**Investigation of the Utility of RAP for Peace Corps Master’s International Students Engaged in Environmental Development Projects**

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### WHAT IS RAP?

**Rapid Assessment Process (RAP)** is a research approach used to gain understanding of an identified problem when time and resources do not permit the more extensive and traditional use of ethnographic methods, but where immediate actions are apparent for collaborators to pursue (Beebe, 2001).

RAP research must:
- be team driven to promote the identification of “responsive and relevant” interventions (McNall and Foster-Fishman, 2007, pg. 155)
- complement existing efforts as one step in a larger process
- use triangulation to validate data collection

### THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

What is the utility of using systematic social science methods to understand a community and work collaboratively to implement appropriate environmental development projects?

When a PCMI arrives at site and sees a lagoon these challenges, how should they go about understanding why a community’s only water source appears not be protected?

### METHODS

- Designing and conducting a RAP in the field with a PCMI in Guatemala
- Gathering data about PCMI experiences by conducting semi-structured interviews with the 9 PCMIs who had served in Guatemala and extensive participant observation in the Michigan Tech PCMI community

**RAP Design for Guatemala Case Study:**
- The RAP was adapted as a 2 week case study to investigate the perceptions and behaviors of local residents of San Jose de Calderas, Amatitlan related to their lagoon.
- Calderas lagoon, an endorheic lake which serves as the primary water source for 14 communities’ domestic and agricultural uses and geothermal production, lacks comprehensive management.

### RESULTS

- 14 days of RAP field testing resulted in a “better understanding of the community attitudes through their history towards water usage and conservation” and strengthened relationship of the PCMI and his community collaborators.
- The PCMI student’s thesis project originated from information learned during the RAP.
- Observed trends were presented to the community council and ideas generated for next steps; site change and conflicting priorities resulted in no further action by the RAP team.

### DISCUSSION OF RAP UTILITY

The preliminary investigation suggests that there is utility for RAP as another tool that PCMIs can use in order to develop a deeper understanding of their community and environmental problems.

The two levels of greatest utility would be:
1. for those that wish to incorporate social research into their master’s research, and
2. for those who have interest in using it for enhanced cultural understanding, collaboration, and appropriate project development.

**Recommendations for Implementation:**
- Offer a hands-on RAP workshop for PCMI students while on campus
- Create a RAP guide for PCMIs to reference during their service.
- Understanding and support of PCMI faculty advisors
- Conduct another field test of RAP with a current PCMI

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