

Title

- ?The forests around our village are important because they are our main source of fuel wood and medicines?
- ?The roads to our village are so bad that we can?t effectively market our fish and the prices we get locally are too low?
- ?Our fields and village gets flooded each rainy season leading to hunger and disease?
- ?The marsh and lake are important to us ? they make us more resilient to the effects of climate change?

These were the kind of statements which formed part of animated discussions among a group of individuals from Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and Kenya last week. They reflect real life situations, but were in fact the conversations taking place in a role play exercise that was part of training in Participatory Rural Appraisal.

The project

The BirdLife International Partners in Kenya (Nature Kenya), Rwanda (Association pour la Conservation de la Nature au Rwanda), Uganda (Nature Uganda) and Burundi (Association Burundaise pour la protection de la Nature) are implementing the project ?Conservation of the birds and biodiversity of the Lake Victoria Basin (the Greatest of Africa?s ?Great Lakes) through community-led action and sustainable development?, funded by the Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation.

A key output of the project is the development, through participatory processes, of Community Natural Resource Management and livelihoods development plans at the Important Bird Areas targeted by the project. The plans are expected to also have a focus on building resilience to climate change with ecosystem-based approaches.

The use of participatory approaches aims to increase the sharing of benefits and decision-making power, helping people to plan for themselves and enabling them to take action. Participation is not an end in itself, but can be a powerful catalyst towards achieving social organisation, empowerment, and providing access to decision-makers ? all key to the sustainable management of natural resources.

BirdLife?s experience shows that local organisations have great potential to drive positive change. Using a participatory approach to planning the sustainable use and management of local environmental resources can help to advance a demand driven model of rural development that gives local stakeholders a more active role.

PRA techniques

As a key project activity, a 2 day PRA training was conducted on 22nd and 23rd January in Nairobi, Kenya, where six participants from the four participating countries, in addition to four support staff attended the training. The training comprised a mix of ?classroom? and practical exercises/role play with special emphasis to be placed on the principles, attitudes and facilitation techniques for effective participatory approaches, including (but not limited to):

- How to facilitate self-reflection and analysis by the community and how to observe and record diverse community perceptions
- How to solicit and record information that goes beyond the direct and immediate response to the questions (how to facilitate a ?dialogue?)
- How to ensure that multiple perspectives are voiced, recognised and respected
- How to manage a group/community to ensure that everybody has the opportunity and feels comfortable to contribute
- How to direct without dictating; how to ensure community ownership of the process and the results.



Photo: David Thomas

The training provided an introduction to the different sets of techniques and exercises involved in participatory analysis and planning, and with a focus on those approaches recommended in the project's guidance documents and also trained partners on how to package the information in order to achieve the main goal of developing community natural resource based plans for the sites and communities. PRA are a set of tools used to conduct analysis, plan and take action in an effective bottom-up approach. It enables cross learning between facilitators and rural communities. Participants at the training appreciated that PRA is a continuous learning process as each facilitation process has unique challenges and opportunities.

Further information on PRA can be read here <http://go.worldbank.org/ZGZHJEDBZ0> and here www.fauna-flora.org/wp-content/uploads/Tools-for-participatory-approaches.pdf

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