



# PARTICIPATORY RURAL COMMUNICATION APPRAISAL

A Handbook



SADC Centre of Communication  
for Development



# PARTICIPATORY RURAL COMMUNICATION APPRAISAL

## Starting with the people

**A Handbook**

Second Edition

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for

the **SADC Centre of Communication for Development**  
in collaboration with  
the **Communication for Development Group**  
Extension, Education and Communication Service  
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## INTRODUCTION

1. How this handbook can help
2. Who can benefit from this handbook
3. Suggestions for using this handbook

This handbook describes the procedure for planning and conducting Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal (PRCA) as the first step in the design of cost-effective and appropriate communication programmes, strategies and materials for development projects. Developed by the SADC Centre of Communication for Development, in collaboration with Communication for Development Group of FAO. PRCA is a quick, multidisciplinary and participatory way to conduct communication research. It actively involves the people concerned in the research process to ensure that Communication for Development programmes are effective and relevant to them.

Since it was originally developed between 1994 and 1995, PRCA has been tested in development projects dealing with areas such as agriculture, animal husbandry, soil conservation, poverty alleviation, food security, adult education, health, family planning, water, sanitation and natural resource management. Experience from the field shows that there are a number of potential benefits for the people who use the PRCA process described in this handbook. For the grassroots, PRCA gives them the skills to articulate their opinions, to identify and prioritize their problems and needs and most importantly to seek ways and means of solving their problems and provide for their needs with or without outside intervention. Thus, PRCA is a way of sharpening the decision-making processes in the community and empowering the people to face up to any outsiders who might want to impose their wishes on them.

For the communication specialist, the findings of PRCA ensure that communication programmes spring from the people's perception of her needs and problems. Such programmes utilize culturally appropriate communication approaches, materials and activities that the people find relevant and useful. Community identified opinion leaders, role models and influential sources of information and advice play a major role in such communication programmes.

For the development worker and extension staff, PRCA reveals that there is knowledge at the grassroots, although of a different form and nature from what they are accustomed to. With PRCA, this community knowledge can be identified and integrated in any joint development effort to improve the people's livelihood. PRCA is, therefore, capable of transforming development workers and extension staff from lecturers and educators into true grassroots catalysts. PRCA is also capable of breaking through the conspiracy of silence and diplomacy often associated with rural people. With its in-built field practice component, training in PRCA provides development workers with facilitation and communication skills as well as the right attitudes to work more effectively with the grassroots.

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After the training, development workers and extension staff are better equipped to assist rural people to articulate their opinions and perceptions, identify and prioritize their problems and needs, and most importantly, develop and implement development action plans and supporting communication strategies to improve their livelihood in a sustainable manner.

For the development agency, results of PRCA provide the basis for planning communication efforts within development programmes that respond to the way the people define their own problems and their own ways of dealing with them. Such programmes are more likely to succeed and, in a sustainable manner, assist in the improvement of livelihood at the grassroots.

## 1. How this handbook can help

This handbook provides a simple, easy to follow step-by-step procedure to plan, conduct and analyze PRCA with communities in order to design effective communication programmes. It specifies the appropriate attitudes and behaviors required for the successful implementation of PRCA in the field. The handbook is illustrated with experiences garnered from various grassroots development efforts, especially those assisted by the SADC Centre's Action Programme for Communication Skills Development in the Southern Africa region and beyond.

## 2. Who can benefit from this handbook?

This handbook has been prepared primarily as a training and field guide for development workers and extension staff, field workers and communication practitioners. However, the publication could also serve as a valuable text on participatory rural communication research for universities, middle-level training institutions and professionals in rural development, communication and extension.

This handbook is also intended to be a useful guide for field practitioners, and their managers who need to know what is involved in designing and implementing effective communication programmes to facilitate rural development. Field development workers and extension staff who read this handbook are strongly encouraged to practice what they learn from it with communities in the research, planning and implementation of communication programmes. This is to ensure the success of development projects and ultimately the empowerment of the people.

This handbook is only a guide and staff who use it should see it as an inspiration to switch on their own creativity in order to develop and experiment with new and appropriate approaches for more fruitful participatory interactions with the various communities with whom they work.

## 3. Suggestions for using this handbook

PRCA is normally conducted by a team of facilitators made up of subject matter specialists, extension staff, field workers, communication and media experts in radio, video production, graphic design, translators and so on. Development workers, communication practitioners and extension staff can use this handbook in two major ways. First as a reference guide (especially chapters 6 and 7) as they conduct PRCA in the field and second, as a training guide as they prepare others to plan and

conduct PRCA. For those who have not been trained in PRCA, it is advisable to arrange a brief orientation workshop in which the principles and procedures in the handbook can be learnt and practiced before applying them with a community group. For those who will use this handbook as a training text, a facilitator's guide should be prepared ahead. A reference manual can be obtained from the SADC Centre.

This handbook is still very much a working document and feedback is positively encouraged. Please send comments to:

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