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Potential Applications of RRA Data Analysis Technique in Rural Areas: A Case Study of Malda District of West Bengal

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Abstract: Rra frequently known as rapid rural appraisal is more commonly described as a systematic but semi-structured activity carried out in the field by a multidisciplinary team which is designed to obtain new information and to formulate new hypotheses about the rural life. The elementary characteristic of RRA is that its research teams are multidisciplinary that means individuals of varied field, expertise, experiences, knowledge, skills and abilities are involved for the desired data analysis pertaining to rural market. However, the peculiarity between RRA and other research based data analysis technique lies upon its multidisciplinary approach and the exacting combination of tools that it employs. The adoption of Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) methodology owes much of its early development to farming systems research and extension which has been promoted by various organizations exclusively dealt with rural production and marketing systems respectively. In this way, it is thought that the varying perspectives of RRA was developed in response to the disadvantages of more conventional research methods, including: the time taken to produce results, the elevated cost of formal surveys and the low levels of data consistency due to non-sampling errors. An assortment of programs launched by the government of India for developing the rural areas are found to be operated or operating at Malda in a holistic manner are: National Food for Work Programme (NFWP), National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), Provision of Urban Amenities in Rural Areas (PURA), Rural Housing, Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Campaign, Bharat Nirman Yojana. RRA has also been applied in agricultural marketing, rural marketing etc although the marketing orientation of RRA studies has not been very well defined and studied for the region of Malda. Through this paper the researcher tried to discuss the potential applications of RRA data analysis technique with respect to rural areas of Malda district of West Bengal in the outline of a case study.

Keywords: rapid rural appraisal, rural area, data analysis, development programs.

I. INTRODUCTION

The foundation concept of RRA is that research should be carried out not by individuals, but by a team comprised of members drawn from a variety of appropriate disciplines. Such teams are intended to be comprised of some members with relevant technical backgrounds and others with social science skills, including marketing research skills. The multi dimensional research team members will provide a more balanced picture as sought since its inception and preponderance. According to McCracken et al. describe, rather than define, RRA as an approach for conducting action-oriented research in developing countries. India is vastly paced developing countries and second largest economy in the world (IMF 2016 report). The potential application of RRA has been quite broad as regards rural development, for example in health, nutrition, emergencies and disasters, non-formal education, agro-forestry, natural resource assessment and sociology approaches. With respect to India it may be applied to rural landscape and hinterland for its application to improve the rural livelihood pattern. Moreover, India is an agriculture dominated country (service sector taking a big leap from second rank) thereby truly reflects the promise RRA holds in these rural areas. West Bengal is also depending on agriculture to support the state GDP. The case study is developed for the rural economy of district of Malda. The various programs launched by the government of India for developing the rural India and are found to be operated or operating in Malda in a holistic manner are:

- A. National Food for Work Programme
- B. National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill 2004
- C. Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)
- D. Provision of Urban Amenities in Rural Areas (PURA)
- E. Rural Housing

F. Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Campaign

G. Bharat Nirman Yojana

RRA has also been applied in agricultural marketing, rural marketing etc although the marketing orientation of RRA studies has not been very well defined and studied for the region of Malda.

II. REVIEW OF BRIEF LITERATURE

'The majority of published available literature exemplifies the application of RRA to agriculture and rural development with special emphasis coming from farming systems approaches to research (FSAR). FSAR is an approach to agricultural research and development that views the whole farm as a system and focuses on (i) the interdependencies between the components under the control of members of the farm household; and (ii) how these components interact with the physical, biological and socioeconomic factors not under the household's control (Shaner et al., 1982). The FSAR attempts to link agricultural research more effectively with resource-poor farmers (Zandstra, 1983). Perhaps the best overview of RRA as a critical component of FSAR has been provided by Beebe (1985).'

'The earliest reference to rapid rural appraisal date back to and 1979, to a workshop and a conference at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex. The emphasis was on the disadvantages of conventional survey methods, the weakness of 'quick and dirty' alternatives to 'long' surveys, and the need for 'quick-but-not-too-dirty' methods. A related issue was indigenous technical knowledge and the value of RRA as a research method for putting the farmer and their needs, circumstances and knowledge squarely into the search for new technologies or approaches to management. Much of this is associated with the work of Robert Chambers (1980, 1981) who has focused more on the 'why' of RRA than on the 'how' and on the need to reorient research and rural development management if we are to produce well-adapted results that farmers will use dependably.'

'Significant agricultural research emphasizing how RRA is performed includes the work of Hildebrand (1981, 1982), Collinson (1981), Shaner et al. (1982), and Rhoades (1982). Each of these authors, identify different forms of RRA as diagnostic tools in farming systems approaches to research. RRA is seen as a critical first step in FSAR in developing countries like that for Asian contexts for national and international agricultural research. More recently RRA has been proposed as a monitoring technique in FSAR that incorporates elements of extension in all stage of FSAR (Norman, 1985).'

'Influential agricultural based RRA's described in the literature of 1980-82 aimed to be problem-solving, farmer-based, and sensitive to location, interdisciplinary, qualitative, quick and informative to the decision-makers. Since then RRA has been tried and tested by a large numbers of agricultural organizations to diagnose topics or location based problems (Grandstaff and Grandstaff, 1985), to plan technologies appropriate to farmers (Byerlee et al., 1984), to reorganize agricultural administration (Klepper, 1980), to plan projects (Ellman, 1980), and through the use of the socio-technical profile to equip bureaucracies for participatory work (de los Reyes, 1984). These studies demonstrate clearly the broad scope of RRA and are beginning to identify specific tools, strengths and weaknesses of RRA aimed at different targets. Grandstaff and Grandstaff (1985) et al., have also begun to identify the conceptual and methodological 'core' of RRA based on extensive field experience and progressive experimentation with RRA preparation, field methods, and report writing.'

'In 1988, there were parallel developments in Kenya and India. MYRADA, based in Bangalore, trained its senior staff in RRA in early 1990 (Ramachandran 1990), and came to play a major role in training for other NGOs and for Government. AKRSP continued to innovate and broke new ground in showing how well village volunteers could themselves be facilitators of RRA. ActionAid, Bangalore undertook a networking role. Any listing of the NGOs that pioneered at an early stage would include (in alphabetical order) ActionAid, Bangalore; Activists of Social Alternatives, Trichy; the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme; Krishi Gram Vikas Kendra, Ranchi; MYRADA, Bangalore; Seva Bharti, Midnapore District; SPEECH, Madurai; and Youth for Action, Hyderabad. Government organizations that received and promoted training included the Drylands Development Board, Karnataka, the District Rural Development Agencies, Andhra Pradesh, and several Forestry Departments. PRA methods were adopted by the National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie for the fieldwork of its 300-odd Indian Administrative Service probationers each year, and by the Xavier Institute of Social Services, Ranchi, which introduced RRA for the fieldwork of its students.'

III. RESEARCH GAPS IDENTIFICATION

Though the above mentioned and currently available literature seemingly appears to be inadequate, still a lot of research needs to be done in specific geographic rural markets like that of Malda in this study related to probable application of RRA for its data collection, findings, analysis and interpretation. The literature review conducted for the current research makes it clear that

hitherto NO research has been done on the application of RRA in rural marketing in West Bengal, the region specific with reference to Malda district. Hence, it is decided to conduct a study with reference to present status quo of application of RRA in rural marketing in Malda region of West Bengal. The extensive, meticulous and rigorous review of literature on rural marketing throws and opens the fact that there are gaps in the studies on this subject. The researcher believes that this study would be the first of its kind which would possibly open the avenues for more future research and studies.

A. *purpose/need of the case study- the following information sought & to find out:*

- 1) What are the problems in the government schemes developed only for the purpose of rural area development for the district of Malda?
- 2) To review critically the ongoing and prevailing government schemes operating in rural areas of Malda district and to find and dig out the real, practical and burning issues and problems associated with it.

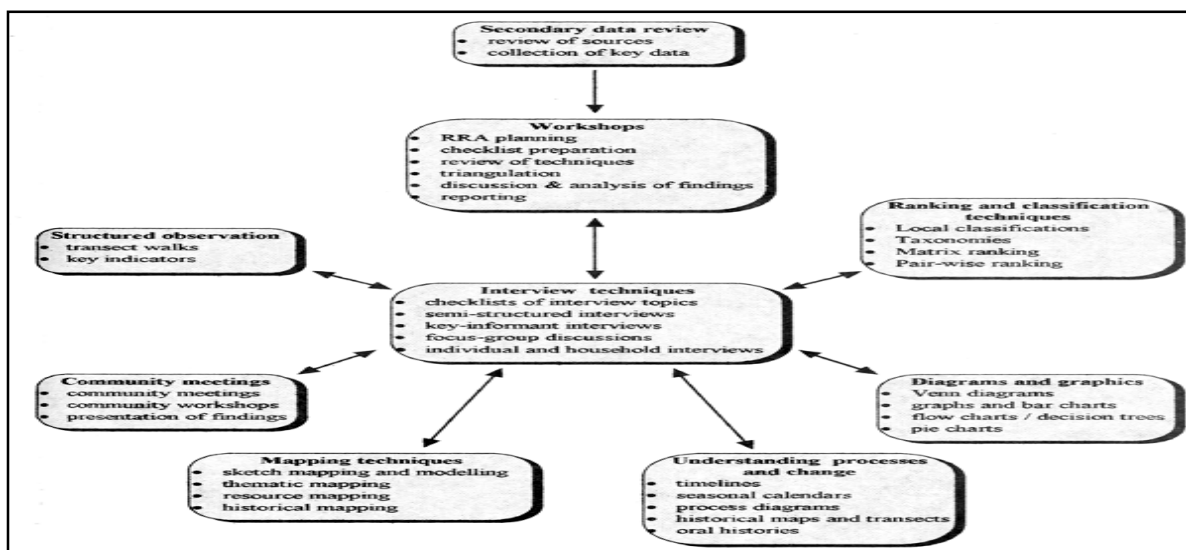
B. *Bounded System Of The Case Study*

The scope of the study has been limited to application of RRA in rural marketing only. The study has been confined and bounded to Malda district rural areas only. The study region is growing & developing with respect to rural economy hence chosen for the study. The study has been conducted from January 2014 to January 2015. So the study is devoid of latest data based on current year and time frame.

IV. RESEARCH DESIGN & ADOPTED METHODOLOGY

A systematic literature search of multiple databases has been conducted, chosen for their coverage of a range of relevant disciplines, including psychology, sociology, business / marketing, and related social sciences using the keywords “RRA” of rapid rural appraisal (social sciences/business/periodical databases). The study is exploratory & descriptive in nature and includes survey research & ethnographic studies. Application of focus group discussion (FGD), personal interview and informal chat sessions has been conducted with the concerned people involved in. When it comes to rural research then the term rapid rural appraisal (RRA) comes into picture and effect. RRA does not refer to a single technique but to a range of investigation procedures characterized by that they take only a short time to complete, tend to be relatively cheap to carry out and make use of more 'informal' data collection procedures. The techniques rely primarily on expert observation coupled with semi-structured interviewing of farmers, local leaders and officials. RRA consists of a set of guidelines which help people to work in a structured but flexible way in rural communities and a set of tools to aid communication and interaction with those communities. How these guidelines and tools are used depends very much on what users need and want. An overview is given of the different types of RRA tools, how they are different from traditional research tools and how they can be combined into an RRA.

A. *Exhibit 1 RRA Tools*



(Source: Researcher compilation)

B. Substantive Findings

The top most reason is sluggish, incompetent, ineffective, inefficient and corrupt machinery responsible for implementing schemes. The corruption by the concerned authorities itself also make the situation pathetic. Poor designing of schemes and designing for political benefit, siphoning off money or corruption in mind is the other big problem. The researcher find people themselves are responsible. Because of their lack of awareness (education) they don't think positive about the schemes. Over the decades people have developed mentality that government should spoon feed them. They lack initiative in many situations and go for short cuts or quick money. Greed and corruption of course are the biggest culprits. The funds are allocated, and the states have to request for these funds, which is dependent on number of people (beneficiaries or perspective beneficiary - in case it's a pregnant woman) who are counted during the umpteen number of BPL surveys. These BPL lists are never complete nor comparable - why - because the entire process is tedious, time¹ consuming and of course, why should the benefits not reach who may not really be BPL? This leads to data fudging, incorrect information and ghost members.

C. Analysis and Interpretation- based on RRA tools

- 1) Agriculture is a state subject. No scheme can be successful without coherence between the Centre and States in policies and strategies. But involvement of plethora of so called formal levels and hierarchy in the form of bodies and departments at center and state level results blame game and conflict of interest. Problem is compounded and worsens when ruling parties are different at state and center level. Example: just like the prevailing case and situation of West Bengal Vs Central government till today.
- 2) Most schemes have low ceiling (they just give a few lakh rupees) and as plant size increases, the MSME tax benefits decrease. So food-entrepreneur setups two small plants using money two schemes, rather than one big plant. Smaller the plant poor economies of scale leading high production cost. The government rarely or can't invest in marketing-research, innovation, export quality products. Example: Idle lying and unutilized the Malda food park justifies this point.
- 3) These Subsidies/grants are "back-ended" (meaning cash is not given before start of the project, but only after the project is completed or in final stage). Significant time lags from the date of application for financial assistance, to release of funds affects the project schedule which become cost overruns for the investor. This is the actual scenario in every government project in the district.
- 4) The Parameters of project approval/ file-Processing are non-transparent. Timely clearance of project files is a rare phenomenon. Sometimes they don't even give reasons for rejecting a project. Food-Entrepreneur is unsure whether bureaucrats will approve his file or not that leads to bribe demand. This can be experienced by those who were refused or rejected for the project or asked for bribe. Anyone can go and ask the Malda district secretariat about Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), will not receive any convincing response.
- 5) Most schemes seek to get investors to pump money in certain infrastructure without providing the necessary support for the utilization of the infrastructure. (e.g. asking private player to setup cold storage, without guaranteeing continuous electricity supply).
- 6) Over enthusiasm means estimation of excess capacity without even bother to verify or cross check. Example: many tax-benefits given to Mango processing industry. New units keep popping up even when every year cultivation is not sufficient to provide raw material to all processing units. Result: No unit runs on full capacity, industrial sickness, loan defaults, NPA.
- 7) Inputs of Panchayati raj institution, cottage industries, local entrepreneurs are considered irrelevant in scheme design.
- 8) Lack of focus/financing for freezer cabinets in retail outlets/ kirana stores, vending machines for tea/coffee/beverages.
- 9) Working capital requirements are high for food processing industry (thanks so many intermediaries, electricity, high duties on imported chemicals etc.) But these schemes only give money for initial project/machines. Don't provide support for working capital (i.e. cost of day to day operations, buying raw material, electricity-utility bills etc.)

D. Solution

Need to integrate all schemes offered by various Ministries and allied agencies. After years of stupidity and corruption, finally they woke up during 12th Five-year plan drafting. Now they're merging various schemes of Horticulture board, Agriculture ministry, Food processing ministry and Commerce ministry under the National Mission on food processing. The real time machinery for

¹Findings, analysis and interpretation are solely personal observation of the researcher since formal education.

monitoring the status of funds disbursements should be allotted ensuring that the real beneficiaries are getting the outcome. Practical and feasible strategy needs to be adopted for its successful implementation.

V. CONCLUSIONS

RRA has been forced on rural development professional by scarcities of resources and the demands of practitioners for progress. However, RRA appears to be capable of generating information that is not only timely and economical but qualitatively distinctive. In the words of Carruthers and Chambers (1981) short-cut methods do not have to be second rate and unprofessional. Indeed, the experience of the last five years suggests the RRA has contributed to a new professionalism in rural development that puts the small-scale farmer and poor rural people in developing countries first. RRAs are not only cost-effective in terms of personnel, time and money but powerful tools for directing and motivating rural development professionals. RRMA is an emerging approach, evolving and improving, and therefore it is still limited. There are types of research that RRMA cannot do, for example that requiring statistical reliability, strict replicability and quantitatively precise conclusions. However, it seems to be always useful in exploring, complementing, supplementing and validating other types of marketing research - that is to say more formal types - in rural environments. Its usefulness will depend on the particular interests of each piece of research, but it is always a viable alternative.

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