

## Adoption of Participatory Rural Appraisal: a case study from China

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**Introduction** There are many models of technology transfer. They vary from the linear “scientist-extension worker-farmers” model to the integrative “natural resource management” model (Jiggins, 1993). International experience has shown that for small holding farmers in developing countries a farmer driven model based on participatory approaches (the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) Model) is more effective and efficient.

**Methods** Three PRA workshops were conducted in China: at Chengdu, Zhangye and Pingliang. At the Chengdu workshop approximately 37% of the participants were senior government officers. Traditionally, these people were considered as “sabboteurs” (Pretty *et al.* 1995) by development practitioners because they tended to dominate the proceedings and could result in non-participation by lower ranking officers and farmers. At the two subsequent workshops (Zhangye and Pingliang) more lower ranking extension officers were selected for training. In order to assess the degree of adoption of PRA methodology by the participants, two post-workshop surveys were conducted at 9 months (March 2002) and 3 years (Jan. 2004) after the workshops respectively. Table 1 summarises the key findings.

**Table 1** Adoption of PRA by participants

Workshops	Chengdu (Oct. 2000)	Zhangye (June 2001)	Pingliang (June 2001)
No .of participants	46	30	34
No. of organisations represented	22	20	21
Senior ranks (%)	37	26	15
Survey March 02, No. responded (%)	24 (52%)	24 (80%)	30 (88%)
Survey Jan. 04, No. responded (%)	22 (48%)	13 (43%)	6 (17%)
Was PRA useful? Yes (%)	68%	38%	33%
No. organisations using PRA in Planning	12 (55%)	5 (25%)	1 (5%)

**Results and conclusion** There was a greater degree of adoption by participants from the Chengdu workshop and PRA application was more successful even though there were more potential “sabboteurs” than in the other two workshops. Amongst the success stories were (1) a rabbit factory moved from a loss situation to profitability within two years of the manager adopting PRA when dealing with farmers (2) a research centre had 150% improvement in the number of projects approved by head office after the scientists had involved farmers in identifying research priorities, and (3) Tibetan herdsmen accepted modern veterinary practices after the veterinarian had used a PRA approach to combine traditional Tibetan herbal medicine with modern medicine. These results were reported separately by Chu (2003). One of the lessons learned is that the PRA method by itself is not enough to cause any significant changes in technology adoption by farmers. To be effective, at least in the Chinese “top down” context, the institutional framework behind the development projects needs to be built around the participatory philosophy and has to be fully supported by the Government authorities. Otherwise PRA simply goes through the motions, but does not result in any sustainable changes. It is concluded that one has to be flexible in applying the principles of PRA in developing countries as each could have its own unique political and social environment through which adoption of the PRA methodology would occur.

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