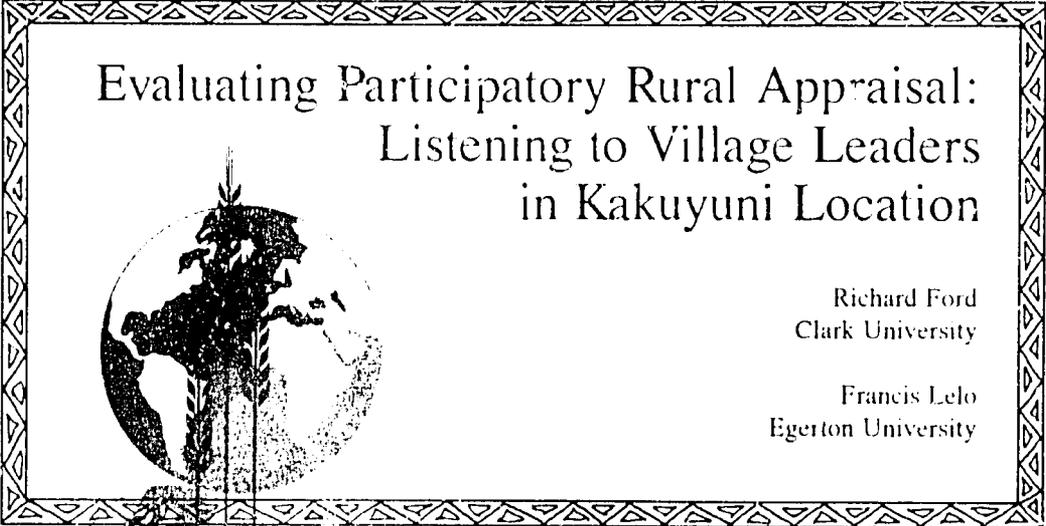


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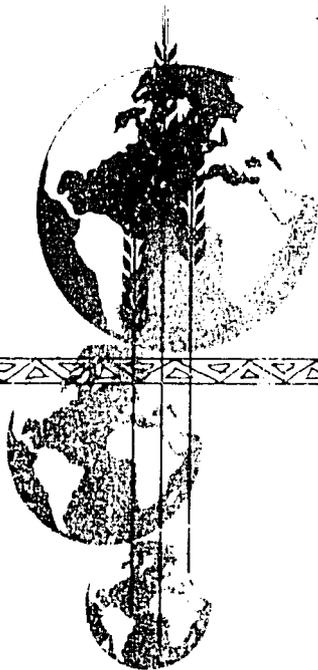
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Evaluating Participatory Rural Appraisal:
Listening to Village Leaders
in Kakuyuni Location

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Clark University's Program for International Development (ID), in cooperation with organizations in Africa, is carrying out field research to develop new approaches to implement sustainable development. The *Forest, Trees and People NEWSLETTER*, published quarterly, is devoted to issues of sustainable production. The June, 1991 issue included an article about Participatory Rural Appraisal which Clark, Kenya's National Environment Secretariat, Egerton University and several NGOs have developed.

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Evaluating participatory rural appraisal:

Listening to village leaders in Kakuyuni Location

By Richard Ford & Francis Lelo

For some years **Kenya's National Environment Secretariat (NES)** of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources and **Clark University's Program for International Development** have, in collaboration with **Egerton University**, been working with Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRA). As a refinement of RRA methodology, they are attempting to develop an approach that would deal specifically with problems of resource management in marginal areas.

In June 1990 a three day workshop was convened in Kakuyuni Location, Kangundo Division, Machakos District, to carry out an "in the field" evaluation of this approach. It was attended by community leaders (both those who had taken part in the work and those who were interested in learning more about it), technical extension officers and staff members of NGOs. The discussions centred around the experiences of two years of PRA activity in Kakuyuni. The main conclusions from this workshop are presented here. The strengths and weaknesses of PRA are outlined and the future areas of work to improve this approach are presented.

What is PRA?

PRA is a field based methodology that mobilizes communities. It enables multi-sector teams to join with village leaders to gather data, rank village needs and priorities, and on the basis of this draw up a village resource management plan. The plan becomes the basis for action in the community and enables local institutions, government agents, and NGOs to cooperate. PRA draws upon knowledge and skills already known in the village; it creates a setting in which local residents exchange information both with one another and with the local officers; it provides a structure for local aspirations and goals to be expressed and implemented; it yields a ranked list of village project activities that funding agencies can support, and it puts in place a plan that village leaders and institutions can implement and sustain.

The following aspects are central to the PRA approach.

Focuses on rural communities:

PRA assumes that rural communities are Africa's primary building blocks to reverse natural resources degradation and to increase food production;

Offers alternatives for marginal areas:

PRA argues that macro development strategies such as structural adjustment or production of high value crops serve a portion of Africa's development constituency. However, macro strategies almost inevitably bypass the rural poor, especially those in ecologically marginal areas where the ecosystem is difficult to manage, population is growing rapidly, households are often ▶

headed by women, and food production has been on the general decline in recent years;

Systematizes rural participation:

PRA is rooted in the conviction that participation is an essential element in sustainable development. PRA provides a structure which brings together residents and leaders from the community, technical officers assigned to the area, and NGOs. By bridging the gap between intended beneficiaries and those who manage development resources practices are introduced that village institutions can maintain;

Uses visual materials and group discussions:

PRA uses visual data gathering instruments and relies heavily on charts and graphs for data presentation. These visual materials help local leaders to discuss issues with the PRA team and solicit participation in

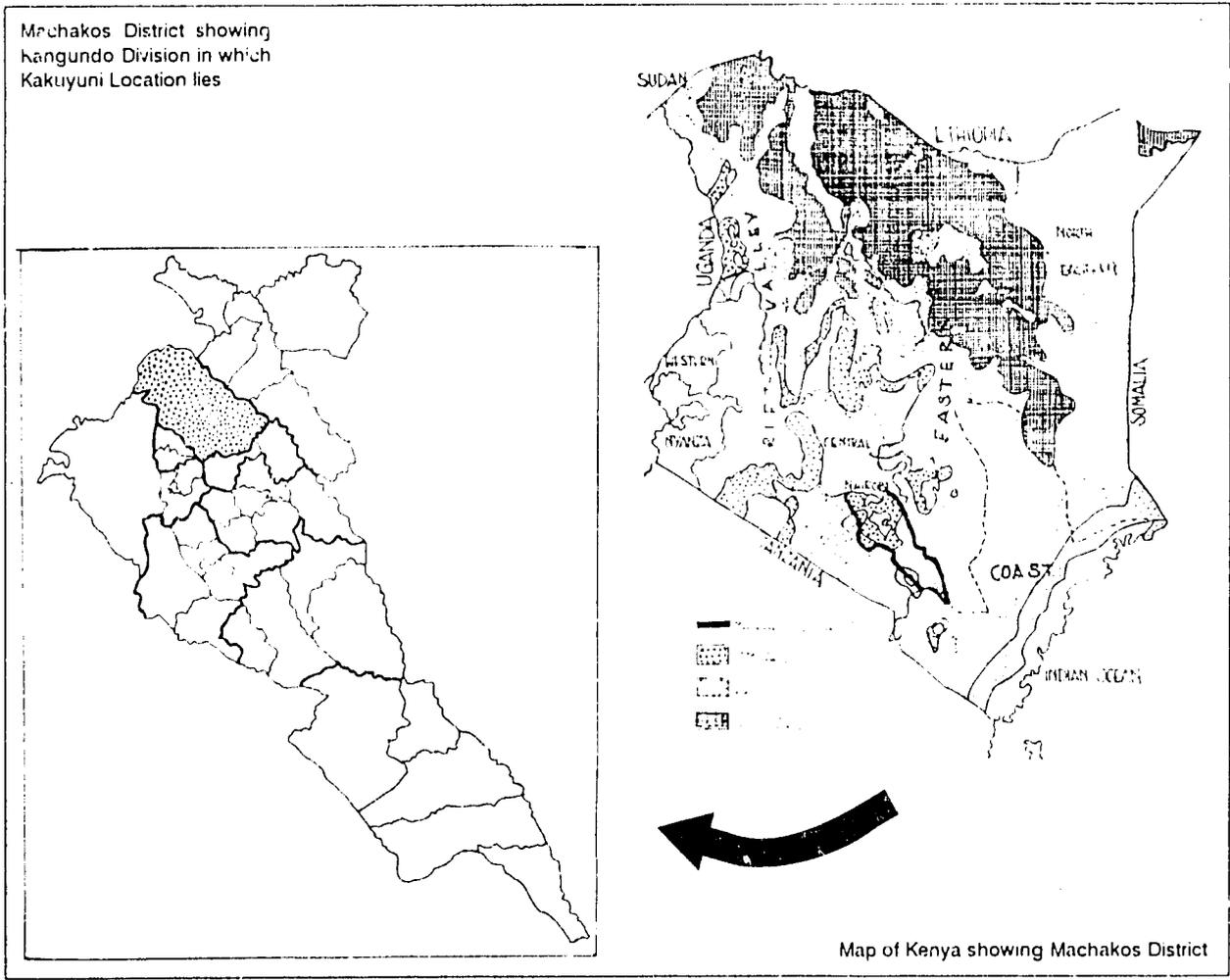
ranking problems and setting solutions. It also makes the data usable by the community institutions so they feel they "own" it;

Helps rural communities to set resource management plans:

PRA sponsors community meetings jointly with technical extension officers to draw up a Village Resource Management Plan. The plan indicates what is to be done, who will do it, how materials will be organized, and who will manage the implementation;

Integrates sectors and organizations:

PRA uses the theme of natural resources management to integrate development sectors including water, livestock, health, wildlife, agriculture, forestry, and community development. This integration is defined by the community and can therefore serve their needs.



Sounds good but how well did it work?

Kakuyuni Location is not a prosperous farming area. It is dry with sandy to rocky soils and has suffered in recent years from soil erosion, drought, deforestation, unreliable crop yields, and a declining water table.

The PRA that was carried out there had eight clearly defined steps including site selection, preliminary visit, data collection, synthesis and analysis, problem and opportunity identification, ranking opportunities and preparing a Village Resource Management Plan (VRMP), adoption and implementation of the VRMP, and follow up, evaluation, and dissemination of findings. The methodology is clearly outlined in the handbook mentioned in the note at the end of this article.

An illustration of the PRA in Mbusyani (a community in Kakuyuni) provides an example of how PRA can activate local institutions. Mbusyani's PRA began in July, 1988 and led to a community plan which included rehabilitation of two dams and catchment areas, installation of a well, soil erosion control on several slopes, and eventually water development at several smaller sites.

The accomplishments

Since the adoption of the plan in September, 1988, Mbusyani has implemented several of the PRA-identified projects.

Community institutions have dug and installed a well that serves 100 households, with labour supplied by community groups and materials from the Ministry of Water Development.

Women's groups have rehabilitated a reservoir previously infested with bilharzia, infecting those who used the water. The rehabilitation program has had several steps including construction of a fence, digging cut off drains and bench terraces to reduce siltation from the catchment area, and planting trees and grasses above and on the bench terraces to hold the soil in place and retard water runoff. Perhaps most significant, Mbusyani residents have prohibited access of all livestock to the reservoir through installation of a barbed wire fence. For the fence construction, the community provided the labour

and an indigenous NGO, Kenya Water for Health Organization (KWAHO), contributed fence posts and wire.

Women's groups have also brought a steep and severely gullied hillslope under control, thereby greatly reducing siltation in a small river and reclaiming the hillslope for productive use. Women's groups dug bench terraces and cut off drains. The Ministry of Agriculture and a private donor supplied hand tools and technical advice, especially in laying out the patterns for the terracing and in planting the newly terraced slopes with durable plants, such as sisal, to hold the exposed soils in place.

Leaders in Mbusyani joined with a staff member from KWAHO and wrote a successful proposal for funds to hire tractors to desilt the newly protected dam and to rehabilitate a second reservoir. Implementation is just beginning and involves close cooperation among the Ministry of Water Development, KWAHO, and institutions in Mbusyani.

As an additional PRA project, Mbusyani women's groups raised money for a maize grinding mill. The fund raising included both local contributions from community residents as well as funds raised through proposals to donor organizations. As of July, 1990 (20 months after the PRA), the mill was working with two thirds of the cost raised by the community and one third as a loan from the supplier, with repayment provided through monthly proceeds from the mill.

The Workshop for Local Leaders, which was held in June last year, offered an opportunity to consider the PRA experience as a general approach to rural resources management as well as to consider immediate accomplishments. The participants included: 7 Chiefs and Assistant Chiefs; 14 women's group leaders; 8 village elders and male local leaders; 9 school headmasters; 20 government technical extension officers; 9 representatives from KANU, Kenya's national political party; 3 church leaders; 2 from NGOs; 6 from N.E.S./Egerton Clark.

The workshop agenda included general discussion about village-based development, specific descriptions of the PRA methodology, a one day field visit to all of the community projects in the two sublocations, and an intensive discussion on what the community leaders thought about PRA. ►

Key issues and principal findings: What were the strengths and the weaknesses?

Key issues for the workshop centred on whether and how community participation can be systematized and structured to achieve sustainable management of natural resources. PRA reinforces and expands on Kenya's District Focus for Rural Development which aims to involve the people in all stages of project planning and

implementation. PRA places formal initiative in the hands of the ultimate beneficiaries in ways that provide a sense of community ownership for the activities.

Discussions over the workshop's three days were vigorous and productive. There were never fewer than eighty people present so it was clear that the topics were of high priority to the village leaders assembled. Important comments focused on both the strengths and the weaknesses of the process. These are summarized in the boxes below.

PRA Strengths

community forum: PRA provided an arena for the community to discuss its needs in a broadly based forum and strengthened dialogue among the community, government technical officers, NGOs, and other interested parties;

local solutions: the process brought leaders of the communities together to find locally sustainable solutions to the communities' needs;

adequate data: PRA generated sufficient data for the community to rank problems and consider solutions, integrated with technical and economic considerations from government officers and NGOs;

systematized participation: PRA provided a structure that made it possible for individuals to identify how they could participate. It also served as a catalyst for local and external elements to introduce positive change;

accelerated changes already in motion: PRA mobilized the community, accelerated forces already underway, and persuaded technical officers, NGOs, and donor agencies that their communities would be good investments of time and development energies;

built self confidence: PRA enabled villagers to achieve significant accomplishments in project activity, in Mbusyani's case, in soil, water, and income initiatives;

stimulated self-reliance: the process created a sense of accomplishment as well as awareness that communities need not wait for governments or donors to come before starting to solve community problems.

PRA Weaknesses

strong rural institutions required: Where rural institutions are not already strong or not clearly defined, PRA has had difficulty mobilizing community groups. Weak institutions may result in conflicts among leaders;

training in management skills needed: Greater attention is needed to nurture and train local leaders to organize community institutions to manage the PRA process from data collection to implementation;

self interest can still predominate: PRA does not eliminate selfishness and attempts at personal gain within a community;

enthusiasm eventually wanes: While PRA creates initial enthusiasm, after 18 to 24 months, some of the interest falls off. Ways to maintain or rekindle the spirit of community self-help need to be found;

more precision in village plans needed: The PRA plans need more precision in assigning responsibilities for who will do the work and who will be responsible for finding external inputs such as building materials, etc .

dependency is sometimes a problem: If not managed carefully, PRA can perpetuate rural dependency on external funds and outside agents;

more guidance and support for the implementation stage is required: Carrying out the plan is as important as creating it. Greater attention is needed to help village leaders understand how to implement, how to call on resources that are potentially available to them, and how to keep community groups focussed on the tasks at hand.

Lessons learned: How can we do it better?

In terms of what has been learned from the PRA experience, the main conclusions from the workshop discussions concerned the implementation stage of the the VRMP. Village leaders agreed that PRAs had done well in supporting the process of drawing up a plan that the community endorsed and that residents were prepared to implement. The PRA had been less precise in stating who and how the implementation would be achieved. While both communities had accomplished much of what the plans had identified, the actual management of the plan was not clearly specified.

To correct this uncertainty, village leaders made a number of concrete suggestions.

First, they recommended that the PRA team pay more attention to orientation sessions for village institutions before beginning the PRA exercise. While a short booklet has been prepared for leaders, this seemed to be insufficient for rank and file participants.

Second, leaders noted that better definitions were required of what constitutes external in the Village Resource Management Plans. In preparing plans, village groups agreed that some resources could be found from within the community (eg sand or gravel) and others

would have to be raised externally (eg hand tools or cement). Previously, some local groups interpreted "external" to mean things that an outside agent (eg the water engineer) had promised to provide. This was not the intention of PRA. It is important to identify who or what institution within the community will find external resources in order that they learn about the nature and means by which external assistance can be obtained by the community.

Third, community leaders recommended more specific help to learn how to find external resources. Kenya abounds with government, non-government, and international agencies with resources available to help rural communities. Local leaders, however, frequently lack means and ability to contact these organizations. Further, community leaders often lack the skills of taking data from PRA assessments and using them to formulate short and pithy proposals. Options are available. Most rural communities have teachers or retired civil servants who can help organize information for external organizations. But they too need special assistance. Community leaders noted that such help would make implementation of PRAs more effective.

Fourth, just as the role of "external assistance" needs to be spelled out more precisely, so do assignments for individual groups in the community need to be specified. Because there are many different community ▶



The women provided the labour, the Ministry of Agriculture the shovels for digging bench terraces. What did the village men provide?

Photo: Richard Ford

institutions, both formal and informal, it is important that responsibilities are clearly defined. Who will provide materials, raise money, carry out manual labour, write up agreements, etc.?

Fifth, where trained personnel are lacking or where people are only partially skilled in tasks (for example as stone masons) attention should focus on training goals, and these should be stated clearly in the village action plan. In some cases the training may be provided by skilled members of the community. In other cases, the training may need to come through outside individuals or agencies.

Sixth, PRA needs to pay more attention to sustaining enthusiasm two and three years after the initial PRA. While all indicated that initial enthusiasm was high as a result of PRA, people noted that after some months, energy sagged. PRA has not yet dealt with the question of long term (five to ten years) mobilization of a community and needs to do so.

Finally, while the question of "external" financial and material support cannot be totally overruled, a situation which creates aid dependency should be avoided. PRAs must be presented to communities in the right way; not as a methodology that brings outside development "goodies" but rather as an approach which enables communities to define their own needs and to identify the appropriate resources to implement their plans.

Next steps in understanding rural resources management: Where do we go from here?

The evaluation workshop revealed that PRA has been both a substantial success but also a methodology in need of continual refinement. Organizers of the workshop felt moved that the village-based approach had achieved significant results. But at least five areas were set aside as requiring additional attention in conducting future PRAs:

Regional view: a focus beyond the village

PRAs function effectively within individual communities. Yet communities do not exist in isolation of the larger economic, social and political environment of their district, province, and nation. Future work is required

to consider how PRA can scale up to enable local groups to participate in and contribute to setting goals and allocating development resources in the larger regional grid of development policy and planning. Government administrative officers at division and district levels need to learn about what PRA can accomplish and how they can adopt regional-based policies to support PRA's work. Achievements of village based development will be limited and will suffer from lapses in continuity if participation in decision-making does not extend to the same governance units which government administrative bodies employ for allocating development resources.

Continuity: success as an agent to support enthusiasm

Continuity relates to satisfaction. That enthusiasm wanes is inevitable. Yet in at least one PRA alumni community, local leaders have been able to initiate new projects on their own, in part from the skills learned during the PRA, in part through the lines of communication that PRA opened within the community, and in part through the satisfaction that groups have achieved through the effective locally-based implementation of several small PRA projects. Continuity seems to be a factor of locally based achievement. The degree to which PRA can focus attention on effective implementation and achievement in addition to its current focus on how to plan may be the difference between PRA fostering short term enthusiasm as opposed to long term sustainability.

Less empowered perspective: reaching under-represented groups

PRA has done well to draw out data, knowledge, skills, and attitudes from community leaders and institutions that have been overlooked for decades in development planning and implementation. Yet many rural communities bring stratification to PRA that inhibits some groups and interests from full involvement in data gathering, planning, and decision making for village management plans. The case of women's under-representation has been present at the beginning of virtually every PRA. It has taken explicit action and clearly focussed strategies to draw out women's participation and to incorporate priorities of women's groups into the village action plans. To varying degrees, issues of class, ethnicity, political access, and wealth have also been present. Specific techniques for drawing out under-represented groups exist for PRA. One promising approach is gender analysis that allows for improved

representation of women in village decision making. There is need to focus more explicit attention in PRA analysis on under-represented elements of rural society and how inclusion of these groups will insure even greater sustainability than has now been achieved.

Traditional knowledge

Centralized planning and development initiatives have often stifled traditional knowledge and skills in natural resources management. PRA has made some progress in understanding the role of traditional knowledge but needs to be more systematic and go into much greater depth in documenting and using such knowledge in effective implementation of village plans.

Beyond PRA: an explicit focus on rural institutions

True sustainability, therefore, enables communities to maintain energy, activity, sources of external assistance, and continued productivity of resources based on leadership and initiatives from within the community. While PRA has opened up new ways to help local leaders and community institutions to help themselves, much more needs to be known and understood about the dynamics of rural institutions and ways in which these groups interact with national and region-wide institutions including economic units, political governmental bodies, NGOs, and voluntary associations such as church groups. If PRA holds promise for long term sustainability, the very institutions that will do the sustaining need nurture, support, training, and cultivation. Existing approaches to development have barely considered roles of such institutions. PRA has identified the potentials; research, training, and field applications are required to realize the result. □

Note

Additional information on PRA can be found in two recent publications:

PRA Handbook. Written by Charity Kabutha, Barbara Thomas-Slayter and Richard Ford, published by the World Resources Institute, Egerton University, Kenya's National Environment Secretariat, and Clark University. The Handbook has become one of the primary guidebooks for PRA. Copies are available at \$10.00 each from the World Resources Institute, 1709 New York Ave NW, Washington, D.C. 20006, USA.

Introduction to PRA for Rural Resources Management. Written by Barbara Thomas-Slayter, Wanjiku Mwangi and Richard Ford, this Introduction is very short and heavily visual. It is designed for use primarily among community leaders to provide an orientation of what PRA does and what is expected of cooperating communities. It has been translated into Spanish and Kiswahili and could easily be translated into other languages for use with community groups. The English version is available at \$5.00 each from Program for International Development, Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts 01610, USA.

Other reports that discuss this experience include:

Barbara P. Thomas-Slayter, "Implementing Effective Local Management of Natural Resources: How Much Can NGOs Accomplish?" paper presented at the African Studies Association meeting, November, 1989.

Charity Kabutha and Richard Ford, "Using PRA to Formulate a Village Resources Management Plan, Mbuysyani, Kenya" in PRA Notes, Volume 2, October, 1988.

The authors would be happy to hear from our readers. If you have comments on the ideas presented in their article or experiences you would like to share with them you can contact them at the following addresses:

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Those who wish additional information:

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