several projects in Country X but from the regional office. In 199\_, CRS conducted an extensive assessment to explore the feasibility of opening a full time office in Country X. The result of the assessment was the opening of an office in late 199\_.

CRS/Country X is planning to launch programs to address the main needs in the country focusing on food security. The objectives of these programs will be to improve the food security of Country X's rural poor through a variety of approaches including one or more of the following: agriculture/natural resource management, health, education and income generating programs. Before designing a program, it is necessary to conduct comprehensive technical assessments to fully understand the poverty situation in

Country X and how best CRS/Country X can address these conditions.

### II. Background

CRS/Country X will carry out assessments in several technical sectors with the goal of establishing a comprehensive approach to improving food security in specific target communities of Country X. ***This scope of work focuses on the health sector but should be viewed in relation to the overall food security goals of CRS/Country X.***

**FOOD SECURITY** is defined by CRS as people having physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive and healthy life today without sacrificing investments in consumption and livelihood security for tomorrow. Food security is defined for purposes of this study in terms of access, availability and utilization:

- **Availability** refers to the level of food production at the household level. Factors which affect the production of food include lack of inputs (seed, tools, fertilizers, land, animal or mechanical traction) and poor agricultural practices. Other factors include soil erosion, lack of water or irrigation schemes, and poor soil fertility, which hinders production. Still others include sufficient storage of food for later consumption or sale.
- **Access** refers to the ability of people to purchase or get physical access to food. In many cases, food is available in the market but families do not have enough disposable income to purchase it. In other cases, farmers are not able to transport their food to markets for sale (income) thus also hindering their access. These limits to access also include limits to education and health facilities. Still in other cases, disadvantaged groups (e.g.: children, handicapped, mentally retarded, elderly, and hospital patients) are not capable of getting access to food given their health or age.
- **Utilization** is the proper biological use of food, requiring a diet providing sufficient energy and essential nutrients, potable water, and adequate sanitation. Effective food utilization depends on large measure on knowledge within the household of optimal food preparation; basic principles of sanitation, nutrition and proper child care.

The success of the CRS/Country X program depends on the ability to address all three of the constraints to food security in an integrated manner. Therefore, the general objectives of the assessments are to:

- conduct a need assessment in the health sector in order to garner information on which to formulate viable CRS/Country X objectives, targets, assessment tools and the scope of future interventions.
- validate the above with appropriate national and local level data (using rapid rural assessment methodology).
- establish an index of possible intervention activities for the sector based on current approaches to above.
- explore root causes of the problems in the sector.
- inventory of government and international/local non-governmental organization working in health sector.

In the process of the assessment, the following categories should be addressed for each village studied:

1. **Services/quality of services** (e.g. access, availability and quality of current health services especially child survival);
2. **Environmental issues** (e.g. natural and human environment such as status of potable water/sanitation, malnutrition levels of children under 5, etc.);
3. Assessment of **key health problems and attitudes and practices** related to them (e.g. breastfeeding practices, weaning foods and practices, child spacing);
4. **Community organization** for health (e.g. level of community organization in health, presence of trained health workers).

### III. Methodology

The assessment is divided into three parts: 1) Field analysis, 2) Post-field analysis, 3) HQ debrief.

1. The **field level analysis** will include gathering information at the field level and include interaction with rural villages (to be identified), local NGOs, Local Partner, and district government ministries. The rural rapid appraisal (RRA) technique is recommended at the village level. One to two villages will be selected within each diocese to serve as representatives for the diocese. This phase is meant to confirm information gathered at the national level and to allow the villages, and the organizations that work with them, to express their experiences, problems, needs and opportunities in each development sector. The consultant will implement this phase with the other consultants hired for the other sectors in the joint assessment to ensure that food security problems and opportunities are identified and addressed in an integrated manner. This process will begin with a one-day collective session at the start of the consultancy.
2. The **post-field phase** will consist of the synthesis and analysis of the gathered information. This information will be provided in a final report.
3. **Debrief** of CRS staff at end of month.

### IV. Deliverables

The consultant will submit a final report in hard copy and electronic form that will include data gathered and synthesized from the pre-field and field phases. The report should include at a minimum the following sections:

- executive summary
- background and literature review

- methodology: detailed description of each phase of the assessment
- results reported for each village studied

Recommendations based on above problems with detailed listing of possible interventions/projects for CRS and its implementing partners to pursue that will address the above definition of food security.

6. What are the potential targets of opportunity (possible "points" of intervention) that link the problem to a possible village-based solution (improved practices: hygiene, sanitation, weaning, breastfeeding, immunization rates, diarrheal management, disease prevention, increased quality, availability and access to health services increased availability of potable water and sanitation particular needs of AIDS orphans, the handicapped and elderly reasons for or against using food in programming (e.g. FACS) opportunities for local collaboration with MoH )
- identification of impediments/problems in the sector for each area surveyed
  - current activities and actors in the sector, particularly the Local Partner giving special attention to FFW or other supplementary feeding programs
  - appendix with any questionnaires or guides used in the assessment (list of dates, contact persons, phone numbers, and summary information gathered from all organizations and individuals consulted, list of NGOs and government activities in the geographical areas.)

## V. Time frame

The proposed time frame for the consultancy is as follows:

23 days field based research (three days per village in each diocese / three days travel / four Sundays)<sup>3</sup>

5 days final report writing

The final report submission on xx date by 5 PM.

## VI. Remuneration

The consultant will be paid 50% of the agreed upon consultancy fee within five days of signing a contract agreement with CRS/Country X, and the remaining 50% upon submission and approval of the final report. The consultant bears responsibility for all tax obligations.

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<sup>3</sup> This is the lower limit time-wise for an RRA. The norm is 5-7 days per village/community.

## Where to Go for More Information

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### RRA/PRA Practitioners

The best resource for RRA and PRA novices are the experienced practitioners who have used the techniques successfully in the past. (Care must be taken, however, to find people who take the methods seriously and are well versed and attentive to the methodological principles: see box on page 27.) Many countries or regions now have PRA Networks that maintain lists of people who are using the methodology. For an up to date list, contact the PRA web site at the Institute for Development Studies (see below).

### PLA Notes

PLA Notes is the semi-formal journal of RRA and PRA practitioners. A one year subscription costs \$30 (free to practitioners in non-OECD countries and libraries) and can be ordered from IIED, 3 Endsleigh St., London WC1H 0DD, England. People involved in training for these methods should also take a look at: Participatory Learning and Action: A Trainers Guide London: IIED, 1995 which is available from the same organization. IIED's web site is: **[www.oneworld.org/iied](http://www.oneworld.org/iied)**. Their e-mail address is: [iiedagri@gn.apc.org](mailto:iiedagri@gn.apc.org) and the fax number is (44 171) 388-2826.

### The IDS PRA Resource Center

The Institute for Development Studies at the University of Sussex (UK) maintains a resource center with publications on RRA, PRA, and related methods. These materials are catalogued by sector. They publish an annotated bibliography of selected materials drawn from this collection. Their web site at **[www.ids.ac.uk/prai/index/html](http://www.ids.ac.uk/prai/index/html)** is linked to other PRA web sites and includes country contact lists. Information about the annotated bibliography can be accessed through this site. The IDS fax number is (44 127 362-1202) and the mailing address is: IDS, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK.

### Training Opportunities

PRAXIS (the Institute for Participatory Practices) is an NGO in India that specializes in PRA training, including a field training component. They can be reached by mail at 12, Pataliputra Colony – Patna, Bihar State, India or by phone at 91 612 262 027 or e-mail: **[praxis@actionaidindia.org](mailto:praxis@actionaidindia.org)**. Other individuals and organizations that do training and/or consulting in RRA and PRA can be found on the country contact lists maintained by IDS.