HOW DO WE FIND OUT? ISSUES IN COLLECTING INFORMATION

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SUMMARY

In integrated impact assessment there are many different ways in which different methods can be combined in an investigation. The most cost-effective combinations must be assessed in relation to each assessment: the purpose of the assessment, the particular issues to be addressed, the stakeholders involved and the ways in which findings are to be used. The answers to these questions will depend on the purpose of the investigation. They will also depend on the particular context of the investigation, and the particular dissemination needs of the end-users.

This paper begins by looking at the methods and key issues in integrated assessment. It goes on to examine the different stages of the investigation process - the methods, pitfalls and ways forward, and finally reviews institutional considerations.

CONTENTS

SECTION 1 COLLECTING INFORMATION: METHODS AND KEY ISSUES IN INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT

1.1 Collecting information: key steps in investigation and underlying assumptions

All impact assessments involve collecting information. This is done mainly through asking questions of various types, but also through observation. There are a range of techniques, details of which are given in the papers on different methodologies elsewhere on this site and are not repeated here (See Box A).

The process of collecting information however involves much more than listing a few questions and then asking them in the field or conducting a few PRA exercises. Whatever methods are used in the investigation, a number of different steps are involved. All these steps are important for the reliability, relevance and cost effectiveness of the investigation. These steps apply to both the assessment as a whole and also to each individual part of the investigation:

- ***Reviewing existing information:*** Any investigation needs to complement rather than duplicate existing information, otherwise it wastes the time and resources of both funders and respondents.

- ***Establishing and maintaining rapport:*** No matter how sophisticated the questionnaire or sampling design, if the investigation fails to establish rapport with communities or particular respondents reliability of the responses obtained is likely to be highly questionable.

- ***Recording the information:*** Even where questions are asked and reliable responses given, if this is not appropriately recorded then the information cannot be meaningfully analysed.

- ***Checking for reliability*** both within and between interviews is necessary to establish the reasons for any contradictory information and/or the limitations of any practical conclusions which can be drawn.

- ***Ending the investigation:*** The ways in which both interviews/workshops and the assessment as a whole is ended is crucial not only for moral reasons, but also for making a useful contribution to programme/policy change and to the reliability of any subsequent interviews and assessments.

This paper discusses ways in which different methods can be cost effectively integrated at each stage to increase the reliability of information obtained.

The discussion is based on a number of underlying assumptions about the nature and purpose of impact assessment:

- The assessment should be able to make **realistic recommendations** for improvement in programmes and policies

- Any one assessment should as far as possible contribute to setting up of **sustainable learning systems** for programme and policy improvement over time

- **Stakeholder participation**, particularly of the poor and most vulnerable, is essential to both making realistic recommendations and improving programmes and policies in the longer term.

These requirements mean that the assessment can itself be a cost-effective contribution to development rather than an additional cost. They do not in any case necessarily substantially increase the costs of impact assessment. They require rather a different approach which fully integrates concerns of programme/policy change, sustainable learning and stakeholder participation at all stages of the investigation, rather than treating them as an additional frill in the form of one dissemination/policy workshop at the end of the assessment. The implications of these assumptions for the investigation process are discussed in detail below.

BOX A:THE INVESTIGATION PROCESS

UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS

- policy relevance
- sustainable learning
- stakeholder participation

PROCESS

Step 1: Reviewing existing information
Step 2: Establishing and maintaining rapport
Step 3: Asking the questions
Step 4: Recording the information received
Step 5:Checking for reliability
Step 6: Ending the investigation

TECHNIQUES

- structured questionnaires (See EDIAIS document on Quantification Methods)
- semi structured and informal interviews See EDIAIS document on Qualitative Methods)
- case studies (Qualitative Methods)
- observation, photography and video (Qualitative Methods)
- PLA diagramming tools (See EDIAIS document on Participatory Methods)

1.2 Balancing competing priorities: fundamental questions

Any investigation will require resources and takes up the time and energy of respondents, interviewers and funders. It is therefore important that these resources are used cost-effectively and not wasted collecting a lot of information which is never used. This requires assessments to be carefully focused on particular practical or policy issues. In order to produce realistic recommendations for programme and policy improvement it is not however sufficient to rely solely on a priori identification of hypotheses which are then tested by statistical quantitative methods. As discussed in detail elsewhere on this site (!! Insert link to paper on data analysis forthcoming) conventional statistical analysis is insufficient even for establishing reasons for any correlations identified. In order to produce realistic recommendations the assessment needs to:

- increase **understanding of the nature of development processes** and the complex interactions between programme interventions, contextual factors and the aims and aspirations of the intended beneficiaries. This requires investigation not only of quantitative impacts at beneficiary level, but their attitudes and aspirations. It also requires detailed institutional and contextual analysis.

- explore **realistic possibilities for innovation and change**. These may not be immediately apparent from statistical analysis of impacts of existing policies and practises. It is likely to require careful analysis of particular cases of success or failure and/or participatory consultation regarding what different stakeholders see as possible ways forward.

- as far as possible **gain support for implementation** of the recommendations and identify any potential problems or conflicts of interest between stakeholders.

It is crucial that assessments go beyond mechanical questioning of intended beneficiaries to a much broader and in-depth understanding of the complex ways in which development interventions contribute to processes of change. This involves assessment at a number of different levels:

- **intended beneficiaries** differentiated by different stakeholder categories and including potential beneficiaries, dropouts and those excluded from programmes and policies as well as actual beneficiaries

- **institutional analysis** not only of implementing programmes and their interventions but also other institutions involved eg government agencies, other NGOs operating in the area, grassroots organizations and traditional power structures

- **contextual analysis** of both micro and macro-level opportunities and constraints affecting both intended beneficiaries and involved institutions

Understanding these different levels is important not only as a focus of any investigation which aims to produce realistic practical recommendations, but to the design of the investigation process itself.

Achieving the difficult balance between potentially competing priorities of:

- **careful focus** to maintain rigour on the one hand and
- **breadth and depth** of investigation to maintain credibility of practical conclusions on the other within
- given **resource, time and contextual constraints**

involves asking a number of fundamental questions as outlined in Box 2. It is only when these issues have been thought through that the details of design of the investigation can be considered – although it is likely that these questions will also need to be continually revisited as new possible uses for the information present themselves and/or unexpected challenges arise.

There are ***no blueprints*** or ' definitive questionnaires ' for any topic, but only a broad framework of questions which must be adapted in relation to the particular purpose of any one assessment. Even within a broad remit of policy relevance, assessments may have a ***variety of purposes***. Commonly different stakeholders have different agendas which need to be acknowledged and addressed. These will affect the main focus of the broad questions to be asked, the degree of detail which is needed in relation to each and the ways in which different stakeholders need to be involved. Much of the discussion in this paper uses as illustration the issues involved in two rather different examples:

Illustrative examples of requirements of different types of assessment

1) ***Programme improvement***: to find out how particular loan conditions in a microfinance programme should be improved. The intention is to introduce any required changes quickly in response to high drop out rates. Here a sophisticated statistical questionnaire about impact on incomes for a large random sample which takes a long time to analyse is likely to be of limited use. More useful would be a series of carefully planned focus group discussions followed by a short questionnaire containing a number of policy options canvassed for particular clients to gain consensus about change and/or identify differences between different categories of client.

2) ***Policy development***: to find out the gender impact of particular changes in regulatory frameworks for enterprise. The intention is to develop gender sensitive policy guidelines and develop structures and networks which take into account the needs of different stakeholders, linkages between different types of enterprise and particularly focusing on the needs of poor women. Here a combination of statistical survey, qualitative research and participatory

methods will be needed in order to get beyond simplistic and anecdotal information. It will require in-depth analysis of complex informal and maybe illegal informal activities and intra-household relations. It will also require ongoing analysis of findings and participatory discussions with different stakeholders in order to investigate appropriate policy responses by different agencies.

See Appendix for more details.

Whatever its purpose, any one assessment cannot be seen as an independent self-contained event, but the mid stage of a learning process to which it can contribute. In order to do this it must:

- **build on what is already known**
- **consider how the findings are to be used and by whom**

Few assessments exist in a vacuum. They are generally a follow-up of previous studies of varying degrees of reliability. They also are able to draw on a wealth of unpublished ' grey material ' and/or undocumented knowledge about institutions, contexts and impacts. Much of this information can be rapidly collated through use of qualitative interviews and/ participatory methods/expert workshops. This enables more cost-effective targeting of any one assessment and better design of the investigation. In some cases the aims of the assessment are to establish a baseline for future impact monitoring, or indicators for integration into Management Information Systems.

The final end use of the findings and the disciplinary skills, time and likely degrees of interest of the intended end-users are particularly important. There is little point in spending scarce resources on a very detailed statistical investigation of a particular dimension of impact if the intended end-users are unlikely to be able to understand or have the time to read the findings. In this case carefully selected case studies together with participatory quantification of a few straightforward questions may be sufficient. This does not mean a sacrifice of credibility and rigour, but a much tighter focusing of the questions to be asked and careful attention to their presentation and analysis on the limitations on conclusions which can be drawn. Alternatively other stakeholders like local academics or higher level policy-makers must be identified who are capable of using the information and conveying it to practitioners. On the other hand if the assessment is intended to be a critical contribution to both academic and policy debate, then statistical rigour and the rigour of qualitative investigation will be very important. Again there must be careful attention to presentation of both complex statistical argument and qualitative and participatory information. In most cases, a compromise between these two extremes is likely to be needed which will both:

- yield certain sorts of information easily and quickly and
- require other information in more depth and with greater rigour but with a less tight time schedule.

The ***institutional context*** is important not only for the reliability of findings and recommendations, but again for the design of the investigation. Where programmes are operating well and have reliable information systems it may be possible to rapidly collect reliable and detailed information building on existing information. For most purposes it is also likely that programme staff can play a significant role in collecting further information. This improved staff understanding will then improve programme implementation. Where on the other hand investigation involves programmes which are functioning badly, policy areas and regulation which are widely resented and evaded and/or where corruption is rife collecting information will need to be done by independent researchers. Contexts like emergencies and countries with political instability and oppression are also likely to present problems.

The ways in which an appropriate balance can be found will depend partly on the ***socio-economic and institutional context***. Understanding of context is not only essential for the reliability of findings and recommendations, but also design of the investigation itself. Some questions are easier to investigate in some contexts than others. Which questions are likely to be sensitive and which can be rapidly and reliably assessed cannot necessarily be foreseen. Assessing levels of income may be very sensitive where there are high levels of culturally unacceptable or illegal activities like prostitution or cross-border smuggling. Asking questions about intra-household decision-making on the other hand may be less sensitive than often assumed provided questionnaires are based on prior qualitative or participatory research to identify context-relevant questions and how they should be asked.

Examples of unexpected problems

In South Africa Small Enterprise Foundation found that questions about asset values were extremely sensitive as people were unwilling to disclose second-hand values of property. This made any quantification of impact on incomes extremely problematic (personal communication from Anton Simanowitz).

In Cameroon attempts to get participatory indicators for women's poverty and assess income levels proved extremely problematic. Firstly women asserted that they were all poor and were very reluctant to give any relative ranking. The main criteria referred to were marital status and age with junior wives in polygamous marriages, widows and elderly women being generally agreed to be the poorest. Secondly women frequently worked many different plots of varying distances and productivity under a range of tenure agreements under customary arrangements and with landlords and often did not know the area of each plot. Produce was sold or consumed as circumstances required and no records were kept. Most women traders and entrepreneurs were also farmers. On the other hand attempts to develop participatory indicators for empowerment proved far easier focusing on women's control over their own income and data on this was far easier to collect (Mayoux 2001).

More detailed discussion of issues involved in ***selecting indicators*** and ***samples*** is given elsewhere on the website. Indicator trees can be used to identify priority areas of investigation and sections of a questionnaire and indicate interrelationships between them (See EDIAIS document on Selecting Indicators). Stakeholder analysis should be used to identify samples for both quantitative and qualitative investigation, stakeholders to participate or be represented in participatory exercises and workshops and end-users of the information. Stakeholder analysis should clarify ways in which the investigation can be made relevant to the various stakeholders, including the poorest and most disadvantaged. It should also clarify the ways in which methodologies and questions might need to be modified for different groups e.g. for women and men or different ethnic groups, and also the ways in which dissemination might need to take into account their different levels of access to particular media, different skills and understandings (See EDIAIS document on Stakeholder Analysis and document on Sampling).

The ***interpersonal dimension*** of the investigation are likely to be critical to the investigation process: who is to be involved at different stages and how they are likely to relate to different stakeholders. Even the best and most sophisticated questionnaire and sample design will not give reliable or useful information unless the investigation is done well and carefully by sincere investigators who have good interpersonal skills. It is not necessarily the case that information is best collected by external researchers, in some cases it may be done better by programme staff, grassroots groups or even illiterate women themselves given appropriate support. Each assessment must examine the various types of information needed and the most appropriate type of investigator on its own merit. In some cases sensitivity of context or topic may necessitate particular recruitment requirements eg gender and/or ethnic background, particular linguistic skills and/or educational/disciplinary background. In other cases it may be appropriate to maintain an equal opportunities policy for recruitment of investigators as a moral issue in itself and/or in order to challenge particular gender, ethnic or other stereotypes. In some contexts local village researchers or grassroots group leaders may be better able to get reliable information than educated outsiders from urban areas who do not speak the local dialect and/or are perceived as unsympathetic to local customs. In other contexts local researchers and leaders may be perceived as too partial or not to be trusted and outsiders may be able to get more reliable information, partly because of their novelty value and higher levels of confidentiality. These are issues which must be at least considered in the interpretation of the information collected, even if for various reasons they cannot be foreseen or addressed in investigator recruitment.

Finally there are a number of ***cross-cutting ethical issues*** which must be considered at all stages of the investigation. This is not only a moral issue but also has implications for the reliability of data collected. Certain types of information, for example particular sources of income, intra- household relations or levels of corruption within communities or programmes may be very sensitive. At the same time in some contexts widespread occurrence of black-market activities, secret saving and/or bribery make any estimate of income which ignores these activities will be very unreliable. Investigation of

levels of intra-household conflict and violence may be essential to understanding women's strategies and high incidence of female and child poverty. In many contexts these are important factors in explaining issues like women's savings and loan use, enterprise behaviour and patterns of income earning. These issues are discussed in more detail in some of the Case Studies on this site (Insert links to Self-Help Development Foundation Case Study). Where it is necessary to collect such sensitive information it is crucial that the confidentiality of information from particularly vulnerable respondents is observed in order to protect them from repercussions within households, from other community members and/or programme staff or other administrative authorities.

BOX 1: COLLECTING INFORMATION: FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

- **What is the purpose of the assessment?** How does it fit into ongoing learning processes within programmes and institutions? Whose agendas are involved? What does this imply for stakeholder representation at different stages of the investigation?

- **How is the information to be used and by whom?** What does it imply for the speed and timing of dissemination of findings? For priorities of the investigation? For sensitivity of particular findings? For the ways in which the findings are to be presented?

- **Are there any particular contextual opportunities and constraints?** Are there any social, economic or political factors which might make any parts of the investigation particularly fruitful or particularly sensitive? Is the organizational and institutional context conducive to the investigation or likely to be problematic?

LEVELS OF INVESTIGATION

- **Intended beneficiaries**: including observed impacts, attitudes and aspirations

- **Institutional analysis**: including intended aims of the intervention, institutions involved, implementation processes, opportunities and constraints of institutional cultures

- **Contextual analysis: including** opportunities and constraints of macro-economic and political context, ethnic, class and gender relations, local market and environmental conditions

DESIGN OF THE INVESTIGATION

- **What do we want to know?** What does this imply for the main focus of the investigation? What does this imply for selection of indicators? The level of detail required on different issues?

- **Whom do we ask?** What is this imply for the types of questions which can be asked? The timing of the investigation?

- **What methods are to be used?** What are the potential advantages and disadvantages of each? How are they to be overcome through integrating methods, crosschecking and triangulation?

- **Who is to be involved in the investigation?** Which parts of the investigation are best conducted by external researchers, programme staff, grassroots groups? Are there any special requirements for particular questions or respondents in terms of gender, ethnic background, educational/ discipline/skill background, language proficiency and so on?

CROSS-CUTTING ETHICAL QUESTIONS

- Is the collection of sensitive material absolutely necessary? How is it to be used?
- How are vulnerable respondents to be protected?
- How are positive findings to be used?
- How are negative findings to be dealt with?

1.4 Integrated assessment: building on complementarities between methods

Many impact assessments have mainly used simple survey questionnaires with relatively small samples of people. Others have used a limited number of PLA techniques and focus group discussions. Yet others have used informal interviews with a small number of respondents. All of these approaches based on a single methodology have yielded information of limited value in terms of its reliability, its representativeness and/or its usefulness for programme improvement.

Integrated assessment by contrast seeks to combine different methods at different stages of the investigation in order to build on their complementarities and address their weaknesses. A summary of the different methods, their requirements, advantages and pitfalls based on discussion elsewhere on the site is given in Box 2 (See documents on Quantitative Methods, Qualitative Methods and Participatory Methods). Integrating methods is not just a question of using different methods at different stages of an investigation, although this is useful. Methods can also be integrated at each stage, for example:

- Qualitative unstructured interviews on attitudes or more sensitive issues may be added on to a structured questionnaire either as follow-up to particular questions or as a separate section.

- Questions on attitudes and perceptions indicated through qualitative methods can be added to surveys and questionnaires for quantification.

- Short quantitative surveys are useful as an introduction to qualitative interviews and criteria for deciding which respondents should be investigated in most detail can be specified in advance or developed as the investigation progresses. People are often used to surveys. In some contexts this may be a less public way of beginning an investigation of sensitive issues than participatory methods. They may also be a good way of introducing more qualitative interviewing and/or ensuring that certain quantitative information on respondent background and certain key indicators exists for analysis of qualitative information.

- Focus group discussions may be used to bring people together and then individuals surveyed or interviewed privately in a separate room while others attend the focus group. This is often a time-effective way of integrating methods where populations are very dispersed.

- Observation techniques including photography and video can be used throughout all types of investigation to give an idea of the reliability of information obtained, possible other important areas of investigation and possible limitations to the generalisability of information from particular respondents.

These various ways of integrating methodologies at different stages of the investigation are discussed in more detail below.

BOX 2: COLLECTING INFORMATION: INTEGRATING METHODS

	Statistical methods	**Qualitative methods**	**Participatory methods**
Types of questions	• What is happening? • Who is it happening to? • Why do people think it is happening?	• What is happening? • Who is it happening to? • Why is it happening?	• What is happening? • Who is it happening to? • Why is it happening? • What can be done about it?
Techniques used	• Structured questionnaires	• Semi-structured and informal Interviews	• PLA diagramming tools

		• Case studies • Observation, photography and video	
Scope of indicators	• Narrow range of indicators which can be measured or enumerated	• Broad range of complex indicators	• Broad range of measurable and complex locally-identified indicators
Sampling methods	• Large random samples	• Small purposive sample	• Combination of small and large purposive samples

Main method of analysis and dissemination	• Statistical analysis with tables and charts • Report/s for selected policy-makers at specific stages of the investigation	• Qualitative information, generally in textual form but sometimes as diagrams • Report/s for selected policy-makers at specific stages of the investigation	• Diagrams with textual information • Participatory workshops which give immediate information to participants at all levels • Participatory dissemination and policy workshops for selected stakeholders both grassroots and policy makers
Stages of investigation where most useful	• To investigate the generalisability of findings from qualitative and PLA methods • May be good introduction for use of other methods and/or identifying samples to be investigated in more detail	• Exploratory investigation of context and meanings which will be attributed to particular questions • In-depth investigation of particularly sensitive and complex issues • Follow-up on correlations identified by quantitative methods or findings of PLA	• Establishing rapport with communities and individuals • Exploratory investigation of context and meanings which will be attributed to particular questions • Investigation of possible policy responses to findings
Advantages	Potential elimination of sample bias	• Can get good understanding of complex issues • Can get information on sensitive issues	Rapid collection of data on broad range of issues Potential to directly combine investigation with programme improvement
Potential pitfalls	• Narrowness of analysis • Potential	• Potential for bias in samples	Potential bias in both responses and samples

	superficiality or falsification of responses to long or difficult questionnaires		

SECTION 2: DIFFERENT STAGES OF THE INVESTIGATION PROCESS: METHODS, PITFALLS AND WAYS FORWARD

2.1 Reviewing existing information

Failure to build on existing information wastes the time and resources of funders. It is likely that those interviewed will also rapidly become tired of answering similar questions in different assessments unless the usefulness of doing so is clearly apparent to them. This will seriously affect the reliability of any information obtained.

Reviewing existing information includes looking at obvious sources like programme records and statistics. Even where previous impact assessments have not been conducted, reviewing existing information is essential for institutional analysis[1] which is in turn necessary for explaining outcomes and identifying ways in which different institutions are to be involved in the assessment itself. There is also generally a wealth of contextual information from local research institutions, government offices, NGOs and other local organisations. These can reveal information on health, incidence of domestic disputes, political participation of women, ethnic minorities and so on. Participatory workshops and focus groups are also often useful for identifying a range of sources of information, identifying gaps and shortcomings and establishing rapport as discussed below.

Examples of use of existing information

Microfinance programmes often have comprehensive statistical information on background of clients, repayment patterns and activities for which loans were said to be taken. Although this last cannot necessarily be taken at face value because it is often unreliable, this information could be analysed in much more detail to identify ways in which services could be improved. For example seasonal differences in repayment patterns for clients from particular backgrounds can identify probable incidence of seasonality of certain dimensions of poverty. The statistics can often be analysed in much more detail to reveal gender differences in programme participation, loan taking and savings deposits, loan sizes and extent of repeat loans which can indicate some of the gender equity issues to be addressed and/or the different needs of women from different economic, ethnic or marital status. Similar analysis is

[1] For a very useful discussion of using existing information for institutional analysis see O'Laughlin 1998 for analysis of 'grey literature'; Roche 1998 for more general institutional analysis and analysing accounts Jones 1998. For a discussion of gender-sensitive institutional analysis see Goetz 1992, 1995.

usually possible for ethnic differences, rural/urban differences and so on. This analysis can be a good way of identifying particular priority questions, samples for surveys, client categories for whom different loan packages may be needed and preliminary indication of any seasonal dimensions or requirements of particular economic activities.

For ***policy research*** there are often a range of existing sources of information from research institutions, NGOs and government offices. Participatory workshops with different carefully selected stakeholder groups is also likely to be a very useful way of rapidly collecting preliminary information. Participants can be asked to bring along any existing information they have, or even do some preliminary documentation of their experience or investigation of existing knowledge of groups with which they work.

Once the range of existing information has been assessed, its reliability and coverage should be reviewed:

- whether or not the information can be used directly in the current assessment,
- whether or not it can be built on through using supplementary questions
- or whether it is too limited, unreliable or out of date to be used at all.

This includes for example examination of the frameworks used and whether or not they are adequate to answer questions involved in the current assessment, which types of respondents have been covered and whether or not any relevant groups or geographical locations have been excluded, whether or not the information is out of date.

Even where existing information cannot be used, it is useful to be able to explain why this is the case and the rationale for the current assessment to both respondents and collaborating institutions. Where it can be used it can greatly increase the cost effectiveness and reliability of an impact assessment through for example:

- providing baseline information on at least certain respondents who can be revisited,
- providing statistical information against which the likely generalisability of in-depth qualitative research can be at least roughly assessed or
- highlighting key questions to be asked and some of the pitfalls to be avoided in asking or phrasing questions.

2.2: Establishing and maintaining rapport

Establishing and maintaining rapport both with communities and stakeholders for the investigation as a whole and also at the beginning of each individual interview or participatory exercise is crucial. Any investigation takes up the time of respondents and/or intrudes on their privacy. In some cases the investigation may be a welcome diversion in a dreary daily routine. Respondents may readily see the importance of the investigation and be grateful for an opportunity to voice their opinion. In many cases however

respondents will be extremely busy and have little time to spare. Although they may see the point of certain questions and be eager to discuss particular issues, they may be less enthusiastic about other questions, particularly those which are collecting detailed information about their personal lives and which seem to have little benefit for them. Unless rapport is established the answers they give are unlikely to be reliable.

Establishing and maintaining rapport with different institutional interests is also critical to the outcomes of the assessment. Bad relations with powerful interests can jeopardise the whole assessment and/or prevent collaboration by vulnerable groups. Good relations are essential to ensuring realistic practical recommendations which have been broadly discussed to test their acceptability and possible limitations. Good relations are also essential if the recommendations made are to be broadly supported and implemented.

As noted above, familiarity with any other studies or research on similar issues is very useful introducing the assessment and explaining its significance. It is important to clarify the expectations which different stakeholders might have of the assessment itself and potential outcomes. In some cases the assessment may be linked directly to changes in programmes and policies, as in the microfinance example above. In others, as in the gender policy example above, the outcomes may be less direct or certain. Currently powerful stakeholders may even be disadvantaged relative to certain currently disadvantaged stakeholders.

Deciding how the linkages between the assessment and outcomes for participants should be explained is obviously tricky. Unless handled sensitively, respondents may falsify information depending on what they expect the outcomes to be. It is therefore crucial that if direct linkages between the assessment and outcomes is to be made, that the importance of obtaining accurate information is stressed and the commitment to balancing competing and potentially conflicting interests in the interests of those disadvantaged is emphasised and maintained. Where no direct outcome is likely, this should be made clear to respondents from the outset and their participation in the investigation must be encouraged through other means. Where very detailed information is needed on particular topics, the reasons for such detail must be explained to respondents and the interview made as much fun or as useful to them as possible. Where good relations are established it is likely that substantial amounts of useful and reliable information can be collected by grassroots groups and local people if they are appropriately supported.

Examples of ways in which investigation can be made useful for respondents

- detailed questions about income can be presented in ways which help people understand the relationship between their cash and income flows and the reasons for any problems.

- detailed questions about decision-making in the household and women's status can be conducted in ways which both encouraged women to think about gender inequality and ways which they can address them. Such questions addressed to men can also perform an awareness-raising function.

The best methods to be used for establishing rapport will depend on the context, the sensitivity of questions to be asked and particular stakeholders involved. In cases where the issues are relatively uncontroversial, where favourable institutional context exists and stakeholders are likely to be articulate then participatory methods may be the most cost-effective means of rapidly introducing the investigation to a large number of people and building support. Where the issues are much more sensitive and/or the institutional context is difficult and/or respondents unused to participating in public fora then participants observation, informal interviews or initial surveys containing uncontroversial questions may be the best means of introduction and ensuring participation of particularly disadvantaged people. It is likely that different methods for establishing rapport will be needed for different stakeholder groups and possibly for different stages of the investigation if the issues to be addressed become progressively more sensitive.

Whatever methods are used, establishing rapport requires good interpersonal skills on the part of the investigating agencies and also an understanding of context. It requires:

- treating all respondents and their needs with respect and appreciating their generosity in giving their time for the assessment
- sensitivity to the respondents' mood, body language and time constraints and to the different cultural norms that may shape these;
- making interviews and discussions fun through using humour and personal experience to lighten up long list of questions, bring up sensitive issues or to challenge a response
- respect for any fears or reservations which they may have about potential outcomes from the investigation.

These points apply to each individual interview or participatory exercise even where rapport has been established at the community level.

2.3: Asking the questions

As noted above, there are ***no blueprints*** or ' definitive questionnaires ' for any topic, but only a broad framework of questions which must be adapted in relation to the purpose of an investigation, how the findings are to be used and by whom. As noted above indicator trees can be used to identify particular areas of question and the particular methods to be used for each. Stakeholder analysis can be used to identify whether different methods are likely to be needed for particular questions for different stakeholders. Examples of frameworks of questions for particular topics of investigation in different areas of enterprise development are given elsewhere in the web site.

Detailed questionnaires used in particular studies can also be found in some of the resources mentioned at the end of these papers[2]. What follows here are some general practical considerations in using and integrating the different methods following our discussion above and the questions in Box 2 (See Box 3).

If the assessment is to yield useful policy recommendations then policy-related questions based on institutional analysis need to be integrated into questionnaires, interviews and participatory exercises where possible. This includes not only analysis of reasons why particular impacts are occurring, but attitudes and aspirations of the different stakeholders involved and also their views on possibilities for change. Questionnaires, interviews and participatory workshops can also be used to identify ways in which ongoing structures for programme or grassroots level learning could be set up and maintained. This must however be done sensitively, bearing in mind institutional constraints and the probability that even with the best will in the world it will not be possible to fulfil all the demands made. The possibility that expectations of programme change may influence responses given must also be borne in mind. It is best therefore if policy-related questions are left to the end of a questionnaire and/or crosschecking questions are included. Alternatively, where the situation is very sensitive, policy-related questions could be canvassed for a carefully selected sample of key stakeholders after analysis of the key findings as a follow-on to this.

Throughout the process of asking questions, interpersonal issues are extremely important, not only for ethical reasons but also to increase the reliability of information[3]. It is important that time and resource constraints of respondents also be taken into account in the design of questionnaires, interviews and discussions. This is as true of 'grassroots' research like diaries and so on as of more conventional investigation by outsiders. As noted above there are ways of making questionnaires useful for respondents and the timing and location of interviews and participatory workshops should be convenient for participants to ensure a relaxed and open atmosphere. It is important for the interviewer or facilitator to be self-critical of their own value judgements and avoid leading questions. They should also observe behaviour as well as recording verbal responses.

In the case of statistical surveys where many people are to be interviewed and data needs to be quantified for statistical analysis, sessions and questions should be kept to a minimum and as simple and short as possible. The degree of precision of quantification should be clear, but there should always be space for recording qualitative information where necessary.

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[2] Detailed questionnaires for microfinance can be found in The SEEP Network 2000. Detailed frameworks used for gender and empowerment are given in the TSP paper on women's empowerment. Detailed frameworks of questions used in Fair Trade are given in the Case Studies of Oxfam Fair Trade and Just-X. Further outlines for constructing questionnaires are given in Nichols 1990 and Roche 1999.

[3] A stark example of the importance of interpersonal relations is given in the SHDF microfinance case study (Insert link forthcoming) where there was a very considerable discrepancy in answers to even straightforward questions like loan use depending on the relationship between interviewer and despondent. This is by no means an isolated finding.

Questions should be free of value judgements and not biased towards particular responses. Questions should ideally be asked in the same way from all respondents. Otherwise differences in responses may be due to differences in the ways in which questions asked rather than actual differences between respondents. This is a very tricky issue. Not all respondents will understand the same question or words in the same way and it may be differences in understanding rather than real differences which may cause different responses. A balance must therefore be drawn between standardisation on the one hand and flexibility to different potential respondent understandings on the other. Where either standardisation or flexibility in questions is not possible the possible implications must be borne in mind at the analysis stage.

Use of qualitative methods is very different. Informal interviews and case studies need to be flexible to the priorities and interests of respondents as well as those of interviewers. Although there must be a rough outline of the questions to be asked, these need not be asked in the same order for each respondent or focus on the same issues. Questions should be open-ended in order to invite detailed responses. Again attention needs to be paid to the ways in which the data are to be analysed. Particularly in short investigations, it is often possible to visualise the way in which an interview or case study will be used or written up and this helps guide the line of inquiry. Direct observation needs to balance specificity and reliability of evidence observed with openness and flexibility to the unexpected.

Detailed guidelines for participatory workshops are given elsewhere in this web site and in numerous manuals on the topic (See Participatory Methods). It is possible to use participatory methods to get quantitative as well as qualitative information. It is important that participatory exercises have a clear focus and build on each other to maximise complementarities between different types of participatory tool. Otherwise there is a danger that the investigation becomes vague and/or mechanical. It is also important to ensure that all participants are able to contribute and that power relations and inequalities do not bias the outcomes. This can be done through:

- the ways in which particular techniques are used and the ways in which responses are probed
- careful selection of participants in each workshop and/or separating stakeholder groups within particular workshops

BOX 3 PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN INTERVIEW/WORKSHOP DESIGN AND PROCESS

GENERAL QUESTIONS

• **What do we want to know?** What does this imply for selection of indicators? For background information on each participant? For general contextual information? For information on organisational and institutional context?

• **Whom do we ask?** What does this imply for the types of questions which can be asked? The timing of the investigation? The types of methods to be used?

• **How is the information to be analysed and disseminated?** What does this imply for the levels of reliability required? For the use of quantification? For the use of illustrative case studies? For the design of participatory workshops?

• **What does this imply for methods to be used?** For indicators and background information to be quantified? For areas to be covered by qualitative informal interviews and observation? For issues to be covered in participatory exercise is?

GENERAL POINTS APPLICABLE TO ALL METHODS

• Where possible include questions and/or discussion of reasons why particular impacts are occurring and exploration of possible solutions
• Make the interview as interesting and useful for respondents as possible
• Timing and location should be responsive to the needs of respondents and the possibility for open and frank discussion
• Avoid leading questions and value judgements
• Observe the behaviour of respondents and those about them

GUIDELINES FOR STATISTICAL SURVEYS

• Each session should be as short as possible without unduly compromising reliability and depth
• Each question should be distinct and not conflate different issues.
• The degree of precision of quantification required should be clear with separate space left for recording qualitative information.
• Questions should be as clear, short and specific as possible inviting a limited range of responses which can be quantified.
• Question should be value-free and not biased towards particular responses
• Words should be simple, direct and familiar to all respondents and should not be value-laden.
• Questions should be applicable to all respondents using the same language and asked in the same way. Where this is not possible implications must be borne in mind at the analysis stage.

GUIDELINES FOR INFORMAL INTERVIEWS AND CASE STUDIES

• Questions or topics should be tailored to different informants and stages of enquiry making use of findings from previous interviews
• Open-ended questions should be used to follow the line of the interview as it evolves with the respondent and probe more deeply
• Informants can be identified progressively to explore a range of different types of knowledge and perspectives

GUIDELINES FOR DIRECT OBSERVATION

- The particular behaviour activities or issues to be observed need to be identified
- There need to be clear guidelines and explanations of how evidence is to be assessed and what types of behaviour are to taken as evidence
- There needs to be an assessment of the representativeness of the particular context observed
- There needs to be provision for the unexpected

PARTICIPATORY EXERCISES AND WORKSHOPS

- Each participatory exercise should have specified objectives
- Exercises should complement and build on rather than repeat each other
- Everyone should be encouraged and able to participate equally

2.4: Recording the information received

The range of information which could be recorded is almost infinite. Very simple questions in surveys may not accurately reflect the complex reality of particular respondents and respondents may give long and complex answers. Much of this information will be relevant to interpreting the answer which is finally recorded on the piece of paper and to explaining patterns or abnormalities identified in statistical analysis. Similarly many contextual factors affect the responses given and are relevant to their interpretation. Unfortunately the relevance of many details may only become evident in the light of subsequent investigation with the same or different respondents. Which particular details are relevant cannot therefore always be predicted with any certainty, particularly at the beginning of an investigation. At the same time it is obviously not possible to put down everything. Recording information may disrupt the flow of communication, may seem threatening to those interviewed and/or may increase the time needed in analysis.

There is therefore difficult balance to be struck between comprehensive recording on the one hand and manageability of information on the other. This is always tricky and with hindsight decisions may not always have been correct. Nevertheless a number of general guidelines can be applied as indicated in Box 4. As far as possible the exact words of an interviewee should be recorded and separated from remarks and interpretation of the interviewer. Note taking should be as inobtrusive as possible. Particularly for the qualitative dimensions of an investigation and/or participatory workshops tape recording or videoing may be the least obtrusive method. It ensures that that all information is retained for crosschecking if need be and only the points which are judged to be most important that the time need be recorded during the interview or workshop. Photographs may be extremely useful even in surveys for corroborating certain evidence on e.g. general indicators of poverty like housing, health status and so on and for recording particular types of contextual information.

Certain minimum details of the context of any particular interview or participatory exercise should be noted as this is likely to influence the reliability of the data obtained. Even in statistical surveys this may explain certain patterns or anomalies identified. For example a particular batch of respondents may give particular answers because they have been asked in a different location or different season from others. Individual respondents may give apparently contradictory or nonsensical answers because other particular individuals were present which meant they falsified their answers because of fear of repercussions.

In statistical surveys it is important to both standardise the ways in which responses are recorded and quantified and to note any qualitative information which may affect responses. It is crucial that there is consistency between interviewers as well as interviews. This is likely to require a pilot phase to identify any inconsistencies in the ways in which questions are asked and recorded. It is also important to record certain minimum information on the context of each interview. For example if questions concern sensitive issues like incomes, intra household relations or behaviour of programme staff, it may be relevant to give the list of people present when the questions were asked. Time of year or location may be relevant. In integrated impact assessment it is important to maximise the opportunities offered by the survey interaction to observe differences between respondents over a large sample and follow-up qualitative areas of investigation as they arise.

In qualitative investigation the balance between detail and manageability of information is particularly difficult. Qualitative methods are used to record complexities of situations and processes. It is particularly difficult to predict what is likely to be relevant and not relevant. It is therefore important to make recording information as true as possible to the interviewee's exact words and also to record any information considered relevant to its interpretation. In integrated assessment it is also important that qualitative information can be used to shed light on the findings of quantitative investigation. It is therefore important that certain minimal responses are recorded as quantitative measures for example on interviewee background and certain key questions. This enables the generalisability of particular interviews to be assessed, and also for qualitative responses to be compared with the same findings from quantitative surveys.

There are some ways in which the recording of qualitative interviews can be made easier through using diagrams to record information, drawing on participatory techniques. Tape recording should be done wherever possible so that there is a record of the interview as a whole just in case certain information needs to be crosschecked at a later date and/or to follow-up particular issues which did not appear important at the time. Photography and video can be useful in recording particular impacts, for example achievements of poor households (See photograph 1), impact on gender relations (See photographs 2 and 3). These records must

however be accompanied by the necessary contextual information to interpret them.

In participatory exercises the process of participation and discussion is important, not only the final diagram product. It is therefore important to document this process in detail to identify the ways in which particular information is obtained, how consensus is reached and the power relations which may have affected this. This involves not only recording discussion in the exercises themselves but also detailed observation of body language, surroundings and recording details of informal interactions. Where possible video should be used to decrease the amount of information which needs to be recorded during the exercise and free the facilitator and rapporteur to observe the process rather than having their head down in note taking. Again this also ensures that a record is kept for future crosschecking or following up of issues which may not at the time have seemed important. Videoing is however inevitably selective and it is important therefore that considerable care is taken to ensure that the video is as objective and complete as possible rather than attempting to be a selective and interpretive work of art. Editing for dissemination can be done at a later stage.

BOX 4: GUIDELINES FOR RECORDING INFORMATION

GENERAL

- as far as possible quote an interviewee's exact words
- make clear where the interviewer's own analysis and interpretation has been added
- make note taking as inobtrusive as possible.
- video, photographs and tape recording may be very useful where possible

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION TO BE RECORDED

- Who was present? (numbers, relation to respondent, gender, poverty status, ethnicity, generation, names where appropriate)
- Who did the investigation? How might interpersonal factors affect the reliability and scope of the information collected? For example linguistic problems, gender and ethnic issues.
- Are any particular characteristics of the location significant? e.g. lack of privacy, excessive noise disturbing responses and so on, inability to be relaxed?
- Are any particular characteristics of the timing or length of the interview significant? e.g. the respondents being very busy or tired, just having had a particular shock or seasonality factors which may influence the ways in which incomes and expenditures are perceived and reported?

POINTS SPECIFIC TO STATISTICAL SURVEYS

- standardise as far as possible the ways in which responses are interpreted and recorded. Where several interviewers are used then a

trial set of questionnaires should be conducted and cross checked to ensure consistency between interviewers.

- qualitative notes and qualifications should be recorded**,** particularly where these are relevant to the reliability of the qualitative information collected and/or to identify areas to be followed up with qualitative investigation

POINTS SPECIFIC TO QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION

- collect detailed contextual information
- record the interviewee's exact words and also general observations of the interviewer
- responses certain key questions should be recorded systematically to allow for quantification at the analysis stage
- diagrams should be used where possible to reduce the burden of note taking and also to facilitate crosschecking of information with respondents
- use tape recording where possible for crosschecking later or following up on particular issues
- use photography and video to highlight particular impacts together with the necessary contextual information

POINTS SPECIFIC TO PARTICIPATORY EXERCISES

Make detailed notes on:

- who was present and how they participated, who was not present or did not take part in discussions and why.
- any points of interpretation essential to understanding each visual output? e.g. who contributed, degrees of consensus, whether the diagram was jointly produced or the product of combining a number of separate diagrams, points of disagreement
- the way in which different individuals and groups treat each other, and each other's ideas, particularly the ways in which conflict or disagreement between individuals and groups is handled and the degree of independent decision-making by different people and groups;
- the body-language of participants and the physical setup of the house or meetings and gatherings;
- the informal interactions before, during, and after discussions, meetings and during breaks.
- use video where possible for crosschecking later or following up on particular issues

2.5:Checking for reliability

Ensuring the reliability of particular interviews depends on the levels of rapport which have been established and the way in which the investigation has been explained to respondent/s. It may be necessary periodically to emphasise the importance of giving honest answers where there is any doubt. It is also important to address the needs and fears of respondents as they arise and to continually be aware of any potential for

biases in the interviewer interpretation of responses. Where responses are vague or obviously contradictory there are number of probing techniques which can be used. Where necessary questions can be repeated in a different form provided this is noted so that it does not prejudice comparability between interviews. At the end of each interview information should be reviewed and read back to the respondent to clarify any points which may have been misunderstood or which appear contradictory in the light of subsequent information and discussion.

In integrated assessment information can and should be cross-checked through triangulation of methods. At the analysis stage, or even during the interview or workshop, it is important to identify which areas of investigation required to be crosschecked by other methods. For example it may be difficult to explain certain patterns thrown up by quantitative methods and these should then be further investigated using qualitative or participatory methods. Conversely the generalisability of findings of qualitative and participatory methods may need to be crosschecked through a survey. It is also important to constantly compare the information collected by different methods to see how they are building on each other.

Crosschecking reliability of information is crucial to ensuring that practical recommendations are representative and realistic. Where it has been possible to include questions about programme implementation and policy in questionnaires and workshops, this can be crosschecked and followed up in any workshops at the end of the research. Ideally also any recommendations should be discussed informally with the relevant stakeholders before presenting to a wider audience. Where the policy and institutional context are more sensitive, practical questions about follow-up should at least be broached through a participatory workshop which produces concrete proposals for follow-up discussions.

BOX 5: TECHNIQUES FOR CROSS-CHECKING INFORMATION

GENERAL POINTS

- continually emphasise where necessary the importance of the investigation and of giving honest answers
- be sensitive to respondents needs and fears and address these wherever possible
- continually examining own biases
- responses should be read back to the respondent at the end of the interview

PROBING TECHNIQUES[4]

- Show interest
- Pause: Silence can tell a respondent you're waiting to hear more

[4] Adapted from Frey and Oishi 1995 'How to Conduct Interviews by Telephone and In Person Volume 4 'The Survey Kit' Thousand oaks, CA Sage publications quoted SEEP Network 2000.

- Repeat the question: this can help the respondent who has misunderstood, misinterpreted or straight from the question to get back on track
- Repeat the reply: this can stimulate the respondents say more or to recognise the inaccuracy
- Ask a neutral question:
- For clarification: ' What you mean exactly? ' ' Could you please explain that? ' For specificity: ' could you be more specific about that? Could you please explain that?
- For relevance: ' I see. Well, let me ask you again. ' ' Could you tell me how you mean that? '
- For completeness: 'what else? Can you think of an example?

2.6: Ending the investigation

Ending the investigation properly is extremely important. This is obviously so for moral reasons and ethical considerations. It is also crucial to the reliability of any subsequent interviews. News of any impropriety on the part of interviewers and/or fears of potential repercussions travel fast and may seriously jeopardise co-operation in subsequent interviews and/or the reliability of responses. The different questions which should be asked at the end of each interview or participatory workshop are given in Box 6.

BOX 6: ENDING THE INVESTIGATION

- Do respondents wish certain information to be kept confidential?
- Do respondents have any questions they want to ask the interviewer?
- Do respondents have any worries arising out of the interview?
- Which of the findings do respondents feel clearly indicate possibilities for improving the intervention/s under investigation?
- How do they think this can or should be followed up?
- What does the interviewer honestly feel it is possible to do in response to these answers?

Ideally findings of the investigation and possible policy recommendations should be discussed with the relevant stakeholders throughout the research, to avoid mistrust and unexpected shocks which might jeopardise future relations. This includes both programme staff and other implementing organizations as well as intended beneficiaries. Practically, where the institutional context is difficult this ideal may not be possible and the ways in which findings and recommendations can best be presented to different stakeholders may need to be treated with care. It is nevertheless important that all these concerns are brought together and addressed at the end of the investigation as a whole. This is in order to ensure that the impact assessment is integrated into programme and policy improvement. It is also important to ensure cooperation in any subsequent investigations. Issues in designing participatory dissemination and policy formation workshops are discussed elsewhere on the site (Forthcoming document on Information Analysis and Dissemination).

SECTION 3: INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT: SUMMARY GUIDELINES FOR COLLECTING INFORMATION

In integrated impact assessment there are many different ways in which different methods can be combined in an investigation. The most cost-effective combinations must be assessed in relation to each assessment: the purpose of the assessment, the particular issues to be addressed, the stakeholders involved in the ways in which findings are to be used. Possible ways of integrating methods in relation to the above examples of microfinance and gender-sensitive enterprise regulation are given in the Appendix. A summary of the general questions to be asked at each stage of the investigation based on the above discussion is given in Box 7.

The answers to these questions will depend on the purpose of the investigation as indicated in the examples of microfinance and gender-sensitive regulatory frameworks given in the Appendix. They will also depend on:

- the particular context of the investigation, and the suggestions given in the Appendix depend critically on the degree to which the assumptions indicated are realistic.

- the particular dissemination needs of the end-users as discussed elsewhere on the site (Insert link to 'What do we do with the information? Analysis, Dissemination and Implementation final tool paper to be produced by end of March)

BOX 7: SUMMARY QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED AT EACH STAGE OF THE INVESTIGATION

Step 1: Reviewing existing information

- What information is available and what are its limitations?
- Which information can be used directly in the proposed assessment?
- Which information can be built on through using supplementary questions?
- Which information is too limited, unreliable or out of date to be used at all?
- What critical gaps exist which need to be covered to enable useful practical recommendations to be made in the proposed assessment?

Step 2: Establishing and maintaining rapport

- Who are the key stakeholders? How are they to be involved in the research? In particular are programme staff or intended beneficiaries to be only respondents, or involved in investigation itself?
- What are the likely sensitivities, needs and fears to be addressed due to the issues to be addressed, the institutional and/or socio- political context?

- How are these sensitivities, needs and fears likely to differ between stakeholder groups? How can any particular sensitivities be addressed?
- How might the methodologies need to be adapted for different issues, contexts or respondents?
- Should or can practical policy questions be introduced at this stage?

Step 3: Asking the questions

- How is information on each issue to be collected and by whom?
- Which particular indicators and variables need to be quantified and with what degree of precision?
- Which processes require investigation by qualitative methods?
- At which stages are participatory methods needed?
- What is the best way of integrating practical policy questions?

Step 4: Recording the information received

- What is the appropriate balance between simplicity of recording to assist analysis and detailed recording to ensure reliability and enable crosschecking at a later stage?
- Is the use of tape recording, photography or video feasible?

Step 5:Checking for reliability

- Which of the findings are considered reliable and credible in themselves? How do we know? Does the questionnaire or discussion have inbuilt crosschecks?
- What practical policy conclusions are incontrovertible and broadly agreed and which are contentious?
- Which of the findings or policy conclusions require further investigation by other methods? Which findings and which methods should be used?
- Are there any relevant aspects of the context which are key to understanding the process of investigation? The findings? The policy recommendations? e.g. aspects of the social context known to be relevant, power relations. Do any of these require further investigation?

Step 6: Ending the investigation

- How are the findings and practical policy conclusions to be presented and to whom?
- Do respondents have any questions or worries which need to be addressed in follow-up?
- How can the policy recommendations be implemented? How will this be followed up?

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