Chapter 6   Forming groups and creating an activity plan for the initial phase

6.1 Objectives and procedural outline

This chapter explains the process for forming community groups in order to begin group activities for learning community development and watershed management. The organizational strengthening and evaluation of the groups are issues that are discussed in Chapters 8 and 12, respectively.

Please note that when working with community groups that already exist (formed previous to the project), they will require a different treatment than what is explained below.

6.1.1 Advantages of forming groups

From the viewpoint of community development and watershed management the formation of community groups for the learning process has the following advantages:

1) Creating a space for efficient learning

Sustainable farming in watershed management is particular to a specific place and moment. Farmers will need to modify the conservation techniques to their land by observing the effectiveness of their application under the changing conditions of the land. If a farmer is working alone, however, he will be limited in the ideas or discoveries that may occur to him for applying the techniques on his farm. Also, a good way to apply a certain technique may not occur to each farmer. Therefore, by learning together in a group, the members can generate more and better ideas that can benefit everyone. Finally, the exchange of ideas among members should increase the effectiveness of their learning process.

2) Promoting the practice of mutual help

Sustainable farming and conservation practices need to spread from the area of group activities to the entire watershed area for the watershed management to be successful. However, an individual farmer alone cannot do the heavy labor involved in some of the construction and maintenance activities, especially if he cannot pay for day laborers. The practice of group members helping each other through their group activities is a way to meet the labor needs of the group members or neighboring groups. Furthermore, the group's fund can serve as a type of community insurance in the case of a member's emergency health need or an accident.

3) Organized groups are entitled to benefits and credit

The sale of products and environmental services is more successful when done collectively rather than individually because of greater efficiency and economy of scale. Also, an individual farmer will find it difficult

to obtain financing from outside sources for the implementation of plans to improve productivity and watershed conservation. Even an organized group will have to prove it is credit worthy by showing it can do proper bookkeeping and fund management, and has legal capacity. The activities the group members participate in with the project give them an opportunity to also gain knowledge and abilities in other areas beside farming and conservation, such as collective sales, simple bookkeeping, fund management, and an understanding of the advantages these skills represent.

In the case of communities that are too small to form a group (such communities generally receive almost no assistance from outside and still practice traditional farming methods), you could consider using a public place to develop the activities presented in this Guideline, for example: begin activities at the local school with the students and their parents. The method for developing activities in such small communities is explained in greater detail in Chapter 13.

6.1.2 Work procedure

The process for group formation consists of the following activities and objectives.

ACTIVITY (1): Promotional meeting
- Introduce the general orientation and the work methodology of the project, and the implementing institution to the interested communities.
- Once a community decides to participate in the project, make an agreement between them and the project, and form, or reorganize, a representative community group, and establish their group farmland (learn about the situation of farmland availability).

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ACTIVITY (2): Participatory Rural Assessment (PRA) workshop
 (Analyze the community's current situation and their problems)
- Learn about the community's current access to economic and natural resources, its agricultural production, and the level of involvement of institutions or organizations supporting the community.
- Analyze the community's problems together with the participants to define the activities they will develop with the help of the project.
- Take a tour and make a technical inspection of the land proposed for the group farmland.

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ACTIVITY (3): Workshop for planning initial activities and its validation
- Analyze and identify, together with the farmers, those activities that would mitigate the problems related to conservation and watershed management.
- Choose the activities that the group needs to carry out in the initial phase and program the approximate dates for their implementation.
- Confirm the results of the PRA workshop and the initial activity-planning workshop with the group.
- Clear up any doubts about the plan and solidify it by providing technical advice to the group so that it can begin the activities.
- Make a final decision on the group farmland site so the group activities can begin; explain to the group that the next step they take with the project will be to prepare the "group farmland use plan" (see Chapter 7).

6.2 Activity (1): Promotional Meeting

6.2.1 Preparing for the promotional meeting

Promotional meetings provide the project an opportunity to contact the people of a community who may be interested in forming a representative group of the community and beginning activities with the support of the project.

One way to invite the people of a community who may be interested in the project to a promotional meeting is to ask the help of the key persons that were contacted during previous visits to the community. When a community has confirmed its interest in participating in your project and wants to discuss the project in more detail, you can then coordinate a date and place to hold a promotional meeting that is open to everyone from the community. You need to take great care, however, when making invitations through key persons so that they don't invite only their family, friends and close contacts.

Besides using the key persons in a community, there are various other ways of inviting people to the promotional meeting. You could post announcements in public places, distribute flyers announcing the meeting, make door to door visits, and visit a school to invite students' parents. The best methods can be chosen according to the given situation.

If you discover that there is a community group that worked together in the past, but is currently inactive, an alternative would be to reorganize them and motivate them to participate in the current project.

A community is composed of people with various socioeconomic characteristics, such as gender, age, religion, ethnic group, economic stratum, influence (leadership), profession, land ownership, etc. Their needs may vary according to their circumstances, therefore, when forming a group, it is important to observe the following points:

- Avoid the tendency of group members to become a homogenous group;
- Insure equality and transparency in decision making.

The promotional meeting does not necessarily have to end with one visit. It can be repeated if the people of the community have some doubts or need more time to discuss the issues with other inhabitants before making a final decision.

6.2.2 Procedure for the promotional meeting

A promotional meeting takes the following procedure:

1) Introduction of the project team

One person introduces the project team to the community and explains the purpose of the team's visit. Each member of the team may also want to introduce himself/herself to the people at the meeting. You should remember the proper attitude one should have when approaching a community (see Chapter 4), and try to keep a relaxed and friendly atmosphere during the meeting.

2) Explanation about the project's orientation and philosophy

The project's general orientation and purpose, the goals it seeks to achieve with the community groups, and the general orientation of the implementing institution are explained to the participants. The work method or methodology that the project will use should also be explained. It is important to also clarify to the groups that the following requirements must be met for beginning activities with the project:

- Members should be interested in learning about conservation and watershed management;
- Members should understand the importance of forming and strengthening an organized group for carrying out the activities;
- Land with access to water must be available for doing group activities;
- Members should be committed to participate every week in the technical assistance;
- Understand the importance of the participation of women, men and youth in the project;
- Understand and agree to the limits in the project's investments, in other words there are restrictions in the quantity and content of the investments.

3) Conversation and discussion with everyone about any doubts, concerns and opinions

Ask the participants of the meeting if they have any doubts or points they want to clarify about the project. Have a frank and sincere conversation with all the participants so that the community can evaluate the opportunity of forming a community group and participating in the project. The following are some of the more frequently asked questions:

Most frequently asked questions in promotional meetings and their possible answers

Question 1: *"How many people are required to be able to participate in the project?"*

Answer 1: *"We don't want to set a minimum number for forming a group, but 8 to 12 is a good number for doing group activities. The most important point is the interest of each member in learning and in strengthening the group. We recommend that group membership should eventually grow to at least 12 members so that you can obtain legal capacity and have access to non-refundable financial resources."*

Question 2: *"I want to work as an individual on my own farmland and receive direct benefit. Doesn't the project give support to individual farms?"*

Answer 2: *"Providing support to work on individual farms could be the next stage, but first you can learn the appropriate techniques on a group farmland. We understand that everyone wants to receive benefit on the individual level, but you can learn more in a group. Through weekly meetings to receive technical assistance and helping each other as members you can gain things that would be difficult to achieve as an individual. Once you acquire the appropriate techniques in the group, you can later put them in practice on your own farms with the help of the group. We want you to learn to organize your work as a group."*

Question 3: *"I want to do a project for raising chickens (or improved pasture). Does the project support this?"*

Answer 3: *"As a project, we plan the activities together with you based on an analysis of the community's problems and the solutions that your community can achieve. This is done in a PRA, participatory rural assessment, workshop that is the next step if you should decide to accept the project. It all depends on the results of the workshop, although there are certain limitations imposed by the supporting institutions, the orientation of the project and cost."*

Question 4: *"Will the project pay for our labor?"*

Answer 4: *"No.... We do not pay for day laborers. We are not a foundation or organization that supplies money and material. We are a government project that gives technical assistance. Once you have crops and sales income from the group farmland, you can divide the profits among the members."*

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4) Making a decision

Once the open discussion ends, the community may be able to arrive at a consensus on whether they want to participate as a group in the project or not. However, the decision does not have to be arrived at in one meeting. The participants may want more time before making a decision, or want to consult others who did not come to the meeting. In such case, you can let the issue lie for the time being and plan another meeting.

5) Explain the importance of the PRA and coordinate a date and place

When the community reaches an agreement and decides to participate in the project as a group, you can then explain the importance of the PRA in the next step. Set a date and place for the PRA with the participants. You should inform them that it will take several full days' of work (morning and afternoon). The activities will require a place to hang a large sheet of paper with diagrams and a place to cook lunch for everyone.

6.2.3 Points to consider before the PRA workshop

At this point in the promotional meeting, or later in the PRA workshop, you should select the site for the group farmland with the help of the project's technical personnel, ideally the person who will be assigned to help this community. The group's farmland should have access to water. Also, since its topography will determine the type of conservation techniques that will be practiced and learned in the group activities, you need to consider if those techniques will be appropriate for the individual farms in the future.

It is also very important to make a written agreement between the group and the owner of the land to be used for the group farmland. The document should specifically mention the group's right to use the land, to install farming infrastructure (i.e. irrigation pipelines) and the division of harvests and economic profits among members. The group should also agree that the inputs and tools supplied by the project are to be group property and do not belong to the landowner. A written agreement or contract between the group and the landowner will help to avoid future conflicts.

6.3 Activity (2): PRA workshop – Analysis of the community's current situation and problems

The PRA workshops consist of a set of tools that help us to understand a community's real situation based on problems related to access to natural resources, farming, infrastructure, support from institutions and organizations and other issues.   These data are very important because they allow the project's direct beneficiaries to reflect upon the real needs of their community and to plan, together with the project, the activities that are to be implemented. This participatory process enhances the participant's acceptance and sense of ownership of the project and will contribute to its success.

6.3.1 Flow of the PRA

The following diagram shows the flow of a 2-day PRA workshop. The length of the workshop varies according to the time taken by participants in their discussion, their punctuality and the skill of the team of moderators.
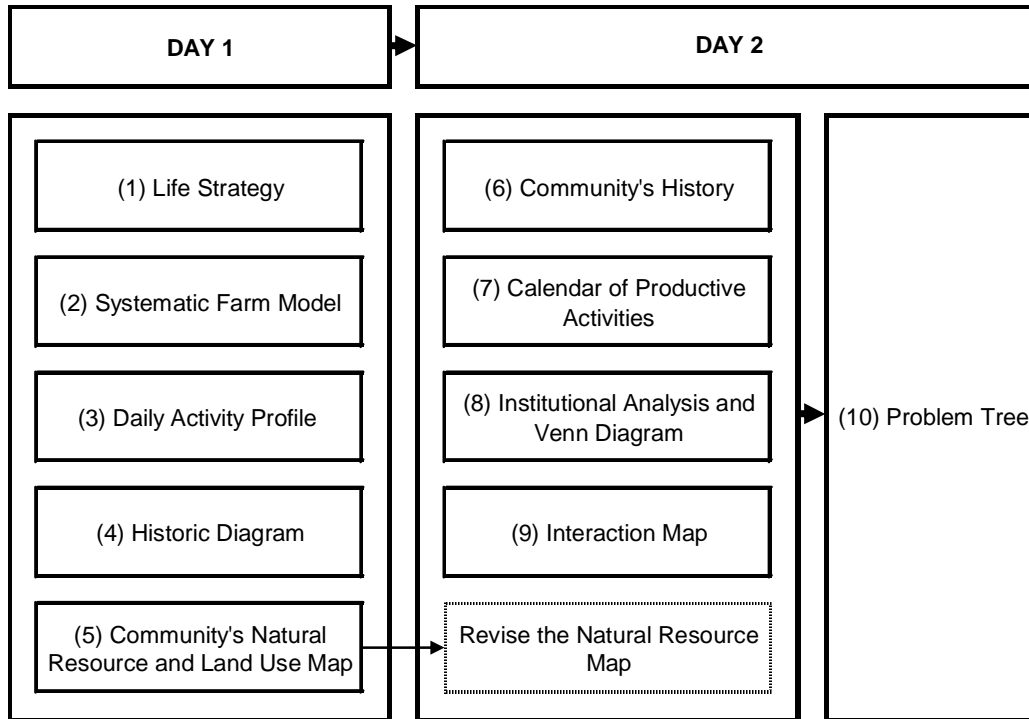
Figure 6-1 Model Program of a PRA workshop

The order of the tools may be changed according to the logical sequence of the analysis conducted by the moderator team, and according to the characteristics of each tool as it motivates the participants. However, the Problem Tree (problem analysis) should be undertaken during the last part of the PRA because this tool analyzes the problems that are identified by the other tools.

6.3.2 PRA tools

The objectives of each of the above tools are explained in the following table. To understand the appearance of the tools (example) and how to apply them (procedure), please refer to other manuals, such as ***"80 tools for Participatory Development"*** (Geilfus, F., 2000: IICA). Regarding an integrated perspective on gender, please refer to ***"Field Manual, Program for Socioeconomic and Gender Analysis (ASEG, acronym in Spanish)"*** (FAO, 2002).

Table 6-1 Tools for PRA workshops

| Tools	Objectives
(1) Life Strategy	To understand what are the different income possibilities the community members have and what are the conditions for accessing such income sources.
(2) Systematic Farm Model	To draw a systematic model of the farm's production process, including its components and the different flows and exchanges that exist.
(3) Use of Time (daily activity profile)	To create understanding between the women and men of a community about the real support made by women in the community's activities (including productive and reproductive activities).
(4) Historic Diagram	To depict the changes that have occurred in the community as a result of the different activities carried out by its inhabitants.
(5) Natural Resources and Land Use Map of the Community	To create a drawing depicting the community's natural resources, agricultural production and socioeconomic data. This "community Map" enables you to identify the critical areas where there is "canal grass", soil erosion and/or degradation, water resources including its quality and abundance, etc.
(6) Community's History	To organize the history of the community from its first settlement to the present. The same exercise can be done with a group by asking the members about its initial formation, background and what problems it currently faces.
(7) Calendar of Productive Activities	To understand the different types of productive activities that occur in the community and the outstanding characteristics of each. This tool is generally used for farming, but it can include other types of productive activities as well.
(8) Institutional Analysis and Venn Diagram	To understand the organizations and institutions that work for the benefit of the community, and to also analyze the possibility of conducting joint actions.
(9) Interaction Map	To identify all the key actors with which the community interacts both inside and outside the community, in such areas as communication, sales, extension service, farmer support, relationship with promoters, other farmers, etc.
(10) Problem Tree	To determine the causes and effects of the problems that exist in the management of natural resources and agricultural production (see the example below).
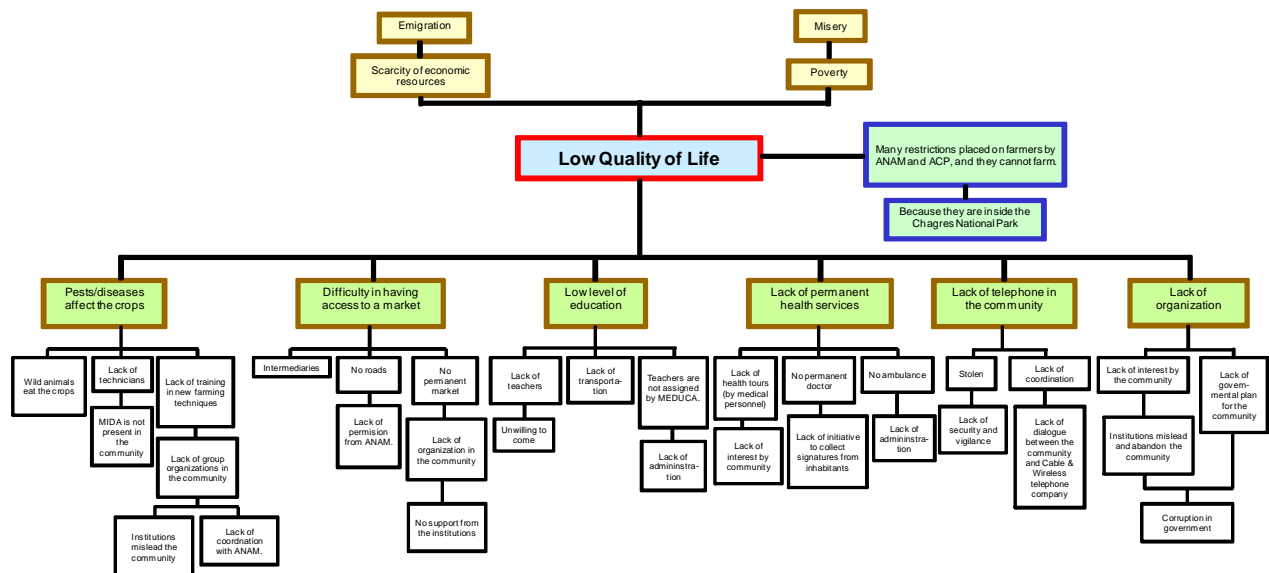
Figure 6-2 Example of a Problem Tree

6.3.3 Important considerations

1) Number of workshop moderators

When conducting a PRA workshop, it is advisable to form a multidisciplinary team, for example a team of three people. One person facilitates the use of the tool, another helps the facilitator by preparing paper, index cards, tape, etc., and the third person observes the exercise to ask questions about information that may be missing and to take notes of the results of the exercise. The role of the facilitator can be rotated within the team with each PRA tool so that the participants do not get bored with the same person as the facilitator.

2) Selecting the tools

The tools used in this model are the most representative of the tools available. The tools should be chosen in view of the workshop's objectives and personnel, and time and budget constraints.

3) Workshop program

A long workshop of several days in succession does not necessarily guarantee greater participation by the same people because they may have other commitments to attend to. On the other hand, if the workshop is held on separate dates, you should be careful that they are not too far apart so that the participants from the community do not lose their motivation or forget what was discussed at the earlier date.

6.4 Activity (3): Workshop for planning initial activities and its confirmation

After analyzing the current situation through the PRA workshop, the next step will be the workshop for planning the group's initial activities. The purpose of this workshop is to help the groups plan the activities that they want to implement during the first period of the project. The workshop is also an opportunity for the project and groups to make agreements on the obligations each side will need to fulfill, step by step, in the implementation of said activities. The activity-planning workshop is conducted in the following order:

STEP 1: Problem analysis and solutions
- Suggest alternative solutions that could mitigate the problems identified by the tool "Problem Tree" and identify the activities that need to be carried out in the first period (from several months to a year).

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STEP 2: Classification of activities
- Prioritize the activities that were identified above and make the group's initial activity plan.

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STEP 3: Initial Activity Plan
- Determine the degree of support that can be provided by the group and by the project for each activity.
- Organize and program the activities.

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STEP 4: Validation of the initial activity plan
- Validate the initial activity plan among everyone and present the project staffs.
- Inspect the land for group farmland and select the directors.

1) Problem Analysis and Solutions

Using the Problem Tree select the problems related to watershed conservation and management and write them on separate cards. For each problem determine the activities which may lead to its solution.

2) Classification of the Activities

Classify the activities as "urgent", "important" or "easy". Explain to the participants that "urgent activities" are those that need to be done as soon as possible, "important activities" need to be done or started during the initial period with the project, and "easy activities" can be done whenever it is convenient. Once all the activities have been classified, place a card with the activity "Make a Farmland Use Plan (FUP)" in the urgent category and explain to everyone about the importance of the FUP in community development and watershed management.

3) Initial Activity Plan

For each activity determine what resources are needed to carry out that activity, and also which resources the group has, or are available in the community, and on the contrary which need to come from outside the community. Estimate when each activity can be initiated and place the approximate dates for their implementation.

Table 6-2 Example of Initial Activity Plan

Classification	Activities	Place	Schedule (approximate date of start)	Outside contribution	Own contribution
Urgent	Make the Farmland Use Plan.	Group farmland	May	Technical assistance in making measurements.	
	Build a fence around the group farmland.	Perimeter of group farmland	June	Barbed-wire and "balo" stakes.	Labor force
	Implement soil conservation techniques.	Group farmland	June	Training and technical assistance from the project.	Desire to learn and labor force.
	Plant vegetables.	Plot to be determined	June-August	Tomato, red pepper, green pepper, cucumber, and watermelon seeds	Labor force
Important	Build a reservoir for supplying water.	Spring near group farmland	August	Pipes, cement blocks, cement, metal bars, sand, and water storage tank.	Labor force and stones
	Improve the plots of plantain.	Plot of plantain	August	Training and preparation of organic fertilizer	Seedlings and labor force
	Sow peanuts for chicken feed.	Plot to be determined	August	Peanuts	Labor force
	Nursery for timber seedlings, medicinal and ornamental plants.	At side of the meeting house to be constructed	September	Project's guidance	—
	Market research for the group.	Community	Depends on the project	Project's guidance	—
Easy	One five.	Community	Every 2 weeks	—	Money for buying lottery tickets and labor force

4) Validation of the initial activity plan

After finishing the PRA workshop and making the initial activity plan, put the results in writing so that they can be shared between the project team and the community group. Take the written results to the group to confirm their contents and correct any errors that may exist before putting them into a final document. The project's technical personnel in charge of the community should also participate in this meeting to converse with them about the initial activity plan and to clarify any doubts and provide technical advice.

The land that the group will use for their farmland needs to be available from this time on so that the project technician can inspect it in view of starting the group activities, and especially for determining a suitable water source. Once the group farmland is selected, the technician will give advice to the group on how to make their FUP so members can learn to plan and make a rational and sustainable use of the farmland. The crops and farming techniques to be used will be selected based on this plan.

The group should select their own board of directors, which consists of a president, secretary, treasurer, supervisor and messenger. If the group does not have a large membership, only select the 3 most important posts, namely the president, secretary and treasurer. There is no obligation to have all 5 directors.

It would be best for the group to select its directors before the validation of the initial activity plan. However, if the group needs more time in the selecting process, leave the decision to them for later. It should be made clear to the group, though, that they will have to have selected their directors in order to request material and tools from the project, because it is the directors who are responsible for preparing the request forms and managing the supplies and group activities. The basic functions of each director are explained in the following chart:

Table 6-3 Functions of the directors

Directors	Expected Functions
President	- Plans and coordinates activities with the project; his/her initiative in making a group decision should be respected. - Prepares the project's administrative forms, such as the Material Request Form and the Monthly Meeting Report and authorizes them with his/her signature.
Secretary	- Keeps the attendance list and the record of the work and meeting days once the group activities begin. - Prepares the project's administrative forms, such as the Material Request Form and the Monthly Meeting Report and authorizes them with his/her signature. - Keeps the group's Material Registry, such as tools, when the group receives them. - Prepares the report or minutes of the monthly meetings.
Treasurer	- Keeps the group's money once it begins to receive income whether from membership dues or sales. - Manages the group's expenditures when there are any. - Records the movement of money and makes a treasury report in the monthly meeting.
Supervisor	- Supervises the use of the group's goods and funds whenever the group receives material or there is movement of money.
Messenger	- Helps the internal communication of the group by conveying important notices to the members.

Afterwards the group should choose a day of the week for their weekly technical assistance so that the regular extension activities get started.

6.5 Other issues to consider

6.5.1 Use of promoters

During the process of forming the community groups you might consider the option of contracting several promoters for the project. The promoter is a person who lives in, and knows, the project's target area. Her/his role is to communicate with the leaders or key persons of the community to organize a visit by project personnel to the community and the project's promotional meetings. The promoter helps the project in approaching the community and can accelerate the formation of groups. He/she can also be an assistant to the project personnel in helping to conducting the PRA workshops and in delivering information about the groups and their members to the project.

On the other hand, contracting people from the communities in the target area may create jealousy among the inhabitants of the same communities, which could affect the internal relationship of the community if the promoter decides to participate in the project. Therefore, when selecting the promoters you should clarify the background of the candidate promoters and the community's perception of them. Try to select people that are as neutral as possible. In this way you can try to avoid uncomfortable situations in the project's implementation.

6.5.2 Application of participatory development tools

If the above-mentioned tools and the respective forms and charts are used in a PRA workshop, but the results are not discussed and analyzed, the PRA will only serve as an "initiation ceremony" for the project. It is important to discus the results of the PRA between the participants and the project. The same tools can be used again at any time during the course of the project whenever a decision needs to be made with the group, for instance to promote the communication between project technicians and the farmer groups in order to analyze and develop more creative activities.

The execution of a PRA workshop at the beginning of the project does not mean you have achieved participatory community development. Participatory methods and tools should be applied not only in the PRA, but also at other stages during the project, such as in the training process. Remember that the project's role is that of an outside actor who "facilitates" the group members learning process so that they can think, analyze the various aspects of community development, agricultural production, and watershed management, understand

the reasons, make a decision and take action on their own.

Examples of applying participatory tools in different occasions

The "Use of Time" tool by women and men can be used to describe the work that is done by women and by men, such as remunerable and non-remunerable work, productive and life management work, and work that impacts watershed management. The "Farm Calendar" can be used to ask what farm work is done by men and done by women, respectively, in which months they have the greatest income from farming, in which months they have the most food or what are the most common foods they eat in each month. The project can incorporate the gender perspective in this information to develop different productive and environmental activities for women and for men.

6.6 Inputs needed

Activity	Personnel	Time	Material and Cost
Coordinate the promotional meetings with the communities	Promoter, if needed; A multidisciplinary team (2-3 people with different specialties)	Once every 1 or 2 weeks in each community until reaching an agreement and deciding on regular meetings (approximately)	Project pamphlets, if any have been made.
Promotional meeting	A multidisciplinary team (2-3 people with different specialties); Promoter, if needed	1-3 days	Project pamphlets, if any have been made
PRA workshop and initial activity planning	A team of multidisciplinary moderators (moderator, assistant and secretary)	Total of 2-4 days	Manila paper, markers, adhesive tape, index cards, cut sheets of paper, food $30 / day
Validation of the initial activity plan	Person in charge of organization; Project technician in charge	1/2 day	PRA results and the Initial Activity Plan