

HANDOUTS FOR A WORKSHOP IN PARTICIPATORY RURAL APPRAISAL (PRA) OR PARTICIPATORY LEARNING AND ACTION (PLA)

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**What is the difference between PRA and PLA?**

Very little. PRA is mainly for research. PLA is newer, and includes tools for planning, implementation and evaluation. However, the philosophy, techniques and most tools are exactly the same.

**What is development?**

Development is the process of change from state 'a' to state 'b', where state 'b' is considered better than state 'a' by the people who drive the changing

**Examples:**

- the change from poor to rich
- the change from traditional to modern
- the change from rural to urban
- the change from agricultural to industrialized
- the change from localized to globalised
- the change from polluting to clean
- the change from resource exploiting to resource conserving
- the change from religious to secular
- the change from splintered to communal

**What is sustainability?**

Sustainability is about activities that can be maintained or continued indefinitely, because the activities do not cause a reduction in, or degrade, the initial capital or resources necessary for the activities.

“To keep in existence; maintain” ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com))

**Examples:**

- Industry that does not use resources faster than the rate of renewal of those resources
- Agriculture that does not poison water, reduce the fertility of the soil, cut down trees, kill wildlife etc
- Politics and/or cultural practices that do not cause suffering, or marginalization, of portions of the population.

**What is participation?**

Participation, in its simplest definition, just means togetherness, or joining in. Participation in this context has a more specific definition than that, though, as there are many ways that people can join in, not all of them positive. Participation as a technique and goal in development (as in Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), or Participatory Learning and Action (PLA)) seeks to maximise the potential for **empowerment** that research, planning and implementation can bring to marginalised people. It does so by encouraging people to analyse their information collectively, seek consensus, manage conflicts, and own the decisions that they make.

**'Levels of Participation':**

Passive					Active
Top down	Paid labour	Veto role	Consultancy	Facilitation	Self-mobilisation
The community looks on	The community gets some paid work	The community can say 'yes' or 'no' to the decisions	The community can adjust and adapt any proposed plans to suit their own place or needs	The community makes the decisions, guided and assisted by the outsiders	The community makes all the decisions and does all the work itself
Outsiders make all the decisions, and do all the work	Outsiders make all the decisions, and control all the work	Outsiders make all the decisions but ask permission first	Outsiders make the initial plans only, which are improved by local people	Outsiders provide expert advice and process guidance when needed and asked for	Outsiders look on

Which level of participation do you think is the best?

## **What is Facilitation?**

Facilitation literally means 'making things easier' or guiding. Facilitation is concerned with the process of doing something; but the result is the responsibility of the participants. Therefore, facilitators of participatory methodology must be impartial, who guide the process only. They should broker expert advice if it is needed, instead of giving it themselves, so as to remain impartial.

## **Principles of PRA/PLA**

- Respect people, and remember that they know a lot and have ability and potential
- Always have a clear method and process
- Collect and consider many different perspectives, opinions, examples and expertise
- All activities must be relevant, so be flexible and specific: PLA can be used anywhere
- Action must follow, after research and planning
- Take personal responsibility

## **Techniques of facilitation**

These are the methods that underpin all facilitation. These techniques are used over and over again whilst running the tools (see below). Techniques include:

- chairing and leading meetings,
- dealing with difficult behaviours,
- forming small groups from the large one,
- running brainstorming sessions,
- choosing, ranking, and voting,
- working with illiteracy

## **Rules of Facilitation**

When facilitating PRA with a group of people, it is good to remember these simple but effective rules:

- Introduce yourself: your name and organization, with some explanation if necessary, and ask them to introduce themselves too (unless you know them all already)
- Explain why you are meeting with them (even if they know, it is good to repeat it and remind people what the meeting is for)
- Give clear explanations of what you want them to do. You will find that it is usually necessary to explain things more than once, even if you are all working in the same language
- Provide an example if it is necessary, but avoid this if you can – it is better to let them figure it out themselves; the results will be more 'theirs'
- Hand over the stick. This means give them the tools to do the exercise themselves. This means paper and pens, or string, or sticks and leaves, etc. Never keep hold of the tools of the exercise yourself, because then you will do the tool instead of them!
- Give them time to do the exercise, and encourage all people to join in (including old, shy, disabled etc)
- When they have finished, make sure the results of the exercise are analysed by the group. This is where people get a chance to learn new things (because the information they have recorded they would already know)
- Discuss what will happen next – when is the next meeting, what are you going to do between now and then, what are they going to do between now and then
- Thank them

## **The Facilitator's group**

I find it is best to have 3 people in the facilitator's group:

- The primary facilitator – the leader of discussions, asks questions, does most of the talking
- The second facilitator – assistant to the primary facilitator, organizes materials, deals with problem behaviour and ensures that things go smoothly; and facilitates small group discussions if necessary
- The third facilitator – the recorder or secretary: records the comments, discussions etc. Takes photos, writes on flip chart paper etc

## **Tools of PRA / PLA**

Tools are games, exercises or activities designed to increase the chances of participation, and to help get a certain output. Tools are facilitated, and the facilitator uses many techniques to help the process. Tools are very flexible, and can be adapted to suit many different scenarios.

Tools have been designed for every step of a project cycle. Here are some examples:

Research of resources and place	Community mapping Seasonal calendars Community resource use Forest transects
Research of community	Community institutions and relationships Historical time lines Community economy
Research of future	Group dreams and visions Needs analysis
Analysis of problems	Root cause analysis Problems and solutions
Planning	Management options Flow charting Action planning
Evaluation	Any tool can be adapted

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

**Monitoring** happens all the way through a process.

**Evaluation** happens at the end (of the whole thing, the activity, the day...) and so it is LOOKING BACK.

With both, you are trying to assess the success / failure of what you are trying to achieve.

Remember to evaluate both qualitatively and quantitatively.

I find it helpful to think of three groups of things to look out for:

- ✧ **outcomes** / results
- ✧ **process** of getting to the outcomes
- ✧ **emotional** response / reaction to the process, project, research by the participants (including you)