POLICY ALTERNATIVES FOR LIVESTOCK DEVELOPMENT IN MONGOLIA (PALD)

A Research and Training Project
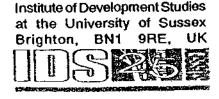
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A TRAINING COURSE IN RRA FIELD RESEARCH METHODS FOR ANALYSIS OF THE MONGOLIAN HERDING ECONOMY

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Note

This set of training materials is not intended to be a complete package. That is why some of the sections are headings only. It is to be used as a supplement to the training workshop on RRA research methods on 15-17 July. You can make your own notes during the workshop to supplement the information provided here. During the workshop you will receive an introduction to RRA. We will use a range of audiovisual aids, including slides of RRA activities being used in many different countries. You will take part in workshop exercises and games designed to help you understand how to use RRA techniques. We will leave for the first phase of field work on 18 July (or as soon as possible after). During this phase we will continue the training in RRA methods in the field, 'learning by doing'.

1. WHAT IS RRA?

1.1 Summary

1.2 Why use RRA?

RRA methods were conceived a decade or so ago in response to the perception of formal surveys as time consuming and data-hungry, often producing results too late to have an impact that justifies their high cost. More recently, RRA methods are being developed not only to provide cost-effective and timely results, but also as research tools that give us better insights into the ways people living in marginal environments make their livelihoods.

The ways people earn a living in marginal or risky environments like Mongolia's, are usually complex and diverse. Rural people make a living doing a number of different things, not just one job. They may do different activities at different times of year. Women may have different productive activities from men. All these differences are important to understand how the rural economy as a whole works, and to identify particular problems and possible solutions to those problems.

Formal survey techniques, often using questionnaires, try to find out a lot about a few things (eg. income, production of animals or crops). Usually they try to gather many figures on these things that can be analysed statistically. More informal approaches like RRA aim to learn just enough about many things, to understand how different aspects of the household or collective economy work together as a system. This understanding is based on qualitative as well as quantitative information. It uses many different kinds of information - not just figures - including the perceptions of different people. The quality of the information is ensured by cross-checking different sources of information rather than by gathering more and more figures.

Rural people themselves know much more than we do about their local economy. They are also capable of analysing relevant information. We have to learn from them in a participatory way. These notes give an indication of the range of RRA methods that can be used in field work to learn from local people. Don't be put off by the length of the lists. They are a 'menu', not a list of instructions. You can chose to use whatever methods are most appropriate, depending on the situation you are investigating. Many of the techniques will be familiar to you already, others less so. Some are plain common sense and common practice. Some are quite simple to use, others less so. You can invent new techniques.

The name 'rapid rural appraisal' or RRA was invented more than 10 years ago. It continues to be used only because it is now internationally understood to refer to a particular approach to rural development field research. 'Relaxed' rural appraisal is a better description than 'rapid'. The point is it does not have to take a long time to understand local agricultural or animal husbandry systems better. Many applications of RRA are not even rural; the methods can be used in urban settings as well. And the word 'appraisal' is a bit out of date now. In this context it means a kind of exploration of issues. Participatory learning is closer to what RRA actually is. And it is often enjoyable, both for rural participants and for us as outsiders who initiate it.

1.3   Problems and dangers

*   if our attitudes and behaviour are wrong, many of the methods will not work as well as they could. Where attitudes are right and rapport is good, we can be surprised by what local people show they know and how analytical they can be

*   how to the find poorer people, and learn from them and with them

*   lecturing instead of listening and learning

*   not observing carefully

*   imposing 'our' ideas and categories, values, without realising we are doing it, making it difficult to learn from 'them'

*   normal professional training, including the pressure to produce statistics, and to measure things rather than just compare, rank, identify trends

*   wanting to have a safe, 'blueprint' programme and method to follow   •

*   finding the questions to ask! Good listening is the first rule. The important questions will emerge gradually

*   male teams and the neglect of women and their views

*   failure to establish good rapport with rural people. Good interview technique, and the quality of information from interviewing, depends on good rapport with respondents (this is worth repeating)

1.4   Approaches and methods

1.5   Practical tips

1.6   Examples and applications

2.   GENDER ANALYSIS

We tend to take it for granted that the household or family (all those living in one ger) operates as a single unit. We also assume that the male head of household is the principal decision maker and source of information. The roles of household members other than the male head of household are often ignored. But adult women, senior men and women, and children also bring specific skills, resources and priorities to the rural economy based on animal husbandry. If we ignore them we ignore half or more of the system in which decisions about animal husbandry are made.

Decision making within household units and within larger social groups varies according to differences of gender (men or women), age or stage in the lifecycle, seniority and status. In every society, men and women do different things, have access to different resources and benefits, and have different responsibilities. In Mongolia, men, women and children are responsible for different tasks in animal husbandry. These differences are rooted in social organisation and supported by cultural beliefs and values. But they are also very often a point of discussion, negotiation and bargaining between the different members of a household. We also know that despite the persistence of beliefs about what people do or should do, these roles can and do change over time.

Changes in economic opportunities in Mongolia today will affect men and women differently. It is important that we investigate the differences between men's and women's attitudes in our field research, so that we can understand their different experiences. Many of the methods of RRA can be used separately with single men and women, or with separate groups of men and women, to try to show their different perceptions and priorities. Some examples include:

* mapping
* ranking
* seasonal calendars
* daily routine or labour profiles

But we also have to be aware that there may be particular difficulties in involving women in RRA. For example,

* some methods take too long for women to be involved as they frequently do not have free time for long periods at a stretch
* RRA work should be timed to coincide with women's free time as far as possible
* women may have inhibitions about discussing particular issues. It helps to have women on the RRA team to try and minimise this problem
* if the RRA team has few women, it is easy to overlook issues that are of importance to women
* in mixed group discussions (men and women together), women often feel inhibited about speaking out. But getting women together for a group discussion is often difficult as their free time may not be synchronised

Here is a simple framework for organising field research that builds in gender analysis. Think of ways to use various RRA methods with men and women separately to answer the following kinds of questions:

(a) activities analysis: who does what, at different times of year? What tasks are performed by men, women, and children which contribute to animal husbandry, to household production (for own use or sale), to looking after children, and to other productive activities within or away from the household?

(b) resources analysis: management decisions within the household are determined by the availability of and control over or access to resources or inputs (money, tools, labour or time, credit, education, knowledge etc). 'Control' means the power to decide whether and how a resource is used or how it is to be allocated. 'Access' means the freedom or permission to use the resource, perhaps for a specific purpose. Who controls and who has access to which resources within the household economy?

For example, if a woman makes a felt carpet for sale, she controls the money she gets from its sale if she can keep it and decide how it is to be used. Her husband may also have access to that resource (the money) if he is allowed some say in how it is to be used. A particularly important resource in any market economy or an economy with some private marketing is access to markets.

(c) incentives analysis: this goes one step further. Different members of the household have different preferences about each output in the household economy (eg. numbers of animals, quantities of milk and other dairy products, handicrafts for sale or making products for use in the home etc.). These preferences underlie the incentives of each individual to change what he or she does.

Pay particular attention to changes in access to markets. If men benefit more than women from sale of products on the market, conflicts may arise within the household over the allocation of resources such as labour. Women may be less able to benefit from new market opportunities since their household responsibilities give them less freedom to decide how to use their resources of time or labour.

3.   DIAGRAMS

3.1   Participatory mapping

3.2   Transects

3.3   Seasonal calendars

3.4   Labour profiles

3.5   Institutional analysis (venn diagrams)

4.   QUANTIFYING **AND RANKING**

Rural people have a greater ability to quantify and rank than many outsiders believe. This ability can help build rural people's self-confidence, strengthen their analysis, and contribute to outsiders' (our) learning and understanding. In the past few years, several participatory approaches and methods for quantifying and ranking have been developed. They are forms of analytical games, and are often interesting for everyone involved.

Quantification and ranking methods have many uses and applications. They can be used to find out what are people's estimates, knowledge, criteria for making decisions, preferences and priorities. They often have in-built cross-checks, especially in group interviews. They should never be rushed, even though they use time efficiently.

4.1   Wealth ranking

Agricultural research and development must take into account differences in wealth or economic status among farmers and herders, in order to determine priorities and develop interventions that are relevant to all groups of farmers and herders. In Mongolia the differences in income between herders may not be very great, but they could increase quite rapidly under more open market-based economic conditions.

Inequality exists in all societies and countries. But the degree of inequality and its attributes or indicators (what makes a person 'rich' or 'poor') vary from country to country and from place to place. As the nature of economic resources varies from community to community, so too will the specific defining characteristics of wealth.

It is important to understand 'wealth' as being more than just 'income'. Wealth status is not merely an economic attribute of a person or household. It has important social and political dimensions, which often go together:

* poverty
* physical weakness
* vulnerability (to hunger, natural disasters, etc)
* powerlessness
* isolation (including lack of education and services)

Wealth affects such factors as the availability of labour (both family and hired), money for purchasing inputs, or for savings and investment (eg. in the form of livestock). Wealth affects numbers and species of animals owned, or herded for the collective or other people; and often affects management strategies and use, which in turn affect overall productivity. Herding families of differing wealth have different needs and problems, and varying ability to respond to new economic opportunities. Development plans are often made for the 'average' herding family, but the actual existence of an 'average' herding family is a myth. Many societies have a strong ideology of equality, but this does not mean that inequality does not exist. Planning for the 'average' herding family seems simpler but it is much less effective.

In our fieldwork we must be very careful to ensure we consider the problems of the whole community, both poorer and better-off herders. We are also doing research in two different ecological zones, East Gobi and Arkhangai. Wealth differences between the zones are important as well as within them. We know East Gobi is generally a poorer area than Arkhangai. The climate and environment are more risky. Last year animal numbers in Mongolia as a whole increased, and Arkhangai was one of the more prosperous areas. In East Gobi however, livestock numbers fell overall, reflecting more difficult conditions there.

Wealth ranking is a way of stratifying a community according to its own definition of wealth/ status characteristics. In other words, it helps us to identify what kinds of differences there are between poorer and better-off households. In fieldwork it is all too easy to 'miss' the poorer households, and so to ignore their needs and priorities. We must deliberately look for them. Wealth ranking is one way of doing this. We will go through the technique in the training workshop, but these notes give a step-by-step guide to how it is done.

Before you start

(1)   Find a few informants (3 to 5) who are familiar with the local area and people. Informants should represent a cross-section of the community, including both poorer members of the community as well as the better-off. They should be honest and long-standing members of the community. Local leaders can suggest suitable people but are not themselves the best people to use as informants.

(2)   Discuss with informants the **definition of the** 'community' and its boundaries. A unit of less than 100 households is desirable as the informants must know the people well. (eg. a single brigade, or tasag?). If the unit is too small, inaccuracies may result from sampling bias. In a herding economy like Mongolia's, households may be constantly on the move. The community may be a group who normally live in a particular area during the winter.

(3)   Discuss with informants the **local concept of wealth.** It is important to use local definitions. Income may not be the best one, and will never be the only one. It may have several different components eg. different kinds of livestock holdings, access to particular grazing resources or markets, receipt of remittances from family members living and working in towns etc. It is important to check whether the concept can be applied to a household or only to individual people.

(4)   Discuss with informants the definition of the household. In Mongolia this is usually the members of a single family (father, mother, children, perhaps also grandparents?) who live in one ger. If there are some exceptions to this definition, it is important to know what they are (eg. if the family ever takes in guests for a long period of time). The important thing is that whatever unit is chosen, a comprehensive list of all the households in the community must be obtained.

(5)   Obtain a complete list of all the household heads in the community. Sometimes negdel records or census lists can be used as a basis, but these must always be checked with members of the community in case they are incomplete or out of date. Once the list of household heads has been obtained, each name should be written on a small card. Each card should be given a number for ease of reference.

Actual informant ranking

(6)   The ranking exercise if carried out once with each informant, separately. First explain to the informant the purpose of the wealth ranking exercise. They are only asked to group people into different wealth categories, not to provide sensitive information about individual families, so unwillingness to participate is very rare.

(7)   Ask informant *to* give 1 or 2 examples of differences between rich and poor, (a) generally, and (b) specifically related to the research (ie. to understand herding economy). Differences will be discussed in greater detail during card sorting. This is only to make the informant feel at ease and to show the purpose of the sorting.

(8)   Shuffle the cards into a random order, in separate sessions ask each informant to place each card before him/her, making a series of piles. Each pile of cards should contain households of similar wealth status. The informant should decide the number of piles, as long as there are at least 3. If at any point the informant is unsure, he should leave the particular card and some back to it later. Once the sorting is completed, the next step is to review each pile. Confirm that the informant believes the households in each pile are similar in wealth. As a general rule, no single pile should have more than 40% of the households. As the informant to divide piles that are larger than this into two or more piles.

(9)   Ask informant, 'what do the households in each pile have in common?'. Start with the richest. There may be several different indicators of wealth for each pile. Do not ask about specific households; the point is to understand the categories. Repeat this for each pile. This will give you, the researchers, a very good understanding of what factors define wealth differences. They will probably raise issues that can be followed up in fieldwork later. Let the informant say what the most important factors are.

(10)   As soon as the informant has left and has been thanked, the information should be recorded, together with any comments. See the sample recording sheets.

(11)   Workout the scores for each informant's responses, then the average scores for each household across all informants responses (we will go over this in the training workshop). For the households in each pile, its score is the pile rank number divided by the total number of piles (then multiplied by 100 and rounded for ease of calculation). eg. a household in the richest pile out of a total of 5 piles is $(1/5) \times 100 = 20$. To find the average score for each household, the scores given by each informant are added together and divided by the number of informants. If one informant consistently disagrees with the others, try to find out why. This information could be useful later.

(12)   You will end up with all the households distributed along a continuum from a small number (the richest) to a large number (the poorest). Make a list of all the households in this order.

(13)   Stratify (divide) the list into a number of groups or wealth categories. Look to see if there are 'natural breaks' in the distribution of scores. Normally there should be about the same number of final wealth categories as the average number of original piles made by the informants.

WEALTH RANKING: A SUMMARY

A.   General background activities
*   discuss levels of 'community'; obtain words in local language
*   discuss local concepts of wealth
*   define household in local language, obtain word or phrase

B.   Community specific background activities
*   obtain names of all households; write on paper; check and number them
*   write name and number of each household on index card
*   choose informant; explain basic nature of work
*   find   quiet place to interview

C.   Introduction to the informant
*   discuss purpose of research
*   discuss how rich different from poor generally in the area
*   discuss how problems of rich and poor are different
*   discuss chosen word for wealth in local language
*   discuss   household concept; names on cards stand for whole household

D.   Actual card sorting
*   explain how it works; as many piles as he or she wants; can change number of piles at any time
*   shuffle cards
*   one by one, informant puts cards in piles
*   review each pile to be sure cards in right one
*   count piles to make sure no more than 40% of households in any one. If there are, ask informant to subdivide
*   write down household numbers by pile on a recording sheet

E.   Follow up discussion with informants
*   for each pile, ask informant what characterises these herders generally
*   record responses by pile number
*   ask informant how these herders differ in terms of our research objectives

F.   Repeat C, D, E with 2 or 3 more informants

G.   Compute average score and group
*   write household numbers down in a line
*   write score for each household for each informant

Score =   Pile number of households x 100
              Total number of piles

Note: Pile 1 is the richest

*   compute average scores for each household as total of its scores divided by number of informants
*   household must have two scores to be included
*   write average score for each household in large numbers on index cards
*   put index cards in order from lowest to highest average score (rich to poor)
*   copy on a sheet of paper in this order: the position number, the average score, and the household number
*   divide into about 3 groups of near equal size