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Rapid Rural Appraisal: lessons learnt from experiences in Palawan, The Philippines

Victoria Ortega-Espaldon and Leonardo M Florece

• Introduction

Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) has become highly acceptable in government bureaucracies amid their humble recognition of the gross failure of traditional or top-down planning. The appreciation of such methods springs from the realisation of the importance of a quick method to gather information, for planning and formulating community projects (Lamug, 1985) and a method to elicit local community participation at the onset of any development programme. As a methodology it is claimed to generate accurate and useful information on rural conditions in a more timely and cost effective manner (Chambers, 1980 as cited by Sajise, 1989).

The Institute of Environmental Science and Management (IESAM) is one of the numerous groups practising RRA in the Philippines. One recent experience is the RRA conducted in Northern Palawan. This was done on request of a non-governmental organisation (NGO), the Palawan Center for Appropriate Rural Technology (PCART) as part of a proposed agroforestry project funded by a Swiss NGO, Helvetas. The five member IESAM team was assisted by several staff members from PCART who knew the sites well.

The three upland communities chosen for the RRA are located in Northeast Palawan, an island province now being referred to as the 'last ecological frontier' (Figure 1). Each site is located in a valley interspersed with large river systems and tributaries draining towards the east coast of Palawan. The total land area of the barangay (settlement area) ranges from 400 to 600 ha. Sixty percent of the farms in

the three sites have 10-30% slopes and are found within the settlement areas while 40% of the farms have 30% slopes and lie below the forest zones.

• The RRA

The specific objectives of the RRA were:

- to assess the biophysical and socioeconomic conditions of the three sites;
- to identify upland development issues and constraints and opportunities confronting the people; and,
- to determine appropriate implementation strategies for a community-based agroforestry project.

The RRA team included a soil scientist, a forester, an economist, a horticulturalist and an ecologist. The RRA was carried out from May 8 to 15, 1988 with five days of fieldwork. Three days were spent travelling since the communities are far apart.

A week before the field interviews, PCART staff notified the farmers and community leaders on the purpose and the dates of the interviews. On arrival the PCART community organiser briefed the team on the location using a rough sketch of the areas to be appraised. PCART staff who joined the team are known in the communities, so interviewers did not

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have the problem of establishing rapport, which facilitated the interviews. Just before the team set out for the field, the members of the farmers organisation -Samahan ng mga Magsasaka ng Palawan (SAMAPA) - were listed with the help of the host farmer. These farmers are the target clienteles of the project. The people interviewed made up almost 85% of the total membership of SAMAPA.

Besides formal interviews, two members of the team conducted biophysical characterisation and mapping of the existing land use and settlement pattern in every barangay. Another team, which was led by the soil scientist, conducted soil sampling in the major land use areas. Soil analysis was done using a portable soil test kit.

After the data had been analysed, a draft report was presented in community meetings.

The IESAM RRA made use of the following patterns, most of these are from Agroecosystem Analysis (Conway and Sajise, 1986): space patterns (Figures 2 and 3), time patterns (Figure 4), flow patterns and decision patterns (Figure 5).

Besides these data, gathered from the interview and direct observations, other information was also collected:

- Family portraits: derived from interviews.
- Map of the Palawan Province with a scale of 1:50,000, showing land use and topography.
- Socioeconomic and demographic data of nearest towns, since records specific to the sites were not readily available.
- Land tenure - this information was obtained during discussions with other institutions.
- Information on previous programmes of the government and NGOs in the area.
- Historical information derived solely from the PCART staff.

- **Presentation of observations and findings to the community**

After the data analysis, the first draft of the report was written and checked with the communities. Presentation was made using visual aids such as:

- Sketch map of the community showing the various structures, such as: houses, secondary forest, river systems, farms and fallow fields;

- Transects of the agroecosystems in the community to show the relationships of the agroecosystem components;

- Cropping calendars and diagrams showing species of crops raised and their yield, and animals raised; and,

- List of management problems encountered by the farmers

Slide presentation of the general features of the area and existing land-use/cropping systems in Palawan were shown in contrast to other marginal uplands in different parts of the country. The objective was to give the farmers a clear view of environmental situations in the country and develop their perspective regarding sound environmental management.

After the presentation of RRA results and slides, the farmers' comments on the RRA findings were solicited, refocusing attention on the problems in their own community. Discussion about alternative solutions to their problems did not happen immediately after the evaluation because the checking of the findings was really meant to stir their awareness.

One month after the evaluation 'echo training' to farmer beneficiaries by PCART agroforestry staff took place to broaden farmers' knowledge and explain the various activities in pursuing an agroforestry project. Detailed activities were lined-up starting with nursery development activities and individual

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farm development activities. Priority crops to be planted on each farm were listed during the workshop including the desired number that the family could plant in the coming planting season.

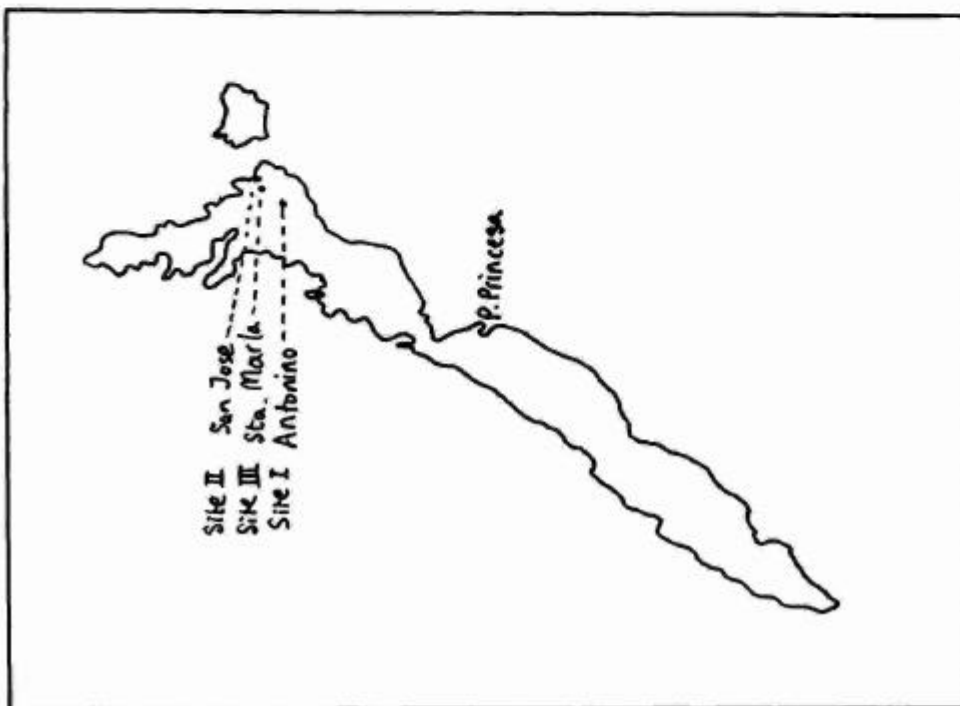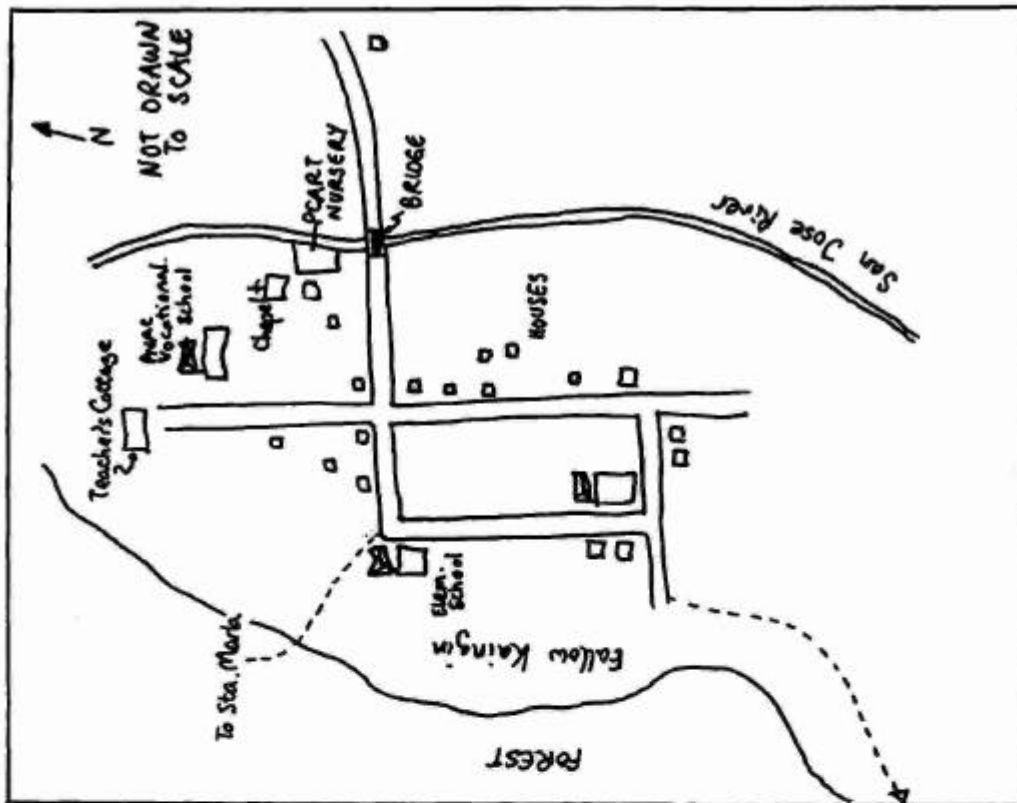**Figure 2. Site map of San Jose' Barrio proper Approx. area = 250 Ha.**

Figure 1. Map of Palawan showing location of the three pilot sites
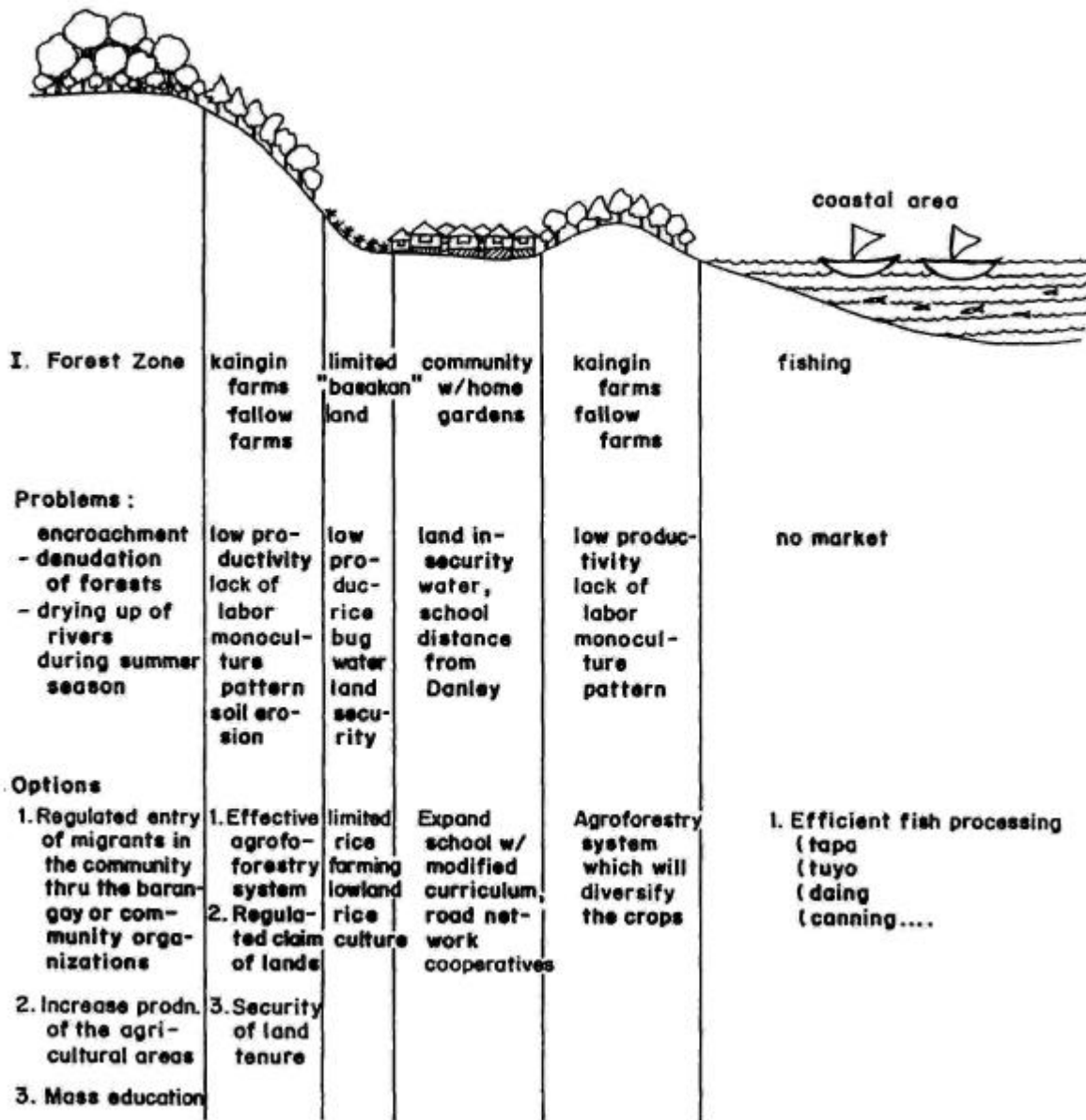
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Figure 3. Transect of the agroecosystems in San Jose'

I. Forest Zone	kaingin farms fallow farms	limited "basakan" land	community w/home gardens	kaingin farms fallow farms	fishing
Problems :					
encroachment - denudation of forests – drying up of rivers during summer season	low pro- ductivity lack of labor monocul- ture pattern soil ero- sion	low pro- duc- rice bug water land secu- rity	land in- security water, school distance from Danley	low produc- tivity lack of labor monocul- ture pattern	no market
Options					
1.Regulated entry of migrants in the community thru the baran- gay or com- munity orga- nizations 2. Increase prodn. of the agri- cultural areas 3. Mass education	1.Effective agrofo- forestry system 2. Regula- ted claim of lands 3.Security of land tenure	limited rice farming lowland rice culture	Expand school w/ modified curriculum, road net- work cooperatives	Agroforestry system which will diversify the crops	1. Efficient fish processing (tapa (tuyo (daing (canning....

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Figure 4. Cropping pattern of annual crop in Antonino
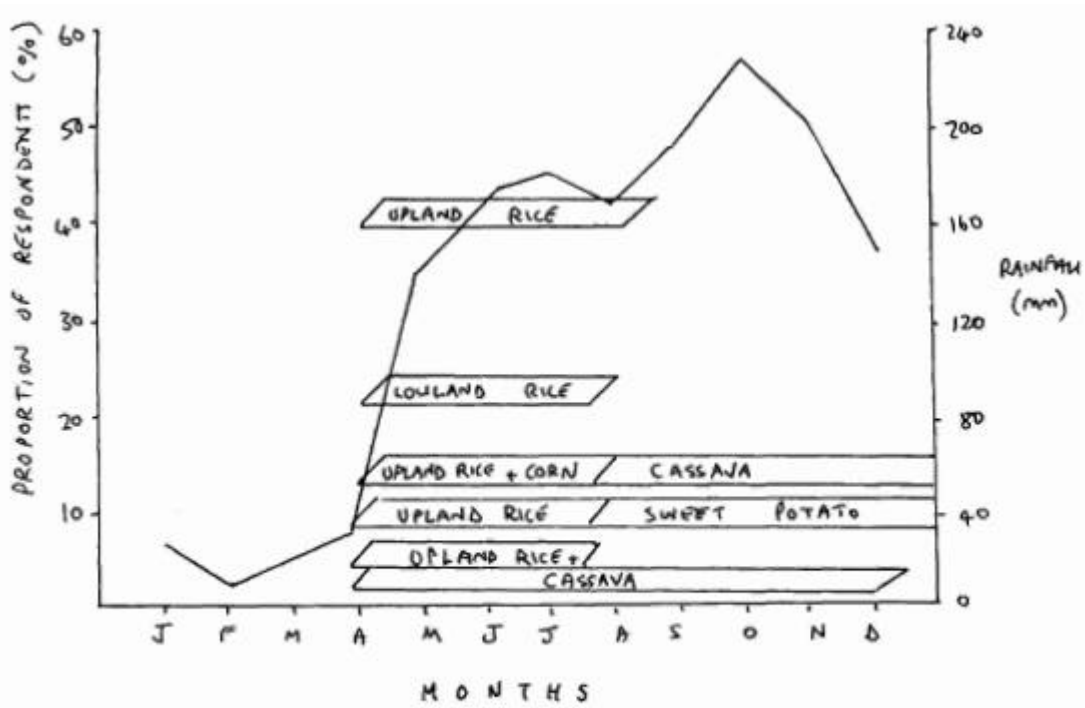
Figure 5. Decision tree of the livelihood systems for farmers in the three sites

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                              ┌─ Larger Kaingin farms
                              ├─ "Basakan"/Plowed field
      With draft animal       ├─ Can put up "sari-sari" store
      and capital             ├─ Well kept cashew monoculture
                              └─ "Baklad" owner
  Land
                              ┌─ Rattan gathering
      No capital              ├─ Fishing
                              └─ Poorly maintained Kaingin

                              ┌─ Baklad owner ++
      With capital            ├─ Middlemen
                              ├─ Store owner +
                              └─ Tenants
  No land
                              ┌─ Sustenance fishing
      No capital              ├─ Hired laborer
                              └─ Tenant/Kaingin for rice only
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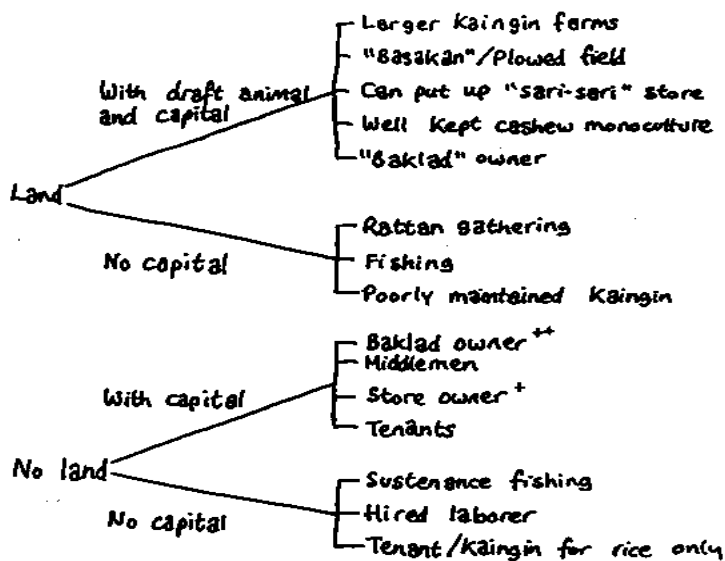
\+ in minimum frequency
\++ existing in San Jose but do not exist in other areas

Farmers identified two priorities:

- Strengthening of the farmers organisation, SAMAPA. Bylaws of the organisation will be prepared by them, including rules and guidelines that will be enforced to make development activities effective and efficient, e.g. in distributing benefits to individual farmers and their responsibilities to the project. Training will be given to enhance their capacity in handling organisational matters.

- Intervening support. Water buffalo distribution scheme was discussed by the farmers and PCART staff. Other services like a water system, a marketing co-operative and land tenure security were also discussed.

After the detailed plan of activities was laid down the organisation was divided into 4 sectors or groups. Selection of sector members was based on geographical considerations for effective mobilisation and channelling of information. Leaders responsible for assigning tasks were chosen and groups were given their respective assignments and specific schedule as stipulated in the action plan.

When enough seedlings and other planting materials are ready, the farmers will be trained in land-use planning in preparation for the coming planting season. Each farmer is expected to have his/her own farm plot and specific plan of activities.

- **Lessons learnt from the RRA**

The RRA experience has taught us specific lessons concerning interviewing and the project, village and institutional contexts in which it took place.

The structured interview used was too rigid so the team had to keep separate notes to record the information missed on the questionnaire. It would be better to identify key respondents in

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advance with the help of the local agency prior to field visits. Then guiding questions can be formulated depending on the objectives of the RRA, instead of preparing a survey questionnaire which is the 'get-all-the-information-that-we-can' type of 15-20 pages. Interview schedules would need to be modest, to neither frighten nor bore the respondents by their length.

The RRA experience has helped to streamline the agroforestry project. This has finalised the overall thrust of the project - giving details such as the desired species vs the suitable species in the area. For example, cashew has been found to be the most preferred cash crop. There is, however, a tendency towards monoculture which is unstable for a site as tropical as Palawan. As an island, it is also more vulnerable to pests and diseases. The risks and possibilities in farm development were discussed openly in the community dialogue.

At the village level however, Antonino, which is the most accessible of the three sites, has developed a kind of 'dole-out' mentality, perhaps because of past development efforts in the area. Social rifts are appearing between the different social groups originating from different parts of Palawan and between these groups and migrants from other provinces. On the other hand, San Jose and Sta.Maria, which are the more inaccessible sites, appear to be more cohesive communities. The development activities implemented by PCART and the government-sponsored Palawan National Agricultural College are knots that have strengthened their ties instead of knocking the community into pieces.

RRA is an effective rural assessment method which will identify appropriate strategies for rural development projects (Sajise 1989) when handled skilfully. But this is not going to stand on its own without additional institutional support. This means that RRA must be fully reflected and incorporated into the development project plan. This has been the best advantage of working with an NGO like PCART. RRA results can be conveniently

integrated into the plan unlike in government-initiated programmes that leave little room for adjustments and a large number of people to convince.

Assistance by an NGO is a vital aspect of local community development. The technical staff from the community-based NGO are important in facilitating an effective RRA. They know the language and the people. However, one shortcoming of our RRA was that the technical staff were relegated to the background and functioned only as guides. Their potential of the community-based technical staff can be fully harnessed in the RRA process by letting them help in administering field data collection. Perhaps a background in RRA can be given to them prior to its application so that the process is known to them in advance, and its difference from other known methods of gathering data is known.

The strongest feature of the RRA findings was that they were incorporated into the plan of the NGO. To ensure the smooth implementation of the development programme, a forester and a technical staff member were committed by IESAM to follow-up and monitor the development of the project.

Staff development for the implementing NGO was also conducted by IESAM with the sole purpose of building the institutional capability of the organisation. This must be followed up by more intensive and integrative training and synthesis of field experiences. Furthermore, IESAM has helped in establishing institutional linkages with government agencies involved.

One major limitation of this RRA was its operating cost, which runs to thousands of pesos. However, we cannot do away with this initial amount. One possible improvement is to develop the capacity of local technical staff to conduct any type of RRA. In the long run, the community-based development office can be self-reliant and expenses can be minimal. In this context, both formal and informal RRA training for many private and government development agencies must now be given

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priority. This will finally liberate RRA from the domain of constancy firms and educational and research institutions.

- **Victoria Orteaga-Espaldon** and **Leonardo M Florece,** Institute of Environment Science and Management, Universtiy of the Philippines at Los Banos College, Laguna, Philippines.

NOTES

Other member of the RRA team: Antonio J Alcantara, Efren Operio and Plato Tirol.

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