



The most popular method in Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) social mapping explores where and how people live and the available social infrastructure: roads, drainage systems, schools, drinking-water facilities, etc. A social map is made by local people and is not drawn to scale, illustrating what the local people believe to be relevant and important for them. This method is an authentic way of determining what the social reality looks like for locals through social stratification, demographics, settlement patterns, social infrastructure, etc.

**Steps:** The process for social mapping should include the following steps:

1. Consultation with the local community to identify an appropriate time and place for the exercise. Ensure that the time and location is suitable (good size, convenient, comfortable for all members of society) for as many people as possible.
2. Explain the purpose of the exercise to the participants. Ask them to begin by drawing the main physical features of their locality. Let them use whatever materials they choose (local or other materials) as creatively as possible. This may mean using twigs and rocks or yarn on canvas on the ground, or it may mean markers, depending on the community.
3. Watch the process carefully and take detailed notes. Don't rush things!
4. Keep track of who is actively involved – to which section of society do they belong? Who is being left out? Take steps to involve them.
5. You are just a facilitator — intervene only when necessary, like when participants are going through a rough patch.
6. It is important not to disrupt this process – wait for a good time in the process if you must add or clarify anything. Ask them: “What about ...”, “What does this symbol represent?” etc.
7. When they have finished mapping, ask some people to identify their houses in the map.
8. Identify and number the household details you need according to the goal of the exercise, like caste composition, school age children, etc.
9. Take a look at the map and clarify: ask specific questions on parts that are unclear to you. Copy the map made by participants onto a large sheet of paper immediately, with all details.
10. Triangulate the information generated with others in the locality.

## Social mapping helps gather village information on:

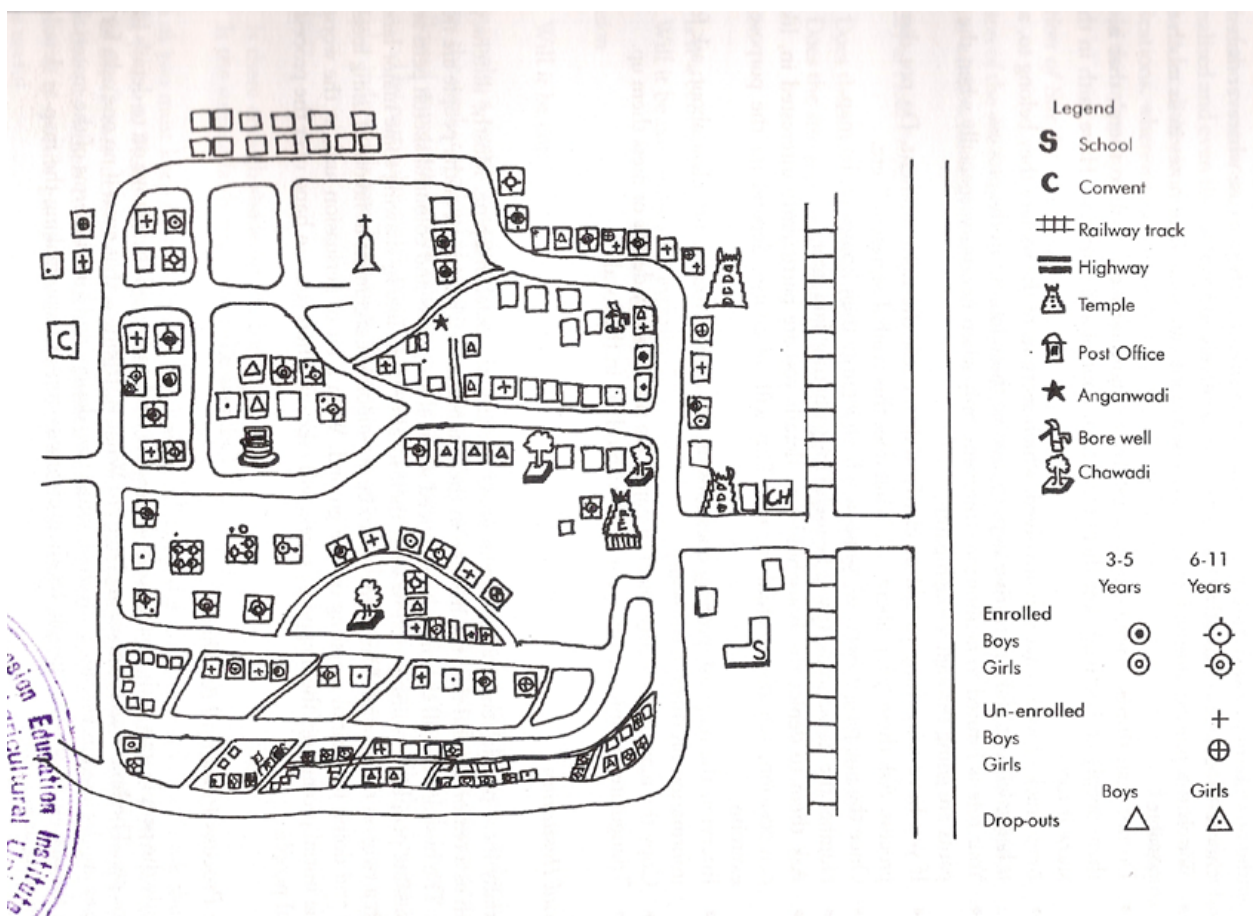
- Caste distribution and their spatial distribution within the village
- Ethnic distribution
- Social institutions and economy
- Family structure, patterns, and relationships
- Government institutions available
- Education background of villagers
- Social groups
- Assimilation patterns
- Accommodation practices
- Leadership patterns
- Value systems of the village
- Social interactions
- Cooperation and conflict practices
- Media/communication practices
- Social norms, folkways, history
- Social evils like alcoholism, child labor, prostitution
- Religion, leadership pattern and customs

Extension professionals can design and plan interventions in a village to improve extension and advisory services with this information.

**“What amazes new PRA practitioners is the way in which even those who generally remain on the fringes of the community process viz., old people, women and children get involved in mapping. The marginalized and even the illiterate follow the process and most of them are able to locate their houses and their localities in the social map.”**

**Example of a Social Map:** Villagers mapped out Chetlamallapuram in Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh, shown in figure 1. They depicted the lanes, sub-lanes, school, railway track, temple, post-office, well, community hall, and convent in the village. The map helped determine the educational situation by gender and age, revealing that more boys go to school than girls, more girls and un-enrolled than boys, and more girls drop out than boys in the 6-11 year age group. From this information, extension workers can better determine next steps for the community.

Figure 1: Social Map of Chetlamallapuram



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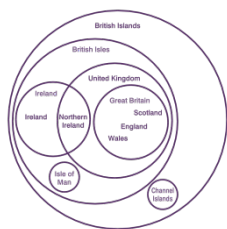
Prepared by Oliver Ferguson and Kathryn Heinz, July 2014  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
Available at [www.meas-extension.org/tip-sheets](http://www.meas-extension.org/tip-sheets)



maps drawn by different groups may show different features that highlight issues which are important to them.

### **Mobility maps**

These record, compare and analyse the movements of different groups in a community or area, and are a useful indicator of these groups' contacts with other groups and communities. Historical maps can be drawn at different points in time, showing how movements of groups, or access of groups to different areas, have changed.



Diagrams present information in an easily understandable form. They are usually developed in a participatory way. Like maps, they can be developed using local resources. It can be useful to compare diagrams developed by different groups. Some examples of diagrams are as follows.

### **Daily routine diagrams**

These help to compare the daily or monthly routines of different groups of people, and their different roles and responsibilities. They usually show the type and distribution of workload, and can enable comparisons to be made between men and women, young and old, domestic and agricultural roles etc. They can be useful in assessing the impact of a programme over time (for example, in changing women's workload, or children's school attendance). They can also help to identify suitable times for community meetings, project visits, M&E events, training courses, etc.

### **Livelihood analysis diagrams**

These can help to interpret the behaviour, decisions, and coping strategies of households with different socio-economic characteristics and / or living in different types of agro-ecological or pastoral systems.

### **Flow diagrams**

Flow diagrams are a visual tool for tracking the flow of resources, benefits or negative effects in order to explore the potential or actual impacts of a project, or a wider change. People, institutions, resources and so on are represented diagrammatically, and arrows are drawn to indicate the flow or the linkages between them.

### **Venn (or chapati) diagrams**

These can be used to show the key institutions and individuals in a community, and their relationships and importance for decision-making and/or their influence on different people or groups. Different sizes of circles are drawn, indicating different institutions and individuals and their relative influence. The circles can be placed closer or further away to each other depending on the level of contact, or closeness of the relationships between the different institutions or individuals.



Ranking and scoring exercises are good for comparing the preferences, priorities and opinions of different community groups or social actors. They are a good way of stimulating discussion.

### **Preference ranking**

People vote to select priorities. For example, a few issues or options are listed, and people allocate a score out of 10 for each one.

### **Pairwise ranking**

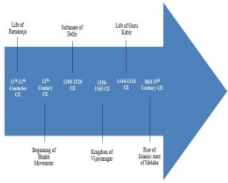
In pairwise ranking a matrix is used to compare different options against each other to identify which is the preferred option, and the reasons why. Scores are then aggregated to find out the overall favourites.

### **Direct matrix ranking**

Direct matrix ranking is used to generate different criteria for decision-making and to score different options against these criteria. It can be used as a means of understanding the reasons for local preferences for such things as different seed or crop varieties, tree species or types of food.

### **Wealth ranking**

This can be used to investigate perceptions of wealth differences and inequalities in a community, in order to discover local indicators and criteria of wealth and well-being, and to establish the relative wealth of households in the community. Wealth ranking can be useful if a project is trying to target the poorest people. It is done by making a list of all households and asking different people to sort them into categories according to their own criteria of wealth or well-being. Like all participatory tools, this must be done sensitively and appropriately to avoid stigmatising particular groups.



Timelines and time trends are constructed to show changes over time. This makes them particularly useful for M&E – seeing not just how things have changed, but also understanding the reasons and contributing factors.

**Timelines**

A timeline is an illustration of key events in the life of an individual, household, community or organisation over a specified period. Often this will involve drawing a linear timeline, and asking people to mark the timeline with key events. Timelines can be used to plot the progress of a project or programme over time, highlighting achievements and challenges faced along the way.

**Time trends**

Time trends are graphs that show how things have changed over time. They can be used for many variables such as crop yields, areas under cultivation, livestock population, prices, and rainfall.

Calendars can show key events and how they change over time – years, seasons, months, days and hours.



**Seasonal calendars**

These are useful ways of representing seasonal variations in climate, crops, income-generating activities, nutrition, health and diseases, debt, etc. They can help identify times of shortage – of food, money or time – and the best time of the year for particular kinds of development work.

**Daily schedule**

A daily schedule is a diagram to show an individual’s pattern of labour over the course of a day. This usually shows the type and distribution of workload and enables comparisons to be made between men and women, young and old, domestic and agricultural roles etc.



Many kinds of performing arts can be used to encourage people to discuss and analyse their situations in a relaxed and light-hearted way. However, it is always important to make sure that people are comfortable with performing in these ways.

**Role play**

Groups role play a situation or a change in the community. Different groups (e.g. men, women, young or old people) may role play the same situation from very different points of view. People can then compare how different groups see the same problems or challenges.

**Theatre**

Particularly effective when working with children, theatre might involve discussing issues with children, selecting a key issue on which to make a play, developing a drama, and performing that to a wider audience. Issues arising can then be discussed more widely.

**Strengths and weaknesses**

PLA can help provide a good, in-depth understanding of a community, including its capacities and problems, from its own perspective, including the perspectives of different groups or sections of the community. For M&E purposes, it can also provide different perceptions of the changes occurring within a project or programme, and the reasons for those changes.

If carried out properly, PLA supports the empowerment and mobilisation of local communities and the people within them, whilst at the same time providing information for outsiders, including project or programme staff. One major benefit of PLA (for M&E) is that analyses and results are immediately available in a form which can be fed back to, and discussed with, communities.

However, PLA can also be time consuming, not least for community members. It is therefore important that the benefits of the work to communities outweigh the costs.

This is one of the reasons why PLA should not just be carried out for data extraction.

PLA is also difficult to do well. Participatory approaches are not inherently ‘good’, and as with any development work they can be carried out in a sloppy, biased, rushed, uncritical or self-serving way. An essential element for good PLA is good facilitation skills. PLA work may expose tensions in communities, and may arouse false expectations if not handled well. The role of the facilitator is therefore very important. The facilitator (or facilitators) needs to make sure that PLA is carried out to high quality and ethical standards, ensuring that attitudes and behaviours are conducive to learning, and that the needs of the community are placed before the needs of outsiders.

One potential disadvantage of PLA work is that results are usually specific to a local community. This means it is not always possible to make wider generalisations. PLA is not appropriate when a large amount of quantitative data is required.