Editorial

Happy New Year to all our readers

Nutrition, welfare, and participation are the three main themes of this issue of RRA Notes. The articles illustrate well the current diversity of RRA applications. Firstly, in geographical location. The two articles on nutrition draw on experiences from Nepal, Zambia and Sudan; the piece on local participation in RRA comes from Ethiopia while the two notes on income and wealth come from Ethiopia and India. Secondly, the types of end-users of the RRA results are equally diverse. The first article describes RRA work conducted for Norwegian Save the Children and FAO, the second concerns work for Oxfam, the third for the Ethiopian Red Cross Society and the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture, the fourth for the World Food Programme and the fifth for an Indian NGO, the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (India).

We have listed the full addresses of authors at the end of their articles, so comments can be sent directly to them. We would also welcome copies of your comments, to share through the Notes.

With the increasing concern for training of trainers for the effective institutionalisation of RRA, there is an ever-growing number of manuals and guidelines, produced by a variety of institutes. The diversity of manuals is certainly healthy, as together they cover the many different approaches and techniques, which are evolving. We have listed some of the manuals at the end of the Notes, with contact addresses from where they can be obtained.

- **Jennifer McCracken**, IIED, 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H ODD, UK.

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 8, pp.5, IIED London

1

Nutrition and RRA

Judith Appleton

- **Using a stress calendar to plan nutrition work with community development workers in Nepal**

Norwegian Save the Children (Redd Barna) wanted to know more about the food, nutrition and health situation in their community development (CD) project area before negotiating the local request for health centres. The table below evolved in the project area as I summarised food and health calendars, and my notes on conversations with villagers and with the project's Magar CD workers. The latter had 2 years' experience of Magar village life, in the project's 3 panchayats lying at approximately 2000 metres. These public, translated chats were monitored by participant audiences of children and ancients, with some shorter attention from older children, women and men as they rested on their way to or from field/water source/fodder collecting. Much of the information was confirmed by the results of a simple nutritional status baseline survey.

Numerous references to the hungry season suggest that a diagrammatic nutritional picture should have a seasonal axis; that several major general nutritional stress factors should appear together on the other axis of the same diagram for ease of comparison; and that some indication of intensity of stress ('X's) would bring out the variation in the related problems.

The evidence of the bunching of nutritional stress factors was striking, and was confirmed by the CD workers, although they had never consciously listed all these stress factors impinging simultaneously on people's lives (Table 1).

Table 1. Periods of household stress in 1985/86 in families with children under five, in Arung Khola watershed, E. Palpa, Nepal.

	Push Dec	Mag Jan	Phagun Feb	Chait Mar	Baisak Apr	Jesta May	Asar Jun	Sravan Jul	Bhadra Aug	Asvin Sep	Kartik Oct	Mangsir Nov
Rainy season					x	x	xxxxxx	x	x	x	x	x
Agr. labour peaks	xx	x	x			x	xxxxxx	x	x	xxxxx	x	x x
Maize harvest								xxxxxx				
"Hungry season"			x	x	x	x	x x x x	xxxxxxxx				
Birth peaks			x	x			x	x	xxxxxx	x	x	
Perinatal deaths							x	x	x	xxxx	x	x
Infant deaths	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	xxxxx	x x
Child deaths	x					x	x	xxxxxxx	x		x	x x
Diarrhoea deaths (0-14)						x	x	xxxxxxx	x		x	x
Measles season			x	x								

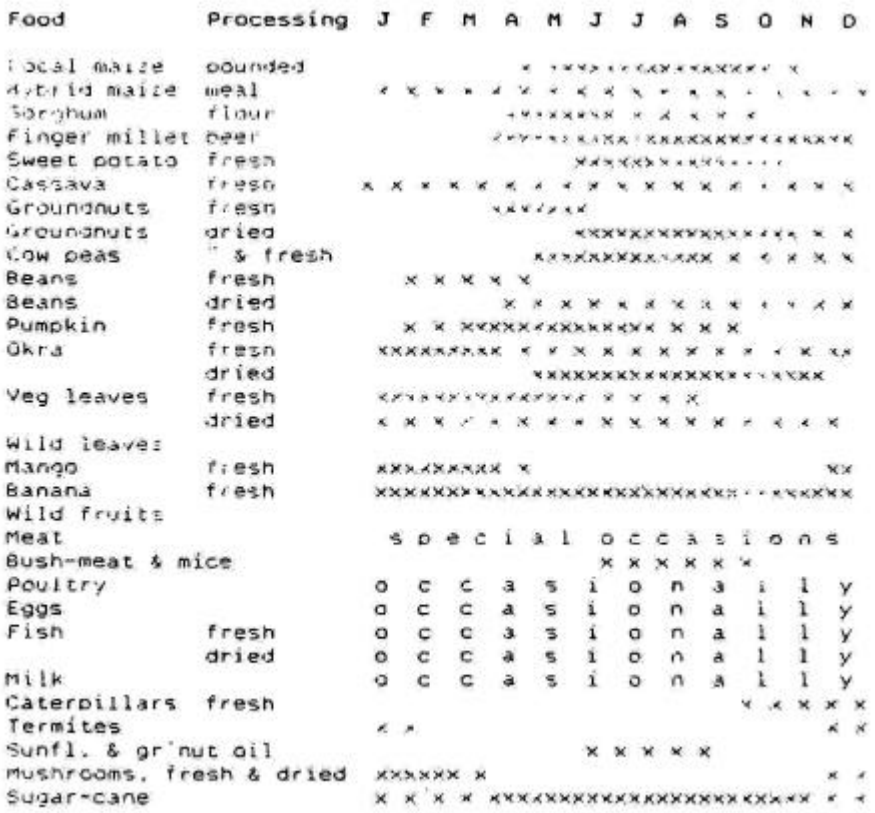
Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 8, pp.6–9, IIED London

The result of this experience for the CD workers was a request for suggestions on how to relieve some of the disease and general household stress. We noted we had no control over the rainy season, discussed the social, economic and political constraints on agricultural change, and hit on diarrhoeal disease as one thing we could actually try to effect a change that would both benefit those affected and reduce the demands on women's energies. The pattern of diarrhoeal disease and mortality suggested pitching an all-out campaign to familiarise all members of families with oral rehydration treatment of diarrhoea, for one month before the rainy season. The technique of focussing on an actual child with diarrhoea and using the mother's own equipment to demonstrate the making of rice-meal and salt solution was to be used in this connection. We substituted locally-available rice-powder for scarce sugar in the oral rehydration solution. We also made a plan to focus on weaning foods during the next slack period after harvest, when the raw materials would be available locally.

- **Using a stress calendar for rapid community nutrition assessment**

We (three nutrition consultants) were asked by FAG's fish-farming project, Aquaculture for Local Community Development (ALCOM), to consider how useful aquaculture can be in improving nutrition in "poor households' in Southern Africa. We started our 10 days in the pilot project area in Zambia by mapping what we perceived as nutritionally relevant factors for such households, and summarised the resulting nutrition profile in a table (Table 2).

Table 2. Food consumption calendar for Chipata Plateau, Zambia.



Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 8, pp.6–9, IIED London

This table was presented to the project in Chipata and at a wind-up meeting in Lusaka with the project and members of the newly-formed national Nutrition and Aquaculture Committee. We re-emphasised that the basic food problem among the poor was adequate staple food supply (i.e. maize), which fish could only help indirectly through any income generated, or as barter. We also used the table to build on the project's understanding of seasonality (seen in the varying labour available to dig ponds), to raise awareness of the times of year fish might make a significant contribution to diet. These were:

- directly, through family diets, at the end of the dry season and early rainy season; and,
- indirectly, as cash, during the hungry season; or whenever mealies are actually available at reasonable prices on the market (currently a movable feast the way Zambia's maize policy is working). The technical implications centred on whether the life cycle of tilapia could be modified so that the fish mature at these 'right' times.

Discussion

The technique is to plot by nutrition factor and by month when the factors have a potential negative effect on nutritional status. Use one 'X' for some potential stress, and bunch the 'X's' for more or evident stress.

The advantages of summarising relevant information in this way are:

- reading across the calendar gives an idea of when each factor is most crucial and therefore to be acted on if possible;
- reading down the month columns gives an idea of when people might have extra energy to indulge in new activities, as well as when they are too stressed to think of anything but their own survival;
- flexibility: any factors thought relevant can be introduced and others discarded as investigations proceed;
- it can involve anyone or more ways of getting information: documentation, administration, project staff, field workers and focus groups among the population;
- simplicity: only qualitative local knowledge is needed; data is a bonus;
- it makes use of existing data/information, with the potential of throwing new light on existing knowledge;
- gives explanatory force to any nutritional status data; and,
- you can choose whether to emphasise the time stress for a single factor affecting nutrition, or for a number of factors.

The main advantage of the stress in relation to planning is that it shows when the impact on different negative factors needs to have taken place. The main limitation is that it does not indicate exactly how to effect a change or solution. This can be addressed by continuing focus group discussions and consulting others with relevant experience.

Development of the stress calendar is needed to weight factors for importance, even if changing them is difficult. If you have data, either in a research or a programme/project context, you can assign comparative values, e.g. 1-5, to each factor for each month, ensuring that the values representing the potentially most negative effect on nutritional status get the highest score, i.e. 5 in a 1-5 range. Adding up the total for each factor (i.e. along the line) gives higher scores for more negative factors, i.e. a picture in the resulting final column of the relative importance between the factors in the overall picture. Adding the values for each month (i.e. down the months) gives a monthly weighting for nutritional stress. The problem here is how to assign values so that no factor is weighted disproportionately... I'm trying to work it out with the (partial) Nepal data.

- **Judith Appleton,** Konowsgate 99c, 0196 Oslo 1, Norway.

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 8, pp.6–9, IIED London

2

The use of wealth ranking in nutrition surveys in Sudan

Helen Young

There are few practical examples of the use of RRA in the field of health and nutrition described in the literature. This paper describes the use of wealth ranking as part of rapid nutritional assessments undertaken in Darfur by an Oxfam nutrition team led by myself. The assessments were unique in approach as they combined two complementary techniques; wealth ranking (Grandin, 1988) and measurements of the rates of malnutrition in the community.

Wealth ranking showed us the peoples' perceptions of differences in wealth between families who had malnourished children. This provided us with a useful framework in which to interpret the rates of malnutrition that we found in the community. Contrary to our expectations we found that malnourished children were from both rich and poor families in the community. Thus poor nutritional status did not correspond with the low 'wealth status' as perceived by the people themselves. This has important implications for targeting food at poor families as a means of alleviating malnutrition in a community.

This work has shown that wealth ranking has an important role to play in developing new methods of nutritional assessment.

• Background

Over a 12 month period between 1988 and 1989, we undertook eight separate rapid nutrition surveys of the worst drought affected areas of the North Darfur in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health and other NGO's in the region. The surveys contributed information to the Regional Planning Unit in El Fasher, Darfur. Rates of malnutrition and other household data from the surveys were used to confirm the effects of food insecurity on some of the worst drought affected communities in North Darfur.

Our initial surveys carried out in May-June 1988 reported alarmingly high rates of malnutrition in three communities in North East Darfur, namely Malha, Mareiga and Cuma. By September malnutrition had further deteriorated to more than 25% of children malnourished. Malnutrition is defined as below 80% of the reference median weight for height (NCHS/WHO reference population (WHO 19-86)).

For Darfur as whole a reasonably good harvest was expected in November 1988. However, for Malha, Mareiga and Cuma the harvest rarely produces sufficient to last the whole year and substantial locust damage had been reported. The poor harvest prospects were confirmed by the continued high price of millet in the markets of Malha and Mareiga, while elsewhere in Darfur prices were dropping rapidly in anticipation of a good harvest.

In the light of this situation, a one-off targeted food distribution was undertaken. Food was provided by the Regional Government and Oxfam and distributed by the local Red Crescent Committees to all families who were likely to have malnourished children.

We carried out further assessment of the situation in early 1989 and used wealth ranking as a way to look at the wealth characteristics that people in the community assigned to those families who had malnourished children. The aim was to find out whether it was the poorer families who were more likely to have malnourished children.

The team for this assessment included myself and two Sudanese women field workers (high

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 8, pp.10–14, IIED London

school graduates). They undertook the wealth ranking interviews. In each village we had local volunteers to help us.

• The wealth ranking method

In the first two villages (Malha and Cuma) the wealth ranking was undertaken at a meeting of the Sudanese Red Crescent Committee (SRC) members, while in the last village (Mareiga) the SRC committee were asked to identify three members of the community who would undertake the wealth ranking exercise individually. The latter method was preferred as it allowed cross-checking between the ranks assigned by different people. Their rankings were found to be very similar. Grandin (1988) recommends that individuals from the community undertake the wealth ranking exercise separately. However, I did not obtain a copy of her Field Guide on wealth ranking until the third village was visited. Apart from this the wealth ranking procedure was the same in all three villages.

The differences between rich and poor were discussed briefly and an appropriate local phrase to describe wealth was decided.

The households to be ranked were those whose children had been found to be malnourished in the September/October surveys. The number of households ranked in Malha were 68, in Curna 87 and in Mareiga 45.

The fathers' names were written on cards. The informant or committee sorted the cards into groups according to their perceptions of differences in wealth. If any group contained more than 40% of all families the informant was asked to split it again. After checking that no mistakes had been made, the wealth characteristics of each group were discussed. The informant was also asked whether the richest and poorest families who were ranked, corresponded to the richest and poorest families in the whole community (who were not ranked).

In Mareiga an average wealth score was calculated for each family based on the rankings of all three informants. First, a wealth score was calculated based on the individuals grouping of households;

$$\frac{\text{Group Number (Richest Group = 1)}}{\text{Total number of groups}} \times 100 = \text{Household score}$$

This was repeated for each of the other informants in Mareiga and the average score of all three informants was calculated. Families were listed in order of their wealth score and divided into four wealth strata (rich, medium, poor or very poor). In Cuma and Malha it was not necessary to calculate wealth score as the wealth strata were the same as the wealth groups assigned by the Red Crescent Committee.

• Results of wealth ranking

In all three communities there were similarities between the wealth groups. In Malha the SRC committee placed the families into three groups (rich, medium and poor), while in Cuma and Mareiga four groups were finally chosen.

The richest wealth group

The richer groups obviously had more resources, in particular more livestock. In Cuma most rich families had 30 to 40 sheep, but some owned more than loo these families did not grow millet. They also had other means of livelihood - they were merchants with shops in the market or owned vehicles used for transport. Not all merchants were in the richer wealth group. In Cuma and Mareiga the richest wealth group was thought to correspond to the wealthiest members of the total community. In Malha the households in the richest wealth group were not as wealthy as the most affluent members of the total population, but were similar.

The medium wealth group

In the medium wealth group it was common to find that the head of the household was in employment, for example as a teacher, policeman, soldier or council officer. The number of dependants influenced the wealth ranking, so a man with regular employment but a large family was in a lower wealth group. Number of wives was particularly

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 8, pp.10–14, IIED London

important. The medium group also owned livestock; maybe one or two camels, 15 goats and two or three cows, and also had farms, where they grew millet.

The poorest wealth groups

The poorest groups were generally considered to 'have nothing', in some cases not even farms. Livestock were lost during the 1984 drought and there were few other opportunities for maintaining a livelihood, except collecting and selling grass for fodder or wood for fuel, casual labouring and charcoal cutting.

Charcoal cutting was only undertaken by Zawgawa 'blacksmiths', who immigrated to the area. In Cuma several Meidop families had also immigrated some 20 years previously and others came during the more recent drought in 1985. All were considered to be very poor.

In Cuma and Mareiga where the poorest had been subdivided into two groups, the least poor group owned a few animals, say seven or eight goats (insufficient for subsistence). In the poorest wealth group there were several women-headed households as a result of the husband migrating to Libya in search of work, or divorce, or being widowed. Several of the men migrating to Libya had been absent for more than two years and their families were in the poorest wealth group. There were some women headed households in the medium group where the husband had found work in Libya and was able to send money back, indicating that absence of the man didn't automatically lead to poverty.

• Relation between wealth ranks and nutrition status

In all three communities rich and poor families were found to have malnourished children and even some of the richest households had malnourished children. This indicates that on an individual level poor nutrition status did not correspond with low socio-economic status of the household as perceived by the community and so its use for targeting poor or 'needy' families would have been inaccurate. The original aim of the distribution had been to alleviate the high rates of malnutrition which were considered to be a health risk, particularly as children in Malha and Mareiga were not immunized against measles. An emergency immunization against measles was undertaken by the Ministry of Health and Medecins Sans Frontiers Holland.

• Comments

The wealth ranking was considered by the team to be a great success. It was far quicker than the household interviews in previous surveys and automatically gave an idea of wealth differences based on a whole range of indicators that corresponded to the local perceptions of wealth. The more passive role of the team and the more active role of the informants was greatly appreciated and the latter clearly enjoyed the exercise. Much hitherto unexpected or unknown information was learnt.

It would have been possible to follow up the wealth ranking and interview households within the different wealth groups although time did not allow us to do so.

The team was fairly well known by the communities which may have made wealth easier to undertake. Also the selection of households to rank was made easier by choosing those where a malnourished child was found in previous surveys.

• **Helen Young,** Rural Evaluations, PO Box 3, Boscastle, Cornwall PL35 OHX, UK.

REFERENCES

Grandin, B.E. (1988) Wealth Ranking in Smallholder Communities: A Field Manual. Intermediate Publications, London.

WHO working group (1986). Use and Interpretation of Anthropometric Indicators of Nutrition Status. The Bulletin of the World Health Organisation 64: 929-941.

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 8, pp.10–14, IIED London

3

The role of community participants in RRA methods in Ethiopia

Dessalegn Debebe

From May 30th to June 4th 1989 a group of 9 Ethiopians and 4 expatriates took part in an RRA in a Peasant Association (PA) named Bededo.

Bededo Peasant Association is located in the northern part of Ethiopia at a distance of about 417 km from the capital Addis Ababa. This PA has a total area of about 1300 hectares and has 919 male and 169 female headed households.

The majority of the area is hilly and crop cultivation is difficult due to the sloping farm land. Construction of field terraces to control soil erosion is essential. The rest of the PA, apart from the villages, is closed to allow rehabilitation of the natural vegetation and in some closures there has been enrichment planting of trees such as Eucalyptus and Junipers to speed up the revegetation.

One of the main objectives of the RRA work was to investigate the issues of:

- Hillside closure management;
- Tree planting on communal land; and,
- Tree planting and management in the field and around homesteads.

For the first day of field-work the group was divided into three sub-groups:

Group 1 was assigned the task of producing a sketch map of the area including the location of the main infrastructural components. The group was very successful in this, working with certain community participants from the area and was helped by air photo mosaics.

Group 2 was assigned the task of looking at the hillside closure and forest land particularly of:

- Tree species at present;
- Survival rate;
- Present use of forest and ownership distribution; and,
- Identification of the closed area and replanted areas.

The group was helped by site guards, PA leaders and field workers of that area.

Group 3 was the one which completed a transect through the PA noting in particular:

- Land use;
- Population;
- Livestock;
- Crop pattern; and,
- Soil type and productivity under present condition.

This group was also helped by collecting data from the agricultural development centre at Bededo and by talking with other community participants.

Next day the RRA group for Bededo was re-grouped to interview and discuss with different groups of community participants about the topical issues and other immediate problems of the area.

• Group 1 - Hillside closure management

There were seven community participants in this group, made up of:

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 8, pp.15–18, IIED London

- PA leaders;
- Site guards; and,
- Individual PA members.

I myself was with the hillside closure management group this day and we sat on the top of a hill for a three hour discussion on this topic. One of us from the group was assigned to ask the opinions of the participants about the hillside closure management in their PA area.

Truly speaking farmers in Bededo seem very much aware of the advantages of hillside closures and the importance of the erosion control measures.

I also remember one of the participants saying that *"If it was not for soil erosion control measures, it is not only the soil that we lose but also our life."* After he put it in this way, he continued to speak about the problems of grazing land and fuelwood shortages which were associated with the hillside closure in the PA. There are a lot of closed areas in the PA which belongs to the whole community. For the time being these sites have guards protecting them from intrusion of animals and people of the area.

In this area we can clearly observe that there is a shortage of grazing land and fuelwood. We can also see that there is grass in the closed area which can be used for animal feeding, and matured trees for construction and fuel.

What we learn from this is that the planted trees and closed hillsides should be for the benefit of the community and the community members must be fully involved in the general management and proper usage of it. Therefore from the discussion held there, we learnt many important lessons on the necessity of peoples' participation.

• Group 2 - Tree planting on communal land

In the case of planting trees on communal land, people have been practising this for many years. But to compare this with the management of individually owned trees, 11 old men and women aged between 55-70 participated in discussions about the communal tree planting and management. These people also brought many important ideas that need to be considered in the development activities of the area.

• Group 3 - Tree management around homesteads

To discuss on this topic there were community participants from:

- Individual farmers not in the Producers Co-operative;
- Women association leaders;
- Youth association leaders; and,
- Producers Co-op members.

By using the above mentioned methods of interviewing and discussion each group collected information about the topical issues for Bededo.

Finally an afternoon was chosen for a final meeting together with some participants from each of these groups. This time there were 19 male and 3 female community participants. One of the RRA group members presented a short briefing about the objectives of the study and gave them the opportunity to put forward their opinions frankly and openly. One after another began to speak about their problems and the solutions that need to be undertaken in relation to their available natural resources, manpower and material. Someone from the community participants put the importance of openness in this way "one who hides his illness will not get medicine to cure it".

The majority problems were common to all community participants:

- Shortage of drinking water for human consumption and animals in the western part of the PA;
- Shortage of grazing land;
- Shortage of fuelwood;
- Shortage of farm land; and,
- The necessity of family planning education.

These problems were openly discussed, and ideas were put forward for how they could be addressed through self-help collective action and decision making by the community group

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 8, pp.15–18, IIED London

themselves, in discussion with outside agencies. Some agreements were also reached on the management of the hillside closures and the need for everyone to feel responsible for these closures.

It is clear from the above short activity report that it is very important to work with the different community groups for any RRA development programme, otherwise it will be a failure.

- **Dessalegn Debebe**, Ministry of Agriculture Office, PO Box 80, Dessie, Wollo Region, Ethiopia.

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 8, pp.15–18, IIED London

4

Attitudes to income-earning opportunities: report of a ranking exercise in Ethiopia

Simon Maxwell

• Introduction

As part of a World Food Programme mission on uses of food aid, we carried out two group ranking exercises with male household heads in Dawe Sake PA, Damot Woyde Awraja, North Omo, Ethiopia, in order to investigate:

- the range of alternative income-enhancing opportunities perceived by farmers;
- the criteria they use to select which options to follow; and,
- the ranking of alternative options.

The first exercise was carried out with a group of ten to twelve farmers (assisted by a large crowd of onlookers), sitting on the ground in a covered part of the Peasant Association (PA) building. The second exercise was carried out with a group of five farmers, sitting round the table in the PA office. The method was slightly different in the two cases, which are therefore reported separately.

• The first ranking exercise

In this exercise, a dozen PA members (all male) were selected from a large crowd of villagers observing the interview with the PA leadership. They were seated on the ground on planks in two rows, facing each other. The procedure took about 45 minutes and was as follows:

i. Participants were asked to identify the various ways in which a family might secure a higher income. Each suggestion was written on a separate piece of paper. There were seven suggestions altogether.

ii. The seven suggestions generated in step (i) were then compared in pairs. Participants were asked to choose which they preferred and to say why. This generated eight different criteria.

iii. An attempt was then made to produce a matrix, combining the seven options and the eight criteria. This proved to be difficult, given a time constraint and the absence of a blackboard or flip chart.

iv. The seven suggestions were then ranked, by placing the seven pieces of paper on the ground in a column, with the best at the top and the least attractive at the bottom.

This brief report was prepared after leaving the project area. It includes a ranking table which is derived from the exercise. The results of the exercise are summarised in Table 1. The participants identified the seven income-enhancing options listed across the top of the table. Three of these are agricultural and on-farm, while four are non-agricultural or agricultural off-farm. The only activity to take place outside the village is temporary migration to work on state farms. The list is in order of priority from left to right: food for work (FFW) was ranked highest and work on state farms lowest. The criteria for choosing options are listed down the side of the table. They overlap somewhat, but include measures

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 8, pp.19–23, IIED London

of relative profitability, security and stability of income and compatibility with existing activities. 'Regular income' refers to income all the year round and 'stable income' to income that is not subject to wide inter- annual variation. The criteria are not listed in order of importance.

The results show that food for work is ranked highest among the seven options considered: it provides an assured source of employment at a rate of pay that is high compared to other options; it is over in half a day, which means that farm work can be fitted in during the afternoon; and it provides a possible source both of food and (by selling grain) cash. Among the agricultural options, vegetables are preferred to coffee or teff, despite being more rainfall-dependent, largely because they offer a higher return to scarce land resources. Among non-agricultural options, weaving is preferred to agricultural labour, mainly because it offers regularity and security of income. Labour on state farms is ranked very low on almost all criteria: it is far from the village and therefore precludes farming on one's land, living conditions are poor and wages are thought to be low.

Table 1. Income earning opportunities: results on first ranking exercise

Criteria	Options						
	FFW	Vegetables	Weaving	Teff	Coffee	Farm labour	State farms
Well paid	H	H	M	M	M	L	L
Regular income	H	M	M	L	L	L	L
Stable income	H	M	M	M	L	L	L
Provides cash	M	H	H	H	H	M	L
Does not need land	H	M	H	L	L	H	H
Good in drought years	H	L	H	M	L	L	M
Meals provided	M	L	L	L	L	H	M
Least time required	H	L	M	L	L	M	L
Final rank (by participants)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

H = High M = Medium L = Low

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 8, pp.19–23, IIED London

• The second ranking exercise

The second ranking exercise was carried out with a small group of farmers around the table in the PA office. On this occasion, it was decided to include a wider range of agricultural innovations, derived from discussions with agricultural extension staff. The procedure, lasting about an hour, was as follows:

• Participants were presented with a total of seventeen options, rather than seven. As on the previous occasion, a pairing exercise was carried out in order to generate ideas about criteria for selection. However, given the number of possible combinations, 68, it was impossible to cover all the possibilities. Instead, the exercise was used to focus attention on the criteria that might be used.

• The participants were then asked to assign each option to one of three piles on the table, good, middling or bad. Twelve of the seventeen options were assigned to the 'good' pile, so the bottom two piles were removed and the exercise was repeated. This round gave seven options as 'excellent' and the remaining five as either 'very good' or 'pretty good'.

• Finally, participants were asked to choose not more than one option from the 'excellent' pile as the very best bet. This gave a total of five best bets.

In terms of criteria for choosing between options, the exercise added one or two items to the list obtained from the first ranking exercise. Flexibility was mentioned a number of times as a desirable characteristic: options were preferred which could generate both cash and food. Food for work and teff were mentioned in this connection. Avoiding dependency was also regarded as desirable, which prejudiced participants against working for others or travelling to state farms. A regular cash flow was regarded as desirable, which made weaving particularly attractive.

In terms of ranking, the exercise yielded the following results:

Absolute best bets: food for work, weaving, row planting, compost, planting more coffee.

Excellent: spinning, coffee pruning.

Very good: selling teff, improving forage, using improved seeds, planting fruit trees.

Pretty good: trade.

Middling: intercropping.

Bad: selling more vegetables, brewing, working for others, working on state farms.

• Discussion

The exercises suggest that PA members use a complex set of criteria in choosing income-enhancing options. Total profitability is only one of the criteria; regularity of income (within and between years), food security and avoidance of dependence on others (especially other farmers and state farms) are also important criteria.

Applying these criteria to the available options produces a clear ranking, although the ranking is not identical in the two cases. Food for work rates highly because of its present relatively high return, its contribution to food security and its reliability. Working on state farms rates poorly because it fails on all these counts. Among the agricultural innovations, coffee and teff are highly regarded. Vegetables ranked highly in one exercise, but low in the other. Among non-agricultural options, weaving is regarded as a good source of regular and independent cash income.

It is worth noting that livestock intensification was not included in the list of options. It was also impossible, given time constraints, to investigate what would happen to the rankings without food for work. However, participants in the second exercise were adamant that they would not participate in food for work for

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 8, pp.19–23, IIED London

anything less than the current wage of 3 kg of wheat per five-hour day. This was almost certainly an astute bargaining exercise and reflected their expressed view that 'foreigners are always kind!'.

• Conclusion

This exercise was inserted without preparation into a wider food security assessment. We decided to do it when it became apparent from interviews with key informants that we needed to know more about the impact of food for work on agricultural innovations. The ranking exercises were male-biased and rather rushed. It is also rather hard to do a group ranking without a blackboard or flip chart. Nevertheless, a 'quick and dirty' group ranking is a very good way to explore options, assess criteria and generate discussion on priorities. The trick is to keep the discussion lively by varying the format and adapting to the circumstances.

• **Simon Maxwell,** Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RE, England.

NOTES

A more detailed paper is also available:

Simon Maxwell et al: The disincentive effect of food for work on labour supply and agricultural innovation in North Omo, Ethiopia.

The other members of the mission team were:

Deryke Belshaw from University of East Anglia, Alemayehu Lirenso and Solomon Gebre from University of Addis Ababa and Jane Brown of World Food Programme, Addis Ababa.

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 8, pp.19–23, IIED London

5

Economic classification of a community using locally generated criteria

Parmesh Shah

We (a team of about 5 staff members of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (India)) conducted a five day RRA exercise in a Gujarat village in April last year. With a view to classifying the economic status of the community we held meetings with individuals and with focus groups. The information collected during the group meetings was then tested during subsequent discussions.

Two sets of interviews were held separately in groups. The first one with two religious heads. Both these people were very articulate and knew the vast majority of households in the village and their economic status. The second one was with a group of three men who could be conventionally classified as small, marginal and landless. Approximately two hours was spent with each group.

We read out a few names randomly from the list of households given to us and asked the respondents to categorise the same in four categories of their economic well being. The criteria for doing this classification was left to them. Why four categories and not more was purely for convenience and to avoid complex overlapping between categories. This served our primary objective of getting an economic classification as well as the criteria for the same on which we could proceed to classify the entire village community. More perceptive information was got in the second interview, but there were no significant variations between the two, in fact the second interview provided information which complemented the first with greater detail.

The respondents categorisation in four categories was based on keeping the first category for the most well-off family and the fourth for the poorest. In between these two limits they were asked to classify the rest. Such a classification was well understood, as was evident from the fair representation across the four categories.

There are a total of 249 Ismaili families in the village. It was from this number that we chose 23 household names, at random, for the first group to classify. Then all the names against which there was some hesitation, debate, doubt among the respondents in classification were taken up to find out the criteria for classification. This was later followed up by asking respondents specifically to state their criteria for each of the four categories. We also asked about the other communities in the village to see how their economic status related to the Ismaili households.

• Findings

The respondents classified the households on criteria which took account of the overall economic status of each family.

They listed down the following criteria:

- Health of the family members:
- Education of their children, emphasis on the male child;
- Asset ownership;
- Credit worthiness;
- Bank balance;
- Land ownership;
- Part time job if any;
- Number of dependants in the family, emphasis on female unmarried members; and,
- Size of the house.

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 8, pp.24–29, IIED London

It is interesting to note that the sequence of classification criteria takes into consideration first the indicators of economic well-being and then the real factors which make them. For instance land ownership, a critical factor, was stated later on, while the rest of the factors are more effects of economic well-being than causes.

Animal husbandry and horticulture were not considered criteria for measuring the economic status, and so were never listed specifically.

The above list of criteria does not necessarily represent all the factors which determine the economic status of a village community. Yet it is quite useful in giving an understanding of the dynamics of rural incomes classification through an RRA kind of exercise which, when compared with the standard income classification tools like a baseline survey, has given insights into qualitative and open ended questions which are usually left out. Further it gives an opportunity to analyse the sequence and the kind of information obtained, to review the same and draw conclusions in a logical manner.

We can now proceed to the responses generated for each criteria used for classification, starting from the first criteria to the last.

Health of family members

Health was more a result of the economic well-being of the family, than a cause. An interesting finding was the fact that there are such obvious compromises which a family has to make for basic health care.

Only the most well-off in the village are in a position to avail preventative treatment, which includes check-ups as well as prevention. It also meant that they could spend more on medical care.

Only curative treatment was availed by the second category of respondents.

The third category can afford to spend less on curative treatment, at times leading to relapses.

The fourth category relied on the Aga Khan Health Services

Education - of children

Education of the children and not adult education, featured in their priority. Education was considered of great significance in getting a job. The absence of facilities to provide market oriented skilled training was regretted, and help was requested. In fact it was the third category of respondents who were most distressed about the state of education. Some responses were of the type:

The richer families can send their children for education anywhere outside the village/district and bear the costs. They can get them trained for any skilled trade, and get an independent business started for them. But, given their wealth, they don't even need to get their sons educated! These responses from the poorer villagers, clearly show that education opportunities are not equally available for everyone and that education can be purchased by those who can pay for it.

The second category of respondents can only send their children for education within the district, but cannot afford to get them an independent business. This means that they do not have enough money/savings from their agriculture to spare for such investment. Or maybe if they do have such money, the opportunity cost/returns from investing in agriculture are certain and higher.

The third category of respondents said they could only educate their children up to school leaving level, not higher than that. That is why they are most worried about the future of their children who seem to be going through a rather worthless education with no hope of either any skilled employment or a job in near future. With the small land holding incapable of absorbing additional labour the other option is hard manual daily wage labour.

The last category of respondents could educate their children only up to primary stage, in the village, or not even that.

This gives us a brief yet useful current status of education level, the expectations of the people from the same and the dilemma of those who look forward to education as the only means of avoiding poverty. In the Ismaili community both girls and boys are educated

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 8, pp.24–29, IIED London

yet only the education of the male child enables him to earn and this is considered critical.

Asset ownership - farm implements

Farm implements were classified as assets of primary importance

First category - besides a tractor, all other assets were required in pairs, by this category of farmer. That means a pair each of bullocks, of spraying pump, ploughs. Also a thresher, and a bullock cart.

Second category - while the implements remained the same, pairs of the same asset were not needed for cultivating the smaller landholding.

Third category - only a pair of bullocks and a plough. Inability to keep/purchase other essential implements.

Fourth category - no agriculture related implements or assets kept. Inability to maintain even a pair of bullocks.

Farm implements/assets were viewed in relation with the size of land holding. Inability of the farmer to keep the basic implements privately, was viewed as contributing to his poverty, while more capital intensive asset investment in a thresher, for example, was a result of higher yields.

Credit worthiness and bank balance

First category - never in debt. More than Rs. 25,000/- in bank balance.

Second category - in debt only for big capital investments like a tractor. Regularly pays the loan instalments. Gets credit from the bank, not from anyone in the village. A maximum of Rs.25,000/- bank balance.

Third category - in debt for reasons to do with an unusual monsoon/drought which affects the high investment made in sowing. Thus the debt trap is avoided only if the monsoon comes regularly. For instance a farmer with outstanding dues from the 1987 drought year, would be able to repay these over the three good harvests following a good monsoon of 1988, before the monsoon of 1989. But still the farmer would require credit for buying seeds for the Kharif/monsoon crop of 1989, and in the event of a bad monsoon, the debt cycle would begin again. Bank balance nil.

Fourth category - always in debt. No question of any savings.

The first two categories of farmers can manage to tide themselves over during droughts, can earn and save enough to acquire assets. The third category is affected by droughts and as their state is worsening rapidly, the Ismaili religious head joked that there were many who are falling into the category of landless every year. At least five such families from Ismailis were on the edge of their land in debt this year. The buyers of the same were the richer Ismailis of the first and second categories. Those families in the fourth category, to whom no one in the village now risks giving credit, belonged to the Siddhis and a lot of the other communities.

Land ownership

First Category - 50 to 60 bigas (20 to 24 acres) was the average land holding of this category of the most well-off families. Implicit in this was that the land was irrigated by a private source, was fertile and optimally utilised for intensive multi- cropping throughout the year.

Second Category - average 30 to 40 bigas of land. As in the first case such land would be prime agriculture land.

Third Category - 15 to 20 bigas land holding. A mix of dry and irrigated land with varying productivity, not the prime land of the village.

Fourth Category -less than 5 bigas or landless.

Interesting is the 10 biga gap between each land classification. This could be to accommodate an approximation for factors related to varying features of land and that land is not a uniform resource. Yet in the commercialised agrarian economy of the village, land is the single most critical income source next only to some outside employment. Among the seven households listed under the first category are exceptions like the richest trader.

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 8, pp.24–29, IIED London

Part-time job (employment outside/in the village, but not daily wages)

The first two categories were either full time farmers or traders of groundnut who did not bother with a part time paid job. But part time employment did make a difference in the economic status of the last two categories. This was evident during some of the arguments between respondents during the classification.

Such a part time job would not be a manual daily wage earning one but it could never be on a par with the farming incomes of the top two categories.

House size

The size of the living quarters of the family and the number of rooms it had was an indicator of economic well-being.

The first category respondents had four to five rooms, one to store fodder, one for grain, one for a general purpose store and two for living.

The construction material, the size of the courtyard, the location in the village, the height, etc were not mentioned. Presumably only the number of rooms are of consequence.

The second and third category respondents were distinguished again on the number of rooms of their homes. Thus there were many combinations of store cum-living-room or fodder-cum-grain room or grain-cum-living room.

• Conclusions

Among the Ismaili community of 249 families, only 7 were put in the first category, 10 in the second, 189 in the third category and 43 in the fourth category.

When asked to classify other communities among these four categories, only 7 Muslims and 2 Koli Patels could be up in the third category. And the remaining (i.e. out of a total of 535 families) in the fourth category which works out as a high percentage of families in the third and fourth categories.

The results show a very large difference in the standard of living and wealth of the top two categories from the rest, and this is becoming more pronounced over the years. Thus any intervention in agriculture will benefit the most well-off sections first, unless it has to do with an exclusive package for say the Sathni (previously landless) farmers.

We took the opportunity of this RRA exercise to discuss possible income-generating projects, especially with the poorer groups in the village, and to classify the policy of AKRSP(I) to work with rural people regardless of which religious community they belong to.

- **Parmesh Shah,** Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, Choice Premises, Swastik Cross Road, Navrangpura, Ahmedabad 380009, Gujarat, India.

Source: RRA Notes (1990), Issue 8, pp.24–29, IIED London