



Factsheet

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Communities Assisted to Solve their own Challenges

Getting enough water never used to be a problem for Irene Hebel and the residents of Pohsoain Village. Vibrant vegetable gardens once thrived in all 10 households of Pohsoain. Without water, those gardens are now all but empty.

Pohsoain is a small village in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). Rainfall has always provided plenty of water for the village's needs, with FSM rated as one of the wettest places in the world¹. But climate variability and change is impacting that. Across the Pacific Islands, subsistence farmers like Irene are some of the first to feel the impacts of climate change. Smallholder farmers are often extremely vulnerable to things like more powerful cyclones, higher temperatures, sea level rise and changes in rainfall patterns.

Irene knows how important the water is to her garden. And she knows how important the garden is to her family's health. "When I do the garden me and my family get less flu and sickness," she explains.

"If I do the garden again when the water will come, there will be more fruit and vegetables for the benefit of the health of me and my family."

But a solution is in sight after a recent Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) session helped Pohsoain's residents to map out strategies to address their water problem. The

¹ *Rainfall Climatology for Pohnpei Islands, FSM by Mark A Landers and Shahram Khosrowpanah, Technical Report No. 100, October, 2004. Download 7/11/16: www.weriguam.org/docs/reports/100.pdf*

Live PRA Demonstration in Pohsoain Village, FSM

Participants at a recent workshop were trained in the essentials of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and were then able to use what they learned the next day in a 'live demonstration' of PRA in Pohsoain Village, FSM.

About 40 agriculture extension officers, farmers, managers and other agriculturalists learned valuable skills and had the chance to use them in the field. In doing so, they provided direct assistance to the residents of Pohsoain Village through the PRA method.

The workshop was led by the FSM Government's Department of Resources and Development in partnership with the Pacific Community (SPC) through its European Union (EU) supported intra-ACP Pacific Agriculture Policy Project (PAPP), in collaboration with the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) and the Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services (PIRAS).

PRA enables communities to study and analyse their circumstances, identify the problems, and prepare, implement and monitor the plans.

This approach assumes that every community member has knowledge in particular subjects based on their experience. PRA enables people to share that knowledge and experience. It also supports decentralisation, democracy, community participation, transparency, empowerment and sustainability.

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PRA was facilitated by about 40 agriculture extension officers, farmers, managers and other agriculturalists who visited Pohsoain on a field trip as part of a sub-regional workshop. The workshop trained the agriculturalists from FSM, Palau and Marshall Islands to be facilitators in the PRA method. Workshop participants then used the PRA method in Pohsoain, and in doing so learnt how, in future, to best use those skills to support their own local farming communities back in their home provinces or countries.

Participatory Rural Appraisal empowers communities to solve their own problems. Local people are experts in their own lives and have the capacity to find solutions using their own knowledge and resources. PRA brings people together to identify their most pressing needs, but also encourages them to recognize their strengths and how they can use those to find solutions.



The community divided into two groups for the PRA; women and men.

“Using a ‘bottom-up’ approach like PRA generally leads to excellent results. SPC has observed this in many areas of our work,” says Gibson Susumu, SPC PAPP Participatory Extension Specialist.

“It’s important that communities prioritize their own problems, and also take ownership of the solutions. PRA helps them do that.”

PRA is a reliable method that anyone can use – especially those in the agriculture sector – to empower people to plan ways to solve local problems.

“**Using a ‘bottom-up’ approach like PRA generally leads to excellent results. SPC has observed this in many areas of our work,**”

Gibson Susumu

SPC PAPP Participatory Extension Specialist

“The workshop will help improve services we provide to communities to help them make decisions and plan to address situations,” said workshop participant Valentino Orhaitil from Yap, FSM.

Led by Pohsoain village chief Mr Herman Semes, the village is now working on its own action plan to address the water shortage problem. Village Chief Semes is enthusiastic about the opportunities PRA brings.

“New knowledge that comes into the community is shared... for the betterment of the community. This is a very new process and we appreciate being part of it,” Mr Semes said.

The experience in Pohsoain demonstrates the power of PRA. Pohsoain’s water problems are not solved yet. But Irene and her neighbours were grateful for the chance to get to grips with the challenges they face and already planned a follow-up community meeting within one week after the PRA.

“We are very appreciative of the process – each of us was able to express our individual concerns” said Irene.

Participatory approaches to development like PRA have a tangible impact on local communities. Workshop training and demonstrations such as this are a crucial way of educating agriculture officers while also empowering people to understand their challenges, share their knowledge and build on their strengths.



The PRA process encourages and assists communities to prioritise their own problems take ownership of the solutions.

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Participants learned the essentials of PRA facilitation during the workshop, rather than the comprehensive program, including a series of document-based tools and processes specifically relevant to communities in the North Pacific sub-region.

For example, some of the tools used during the Pohsoain Village PRA included:

- **Seasonal Calendar**, where villagers listed how much seasons are changing locally and the magnitude of hazards such as landslides and droughts, plus how this is impacting on the behaviour of local animals and plants such as changes in mating seasons or planting and fruiting seasons.
- **Climatic Hazard Ranking**, which helped the villagers compare and prioritise their most critical local climatic hazards such as floods, landslides, fire, earthquakes or health epidemics impacting people.
- **Historic Trend Analysis** was used to assess the impacts of the prioritised hazards, while

- **Livelihoods Assets Prioritisation** tool assesses the adaptive capacity of communities.

Issues discussed throughout the process were revisited and the Cause and Effect Analysis tool was used to identify adaptation options.

The complete PRA training is much more extensive and its processes and tools for a Community-based Vulnerability Assessment enable a comprehensive insight into a community's resilience to climate change. That is, it helps people in a community to better understand and agree on local climate variations to which the community is exposed, its sensitivity and ability to adapt to the impacts of climate change. It does this by measuring its exposure, sensitivity and its adaptive capacity, which are defined as:

- **Exposure** is the nature and degree to which a community is exposed to significant climatic variations at a local level. This climate variation includes average climate change and the extreme climate variabilities.

- **Sensitivity** is the degree to which a community is affected by climate change and related hazards to the local system – biophysical and socioeconomic.
- **Adaptive Capacity** is the ability of a community to adjust to climate change (including climate variability and extremes) to moderate potential damages, to take advantage of opportunities, or to cope with the consequences.

Assessing each of these three factors allows a community to understand their challenges, but also to realise their strengths and how they can use them to solve local problems.

Using a participatory approach to rural development is not new. However, PRA's systematic methodology and use of tools targeting climate variability and change is new. The participants in this workshop were provided with a reliable process which helps their target communities to discuss, identify and analyse their key problems caused by climate change, then collaboratively plan for solutions.

This PRA facilitator training was part of a sub-regional workshop on PRA and knowledge management. The workshop, Capacity Development Support for Agricultural Policy, Research and Extension Services through Applied Knowledge Management Tools and Approaches, was held in Pohnpei, FSM, from 17-21 October 2016.



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