

# **A Study on the Application of Participatory Methodologies for Poverty Assessment in an Urban Setting<sup>1</sup>**

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## **1. Introduction**

The study explores applicability and suitability of applying the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) method in an urban poor community. It is a part of methodology design for the World Bank's World Development Report 2001: Consultations with the Poor, which aims to study poverty issues from the perspectives of the poor themselves. It was undertaken in an urban poor area in Samutprakarn province nearby Bangkok.

The pilot study explores poverty in different dimensions as conceptualized and analyzed by the poor themselves. It is expected to generate new insights relevant for policy and contribute to a shift of policy emphasis which reflected the realities of the poor people. The study will be documenting the principal views of the poor based on their own statements in order to provide greater insight into the key findings and conclusions of the study. The set of core themes cover the following areas:

(1) Trends and changes in indicators that have taken place over the past ten years. Examples of indicators are:

- Security of livelihoods (by type of livelihood)
- Poverty level (Increased a lot? A little? Or stayed the same?)
- Well-being/quality of life
- Opportunities
- Risk
- Social mobility
- Crime/conflict/tension

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- Vulnerability
- Hopes and fears for the future

(2) Priority ranking of problems and concerns faced by the community

(3) Institutional and power relations in the community

## **2. Methodology**

Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) has been used in development projects in order to enable the members of target communities to think, analyze, plan and act on their own. The process of PRA empowers local people and encourages them to participate, analyze, and share their information through brainstorming. The process also makes local people feel that they own and have contributed to the output. PRA mainly provides qualitative data although a number of attempts have been made to quantify data to make it comparable between different sites and groups.

Methods employed during PRA are not cut and dry. Rather they have been modified from rapid rural appraisal (RRA) and some were developed based on field experiences in several countries. The key issue that distinguishes PRA from RRA is that the former places an emphasis on people's participation. Table 1 shows the PRA methods and techniques employed in this study. These methods and techniques are discussed briefly as follow.

### ***Wealth or well-being ranking***

Wealth or well-being ranking is used to sort households into groups according to wealth, well-being, or ill-being based on their own criteria. This has identified target group members for subsequent PRA discussions with the community and provided an important background to subsequent analyses with the community. It also helps to identify specific groups such as the poorest group in the community for projects. The PRA facilitator usually asks participants to list all households in the community and then asks them to sort the households (including their own) into groups according to wealth, well-being, or ill-being based on their own criteria.

### ***Matrix Ranking and Scoring***

Matrix Ranking and Scoring are used to obtain perception of com-

munity members on various issues or items, e.g., community problems and concerns, security of livelihood overtime, the importance of different institutions, and levels of power. During a PRA session, the facilitator asks the community members to rank or provide fixed or free scores on each issue (sometimes using seeds and stones as counters)

### ***Venn diagrams***

Venn diagramming method is used to identify different institutions and individuals within and outside the community which have influence on members of the community. It also helps to reflect importance, their accessibility, the group's trust and confidence in these institutions, and the effectiveness of these institutions by using size, color, distance, and overlapping to show different variables under consideration.

### ***Timelines and trend analysis***

Timelines is temporal analysis on a historical basis. Community members list chronologies of events and major local events that take place at different times. This technique could be used to show community history, local history of changes in livelihood pattern, land use, migration, health problems, women status, etc. Trend analysis is used to analyze the changes that have taken place over a certain period of time. In this study, the method is used to explore issues related to well-being, poverty, vulnerability, etc.

### ***Semi-structured interviews***

The semi-structured interview, which refers to an open-ended interview with mental or written checklists of key issues that the interviewer wishes to address, is useful to probe a set of questions of interest in depth. It could start with a narrow list of issues but the interviewer ought to be ready to follow up any related or unexpected issues.

### ***Key informant***

PRA teams identify community members who are knowledgeable on specific topics, then seek them out and obtain specific information from them.

### ***Transect walk***

PRA teams walk with community members through an area, observing, asking, identifying different issues of interest in the community, and mapping and diagramming the findings. Transect walk is a survey on spatial

dimension including land use, crops, housing, community's public space, etc.

### ***Livelihood analysis***

livelihood analysis examines the details of individual or group livelihoods on income, expenditure, assets, consumption, occupations, employment, etc. Method employed in the analysis could be seasonal calendars, pie charts, flow and network diagrams, bar graphs or matrices.

**Table 1: The PRA methods used in the study**

<i>Method</i>	<i>Number of PRAs conducted</i>
Ranking and scoring	7
Venn diagrams	3
Wealth or well-being ranking	4
Timelines and trend analysis	5
Semi-structured interviews	2
Key informant	1
Transect walk	1
Livelihood analysis	1

### **3. The Research Site: Charcoal Alley community**

The Charcoal Alley community is located in the downtown area of Samutprakarn province nearby Bangkok, and is surrounded by a temple, a jail, a school, a hospital, and private clinics. It covers an area of 8 rais (about 3 acres). The land is private property, and ownership is as follows: 1 rai is owned by the monk foundation, 2-3 rais are owned by a family (inherited from parents), and 8 rais are owned by the Watphichaisongkram temple. Members of the community pay rent to their land owner. The rent usually depends on the land area, the duration of payment, and the landlords themselves who are either direct owners, or rent from the direct owners. The houses have primarily been built by the renters themselves. However, some renters do not live in the community. Instead, they have built houses and rent them to other dwellers. In this case, the rent charged is higher.

Since formal classification of the community in 1985 as a slum community, there have been a number of fires within the community. Since the

houses are tightly crowded together and most were made of wood, the fires usually spreaded very quickly. The PRA team was informed by some community members that fires have occurred every year and with such frequency that they cannot remember the exact number. The causes of the fires are still unknown or unproven. According to the community committee, a fire which occurred in the last 2-3 years was so frightening that approximately half of the families migrated out of the area. However, migrants from other provinces, particularly the Northeastern part of Thailand, migrated in.

The community is currently comprised of 185 houses, in which 300 families live. This amounts to approximately 800 individuals. The results of the PRA on occupation carried out with the community committee found a variety of occupations among the families. Among the known occupations which provide the bulk of the income for each family, 63 families had at least one government official, 60 families had vendors or merchants, 30 families had workers at the fish port, 30-40 families had laborers, 20 families had employees of companies, 5 families had seamstresses, 3 families had construction dealer/workers, and the other 3 families were making Chinese buns. It should be noted that the sum of these numbers is substantially less than 300—the total number of families stated by the community. The team later found that there were other occupations in the community, for example, some community members pick paper or newspapers from the trash and resell it. However, some community members simply do not work.

Community committees, saving groups, and health volunteer workers are the three main organized groups in the community. Community committees are the most widely known by the community members. Each committee is responsible for taking care of a designated area. It was noticeable that the committees knew the members only those in their areas. Saving groups are less recognized than community committees although some committees are also working in the saving groups. There are about 120 members in the saving group while some families might have 4-5 people enrolled in the group. However, some community members never heard about this group. Other members simply do not have enough money to deposit into the saving group. The saving group gives loans with an interest rate of 1.50 % per month, and requires to be paid back in 2 years. This rate is much lower than that given by other money lenders,. In case of emergency, the members could borrow money not more than 3,000 Baht with an interest rate of 3 %

per month. Another group is made up of health volunteer workers who have been trained by the Ministry of Public Health to perform basic health check-ups. This group primarily distributes medicine when needed.

#### **4. The Research Process**

The PRA team consists of one facilitator and two observers. Facilitator's role is to facilitate group discussion while observers take notes and observe the PRA process.

The PRA team asked the community committee to introduce the team members to the dwellers while walking through the community in order to seek an opportunity to form groups of community members.

In order to solve the difficulty of forming groups for the PRA process, the team's strategy was to start the discussion in a visual space and as the session progressed, hopefully more people would join in. This is proved to be workable. However, space within the slum was very limited. Sometimes the chart had to be put on the ground of the narrow alley and had to be shifted every time people walked by.

It was observed that dwellers usually walk in their community only within certain areas that are close to their houses. Therefore, they usually know only their neighbors but not dwellers in other alleys just a minute's walk away. This indicates that cohesion in the community was low. This also turned out to be an obstacle for the team in forming community groups with members from different areas since they were not willing to go to other areas and meet with unknown faces for group discussions.

In the introduction to community members, the team planned to tell the community the reason that they came to study the community, but avoided using sensitive words such as poverty. The way team facilitators introduced the team to community members was to say that they had come to learn about the lives of people in the community. Although the team tried not to use any sensitive words in the beginning to prevent incentives or disincentives of shaping information given by community members, this proved to be difficult from the first day.

After the morning group discussions, the team went on to another group in the afternoon. This team had two ladies who repeatedly told the

team that they were very poor. The facilitator informed them that the team had nothing to give them, but that they did want to learn about their lives, and hoped that their study would be heard and be of interest to policy makers. It was later learned that their nephew was in the morning PRA group with the other PRA team, and he may have told them that we were interested in poverty issues.

## **5. Nature of Poverty**

Economists define poverty based on income levels being insufficient to meet physical need for nutrition and calorie requirements. Most community members who participated in the PRA sessions defined poverty as having no money. Other definitions included having no money to buy food, inability to find work to earn money, not having enough money, no funds to invest for profit, and having debt. Another definition which is not directly related to money is having no food to eat, and no house to live in. Some also see poverty as having an impact on health and psychological status, e.g., having little time to rest, having too much work, being discouraged by their situation, not being in good health.

### **Box 1 Life of Phi Bupa**

The life of Phi Bupa makes a good example of poverty in this slum community. Before moving to this community, Phi Bupa sold ready-to-eat food next to the police station where her husband worked as a policeman. She had to borrow money at an interest rate of 20% per month for working capital and repay the debt everyday. Most of her income from selling food paid the interest. After her husband passed away, she could not survive by selling food alone, so she moved to stay with her sister-in-law in this community. She lives in one small room with no electricity. Her son was previously a factory worker in this community but had to resign because of health problems. Everyday her son picks up paper and newspaper from the trash and gives it to Phi Bupa to clean before selling at 2 Baht per kilogram. They earn 30-50 Baht/day (about \$1). She keeps 10-20 Baht and gives the rest to her son. She gets food from a monk at the nearby temple every day. If the monk can not go out of the temple to take food from people in the morning, usually because of the rain, she would have to buy food to eat or simply eat just rice. This

would happen about 3-4 times a month. When asked if she ever starved, her reply was no, saying that sometimes there was just not enough food or not very good food to eat with her rice, and sometimes she would eat just plain rice.

Participants within the PRA group were asked to identify categories of households based on living status. Participants identified categories as follows.

**Table 2: Categories of Households in the community**

<i>groups/individual</i>	<i>Categories of households in the community</i>	<i>Definition/criteria of each category</i>
A vendor/worker	Good economic status (approx 40% of households in the community)	Having assets (e.g owning their own house, having gold).
	Bad economic status (approx 60% of households in the community )	No assets.
A former worker on a fishing boat, now unemployed (categories agreed by above vendor)	Rich	Having a permanent job, no or few economic problems, might have debt but be able to repay, some have a lot of debt.
	Medium income	Might be employed or unemployed, rigid circumstances and difficult to adjust.
	Poor	No job and no money.
A group consisting of a garbage collector, factory worker, bus ticket seller, and a housewife	Excellent group status (approx 20% of households in the community)	Rich, have money, and have food to eat
	Medium group (approx 20% of households in the community)	Have little to eat.
	Worst group (approx 60% of households in the community)	Have almost nothing to eat

In an attempt to categorize community households based on wealth and well-being, the PRA exercise was done by using pile sorting. The PRA team requested that each community committee list all households within their area. However, only some committees were enthusiastic to do this. In the end, only 66 households in 1-2 areas were listed. Participants in the PRA exercise were from the same area (mostly vendors/merchants) and they felt strongly that the categorization would create problems within the community. They also felt that if people had to live there and could not afford to move out, that they would all be the same status. However, they did admit that some members who lived in new and beautiful houses in their areas were better off. Finally, they agreed to categorize the households into three categories as follows.

**Table 3: Household Categories**

<i>Category</i>	<i>Definition/Criteria</i>
1. With debt but could repay on time	Having a job, having money to pay back the lenders on time, most are middle income families.
2. With debt but could not repay on time	No income (from being unemployed or being laid off) or vendors/merchants who borrow money to invest but could not pay back because they could not sell their goods.
3. No debt	Elderly with no burden of taking care of family members and depend on their children, money lenders, poor people who do not borrow money, and merchants who have no debt.

The PRA participants classified category 1 as those who were merchants, landlords and construction contractors. There were 29 households classified in this category. Most households in category 2 (13 households) are considered to be poor. They might be hired laborers, unemployed, or vendors/merchants with a lot of debt. Category 3 consists of households with no debt. A few of them are poor, but, according to the participants, they know how to manage their income. Some households in this groups have money deposited in the bank and some are money lenders. There are 24 households classified in this category.

## 6. Trends and Changes Over Time

### 6.1 Security of Livelihoods

The definition of security of livelihood from the views of community members are summarized and differentiated by type of livelihood and shown in Table 4.

**Table 4: Definition of security of livelihood by type of livelihood**

<i>Type of Livelihood</i>	<i>Definition of security of Livelihoods</i>
Vendor/merchant	Having a steady flow of income
	Having a house to stay in without being expelled by the landlord
	Having a means to make a living
	Making profits as planned
Workers in fish boat and Hired labor to buy fish from fish port	Having regular job, not being fired
	Working more would earn more money
	Steady income
Elderly with remittance from children	Being able to work and make a living
Selling old newspapers	Having ways and opportunities to making a living

A group of vendors/merchants (4 men) highlighted the changes that have occurred over the last 2-3 years and the last 5-6 years compared to the current conditions. They stated that 5-6 years ago the economy was more stable, and they had the highest security in their livelihood. They felt that their security had become lower in the past 2-3 years, and was the lowest now. They explained that 5-6 years ago wherever they went to sell their goods, people would buy. However, now people do not buy much and they have to find a very good location to sell things.

For people whose jobs are related to the fishing industries, the security of their livelihood is related to the amount of fish being caught. In other words, it depends on the number of fish in the sea. They gave the highest score to 10 years ago when there was still a lot of fish to be caught. At that time, they received a high income. The second rank was five years ago when

their income was decreasing because of the decrease in availability of fish and the lowest rank was given as nowadays as fish have become much more scarce.

For the elderly, they felt that 10 years ago they were much younger and had more opportunity to make a living or to have a better job. They gave a slightly lower score to five years ago, but they gave a zero score to their present situation, saying that they felt they had very little security because of their age.

## **6.2 Poverty**

Community members have seen increased poverty compared with five or ten years ago. They felt that ten years ago most people had jobs and money. Five years later, expenditure became higher than income, so people were in debt. They stated that part of the reason might be that prices of commodities were higher than in the past. The current situation is the worst because of the downturn in the economy. People have been laid off and as a result their debt burden is increasing. They estimated that 60% of community members might be currently out of a job.

The vendor/merchant group felt that the poverty problem was not so severe 5-6 years ago. At that time they felt that they were able to sell goods and that people had enough food to eat. The problem worsened 2-3 years ago and is the worst now.

## **6.3 Well-being/Quality of life**

Quality of life is seen by some community members as being closely related to poverty levels. They defined the quality of life as being able to have a job, make a living, have money, and have food to eat at every meal. Some provided additional aspects such as being in good health, having a good family, and living in a good environment. Having a good family to them means family members have minimal arguments or conflicts.

All participants in the PRA agreed that their quality of life of 10 years ago was better than 5 years ago and also better than their current quality of life. Moreover, the quality of life between 5 and 10 years ago was not very different. However, the gap has become larger in the past 5 years, and

the quality of their lives has deteriorated very fast in recent years. They explained that, ten years ago, they had jobs and money, but now, because of the economic crisis, it is very difficult for them to find a job and many are unemployed. As a result, some families have only one or two meals a day.

#### 6.4 Opportunities

Community members defined opportunities as opportunities to make a living, to be able to sell their goods, and the atmosphere of easy to sell and buy. The team conducted a PRA on the aspect of opportunities with two groups of merchants/vendors. Therefore, the views might reflect their livelihoods and could be very different to those within other groups. Both groups felt that their opportunity to make a living now compared to that of the past was very low. Five years ago, their chances of surviving in their business were much higher than they are now. Also, their chances of surviving in their business in the last 2-3 years were still higher than they are now.

The following table lists the trends of each indicator compiled from different groups as stated by the community members.

**Table 5: Summary of Trends**

<i>Indicators/Group</i>	<i>Trends</i>
Security of livelihood	Trends depend on types of livelihood but security of livelihood of most groups has tended to decrease over time.
Poverty	Poverty has increased over time and has become very problematic now.
Well-being/quality of life	Quality of life has been decreasing compared to both ten years ago and 5 years ago.
Opportunities	Vendors/merchants felt that their opportunity to making a living was higher both 5 years ago and 2-3 years ago. They feel they have very few opportunities right now.

**Table 5: (continues)**

<i>Indicators/Group</i>	<i>Trends</i>
Risk	A merchant and moneylender stated that doing business is much riskier now compared to 2-3 years ago. Her business has been losing because it is difficult to sell. More people are buying or borrowing money without repaying.
Social mobility	According to one PRA group discussion, now almost everyone has fallen to a lower status. Middle income class families who could live on their own income could consider themselves lucky or as having their own merit.
Crime/conflict/tension	According to one PRA group discussion, the situation has improved substantially from ten years ago (which was the worst situation) because of an increase in the number of policemen patrolling the community.
Substance abuse	(from a male group) Amphetamines are widespread but they are not as dangerous as marijuana was ten years ago or heroin was 5 years ago.  (from other groups) Ten years ago there was no visible drug problem. But drug problems have been very severe both last year and this year. People have had to steal to get more money for drugs.
Hopes and fears for the future	Many people have no hope for the near future. Their only hope is to win a lottery.

## **7. Priority Ranking of Problems and Concerns**

### **7.1 Problems and Concerns**

Different Groups of members in the community which included women, men, mixed women and men, and teenagers were asked to list and prioritize their problems and concerns for themselves and/or their community. For adult men, women, and the mixed group, economic problems were the biggest concern. Other problems were substance abuse, uncertainty of their tenure security, poverty and family separation. Poverty was raised as a concern by only one group of women. Apparently, community members seemed to think of the economic problem rather than poverty itself. Some said that they were all poor and if they had money they would go out to find a better place to live, but since they were all stuck in the community, it meant that they all were in poverty. This might be a reason why most of them did not mention poverty as a problem or concern.

Teenagers who did not have the responsibility of earning money for their families gave lower priorities to the economic problems. On the other hand, teenagers who had to help their families to make ends meet ranked the lack of working capital for trading or for studies as their highest-priority problem. Other problems raised by community members included substance abuse, the environment, security of housing, neglected children, thieves, and gambling. Selected problems are discussed below.

#### ***Economic problem***

Adult men, women, and mixed groups always ranked the economic problem as their priority concern. They related economic problems to their inability to find a job, being laid off, working hard with low pay, decreasing wages, no money, or too much money needing to be spent due to increases in food prices. They mentioned the present economic downturn as the culprit of these problems. They have coped with the economic problems by consuming less. Some cut down from 3 to 1-2 meals per day. Some eat rice with salty eggs, which is inexpensive, ready to eat, and does not require the use of cooking oil. Some reduce their dishes to just one for the whole family.

The economic problem has greater impact on families with dependent children. Children have to be out of school since many parents can not

afford to send them to school, although the tuition is free. At the same time, children are also reluctant to go to school since they have no money to join the same activities as other children. Some families requires their children to earn money and to help the family. Some simply let them hang around with friends while the parents go to work. Some children have become drug addicts as while their parents struggled to earn money to support their family they had no time to supervise them.

### ***Substance abuse***

Substance abuse was mentioned as a problem during every PRA that was carried out. Community memebers reported that drug use was so widespread that it could be found in every area and alley. They all agreed that amphetamines were the major drug used and use was widespread within the community. The community members engaged in the PRA discussions even asked the team whether they wanted to have or taste some drugs which they could provide right away.

For some families, the whole families were drug addicts. When asked why this happened, the answer was that, in order for the family to survive this economic crisis when people lost their jobs, the easiest way out to make a living is to sell drugs. Some families had children with a drug addiction and this later led to other adults in the family selling drugs. It is not clear whether poverty led to substance abuse or vice versa. However, substance abuse has a long history in the community. Ten years ago, people used marijuana and then five years ago they switched to heroin, and they have now switched to amphetamines. One informant said one could consider it a fashion that has changed overtime. When asked how the primary drug type switched from one to another, the answer was that the availability of each type of drug had changed over time. For amphetamines, it began because people had to work hard to make ends meet, and the drug helped them to endure long and hard working hours.

The teenager group felt that the drug problem was difficult to control because outsiders also came in to sell and use drugs in the community. They felt it was not a good sight for children to see and they feared that small children in the community might imitate this type of behavior.

Drug problems also lead to another negative consequence for community members. The random capture of drug sellers by policemen has increased the debt burden of some dwellers who had to bail out their teenage boys and has even driven some young dwellers, especially males, to move out of the community.

### ***Environment***

Although community members spoke about their surrounding environmental problem, they gave lower priority to this problem compared to other problems e.g., the economic problem, substance abuse, and housing tenure security. Only one teenage group gave the environmental problem second priority. They primarily mentioned the fact that garbage was all over the place, sewers were obstructed which led to flooding, walking pathways, sewer covers and bridges were broken, and there was sewage, and smells. According to them, some problems, especially the garbage problem, were caused by their own community members.

### ***Housing and Land Tenure Security***

Most land in this community is owned by a nearby temple. The members of this community rent the land and have to renew their contracts every year. Recently, there has been a rumor that the contracts might not be renewed next year. This problem is worrying community members since most of them would not have a place to go if they were expelled from this community. However, members of the saving group (a self-help organization promoted by the Ministry of Interior) would be eligible for new land and the Institute of Community Development would provide money for them to buy. Community members who are not in the saving group said that they simply did not have money to deposit in the saving group.

### ***Thieves***

The problem is not considered very important by the male group. However, women and teenagers ranked this problem as third and fourth priority respectively. The male group claimed that most thieves were outside fugitives who escaped into the community making it their refuge. This gave a bad image to the public that the community was full of thieves. Unlike in

the past, families in the community now do not have much money or assets for thieves to steal, and, as a result, there have not been many incidences of theft in the community. The teenage groups gave a similar opinion but gave stealing a higher rank than the male group. The womens group reported that the number of thieves had increased significantly and they believe that the economic crisis has contributed to this problem.

## **7.2 Solutions**

Community members felt that each family must tackle the economic problem on their own. Some ways mentioned to overcome the problem were to work more or work as hired labor doing any kind of work and not overspend. Community members also considered substance abuse as an individual problem. Thus, they regarded it as an individual's responsibility to decide whether they were going to use drugs or how they chose their friends. Families might be able to help by bringing the substance abuser to treatment, but it was not regarded as the parents' responsibility whether their children used drugs.

Community members agreed that some environmental problems such as garbage should be the responsibility of the community. In the past, community leaders persuaded the members to take care of the environment but there was not much of cooperation. However, some problems need the help of the municipality or the National Housing Authority, for example, broken walking paths, broken sewer covers, or floods.

For other problems such as thieves, gambling, or drug addiction, report are made to policemen and most of the time this method works. Community members stated that they would continue use the policemen. When the community members were asked what they could do to solve these problems in the future, they said friends and families could advise the gamblers or drug addicts not to not to gamble or use drugs.

The first priority for which they require external support is to have a loan with a low or zero interest since now they have to pay interest rates of 20-40%. Moreover, if they could not repay, violence would sometimes be used on them by the money collectors. According to community members, money lenders could use violence to collect debts because the policemen would not take any action or sanction a case or sometimes policemen were the moneylenders themselves.

Community members also want the government to control prices of basic, necessary items.

For the teenage group, they ranked substance abuse as the first priority problem. They want policemen to eliminate the use of drugs in their community.

**Table 6: A summary of problems prioritized by various groups**

Problems	PRA Groups: Problem Ranking Priorities						
	<i>Men</i>		<i>Women</i>		<i>Men &amp; Women</i>	<i>Teenagers</i>	
		<i>1 °group</i>	<i>2 °group</i>			<i>1 °group</i>	<i>2 °group</i>
Economic Problem	1	1*, ( 3)**	1	1		3	1
Substance Abuse	2	2	3	3		1	3
Environment	4		3	5		2	
Housing Security				2		4	
Thieves	7		3			3	4
Gambling	6					5	
Noise	8						
Neglected Children							2
Neglected Elderly			4				
Random Capture by Policemen				4			
Family Separation			2			5	
Children Education			5				
Flood	3						
Loan	5						
Poverty			2				

Notes: The lower the number, the higher the priority ranking, for example, 1 means the highest priority.

\* being laid off

\*\* having low income

## 8. Institutions and their Power

### 8.1 Institutions

Different groups of community members identified institutions differently. The elderly who felt isolated from their community and neighbors because of their poverty identified neighbors (negatively), their landlord, temple, sisters, and their children as influential and important individuals

and institutions. Women groups identified relatives, neighbors, and money lenders as closer to them than community groups such as (government promoted) saving groups. The results were consistent with other PRAs conducted with other elderly groups in that the saving groups had no role in their lives. Moneylenders were considered as important because the women felt moneylenders helped them by providing them with the needed credit although they had to repay the money with high interest rates.

In contrast with women groups, male groups identified institutions which were located outside the community as important. They included Po Tek Tung, an emergency relief foundation which always came first to help when there was a fire or flood in the community; the province and district who also gave out necessities after fires and floods; and the municipality who cleaned the sewer and supplied apparatus to build houses after a fire. The role of institutions in the community e.g., saving groups, volunteer health personnel, and community committees were rated with a lower importance.

Teenagers identified the community Chairperson, relief organizations, members in the community, policemen, and foreigners who came in to help as important. Doctors (in clinics and hospital) and monks were less important. Drug gang leaders and teenage gang leaders were also not important.

The accessibility of these institutions is likely to be consistent with their importance. This means that the role that these institutions played in their lives would be important only if these institutions could be accessed easily. For example, Po Tek Tung would come if they just made a phone call.

## **8.2 Power**

A male group stated that power meant the ability to give order or approval. The police station was ranked with the highest power because policemen could come and search their house and they could not do anything about it. The province and district were ranked second since the office could approve projects or appliances to build their house, and provided things when they were in need. The third rank was the temple who could decide whether the rent contract should be renewed each year.

In the community, saving groups had the most power since the group approved loans. Community committees came second since they could order their members to do things. Men considered that they had moderate rights and power to be able to change their own lives.

Women related power to well-known persons. They stated that people who had power had to have money. They divided power into good and bad. Good power was related to people who could help them and it was easy for them to ask for help, e.g., relatives. They would pay respect to these people and they would be the most influential people in their life. Bad power meant people who threatened others but did not have real power over their lives.

For the female teenage group, power meant being able to hurt other people, and to force them to do bad things, telling lies about others, and telling them not to discard trash randomly. They identified every institution as having power except foreigners. They considered policemen and doctors to have the highest power, followed by the community chairperson, members of the community, relief foundations and monks, drug gang leaders, and teenage gang leaders. Teenagers considered that they had a lot of rights and power, and were able to change their own lives.

## **9. Field Experience**

### **9.1 Ranking and scoring**

Ranking and scoring was used in all three areas of the research, i.e., the analysis of trends and changes over time, priority ranking of problems and concerns and institutional and power relationships. Facilitators asked the community members open-ended questions regarding what scores they wanted to give for each item. Generally, community members would respond by stating their own scoring scales from out of 10 or out of 100. From field experience, using seeds did not make the process of scoring easier. It tended to hinder the process as community members would place the seeds without much thought and would change their scores frequently when the facilitators asked them to provide explanation to their answers. Since community members did not spend much time with the team, using seeds proved to be ineffective. However, using visual instruments like seeds could draw people's attention more than using only charts and pens and perhaps cause observers who walked by to stop out of curiosity.

## **9.2 Venn diagrams**

The PRA team used Venn diagrams for institutional analysis. This method makes it easier for community members to determine the importance and accessibility of each institution. However, the information they provided would be less precise and detailed compared with matrix scoring. For example, the size of the circle they cut for each institution or the distance that they put it was sometimes too similar to make a comparison. Although facilitators could probe the output, the degree of difference was not as precise as using scoring. It was also found that male groups did not like using the Venn diagram method because they did not want to cut and paste paper. This could be a male attitude that this type of activity is for women.

## **9.3 Trend analysis**

Graph and matrix scoring were used to show changes over time. These two methods proved to be flexible and community members used them without difficulties. They also facilitated information sharing and analysis among community members, although they were sometimes reluctant to mark scores on the graphs at the beginning of the process.

## **9.4 Transect Walk**

Transect walks were very useful in order to understand the different groups of people in the community. Transect walks with community committees was also an efficient method to introduce the team to the community. It was also a good opportunity to inform the community about the reasons for our presence and about how long we would stay in the community. However, if the committees were only representatives of one group of community members, the team would be introduced to only certain groups of people, possibly making other groups less cooperative with us.

The team also use transect walks for the purpose of wealth or well-being rankings. As discussed earlier, community members would usually only know their neighbors living in their own alleys and pay no attention to others living within the community. When the team asked community committees to put the name of each households on a card, they could put only names of people in their areas, but still not all households in that area.

Transect walks with community committees were also used to check and fill out the missing households. This method was found to be very informative since it provided an opportunity for the team to know every household in each area. Other information, for example occupation, relations with other households (some are relatives), length of stay in the communities, and other specific information were also revealed during the transect walks.

### **9.5 Semi-structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were found to be effective for obtaining information from a small group of people or from individuals. It was used before other activities began or after they were finished to find out additional information. It was also used before discussion sessions began while waiting for other participants.

## **10. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The PRA process was found to be an effective way to gather information from community members through discussions and sharing of information although some problems did arise. One of the very first problems the team faced was the difficulty in forming groups for the PRA process. One of the obstacles was that community members were not willing to walk to other parts of the community which they did not consider in their areas, nor did they want to discuss issues with members in other parts of the community. Therefore, the best that could be done was to form groups comprised of people in certain areas. This in itself was difficult even with the help of community committees. Some community members simply told the team that if they had come with something to give, a long line of people would be waiting to meet them.

The second problem was that the questions asked and the terms used were quite difficult for the community members to understand. Community members had problems defining the meaning of questions and terms such as opportunities, social mobility, vulnerability, etc. Moreover, these terms also overlap with each other. This made the participants lose interest in answering the questions and as a result they simply responded that all the issues were indistinguishable to them, e.g., security of livelihoods, poverty, and well-being/quality of life.

One challenge for the PRA researcher is to find ways to generalize the findings into national and international levels. The process needs a collaborative effort by the researchers and the PRA teams. They need to discuss and outline a methodology in order to obtain the same standard and make information most comparable for every study site.

The PRA teams are very important in the data collection process. The quality of the research depends on whether they collect every important aspect of the information needed. The teams, especially the facilitators, need to know what information is needed, what should be asked and probed, and what is important and relevant. This requires a strong understanding of the research being undertaken. It was found that probing was very important and required facilitators with a good technique and more importantly, facilitators who were good researchers. Observers also require the same level of research skills. They need to understand the issues addressed in the discussions in order to be able to take good notes. Moreover, they need to know what details could help to interpret the underlying problems or issues better or what could have provided a deeper analysis to the problem.

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