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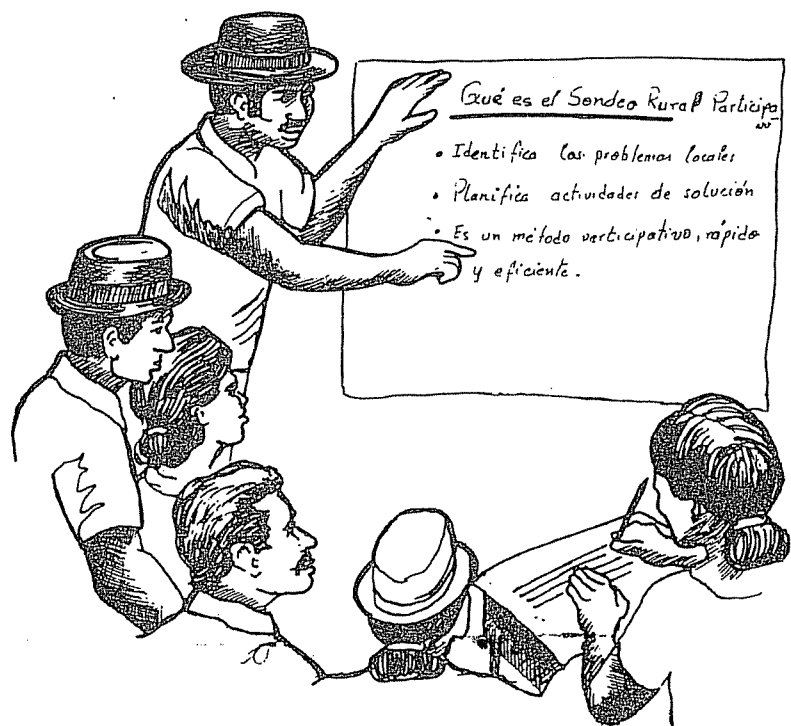
## What is Participatory Rural Appraisal and Planning?

Participatory Rural Appraisal and Planning (PRAP) is a methodology which helps to identify community problems and to plan solutions with the active participation of community members. More specifically, PRAP allows for the rapid and systematic:

- Description and analysis of the community and its context,
- Identification of problems and potential solutions, and
- Project design and programming of activities for project implementation.

First, the characteristics and conditions of a community are analyzed by its members. Then, problems and possible solutions are identified.

This methodology facilitates the identification, preparation and design of community projects based on the reality and criteria of the inhabitants themselves. This promotes and supports self-reliance and sustainable development.



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## Advantages of PRAP

### Community mobilization

PRAP is carried out *in* communities, under the responsibility of its members, and with their active participation.

An advantage of PRAP is its capacity to mobilize communities to solve their own problems. PRAP raises the consciousness of local people regarding their reality, and what can be done to transform it.

### Use of visual techniques

Rural communities participate more effectively when they use visual techniques for gathering, analyzing, and presenting information. PRAP uses a variety of visual tools -diagrams, maps, matrices and other graphics- which local people design, interpret, comment on, adapt, and make corrections to during the PRAP exercise.

### Participatory community analysis, identifying problems and potential solutions

Through group discussion and the use of visual materials, PRAP promotes the active and sustained participation of community members in the description and analysis of their community, including the identification of its problems and solutions.

### Promotes grass-roots development

PRAP allows community members to search for solutions in accordance with local criteria and priorities in areas such as technical and social feasibility, sustainability, cost, and the role of participants.

### Strengthens collaboration between the community and external institutions

The PRAP process provides a space in which community members and development workers can get to know each other better. The objectives and roles of an external institution are made clearer to local people, allowing for higher levels of trust and understanding in joint activities.

### Allows for the formulation of realistic proposals

The results of PRAP allow communities, farmer organizations and NGOs to prepare realistic project proposals which can be presented to donors for financing.



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**Promotes integration**

- PRAP encourages the participation of diverse groups, especially women, children, and the elderly.
- It integrates different themes, such as history, geography, social aspects, economy, production, etc.

**Speed and low cost**

Once the initial contacts have been made and the community is willing and ready to work, PRAP can be done quickly. Three days of fieldwork are usually sufficient.

Moreover, the methodology does not require significant resources on the part of development agencies or farmer organizations. The existing technical staff themselves, or farmer promoters, can facilitate the PRAP process. The materials used are low cost and easy to obtain.

**Development workers  
'wake up' to a new reality**

PRAP allows development workers to systematically learn "first-hand", in a short period of time, the general situation of a community. This reduces the possibility of designing "desk-based" projects with little real knowledge of the situation at the community level.

The participation of technical staff in PRAPs reduces the possibility of imposing unworkable projects. It provides a space in which community members can explain to "outsiders" what they perceive to be the true problems of their community and how these problems might be resolved.

**The community has control  
over project definition**

The methodology allows for the active participation of different sectors of the community in the identification of priority projects.

**It is based on  
first hand information**

Given that PRAP is carried out *in* and *with* the community itself, it is based on first-hand information of the local reality, which includes local knowledge, world views, cultural values and needs.

**Encourages a systematization  
process**

The knowledge generated in PRAP comes from the collective memory and oral tradition of the community. "Brought to the surface" and collectively systematized, this knowledge recovers and reconstructs the history of the community for its own benefit.

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## Limitations in the application of PRAP

- False expectations can be raised in the community, especially regarding financial support. Community members generally think that "after PRAP comes the money".
- PRAP does not offer "miracle solutions". The fact of identifying problems and solutions does not necessarily guarantee actions or results.
- Some of the information obtained can be superficial, false or exaggerated.
- The relative speed of the PRAP process can limit the quality and degree of trust established between the community and development workers. In particular, gender relations, power relations, dominant local political forces can be "hidden" due to the speed of a PRAP which does not allow for in-depth research on delicate topics.
- Group analysis does not provide many opportunities to learn important individual interpretations or gossip.
- The lack of experience and commitment in participatory work by development workers can have a negative impact on the quality of the exercise. The "outsider" MUST NOT conduct the PRAP exercise FOR the community: he/she must only FACILITATE it.
- PRAP has been applied primarily at the community level. There is still very little experience in applying the methodology at regional, provincial, and watershed levels.
- Communication difficulties can occur, especially when there are language or marked cultural differences.
- The speed of the exercise can affect the quality of participation of community members.
- Sometimes the community is just not interested.
- Information about the community is sometimes "stolen" by outsiders for their own benefit (a thesis, for example) or for the benefit of the organization they work for, rather than for the benefit of the community.

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- Every sector of the community is not always adequately represented (women, children, the aged, the landless, ethnic and religious groups).
  - When several areas of analysis and different indicators (quantitative and qualitative) are considered in the same diagram or matrix, community members can become confused and the results can be difficult to understand.

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## Results obtained from applying PRAP

### Community empowerment

PRAP empowers community members because it allows them to conduct an appraisal and analysis of their reality from their own perspective and world view to plan activities which best suit them.

### Proposal for action

There are cases in which the identified problem can be resolved exclusively with local resources (labor, materials, skills) without the need for outside support. In other cases, the local appraisal and analysis serve to design a project proposal based on the felt needs of the community, which can be presented to an external institution.

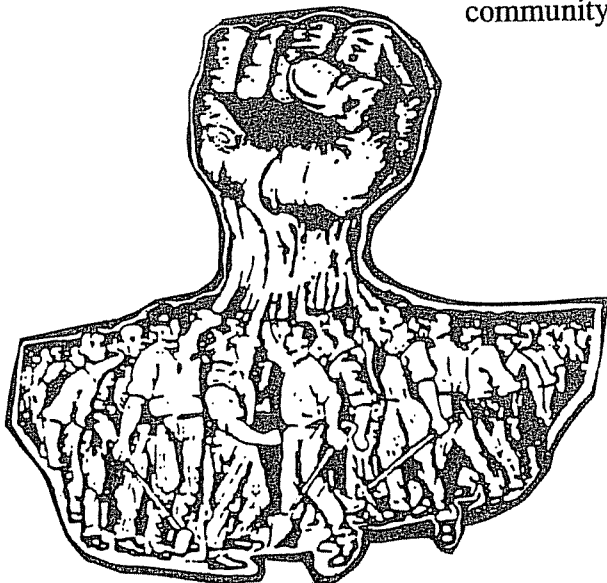
### Capacity-building of local institutions

The process of coordinating and conducting a PRAP provides local communities with important technical and organizational experience, strengthening their capacity to act with initiative and greater efficiency.

On the basis of the decisions taken during the exercise, PRAP can promote future action.

### Reference material

The material "on paper" which results from a PRAP (maps, diagrams, matrices, sketches) constitutes a kind of reference book or "living encyclopedia" for the community, development organizations, and donors.



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## Guiding principles of PRAP

### Farmers know their reality

Farmers know their problems and can propose local solutions. Sometimes a community is not aware of the power of the latent knowledge it possesses. PRAP allows such knowledge to "come out in the open", to be systematized, and, more importantly, to be "owned" by those who generate it.

### Community mobilization

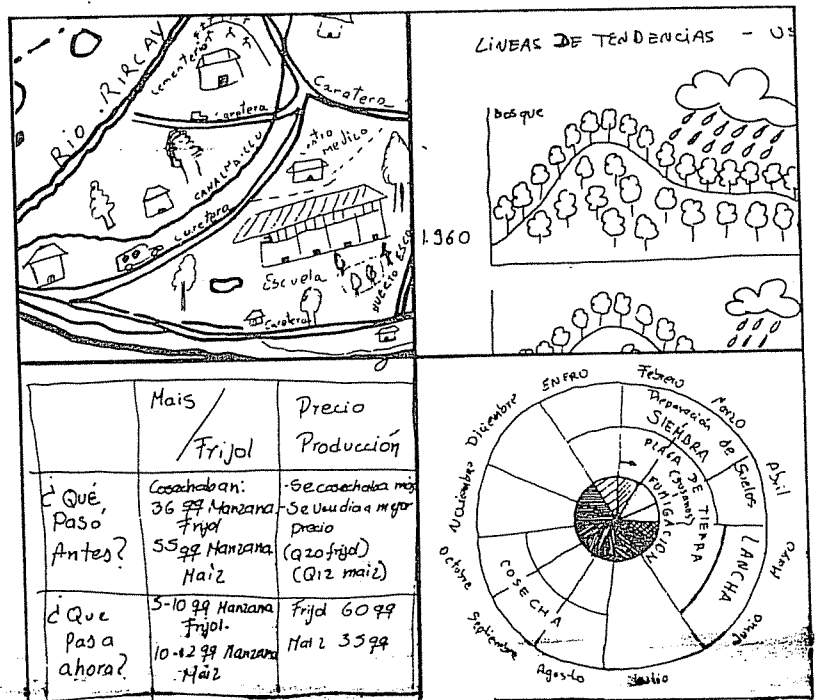
By building consensus on problems and possible solutions, farmers may mobilize for action and thus decrease dependency on external agencies.

### Interinstitutional collaboration

PRAP helps communities to identify problems they cannot resolve on their own. The need to solve a problem which requires external assistance (funding, training, new technologies) may stimulate greater interinstitutional collaboration.

### Promotes sustainability

Since projects which result from PRAPs are based on priorities and solutions identified and analyzed by community groups, they tend to be more sustainable than those formulated exclusively by development workers.



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## Who applies PRAP?

- Rural communities and organizations (community members, farmer leaders, rural promoters).
- Non-governmental organizations (executive, technical and extension staff, and other development workers).
- Government institutions (officials, extension agents, researchers).
- Donor agencies (consultants, technical experts, evaluators).

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## Who participates in PRAP?

Any member of the community in question can take part in a PRAP exercise. Care must be taken to ensure that the process is not manipulated by community leaders or development workers.

The number of community members can vary from 20 to more than 100 people.

Other participants are the external facilitators (numbering between one and three) who facilitate the PRAP process.

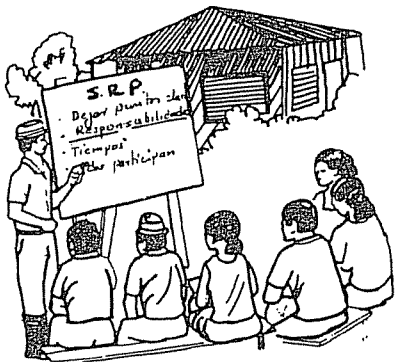


### Who facilitates PRAP?

PRAP is generally facilitated by development workers, farmer promoters or farmer leaders. Preferably, the facilitator should have prior experience with and be specifically trained to facilitate the PRAP process before assuming this role.

### What does the facilitator do?

His/her principal role is to "facilitate" the PRAP process, while maintaining a respectful attitude at all times towards the various groups in the community and promoting the genuine participation of its members. Specifically, some of the facilitator's roles could be:



- During initial contact with the community, he/she should explain the objectives and contents of the methodology, its benefits and limitations, and its potential results and uses. Enthusiasm for working with the community is essential at this stage, as people may feel suspicious of the facilitator's intentions, or may simply not understand the "why" of PRAP.
- During the preparation phase, he/she should reach agreements with the community groups as to when and where the PRAP will take place, what materials will be needed, and the roles and commitments of the different participants.
- At the beginning of the PRAP exercise, he/she should give a brief theoretical introduction and then guide the community through each PRAP exercise.

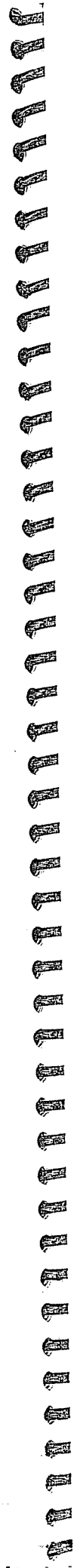
### What sort of attitude should the facilitator display?

The facilitator must always display a respectful attitude (one of "equal to equal"), keep an open mind, and be eager to learn and share knowledge. S/he must not impose his/her own criteria or try to direct the community to reach predetermined results such as the objectives of the institution the facilitator works for. S/he must respect the decisions, comments or discussions generated among the community groups during the PRAP process.

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The facilitator must make an extra effort to promote equitable participation of different community groups (women, men, youth, children, the elderly, ethnic and religious groups).

The facilitator must adapt to and respect the customs and attitudes of the local culture, must display a positive attitude, and must be punctual. S/he should not shy from using games to stimulate communication and knowledge exchange, thus making the PRAP process as dynamic as possible.



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## Where should PRAP be implemented?

It is ABSOLUTELY INDISPENSABLE!!!! that PRAP take place in the community itself. It is unacceptable and unethical to do "office-based" appraisals to identify felt needs and potential solutions.

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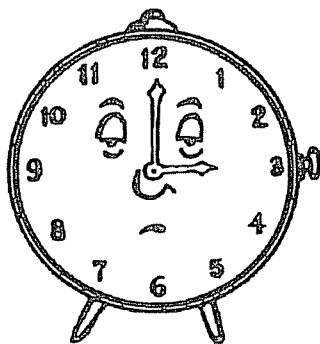
## How much time is needed to conduct PRAP?

### Time needed to apply PRAP

On average, a typical PRAP lasts about three full days. Nevertheless, depending on the circumstances, a PRAP exercise can last as little as one or two days or as much as five or six days. It very much depends on:

- the time available to both the community members and the facilitators,
- the number of development workers or farmer promoters available to facilitate the process, and
- the number of community members able and willing to participate.

### Time needed for each exercise



Each exercise can take between two and four hours. But there are also exercises which may take as little as half an hour while others may take a whole day. This depends on:

- the level of detail of the information required,
- the previous experience of the facilitators in working with PRAP tools,
- the time that community members need to understand and conduct the PRAP exercises, and
- the time needed to discuss a particular topic or theme.

**What is it?**

This is a perspective which focuses on a wide array of characteristics which distinguish men and women in a given society. It covers aspects such as the social responsibilities, behaviors, values, preferences, fears, activities and expectations which society assigns in differentiated ways to women and men.

For the purposes of this workbook, the following definition helps to understand the difference between the terms "gender" and "sex":

*"Gender refers to the socially or culturally established roles of women and men. Because gender is a social construct, women's and men's roles may differ from one place or culture to another and may change over time. In any particular location they need to be discovered. Sex, on the other hand, refers exclusively to the biological differences between women and men. Despite the fact that gender is universally one of the key ways in which societies and cultures demarcate rights and responsibilities, the different roles of women and men in agricultural production frequently have been ignored in agricultural research and extension activities." (\*)*

In sum, it explores the different roles and needs of men and women in a given culture and how, in some cases, these might be changed. Adopting a gender perspective does not mean working exclusively with women. Its true significance lies in its recognition of the need to integrate in processes of change women as well as men, girls as well as boys, elderly women as well as elderly men.

**What is it used for?**

It serves to insure that the outcomes of PRAP are as equitable and just as possible based on a comprehensive analysis of how work is distributed between men and women, both from the community and the family perspective. It helps to raise the self-esteem of women and to improve the quality of their participation. It also serves to ease the burden of women's productive, reproductive (family) and communal activities.

**What kind of information does it generate?**

It identifies men's and women's points of view, criteria, and needs equally, giving them the same value when decisions have to be taken, activities implemented, and benefits distributed.

## How is it done?

Gender perspective is an attitude which the facilitator should assume throughout the PRAP process in order to insure more equitable participation of women and greater respect for decision-making outcomes which involve women. In the process, it is important to insure that:

- women participate actively;
- the practical and strategic needs of women at both community and family levels be clearly specified and made explicit in the objectives of PRAP;
- the use of the methods are adapted in order to obtain information on the problems that women and men confront on a daily basis;
- the facilitators are trained and sensitized in such a way that a gender perspective pervades the entire PRAP process as it unfolds; and that
- the gender perspective be adopted at the family level and within any new activity or project by including gender training activities for participants, insuring gender equity in the planning and implementation of any activity, and by including gender indicators in the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for any project.



(\*) Source:

Hilary Sims Feldstein and Janice Jiggins (eds). *Tools for the Field: Methodology Handbook for Gender Analysis in Agriculture*. Kumarian Press, West Hartford, Connecticut, 1994, p.2.