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Participatory Rural Appraisal and Participatory Learning methods: recent experiences from Myrada and South India

James Mascarenhas

About MYRADA

MYRADA is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) which has been involved in rural development since 1968. It works in approximately 2,000 villages in South India, in the states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. MYRADA initially started as an organisation which resettled refugees from Tibet. Since then its role has expanded and today it has six major programme thrusts:

- Participative resource development and management projects (particularly in semi-arid areas). These include wastelands and watershed development programmes;
- Resettlement and rehabilitation of released bonded labour and landless families;
- Development of women and children in rural areas;
- Development of rural credit systems;
- Development of appropriate institutions and management systems in the rural areas; and,
- Training - evolving training methods which are appropriate to the Indian context - particularly the rural areas.

What's in a name

In India, particularly in South India the last 14 months have been significant in the development of participatory methods to understand and assess rural situations - and plan for their development. In the course of applying Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) methods in its work, MYRADA came to the

conclusion that 'Rapid' cannot be 'Participatory'.

Prominent features of MYRADA's style of functioning are:

- its emphasis on the participation of village people in their own development; and
- its active and ongoing presence in a defined rural area not as 'patron' and 'benefactor' but as 'catalyst' and 'partner' in development.

What was required was a method which did not stop just at 'Appraisal', but which went beyond it into a shared analysis and understanding of rural situations. This, in turn should lead to developmental activities that are creative, productive and sustainable over a period of time. Thus, it was that PALM evolved (Participatory Learning Methods) and indeed there was plenty to learn - from, with and about rural people and their situations. The PALM method complemented and integrated well with MYRADA's approach, and the results of this have been quite substantial.

• The PALM experience

PALM took off much faster than we expected. Since we adopted it at the end of 1989, a little over 50 PALM exercises have been conducted. These have been on a variety of topics and situations. The PALM programme thrust has been on rapid training and exposure, building up of training teams, developing new methods and applications, constantly reviewing and refining the methodology, analysing and documenting experiences, and initiating participative developmental programmes

based on the outcomes/outputs of PALM exercises.

Applications

Tentatively at first, and more confidently as we began to understand the methodology better, we worked out ways in which PALM could be applied to a variety of situations. Some of these are:

- Participatory planning of natural resource development and management projects. These include programmes for the development of wastelands and watersheds, tank and lift irrigation and afforestation programmes.
- Participatory planning of integrated rural development programmes, in which the different sectors such as agriculture, sericulture, animal husbandry, education, health, etc, are integrated into a single programme.
- Tracking and identification of beneficiaries for appropriate programmes. These include child sponsorship programmes and programmes for health care, poverty alleviation, etc.
- Studying the coping strategies/mechanisms of the rural poor - crisis management, credit needs and sources, and credit management.
- Studying other aspects of rural life - customs and traditions, trends, conflicts and their resolution, health and nutrition, education etc.
- Participatory impact monitoring and assessment of developmental programmes, e.g. impact of a road, an agricultural research station, a health programme, etc.

What's a PALM training exercise like?

A typical PALM exercise has about 25-30 persons participating. The participants are drawn from various organisations - NGOs, research and training institutions, the government, etc. A village is selected as a location for the exercise. This village is usually one where there is already an established ongoing presence by an outside agency and where developmental programmes are taking place or are being proposed. This

stipulation is made out of respect for the villagers whose curiosities and expectations are raised by such exercises, and to leave the village without a concrete response to expressed needs would not be appropriate.

The participants stay in the village. This helps in several ways. Apart from simplifying logistics, it gives the 'outsiders' a feel for what the village is really like. There is also a greater opportunity for villagers and outsiders to access each other and interact - especially in the evenings after the day's work is done. A strong rapport is developed and the degree of sharing extends over many more aspects of village life which are more intimate to the villagers than only their work. Village camping thus has a definite impact on participation.

Participation is also enhanced by introducing the outsiders to a 'code of conduct' several Do's and Don'ts but the most important ones are:

- Choose a time suitable to the villagers;
- Follow necessary cultural protocol as required by the situation;
- Take care not to raise the villagers' expectations - particularly if those expectations cannot be responded to;
- Initiate a few 'equalising' exercises - simple everyday tasks (basket weaving, transplanting rice, house construction, etc), with the villagers as the teachers. The outsiders who are usually 'qualified' and hat these 'simple' village tasks are not so simple after all. The villagers on their part begin to feel less inferior and begin to see that their skills have a value and status in the eyes of the 'educated' outsiders. This gives them greater confidence and increases their willingness to participate in the exercises and tell us more about themselves and their situation; and,
- Exercise discipline in the mode of interaction is another item aimed at stimulating participation. To be avoided are the superior modes - lecturing instead of listening and learning.

Layout of a PALM programme

The layout of a typical PALM Programme is generally as follows:

Day 1 - Introductory

History of the village
Village layout
Village infrastructure, etc

Day 2 - Exploratory (Simple)

Study of resources
Livelihoods
Trends
Preferences, etc

Day 3 - Exploratory (Complex)

Seasonality
Identifying resources
Wealth ranking
Class and caste stratification, conflict, etc
Causes & effects, etc

Day 4 - Convergence

Identifying opportunities
Listing priorities and best bets
Identifying roles and responsibilities
(defining participants of the various partners - including the people)

Day 5 - Concluding

Operational plan
Documentation, etc

These are only a few items. There could be many more. Neither is this a fixed format. Variations are not only possible, but they are recommended.

Some tips

Apart from the actual topical exercises, early morning review sessions followed by briefing sessions for the day's work are held. Evenings are reserved for group presentations. These are times when most of the villagers are free after the day's work is done. Presenting this information in the large evening forum has the advantage that it is up for everyone's scrutiny and is subject to correction. Thus there is a reasonable chance that at the end of the day we have an end product that is accurate and reliable, having been refined several times over from the initial discussions in the sub-groups, to the final presentation. Such

gatherings are usually lively with the village folk correcting one another and arriving at consensus on various issues, events, practices and other information. Thus an important principle of PRA/PALM is met - that of 'triangulation' of information.

There are many other aspects and elements that go into the making of a PALM programme. For obvious reasons all these cannot be described here - many have to be experienced. There are also standard group processes and techniques, which have not been described in detail but are very much part of the methodology which MYRADA follows in its PALM programmes. Some of these are ice breakers, outsider to villager ratios, group sharing, evolution of topical agenda interviewing techniques, role plays, 'buzz' sessions, 'dummy' exercises and so on.

Some methods and their applications

Time line

Time and events, history, evolution of village, agricultural practices, etc. This is done by constructing a chronology of events that have taken place in consultation with the people (Figure 4).

Participatory

- Social mapping etc (Figure 5)

Village layout, infrastructure, population, chronic health cases, handicapped, malnourished children, family planning cases, vaccinations, widows, destitutes.

- Primary resource mapping & modelling

Land, water and tree resources, land use, land and soil types, cropping patterns, land and water management, productivity, watersheds, degraded land, treatment plans, etc. These are done by the villagers themselves with paper and pens when it is to be mapping on paper or coloured chalk or coloured powders (rangoli) when it has to be mapping on the ground (Figure 6).

Transects

- Straight
- Nullah
- Sweeping

Perambulatory/observatory walks to study natural resources, topography, indigenous technology, soils and vegetation, farming practices, problems and opportunities which are cross tallied with the resource mapping and modelling. These are done by walking through the area, with a group of villagers - either following a particular course, cross country or covering the area in a combing or sweeping motion (Figure 7).

- Historical

Pictorial/graphic representations of the area at different points in time, to give evolutionary trends in land use, vegetation, erosion, population, etc. These are done by interviewing older people and asking them to recap the landscape of a given area at different points in time (Figure 8).

Seasonality diagramming

For obtaining seasonal patterns of rainfall, employment, income and expenditure, debt, credit, food and nutrition, diseases, fodder, milk production, marketing, etc. These are done with the use of stones, sticks and different coloured seeds to represent months quantities of rainfall, number of days of employment, income, etc (Figures 9 and 10).

Ranking

- Pairwise
- Matrix

- Preference
- Scoring

For ranking items such as: crops; varieties, types and breeds of livestock; trees; fodders; supplementary income generating activities; etc. These are conducted by asking farmers to list different items, e.g. species of trees or vegetables and different criteria for evaluating them. Each class or category is then given a rank or score by the villagers. This is done by means of quantification with pebbles or seeds (Figures 11 and 12).

- Wealth

Establishing economic order of members of a community. This is done by interviewing a suitable villager(s), who then classifies different members into separate groups identified as distinct economic classes in the village.

Diagrams

- Venn (Chapatis)

Used as a means of identifying and establishing relationships between a village and its environment in order of their relative importance.

- Linkage/relationship charts

Also for mapping processes, causes, effects, linkages (Figure 13).

- General

Pie diagrams, flow diagrams, trend diagrams, graphs, etc, for depiction data about various topics (Figure 14).

Figure 4. Time line of village of Kalmandargi. The 1972 drought was thought to be the most critical event in the village

PIDOW-MYRADA GULBARGA.

<u>TIME AND EVENTS.</u>		Geographical Location MIDAMHA GULBARGA	Anthropology Date 22.02.1999
	Cholera (many tops)		
1940	Plague disease (Andis tops)		
1955	100 houses burnt (fire accident)		
1957	Independence		
1959	Land survey; Community fight for land 52-Nr 204		
1960	Primary school.		
1963	Mallik Sahab tank Construction.		
1965	Land ceiling act		
1966	Green Revolution		
1966	People started going to health hospitals.		
1968	Starting of POST OFFICE		
1971	Abolition of local judicial systems (Police P.M.I, Mall Patti)		
1972	SEVERE FAMINE, MIGRATION, FELLING OF TREES, ROAD FORMATION.		
1973	Introduction of hybrid varieties, famine gave an opportunity for the people to see - outside areas, knowledge etc.		
1974	DeLapole system		
1975	MYRADA intervention, electrification, using of fertilizer & Plant Protection Chemicals		
1985	Mini Water Supply; Temple Construction.		

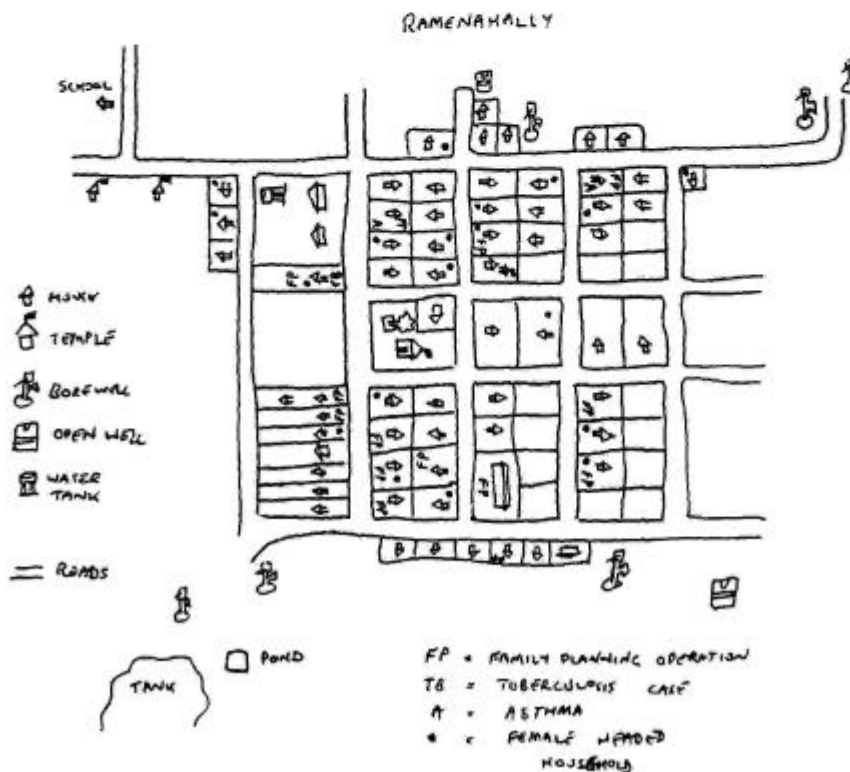


Figure 5. Socila map drawn by villagers of Ramenahally village

Figure 6. Village resource map showing land use, trees, water bodies, hillocks etc. as shown by villagers of Godavellagudda village

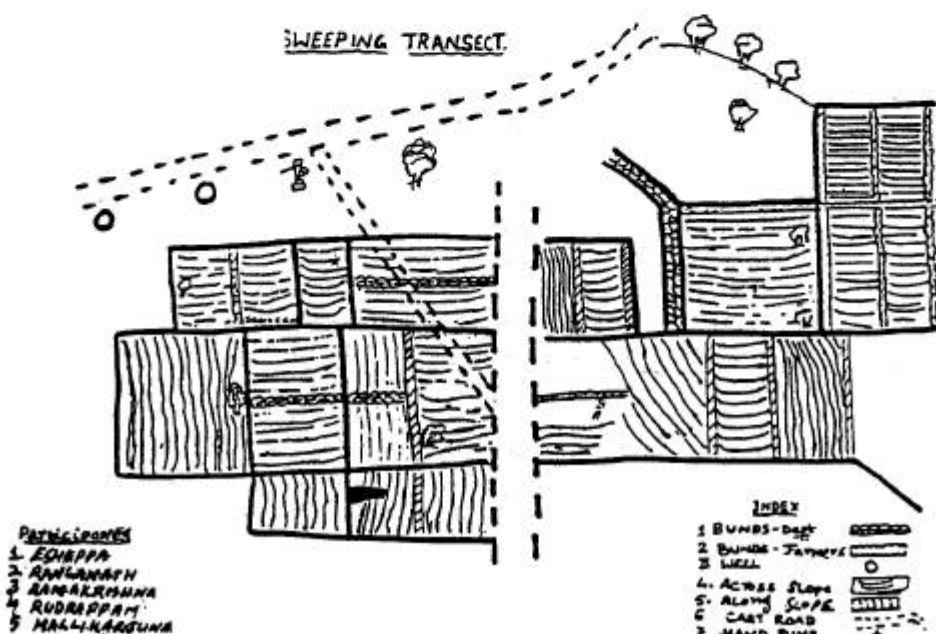
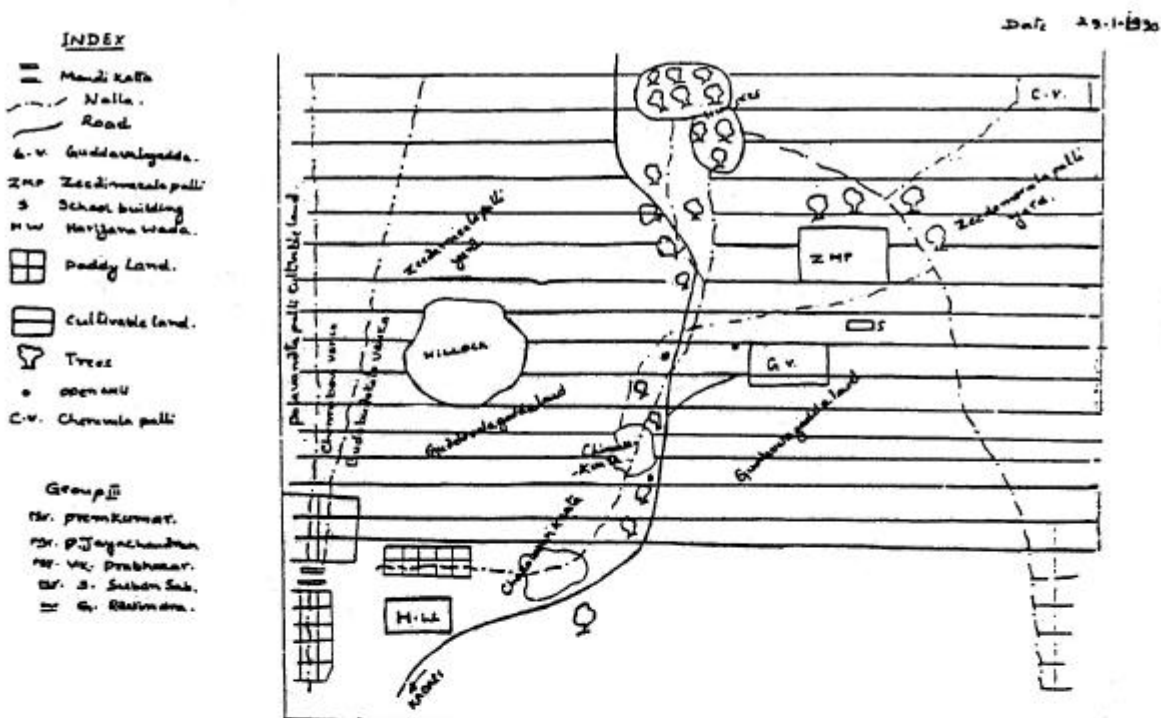


Figure 7. Sweeping transect of right bank of a stream in Simbu village

- **Extensions and hybrids**

Constant and extensive use of PALM in our work in a variety of situations has helped bring about progress in PALM methodology.

New applications

Such as applying the time line exercise to areas other than just the history of the village. For example it is used to record the evolution of health and agricultural practices, education etc. One interesting recent application was its use in the profiling of a poor family (Figure 15). Another prominent application has been the use of participatory village mapping to see patterns of caste, asset ownership, family size and to identify households with handicapped persons, persons having chronic ailments, family planning cases, etc (see Figure 5).

In one recent exercise while the village was being mapped by women, a discussion on malnutrition was initiated, and the symptoms described. After this the women began to point out and mark on the map the houses which had children suffering from malnutrition.

New extensions

Such as the evolution of participatory mapping on the ground to participatory modelling on the ground. From this point the method was extended further by making models of what a particular area such as a watershed looked like 50 years ago, what it would look like 20 years hence, and so on (Figure 16). Treatment plans for land development have also been shown on the maps or models.

New methods

In the use of transects for planning development of village lands a new method used was the 'sweeping transect'. Here groups

of farmers and outsiders comb different blocks of the area to bring out information about indigenous technology, problems and opportunities. Using this method, site specific plans can be made - even on a plot by plot basis (see Figure 7).

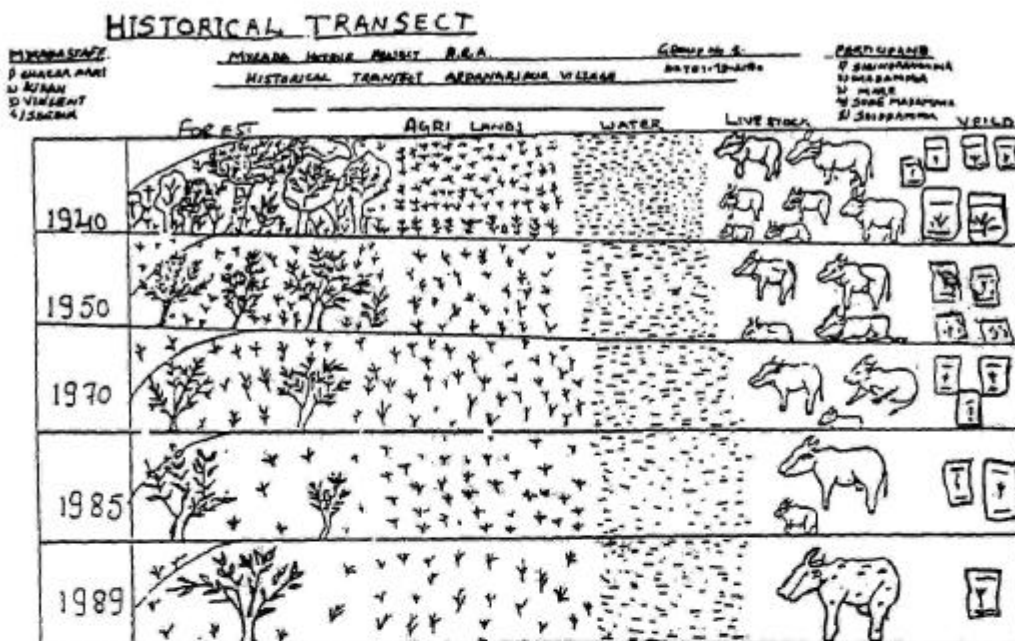
Hybrids

It has been possible to evolve new methods by combining 2 or more methods. For instance, participatory village mapping has led to participatory wealth ranking. This was further developed to include participatory resource mapping, with land ownership, land use, soil types and productivity of each plot of land indicated. Later attempts were made to correlate wealth to productivity.

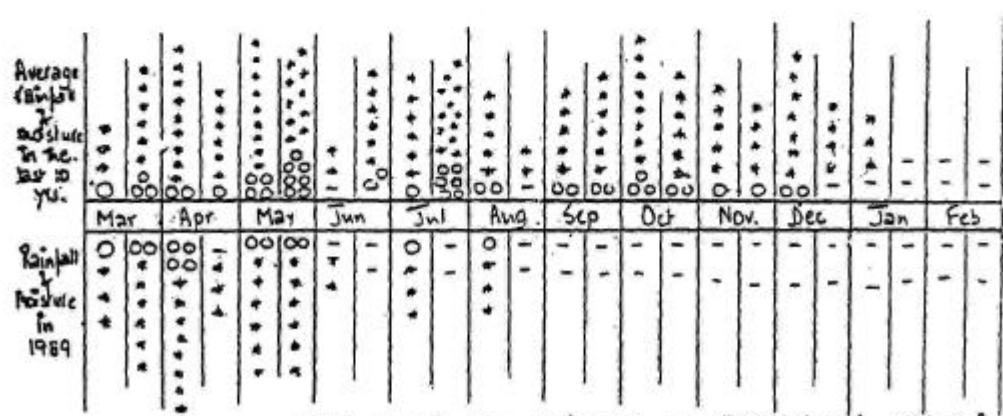
The innovations and learning continues. Lately we have been experimenting with different ways in which the PALM exercise can be conducted. For example, in several cases we have had the farmers themselves draw the village and resource map and indicate possible interventions. This was done without any outsiders being present, while the exercise was going on. The results have been extremely encouraging. Similarly, we now have farmers conducting their own exercises, interviewing one another and so on.

And we continue to learn. We are learning to 'embrace' error and to listen instead of lecturing - not very easy tasks. We are learning how to handle 'dominant' participants - including some from the village who have vested interests. Sequencing our questions during interactions, sequencing of topics during a PALM exercise and sequencing of follow-up activities - whether to do with the village programme or to do with the development and institutionalisation of PALM - all these and many more are areas where we are engaged in a continuous process of learning.

Figure 8. Historical transect for animals, trees, water and crops. Drawn by villages of Ardanarypura village



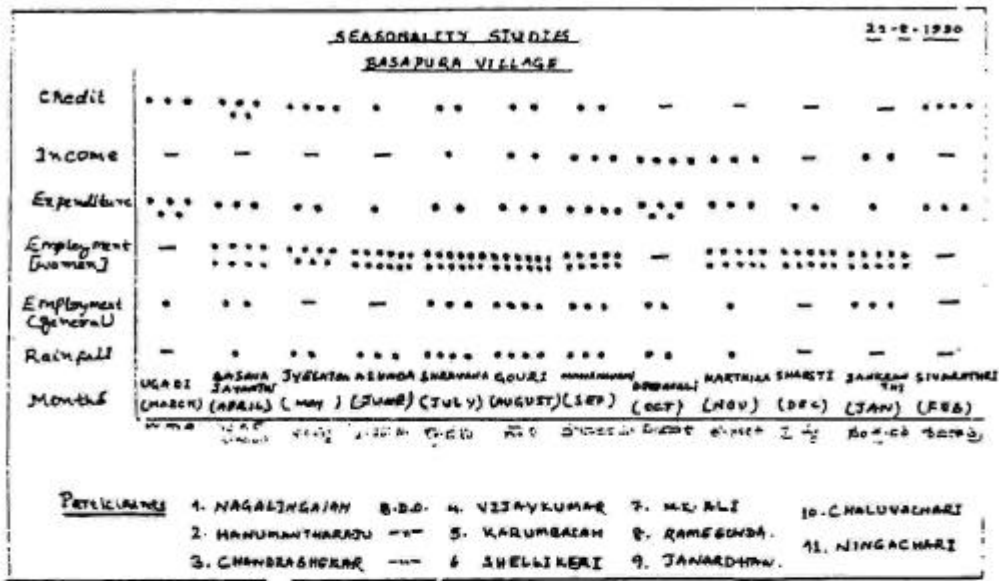
○ = Stone
 ▼ = Lab lab seed
 1 Seed = 1 rainy day
 1 Stone = 1 inch of moisture in the soil



Talking to this group of farmers we discovered that moisture in the soil is more relevant than quantum of rain or number of rainy days.

Figure 9. Seasonality of rainfall in Neegu village. Drawn from an original diagram made by villagers

Figure 10. Seasonality of employment, income, credit and expenditure in village of Basavapuram



	COBBLER	TAMARIND	LEAF PLATE	MUSTARD APPLE	BRICK MAKING	FIREWOOD	PONGEMA
TIME CONSUMPTION	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	••
PROFITS	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•
LABOUR	•	••	•	•	•••	•	•
LOAN	••	-	-	-	-	-	-
HARD WORK	••	••	••	•••	•••	•••	••

Staff : Elias
Suresh
Padmavathi

Participants : P. Lakshminarayana
krishnappa
Gangulamani
Gangojama

Figure 11. Matrix ranking of non-agricultural livelihoods in Godavellagudda village. Constructed by village women who selected their own criteria

Figure 12. Matrix rankings of finger millet and cotton varieties according to villagers' own criteria in Neegu village

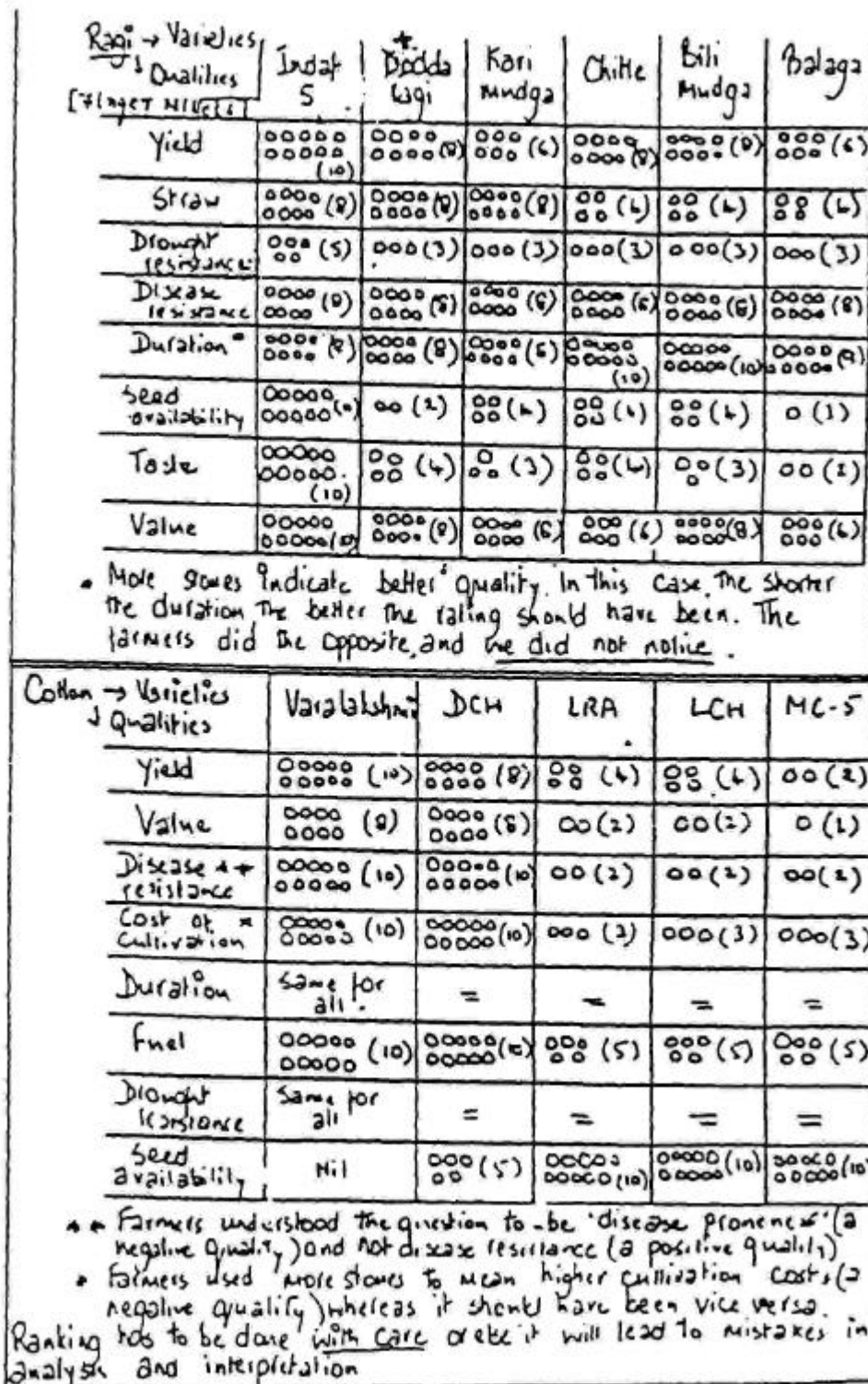


Figure 13. Flow diagram describing effects of drought of 1972. Explained by villages of Kalmandargi village

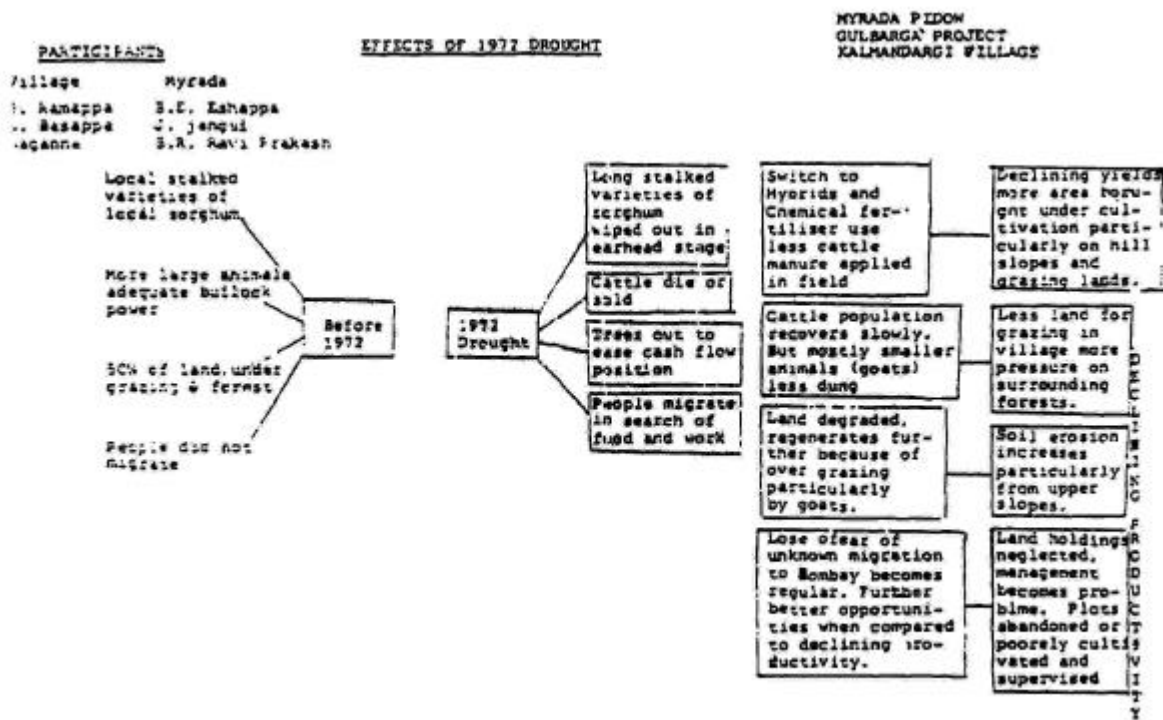
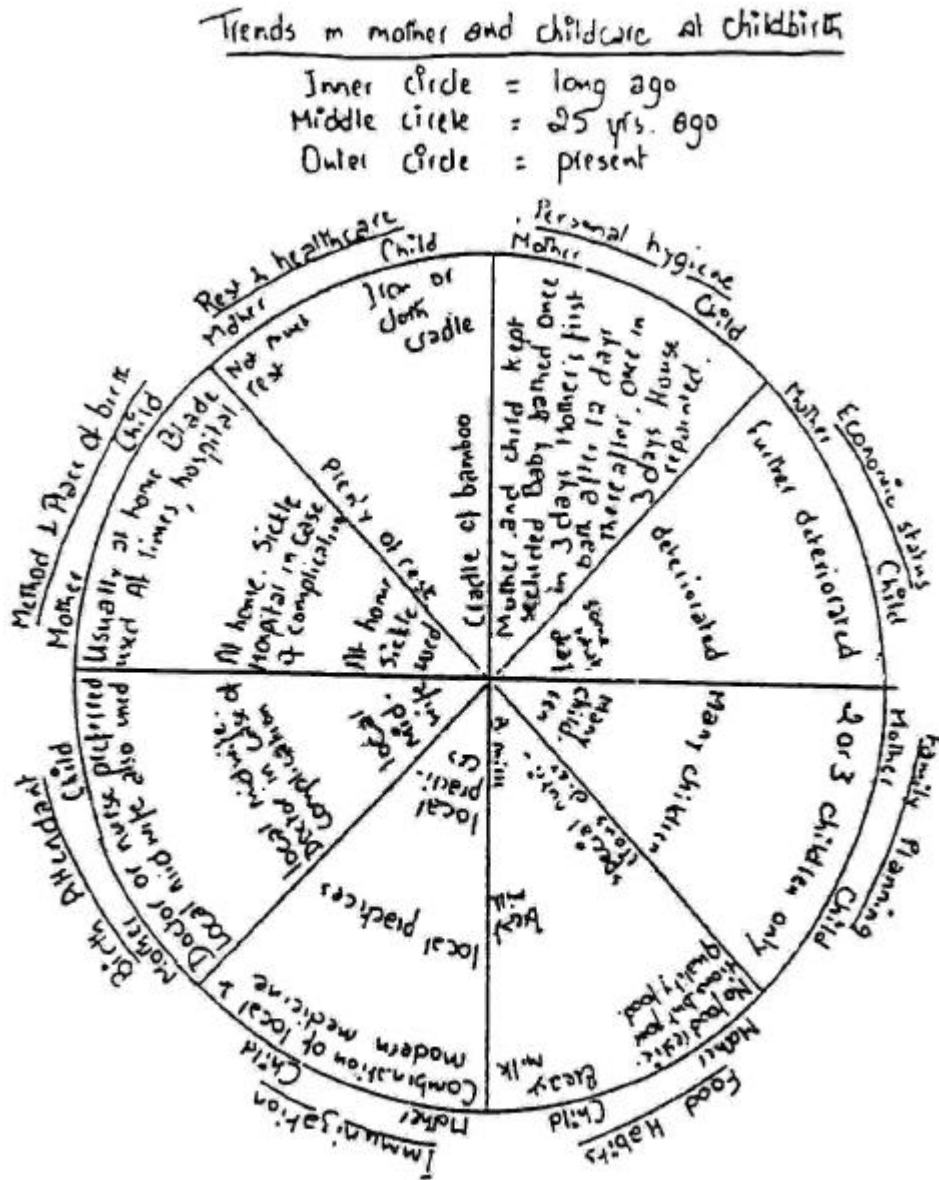


Figure 14. Trends in mother and child care over three generations – grandmother, mother and child. Drawn from information gathered from women at Neegu village



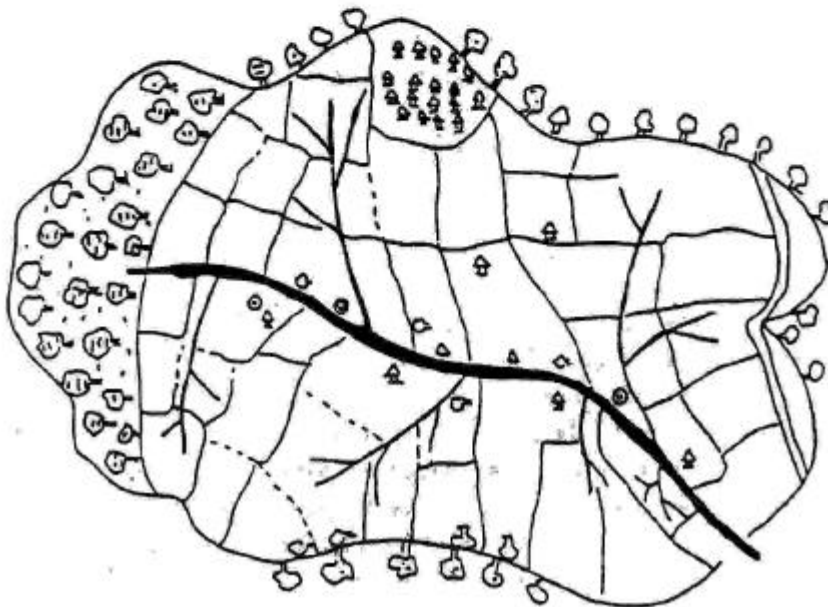
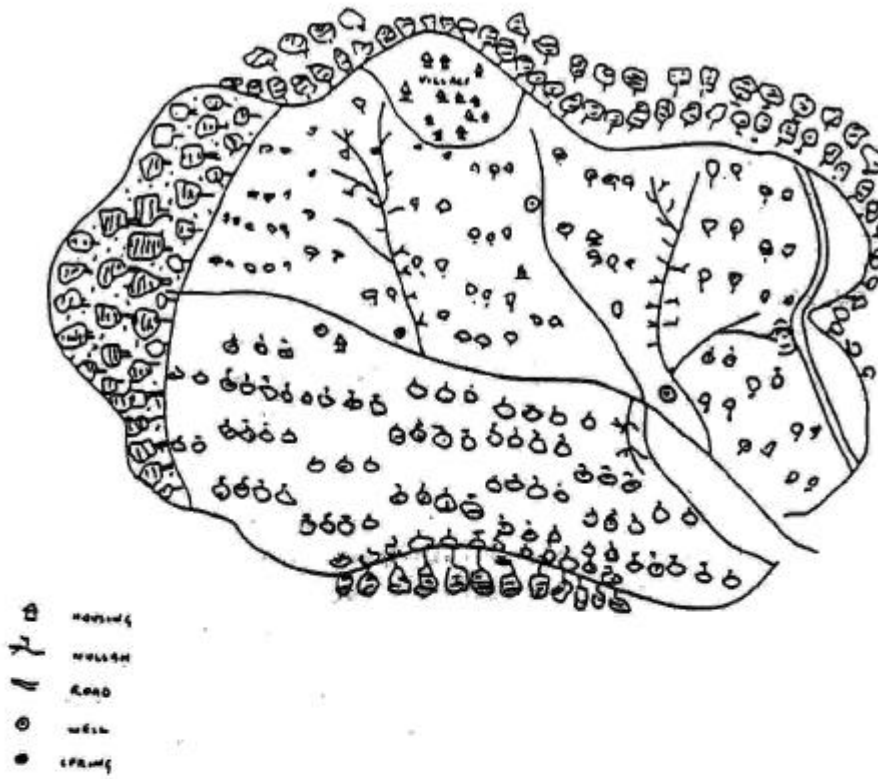
[Information collected from middle class household.
 Cannot be generalized for all households]

Figure 15. Time line of a family, indicating crisis periods in a poor woman's life, and how she managed these crises. Information from Muddamma of Mudlanar village

Muddamma's Life Story :

- 1935 : Born in a poor family - Mudiyanur.
Childhood : Living on alms & casual work.
- 1950 : Married to an equally poor person in Gundalpet.
- 1951 : First son born.
- 1954 : Loses her husband.
Back to Mudiyanur with her son -
For livelihood - casual work & Missionarie's help.
- 1956 : Migrated to Bangalore - working with nuns.
- 1960 : Comes back to the Missionaries in Panakahally.
- 1961 : Finds her new marriage partner - Bagyarathnam.
- 1962 : Bagyarathnam ex-communicated and returns to Mudiyanur.
The first son placed in bondage - second son born.
- 1964 : Life's struggle worsens - Drought.
- 1965 : Has a third son - Unable to feed children.
Sickness in the family - forced to seek alms.
Her another son and a daughter in succession.
- 1970 : Second & third sons placed in bondage in order
to release the eldest and get him married.
- 1972 : Worst drought - No drinking water -
walks 5 kms to Doddapurma for water.
- 1980 : Eldest son releases one of his brothers and gets
him married.
- 1982 : Loses her husband.
- 1985 : MYRADA's intervention in second son's development
(Laurance) - Sericulture; cross bred calf.
- 1986 : Second son releases both brothers and gets the
elder married.
- 1987 : Moves to Government allotted house with Laurance's
family - Gets her daughter married.
- 1988 : Participants in the development attempt of
Laurance - I.R.O.P. LOAN - Bicycle shop.
- 1990 : Narrates her life struggle - 2 meals a day
Freedom from struggle
Looking forward

16. Maps drawn from two watershed models made by people of Ardanarypura village, Karnataka. The top shows the watershed 50 years ago, the bottom as it is today



• Lessons

There have been several lessons. Enough has been said elsewhere about the qualitative differences between the information generated in the PRA/PALM method and the conventional survey method (see, for example Andy Inglis, RRA Notes 12). The latter are unfamiliar to the people and therefore non participative. What do we do with villagers who have ideas and perceptions far different from our own, which are also expressed differently and do not fall into any of our existing formats?

We have found, as others have, that the villagers are capable of collecting far more accurate information than outsiders. They can also correct it, order and analyse it and start a process of development if given the opportunity to do so. Alongside this realisation, there is also the growing realisation that people in the rural areas are extremely skilful managers forced to live as they are under extremely marginal and vulnerable conditions. Their decision making has got to be precise. Hence, their perceptions about their situations are absolutely critical inputs in any planning.

There is a need to understand and appreciate traditional management systems, livelihood systems, indigenous technologies, and the ways and reasons for how people feel, see, think and act in rural areas. PALM offers a way in which both outsiders and villagers try to discover the situation through a process of joint observation and interaction and shared analysis. The focus is on relationships rather than on any single event, aspect or activity.

We have found that PALM is a method much enjoyed by both villagers and outsiders alike. It not only enhances participation, it also enhances the generation of both information and ideas. And we find that the village has begun to 'grow' on us.

Villagers are increasingly emerging as resource persons in our PALM exercises. This includes small marginal farmers, landless, tribals, women and even children. The latter have often participated actively and have demonstrated their expertise in terms of

identifying different types of grasses and trees (particularly fruit trees). They also help identify school dropouts, handicapped children, etc.

The PRA/PALM field is a new unexplored and seemingly open-ended frontier. Several possibilities exist - in methodology development, applications and generation of information - particularly local knowledge. But there is a danger - that of a lack of quality control and the consequent propagation of wrong methods. There is an urgent need to rapidly increase the use of good PRA methods and introduce this approach in mainstream organisations and institutions. And finally, there is a need to train more and more people in PRA/PALM. But where are the trainers and how do we go about achieving this?

- **James Mascarenhas** MYRADA, No. 2, Service Road, Domlur Layout, Bangalore, Karnataka, India.

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