

Training Modules for RRA/PRA Training -  
 Bhutan-German Integrated Forest Management Project,  
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## FOREWORD

The following document is the result of a one-week training seminar in Rapid and Participatory Appraisal, held in and for the GTZ-supported Bhutan-German Integrated Forest Management Project (BG-IFMP) in Bhutan. The training was carried out as a two-day classroom introduction to RRA and PRA, followed by a three-day RRA practicum with the 13 workshop trainees in one of the pilot sites of the project, Nahi Valley. The training was rounded up with a half-day reflection session on the exercise and the methodology.

Trainees were mostly forestry personnel, both from the district extension level and from national level, as well as district extension staff from agriculture and animal husbandry. Additionally, personnel from the land use planning section of the Ministry of Agriculture, as well as the German teamleader for the BG-IFMP took part in the whole session. The purpose of the workshop was both to practically acquaint and familiarize local staff with the RRA and PRA approaches and methods, and to understand the environmental and social situation in one of the project's pilot sites, with a strong focus on (social) forestry. The actual results of the field exercise as far as Nahi Valley is concerned, are documented in a separate report.<sup>1</sup>

The document is an attempt to describe the different training modules used in the workshop for the introduction and practice of RRA and PRA; each module is first of all described with its general rationale and approach; after this module introduction, an illustration of its realization, the associated problems and insights from the training workshop are given in italic script. Some handouts and overviews are included here for illustration purposes and as an inspiration for other trainers. Thus the document shall serve the purpose of giving the many advocates and trainers of PRA in GTZ and other organizations ideas on how to design a one-week introduction to RRA and PRA. For the BG-IFMP itself it is both a reminder of how the training was conducted and which insights were gained, and a guide in future attempts to conduct training workshops or field exercises in RRA without the help of external facilitators.

I was inspired to undertake this form of documentation and presentation by my colleague and "participation-expert" Ueli Scheuermeier who works for the Swiss NGO "LBL" (Laendliche Beratungszentrale Lindau) and who recently documented a PTD workshop which he had held in Southern India in a similar manner. In the informal PRA/PTD network which was formed two years ago in Europe, we are trying to go ahead in the preparation and documentation of modules for trainings in participation. I hope that a number of my colleagues in the PRA/PTD network, in GTZ and in other organizations can make use of some of my ideas and illustrations from a highly interesting fieldwork in one of the exciting and rarely travelled Himalayan countries.

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<sup>1</sup> U. Kievelitz (1995): An Assessment of the the Environmental and Social Situation in Nahi Valley gewog, Wangdi District, Bhutan - Results of a Rapid Rural Appraisal. BG-IFMP Working Paper No. 3. Thimphu.













## PART I: THE CLASSROOM INTRODUCTION

### 1. Introduction

The first introductory workshop session acquaints participants always with each other, with some of the methods used in the workshop, and with the general type of seminar. In participatory workshops, it is therefore important to find ways to introduce people to each other by utilizing visual methods as well as by making them loosen up and engage with each other. Finally, it is helpful to design an introductory session in such a way that the trainer(s) receive(s) information on some of the background of participants. Therefore I often use a combination of more formalized introduction, combined with a first practical exercise, such as "the cob web": all participants gather in one big circle, and then pass a ball of thread to each other. Holding onto it and passing it to the next person whose name they can remember, they slowly create a web which connects everyone, and which signifies the expected group dynamics during the workshop. Unravelling the web by throwing/passing back the threadball, people might be asked to tell something about personal associations connected to the seminar.

*I utilized a combination of card introduction (name - function - expectation) by everyone, followed by a practical exercise. Card introduction acquainted participants for the first time with writing and visualizing. This exercise showed already that there generally was a low level of experience in talking in front of others, and in writing clearly. Also some expectations were wide off the mark for the actual program ("learn about animal husbandry"). After this more formal introduction I used the game "cob web" to create a first "action" situation, to have people practice each others' names, and to say something about their previous experience with social science research. The cob web game achieved its purpose of loosening up participants, creating a group feeling and having everybody say something about himself, in this case about experiences with social analysis/survey/RRA. The web is also always good for signifying what we are about to achieve: group dynamics, team work, and personal interaction., and was therefore chosen by me. The participants easily caught on to the idea.*

### 2. Introduction to Participation

Finding a way to introduce people to an RRA/PRA workshop can be quite difficult. I used the approach - which Ueli Scheuermeier describes as very successful for PTD in India - to first informally discuss with people about a positive learning experience in school and training (experiential learning, active participation...), and after that ask people directly, to discuss in groups of about 5 people what they find important about participation. Assumption: participation is such a key word in every political speech that people must have some notion about it. This introduction actually achieves four things: 1) participants start with group work, debate, having to find common conclusions and a common product; 2) they start thinking about some of the very fundamental issues regarding RRA/PRA; 3) they



visualize and later in the workshop group even do a first ranking exercise; 4) the exercise documents where is the "starting line", the "zero point" from which dynamics start.

*The session proved to be difficult: people almost did not give any examples from their positive learning situations in education; later in the groups they had a hard time and came up with only an undifferentiated, in some ways ambiguous picture of participation. This demonstrated that the participants were starting from a rather low level with regard to insights into the workshop topic. Thus the module was helpful for the trainer in understanding from what basis the trainees were starting their learning attempts.*

### **3. Basic Attitudes and Behaviour**

In all recent PRA and PTD literature the importance of a focus on "our" attitudes and behaviour is expressed. Participatory approaches require certain attitudinal and behavioural prerequisites, without which the execution of field work in participatory analysis and planning will not succeed. Aspects like the willingness to learn rather than to teach, openness for the unexpected, commitment to the rural people, especially the rural poor, being able to facilitate rather than to doctriate - all these attitudes and behaviours are not easy for many people, and therefore ample time has to be given in training workshops to prepare the trainees for such kind of mental "switches" and to sensitize them to what will be expected of them later in the field.

Especially for a group of trainees such as forest rangers and officers - who generally have little experience in communication and dialoguing with local people - focusing on attitudes and behaviour is mandatory, even if in two days there is actually little one can do.

*I tried to relate to past experiences by asking to discuss in buzzing groups with the neighbour, what had been past positive and negative interaction experiences with farmers, and why these had been so. As a second step, these supposed insights were carried into larger groups (5 persons), in order to destill some general ideas of positive attitudes and behaviour patterns for the three day practical experience. Dissenting views were to be documented also - just as one way to practice multiplicity of expression in a group, and to show that RRA/PRA also looks for diversity and difference.*

*The task proved to be difficult again, which was astonishing because it was relating more to peoples' daily experience than the first, rather abstract group work. In the buzzing groups, no buzzing noise developed, as people were hardly discussing with each other. In the bigger groups, some discussions in Dzongka evolved and finally charts were written which contained a few surprising good details (e.g. the point, in both groups, that no forest ranger uniforms should be worn in interactions with villagers). Apparently some of the younger, more dynamic extension personnel was able to make their point. Dissenting views, however, were not expressed.*



*The session was rounded off by "12 golden rules" from the moderators side, as I had been anxious to make sure certain minimum rules, like forestry personnel not to go to the village in uniforms, or the participants to be prepared to stay overnight in the farm houses. Also I wanted to introduce some of the PRA basic rules ("listen and learn" etc.) for people to relate to later. As could be seen, some of my "golden rules" had already been taken care of by the groups which showed that their insights were beginning to build up.*

#### **4. Introduction to PRA**

For the introduction to PRA it proves, even in more theoretically oriented groups like German academics, to be good to be short and practical. In fact, showing a video is one of the best ways in conveying the basic approach of a PRA workshop in a village. Based on such a video, feedbacking can help to elicit principles and methodological aspects, as well as in critical groups already first discussions about the validity and usefulness of the approach.

*In Bhutan, we watched the video "Garuda Kempanahalli" of the Indian NGO MYRADA. It served the purpose well, as participants feedbacked individually. However, in the large group again it proved almost impossible to provoke any reaction from the audience. I rounded this module off with an overview of definitions of RRA and PRA, as well as with an outline of the major principles (as for example recently outlined in Forest, Trees and Peoples Newsletter, April/May 1995). The participants also received a small folder with some basic RRA/PRA literature for their further reference.*

#### **5. Practicum I: Mapping**

The final module of the day was a short exercise in mapping. Mapping is always one of the easiest and best understood methods in RRA/PRA workshops, as people all over the world are familiar with spatial representations such as maps. Also, mapping is one of the best basic exercises when entering a new environment, as they give an overview of an area and leading to discussions on natural resources as well as social organization. The mapping exercise consists of the participants building pairs, one receiving a paper and pen, and the other one asking him/her to draw the home environment. The drawing person should be guided in his/her depiction of her home environment by the questions of the partner (like: "Are there any shops close to your home? Which ones do you frequent?") In this way, two basic RRA/PRA skills are trained: visualizing, and asking questions/guiding people through dialogue.

*The participants had no problems carrying out this task, even though clear differences appeared in the intensity with which people asked others to map certain items of their environment. It was a good practical exercise in questioning and basic visualization.*







## **6. Practicum II: Basic Listening and Interviewing Skills**

The basis of all RRA and PRA are solid skills in the art of dialogue, of listening, discussing and interviewing. These are skills which many government employees, researchers, extensionists and others usually do not practice very much, as they are more used to "teaching and preaching" to others. Therefore in any training situation it is necessary to practice and reflect on human communication. Some basic rules can be formulated, but the main learning comes from practice and critical (self-)reflection and feedback.

In the workshop I first introduced some of these basic characteristics, rules and supporting mechanisms ("six helpers") of communication, before setting up a role play. Two groups practiced the same situation: a young researcher in need of socio-economic farm data coming to a poor rural household for interviewing. He meets a shy and somewhat suspicious farmer who does not like to tell him too much about his economy; his wife who is extroverted and sees a chance to ask this strange visitor from the town - who must certainly be from government - to do something about the health situation in the village; one of their children who tries to lead the visitor to his little sister who is ill; and after some minutes, a richer farmer from the neighbourhood who wants to make this government visitor come to his own house instead of staying with the poor family. A highly complex situation all in all, which is, however, quite typical of dialogue and interview situations, where the different actors have different objectives for the communication situation in mind. Therefore, one should also foresee one or two observer roles who should carefully watch the interaction patterns.

*In our training situation, all participants without exception had great difficulties in acting: they showed little creativity, did not try to make life difficult for each other - which happens quite frequently in role plays - and did not elaborate very much on the text. Still the role play served its purpose quite well, as the reflection on the plays in the large group for the first time gave almost all participants the chance - or forced them - to say something, thus making group dynamics more intensive; secondly, because the group reflected rather well on mistakes made, problems encountered or difficult situations mastered in the role play: the failures of not introducing themselves adequately and making clear the purpose of coming for a visit; the problem of falling back into the teaching, rather than the listening, mode as soon as family members started asking for support or advice (even with regard to health!); the more or less elegant solutions of following the invitations of the rich neighbour; the problems of losing somewhat track of the original purpose why the visitors had come. Even more fundamental, the participants started to discuss among themselves, how much any interview situation should also imply a "give-and-take", or whether it is (ethically) correct to just "hunt for information".*

## **7. Introduction to Focus Group Discussions and Gender Issues**

A Focus Group is a special dialogue situation, which has much in common with the general dialogue and interview setting, but has some additional features. Focus groups discussions are an important method in qualitative social research (and are successfully practiced in market research as well as in health studies), but are often



overlooked. Therefore it is helpful to combine the introduction to this method with the general listening/interview introduction. Again, a practical situation with sufficient reflection and feedback is worth more than any lengthy lecture.

*I originally wanted to combine the introduction to this method with a special side-view on gender issues, as focus groups are very helpful for gender-specific approaches. I had in mind to set up a practical focus group round with this all-male group on why men and women experience the world differently, prompted by some mental maps of the same village and its environment, drawn separately by males and by females. However, judging from the limited competencies of the trainees in self-reflection and articulation of more abstract topics, I shortly let go of this idea.*

*Instead, I introduced some of the specific characteristics and rules of focus group discussions in an overview. Then the two previously established groups discussed on a topic which was familiar to all of them and which I hoped would lead everybody to participate: "Pro's and Con's of Social Forestry", including issues such as*

*### productive forest management vs. social forestry*

*### problems of wild animals*

*### forest grazing.*

*One volunteer for each group was the interviewer, whereas the others were to be seen as experts on different issues of social forestry.*

*It proved that the groups still had difficulties to equally discuss with each other. In both groups patterns established where a few people led the discussion, while others were listening. The problem was apparently two-fold: on the one hand the interviewers had problems to really take over the function of competent facilitators of a dialogue among all participants: rather, they fell back into the mode of either questioning a senior person, or they became enrolled in arguments with one or two persons in the group themselves.*

*The other problem was a clear situation of a "senior and expert bias": only the elder, socially senior, or foreign participants were involved in the dialogue. Language played a role in this context: while we had allowed to use either English, Dzongka or Nepali, the one group with a strong bias situation stayed purely in the English mode. In fact, in this group the role model reversed: the facilitator became one of the arguers for a certain aspect of social forestry, while one of the participants, an expatriate, became the facilitator.*

*I used the drastic form of visualization with circles of monologues to drive home the major problems with the practice of this method. This made some of the basic issues underlying focus group discussions clear to all participants. At the same time this form of feedback was intended to weaken somewhat the strong hierarchical group order which was still prevailing at this point in time.*

## **8. Overview of Other RRA/PRA Methods**

The next step was to familiarize the trainees with the major visualizing methods in RRA and PRA approaches. This can be done well by using slides of the utilization of visualization methods in the field and overhead sheets showing a variety of actual products. Such slides and sheets can be amply elaborated on, salient







features pointed out, and thus the major points regarding the power of visualization shown to the participants.

*I used a parallel presentation of slides and overheads from applications in about 8 different countries including Bhutan, starting with mapping, transect walks and building models, and then going into trend and change diagrammes (seasonality, history), systems diagrammes, institutional diagrammes and different forms of ranking methods. At this point I purposely left out wealth ranking, as the method is usually rather more difficult and not uncontroversial in a number of countries, and as I did not want to make things too complicated for the trainees.*

### **9. Practicum IV: Trend, System and Institutional Diagramming**

After a general overview of the different methods, it is most necessary to acquaint trainees directly with some of them, in order for them to get a feel for the virtues and vices of the methods, the possibilities of carrying them out in small groups, and the quality of information they can give. One way to quickly familiarize larger groups with several of these methods is to give them different alternative ideas which relate either to their own (professional) background or life situation, or to the environment in which the training seminar is held. Different small groups pick different methods, and in the following presentation everybody can view and reflect about the different results.

*The Bhutan group was first given a short "how to do..." introduction on each of the methods, after which a number of alternatives were offered which either related to their main forestry background, the NRTI training institute and its environment, or the IFMP project. Small groups were quickly formed, and then the trainees left the main room. I had hoped that they would use the easy chance to interact with either the teachers or students of NRTI - which was offered to them by one of the teachers - or with the BG-IFMP project personnel. This, however, did not take place, and instead the groups worked only among themselves. This signified a low confidence of the trainees towards their own communication and facilitation skills and towards the methodological interaction situation expected from them, and indicated that we might get problems later in the field situation (which proved to be true two days later). From the visualization point of view, the results were relatively satisfactory; however, they were not directly produced, but rather reproduced after a discussion and some note-taking as well as preparatory drawing in small notebooks. Thus, the full scope of visualization methods was not yet recognized.*

### **10. Practicum V: Ranking Techniques**

In order to intensify the practical experience with visual methods in a "safe" classroom atmosphere, a final practicum was designed on ranking methods. Ranking methods are dealt with separately, as they have different features from other forms of diagrammes, and as their rules and production steps are also somewhat more complex.

*The practicum was introduced by a very practical example which usually always works in training situations: ranking beverages for a party. The trainees immediately caught on to the basic principles and rationale of ranking, and how to do it. The practical experience in four small groups was carried out by using an example which related to their professional background and at the same time mentally prepared them for the field situation: the participants were asked to list the major trees they were expecting to find in Nahi Valley, the training ground for the practicum, and to rank them according to certain criteria of use/value which they had to define themselves. The practicum became one of the most lively modules of the first two days, in which none of the groups had any difficulties to carry out the task. In fact, the results were quite differentiated, but very similar across the four groups. It was good to have such a stimulating and successful group work towards the end of the classroom period of the training.*

## 11. Putting it All Together: Sequencing and Planning

In any discussion on RRA and PRA, it is all important to go beyond any simple discussion and practice of individual methods: the underlying necessary attitudes, forms of behaviour, group dynamics and communication skills as well as the issues of combining approaches and individual methods to a useful analytical sequence, and following it up towards a planning exercise (at least as far as PRA is concerned), have to be made clear. Also, towards the end of classroom exercises clear differentiations have to be drawn again between RRA as an external team analysis method and PRA as a facilitation method for local analysis, planning and action. Thus the main issues of sequencing and planning have to be brought out. For sequencing, some good material exists which is based, however, on quite complicated examples (e.g., AKRSP in India<sup>2</sup>). Cases such as these are helpful for general reflections, but it is usually better to give trainees - especially inexperienced ones - a more simplified "blueprint" for the coming field exercise.

For the issue of planning one can relate both to general PRA principles and examples as to special applications, e.g. PRA to initiate land-use planning.

*As the day was drawing to a close, I confined myself to giving the trainees an overview of sequencing based on a sequence which I had elaborated for the training situation. After the discussion of this, I finished with some slides on applications of PRA for planning, concentrating on the ideas of empowering people to plan themselves, and on a specific example of PRA and planning from recent GTZ work in a watershed development project in Northern India<sup>3</sup>.*

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<sup>2</sup> cf. P. Shah (1993): Participatory watershed management programmes in India. In: IIED (ed.) Rural Peoples' Knowledge, Agricultural Research and Extension Practice.

<sup>3</sup> Indo-German Changar Eco-Development Project, cf. K.Kar/S. Preuss: Authority and Participation. Experiences with PRA for Natural Resource Use Planning in a Government Project in Himachal Pradesh. In: U. Kievelitz (ed.): Participatory Learning Approaches in Multisectoral Projects. Experiences from Rural and Urban development Cooperation in Africa, Asia and Latin America. (Kurzinfor Nr. 21, Abteilung 425, GTZ). Eschborn 1995.



## **12. Outlook on the Field Days: Purpose and Organizational Matters**

Before starting into the field, the trainees should have a clear idea on the connection of a field exercise with some "real life issues", such as its utilization in the context of a development cooperation project. Otherwise the danger exists that the field situation is abused for pure training needs. It should be made very clear whether the local population is entering into any form of longer interaction process with an outside group or not, and whether they can expect any long-term benefits from their involvement, or whether they need to define a use of the exercise for themselves.

Also the trainees at this point in time usually get quite anxious about the field situation, and therefore need additional information about organizational and logistical arrangements, as well as about what is expected from them.

*In the Bhutan case, the project director and the German advisor gave a clear introduction to the purpose of the field work: as Nahi Valley was defined to be one of the pilot areas of BG-IFMP, and as a forest management plan had already been prepared for parts of the area, the field work was supposed to be useful for establishing relations with the local population, helping to find out needs, problems and interests of the people and should thus contribute to further planning steps between the project and the people. Furthermore, the organizational and logistical arrangements were explained to the group: trekking to the site in the morning of the next day (3 hour walk) after a short vehicle transport; staying overnight in tents near the local school and/or in the school; food basically arranged from a cooking tent at the school site; the local head of the municipality (gap) already informed of the coming of the group; rural households living dispersed over the whole area of the municipality (gewog), which meant walking to them in small groups and potentially staying overnight there as well. The basic three-day programme was finally explicated, and the participants were asked to evaluate the first two days via a mood barometer.*



## PART II: THE FIELD EXERCISE

### 13. Travel to the Field Site

The travel to the field site can already be used to have participants practice transect walk discussions and sketches, even if the group travels by car or train.

*In our field exercise, we walked three hours from the roadhead to the school of Nahi Valley, almost all of the time already through the district (gewog) itself. Some participants in fact did some note-taking and sketching, and I introduced some of them during the walk to methods of taking transect notes, and of making three-dimensional sketches of the area.*

### 14. Discussion with the Local Representatives

It is pre-eminent to get into contact with the local leadership structure right in the beginning of a field workshop. The purpose of the visit has to be (re-)introduced<sup>4</sup>, the local leaders have to be given the chance to bring forward their concerns, thus making a "contract" situation possible, where both parties agree what can and should be achieved in the next days of cooperation, and finally further organizational arrangements need to be discussed. Typical points for such arrangements are: local company for transect walks; best times of meeting farmers; interests and possibilities of concluding the field days with some form of village meeting.

*In the Nahi Valley situation, one present gap and to former office bearers were ready to meet us. At once, after the short introduction of ourselves, they lengthily explained their concerns regarding the apparently major problems of the village: a road connection, and the rehabilitation and improvement of small irrigation schemes. This indicated that our visit was seen in the framework of recent discussions about a potential (forest) road connection, as well as the written concerns of the municipality in the district planning meetings on improving the local irrigation systems.*

*For the training situation, these strongly voiced concerns were actually quite positive, as they showed that our visit would be met with high interest, rather than suspicion or apathy, on the local side. It also meant that we would be given the necessary support. Nevertheless, this initial discussion showed also that we had to be careful not to raise false expectations by the public.*

### 15. Mapping

Mapping is one of the best exercises in both RRA and PRA to start field work: it introduces everyone to the area, it demonstrates the use of visualized methods, and it helps in making decisions regarding the next step, which is usually a transect walk through the local environment, but could also be a discussion of the local social structure (social mapping). Mapping is also one of the easiest exercises for everyone - especially local formal leaders - and thus almost always works. Usually it is one of the trainers, however, who has to make the first step of asking the local people for the production of a map, as trainees are often not confident enough about facilitation approaches to visualization.

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<sup>4</sup> It is understood that previous contacts and clarifications of the purpose of the training must have preceded the actual field exercise

*This was exactly the case in our group. It was rather easy to ask the gaps to prepare a map for and with us, as they immediately understood its usefulness for us. However, first prompting came from me rather than from the trainees. The gaps were a little hesitant at first to start with mapping on paper when I gave them a boardmarker. I tried to prompt them by sketching the approximate boundaries of the gewog and the river on the paper, without paying attention to the actual direction of my sketch. The mistake was corrected at once: one of the gaps looked at the sketch of the boundaries and the river, stopped startled, then took the paper and turned it into the actual direction which coincided with the way we were seeing the local environment from our sitting position! Then the gaps started drawing and discussing without any hesitations; the discussions and drawings became lively, the trainees started to ask questions and thus to guide the municipal heads, and the trainer could resume to the background. In a matter of less than half an hour, we had quite an accurate map of the whole district, showing more than 90 out of the total 104 households, giving the major irrigation areas, forests with their major tree compositions, and local forest grazing areas.*

## **16. Transect Walks**

To get to know the local environment, it is best to schedule a transect walk together with representatives of the local population as early as possible. Usually transect walks go from the highest to the lowest point (or vice versa) of a watershed, or around the major village. It is also quite useful to create several groups which can march off into different directions. The walks can be arranged on the basis of a previously produced map, after having discussed with the local people the most interesting route(s).

For the training situation, it is wise to give the trainees a reminder about the transect walk and its products, and to discuss with them a structure for note-taking.

*In our case we decided to make two groups only - as we had only two farmers to accompany us (an indication that we had come at the wrong season: peak rice transplanting time!), and to march off into opposite directions of Nahi Valley, focusing on reaching two villages in the distance of little over an hour. A structure for the transect was discussed and decided, then we walked off with one guide each.*

*The trainees busily took notes from the beginning, mainly on the composition of the forest through which we walked. The foresters could easily point out trees and their potential uses, but when we asked our guide for which purposes certain products were used, our foresters had to accept that the people of Nahi made much wider use of specific plants than they had thought - a good introduction to local knowledge.*

*Once the settlements were reached, the method of choice changed from observation and internal discussion to unstructured interviewing. As one group had reached the poorest settlement in the valley, a number of insights were gained on the general aspects of poverty, on the time dimension and causality of problems, on the local management of natural resources, as well as on one of the mentioned key problems, i.e. irrigation.*

*After the return from the three-hour walk, the groups started to pull their information together and prepare two-dimensional representations of the transect walk which were quite artistic.*

*As this first field day had actually gone quite well, we decided not to go any further but to use the evening for some informal discussions, relaxation and an early sleep.*

## **17. Review of the Day and Targetting of the Next Interactions**

One of the key aspects of RRA is its group approach with a constant change of action, reflection and action, thus serving as a stepwise focus of the overall exercise. Therefore, daily review and targetting sessions with the whole team are vital.

*We used the first hours of the day to finalize some of the visual material of the day before, to reflect on the major results of the transect walk in the two groups, to give each other feedback and then to focus on some central issues for the day. The use of the forest, local knowledge regarding forest products, livestock management, the irrigation problem and general aspects of health and education were the main points of interests and further focus.*

*Now four groups were established and given a major problem focus each, as well as visual RRA/PRA methods which they should use during the day. Then the geographical areas were assigned, using the map created the day before, with the aim of trying to assure full coverage of the whole gewog. The groups were then asked to use the time between 9.00 a.m. and 4.00 to 5.00 p.m. to meet farmers in the fields and houses, make semi-structured interviews and utilize the given methods.*

## **18. Field Work in Small Groups**

The field work in small groups is the actual test of the quality of the training, and the transfer from theory to praxis which the trainees have (or have not) made. Being in relatively independent small groups, having to organize their work by themselves, and having to struggle for the actual use of visualization, they show how far they have gone in the training, and which further training measures are needed in the future.

*Even though each group had a more experienced group leader, it showed at the end of the day that three out of four groups had only led unstructured or semi-structured interviews, but had not attempted to make use of any of the assigned visual methods. Only my own group, in which I myself prompted all the different times when visual methods were employed, made extensive use of them (institutional diagrammes, simple wealth ranking, matrix ranking of problems). The trainees had shied away from the new methods, and used the excuse that farmers were too busy and only on the fields. Had our own group not made other experiences, it would have been difficult to convince the trainees that this was just an excuse.*

*However, the wealth of material from the interview situations in the fields and houses was in the evening put together in useful diagrammes which referred to the visual methods which I had assigned originally.*

*For our own group, the initial turning point after a number of field interviews was the visit to a very poor woman farmer's household. After a lengthy discussion on origins of poverty (lack of land access, lack of any irrigation possibilities, high crop damage from wild animals - main survival through seasonal labour and monetary transfers from a son working in Thimphu as painter) as well as on health issues, I had the idea that we could ask her about relative wealth and poverty in Nahi by having her make piles of seeds for different social groups. Two of the trainees directly took up the idea, asked her about rice kernels and prompted her to make different groups. As the result was convincing, the two trainees directly went to the next house to "triangulate" by asking the young women there to do the same exercise. It proved somewhat more cumbersome.*

*However, when we reached the third household in which a number of men, among them some formal and informal municipal leaders were convening, we had no difficulties carrying out the exercise a third time. This time it yielded rich results: not only did this*

*relatively favorite group of farmers assign a high number of households to a "poor" category, but they also elaborated extensively on criteria of being poor. We used the situation to discuss at once on developmental problems as perceived by different social groups, and prompted them to make a problem matrix. This exercise provided a first alley into participation of everyone in the household (six people), whereas before basically only two elder men had been talking. Everyone was assigned six seeds which he/she could use for distribution according to subjectively perceived problem priorities. It was easily done, and again the road and irrigation issue came out prominently. Being thus encouraged, we still tried further and asked the group to prepare an institutional diagramme of Nahi Valley internally, as well as its relations to outside institutions. In a matter of ten minutes we had an interesting depiction of the different institutions and their relative priority.*

*The whole experience first of all proved that for farmers it was not the the slightest problem to engage in visual depictions and clarifications of discussions and questions. On the contrary, it seemed that some of the methods helped to clarify certain issues and pin-point them, such as social structure in the gewog, or relative priorities in problem perception.*

*Secondly, the experience was crucial for the involved trainees: as they experienced the ease and the success with which the methods were introduced and carried out, they started to become more creative themselves, asking additional questions and making proposals for amendments to the methods (such as utilizing the simple wealth ranking to ask, how many people in each social category were sending their children to school, or were having a government employee in their family). Also they became more self-assured and convinced of the method.*

*The evening was used to put together and update the material after a long day of work.*

## **19. Review of the Day and Targetting of the Next Interactions (II)**

A regular targetting is necessary in all RRA. On the last day, the question should be in the foreground: what do we not know or understand yet, and how can we find it out in the remaining time?

*For us, group feedback initiated the day. As three of the four groups had not experimented with the visual methods of RRA/PRA, and furthermore some crucial social forestry issues had not been answered yet, it was decided to focus the work on a mandatory experimenting with some visual methods for social forestry questions. Furthermore, we wanted to make use of the fact that we were close to the school, and thus work a while with the schoolchildren and their teachers.*

*One of the trainees had a good suggestion on where to employ the social forestry issues of tree ranking and use of minor forest products: as the latter issue was clearly an income and even survival strategy for the poor, it was proposed to go to the poorest settlement and try our luck there.*

*This last half day of enquiry in the field proved to be quite successful: all groups came back, having utilized the assigned methods, and by this having gained rich additional information. Also, they were now somewhat more confident about the visualization methods.*

*For my own group, the dynamics in the school were likewise very positive. After introducing ourselves to the pupils of classes 3 and 4, we asked them to draw their "vision of development" on paper: how did they desire Nahi Valley and their settlement to look when they were adult (in about 20 years)? Which jobs did they aspire to have? How many children would they like to have?*

*While the students were busy with their crayons, we used the time to discuss with the teachers, to ask them about a simple wealth ranking with seeds, and to undertake a problem ranking of their school situation. The group of five teachers willingly took the initiative and gave us quite a detailed elaboration of four social categories, with 7-8 distinguishing features for each group. Again it showed that the employment of simple "playful" methods like seeds, combined with good questions to a small group of people, can lead to a wealth of structured and well visible information which no interview can adequately reproduce.*

*Meanwhile the students had completed their drawings. It became clear that*

**###** *almost all of them had clear visions of modernization (road, cars, electricity, airplanes etc.) in which basic needs provision only figured in the background;*

**###** *none of them (even after explicit questioning again) wanted to become farmer, but instead seemed to be impressed by the alternative role models of teacher and doctor;*

**###** *overall class 3 expressed themselves more individualistically and less "hooked on modernization" than class 4, which partially utilized textbook drawings for reproductions of 'their' vision.*

*The exercise illustrated clearly what a wealth of information and insights can be gained from working in and with schools and children during field work exercises.*

## **20. Village Meeting**

In any RRA or PRA exercise it should be attempted to finish with a larger public meeting. First of all this requires the visiting group to explain again why it was there, what it found out, and what it intends to do next - thus establishing public accountability. Secondly it pushes the trainees into reflecting on their work, presenting it to others, and explaining it publicly, thereby practicing its communication and visualization skills one more time. It is best when the public meeting can be turned into a participatory exercise through the use of visualization as well as group work and further methodological involvement of the public (e.g., ranking of problems or priorities). Finally, a public meeting can also serve the purpose of cross-checking and thus validating the established data.

*In Nahi Valley, it was only possible to meet with about 15 people - mostly formal and informal leaders, or representatives of institutions like agricultural extension or the village health worker. Women or children were unfortunately not present.*

*Still the final meeting proved to be a powerful methodological closing of the field work:*

**###** *first of all, because most of the trainees were actively involved in moderating, presenting some of their results, answering to the public, or translating the discussion;*

**###** *secondly because the issue of public accountability, and thus reversal of roles, became clearly visible: for maybe the first time the villagers were able to publicly put questions to the forest service personnel and receive public answers, as well as to express their interests, wishes and willingness or cooperation;*

**###** *thirdly, because the method of problem ranking by means of each farmer, followed by an intensive discussion on the major issues of road access and irrigation, gave the final opportunity to exchange viewpoints, as well as to demonstrate again the usefulness of visual and group dynamic methods even in larger public gatherings;*

**###** *finally, because the need and possibility of verification and cross-checking of information was amply illustrated by the wish for correction in some of the charts from the side of the farmers.*

*The two-hour meeting gave us a good feeling of having attempted our best in understanding the local situation. It was amply closed by an evening cultural show of the schoolchildren, followed by a communal dinner.*

## **21. Reflection Session**

After an intensive field work training, ample time should be given to reflect on three items:

- ###** the village exercise itself
- ###** the methodological pro's and con's regarding RRA or PRA
- ###** the possibilities for participants to integrate the approach and its methods into their work routine, and ways to support them in that regard.

*In the Bhutan training situation, time constraints as well as limits in the interests and potentials of participants to generally reflect on the training as well as on their work led to my decision to focus on only a relatively short reflection of their experience as well as the learning that had occurred for each of them. So after the two-hour walk back from Nahi, a final session was held in the NRTI training institute in which only three questions were to be answered in written form:*

- ###** *what have I learned from these five days?*
- ###** *What are my remarks regarding the RRA and PRA methods?*
- ###** *What are my remarks regarding the village exercise?*

*Nevertheless, the trainees showed a clear sign of having understood and appreciated the principles of RRA as well as how to apply some of the methods; and they reflected on the merits and limits of the village exercise, thereby giving highest priority to the problem of coming at the wrong season.*

*The final mood barometer showed mixed feelings towards the field exercise as well as to the training in general. Leaving aside the question of the quality of the training - about which they did not express anything but (polite) positive concluding remarks -, the issue seems to be that at least some of the participants initially were not highly motivated to come (problem of being assigned to the workshop by superiors; having to work intensively in simple conditions at village level; not receiving any daily allowances or other incentives; having to deal with a rather new approach to situation and problem analysis), and might not have overcome this feeling throughout the five days. The main issues of*

- ###** *working on attitudes and behaviour issues again*
- ###** *clarifying the context in which they can, or have to, apply such methods*
- ###** *receiving support, encouragement and guidance from their superiors, thus still have to be taken up after the workshop.*

