

## *Chapter 7*

# **PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES IN COMMUNITY BASED OBSERVATION (CBD) AND RESEARCHES**

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### **7.1 People's Participation in observation, analysis and planning for rural development**

#### **Why should people participate?**

There is no controversy as to whether there should be people's participation in the development programmes in the development programmes designed to meet the basic needs of the people. The post-mortem of any unsuccessful programmes has shown that they have invariably failed when they failed to provide an adequate place and importance to people's participation in the planning and analysis.

There is a body of philosophy and a set of assumptions behind people's participation in rural development. These are;

- i) It should be people's programme with government's participation;
- ii) Community needs to build up their own capacity, agents have got a catalytic role;

- iii) Self- imposed changes have got permanence as compared to those imposed from outsiders
- iv) Holistic approaches are far better than the fragmented approaches;
- v) People need certain help to solve unique problems;
- vi) Barriers that prevent active participation, inhibit personal development as well;
- vii) Given the opportunity, people can innovate solution to their problems.
- viii) Apparently most helpless community can be an active factor in helping themselves by dint of their extreme wisdom.

### **What is Participatory Rural Appraisal?**

Participatory Rural Appraisal is (PRA) is a methodology which helps in interacting with local communities, understanding them and learning from them. It helps in the process of involvement with local communities for indigenous knowledge-building exercises. It is a way of learning from and with community members to investigate, analyze and evaluate constraints and opportunities and make informed and timely decisions regarding development projects.

It involves a set of principles, a process of communication and a menu of techniques for seeking villagers' participation in putting forward their points of view about any issue and enabling them do their own analysis and offer their own contribution in different forms with a view to make use of such learning. It initiates a participatory process and sustains it. Its principles and the menu of techniques help in organizing participation.

PRA is a means of generating different kinds of data, identifying and mobilizing intended groups and evoking their participation and also opening

ways in which intended groups can participate in decision making, project design, execution, monitoring and evaluation. It provides an alternative framework for data collection and analysis. Because of its participatory nature, it is an useful methodology to focus attention on people, their livelihood and their inter-relationship with socio-economic and ecological factors.

PRA is sometimes known as Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA)/ Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA), where the emphasis is on both ‘rapid and participatory’. The emphasis on ‘rapid’ however, is more in terms of data collection and less in terms of process of development or even implementation of plans. Other names are also used for describing PRA, some of which are Participatory Rapid Rural Appraisal) and Participatory Learning Method (PALM). PRA, as Practiced in the field has given rise to different schools of PRA with difference in style and emphasis (Chambers: 1991).

## **7.2 Indigenous Criteria of Wealth and Poverty**

The villagers seemed to have a mental checklist which they were referring to for grouping of households, the checklist for determining their criteria for well-being. They identified poor households on the basis of the conditions and causes of poverty prevailing in such households. Food availability including wild food, during a year was the most significant factor for the villagers in grouping of poor households. The size of landholdings and its productivity was another important consideration for the villagers for identifying higher groups but land alone was not enough. Its productive

capacity was equally important. The number of dependent was also another consideration apart from food availability and land holdings.

On the basis of semi-structured interviews the reason for poverty and deprivation were highlighted by the villagers. Environmental degradation had accentuated the uncertainty of food availability from common property resources and increased the incidence of poverty. Common property resources lent support in several ways. For many, such resources formed the basis of their livelihood, for other it supplemented income, food and other requirements and also provided sustenance during difficult time. Environmental degradation had reduced the quality of life for the poor. It had let to increased deprivation. The poor are no longer able to fall back on the environment for food, water, work, medicine, fuel wood and clean air especially during lean periods and in years of crop failures. The degradation of pond pastures, riverbeds, decline in the number of trees and shrubs, decline in area, decline in quality of water and the erosion of forests as source of food, fodder and fuel wood had directly affected their sources of livelihood, cost of living, its standards, costs and health.

### **7.3 Comparative Analysis: Paradigms, Principles, Objectives and Evaluation**

It is important that analysis of evidence and experience concerning PRA-type enquiry and questioner survey is preceded by a discussion of the foundations of the two systems of enquiry under review. This would help in understanding and appreciating the underlying differences, if any, of the two systems in the context of their paradigmatic bases, principles,

objectives and way of evaluation. This would also constitute a base of for reviewing field experience under the two systems of enquiry.

Any enquiry whether through questionnaire survey or PRA would be guided by their respective belief systems which are known as paradigms. Each paradigm responds to three basic questions concerning the nature of reality (ontology), the nature of relationship between knower and the Known (epistemology) and the methodology involved (Guba: 1990). In this chapter **I examine the two systems of inquiry**, the questionnaire survey and the PRA Method on the basis the following criteria:

- Paradigmatic Basis
- Principles
- Objectives
- Evaluation of Data

### **Paradigmatic Basis and Positivism**

The methodologies of questionnaire survey and PRA emerge from different paradigms. The differences in their paradigmatic bases are a key to understanding the diversities in the nature of systems of inquiry and their practice. To quote Schwandt (1990),” to Study a methodology is not simply to examine the exercise of method, it is to study a way of knowing..... to explore a logic of justification or a meta framework for understanding the exercise of method, that is for examining the principles and procedures by which we formulate inquiry problems, and evaluate the correctness and profundity of those answers”.

Positivism constitutes the basic belief system of conventional inquiry in which lies the paradigmatic basis of the questionnaire –survey. The nature of reality of positivism constitutes reality which exists ‘out there’ and is driven by immutable natural laws and mechanisms. Its nature of relationship between the knower or inquirer and the known is that of an objectivist. It is both possible and essential for the inquirer to adopt an objective approach to the inquiry.

The methodology of positivism is scientific. Question and hypothesis are posed in advance in forms of propositions and are subjected to empirical testing under carefully controlled conditions. To state it in simple words, the scientific methodology is principally concerned with procedures for the development and testing of causal hypothesis. The corner stone of the methodology lie in observation, measurement experiment and theory building with statistics playing a major role in formulation and testing of hypothesis.

In social disciplines, our understanding of methodology has been generally based on the conception of scientific inquiry, the principles and procedures that govern investigations of the physical world. In line with this, our professional belief in the naturalistic interpretation of social science is also pronounced. We regard the scientific methodology as a sure and an independent way of being rational in our inquiry.

### **Paradigm Blocked and Post Positivism**

Any paradigm can block the level of inquiry in four ways:

- Absolute assertion
- The claim that certain things can never be known

- The claim that certain elements of science are basic and independent of all else
- The claim that a law or truth has found its last and perfect formulation.
- In the emerging era of post positivism, such claims positivism are being increasingly challenged in social disciplines. The methodology of natural science is being questioned and being replaced by methods drawn from humanistic disciplines. In this context, post-positivism recognizes that many imbalance of positivism have been allowed in the name of achieving realistic and objective inquiry. Some of them are as follows:
  - The imbalance between rigor and relevance, where, search for more rigor to establish internal validity make the findings less generalized. Thus the laboratory results are generalized only to another laboratory.
  - The imbalance between precision and richness which leads to over emphasis or quantitative methods and precise and accurate responses.
  - The imbalance between discovery and verification which leads to acceptability of selected results since there are not many objective ways of verifying all kind of results.
  - The imbalance between elegance and applicability where the emphasis is on the statement of formal and reductionist theories and their testing and applications. Such theories may not be appropriate

in the local context thus making elegant theories redundant and unrealistic.

### **The constructivist paradigm**

The history of science and inquiry reveals that our knowledge of both the external world and the ways and means of human interaction are always evolving (Schwandt: 1990). Hence some paradigms become old while others are relatively new and emerging. One such recent paradigm is that of constructivist paradigm. Methodologies of such paradigm aim at understanding as much as possible the following:

- Aspects of human experiences as it is lives or felt or undergone as participants in that experience
- The Context of that experience
- The naturally occurring context
- Procedures for considering the context and experience as a complex, temporal, socio-cultural and geographic whole
- The inquirer employing ordinary field work methods.

The constructivist methodologies reject the naturalistic interpretation of the social sciences and aim at inquiring and interpreting the realm of inter-subjective meanings as constituted in culture, language, signs, symbol etc. One contribution to systems of enquiry from the constructivist paradigm is the emergence of participatory inquiry whose framework of analysis is constructive rather than naturalistic.



### The paradigm of 'critical realism'

The paradigm of 'critical realism' is another devilment in the era of positivism from which participatory inquiry has routed its evaluation of findings. The nature of reality is such that the enquirer needs to be critical about findings because of human initiations regarding knowledge of reality. Critical realism recognize that findings emerge from the interaction of inquirer inquired and hence proposes a modified objectivity by relaying on 'critical tradition' which implies that report on any inquiry needs to be consistent with the existing tradition of the field and subjects every inquiry to peer group judgment in the 'critical community' which implies that report on any inquiry needs to be consistent with the existing tradition of the field and subjects every inquiry to peer group judgment in the 'critical community'. This makes it difficult for old and new paradigm to assert them.

Methodologically, 'critical realism generally looks for critical multiplicity which is elaborated triangulation. According to the paradigm of critical realism, it is essential that the 'findings' of an enquiry be based on 'triangulation' of as many sources ... of data, investigators, theories and methods, place and time ... as possible because of inherent human limitations of knowledge, limitation in detecting errors and overcoming biases.

### Participatory inquiry and post-positivism

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is based on post positivism to combine the strength of 'constructivist paradigm' and that of 'critical realism'. From the constructivist paradigm, PRA type of inquiry seeks to

understand human experience as it is lived and perceived by the participants, the context of the experience add an interdisciplinary framework for analysis of the experience. Critical realism helps PRA in evaluating such analysis and correcting for errors and biases through multiple sources, methods, locations and other ways.

All paradigms are human constructions and hence subject to biases and errors. With post positivism we recognize that any methodology is historically situated and it evolves overtime. Our methodologies for inquiry for inquiry and our standards for judging those methodologies are being continually revised by a process of mutual adjustment (Guba: 1990).

#### **7.4 The Principles governing questionnaire Survey and PRA**

The principles governing the methods are quite different. Conventional methods such as questionnaire survey primarily seek a general law which helps in explaining special event under given conditions. Based on a conceptual framework, the general law which helps in explaining a special event under given conditions. Based on a conceptual framework, the general law operates within given conditions. The framework shows the relationship amongst different variables, magnitudes of which can be measured by collecting data and testing it empirically according to such criteria as objectivity, reliability, replication and validity.

In case of a questionnaire survey we are essentially trying to know more about the universe either by deducing from a sample or by complete enumeration of the population in the universe. One is basically trying to find a general picture along certain lines which means a set of common questions are to be repeated in a questionnaire and investigations carried out

carried out on that basis whether of a household or of an individual. Given the questions, the answers are stratified and classified into different groups (common clusters of responses are identified for classifying responses into different groups) to find out the patterns underlying those responses whether across time or across individuals, households and groups. The focus of surveys is on identifying general trends and patterns.

As compared to survey method, PRA is primarily for analysis of differences in local phenomena and processes. It is based on people's perceptions for analysis of complexities and heterogeneity underlying socio-economic systems and processes. The answer to 'averages' and set of patterns can be found only when analysis of difference has been conducted.

### **The principles of PRA**

The following gives an account of the principles guiding PRA. These principles help in improving the quality of participation, ensuring depth and breadth of information generated, the process involved and also provided a mechanism for evaluation.

#### **i. Optimal ignorance**

In order to minimize cost and time, the principle of optimal ignorance is applied by investigators which mean knowing what is worth knowing and knowing enough to serve the purpose and not knowing the rest or not trying to find out more. Associated with this is seeking appropriate imprecision or avoiding precision that is not necessary (Chambers: 1993)

#### **ii. Seeking diversity**

PRA is concerned more with analysis of difference rather than looking for representativeness of results or data collected. It is looking for diverse

events, different processes and forces explaining various relationships in local communities.

**iii. Offsetting biases and triangulating**

PRA is essentially a methodology to offset biases of the questionnaire survey method. It aims offsetting such biases by being relaxed and not rushing, listening and not lecturing, probing and not speeding indifferently and looking for participation of poor and other weaker sections of local communities (Chambers:1993).

The process of triangulation is an important part of PRA. For any data generated it is essential to check the reliability and validity of the data by putting them to different tests. Triangulation is cross-checking the data in different ways. This is done through use of various methods and by using different ways to validate information. ‘Triangulation is adopted as a principle to improve trustworthiness of data. It involves conscious, non random selection in different dimensions such as (a) team composition, (b) Units of observation, (c) PRA techniques, (d) locations, (e) time and (f) sources.

**iv. Listening and learning, learning rapidly and progressively and learning through participation**

Local communities have their experiences, their history and culture, their ideas, their priorities and references. Listening to local people helps in portraying their points of view which otherwise remain unknown. The amount of learning can increase progressively with participation of those who form the subject of inquiry. In this context, the principle of openness operates where an investigator facilitates and individual’s discussion and

views, in a natural setting, so as to interact from within. PRA is also based on the principle of communication. Communication is not only an instrument to cull out expressions, giving information but also an instrument of clarification of the importance of those expressions from the speaker (Streiffeler: 1991)

The above principles contribute towards different features of PRA which promote participation and learning. Some of such features are that learning is iterative, methods are innovative and interactive and the process of PRA remains informal so as to facilitate participation.

A questionnaire survey, in principle, is looking for uniformity, identifying patterns and/or discovering general laws in an universe with regards to a sample population where the output of the survey and its validity and reliability are of major importance. Whereas, PRA is based on principles which emphasize the process of learning and analysis of difference and also to evaluate its findings. In PRA, the process of learning is as important as the output emerging from the process.

#### ***How Errors can Arise?***

Errors can be of two kinds (i) Bias (which includes misunderstanding, misreading, lying, inventing answers, differential/prudent replies and others similar kind) is a systematic error and (ii) noise is a kind of error which is unsystematic and random.

Errors in data collection can be present in the form of bias which can have different sources. Bias in some form and for some reason is present in most data sets and there are several sources through which it can arise. It is a systematic error having an identifiable pattern and can be minimized in

different ways. For factual questions it is possible to check the respondent's answer against a reliable record. For questions about subjective phenomena such as opinions, feelings or perceptions there are not many direct ways to access the accuracy of answers.

The sources of error giving rise to bias are:

- i. Expectations of the researcher;
- ii. Such expectation as communicated to people e.g. wording of a question or even the position of questions can affect answers;
- iii. Age, profession, sex religion, race, language, dress etc. of researcher;
- iv. Behaviour of people and their characteristics;
- v. Research plan design;
- vi. Selection of area, place, time and people e.g. setting of an interview:  
and
- vii. One event selected from a set of events whose results might change if other events are chosen.

As regards biases (i). and, (ii). Clues given by a researcher can be such so as to have results in line with the expectations of the researcher. This can lead to creation of bias thus defeating the very objective of an investigation. One way in which a questionnaire survey can take care of this bias is to keep both people and investigators uninformed about the purpose of the study so that biases from both sides do not affect the study. However, it may happen that the efficiency of the investigator falls in cases in which the investigator remains uninformed about such purpose. In case of PRA, since people's participation play an important role, participation of people

and their analysis can guard against the expectations play an important role, participation of people and their analysis can guard against the expectations of the researchers. Or alternatively, the researcher is supposed to learn from the people's knowledge and views and is not expected to go with a pre-set mind and foregone conclusions.

Biases such as of category (iii) can originate through age, profession, sex and race of a researcher which can affect the respondent's answers. In case of a health survey directed towards ascertaining the percentage of women suffering from communicable diseases, respondents can either avoid male respondents or be reluctant to answer questions or give misleading answers. In case of bias arising through the profession of the researcher, it may be observed that each profession tends to carry its own bias and professional outlook of professional dependents on their training and experience. For instance, economists tend to see the economic aspects of rural problems while engineers are more concerned with the engineering aspects of a problem. It is difficult to find people who naturally have total perspective of a problem at hand.

In PRA exercise, the different sources of bias through age, sex and race can be balanced by altering composition of team members and mixing people of different age, sex and race. Hence, there exists considerable scope to take care of such a bias.

Bias arising through behaviour of people is indicated in category (iv) above. Those people sensitive to the expectations of a researcher can knowingly guess them, e.g. through leading questions and ceases to be their normal selves and move the analysis in line with the researcher's

expectations. The framing of questions can be such that they are not neutral and the people are able to guess the expectations. The framing of questions can be such that they are not neutral and the people are able to guess the expectations of the researcher. For a PRA type of exercise, one way to eliminate such a bias is but not asking leading and closed questions.

### **7.5 Criteria for Trustworthiness of Data**

The question is what data to accept and what to reject; how to reduce errors and to increase the trustworthiness of data. For this purpose, there can be two kinds of criteria which can be applied- the internal criteria and the external criteria. In simple term, the external criteria consist of all that the data has to say and to compare it with what is already known about the areas to which the data relates. The internal criterion, on the other hand, is concerned about the accuracy of the process and method used for collection of data. Both criteria are important for the evaluation of the data collected (Katzer, Cook and Crouch: 1982).

As far as the external criteria are concerned, not many methodologies have provision within them for a comparative evaluation of data already available on the subject. Much depends on the aptitude of the researcher to evaluate the data on the basis of studies available in that area. However, as far as PRA is concerned, secondary data review forms an important method through which background material is provided for a PRA exercise. It is considered as one of the techniques to help in better understanding of the subject concerned.

With regard to internal criteria, in the conventional approach, one can estimate an average error term and examine the deviations of the actual



observations from the average of the expected observation. Greater the deviations greater are the imperfections in the data for such deviations do not help in forming near relationship amongst variables so as to explain a particular phenomenon. The parameters of the equation explaining the relationship would have low acceptability in standard statistical terms and low explanatory power to explain that relationship.

***What is Triangulation?***

Team composition is generally interdisciplinary and can be constituted in such a manner so as to have the information generated from different perspectives. Teams can have persons from different disciplines, sex, culture and experience so that data emerging from PRA can be discussed within a team and with local people by a team to clarify issues and select issues for further probing. The unit of observation can be changed in order to cross check the information gained one also has the option of going for deeper probing if necessary. Different groups can be approached separately or in combination so as to arrive at views from different angles. Other sources of information such as secondary data sources can also be used to examine trustworthiness of PRA data. Different PRA methods can be used to test and verify a piece of information. For example, semi-structured interviews can be supplemented by farm maps, livelihood analysis and flow charts so as to check and cross-check the information obtained. For approaching any topic the methodological design should be such that the method fits well with the problem under consideration. When it is a study of features, trends, characteristics and conditions surrounding people, quantitative method such as survey can be of considerable use.

However PRA techniques which are exploratory and analytical prove to be useful when data required to be collected related to conditions which are ever changing and never stationary and are causal process involved in such conditions are dynamic.

### **Other criteria suggested**

It is often said that participatory methods constitute inquiry which is undisciplined and sloppy and involve only subjective observations and are not amendable to rigor and accuracy. It is often pointed out that if information is changeable, locally valid, and value-laden; then how much of trust worthiness can the information have? There are a set of four questions which users of participatory methods attempt to answer in order to show the trustworthiness of their findings. These questions are related to the following:

- Confidence about the ‘truth’ of the findings;
- Applying these findings to other contexts and people;
- Replication of these findings in similar situations; and
- Certainty about the findings being determined by the subjects of inquiry rather than the biases, motivations and perspectives of the investigators.

Pretty (1993) is of the view that alternative criteria are required are required to establish trustworthiness in participatory inquiry these relate to credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. For example, application of participatory inquiry without triangulation of sources, techniques and investigators and participant checking of outputs will be

considered as untrustworthy. The criteria listed in Pretty's (1993) paper are described below.

A framework for judging trustworthiness of data and findings can be worked out in the following ways:

- Prolonged and/or Intense Engagement Between the Various Actors in order to build trust and rapport
- Persistent and Parallel Observation for understanding a phenomenon and its context
- Triangulation applied so as to cross-check information and increase the range of different people's realities- multiple sources, methods, locations, times and investigators
- Analysis and Expression of Difference so that a wide range of different actors are involved in the analysis and their perspective and realities are represented as accurately as possible
- Negative Case analysis- revising hypothesis until one hypothesis accounts for all known cases without exception
- Peer Checking involves periodical meeting with peers not directly involved in the inquiry process
- Participant Checking to test data, interpretations and conclusions with people with whom the original information was constructed
- Reports with working Hypothesis, Contextual Descriptions and visualizations- The participatory inquiry team sets out working hypothesis. Contextual Descriptions and Visualizations- the participatory inquiry team sets out working hypotheses with detailed description of the context in which they were formulated.

- Parallel investigations and Team Communications with the same system of inquiry coming up with the same or similar findings
- Reflexive Journals- these are diaries kept by individuals on a daily basis to record a variety of information about themselves so as to help remember immediate reasons for methodological decisions and interpretations
- Inquiry Audit conducted to establish the fairness of the representations by examining the process of inquiry and the end product
- Impact of Stakeholders’ Capacity to know and act so that not only should the inquiry lead to action but the rear report should prompt action on the part of the readers not directly involved.

Pretty’s criteria given above are to some extent overlapping and it is possible to group them broadly into internal and external criteria as given in the following Table.

**Table**

Constituents	Evaluation	Criteria for trustworthiness
<i>Process</i>		<i>Internal criteria</i>
The subject of inquiry From Inside	<i>Process/Methods</i>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Better rapport</li> <li>2. Revising Hypothesis</li> <li>3. Analysis of difference</li> <li>6. Observation for understanding of context</li> <li>7. Triangulation</li> </ol> </div>
		<i>Extern</i>
The subject of inquiry from Outside	<i>Output, Process, Methods</i>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Participant checking</li> <li>7. Peer-group checking</li> <li>8. Parallel investigation</li> <li>9. Inquiry audit</li> <li>10. Subsequent action</li> </ol> </div>

Pretty's criteria, as given above, relate to process, understanding of the context, objectivity of output, multiple methods, revising learning process, recording, parallel investigations, inquiry audit and the like. All these help in reducing errors in the inquiry process.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Conventional tests are looking at an average or 'normal' picture and any deviations from the average would either be smoothen out by further averaging or by dropping observations which are considered to be abnormal or exceptional and have major deviations from the average or expected observation. In conventional tests, while estimating parameters for causal relationship, we can apply two standard criteria, the 't' test for judging the significance of the parameters and the 'R-Square' and 'R-bar-Square' tests for judging the explanatory power of the equation with the value of 'R-Square' between '0' and '1' which when close '1' has better explanatory power. The greater are the chances of the average, the greater are the chances of the average relationship being rejected both by two standard criteria mentioned above.

Many aspects of any society's behavior can be quantified whereas other can be expressed mainly in quantitative terms. For instance, while assessing the public distribution system so as to enable the vulnerable section of society to have access to food, the general yardstick used in data indicating off take of food grains from ration shops which are retail outlets of the system. This data, does not however, capture the quality of food-grains distributed, the level of satisfaction on the poor or nutritional level of the poor. If we use qualitative method it may be widely found that the quality of

food-grains supplied is not of acceptable standard such as damped wheat or broken rice or does not have the required nutritional value.

In PRA, each view is important. However, it does not obstruct the analysis in terms of an average picture. One can always look for average relationship for specific purposes. The essence is that search for an average should not tend to suppress the other relationship which may be equally important in understanding the whole gamut of relationship existing in a system. Hence, one should be aware of the missing relationship and links in the system so as to have a total understanding of the system.

**Summary:**

In this chapter, the two systems of inquiry, questionnaire survey and PRA have been defined, illustrated and compared in terms of their paradigmatic bases, principles, objectives and ways of evaluation data. One major conclusion from this chapter is that the two systems of inquiry are based on two strikingly different 'world views' which determine their paradigms, principles and trustworthiness of their respective output. The belief system underlying questionnaire survey is that there are universal laws operating in nature which are present in samples and are to be identified and the data validated on that basis. However, in our search for an average picture or relationship we should not tend to suppress the other relationships which may be equally important in understanding the whole gamut of relationship existing in a system. It is important to appreciate such relationships from the perception of those who experience them and are an integral part of the system. In this context, we should be aware of the missing relationships and links in the system so as to attempt a total

understanding of the system from different points of view. It is here that PRA being contextual and exploratory by nature evokes people's perceptions and criteria and encourages multiplicity and diversity of views leading to people's action.

Every field inquiry has of certain elements to follow, in participatory inquiry process basically being a psychological process, has been tuned to the following operating components.

The elements for field inquiry:

- Its significance
- Its nature and scope
- Its purpose
- Kinds of queries and probing
- Form/ forms of output
- For whom is he output?
- Designing a plan for inquiry
- Time required
- Assessing training needs
- Methods/ techniques used
- Process in field inquiry
- Cross checking of data & process
- Techniques of cross checking
- Utility of output
- Management/organization of data

### **Theme**

To begin with any inquiry process it is important that the theme is stated and clarified whether by researchers, local community or both.

- Description of the issue/ problem/theme of the field inquiry; in a participatory mode, such description if provided by local people would be more participatory, realistic and of direct relevance to the project.

### **Significance**

Once a theme is stated, its significance also needs to be described whether by researchers or the local community involved. Much depends on whether the theme is significant at the national level or is locally significant.

- Description of the significance of the issue/problem/theme; such significance if described by local people would reflect their perceptions and views and initiate local perception from the very start. Or alternatively, to initiate a participatory-type of inquiry, the local people would need to be motivated on a theme which is not of much relevance to them.

### **Nature and scope of inquiry**

- The issue and its significance would determine the nature of inquiry whether exploratory, topical, evaluative or of other kind. In PRA, the nature of inquiry can also be suggested by local people and led and conducted by them if the purpose of the field inquiry is properly clarified to them.



- For kind of output required- is it statistical representation with high degree of accuracy? Is it levels or process of change or both?/ what is the unit of analysis-individuals, households, communities? And what kind of community involvement is expected in data collection and analysis.

**Purpose**

- On the basis of any issue and its significance as suggested by researchers/local people, the purpose of inquiry can be described by the research organization / local people, or jointly by both and its objective(s) formulated. If the objectives of the organization for the project are already existing they can be revised in the light of local people's wisdom to the extent possible.

**Kind of Queries and Probing**

- Description of the questions to be asked, the output required and the user-groups can be determined by researchers / local people or jointly in collaboration with the organization / researchers involved.

**Forms of output**

The different stages of field inquiry involved can evoke contributions of local groups and of outside organization. The kind of output may or may not be pre-determined by researchers/ local community in terms of descriptive statistics/analytical data. It can be quantitative/qualitative or a combination of both depending on the needs of the organization and the preferences and capabilities of the local people.

**For whom is the output?**

Description of the form in which the output/data is to be organized and accessed or the management information system required by the local people/local institutions/researchers or by others. For this the relevant questions are, is the output to be taken away from the local community and processed further or is to be retained at the local level for initiating further action or is it a combination of both?

**Time/ Manpower/Fund Required**

Description of the time required/available, manpower required/available and fund required/ available for the inquiry and the contributions which local community and outside researchers can made, if necessary.

**Designing a pan for inquiry**

Definition of the area of coverage/complete enumeration/sampling frame the size of the area and the sampling procedure to be followed whether probabilistic sampling or non-probabilistic sampling. In PRA type inquiry, non-probabilistic sampling for identifying sampling units like regions, districts, blocks, villages and focus groups may be more effective to take care of the differences existing between the sampling units.

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