

MODULE 5

GENDER SENSITIVE DATA GATHERING TOOLS

Overview

In order to obtain the kind of information necessary to include gender considerations in energy project plans it is necessary to gather it using tools especially designed for this. Most surveys in the past have skipped over the gender question: they have gathered data at household level and have not stopped to consider whether the men might have different opinions or know different things from the women. Clearly, for a better picture, and to use the gender analytic tools of the type described in Module 4, good data is necessary. Much of this data is likely to be qualitative. This module introduces the nature of RRA and PRA techniques and shows how these can be adapted firstly to be gender sensitive and secondly for use to gather energy relevant data. In this module participants will carry out a day's fieldwork to gather data, using the PRA and RRA gender sensitive methods discussed.

The video "A Question of Difference" will illustrate how these methods can be used in village situations.

PRA and RRA are at present very much 'in vogue' and there are many texts which describe them, if not in the energy area then certainly for rural forestry and in rural development generally. It is suggested that the original sources are consulted (the film also shows very clearly how most of the methods work).

Use of PRA and RRA methods is however not without hazard. In the final section, some consideration is given to the limitation of these methods and to what the alternatives might be.

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Topic 1

Methods of gathering qualitative data for gender in energy

Since the beginning of the 1970's it has been increasingly realised that it is necessary to involve the community in project design and implementation, which should result in better project identification and, as a consequence, an increased level of project performance and sustainability. Since information forms a corner stone of project planning, a number of techniques have been developed in which the community is consulted more closely in data gathering at all stages of project planning, but particularly at the identification stage. These techniques have their origin in agricultural extension but in the last few years they have been increasingly adopted by general practitioners of rural development. Increasing awareness of gender issues has also meant that these techniques have had to be adapted to take the gender component into account.

These data gathering methods have been designed as an alternative to the traditional quantitative information gathering techniques of (that is, extensive and detailed field surveys), which are time consuming and expensive and require large numbers of highly skilled staff, who are in short supply in developing countries. In an attempt to obtain sensible data, whilst recognising the constraints of limited time and resources, techniques have been developed which use a qualitative approach, drawing on the research methodologies used in the social sciences. The most well known of these is Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) which evolved from a need to identify priority areas for action (in agriculture).

Qualitative data do not replace quantitative data entirely but they should compliment each other. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages and most appropriate applications. Qualitative methods are particularly useful for dealing with sensitive issues, such as political influence within a community or ownership of project resources, and thus also for many of the gender issues, but are not necessary for obviously quantitative information, such as crop yields. Qualitative data can, if necessary, be quantified at some stage in the analysis. Qualitative surveys can be carried out before quantitative surveys to help formulate and pre-test questionnaires, or after a quantitative survey to follow-up interesting lines of enquiry. Qualitative surveys can help identify the most significant energy end-uses at the household and non-household (agriculture, village industry, transport and utilities) levels.

Qualitative methods, which are conducted a relaxed, non-formal way, should not be confused with informal or casual enquiry. Good qualitative enquiry is systematic, planned and documented. One of the criticisms remains however that the number of professionals with formal training in these techniques is very limited (possibly even more so than in quantitative methods).

Discussion point

Suppose you were involved in the pre-studies for a project that planned to bring solar water heaters to a number of villages.

What quantitative data would you need?

Which of these items of data would you have to obtain through a special survey, and which could you get from secondary sources?

What qualitative types of data might you need?

Rapid Rural Appraisal and Participatory Rural Appraisal

Rapid Rural Appraisal has its origins in agricultural research, where it was first used to identify topics which needed more detailed study. RRA has been described as a *strategy* rather than a *method* (Moris and Copestake, 1993) and involves a number of tools to collect local knowledge and cross-check the information. Although Chambers is usually accredited as one of the founders of this method of research, particularly in agriculture (see reference list), the power of the techniques was soon recognised and taken up by other disciplines. RRA is firmly grounded in using the knowledge of relevant local people. Much of this can be considered indigenous technical knowledge or ITK. There exists an extensive literature on the subject of RRA and it finds a place in many agricultural extension courses.

Since the mid 80's, the emphasis on rural development has switched to more participatory methods, as a means to overcome unnecessary opposition to field activities, and to avoid provision of inappropriate activities and services which fail to

meet peoples' needs. The aim is to provide information to the planner about the issues that are relevant to the community and base projects on this rather than on what the planner (or politician) thinks is needed. The result is that RRA began to change to incorporate these ideas and a new, but related set of tools known as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) were developed.

RRA/PRA consists of a collection of techniques (many of which have been borrowed from the social sciences) including:

- wealth ranking
- maps, models, seasonal calendars
- Venn diagrams
- matrix ranking
- semi-structured interviews of key-informants
- participant observation
- focus group discussions.

Each tool has its strengths and weaknesses (see FAO, 1990 and Chambers, 1989). Most involve some form of community or group meeting to share information and there is particular emphasis on listening and learning from local people. Group interviews are thought to have the advantage of broadening the range of experiences but at the same time dampening extreme responses. In large groups there is always the danger that the opinions of powerful members of the group might dominate, and some people may not like the lack of anonymity. Smaller focus groups may overcome these problems and aid those who lack the confidence to speak at large gatherings (for example, women). Small groups can in addition be composed of all men, or all women, if this helps people to speak out.

It is advisable to use different methods and consult people from different disciplines, and different informants while seeking data on the same problem. This strategy is known as *triangulation*. The use of a variety of data collection methods means different kinds of information can be obtained. For example, surveys are good at obtaining factual information from respondents while participant observation could reveal other information about the actual behaviour of certain groups. The two sets of information can then be analyzed to try to build up a more comprehensive picture of a complex situation. The use of different methods raises the possibility that conflicting data is acquired. There are a number of possible explanations for this, for example, bias within the research team or sample, a weakness in one of the tools (which strengthens the case for using more than one tool). Discrepancies should not be seen a fault but as a means of gaining further insight into the problem.

Discussion point

What, in your opinion, are the advantages of using a formal survey with a fixed sample and pre-prepared questionnaires when gathering social data? (the data could be qualitative or quantitative)

What are the advantages of using RRA or PRA methods instead?

RRA and PRA can be used at any stage in the planning cycle (exploratory surveys, identification, assessment, monitoring and evaluation) but is most commonly used in the early stages of information gathering. The philosophy of RRA can be summarised by the six "I"s:

- iterative goals and processes modified through learning by doing
- innovative techniques adapted to each new problem, rather than used as a fixed procedure
- interactive inter-disciplinary teams; partnership with local people
- informal avoiding use of pre-determined questionnaires
- in the learning through exchange of ideas with rural people in the field
community
- involving bottom-up, participatory

Gathering energy-related gender disaggregated data

A large number of the standard qualitative data gathering methods of the RRA/PRA kind have been "genderised", that is to say, adapted specially so that the gender issue is included. It is important to recognise that the purpose of these tools is not primarily to gather data about gender (or women) but to gather data for a particular purpose, such as energy planning, *disaggregated by gender*. Thus questions about energy use and need, supply, preferences, etc. are asked as in a traditional survey, but care is taken to ensure that the two genders (and other subgroups identified within these two groups) are approached separately to ensure that the voice of both (or all) are heard and data from the point of both (or all) is included. There are a number of books available which describe these 'genderised' field methods in a great deal of detail (see Feldstein and Jiggins, DGIS, and Thomas-Slayter et al. in the reference list).

VIDEO: A Question of Difference

The video "A Question of Difference" shows very clearly how these methods can be applied by fieldworkers, although some training is needed first. The film shows PRA in use with rural communities in Bourkina Faso, Pakistan and Brazil.

Most of these 'genderised' techniques have been developed for agricultural or health research but can certainly be adapted for gathering energy planning data. This is because they mostly deal with issues such as time investment in different agricultural activities, decision making behaviour as regard choice of crops, etc. It will be recognised that these issues are rather close to those that need to be studied in the making of rural energy plans and in designing rural energy projects. In fact, many of the techniques used in rapid rural appraisal in agriculture can readily be adapted for gathering gender specific energy data.

Before any energy field survey is undertaken it is necessary to characterise the population and area to be surveyed, identifying the different socio-economic groups, including their differentiation by agro-ecological zones and farming systems. It is important to recognise the strong linkage between agriculture and other rural activities, which in turn influence the form and amount of energy used. Next, the user groups can be identified. Gender is a very important way of disaggregating the target population, but it is of course only one means of classifying user groups. As has been noted earlier, it may be necessary to disaggregate men and women into subgroups if they have very different needs and potentials. Qualitative methods can then be used to identify significant energy end-uses and the possibilities for interventions. Initial surveys should deal with factual information. A rapport between the interviewer and interviewee needs to be established before complex social processes and private family relationships are discussed.

To ensure that gender aspects are incorporated into the data gathering, the survey team itself should preferably have a good gender division, as well as being multi-disciplinary. The responses to the gender of a survey team members by villagers is highly culturally dependent. Women team members should help to facilitate getting women involved in questions/discussion/interviews. However, it is not always the case that women team members get automatic access to wives. Young, single people are not always taken seriously in all cultures. On the other hand older people (and sometimes expatriates) are treated with such veneration it might be difficult for them to make contact with all social groups or develop a level of trust with them. Women team members are certainly not always rejected by male villagers. Some female researchers claim that their status as professionals allows them to be treated in a different way from village women.

Discussion point

What are the experiences of the group as regards villagers' attitudes to women researchers/ field workers, and how does this affect the success of the fieldwork?

It is important to remember that work varies over the year in villages, and this should not be allowed to be the cause of an unrepresentative picture. Eliminating seasonal biases will ensure that gender divisions of tasks are covered. Certain members of the household may be absent at different times of the year, for example, grazing cattle some distance away. If a particular activity is to be assessed, for example grain milling, then the observer should be present to identify who performs which activity and how. Daily routines also show variations between sexes.

Exercise 1.1

What data is needed?

In the case study of logging in Ulu Kinabatangan, no mention is made of the division of activities between men and women, although it is stressed that some hardship has resulted from the events of the last 10 years since logging began. This is of course not unusual: many reports do not distinguish between men and women. We could make guesses about these, but the society may be rather different from those which most of us are familiar with.

What sort of data would you most need to have on a gender disaggregated basis if you were involved in helping the NGO develop the area, with particular concern for energy and forest products?

The design of the furniture making project is in its infancy. What measures could be taken to ensure that gender issues are taken into account in this?

CASE STUDY FOR GENDER IN ENERGY

EFFECTS OF LOGGING ON VILLAGES IN ULU KINABATANGAN, SABAH

Source: B.A. Gait: Effects of Logging on Rural Communities: A Proposed Community Forest Program for the Two Villages in Ulu Kinabatangan, Sabah, Malaysia. Regional Community Forestry Training Center, Faculty of Forestry, Kasetsart University, Bangkok 10900, Thailand, with supplementary information from other sources.

Ulu Kinabatangan is a poorly developed and sparsely populated region in the centre of Sabah encompassing the upper catchment of the largest river in the state. Until the 1970's the entire region was covered with primary forests and the only means of access was by river or on foot. Since then almost the entire left (north) bank has been logged. Large areas were burned during the 1983 drought. Mile-wide strips of state land along the main tributaries have been opened up but forest reserve land to the south of the river forms part of a reserve and is still undisturbed. As a result of the logging activities, most villages have at least dry-weather road access but their traditional lifestyles and economy have been severely disrupted. During the period when logging was at its height in the area, many men were employed by the timber companies, but these have now largely moved on to other areas.

Kuala Karamuak has a population of 875, all of them Orang Sungai people; they are about half Christian and half Islam. The land around this village was completely logged during the 1970's. Inarad is a more traditional community, with 319 people who are either animists or Christians; they are Murut people. It is the most upstream community, and until 1984 had no road at all. Both villages have lost a large part of their youth to urban centres elsewhere.

The traditional principal economic activity is shifting cultivation for hill rice, for which secondary forests are preferred and two crops are usually grown in the first year, after which cassava is planted with vegetables and fruits. The traditional swidden cycle is 5 years but after about 10-15 years the whole area used to be abandoned and the village resited. It is thought that this has less to do with declining fertility of soil than with depletion of other resources, especially rattan, a wild product which provides a considerable secondary income to farmers, and wildlife and fish, which are the primary protein sources. Resiting of villages was possible because the population density of the area is very low and there has always been room to move. However, owing to the logging and the infrastructure it has brought with it (schools, roads, clinics, etc) people are much less willing to move, with the result that the resources in any one location are getting more and more degraded.

Livestock are rarely kept; there is more hunting in Iharad because there is more forest there. Logged forest yields less wild pig than primary forest, but more sambar deer. However the opening of logging roads means that hunters from outside the area also come with vehicles to areas previously the sole preserve of local huntsmen.

Other forest produce regularly gathered includes honey, damar, bamboo, palm leaves and dug-out canoes. Damar and illipe nuts were formerly significant income earners but as they were gathered from the large dipterocarpus trees which are removed by logging, they have decreased in significance. The main source of cash income in both villages these days is rattan; an estimated 4000 bundles were sold in Karamuak in 1987, for around \$40 each, but as noted the supplies are depleting fast.

In Karamuak but not in Inarad (which is too far upstream), illegal felling of timber provides an important alternative source of income. During times of flood, trees are cut and floated downstream to timber companies.

Housing throughout the area is of wood and rattan and standard of living is low. Standards of health are generally poor; malaria, filariasis and TB are commonplace and few boil the water. During the 1983 drought there was an outbreak of cholera and 50 deaths. However since that time a piped water system has been supplied for Inarad.

During the period the logging was taking place, a large number of men from the communities were employed and received cash wages; the traditional cultivation of rice slumped and a large proportion of basic foodstuffs were imported at that time. Since then rice production has increased somewhat but not to former levels. There are a number of contributory factors to this. What we see is that the arrival of logging activities to hitherto very isolated communities has an enormous effect both on the physical and biological environment and on social and economic patterns. A relatively stable, though primitive economy, rapidly converts to a booming cash economy which later slumps due to employment layoffs, and washed out road access when the loggers leave, and most importantly, depleted stocks of saleable commodities, notably rattan. This pattern results in a high rate of outmigration, and to extreme degradation of some resource stocks.

A small NGO having visited the area became concerned about the situation and has proposed to raise funds from a donor source to help set up a small furniture production yard to be run as a cooperative by the local people. This would use timber from smaller trees which are still available, and the plan is that it should also at a later stage start a small plantation in some of the cleared areas. The machinery would be provided partly by gift of the donor and partly would be repaid by profits from selling the furniture; training would be provide by the donor. The project expects to start with 20 employees. This project is still under discussion locally.

Topic 2

Tools for use in Field Survey of Gender Aspects of Energy Problems

As has already been discussed and shown in the video, a number of RRA/PRA tools have been adapted for gathering gender disaggregated information for rural development. Many of these can also be used in energy planning situations. In this course there is only sufficient time to look in detail a few of these. This paper covers some tools which you are likely to be able to use in the one day field exercise. Some of these tools are visual (maps), some are oral (interviews) and some are written (record keeping). Which tool is most appropriate depends to a large extent on culture, literacy rates, and norms as regards group meetings etc. Many agricultural extension and rural development workers use group methods (which can vary in size from a whole community to a small focused group of 4 or 5 people) but there also tools for working with individuals or households. If you are uncertain which tool will work best when designing your survey, it might be worthwhile talking to the local agricultural extension or rural development officer.

With the individual methods some form of sampling is required. Limited resources mean it is highly unlikely you would be able to interview every community member individually. Therefore to ensure that the information is statistically valid and so provides an accurate picture, a sample is taken. There are a number of techniques available. No details are given in this paper about sampling since during the one day field exercise each group will only have time to conduct a few interviews. Therefore it should be realised that it will not be possible to draw reliable conclusions from the data gathered during this exercise because the sample size will be too small. The exercise should be considered a 'test run' or learning to use the various instruments, rather than a survey as such.

The tools and how to use them

The following tools will be described in detail:

- in-depth household interviews
- gender disaggregated calendars
- focus group discussions
- resource map of household
- Venn diagrams

1. In-depth household interviews

Household surveys are probably the most well known tool, and they involve discussion with members of a household. Naturally where gender is a concern, care must be taken that women's views are heard as well as men's. In a family with a male head of household, it is normal to begin with interviewing him and to continue with other members (including wife or wives). However, if the man is present at the wife's interview, there is often a problem either because she does not like to speak up in front of him and allows him to answer for her, or because she gives the answers she thinks he will want to hear. One way around this is to have two interviewers working simultaneously with male and female members of household, at different places in the compound or house. Ideally, a woman interviewer would interview the women and vice versa, but this is not always necessary. Simply separating the groups is a good step in the right direction.

It is also important to realise that many rural households have no male head of household. Female heads of households should certainly be interviewed, and a note made of the fact that they are in fact the head of household, because sometimes female-headed households have quite different work and decision-making habits than 'nuclear' types of households.

Interviews can be as a group or on an individual basis - the latter might avoid domination of the discussion by one member. Even within a group of women, there can be deference paid by junior members to the opinions of the senior wife, for example.

Purpose

Obtain general information on the gender aspects of:

- livelihood strategies
- gender basis of use, access, management and control over family resources
- linkages with broader social, economic and agro- and natural ecological systems.
- energy priorities and needs

Value

In-depth understanding of a household to allow analysis of important issues and for follow-up discussions linked to energy aspects.

Framework

Interview can be done either with the help of a structured questionnaire where the questions are formulated beforehand, or using a semi-structured interview.

A structured questionnaire is easy for the interviewer to work with - the questions are all set out - and the results can be directly compared from household to household, and easily tabulated (even computerised). On the other hand it limits the possibilities for gathering rich data, and does not allow interesting avenues to be explored should they suddenly become apparent.

If the sample size is not too big therefore, it is recommended that semi-structured methods are used. Interviewing starts with more general questions or topics which have been identified before hand, for example stoves or grain milling, and some relevant issues such as availability, expense, effectiveness which can form the basis for more specific questions which do not need to be prepared in advance. The advantage is that it allows for flexibility to discuss details or issues. The conversation can go in any direction the interviewer wants, provided he/she knows roughly what topics might be of interest.

The art of doing semi-structured interviews is firstly in *listening* very carefully, and understanding not only the words that the interviewee says, but finding out why certain answers are given, and knowing when to press the interviewee for a bit more detail. This is known as 'probing', and it can only be done if the interviewer has some ideas already in the back of his/her mind about why certain answers are being given. If the first question is 'where do you go to gather fuelwood?' and the answer is 'I go to a forest about 6 km away', the probing question is then 'why do you go to that forest particularly, it is a long way?'; the answer may be, 'there is enough wood there, I don't get into trouble if I gather there', and the second probing question might be 'what sort of trouble do you get if you go elsewhere?' and so on. A semi-structured interview should aim at a conversational, two-way communication; the interviewee should not only feel free to ask questions back to the interviewer, but that he or she is actually in a debate or discussion with the interviewer, a debate in which all kinds of opinions can be voiced and discussed.

For semi-structured interviews a framework for guiding the interview is needed otherwise the information may be too general to be of any use for the intended purpose. The framework could be in the form of a matrix, for example:

Activity	Awareness	Problems	Suggestions
Grain milling		Questions about problems with milling	
Beer brewing			
Water collection etc	Questions about awareness of tech options		

Only brief notes should be taken during the interview, because too much writing will inhibit the conversation and make it more formal and one sided. Ideally the interviewer should then immediately spend a least a quarter of an hour writing up in more detail the main things that have been learned as a result of the interview. If you go on instead right away to the next house for a second interview, much of your impression of the first interview will be lost.

Advantages of semi-structured interview

- Less intrusive than structured interviews and because it is two-way the interviewer can also be asked questions and provide information.
- Can give reasons, not only simple answers.
- Sensitive topics are more easily discussed

Precautions

- Interview team needs to meet regularly (after 2 or 3 interviews each) to identify similarities, problems, or misunderstandings.
- It is important to stress to the interviewee the confidentiality of responses.
- Semi-structured interviews take practice in probing and in getting to the underlying issues - it is easy to wander off the topic.

Common problems include:

- Failure to listen closely
- Repeating questions
- Failure to probe when necessary
- Failure to judge answers but just to write down everything verbatim
- Asking vague or insensitive questions.

2. Gender Disaggregated Seasonal Activities Calendar

This is a calendar that identifies livelihood tasks and categorizes responsibilities by season, gender, age and intensity of activity.

Purpose

It can help identify constraints, such as cultural events or particularly busy periods, which need to be taken into account in project planning. For energy planners it identifies when energy interventions might be made.

Method

This tool can be used with either key informants or community members (they can be interviewed alone or in focus groups). Activities calendars are constructed by the planner/researcher sitting with the individual or the group and asking them in detail what they do at different times of day and year. It is better if the planner/researcher does the recording of this, usually, although it is also possible (and more fun) to do it using a black board or large sheet of paper with coloured pencils, where the informants can put the information in themselves, in discussion with the planner/researcher. It is important that calendars vary not only according to gender, but also according to status within the community.

3. Focus Group Discussions

A focus group is a small discussion group made up of the members of the community being surveyed. This is not a lecture by the planner, it is not even a discussion led by the planner, but a discussion among the members: the planner simply observes. The focus group can be one sex or mixed.

Purpose

The purpose is to provide an opportunity to explore gender roles in various aspects of community life, to understand the diversity of perception and opinion on this topic. Focus groups however could also be used as a basis for other tools, such construction of as gender disaggregated calendars. They can also be used to make assessments of change over time in extent of forest etc. But in this context we are thinking of them particularly to elicit gender based data: what work do women do, what access do they have to resources, what income sources do they have, what are their energy concerns, what problems do they face etc.etc.

Method

The observer needs a notebook and pen (tape recorder is possible but may inhibit conversation and recording quality is often poor if the room is not well constructed or group is outside). The key is to get a group which is not going to be dominated by a particular individual or point of view, since the idea is to canvas a broad spectrum of opinion. Clearly, in most cases separate groups of men and women should be created, but there may be a need to separate people also by class or occupation, since there is a tendency for 'low status' people not to express their views strongly if there are much more highly educated people in the group.

Advantage

The advantage of focus groups is that the questions are not directed, as an interview, by the preconceived ideas of the researcher, but the conversation follows directions which the participants think are important.

Disadvantages

Can be time consuming: can get off the track completely.

Precautions

The group is not necessarily representative of the opinion of the whole community. Great care must be taken in forming groups and in assessing whether they are representative or not.

4. Resource Map of Household

A resource map gives details about the kinds of resources that a household has access to and which enable the members to perform the activities identified in a seasonal activities calendar. A sketch of the physical layout of the village with common property resources marked (rivers, lakes, common land etc) can be prepared beforehand. Preferably, it should be drawn so that the interviewees house is in the centre of the map.

Purpose

To provide detailed information about livelihood strategies and resource management activities of households, including energy supply.

Framework

A facilitator guides the discussion with members of the household to obtain key information about location of resources, drawing arrows to show the flows and connections. Natural, economic and social resources can be distinguished, if possible by using different coloured arrows or markings.

The type of information to be obtained could be:

- Who has access to the resource
- Who owns it
- Crops planted, outputs of the resource
- Inputs used and their sources
- Where are products sold
- Access to common property sources

5. Venn diagrams

Venn diagrams are particularly useful in analysing institutions which have influence in the area to be planned. They consist of larger and smaller circles cut out of paper, which can be made to overlap each other.

Method

Venn diagrams can best be constructed by mixed groups (can also be done in gender segregated focus groups: this might provide a check or triangulation on the validity of those done in mixed groups). People are asked to name local institutions (both informal and formalised ones) and talk about them. A circle is cut for each institution mentioned (its name is written on the paper). The size (diameter) of the circle represents the importance or influence of the organisation. Relationships between organisations (for example, similarity of membership; subordination of one to another, friendliness of one to another etc) are indicated by placing the circles on the ground close, or further from each other, or even overlapping.

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is partly to set people thinking about organisations and partly to alert the researcher the existence of organisations, and to their strong and weak points, their reach (who is influenced by them), as perceived by the people.

Time

It may take some time before the group understands the nature of the exercise but people become rapidly taken up and many discussions result.

Outcome

The researcher needs to make a drawing of the final result, but also to record aspects of the discussion that took place during the construction of the total diagram. This conversation may yield many insights into the nature of local organisations and their potential suitability as partners in the project.

Discussion point

What RRA/PRA tool or tools would you need to find data to fill the 'access' and 'control' parts of the Harvard matrix?

What tools would you use to determine men's and women's *strategic needs*?

Who would you use as your respondents for this?

Limitations of PRA and RRA methods

PRA and RRA are very popular at the moment and are widely used and praised by development agencies, but as with any methodology there are limitations to their validity. The approach itself has been criticised as unscientific due to its potential lack of validation: that is, the results are difficult to replicate. It can also be very misleading unless the selection of participants is really representative of the groups whose opinions are supposed to be being measured. Particularly if the exercise is carried out rather rapidly, the sample of people involved may be highly biased and the results therefore not to be trusted. Even in informal settings it may be difficult for younger or less senior members of the community to speak up: and the difference in status may not always be apparent to the planner. Finally PRA/RRA can be criticised on the grounds that participation can generate enthusiasm and expectations among villagers which can lead to disillusionment if it is not followed up within a reasonable time.

To avoid the problems of validity it is certainly necessary to use a variety of techniques and to combine this with evidence or data gathered elsewhere (for example from secondary sources such as earlier reports, air photos, etc). Further, researchers should not be satisfied with one seasonal calendar or one focus group discussion: the exercises

should be repeated over and over with different people.

To avoid the problem of representation, the researcher must have some idea before starting the PRA/RRA exercise, what sort of social groupings are to be expected in the village. In addition to the question of gender there may be social classes with very different experiences and expectations. Probably it is best to identify these groups and approach them separately. Above all, when dealing with a group, the researcher must be aware of who is contributing in the exercise: very often a few people dominate the whole exercise. It may be that the others, who are essentially onlookers, may share the opinions of the 'spokespeople', but on the other hand the contrary may also be true. If there are strong differences in status and authority (as is often the case between men and women, but also more generally) then it is likely that the people who feel themselves to be of lower status will not openly comment on the remarks made by the 'leaders'.

To avoid the problem of disappointment - of raising people's expectations that a project is on the way that is going to solve all their problems - the researcher has to make it very clear, over and over again, what the nature of the exercise really is and why it is being done.

There will always be issues, also in the area of gender differences, which do not come out through the use of PRA/RRA methods. Generally PRA/RRA is good for describing the situation but does not get very deep into the reasons why it is what it is. Detailed household surveys are not the solution to this, as they are equally if not more superficial in most cases. For a real indepth analysis of the gender situation a long term anthropological study may be needed. In some cases these are available for a given community or a similar one nearby from which lessons can be drawn. It is always worth checking in university libraries whether such studies exist (with current internet facilities this is becoming easier and easier). However as such studies usually entail two or three years intensive fieldwork it is unlikely that practising energy planners will be in a position to make such studies themselves.

Field Exercises

Depending on the circumstances, it is important that some of the field methods described in the lecture are carried out in the field. This will involve at least one full day of fieldwork.

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