

## Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA): An Analysis of Experience in Darmareja Village, Sukabumi District, West Java, Indonesia

Keterlibatan Penilaian Desa (PRA): Satu Analisis Pengalaman di Desa Darmareja, Daerah Sukabum, Jawa Barat, Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

*Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is an approach which encourage the community to share their opinions, ideas and experiences pertaining to the local problems, issues and needs. This approach emphasizes on local knowledge and help local community to make their own plans, analysis and appraisal. Thus, PRA is used to facilitate information sharing, analysis and action among stakeholders. The purpose of PRA is to enable the main stakeholders i.e. government, local communities, private sectors or NGOs to work together to plan appropriate and relevant programs for the community. In Indonesia, the Center for Social Empowerment, National University of Indonesia (UNAS) had been championing the use of PRA for development process. This article discusses on the use of PRA in a selected village in West Java, Indonesia. It will highlight the advantages and disadvantages of using this technique.*

*Keywords: Participatory Rural Appraisal, Rapid Rural Appraisal, needs assessment, community, development*

### ABSTRAK

*Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) adalah satu pendekatan yang menggalakkan komuniti untuk berkongsi pendapat, idea dan pengalaman mengenai masalah tempatan, isu dan keperluan mereka. Pendekatan ini memberi penumpuan kepada pengetahuan tempatan dan membantu ahli komuniti untuk membuat perancangan, analisis dan penilaian sendiri. Oleh itu, PRA digunakan untuk memudahkan perkongsian maklumat, analisis dan tindakan di kalangan pihak berkepentingan. Tujuan PRA adalah untuk membantu pihak berkepentingan seperti kerajaan, komuniti tempatan, sektor swasta dan organisasi bukan kerajaan (NGO) bekerjasama dalam merancang program pembangunan yang sesuai dan relevan bagi sesebuah komuniti. Di Indonesia, Center for Social Empowerment, Universiti Nasional Indonesia telah menggunakan PRA dalam proses pembangunan. Makalah ini membincangkan tentang penggunaan PRA dalam proses pembangunan. Kebaikan dan keburukan menggunakan pendekatan ini juga akan bincangkan.*

*Kata kunci: Keterlibatan penilaian desa, penilaian pesat desa, penilaian keperluan, komuniti, pembangunan*

### INTRODUCTION

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is an interactive approach in research that emphasizes local participation, which enables local people to contribute in their own appraisal, analysis and plans. PRA aims to facilitate information sharing among stakeholders. The objective of PRA is to enable development workers, government officials, and local people to work together to plan appropriate programs.

PRA is not new in development process. It has evolved from Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA). RRA is used by development workers in rural areas to collect and analyze data. Webber & Ison (1995) described the 1980s as the decade of Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and 1990s as the decade of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). RRA was introduced in response to the perceived problems of outsiders missing or miscommunication with local

people in the context of development work. In RRA, information is more elicited and extracted by outsiders as part of a process of data gathering (Chambers 1994). RRA caters to the needs of development workers and related agencies with more emphasis on efficient time use and achievement of objectives. This approach was used by development workers to analyze conditions and understand the needs of the local people.

PRA on the other hand encourages the local community to voice out their opinions and ideas with the development workers acting as facilitators. PRA responds to the needs of communities and target groups with emphasis on flexibility to suit the needs and time frame of the local community. Therefore PRA is an approach for the local people to analyze their own conditions and communicate with outsiders. PRA helps community members to better assess their resources and overall situation regarding areas such as agriculture,

health, and education. According to Binns, Hill and Nel (1997), PRA is useful in identifying the needs, aspirations and constraints of rural indigenous communities.

PRA had been used during the late 1960s and 1970s by David Norman and others as an approach in field research in Northern Nigeria (Binns, Hill and Nel 1997). This approach had also been used extensively in the Philippines mainly in agriculture and forestry sectors and for coastal planning in the 1990s (Pido 1995). Webber & Ison (1995) had also used this approach in New South Wales, Australia, to gather valuable information and formulate effective mechanisms to improve agro-based local communities. This approach had been used worldwide, including in Iran and Vietnam (Cramb, Purcell and Ho 2004).

In Indonesia, the Center for Social Empowerment, National University of Indonesia (UNAS) has been championing the use of PRA for development process. This paper, focusing in Indonesia, discusses the use of PRA in a selected village called Darmareja village, in Sukabumi District, West Java, Indonesia. Discussion will also highlight the advantages and disadvantages of using the Participatory Rural Appraisal technique.

#### BACKGROUND OF VILLAGE

Darmareja Village is located in the district of Nagrak, Sukabumi, West Jawa. In local terminology, "*Darmar*" means lamp, while "*reja*" means king/leader. Therefore, "*darmareja*" mean "leader's lamp". It has a total population of about 6,629 people with 3,365 males (50.76%) and 3,264 females (49.24%). Majority of the population are involved in agriculture. Main crops planted are paddy, corns, papaya and vegetables. Most of the farmers buy seeds and fertilizers from private enterprises at the nearest small town of Nagrak. They plant on a small lot of land with limited modern technology. Water buffalos are still used as a conventional technique to plough the paddy fields. There is no proper irrigation system. Water supply relies heavily from nearby river. The village leader informed the research team that most of the village land are owned by people from the urban areas, mainly from Jakarta Metropolitan. Seasonal unemployment is common in Darmareja Village. Most of the male and female youth migrate to the urban areas to find suitable jobs. In terms of access to quality education, there is one primary school and a lower secondary school. However, only 30 % of lower secondary school students proceed to the upper secondary school. A change agent was attached at this village with the mission to improve the level of education, health conditions and the purchasing power of the community.

#### PRA AS AN APPROACH IN NEED ASSESSMENT

Traditionally, many development programs have approached communities with a ready plan or program on their hands. Although these plans are based on sound analysis of the local situation, opportunities to work directly with beneficiaries in the process of needs identification were infrequent. This top-down approach has several weaknesses:

1. communities did not understand the basis for the activities planned in the development program
2. development agents did not understand important local characteristics, such as cultural practices and local values
3. the plans drawn lacked the support of all members of the community

PRA allows development programs to correct these weaknesses. Why is this so? PRA involves communities directly in the process of assessing local needs, identifying what would be the most appropriate solutions and developing plans which respond to these needs. PRA also allows development agents to listen to and learn from villagers. Importantly, PRA recognizes that it is the members of the community, and not development agents, who know best what local needs are.

Therefore, PRA is used as a tool in communicating and transfer of knowledge. Regardless of whether PRA is carried out as part of project identification or appraisal, the learning by doing and teamwork spirit requires proper procedures. The common tools in PRA are semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, mapping and modeling, seasonal calendars and activity profiles, local histories and Venn diagrams.

The research team planned a two-level data collection process to gather valuable and reliable primary information from the community. for the first level, we conducted focus group discussions to explore the socio-economic needs of this remote rural community based on their experiences and views. A total of 15 villagers were gathered at the community hall called "*balai desa*". This session began with a warm welcome and brief explanation of research objectives, researchers' profile and local facilitators by the research team leader. This session was conducted in a relaxed fashion with minimal intervention to get the trust and willingness to share their views. On certain occasions, we had to intervene to stimulate the discussion and encourage the participants to inquire and debate on the views expressed. There was active engagement among the participants in the focus group discussions.

In PRA, we can use various tools of data collection and data validation, for example, through triangulation, such as semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion, mapping and modeling, seasonal calendars, activity profiles and Venn diagrams. For the second level data collection, we visited community farms and

residents' houses. We did transect (with the route and area of transect proposed by the participants of the FGD) and met residents who did not participate in our focus group discussions. During the transect and conversations with the residents, the research team observed, asked questions and listened to the residents, enabling the team members to identify problems, note contrasts and similarities, as well as discovering opportunities.

### REQUIREMENTS FOR THE USE OF PRA

For an effective PRA, it requires three basic requirements, that is: effective and skilled communicator, active participation from the local community, as well as team work and rapport among stakeholders. The research team members visited Indonesia frequently and were familiar with Bahasa Indonesia. In addition, the team members worked together with the researchers and research assistants from University Nasional of Indonesia (UNAS), who were familiar with the village. Hence, the villagers were friendly and accepted the research team cordially and warmly. Our team leader was also able to speak and understand local language. Team members from UNAS explained certain terminology in the local dialect to facilitate interactions between the team members and the local villagers.

During the focus group discussion, we tried to encourage all the participants to speak, and to avoid having one person dominating the discussion. This is important as the success of the PRA depends on the active participation of all community members. We prepared an interview guideline for the session to ensure that all objectives were achieved. Each of the team member had their own area of responsibility to focus on, for example, communication, cultural values, economic activities, during the data collection process.

### ADVANTAGES OF PRA

PRA allows active participation from the local community in the form of voicing their own ideas and concern, and at the same time expressing their knowledge about the past and present. The local community gets to present their own priorities for development and see their ideas incorporated into development plans. For example in this study, access to the main road and agriculture productivity were identified as a priority. Development planners were confident that this corresponded with the real needs of the local people.

Participation in PRA by local development workers (from NGOs, government or private agencies) can increase the motivation and level of mobilization in support of the project or program of which the community is part of. Involvement of people from different administrative and organizational levels is important so that commitment

can be assured. Agricultural workers for example may not be used to working together with other disciplines. Involvement in PRA can help them understand the priorities of workers from other disciplines as well as those members of the community.

PRA also provides authentic input from the community for the government to plan relevant programs. One resident, Pak Hidayat summed up his fellow villagers' problems:

Previously we sold to the enterprise with contract farming procedure. Now we sold to the middleman. Lack of fertilized soil and land size had been perceived as the most important risk in production of herbs. Most of the members have limited size of land. Only four members remained in herbs production because fluctuation of unprofitable price.

PRA will establish better linkages between communities, the agencies and institutions involved in rural community development. In this case study, Darmareja was selected by UNAS as its adopted village. Therefore interaction between communities and researchers can reduce the barriers of suspicion among the major stakeholders. Researchers from UNAS have established a good relationship with the local community members based on mutual respect and consideration. Based on active participation of the villagers in focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, development agents and researcher understood much better the needs, problems and motivations of the community. Therefore, development is planned in accordance with the needs of the community and their support.

### DISADVANTAGES OF PRA

PRA is not without disadvantages. Among its disadvantages are:

1. PRA is a tedious process whereby it takes a longer time for development to be implemented
2. Certain individuals take advantage of the discussion by voicing out their own problems
3. Expectations of community members often cannot be realised.  
This is due to the political situation, the local power and social structure or bureaucracy in institutions which are supposed to be supporting development.
4. Lack of inter-agency understanding and working together between agencies and local community. This problem arises when agencies functioning as stakeholders in a program do not communicate with one another, and when these agencies cannot act upon the concerns voiced by the community.
5. Risk of dominating activities by certain local group, as certain sectors in the local community tend to dominate activities such as the identification of problems and needs and suggestion of activities. For example, the more educated and those with authority

would find it easier to be involved in the activity concerned and monopolize its benefits. The lack of outside involvement in the participatory planning process would make this domination easier to take place. Poor people or those without authority might have to support the decisions of this dominating section of the community, which ultimately would not benefit them will not benefit them at all.

6. Failure to take account of stratification in communities.

Stratification within the community, either by social status, gender or ethnic group cannot be ignored. In PRA, decisions about how to accommodate the conflicting interests of different groups need to be left to the community itself. On the other hand, one of the roles of outsiders involved in PRA is to encourage negotiation between different interest groups. Therefore, if the community decided that they wanted to resolve problems by ignoring the interests of the weaker group, then it would be difficult for the outsiders to do something about this.

### CONCLUSION

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is not just a tool which enables development planners to learn about rural conditions and consult with local people so that they can come up with more appropriate and better development plans. Instead, PRA is sometimes regarded as an exercise which transfers the role of planning and decision-making, traditionally taken by stakeholders and development agencies, to the target group or community itself. This means that outside experts and development planners are no longer the people who have the responsibility for analyzing and interpreting information and coming up with proposals or ideas for development. The role of outside experts and development planners in PRA is to encourage local people to carry out their own analysis, come to their own conclusions and design their own development programs. These would then be facilitated and supported by the relevant agencies. It is important to reduce the problems of mismatch between what is being provided by the stakeholder and what is needed by the community. PRA can be practiced in community development as had being discussed in the advantages of using PRA. After all, development is about changing the lifestyle of the community.

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