The European Union's Food Security Programme for Yemen

Technical Assistance to the Tihama Development Authority

GUIDELINES FOR
RAPID SOCIAL ASSESSMENT
(RSA)

December 2008

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List of Abbreviations

"The Project"	Technical Assistance to the Tihama Development Authority at Yemen EuropeAid/122248/C/SV/YE
GOY	Government of (the Arab Republic of) Yemen
I&D	Irrigation and drainage
O&M	Operation and maintenance
TA	Technical Assistance (currently contracted to Euroconsult Mott MacDonald)
TDA	Tihama Development Authority
WU	Water user (in the general context, an irrigation-dependent farmer)
WUA	Water Users' Association
YR	Yemeni Rial (currently approx. 1 Euro = 200 YR)
RSA	Rapid Social Assessment

Introduction

These Guidelines for Rapid Social Assessment have been prepared by the Project TA team to assist TDA staff to interact sympathetically with local communities, in order to ensure TDA activities involving local communities are accurately targeted and have the support of the communities.

1.   When to Use RSA

The objective of undertaking a RSA is generally one of three types:

1. To obtain data on present socio-economic conditions that will serve as baseline data from which improvement or reduction in such conditions may be quantified (rather than estimated) by future RSAs undertaken in the same location.

2. To obtain the views of local populations on development priorities (in the general case) and on irrigation and drainage development and O&M priorities (in the TDA case).

3. Where a development choice exists (for example, alternative canal alignments), to obtain information on which option is favoured by the affected local population.

With respect to objective types 2 and 3, the underlying purpose of RSA is to ensure development at ground level has the backing and support of the local population, thus helping to ensure TDA funds are spent wisely.

2. Essential Tools & Techniques

2.1 Interaction with Local Communities

RSA depends on effective interaction with local communities. This may be achieved in two ways:

The **conventional approach** is for TDA staff to decide what information is required, design questionnaires to gather this information, and interview representative members of the target population group.

The **participatory approach** is a "bottom-up" approach, in which the target group is involved in the process of deciding what information is relevant and important. In addition to the gathering of information, the aim is to help strengthen the capacity of the target group to plan, make decisions, and to take action towards improving their own situation.

Table 1 below summarizes these approaches.

Table 1: Alternative Approaches to RSA

Conventional Approach	Participatory Approach
Learning rapidly and directly **from** the target group. TDA staff obtain information, take it away, and analyze it. The process is extractive: information is gathered and used according to TDA needs.	Learning **with** the target group. Facilitate local capacity to analyze, plan, make decisions, take action, resolve conflicts, monitor, and evaluate, according to the needs of the target group.

For all but the smallest appraisals, where the information required is limited and uncomplicated, the participatory approach is favoured. This is because the target group will feel "ownership" of the information gathered and conclusions reached, and decisions made are therefore more likely to have successful outcomes.

However, the participatory approach requires good communication skills and attitude of TDA staff. It will be clear that the role of TDA staff in participatory RSA is to help the members of the target group make their own decisions on issues, problems, solutions, and priorities. In other words, TDA staff facilitate, as well as manage, the RSA process.

The characteristics of an effective facilitator are described in **Annex 1**.

2.2 Steps in the RSA Process

The steps in any particular RSA will depend to some extent on the type of information to be gathered. However, in general, a RSA will include the following steps:

1. Select a time and place where the conduct of the RSA will not be disturbed or disrupted. Give enough time for the target group to discuss amongst themselves. Do not rush the exercise.

2. Look for key informants or other knowledgeable members of the target group who are willing and able to participate in the RSA. Get good representation of the group in terms of spatial distribution, gender, wealth class, etc.

3. Explain and agree on the purpose and objectives of the RSA before starting. Brief the target group on how to participate in the RSA.

4. Ask the key informants to identify and prepare a list of issues and problems related to the purpose of the RSA.

5. Assist the key informants to work with the target group to arrive at a consensus about which issues and problems are priorities, and the favoured solutions.

6. Encourage discussions while the RSA is being conducted to enhance probing and cross checking of information.

7. At the end of the RSA, briefly discuss, analyze, and summarize the results together with villagers.

8. Record the details of RSA in a notebook for future reference.

2.3   Semi-Structured Interviews

A key RSA procedure is the semi-structured interview (SSI). This interview method seeks to engage the target group in an exchange of information - a conversation - through a series of guide questions (not a structured questionnaire) relevant to the group. Important information is generated by talking with group members about topics that interest them. SSI can be used with individuals, key informants, interest groups or other smaller sub-groups, such as WUA members and womens' groups.

Like the RSA itself, SSI procedures can be explained as a series of steps:

1. Prepare a checklist of topics and guide questions for discussion and record these in a notebook.

2. Select individuals, key informants, interest groups, or other small groups of people to interview. Get a good representation of the target group - spatial, gender, wealth class, etc.

3. Select a time and location where the conduct of the SSI cannot be disturbed or disrupted.

4. Use the checklist of topics and guide questions but allow flexibility in the conversation so that issues can be explored as they arise. Ask questions that are relevant to the villagers being interviewed (individual or group).

5. Observe proper interviewing techniques. Use open-ended questions (not answerable by yes or no). Probe deeply by posing relevant follow up questions as needed.

6. Modify the checklist of topics and guide questions as new issues arise during the conversation.

7. Record the important points in each interview in a notebook.

2.4   Village/Area Profiling

Village or area profiling is a RSA method that can provide basic information that helps both the target group and TDA staff to know more about a village. It provides information on the bio-physical and socio-economic condition of a village as well as its cultural and social organizations. It helps both the villagers and forestry staff to learn and appreciate the local situation in a village. It serves as a baseline for planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of village development activities.

Items typically included in profiling are:

- Population
- Migration
- Birth/death rate

- Languages spoken/ethnic groups
- Religion
- Literacy rate
- Main problems/basic needs of villagers
- Sources of livelihood/income
- Village labour utilization
- Existing socio-economic facilities
- Accessibility/available means of transport
- Prevalent diseases and causes
- Traditional festivals
- Schools
- Hospitals

Village or area profiling should be conducted in close collaboration with the local administrative authorities, since such authorities may have much relevant information. An example format of a village profile is shown in **Annex 2**.

2.5 Pair-Wise Ranking

Pair-wise ranking is a RSA method that helps target group members to set priorities (i.e. problems, needs, actions, etc.). Ranking can be undertaken with key informants or group of villagers that represents a good mixture of interests. It can also be conducted based on gender to determine different preferences between men and women. For simple issues, villagers can rank them during the semi-structured interview. For complicated issues, ranking can be undertaken using pair-wise ranking in order to determine the villagers' preferences.

The detailed steps in pair-wise ranking during a village RSA are as follows:

1. Ask the villagers to identify and prepare a list of issues (i.e. problems) to be ranked.

2. Prepare a matrix on a large sheet of paper or blackboard. Indicate the issues on the top left side of the matrix.

3. To get the villagers' preferences (through voting), facilitate the comparison of issues with one another and prioritize them. The first issue listed on the left side of the matrix will be compared with the second issue and these tow issues prioritized. Next, the first issue will be compared with the third issue and these two issues prioritized. Repeat the process until all the issues have been covered. Worked examples of this procedure are given overleaf.

4. Encourage discussions while the exercise is being conducted to enhance probing and cross checking of information. Ask the villagers' reasons for their choices and note these reasons.

5. At the end of the exercise, briefly discuss, analyze, and summarize the results together with villagers.

Worked Examples of Pair-Wise Ranking

There are two approaches to pair-wise ranking, the traditional approach and the simplified approach. In these examples, four problems are prioritized using each approach in turn.

Table 2: Example Traditional Pair-Wise Ranking

	Problem	Problem Number				Score	Rank
		1	2	3	4		
1	Lack of fertilizer and seed		2	1	4	1	3
2	Lack of roads and bridges			2	2	3	1
3	Lack of health clinic				4	0	4
4	Lack of school					2	2

Villagers are first asked to discuss and decide which of problems 1 and 2 are of higher priority. In this case, problem 2 is of higher priority than problem 1. So "2" (for "problem 2") is entered in the problem 2 column in the problem 1 row.

Next, villagers are asked to discuss and decide which of problems 1 and 3 are of higher priority. In this case, problem 1 is of higher priority than problem 3. So "1" (for "problem 1") is entered in the problem 3 column in the problem 1 row.

Next, villagers are asked to discuss and decide which of problems 1 and 4 are of higher priority. In this case, problem 4 is of higher priority than problem 1. So "4" (for "problem 4") is entered in the problem 4 column in the problem 1 row.

The villagers are asked to discuss and decide which of problems 2 and 3 are of higher priority. In this case, problem 2 is of higher priority than problem 3. So "2" (for "problem 2") is entered in the problem 3 column in the problem 2 row.

This process continues until all problems have been compared with each other. The "Score" column is then completed. Problem 1 appears once in the table, so scores 1. Problem 2 appears 3 times in the table, so scores 3. Problem 3 does not appear in the table, so scores 0. Problem 4 appears twice in the table, so scores 2.

The "rank" of each problem is the reverse of the relative score. The problem 2 score of 3 is highest, so problem 2 is ranked first.

Table 3: Example Alternative Pair-Wise Ranking

Problem	Score	Total	Rank
Lack of fertilizer and seed	🔵	1	3
Lack of roads and bridges	🔵 🔵 🔵	3	1
Lack of health clinic		0	4
Lack of school	🔵 🔵	2	2

A more simple approach is to simply mark the table each time a problem is deemed more important, as shown in **Table 3**. This approach is easier to understand and faster, but there is no record of the results of each comparison.

3.   Supporting Tools & Techniques

There are a number of tools and procedures that have been developed to produce successful RSA outcomes by clarifying situations so they are understood and agreed by all parties. These are explained in the following sections.

3.1   Time Charts

A time chart (seasonal calendar) is simply a bar chart, such as is used for construction scheduling, that shows patterns and trends throughout the year in a certain village or area. It can be used for purposes such as rainfall distribution, food availability, agricultural production, income and expenditures, health problems, and others. It can also be used to collect information on how villagers allocate their time as well as their labour in various activities within the village.

3.3   Venn Diagrams

A Venn diagram is a diagram of overlapping circles that shows the key institutions, organizations, or groups as well as influential individuals in a village or area and their relationships and importance in decision making.

An example of a Venn diagram is shown in **Figure 1** below. The circles can represent each village institution, organization, or group (colours can be used to represent different organizations, institutions, groups or individuals). The size of the circle indicates importance or scope. Circles that do not touch indicate no contact between the groups circled. Touching circles indicate the exchange of information, cooperation, or authority and interference between the groups according to the degree of overlap.

Figure 1: Example Venn Diagram
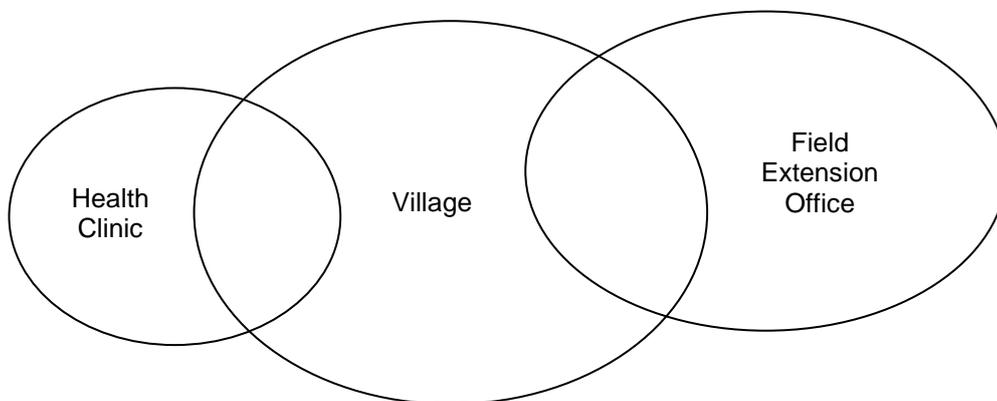
3.5   Social Mapping

Social mapping is a RSA tool that involves the sketching/drawing of houses and other social facilities and infrastructure (such as mosques, stores, rice mills, school, pharmacy, trails and roads, water pumps, irrigation and drainage facilities) in a village or area. These features have usually not been well specified conventional maps. It helps to visualize and situate the location of households and other social facilities/infrastructure in a village. It serves as a baseline for planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of village development activities.

3.6   Census Mapping

Census mapping is a RSA tool that can provide detailed information about a village or area, with emphasis on individual households. It gives the population of the area and TDA staff a chance to take a closer look and better understanding of individual households in the village. It offers as an opportunity for the villagers and the forestry staff to identify indicators for planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of village development activities.

3.7   Wealth Ranking

Wealth ranking is a RSA tool that determines the economic attributes of households in a village or area. It shows information on the relative wealth and well-being of households in a village. It helps in determining the social and economic status of households in a village. The information generated by the wealth ranking exercise helps in identifying the poor households in the village. Ranking is done by villagers themselves, and as such gives TDA staff insights into the actual economic conditions of the village through the eyes of the villagers. It serves as baseline and as an opportunity to identify indicators for planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of village development activities.

Annex 1

CHARACTERISTICS OF
AN EFFECTIVE FACILITATOR

ANNEX 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE FACILITATOR

Appropriate behaviour and attitude of a facilitator is the key to a successful RSA. A good RSA facilitator is characterized by a behaviour and attitude that:

1. Builds rapport with men and women, rich and poor, young and old, and people with different ethnic or social group backgrounds.

2. Being friendly, interested, culturally sensitive, relaxed and open, avoiding making people feel uncomfortable.

3. Listening and probing, and leaving time in conversation for additional comments.

4. Selecting RSA tools that suit local conditions and recognizing that not all tools are suited to all situations or social groups.

5. Engaging in conversations that have a two-way exchange of information.

6. Being patient but proceeding at a moderate pace.

7. Seeking views of the weaker, less influential people or groups.

8. Sharing information.

9. Giving people enough time to communicate and consider ideas.

10. Being self-aware and self-critical, using own judgment, avoiding personal biases.

11. Learning from people, not lecturing.

12. Checking and rechecking the validity of information using different sources.

13. Frequently reflecting on what information has been gained and where the gaps are.

14. Identifying and testing assumptions.

15. Admitting error and learning from mistakes.

16. Trying to ensure that the expectations of the target group are not raised too early, and avoiding making promises that cannot be fulfilled.

17. Asking questions that invite explanations or viewpoints rather than yes or no.

18. Scheduling RSA activities so that they fit in as much as possible with seasonal and daily routines of the target group.

Annex 2

**EXAMPLE VILLAGE
PROFILE FORM**

1.	**Name of village**	*Describe*	
2.	**Location**	*Describe*	
3.	**Village history**	*Describe*	
4.	**Village organization**	*Describe*	

5. Physical data

4.1 Village area	ha	_____	*Remarks* _____
4.2 Rainfed crop area	ha	_____	_____
4.3 Irrigated crop area	ha	_____	_____
4.4 Forest/tree area	ha	_____	_____
4.5 Non-productive land	ha	_____	_____
4.6 Total area	ha	_____	_____
Other data		*Describe*	

6. Socio-economic data

5.1 Total population	no	_____	*Remarks* _____
a Males	no	_____	_____
b Females	no	_____	_____
5.2 Families	no	_____	_____
5.3 Households	no	_____	_____
5.4 Literacy Rate	%	_____	_____
5.5 Av. annual income	YR	_____	_____
5.6 Av. annual births	no	_____	_____
5.7 Av. annual deaths	no	_____	_____
Other data		*Describe*	

7. Infrastructure data

7.1 Mosques	no	_____	*Remarks* _____
7.2 Schools	no	_____	_____
a Distance to nearest	km	_____	_____
7.3 Health clinic	no	_____	_____
a Distance to nearest	km	_____	_____
Water sources/other data		*Describe*	

8. Livelihood data

8.1 Landowner farmers   no _____   *Remarks* _____
                                ha _____   _____

8.2 Tenant farmers   no _____   _____
                                  ha _____   _____

8.3 Sharecropping farmers no _____   _____
                                  ha _____   _____

8.4 Self-employed artisans no _____   _____

8.5 Wage earners   no _____   _____

8.6 Unemployed/no occupation no _____   _____

       Other   *Describe*

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9. Agricultural data

State whether data is for a particular year, or an average of several years

Enter name of crop/fruit/vegetable
       Annual area   ha _____   *Remarks* _____
       Annual production   T _____   _____
       Annual yield   T/ha _____   _____

Enter name of crop/fruit/vegetable
       Annual area   ha _____   *Remarks* _____
       Annual production   T _____   _____
       Annual yield   T/ha _____   _____

Enter name of crop/fruit/vegetable
       Annual area   ha _____   *Remarks* _____
       Annual production   T _____   _____
       Annual yield   T/ha _____   _____

Enter name of crop/fruit/vegetable
       Annual area   ha _____   *Remarks* _____
       Annual production   T _____   _____
       Annual yield   T/ha _____   _____

Enter name of crop/fruit/vegetable
       Annual area   ha _____   *Remarks* _____
       Annual production   T _____   _____
       Annual yield   T/ha _____   _____

10. Basic Needs/Development Priorities

    Describe