

Participatory research methods can be conveniently classified into four main types.

- Participant Observer
- Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA)
- Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)
- Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Rapid rural appraisal (RRA)

It is one of many ways for outsiders to learn in a short, limited period about a community or an area or an activity, or a specific problem they feel they do not know enough about. (FAO, 1993)

Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) has its origin and application in rural development-related research. RRA is described as a process of learning about rural conditions in an intensive, iterative, and expeditious manner. (Grandstaff, 1987)

Any systematic activity designed to draw inferences, conclusions, hypotheses or assessments, including acquisition of new information in a limited period of time (Kashyap, 1992).

RRA consists of a series of techniques for "quick and dirty" research that are claimed to generate results of less apparent precision, but greater evidential value, than classic quantitative survey techniques. (Chambers, 1992)

Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) is a powerful methodology for rural development research. RRA techniques require the researchers to talk extensively and informally with rural people and to observe local conditions, while also making use of secondary information such as administrative records and maps (RDI, 2004).

It is a qualitative survey methodology using a multi-disciplinary team to formulate problems for agriculture and research development (Dunn, 1994).

Emergence of RRA

RRA emerged in the 1970s as a more efficient and cost-effective way of learning by outsiders, particularly about agricultural systems.

Categories of RRA activities

1. Preparatory work that includes selection of a multidisciplinary team, background information retrieval by maximal utilization of pre-existing data, team discussion for developing preliminary hypotheses, and selection of research tools and techniques.
2. Relatively short field visits that may be single or multiple visits to the study areas.
3. Team members discuss and analyze, aiming at reaching a consensus on what has been learned and what is still unclear. The writing should also take place immediately following fieldwork as any delay may result in loss of valuable information and insight.

Advantages of RRA:

1. The approach is participatory in nature. It enables a team, within a very short time, to gather useful information on community nutrition problems and to design community based interventions to alleviate malnutrition and poverty.
2. The approach is holistic. RRA aims at coping with complexity, diversity and interdependency.
3. RRA is used to obtain information in a timely, cost-effective, accurate and insightful manner as a basis for development planning and action

4. The RRA approach is flexible. It is not a standardized method but a systematic approach to problems and identification of opportunities for improvement.
5. Its repetitious nature provides opportunity for researchers to ask relevant questions as the interview progresses.
6. It allows researchers to use a variety of tools and techniques, to integrate different disciplines within the same team and to draw information from a range of people representing different segments of a population.

RRA Techniques (FAO, 1993)

Techniques	Uses
Secondary data review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify objects and coverage of appraisal - Checking on needs for appraisal - Identify possible topics and issues
Preliminary workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finalizing objectives and coverage - Finalizing topics and issues - Draw checklists of topics and issues - Selection of team member - Training of team members in techniques - Organizing practical aspects of appraisal
Direct Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify different zones in the area - Identify economic activities - Identify key indicators of conditions - Identify new topics and issues for discussion - Note the difference between real and reported condition
Semi-structured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collection of general information on area and community - Discussion with concerned people - Identify and ranking needs, priorities and problems - Cross-checking information and expressions - Building up case studies - Collecting historical information
Group interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collection general information about area - Identifying social norms and expected views - Identifying social interest groups - Eliciting participation of local people - Identifying collective views and feelings
Diagrams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Collecting and recording information - Stimulating discussion with local people - Illustrating and communicating ideas and feelings
Ranking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifying priorities of needs and problems

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analyzing specific topics and issues - Identify new topics and issues
Participatory exercises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifying priorities of needs and problems - Eliciting participation of local people - Analyzing local participation, problems and potential - Identifying viable solutions - Planning future action - Cross-checking findings
Regular reporting and brainstorming by team members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Updating checklists of topics and issues for appraisal - Cross-checking findings - Recording and reporting important findings - Reviewing methods and techniques used - Monitoring progress of appraisal
Workshops for analysis and report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussing and analyzing findings - Sharing information and analysis with communities - Evaluating methods and techniques used - Identifying topics and issues for further investigation - Identifying and planning action based on findings <p>Participatory decision making</p>

The principles of Participatory rural appraisals (FAO, 1997)

The following are the principles of RRA agreed by its practitioners, in spite of the fact that there are different opinions and criteria concerning them. These are general principles of theory:

1. Optimizing trade-offs: relating the costs of learning to the useful truth of information, having tradeoffs between quantity, relevance, accuracy and timeliness of the information acquired, as well as its actual use.
2. Offsetting biases: through introspection, it is necessary to identify cognitive biases and deliberately offset those biases. The recommendations are: to be relaxed and not rushed; listening not lecturing; probing instead of passing onto the next topic; being unimposing instead of imposing; and seeking out the poorer people and what concerns them.

3. Triangulating: using more than one technique/source of information to cross-check answers, that is comparing and complementing information from different sources or gathered in different ways. It also involves having team - multidisciplinary - members with the ability to approach the same piece of information or the same question from different perspectives.

4. Learning from and with the rural people: this means learning directly, on-site, and face-to-face, gaining from indigenous physical, technical, and social knowledge. Farmers' perceptions and understanding of resource situations and problems are important to learn and comprehend because solutions must be viable and acceptable in the local context, and because local inhabitants possess extensive knowledge about their resource setting.

5. Learning rapidly and progressively: this means the process of learning with conscious exploration, flexible use of methods, opportunism, improvisation, iteration, and cross-checking, not following a blueprint programme but adapting through the learning process. However, this could sound again as a non-systematic way of carrying out research.

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)

PRA is an outgrowth of and often confused with RRA. (Dunn, 1994)

PRA is an “approach and method for learning about rural life and conditions from, with, and by rural people” (Chambers, 1992).

PRA is a shortcut method of data collection. It is a methodology for action research and utilizes a range of techniques. It involves local people and outsiders from different sectors and disciplines.

Emergence of PRA

Emerging in the 1980s, PRA "proper" builds on RRA but goes much further. To RRA it adds some more radical activist perspectives, deriving principally from South Asia.

Difference

- The main difference between PRA and RRA is that RRA generates information for planners and PRA shifts the "presentation and analysis of information to community members".
- Another key difference between RRA and PRA is that in PRA "rushing is replaced by relaxation" and there is a strong rapport with community members (Chambers, 1992).
- Participatory Rural Appraisal is distinguished at its best by the use of local graphic representations created by the community that legitimize local knowledge and promote empowerment.