

PART I

Rapid Appraisal : What? Who? Why?



WHAT IS RAPID APPRAISAL?

Rapid Appraisal is one of many ways for **outsiders** to learn, in a short, limited period, about a community or an area or an activity or a specific problem they feel they do not know enough about.

Rapid Appraisal describes a repertoire of rapid **approaches** to collecting information and not a single, fixed methodology.

1.1 *Salient features*

For those who are likely to use Rapid Appraisal, it is perhaps best described by listing its salient features:

- Rapid Appraisal is an approach to COLLECTING INFORMATION IN THE FIELD.
- It is shorter than a full-fledged, questionnaire-based statistical survey and does not collect detailed statistics, but it can obtain a good qualitative and indicative (quantitative) picture of the situation. Also, because it is quicker, the information collected can be used sooner. Rapid Appraisal does not replace the detailed and more formal statistical surveys. It can, however, identify specific issues that require more detailed study.
- It is longer, more in-depth and less prone to bias than the flying visits to locations to 'get an idea' of what's going on ('rural development tourism').

- Rapid Appraisal cannot be done by one person. It should preferably be done by an **interdisciplinary team**. By involving as many relevant disciplines as possible in the team, all important aspects of the situation can be covered and the effort will be able to benefit from discussion and cross-fertilization of different disciplines and points of view.
- The size of the appraisal team depends on the size of the area to be studied, the topics to be studied and the complexity of the understanding to be reached by the team.
- Rapid Appraisal is **systematic** but **flexible**
- It is not a totally open enquiry relying entirely on the experience of the people doing it. Instead, it involves careful planning and a systematic approach to collecting information.
- It is not a structured survey with preset questions and formats, but a selection from a repertoire of techniques which can be used, as and when required, to investigate topics which you want to learn about.

These are the ‘fundamentals’ of Rapid Appraisal, the features which most Rapid Appraisals have in common. So, a simple, one-sentence definition of Rapid Appraisal might be :

A systematic but flexible means for outsiders to QUICKLY Learn about conditions or issues in a particular local area using an interdisciplinary team.

Basic features

Rapid Appraisal is an approach to learning which is made up of many different techniques and methods. When doing a Rapid Appraisal, you might decide to use only a few of these techniques, or you might use many. You might even invent new techniques. In fact, using Rapid Appraisal to understand fisherfolk communities would probably require the development of new techniques that are different from those used to learn about, say, agricultural communities.

However, Rapid Appraisal (and the techniques that make up Rapid Appraisal) has these basic features :

It is fairly QUICK

You won't have to spend **too** long preparing your appraisal, collecting information and analyzing data in order to find out what you need to know. What you have learnt could be used almost straightaway and, so, the information will remain up-to-date. This is particularly useful as several formal learning approaches take so long that the situation studied and the need for the studies have often changed by the time the learning is available.

It will help you to learn WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW AND NOT MORE

You won't end up with piles of interesting but unnecessary data. You will learn what's important for the local people and what needs to be done with them. You may also learn that, for some things to be done, more data or statistics are **needed**, but then, that will enable you to concentrate on studying those points and not waste time on other matters which are irrelevant.

It will help you to LEARN FROM LOCAL PEOPLE

You will get a picture of what local people perceive, think, do and regard as important or unimportant, and what **they** think should be done about it. You will also learn how they give meaning to their world, classify things and the terms they use. Rapid Appraisals are useful tools to tap into the indigenous and traditional knowledge of communities and peoples.

It will help you to get MANY POINTS OF VIEW and MANY DIFFERENT ANGLES on each issue.

You will learn about each issue or topic covered in several different ways and from several different sources. You can not only get new and fresh insights, but will also be able to cross-check information and be reasonably sure it is correct. You will also get an in-depth view of each issue because you will have different people's points of view on each.

It will use the views of a TEAM made up of DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES to get a better overall understanding of the situation.

As a Rapid Appraisal is done with a team of people from different disciplines and with different types of experience, this will help you to understand the various features and complexities of each issue, identify more problems and seek out opportunities for improvement which a one-person appraisal may well miss.

It will help you to be FLEXIBLE and ADAPTABLE

You can change your way of learning about things as you work, depending on the situation and depending on what you have already found out. You can also change what you wish to learn about, if your original topic or assumption turns out to be unimportant or wrong.

It will help you to understand SEASONAL DIFFERENCES.

Rapid appraisals, because of their relatively lower cost and time requirements, can be repeated to get a better understanding of seasonal changes and impacts which are often missed by all except elaborate, expensive, long-term studies.

It will require you to work IN THE FIELD

You will have to collect information in the location you are concerned with and so you will learn by observation and direct experience rather than 'second hand'.

It will help you to help local people explain their ideas in ways that are EASY TO UNDERSTAND and EASY TO COMMUNICATE

You will use techniques that will make it easier for local people to communicate with you, and vice versa, thus making it easier for you to communicate what you have learnt to others.

You will end up with information that shows you the important features of a wide range of issues and circumstances in a form that is clear and easy to understand and communicate. You will NOT end up with a lot of statistics that need to be interpreted in order to be understood by a wider audience.

It will help you to AVOID BIASES

You can make sure that you do NOT end up with biased information, which is what you would have got if you had :

- only talked to the most influential, educated or talkative members of the community;
- only seen parts of the area which are near the main road;
- only seen what local leaders or politicians want you to see;
- only learnt about the situation now and not at other times of the year or in the past;
- only talked to men (or women); and
- only talked about things related to your field of interest or discipline.

It will help you to be SYSTEMATIC

You can make sure that, by using checklists, you have covered all the issues which are important and learned as much as you need to learn. You can also systematically cross-check information you are given by using different methods of enquiry with different sources to ask about the same thing.

If you are planning to work in the area you are investigating, it will help you to INVOLVE LOCAL PEOPLE RIGHT FROM THE START.

You can get a better understanding of what local people think, how they think, what they can and cannot do, what their real problems are and how you can work together with them to find solutions to problems. You can also use some of these techniques to make sure that both you and the local people agree on what needs to be done and how it should be done.

The features listed above can be reviewed using Checklist No.1. At any stage during a Rapid Appraisal you could ask yourself these questions to help you improve the work. It should be remembered that these questions could apply to the appraisal as a whole, to particular stages of it, to particular issues you are trying

to learn about and to particular techniques **you** are using to collect information.

CHECKLIST NO.1

How is the Appraisal going?

1. Is there a quicker (and reliable) way to do what you are doing?
2. Do you really need the information you are collecting?
3. Are you listening to and learning from local people enough?
4. Are you getting enough angles and points of view on the issue?
5. Are you cross-checking information properly, using different techniques with different sources to ask about the same thing?
6. Are you making full use of the different disciplines of the Appraisal Team ?
7. Are you adapting as you learn, or are you sticking to your own assumptions ?
8. Are you spending enough time in the field and learning about things first-hand ?
9. Is the information you are collecting easy to understand and in a form you can easily communicate to others ?
10. Are you collecting biased information ? Is it because of the way you are collecting information or because of the people you are talking to and the places you are visiting?
11. Are you being systematic and covering all the issues with as many of the techniques as possible ?
12. Could you be involving local people more in the Appraisal?

2

WHO USES RAPID APPRAISALS? AND WHY?

Rapid Appraisal can be used by many people in many different situations, because it is a flexible approach.

Here are just some of the possible applications of RA:

To help researchers understand agricultural or fisheries systems in a particular area;

- To help project planners identify problems and possible solutions in an intended project area;

To motivate and support local people in the identification and analysis of their problems and needs and in the decision-making on what to do about them;

To investigate particular problems or issues which have been encountered during development work;

- To monitor the impact and progress of development work or a particular project in a particular area or among its intended clients; and,
- To evaluate either on-going activities or completed projects and to investigate their impact.

2.1 *Types of appraisal*

All these different uses fall more or less into four broad categories.

Exploratory appraisals

When government departments, aid agencies, nongovernment organizations, university researchers or any other groups want to commence a programme of action **and need** to know the **local** situation before starting, they might decide to carry out an **exploratory** Rapid Appraisal.

The aim of an exploratory appraisal might be **to identify problems, decide on priorities and look for potential to be developed in the area.** The exploratory appraisal might raise new, critical questions which need to be answered by further research. It might come up with solid ideas for activities to **improve the situation and solve particular** problems. It **could** even aim at coming up with a **detailed project proposal.**

An exploratory appraisal might make a general investigation of an area or it might look at a particular aspect of life in that area, such as fish processing, women's role and status, health, or water supply. What is important is that it will look at the subject in depth, investigate how one subject or area connects with other subjects and areas and do it quickly.



Topical appraisals

The same agencies could have a more limited goal or interest. They might want to investigate a particular problem or issue in a new area or in an area where they are already working. They might already have a specific activity which they have planned, but they might now want to assess its possible impact and where it would be most effective. In this case they could carry out a more highly focussed topical Rapid Appraisal which concentrates on those issues only.

If, for instance, a fisheries development agency thinks there might be potential for introducing a new type of fishing gear which, it believes, will help fisherfolk, it might do a 'topical' Rapid Appraisal to see if the technology answers the fisherfolk's real needs, what the impact of the technology might be, whether it would cause problems for other fisherfolk in the area, what impact it would have on women fish vendors and who might be interested and able to participate in eventual trials and demonstrations of the technology.

Monitoring/Evaluation appraisals

During the course of a development activity or a project, routine monitoring of the progress of the activity could be done using Rapid Appraisals. Such monitoring/evaluation appraisals could concentrate on specific issues which are regarded as criteria for assessing impact. They could also take a more general look at conditions, and how they have changed, in order to turn up unexpected side-effects of project activities. A Rapid Appraisal would, for instance, be very suitable obtaining comparative information from areas neighbouring those where development work is taking place, in order to assess its impact on them.

Participatory appraisals

One of the essential features of the Rapid Appraisal approach is that it should allow local people to express their ideas and 'teach' outsiders about the way they live, their problems and their knowledge. In this sense, all Rapid Appraisals are participatory,

even when they are used by 'outsiders' to learn more about conditions in the field so that they ('outsiders') can work better in the field in the future. In **these cases**, von could say that **local people's participation** is through their '**collaboration**' with outsiders.

Rapid Appraisals can also be used not merely to learn from local people but to ensure that they are involved in the identification, planning and implementation of development work right from the very start. Rapid Appraisals of this type can be termed 'participatory'.

For example, when an agency has already decided that it wants to work in a specified area or village, it can undertake a Rapid Appraisal in which local people 'do their own appraisal' helped by the agency staff, who would act as consultants and assist the local people to identify their principal problems and potential solutions, and plan the necessary action. Such action could be taken up either by the community alone or with assistance from the agency involved.



2.2 Who does a Rapid Appraisal?

Now that expertise in preparing and conducting Rapid Appraisals exists, it should be utilized, if possible, to make sure that the work is done as competently as possible. However, it should be remembered that what is now called Rapid Rural Appraisal grew out of the hands-on experience of many development professionals in the field. Many, if not most, of these people probably had little or no preparation in doing rapid appraisals, but were applying 'commonsense' to the problems they encountered.

Anyone, therefore, who has any interest in the area under study and is involved in it or affected by the work which is being planned for the area should be able to contribute to a Rapid Appraisal. But it also helps considerably to have someone on the team who has had experience of doing Rapid Appraisals.

The people who make up the appraisal team will vary according to what you are trying to learn from the exercise. However, some of the points to consider, when assembling a team to carry out a Rapid Appraisal in a fisherfolk community, are discussed below.

Range of disciplines

The wider and more general the coverage of the appraisal, the more people from different disciplines you are likely to need on the team in order to take up all the issues that might arise during the course of the work. For more 'topical' Rapid Appraisals, fewer people from the relevant fields might be enough.

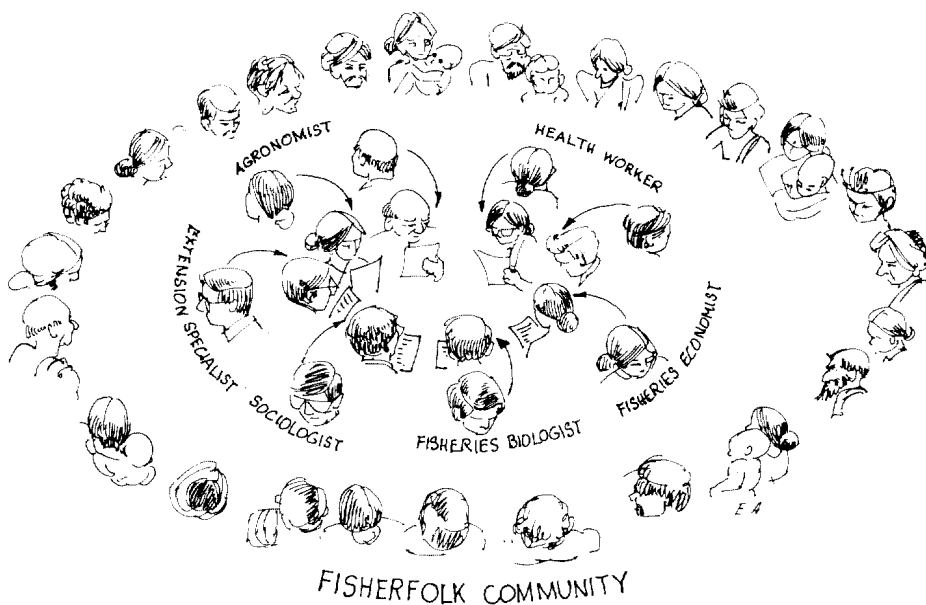
In fisherfolk communities, it should be remembered that many of the local people may be involved in other activities as well, particularly agriculture. So it should not be presumed that Rapid Appraisals in fisherfolk communities should only be done by fisheries specialists. It can often happen that there is more future for 'fisherfolk' in land-based, nonfisheries activities than in fishing and it might take a nonfisheries person to recognize that potential.

At the very least, a team carrying out a Rapid Appraisal in a

fisherfolk community should include at least one fisheries specialist (either a fisheries biologist or a fishing technologist) and one social scientist (either an anthropologist, sociologist or socioeconomist). Beyond this, the composition of the Appraisal Team will change according to the focus and purpose of the appraisal and, perhaps more importantly in practice, on who is available.

Other disciplines which could contribute to a Rapid Appraisal in a fisherfolk community would be :

- Post-harvest specialists (fisheries and agriculture);
- Fisheries economists;
- Aquaculture specialists;
- Extension and communications specialists;
- Agronomists; and
- Anthropologists.



Range of backgrounds and points of view

Just as working with different disciplines enables an appraisal to look at issues in depth, so can team members from different agencies and backgrounds bring different perspectives to the activity. Whichever agency is 'leading' the Appraisal should try to involve other types of agencies who might see things in very different ways. Government departments organizing Rapid Appraisals should invite people from nongovernment organizations or universities to take part. Staff from local government, extension or medical services might have valuable local knowledge and contacts which could contribute to the appraisal's findings.

The importance of having a balance between men and women on the team cannot be overemphasized. Probably the most common bias encountered while collecting information is that of male investigators, and this includes both field-level as well as higher (office) level staff, who are unable to learn anything about women in the community because (according to them) "it's difficult to talk to women if you're a man" or "the women don't play an active role in the village economy". Women investigators will not be put off so easily and will get a more balanced picture of what is, after all, 50 per cent of the local population. The predominance of men in a lot of development organizations, and particularly in technical fields, can make it difficult to overcome this bias in assembling a team, but every effort should be made to include women in the team.

In a 'participatory' appraisal, local people will play a bigger role in collecting and analyzing information. The role of the 'team' does not become less important, as it can help local people to analyze their findings and bring outside knowledge and experience to bear on local problems.

Levels of expertise

One of the main purpose of many development activities is to bring in expertise and experience not available in a particular area and use it to solve local problems. The same can be applied to



Rapid Appraisal. The knowledge of local people is often extraordinary in terms of a detailed understanding and identification of, say, the local fauna and the environment. However, their experience may be restricted to their immediate surroundings and their knowledge of alternatives limited. An expert with wider exposure to different methods and techniques might be able to spot alternatives and options which would otherwise be missed.

On the other hand, an 'expert' might be inclined to bring his or her strong preconceptions to an appraisal and be unwilling to admit that there is anything new to learn in a new area.

Experienced people who have never used Rapid Appraisal in a systematic way before do not always want to try out new approaches to collect information and feel that their own techniques are quite adequate. They sometimes **are** adequate for their normal purposes, but the teamwork which is important to a successful Rapid Appraisal can be disrupted by this attitude.

In Rapid Appraisals, which look at marine fishing and the people who do it, expertise is probably going to be especially important to a good appraisal. **Much** of what happens in fisheries is difficult, or impossible, to observe directly because it happens in widely dispersed locations at sea, or under the water. More importantly, fisheries resources are highly mobile and what is happening in the area under study may be the direct result of fishing activities or



other factors far distant. It would take knowledge and experience in fisheries to recognize such interactions. Likewise, by observing the fish that fisherfolk actually catch, a fisheries biologist can make many 'best guesses' about the state of local fisheries resources from the sizes of fish caught, their relative numbers, how different species occur together, etc.

Unfortunately, as often as not, the qualified specialists you would like to have on your appraisal team may not be available or may not be able to communicate with local people because of language differences. In this situation, one of the benefits of using Rapid Appraisal methods is that it enables the individual members of the team, even if they are less experienced or 'expert', to contribute much more than they ever could working in isolation. A team, working systematically, can be considerably greater than the sum of its individual parts.

The ideal Rapid Appraisal team should try to balance the technical expertise and wide experience of some of its members with the local knowledge of others.

Numbers

Theoretically, a Rapid Appraisal can be carried out by any number of people. What is certain is that there have to be enough people on the team to allow reasonable coverage of an area and the people living there, as well as sufficient different viewpoints to eliminate individual biases as far as possible.

Experience seems to show that smaller teams do better than larger ones and about seven is the maximum. Lots of people working in one small village might end up duplicating each other's efforts, getting in each other's way and disrupting the community's life. Too few people covering a wide area might not be able to do justice to the appraisal.

However many people are involved, they should be split into groups of not more than two or three when it comes to actually interviewing local people and carrying out investigations in the field. Too many 'outsiders' in one place can be very intimidating

for communities and can disrupt the normal pattern of life in the community.

The profile of a good team to carry out an exploratory Rapid Appraisal of a coastal fisherfolk community might be something like this :

- A fisheries biologist;
- A fisheries economist;
- A socio-economist or sociologist or anthropologist;
- A local fisheries station officer or extension officer;
- A local agricultural extension officer; and
- A worker from a local NGO.

The points to remember when constituting a team are found in Checklist No.2.

Most fishery agencies, NGOs and even development agencies may find it difficult to come up with such inter- and multidisciplinary staff. Once Rapid Appraisal methods have been worked out and tested in the field, they do lend themselves to use even by 'nonexperts' – as they make available the commonsense and rules of thumb of the experts. Therefore, it is possible, using Rapid Appraisals, to achieve understanding which would often be impossible without a range of experts. And this is its strength.

CHECKLIST NO. 2**Have you got the right team?**

1. Is there at least one person with experience of Rapid Appraisal techniques to train and assist other team members?
2. Does the range of disciplines represented in the Appraisal Team cover most of the aspects of local conditions which you want to learn about and expect to encounter?
3. Does the range of disciplines represented mean you will be biased towards one subject area or another?
4. If you do not have the range of disciplines, can you arrange for your team members to be trained in the necessary Rapid Appraisal methods?
5. Do you have a balance of men and women on the team?
6. Do you have a balance of 'outsiders' and 'locals' on the team?
7. Can enough team members speak the local language well enough to talk freely with local people?
8. Do any of the members of the team have any special relationship or personal interest in the area you are investigating, which might lead to bias?
9. Do you have sufficient fisheries expertise on the team to investigate local fisheries properly?
10. Are other, locally-concerned agencies represented on the team?
11. Have you got enough people to properly cover the area you plan to cover?
12. Have you got too many people on the team ? Will local people be intimidated by your numbers?

