

Short Communication

**VISUAL PROBLEM APPRAISAL: PREDICTABLE USAGE IN SRI
LANKAN CONTEXT**

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INTRODUCTION

In the complexity of the society, sustainable development has become more complex as causes and the effects of issues related to development is not readily perceptible. These issues are intertwined with social and natural environment. Meanwhile, policy makers and analysts have to make new approach to analyse these issues and to learn the complexity of these problems as most of the stakeholders in an issue would not be confronted to them.

Visual Problem Appraisal (VPA) is a film-based learning strategy which enhances the analysis of complex issues and facilitates a plan of action. It is used in workshops dealing with problem analysis and policy design, and involves the participants ‘meeting’ stakeholders through the latter’s filmed narratives. Participants of the workshop consult stakeholders through watching them on films (Witteveen & Lie, 2012). A VPA set consists of a series of filmed interviews (between 20 and 30) complemented with two documentaries. These films provide particular perspectives on the contextual reality of the stakeholders in a particular issue consequently creating a social dialog.

The problem analysis and policy design workshop follows the stages of ‘scoping’ (review of available information-basically literature review), ‘stakeholder consultation’ and ‘action’, the participants ‘interview’ the stakeholders, which gives them a chance to explore the complex and conflictive arena of the issue.

This paper converse the activities under the production of VPA set, its' learning outcomes and its predictable usage in different public and educational domains in Sri Lanka.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

According to Witteveen and Lie (2012) there have been four VPA sets produced focussing on Agribusiness and Rural Development in Guyana, Integrated Coastal Zone Management in Kerala coast, India, HIV/AIDS and Rural Development in sub Saharan Africa and Rural Livelihoods in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa. These VPA sets were studied and projected in the domains in Sri Lankan context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tea is the major export crop earner in Sri Lanka. Over 220,000 hectares are planted especially in central highlands. According to Central Bank of Sri Lanka (2013), about 320 million kilograms has been exported worth of 180,000 million Sri Lankan rupees. Sri Lanka Tea Board (SLTB), Tea Small Holdings Development Authority (TSHDA) and Tea Research Institute (TRI) are the major government stakeholders of tea sector in Sri Lanka. Majority of the tea estate workers are Tamils of Indian origin and they are accommodated in the estate in poor quality houses. The socio economic status of these estate workers are still under the poverty level. Poor household percentage in estate sector is 8.9% in 2009/2010 (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2013).

In order to analyse the issues faced by employees in tea estates (primary stakeholders in tea sector according to FAO, 2014) and the issues faced by other stakeholders in tea value chain, a VPA can be used.

It is necessary to identify primary, secondary and tertiary stakeholders in tea value chain. According to Witteveen *et al.* (2009), if a diverse stakeholder compilation is not achieved during the production, the package of filmed narratives is not considered to constitute a VPA. This reflects the vitality of each stakeholder in tea value chain as each of the stakeholders is

equally important in sustainable tea industry. Filming location is set to be the general working environment of the stakeholder.

Tea estate workers (tea pluckers/labours) are the primary stakeholders whereas secondary stakeholders will be SLTB, TSHDA, TRI, Other government entities, Tea exporters, Tea importing companies in overseas, Private plantation owners and Tea importing countries like Russia (according to SLTB (2014) the major importer of Sri Lankan Tea is Russia.)

The interviewer has to obtain the informed consent of the informant so that the content of the discourse is kept confidential and used only in learning environment. The interviewer allows the informant to express his/her feelings as the viewer may observe facial, body expressions of informants and consider the severity of the issue for the certain informant.

Since some of the interviewees may speak Sinhala /Tamil language it has to be translated to English with subtitles. The advantage of English subtitling is the films can approach wide audience worldwide either public or educational domain.

Estate sector in Sri Lanka has a different culture and norms as majority of the workers are Tamil women and the bureaucracy in the estates is a predominant feature. Estate superintendent has a dominating power in the region as accepted by the estate community. Witteveen and Enserink (2007) realized that they were challenging a variety of mindsets and cultural notions in a situation of close cooperation and physical togetherness, as working on location was a main pre-requisite of VPA filming. Therefore, VPA design and production in bureaucracy dominated estate sector will be a space for intercultural communication.

The consumer perception of the tea production is also vital in tea value chain. In the light of certification like *UTZ, Rainforest Alliance and fair-trade* a lot of consumers buy certified tea. The VPA will provide the tea planters, Government of Sri Lanka, research institutes valuable insights of the perception of tea consumers and their expectations. At the same time VPA will supply the facts about the issues hinder the sustainable tea industry to the consumers in overseas so that the consumers may support the tea industry.

Witteveen *et al.* (2009) indicates that in VPA workshops, some participants have realized that they had the opportunity to “meet” stakeholders far away from them through filmed narratives. Also remote stakeholders had the chance to raise their voice in a certain issue. Witteveen and Lie (2012) defines mediated participation as filmed contribution of direct stakeholders who otherwise would not be present in public policy making process. Therefore, the VPA allows tea estate labours to participate in tea policy making process in Sri Lanka.

The interconnectedness of the issues faced by the stakeholders of the values chain is clearly recognized and it is useful to have an overview of the context of the issues and its wickedness than reading several printed articles.

At present government agricultural extension services act as technology transfer intermediary with a least interaction with other societal stakeholders. Farmers are connected to the researcher with the assistance of extension officers. However, as indicated earlier VPA allows social dialog among policy makers as well as learners to rethink the innovative approach in extension in the Sri Lankan tea sector.

VPA can be used to create a learning environment among University students in Sri Lanka who follows Agricultural extension programs so that they will learn the issues in tea industry and to identify and analyze the causes and effects of the issues. Most of the students are to be engaged in communication interventions in agricultural innovation practice and VPA will trigger the students to rethink innovative estate sector service delivery methods.

CONCLUSION

VPA narratives expose new learning strategy and reflect the complexity, bitter reality, multidimensionality of the societal issues on the ground level. It encompasses the possible suggestions for system improvements which may be utilized for possible policy amendments.

At the same time, VPA triggers extensive social dialog among general public in Sri Lanka and generate institutional interaction for innovation in

agriculture practices for instance tea industry in Sri Lanka which will ultimately improve Agricultural Knowledge and Information System (AKIS) in Sri Lanka.

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