
UNIT 8 PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF PARTICIPATORY METHODS FOR GROUP FORMATION AND TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Structure

- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 What is PRA?
 - 8.2.1 Key Principles of PRA
 - 8.2.2 Attributes of a PRA Worker
 - 8.2.3 PRA Techniques
 - 8.2.4 Benefits of PRA
 - 8.2.5 Limitations of PRA
- 8.3 Practical Applications of PRA for Self Help Group Formation
 - 8.3.1 Self Help Groups (SHGs)
 - 8.3.2 PRA for SHG Groups
- 8.4 Practical Applications of PRA for Training Needs Assessment
- 8.5 Validity and Reliability of PRA Techniques
- 8.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.7 Glossary
- 8.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Participation is a key term used in developmental activities now-a-days. But what does the term ‘participation’ mean to you? Probably, you would easily understand taking part in an activity for individual benefit like participating in a sports meet or any competition to win a prize. It may also mean being involved in an activity being carried out by a group which you belong to, for e.g., being part of a team to organize a mela in your area. In community work, however, it is not the individual but the group that is important. When extension activity is being conducted in a community, whether rural or urban, the whole community is taken as a beneficiary group. Community women are important. They should be given opportunities with encouragement so that they can participate in their own development.

Development is intended to bring about both social and material advancement (including greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities) for the majority of the people through their gaining greater control over their environment. Women’s participation means their involvement in: (i) decision making while selecting and planning; (ii) implementation of development programmes and projects; (iii) monitoring and evaluation of development programmes and projects; and (iv) sharing the benefits of development.

People should be allowed to choose their ends and then they can be aided to organize their self-help effort successfully to do the things they want to do. Most members of communities will willingly cooperate in carrying out a project, which they have decided to undertake. Women become more dynamic if they are permitted to take decisions concerning their own affairs, exercise responsibility for and are helped to carry out projects in their own localities. Participation of people is of fundamental importance for the success of any development programme. Women must share in the development of a programme and must feel that it is their own programme. Emphasis is placed on an empowering process which, through organization, gives people the strength to create a space for themselves and to build up material assets to support their own self-reliant development. Two important principles are always kept in view in the participatory approach – “Learning by Doing” and “Seeing is Believing”.

Participation may or may not lead to empowerment of the marginalized in the decision making process. Participation enables the voice of the marginalized and excluded to be heard and gives them a degree of influence. It can enable them to realize their own potential.

Objectives

After studying this Unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the importance of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) as a technique for community based programmes;
- apply PRA for group formation and training need assessment; and
- identify important aspects of the validity and reliability of the data obtained through PRA techniques.

8.2 WHAT IS PRA?

When you go into a community for development work, what is the first thing that you do? Try to get as much information about the community as possible from the community members. What are the methods that you could employ to get this information? Probably, you would use observation, interview, group discussions or any method that you find suitable to get maximum information. But when you have to go into a community and work for the people from that community, you would like to have maximum participation from the people themselves in programme planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This will ensure that people get what they want, they get a feeling that it is their own programme and that the development is sustainable.

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is a label given to a growing family of participatory approaches and methods that emphasize local knowledge and enable local people to make their own appraisal, analysis, and plans. PRA uses group animation and exercises to facilitate information sharing, analysis, and action among stakeholders, i.e. the community members. Although originally developed for use in rural areas, PRA has been employed successfully in a variety of settings. The purpose of PRA is to enable development practitioners, Government officials and local people to work together to plan programmes appropriate for the context.

Earlier research techniques had a problem, in that the approach was a top to bottom one where the beneficiaries were considered the takers and the planners, the givers. Under this system, workers collected information, came back to the office, made an action plan and gave it to the people. Thus, the programmes were being planned by people who had no stake in it.

Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) which took shape during the 1970s was an attempt to take a middle course between brief unstructured visits to rural communities (which bore a risk of bias towards more accessible areas) and surveys through questionnaires and interviews which were costly and time-consuming to analyze. RRA sought methods, which were rapid and cost-effective but allowed outsiders to tap into the indigenous knowledge of farmers. Participatory Rural Appraisal, which evolved from RRA, took this further by encouraging rural communities not only to give information, but to determine the methods and categories used to get information, and to participate in the use of that information. In PRA, data collection and analysis are undertaken by local people with outsiders facilitating rather than controlling. It is an approach for shared learning between local people and outsiders, but the term is somewhat misleading. PRA techniques are equally applicable in urban settings and are not limited to assessment only. The people who have a problem will identify and solve them by planning for it and implementing it themselves. Of course, the trainers and personnel from non-government and government organizations would help and guide them in this process. Thus, this technique is more participatory in nature and helps in motivating and mobilizing the community to be self-reliant.

8.2.1 Key Principles of PRA

PRA is a people-centred method. One should understand that power lies with the community because the community is the teacher, the giver and the doer. Let us now try to understand the key principles of PRA.

- *Participation:* Local women's input into PRA activities is essential to its value as a research and planning method and as a means for diffusing the participatory approach to development. Due importance and respect should be given to local knowledge. The community members are more aware of their situation, background and environment than an outsider. Hence, a programme meant for them should ideally make use of the local expertise.
- *Teamwork:* Generally, PRA is best conducted by a local team — speaking the local language, with perspectives and knowledge of the area's conditions, traditions, and social structure — with a few outsiders present, a significant representation of women, and a mix of sector specialists and social scientists, according to the topic. A well-balanced team will represent the diversity of socioeconomic, cultural, gender, and generational perspectives.
- *Flexibility:* PRA does not provide blueprints for its practitioners. The combination of techniques that is appropriate in a particular development context will be determined by such variables as the size and skill mix of the PRA team, the time and resources available, and the topic and location of the work. A PRA worker must maintain some amount of flexibility in her attitude and keep herself open to new experiences, information and knowledge. This will also help in forming a better rapport with the community members and understand their point of view better.

- *Optimal ignorance:* In order to be efficient in terms of both time and money, PRA work intends to gather just enough information to make the necessary recommendations and decisions. Make sure to extract only as much information as is required and avoid asking unnecessary and irrelevant questions. Straying from the issue at hand will dilute the discussion and information obtained may be incomplete. It will also result in waste of time and energy for both the interviewer and the interviewees. Also, one should avoid raising sensitive issues.
- *Triangulation:* PRA works with qualitative data. In order to ensure that information is valid and reliable, PRA teams follow the rule of thumb that at least three sources must be consulted or techniques must be used to investigate the same topics. For getting complete and correct information, it is important to check and cross-check with various sources. This checking should be done at all levels with different people. For e.g., information obtained from the Pradhan or the head of the community should be cross-checked with the other local people to get an unbiased opinion. Also, it is important to use different methods to obtain information and look at the point from different perspectives.

8.2.2 Attributes of a PRA Worker

It is important to discuss here what a PRA worker should be like. There are a few things that she should keep in mind.

- 1) *Behaviour:* A PRA worker should be patient, friendly, warm and receptive. She should make a conscious effort to incorporate these qualities in her behaviour.
- 2) *Attitude:* Every person has an attitude. But one should not impose oneself on another person, especially so in community work. It is difficult to change attitudes overnight. Hence, the PRA worker should try and accept the fact that a change can be brought about only gradually. It is with this attitude that she should enter the community.
- 3) *Listening:* The best communicator is one who listens. This is a very important quality to possess for any person involved in community work. To form rapport and win the confidence of the community members as well as to extract maximum information from them, it is important to listen to what they have to say.
- 4) *Openness:* The PRA worker should keep an open mind when she goes into the community. Even if she does not agree with the community members, she should learn to accept their point of view and give importance and weightage to what they have to say and local knowledge can be gainfully utilized in implementation of development activities.
- 5) *Perception:* All things are perceived differently by different people. For e.g., how would you perceive a half-filled glass – half full or half empty? This is a difficult question to answer, as both the responses would be equally right. Thus, something that we perceive as right may be perceived differently by another person. Hence, while working in a community, it is important to give weightage to the perception of the community people as well as to their views and values rather than imposing our views on them.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) What is PRA and why is it important?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2) List the principles on which PRA is based.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

3) What attributes would you look for in the workers who would want to use PRA?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

8.2.3 PRA Techniques

PRA is an exercise in communication and transfer of knowledge. It involves a two-way exchange of information, especially from the people. It builds on and acknowledges local knowledge. Whether it is carried out as part of a project identification or appraisal, the learning by doing and teamwork spirit of PRA requires transparent procedures. We will be describing some of the commonly used techniques of PRA in the following discussion.

- *Semi-structured Interviews*: It involves the use of flexible checklists rather than questionnaires. A semi-structured interviewing and listening technique uses some predetermined questions and topics but allows new topics to be pursued as the interview develops. The interviews are informal and conversational but carefully controlled. The simple process of talking with individuals or families can help gather much information. One should record all information – who said what, how, in what setting, when, and so on. Probe fully, but sensitively. Cross check all information.
- *Timeline*: This technique is basically used to trace the historical background and progress of the community. It can either be a general timeline or a topical one, for e.g., one can trace the educational history to

see the establishment of various educational institutions in the area. Getting a historical perspective of a community helps in understanding the changes that came about in the standard of living of the community and their social standing. In this technique, major historical community events and changes are dated and listed. Understanding the cycles of change can help communities focus on future actions and information requirements.

- *Seasonal Calendars:* This technique helps to know the changes that occur in the lives of the community members with a change in season. Variables such as rainfall, labour, income, expenditures, debt, harvesting periods and so on can be drawn to show month-to-month variations and seasonal constraints and to highlight opportunities for action. This activity is carried out in a group and the drawings are often made on the ground with sticks and other locally found materials to represent aspects of the chart. Since the information is by, for and of the people, it should be drawn in terms that they use and that make sense to them. It is not necessary to map a whole year and to divide that year into 12 months. One should use the local system of time, and local names for periods and months. It can also be classified in terms of the main seasons like summer, winter, autumn and spring. Possible uses of calendars include crop rotations, nutritional problems, diseases, money availability, scarcity of labour, religious holidays, celebrations and so on.
- *Mapping:* Mapping is a detailed map or picture of an area showing all the basic facilities, main structures including houses, temples, wells, trees, road, school, hospital, dispensary, voluntary organizations and so on. These diagrams are developed by the people themselves using symbols and materials that have meaning and relevance for them. Often this means the map will be drawn in the ground using sticks to make the lines and locally available materials as symbols, e.g., leaves to denote trees, paper to denote school, bulbs to denote street lights, glass of water to denote the source of water and so on. In order to maintain a record of the information, the facilitator needs to redraw the map on paper as accurately as possible and get it approved from the participants before finalizing it. The maps can be layout maps showing the basic layout of the area, resource maps showing the various resources available to the community, transect maps showing the cross-section of the landscape and even wealth maps to identify the areas of wealth and influence in the area.
- *Venn Diagram (Chapati Diagram):* This exercise can be used to find out the problems of people in the community and the priorities they assign to those problems; it also helps in identifying the key decision makers in the community and the hierarchical nature of their relationships. Venn diagrams give a clear picture of the various factors and their inter-relationship. It also gives an insight into people's perceptions. In this method, the facilitator initiates discussions with the community members on problems faced by them which are represented on the ground by using objects as symbols for different problems. They are then provided with different sizes of chart paper circles (hence, the name chapati diagram) which they may place under these symbols to represent the magnitude of the problem. Similarly, these circles can also be used to depict the hierarchy of decision making or overlap of authority.

- *Wealth and Well-being Ranking:* This method is used to rank the people of the community according to their economic and financial position. It helps in finding out the rich and poor individuals in the community. Wealth ranking of households into different classes is defined by local indices of wealth or well-being. People are asked to sort cards (or slips of paper) representing individuals or households from rich to poor or from sick to healthy. This technique can be used for cross-checking information and for initiating discussions on a specific topic (for example, poverty). The technique can also be used to produce a benchmark against which future development interventions can be measured or evaluated.
- *Matrix Ranking:* This is a group exercise which helps in finding out the reasons for taking certain decisions or making certain choices and what is the most important option according to the group. For e.g., let us say that we want to know how people would rank the organizations working in their community. For this, we will put down all the names of the organizations on a paper with the help of the group and then ask them to rank the organizations on a scale of 1-10 according to their importance as well as in comparison to others. Of course this is possible only if the community women in the group have numeracy skills. Otherwise we may use categories ranging from “most to least”.

8.2.4 Benefits of PRA

PRA is distinguished at its best by the use of local symbols, figures and other graphic representations created by the community that legitimizes local knowledge and promotes empowerment. It has various advantages:

- *Empowerment:* Knowledge is power. Knowledge arises from the process of PRA. Through participation, this knowledge is shared between and owned by local people. Thus, new local confidence is generated, or reinforced, regarding the validity of their knowledge. The people are themselves planning, implementing and monitoring the programmes as they are the stakeholders; outside help is sought only for guidance.
- *Respect:* The PRA process transforms the researchers into learners and listeners, respecting local intellectual and analytical capabilities. Researchers have to learn to respect local knowledge and help the community use this knowledge for successful implementation of the programmes.
- *Localization:* The extensive and creative use of local materials and representations encourages visual sharing and avoids imposing external representational conventions. For e.g., if the technique of Chapati diagrams is used to identify various facilities and resources available to the community or the lack of it, the community can depict scarcity of water as the biggest problem by keeping a glass of water on the biggest circle; for the problem of street lights, they can put a bulb on the second circle to depict it as the second biggest problem. Instead of using paper cutouts as chapatis, ‘thalis’ (plates) of different sizes can be used to depict the various problems.
- *Enjoyment:* PRA, if done well, is fun. The emphasis is no longer on “rapid” but on the process.
- *Inclusiveness:* The participatory process facilitates the inclusion of all the people including marginal and vulnerable groups and women in particular.

8.2.5 Limitations of PRA

The term PRA itself can cause difficulties. PRA need not be rural, and sometimes is not even participatory, and is frequently used as a trendy label for other standard research techniques. It has various drawbacks:

- *“Hijacking”*: This occurs when the PRA agenda is externally driven, does not involve local people and is used to create legitimacy for projects, agencies and NGOs.
- *Formalism*: “The PRA team arrives in a local community to do a PRA”. This abrupt and exploitative approach is all too common in project-based PRAs where there is a deadline to meet, or in scheduled training courses.
- *Disappointment*: Local expectations can easily be raised. People would start hoping that immediate solutions to their problems would be found and action would be taken. However, if nothing tangible emerges, local communities may come to see the process as a temporary phenomenon and this can affect future actions.
- *Threats*: The empowerment implications of PRA, and the power of its social analysis, can create threats to local vested interests.

Despite its limitations, the concentrated power of formalization of community knowledge through participatory techniques can generate an impressive amount of information in a relatively short time, leaving time for more selective structured formal surveys where they are necessary and of value.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1) Give one example for each of the PRA techniques.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

8.3 PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF PRA FOR SELF HELP GROUP FORMATION

We have already discussed in detail about PRA and its importance. This technique can be used effectively for bringing people together into groups for development activities. But why a group approach?

As we have already seen, people’s initiatives and participation is very important in the development process. It is essential to have a people-oriented planning process where people at large, particularly the poor, can fully participate. Such a participatory planning process will ensure equity as well as accelerate the rate of growth of the economy. In order to achieve these objectives, there is no alternative to **social mobilization and community participation**. In this process, the role of women is critical. Women show a great ability in management of poverty but given the socio-economic milieu in which

individual women function, they are unable to take important decisions on their own. This is where ‘group’ strategies acquire relevance. The formation of small informal functional groups of women would give them ‘visibility’ and create micro level “power pockets”. Also, this would initiate a learning process through sharing of ideas, skills and interactive capacity and, in course of time, women would learn to articulate their needs resulting in more appropriate participatory and grassroots level plans for them. Some social barriers would also be broken in the process.

Why Organize Women’s Groups		
<i>The group dynamics transform women from:</i>		
Feeling weak and powerless	to	Feeling strong and empowered
Feeling less confident	to	Building up self and group confidence
Feeling directionless and indecisive	to	Moving ahead to desired goals
Feeling dependent	to	Being capable of independent actions

(Source: Indira Mahila Yojana Handbook, DWCD,GoI)

8.3.1 Self Help Groups (SHGs)

Formation of self-help groups will help in bringing women together and ensure their participation in the developmental process. But what is a self-help group? The terminology suggests that it is a group that helps itself, i.e., it is self-reliant and self-dependent.

India has a long tradition of seeing people coming together voluntarily for performing various socio-cultural and economic activities collectively. Self Help Groups work on the principle of mutual help. They are voluntary associations of people formed to attain certain collective goals. Thus, a self help group is a voluntary, democratic, homogenous group of 10-20 women drawn from the same socio-economic background. These women may select their own leader and also fix the tenure or duration for such leadership. The group meets regularly, takes its own decisions, maintains its own records and has access to its own funds. It usually has the following characteristics:

- Sharing common objectives;
- Establishing a relation among themselves;
- Having the same social and economic background;
- Formed around a specific problem.

There are specific functions to be performed by the SHGs. These are:

- Effecting regular savings and credit activity within the group, which would follow explanatory sessions on the difference between consumption credit, production credit and the use of credit for socio-economic transformation in the lives of the members of the SHG. Consumption means that the money is used for survival such as buying food, fodder or paying back moneylenders. It is not used for starting or running an enterprise and therefore production of new goods or services. Money used for the latter is production credit.
- Articulating the group’s requirements in terms of credit and enhancement of skills required for income generation activity;

- Facilitating easy access to credit and instituting the mechanism for its effective channelization;
- Using group dynamics for stressing the importance of and effecting regular repayment;
- Applying viable norms for interest rates, repayment schedules, gestation period, extension and writing off bad debts. (Gestation period refers to time allowed for repayment.)
- Serving as a platform for review of the cost-benefit of the income generation activities being undertaken; and
- Undertaking any other activity including consideration of social issues influencing the lives of women.

You will learn much more about SHGs in the course on Organization and Leadership.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

1) Are you familiar with a SHG? Indicate what functions it is performing.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

8.3.2 PRA for SHG Groups

We have already discussed earlier some of the techniques used for PRA. Since most of the techniques are group techniques, it is easy to involve people with it and make the whole exercise very participative. Before applying any of the techniques, it is very important to have meetings with the women individually and in groups to form rapport. Visit the community during the free time of the women and introduce yourself and your motive for meeting them. If some organization is already working in that area, go through the organization. This will make your task much easier. Semi-structured interviews can be administered at this stage while talking to individuals. This would help the PRA worker in getting information about the community. Once rapport is formed, the PRA techniques can be introduced to the women.

Identify the leaders in the community who will help you in collecting the women for group exercises. Finalize a time for the meeting which is convenient to everyone. More than one visit may be required to get complete information from the group members. It is not easy to say which technique to use first. Based on the time available on a given day and the mood of the women, the PRA worker can determine the sequence of techniques to be used.

A beginning can be made by asking them about their problems. This can be done using the chapati diagrams. First, initiate a discussion on the problems faced by the women in general. Then, give them circles made out of chart paper (or even some plates of different circumferences can be used) and ask

them to depict the problems on them based on their importance as perceived by them. If scarcity of water is the biggest problem, for example, they can depict it by placing a glass on the biggest circle. Similarly, if poor quality of education is the second biggest problem, they can place a book on the second biggest circle. But let them decide on their own about how to depict their problems. The PRA worker is just supposed to be a facilitator, helping the participants to realize how they perceive their problems. Chapati diagrams can also be used to see the hierarchy that exists within the community and identify the people whom the women approach to solve their problems. This will help in identifying more leaders who can be instrumental in helping with group formation.

Mapping can be done to depict the area which the PRA worker wishes to cover for her/his research. We have already discussed what mapping is all about in the previous section. This will help to determine the number of women who are living in that area and how the area is divided on the basis of income, occupation, religion, region and so on. Also, one comes to know the resources available near the area under study, for e.g., schools, markets, banks, religious places, community centres, and so on. Out of these, banks and community centres may be of importance for SHG formation as place would be required for meetings and for any vocational training that may need to be given to the women and banks would, of course, be required for opening their group accounts.

Seasonal calendars can be made to find out which occupations are seasonal or regular. It will help in determining the popular vocations that the women want to take up once they start saving and taking loans for setting up their own microenterprises. Matrix ranking can be used to determine the tasks that they would rank the highest and most beneficial for them. Or, they can even rank the vocation for which they want training. Wealth ranking can be used to identify the really poor and needy in the community. Since this will be determined by the women themselves, there will not be any external bias or partiality involved here.

There are four stages in group formation:

- *Forming*: This is the first stage when the women start developing the habit of coming together and attending meetings. In this stage, fear, suspicion and anxiety of members about the group are discussed and dealt with. Here, the problems become more specifically related to money and its saving and disbursement for loans. Through discussions, the group can decide on who is the most needy and deserves the loan first, who should get it second and so on.
- *Storming*: In this stage, conflicts between individual and group interests start surfacing as each member wants the benefit first. These problems are dealt with at this stage. Leadership also starts emerging. Procedures, rules and roles are established for solving various problems. This is done entirely by the group members; the decisions that they take are their own. Semi-structured interviews can be conducted at this stage to know what problems they are facing and how they intend to solve them.
- *Norming*: By this stage, trust develops among the group members and the group becomes a cohesive unit.

- *Performing:* This is the final stage when the group becomes operational and starts performing various group functions that benefit its members. The group members can then be used as resource persons or social animators to encourage the formation of more SHGs.

Thus, the PRA techniques can be successfully used in the formation of SHGs and help in building confidence among the women to identify their problems on their own and also taking their own decisions.

Establishing sustainable groups that will endure even after the organization/ researcher withdraws from that area requires intensive groundwork and a good foundation is to be laid. Initial work involves building the capacity of the women to handle their group activities on their own and to be able to take decisions. Now, how does one go about trying to bring the women together? This can be done in a few steps.

- 1) *Get ready for fieldwork:* All the members of the team for the fieldwork should be familiar with the PRA techniques. For this, basic training is essential.
- 2) *Select the locale of work:* Focus on working together with a few communities at a time before spreading out. Shift the resources slowly to other communities as the first few groups become self-reliant. It is important to identify groups which are most likely to respond well to this type of approach. Selecting a particular community automatically selects their village as the geographical location for the work.
- 3) *Make the people aware of your intentions and their benefits:* Tell the communities and their supporting organizations what will happen, how they will benefit and what their role will be.
- 4) *Identify constraints and opportunities:* Use PRA techniques for identifying the constraints and opportunities followed by meetings and discussions to analyze the results and to decide the next step to be taken. It will help the communities to analyze their situation and act on it and the facilitators will also get a better understanding of their problems, needs and constraints.
- 5) *Group establishment:* The PRA processes and the follow-up discussions provide a natural focus around which a group of interested women will form eventually. There will be women who will come forward and be ready to form groups. These are the women to be encouraged. Once their groups start functioning successfully, other women would follow and join the groups.
- 6) *Develop an action plan:* Once the groups are formed, it is necessary to develop a plan of action. Identify who will do what, when, the resources required and so on. For e.g., find out who will lead the group; when will the group meetings be held, how much will each member deposit as their individual saving in the group account; how much loan will be given at a time; etc. Once the activities of the group get underway; it is important to strengthen the group's self-reliance. For this, they may need some training on how to open a savings account; how to maintain their own account; how to withdraw money from the bank and so on. The facilitator may need to guide the group based on the decisions they take. It is important to establish monitoring and evaluation activities to help the group make progress, to make changes in their activities as per requirement and to plan the next step.

- 7) *Withdrawal*: Once the group is able to determine the input they need and how and where to get them, it is time for the facilitators and the organization working for them to withdraw. Such groups can also provide support to other less well-developed groups.

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

- 1) List the steps you would take to establish an SHG in a nearby slum. Name the activities women can undertake to become self-reliant.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

8.4 PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF PRA FOR TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Why does one need to conduct training needs assessment? It is basically to find out what the women already know and what they want to learn; which are the areas they need to build expertise in and which are the training courses they want started. Besides these, it will also help determine the following:

- what learning will be accomplished;
- what changes in behavior and performance will come about; and
- what are the economic costs involved and the benefits that the women will get.

The data collected should always be shared with the people. It is important to discuss with them what has emerged from the need assessment and then their opinion sought on the obtained result.

Steps in Need Assessment

In order to assess in what field and what kind of training the women want, the following steps can be a useful guide.

Step 1: Identify the areas in which the women want to acquire skills. Ask them first what they want to learn. Identify their priorities and importance of the stated needs. Chapati diagrams can be used for this purpose.

Step 2: Determine their current level of skill and expertise. What they already know, how they are using it, where they learnt it from and so on. For e.g., if women know a particular craft, but still they say they want to learn it, get all the background information about it. Are they using this skill to meet household needs, or are they utilizing this skill for some income generation also. How well do they do it? Do they know other related activities? Which are the organizations giving training in this particular field – is it an NGO or an institute imparting training in different aspects. All this information needs to be gathered before going

ahead. Focussed group discussions and mapping techniques can be used to gather all this information.

Step 3: Identify the problems/opportunities offered by their current expertise. For e.g., if the women are using the skill for income generation, that means they are catering to outsiders. They might be encountering a lot of problems here. The customers might be coming back with various complaints. Or, the women may be unable to cater to current trend or fashion. Or, they may be losing out on lots of orders because they do not know better techniques. These problems can be found out using chapati diagrams. If some training institutes have been active in the area, matrix ranking can be used to find out which of the institutes the people rank as the best. Or trend analysis can be done to see how much the situation has changed in the past few years since the training programme was initiated in the community.

Step 4: Identify the possible solutions to these problems. Of course, these solutions will be identified by the community members themselves. Do they feel that a group member herself can train them? Or do they feel an outside expert should come to train them? If they agree on the latter, do they know someone who can come and conduct these courses? Or can the local NGO help out? What all would they want to learn – something new or something to improve their already existing skills?

Step 5: Identify the feasibility of the solutions offered. How much will it cost to start such a training programme? What time will suit everybody? How many women will participate? How will they benefit? Where can the programme be held?

Check Your Progress Exercise 5

1) List two steps in training needs assessment in which PRA can be used.

.....
.....
.....
.....

8.5 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF PRA TECHNIQUES

We have already seen the usefulness of PRA techniques especially where intensive research is required. PRA is also particularly relevant in situations where people’s participation not only ensures their loyalty to the programme but also helps in sustaining it. However, questions have been raised about the validity and reliability of these techniques.

PRA techniques are basically qualitative in nature. The techniques are also such that the data is collected and the results are interpreted according to the perception, social and economic interests of different interest groups and individuals. For e.g., if an organization has got money sanctioned for forming a specific number of self help groups in a community, it will conduct preliminary research ‘using PRA techniques’ and use the same in group

formation saying that it is participatory though these might have a hidden agenda to it, i.e. formation of groups by any means. Some concerns have been raised over the use of participatory approaches and methods in community work and research. The following list enumerates these concerns.

- There is a lack of transparency and accountability sometimes about the way the techniques are used for personal ends. Only that information is shared which is thought to be in their favour by the organization so that they can go ahead with their agenda.
- Emphasis is placed on information extraction by any means; probing may involve putting words into the mouth of the participants so that only those answers are obtained that one is hoping to hear.
- One may go into the community assuming that there is harmony in the community as people are living together in the same area. But there may be so many political undercurrents that one is unaware of and sometimes overlooks while using the PRA techniques.
- Sometimes, the reasons for using PRA are not clear. It may be used just because it is the ‘in’ thing.
- Many times, agendas are driven from outside the community rather than from within it. Outsiders want to achieve something from their research work and, hence they use the technique to collect data.
- Using PRA techniques may create hopes in the heart of the people who are actually participating thinking that something positive will come out of it. But when inadequate or no follow-up is done they can be disappointed, even bitter.

However, in spite of these drawbacks, it is possible to keep the trustworthiness of the PRA techniques intact. A framework for judging the trustworthiness of PRA techniques has been given by Pretty, 1994 which can be adapted as follows:

- 1) *Prolonged and/or Intense Interaction between the Various (Groups of) People:* For building trust and rapport, learning the particulars of the context, and to keep the investigator(s) open to multiple influences.
- 2) *Persistent and Parallel Observation:* For understanding both a phenomenon and its context. Such observation is continuous and done by more than one person at a time.
- 3) *Triangulation by Multiple Sources, Methods and Investigators:* For cross-checking information and increasing the range of different peoples’ realities encountered, including multiple copies of sources of information, comparing the results from a range of methods and having teams with a diversity of personal, professional and disciplinary backgrounds.
- 4) *Expression and Analysis of Differences:* For ensuring that a wide range of different actors are involved in the analysis, and that their perspectives and realities are accurately represented, including differences according to gender, age, ethnicity, religion and class.
- 5) *Negative Case Analysis:* For sequential revision of hypotheses as insight grows, until one hypothesis accounts for all known cases without exception. A hypothesis is a statement of interrelationship between variables.

- 6) *Peer or Colleague Checking*: Periodical review meetings with peers or colleagues not directly involved in the learning process, so as to expose investigators or PRA workers to searching questions. Such questions seek to find out more, probe deeper.
- 7) *Participant Checking*: For testing the data, interpretations and conclusions with people with whom the original information was collected, constructed and analyzed. Without participant checks, investigators or PRA workers can make no claims that they are representing participants' views.
- 8) *Reports with Working Hypotheses, Contextual Descriptions and Visualizations*: These are descriptions of complex reality, with working hypotheses, visualization and quotations capturing people's perspectives and experiences. Working hypotheses are statements giving the relationship between variables. For example, women in the community can improve their skill in using agricultural implements through training. The more the number of training programmes, the better the skill. When we conduct research we may be able to prove or disprove the hypothesis.
- 9) *Parallel Investigations and Team Communications*: If sub-groups of the same team proceed with investigations in parallel using the same approach, and produce the same or similar findings, then these findings are more trustworthy.
- 10) *Reflective Journals*: These are diaries that individuals keep on a daily basis to record information about themselves.
- 11) *Inquiry Audit*: The inquiry team should be able to provide sufficient information for an external person to examine the processes and product in such a way as to confirm that the findings are not a figment of their imagination. In other words, such a team will help to show reality.
- 12) *Impact on Stakeholder's Capacity to Know and Act*: This is useful for demonstrating that the investigations or studies have had an impact. One such impact which could be assessed is whether participants are more aware of their own realities, as well as those of other people. The report itself could also prompt action on the part of readers who have not been directly involved.

These points should be kept in mind while using the PRA techniques to make the data collection more objective and to eliminate chances of any bias creeping in.

8.6 LET US SUM UP

Community-based programmes are best carried out involving the community.

PRA works on definite principles. Workers who want to involve themselves in using PRA must be friendly, receptive, patient, prepared to listen to people, open and able to perceive things with positive attitude.

There are specific PRA techniques which can be used. These are:

- Semi-structured interview;
- Time line;
- Seasonal calendar;

- Mapping;
- Venn diagram;
- Wealth and well-being ranking; and
- Matrix ranking.

PRA is used to form SHGs.

Steps to form SHGs are:

- Get ready;
- Select locale;
- Make people aware of your intentions;
- Identify constraints and opportunities;
- Group establishment;
- Develop action plan; and
- Withdraw.

Need assessment of the people is important before establishing SHGs.

8.7 GLOSSARY

Cross Checking	: Finding out whether certain data is corrected by collecting data on the same aspect from different people.
Parallel Observation	: Two or more people/groups of people observing the same process.
Peer	: Person similar to the category being described e.g. women in the same group of similar background would be peers.
Stakeholder	: A person with a “stake” in an activity or project; a stake means strong interest in the success of the activity because of investment of time/money and perceived benefit.
Working Hypothesis	: A statement indicating an interrelationship between two things/processes (called variables) which is tested during the research e.g. women in high income category have most interest in health care issues. To test this, a null hypothesis is formulated e.g. women in lower income category have no interest in health care issues. On the basis of the research, this hypothesis can be proved or disproved.

8.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) PRA is a growing family of participatory approaches and methods that emphasize local knowledge and enable local people to make their own appraisal, analysis and plans. PRA involves the community in collecting data about themselves and finding meaning in that data. This data can form the basis for identifying problems and determining solutions.
- 2) Participation, teamwork, flexibility, optimal ignorance, triangulation.
- 3) Appropriate behaviour, attitude, listening skills, openness and positive perception of community members.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1)
 - a) Semi-structured questionnaire: Interviewing community women on the activities they perform, their time duration;
 - b) Timeline: History of community institutions or groups – their formation, progress;
 - c) Calendars: Seasonal occurrences in crop rotation/ nutritional problems etc.
 - d) Mapping: Map showing water sources in a village;
 - e) Venn Diagram: Circles of various sizes showing incidence of infectious diseases among women – size depending on number;
 - f) Wealth ranking: Sorting people according to economic status using cards, slips or paper of local materials.
 - g) Matrix ranking: Listing opinion leaders in order of influence on a scale say highest to lowest or if women have numeracy skills on a scale from 1-10.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) There are specific functions to be performed by the SHGs. These are:
 - Effecting regular savings and credit activity within the group, which would follow explanatory sessions on the difference between consumer credit, production credit and the use of credit for socio-economic transformation in the lives of the members of the SHG.
 - Articulating the group's requirements in terms of credit and enhancement of skills required for income generation activity.
 - Facilitating easy access to credit and instituting the mechanism for its effective channelization.
 - Using group dynamics for stressing the importance of and effecting regular repayment.
 - Applying viable norms for interest rates, repayment schedules, gestation period, extension and writing off bad debts.

- Serving as platform for review of the cost-benefit of the income generation activities being undertaken.
- Undertaking any other activity including consideration of social issues impinging on the lives of women.

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

- 1) Get ready for fieldwork; select locale of work; make people aware of intentions and benefits; identify constraints and opportunities; group establishment; develop an action plan, withdrawal.

Income generating and credit activities in combination can make women self reliant.

Check Your Progress Exercise 5

- 1) Any of steps 1, 2 and 3 where PRA techniques can be particularly useful.