

PARTICIPATORY METHODS

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ABSTRACT:

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Participatory methods should be an integral part of any impact assessment for enterprise development. Their use is necessary to addressing the concerns of both the sustainable livelihoods approach and the human rights approach in DFID-funded enterprise interventions. Participatory methods are now well developed in relation to project-level impact assessment.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper gives an overview of issues and outlines the questions which need to be asked before deciding when to use participatory methods, who should participate and which particular techniques are most appropriate:

Section 1: *What are participatory methods? Principles and techniques* gives an overview of different types of participatory methods and some recent innovations.

Section 2: ***Using participatory methods: advantages, challenges and ways forward*** discusses ways in which the potential advantages of using participatory methods can best be realized.

Section 3: *Participatory methods and integrated impact assessment: guidelines for commissioning participatory assessments* gives guidelines for commissioning participatory assessments in different types of enterprise intervention.

This text has been prepared by Linda Mayoux

The paper provides guidelines for integrating participatory methods in impact assessment of different types of enterprise intervention. It does not give detailed step-by-step practical instructions on how to use specific participatory tools. For this

the reader is referred to a number of manuals given in the additional resources at the end of the paper.

Participatory methods should be an integral part of any impact assessment for enterprise development. Their use is necessary to address the concerns of both the [sustainable livelihoods approach](#) and the [human rights approach](#) in DFID-funded enterprise interventions. This is because:

- **Complexities of livelihoods and poverty** need to be understood in order to decide **WHAT** is to be assessed. Grassroots participation leads to more relevant identification of impact goals and measurable indicators.
- **Different stakeholders** are affected by enterprise development in different ways. Participatory methods enable better identification of **WHO** is affected in which ways. In particular they enable the voices of the very poor, women, children and vulnerable groups to be heard.
- **Complexities of development processes** need to be understood in order to analyse **WHY** particular impacts are occurring. Participatory methods enable complex interactions between contexts, grassroots aspirations and strategies, institutional structures and enterprise interventions to be better understood.
- **Communication** between donors, policymakers, development practitioners and those affected by interventions is needed to identify **HOW POLICY CAN BE IMPROVED**. Participatory methods facilitate realistic identification of the practical implications of the findings of impact assessment through negotiation between different stakeholders.

Participatory methods are now well developed in relation to project-level impact assessment. In areas like micro-finance, enterprise training and fair trade impact assessments participatory methods have been used as part of:

- **external donor impact assessment.** A number of DFID-funded impact assessments have incorporated participatory tools as have the [CGAP](#) AIMS micro-finance assessments¹.
- **programme monitoring and evaluation.** Micro-finance, fair trade and training programmes have been developing methods for participatory monitoring evaluation integrated into the ongoing activities of programme staff and existing Management Information Systems².

¹ Examples funded by DFID include Kuapa Kokoo and FINCA Malawi. For examples in the AIMS studies see SEEP 2000 available on <http://www.ids.ac.uk/cgap/>

² For micro-finance see Small Enterprise Foundation in South Africa <http://www.sef.co.za> CARE-PULSE in Zambia and [MicroSave](#) Africa. Participatory methods were extensively used in Oxfam's impact assessment of its Fair Trade partners. For a general overview of issues in participatory monitoring evaluation see Estrella et al eds 1998.

There is also increasing experience of using participatory methods in:

- **macro level policy assessment.** Examples of macro level assessments co-funded by DFID in which participatory methods have been used include participatory poverty assessments³, HIV/AIDS policy assessments⁴ and health and education policy research.⁵ Other examples include the [ILO](#) and UNIFEM-funded [WIEGO](#)⁶ research on women and policy for the informal sector.

However despite the important potential contribution of participatory methods, their use needs to be well thought through at all stages of the impact assessment. They cannot be seen as an easy or cheap option. Nor can they be seen simply as a set of tools which can easily be tacked onto conventional quantitative impact assessment in order to give the appearance of grassroots participation. Importantly, although participatory methods can be used on their own for rapid exploratory assessment, in order to increase their reliability and credibility they need to be **triangulated** with other quantitative and qualitative methods as part of an integrated impact assessment.

³ See Brocklesby and Holland 1998; Booth et al 1998; Holland and Blackburn 1998.

⁴ See UK NGO AIDS Consortium 1996.

⁵ For health see papers in Cornwall et al eds. 2000. For education see McKay and Treffgarne 2000.

⁶ Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing [WIEGO](#).

1: WHAT ARE PARTICIPATORY METHODS? PRINCIPLES AND TECHNIQUES

The participatory methods discussed here are now generically referred to as ***Participatory Learning and Action (PLA)***. Participatory Learning and Action combines:

- ***a set of diagramming and visual techniques*** originally developed for livelihoods analysis and now widely used in Natural Resources departments in development agencies. They have since been adapted for use in other sectors including enterprise development.
- ***underlying principles of grassroots participation*** from human rights activism which involve rethinking power relations and partnerships between development agencies, experts and poor people. These are now being developed further to facilitate negotiations between different stakeholders in projects and policy dialogue.

The underlying principles and most common techniques are summarised in Box 1.

Participatory methods for impact assessment are most commonly associated with the spread of ***diagramming and visual techniques*** which began to be developed in the 1970s. These originated in a number of scientific disciplines interested in analysis of complex systems: biological science, ecology, agricultural economics and geography. It became increasingly important to work with farmers to develop more sophisticated models to explain their responses to development programmes. The increasing influence of applied anthropology in development agencies from the 1980s also led to greater awareness of the need for a more sophisticated understanding of poverty, social processes and grassroots perspectives on development. By the end of the 1980s diagramming techniques bringing together the insights from these different disciplines had been combined into a flexible methodology commonly referred to as Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA). Parallel to these developments in the South, methodologies like Soft Systems Analysis and Cognitive Mapping also became increasingly common in areas like management consultancy, organizational research and planning. Here diagrams were used for institutional analysis, highlighting problem areas and brainstorming possible solutions. Workshops for organizations and enterprises included senior executives and managers.

By the mid 1990s it was becoming increasingly evident that the mechanical application of these techniques was often failing to really reach and capture the views of poor people, particularly women, children and socially excluded. There was renewed interest in ***methodologies for participation*** drawing on earlier traditions of participatory action research which had been long established as an integral part of many grassroots organisations in the South. In India for example SEWA and other women's organisations based their programmes on the findings of focus group discussions in the 1970s and 1980s. MYRADA and AKRSP developed

BOX 1: PLA : UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES AND TECHNIQUES

UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

- *embracing complexity*
- *recognition of multiple realities*
- *prioritising the realities of the poor and disadvantaged*
- *grassroots empowerment*
- *from assessment to sustainable learning*
- *relating learning to action*

TECHNIQUES

Visual Techniques

- **Diagrams:** Flow/causal diagram; Venn/Institutional diagram; Systems diagrams; Pie charts; Histograms
- **Ranking Techniques:** Preference ranking and scoring; Pairwise ranking; Direct matrix ranking; Ranking by voting; Wealth ranking
- **Time Trends Analysis:** Historical and future (visioning) mapping; Time trends charts; Oral Histories
- **Mapping Techniques:** Mobility mapping; Social mapping; Transect (walks)
- **Calendars:** Seasonal calendar; Historical seasonal calendar
- **Ethno-Classifications:** Proverbs, Stories, Indigenous Categories and Terms, Taxonomies

Group and team dynamics methods

- **Focus Group** discussions
- **Role-play**
- **Participatory workshops**

Recent Innovations

- **Photo and Video** production with grassroots groups
- **Grassroots diaries** using diagrams and simple numerical and written information

OTHER COMPLEMENTARY QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

- Secondary Data Review
- Structured questionnaires
- Semi-structured interviewing
- Case studies
- Participant observation
- Direct observation,
- Qualitative anthropological fieldwork

participatory methodologies for grassroots mobilization⁷. In Latin America Paolo Freire developed methodologies for action research which were later adopted in other countries. These methodologies were based on underlying principles of human rights and aimed to use the research process itself as a means of

⁷ See for example PALM manuals on MYRADA website [Myrada..](#)

empowerment through use of diagrams as a focus for discussion and other methodologies like drawing and role-play. More recently these methodologies have been extended to include photography and video by grassroots groups and looking at ways in which grassroots groups can record their own information in diaries.

Initially the term PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) was used to describe the bringing together of RRA and activist research. It was emphasized that the most important aspect was not the diagramming tools but their flexible application based on a number of underlying principles:⁸

- **embracing complexity** and seeking to understand it rather than oversimplifying reality in accordance with predetermined categories and theories
- **recognition of multiple realities** to be taken into account in analysis or action.
- **prioritising the realities of the poor and most disadvantaged** as equal partners in knowledge creation and problem analysis.
- **grassroots empowerment**: aiming not only to gather information about impact, but to make the assessment process itself a contribution to empowerment through linking grassroots learning and networking into policy-making.

More recently the term Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) has become preferred because it more effectively incorporates the underlying human rights tradition through emphasising the importance of:

- changing from **appraisal to learning** and hence moving away from the use of participatory methods as an extractive process by outsiders to a sustainable learning process involving different stakeholders as equal partners.
- the importance of **relating learning to action** incorporating programme and policy improvement as an integral part of the learning process.

Participatory methods are therefore a diverse and flexible set of techniques for visual representation and stakeholder involvement characterized by a set of underlying ethical principles. There is no one set of techniques to be mechanically applied in all contexts for all participants. There is on the one hand a set of visual tools to be flexibly applied to assist the synthesis and analysis of information which can be used in group settings and also as part of individual interviews. On the other hand are a set of guidelines for facilitating participation and negotiation in focus group discussions and workshops bringing together different stakeholders. These may or may not make substantial use of visual techniques. Generally both visual techniques

⁸ For an excellent overview of the antecedents and development of PRA see the series of articles by Robert Chambers: 1994a,b,c. Here Chambers describes PRA as: '**a growing family of approaches and methods to enable local 'rural or urban' people to express, enhance, share and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act'** (Chambers 1994a).

and participatory facilitation are combined in different ways. The emphasis is on innovation and creativity in adapting previous practice to new contexts and needs.

2: USING PARTICIPATORY METHODS: ADVANTAGES, CHALLENGES AND WAYS FORWARD

2.1 Participatory methods are now well developed in relation to project-level impact assessment. PLA methods, both diagramming techniques and group methodologies are increasingly used in both microfinance and fair trade impact assessments. They also have considerable potential for adaptation in other project-level assessments including BDS interventions such as training and marketing support. The participatory assessments which are now an established part of macro level policy assessment in other sectors like health and education could be adapted to macro level policy assessment of enterprise development.

Participatory methods have the potential to bring together information from a diversity of sources more rapidly and cost effectively than quantitative or qualitative methods alone. As indicated in Box 2 they have a number of potential key contributions in increasing:

- ***Relevance of impact goals and indicators***
- ***Stakeholder representation***
- ***Reliability of understanding of development processes***
- ***Credibility of practical inference***

A number of significant contributions to poverty assessment have been noted in reports on the recent World Bank-funded participatory assessments (seeee Box 3).

However participatory methods also face a number of inherent challenges which need to be taken into account. Some of these are common to all impact assessment methodologies, some are due to the visual tools and some to the participatory process. The degree to which participatory methods realise their potential contribution depends critically on how carefully they are used and in what context. As noted above, participatory methods are not a fixed set of mechanistic tools but a diverse range of possible techniques which need to be flexibly adapted to particular situations and needs. In some cases problems can be resolved through innovation in the methods themselves. Sometimes limitations can only be , others can only be addressed through triangulation with other quantitative and qualitative methods.

BOX 2: PARTICIPATORY METHODS: ADVANTAGES, CHALLENGES AND WAYS FORWARD

	Advantages	Challenges	Ways forward
<i>Relevance of impact goals and indicators</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rapidly identifying the range of potential impacts • participatory prioritisation of different impact goals • identification of locally relevant indicators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standardization of impact goals and indicators to allow comparative assessment • ensuring that sensitive issues are aired 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using the same impact goals, weighting locally-specific indicators • role play and/or triangulation with qualitative methods
<i>Representation of different stakeholders</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifying relevant stakeholder categories for assessment, control groups and analysis • involving different stakeholders in a participatory process, including the most vulnerable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the focus on consensus may mask differences • ensuring that the most vulnerable are present and their voices are heard • resolving differences between stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paying attention to participatory process: location, timing, composition of discussion groups and discussion agenda • triangulation with quantitative survey or informal qualitative targeted interviews
<i>Reliability of findings</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rapidly obtaining impact and other information for whole communities or groups • exploring processes and hypotheses • rapidly investigating underlying or side issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • scale and representation beyond physically identifiable communities • focus on diagram outputs may detract from analysis of processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using quantitative PLA methods eg mapping and voting • careful documentation of context and the assessment process • triangulation with other methods
<i>Credibility of</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may raise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attention to

<i>practical inference</i>	<p>communication between donors, policymakers, development practitioners and those affected by interventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • makes information immediately accessible to different stakeholders 	<p>unrealistic expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may create tensions which cannot be resolved 	<p>identifying and clarifying the limitations of the programmes and policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • careful attention to the participatory process
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2.2 WHAT is to be assessed? Relevance of impact goals and indicators⁹

Enterprise interventions funded by DFID have the primary stated goal of poverty reduction. This involves a range of different complementary types of intervention from support for large and medium-scale private sector development to direct support for small and micro-enterprises and trade unions. Some impact assessments may aim to assess the poverty impact of one intervention in one context as part of project management. Others aim to compare the relative effectiveness of different types of intervention and/or across different types of context and/or for different target groups. This latter is becoming increasingly important as donors attempt to develop coherent sectoral policies to increase the impact of their support.

In either case the identification and prioritisation of impact goals to be assessed is contentious. Impact assessment based on market incomes of direct project participants or those targeted by macro-level policies is likely to miss a range of other positive and negative impacts. Examples of key issues which are likely to be missed are:

- qualitative aspects of working conditions and ways in which incomes are earned which have implications for health, nutrition, skills acquisition for future increases in income and vulnerability to crises
- intra-household relations, particularly gender and age inequalities, which have implications for the relative well-being of different household members
- broader impacts on inequality, environment, civil society and democratization which affect access to services and resources, security for investment and so on.

⁹ In this paper the term 'impact goal' is used to refer to *what* is to be assessed eg increased income, the term 'indicator' is used to refer to *how* it is to be assessed or measured eg increase in enterprise profits, increase in wages, increase in consumption of particular goods

BOX 3: PARTICIPATORY POVERTY ASSESSMENT: CONTRIBUTIONS OF PARTICIPATORY METHODS

HIGHLIGHTING CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF POVERTY

Rural conceptualizations of poverty likely to be conceived of in terms of

- *Community level:* physical isolation, access to safe water, quality of land, social capital
- *Individual level:* ascribed attributes: gender (particularly widows, single mothers and to a lesser extent female heads of household often perceived as the poorest); age with the elderly being very poor; childlessness; health status and disability; hunger and nutrition; access to productive land; access to productive assets like livestock; access to health and education.

Urban conceptualizations more likely to be individual in terms of individual ascribed status, particularly gender; income and employment; access to social and economic infrastructure

Common issues: seasonality, corruption, political exclusion, discrimination in access to health and education services

HIGHLIGHTING DIFFERENCE

The PPAs highlighted a number of womens' concerns to be fed into policy:

- relationship between polygamy and poverty
- importance of women's tenancy rights
- problems of increasing violence and conflict in the home

IMPROVING UNDERSTANDING AND COMMUNICATION

A key contribution to the subsequent policy dialogue was the awareness-raising function of the participatory techniques which in many cases was the first real direct exposure which some senior policy makers had had to the problems of poverty.

POLICY CHANGES

These varied depending on issues identified and the adequacy or otherwise of structures for feeding the findings into the policy-making process. The changes included:

- greater emphasis on physical infrastructure like roads
- greater emphasis on public services and attitudes of public service providers
- greater attention to exposing and discussing corruption
- greater emphasis on gender issues.

Sources: Brocklesby and Holland 1998; Holland and Blackburn eds 1998 particularly papers by Robb and Norton.

These are all important dimensions of poverty reduction as perceived by poor people (see Box 3) and are therefore also important to improving projects and/or gaining a balanced view of differences in impact between different types of intervention.

At the same time most impact assessments cannot feasibly include all possible impact goals in a quantitative survey or qualitative investigation because of resource, time and/or skill constraints). Using participatory methods provides a useful way of:

- **rapidly identifying the range of potential impacts** through exploring the interlinkages between different dimensions of livelihoods and poverty
- **prioritising the different possible impact goals** for assessment by identifying which of the range of possible impacts are most important for the primary stakeholders eg increased income versus decreased leisure, levels of income and/or working conditions expected
- **identifying reliable measurable or qualitative indicators** which can be used in different contexts or for different target groups.

Commonly used techniques include:

- **flow diagrams and Venn diagrams** to identify the range of possible interlinkages between the different dimensions
- **seasonal calendars** to identify particular periods of high work activity and/or income vulnerability.
- **wealth ranking and other ranking techniques** to identify the ways in which people define poverty and prioritise different impact goals and identify measurable indicators

These potential contributions of participatory methods also have their own challenges:

- **challenge of standardisation** for comparison because of the emphasis on locally-identified impact goals and indicators there are added challenges for comparative assessment. It is however possible to agree on common impact goals to be applied across contexts and then weight locally-specific indicators by which they are to be measured. This is merely an extension of the weighting procedure itself which inevitably involves a certain amount of rather imprecise measurement and assumptions. The participatory process enables the rather arbitrary nature of *a priori* weighting to be based on local rather than external priorities.
- **challenge of sensitive information:** it cannot be assumed that the participatory process will necessarily yield in-depth information on sensitive issues. In some cases the inevitably unpredictable nature of participation has enabled generally private issues like domestic violence or controversial issues like caste discrimination to be raised. Including techniques like role play has been found useful in highlighting dimensions of power relations. In other contexts this sort of sensitive information may require in-depth investigation by qualitative methods.

2.3 WHO is to be included? Questions of representation

Enterprise development interventions affect different people in different ways. Those affected by interventions include not only primary stakeholders (e.g. entrepreneurs involved in training or credit programmes or employees in assisted enterprises) but also secondary stakeholders including:

- other family members
- other entrepreneurs in the same markets
- consumers
- staff in development agencies
- others affected by macro-level change.

The list of potential stakeholders is often very long. Moreover each stakeholder category is often an umbrella for different sub-categories e.g. by gender, age, income level, ethnicity and so on. Assuming homogeneity of 'communities' or 'beneficiaries' is particularly problematic. As indicated in Box 3 the participatory poverty assessments have highlighted differences between women and men, and also between different age groups and between different ethnic groups and economic classes. At the beginning of an assessment it is often unclear which stakeholder categories are most relevant for the issues concerned. A controversial example is gender – for example, should women be treated as a separate category? should all women be placed in the same category? Identification of stakeholder categories is crucial, particularly for non-random sampling, choice of control groups and statistical analysis. At the same time, including a very broad range of stakeholder categories in the sample for impact assessment as well as control groups is often extremely costly and time-consuming. For this reason categories are generally simplified based on (often rather arbitrary) a priori assumptions, frequently leading to oversimplified and/or biased conclusions.

The participatory techniques outlined above can again be used to make the process of simplification less arbitrary. The diagramming and ranking techniques can be used to:

- **refine stakeholder categories.**
- **give visibility to the voices of the most disadvantaged** as a distinct set of interests

However again the participatory process has a number of inherent challenges:

- **emphasis on consensus may serve to privilege dominant views** and further marginalise the most disadvantaged through giving the appearance of participation. Explicit attempts are likely to be needed to include the very poor, women and socially excluded and also to ensure that they are not only present, but their voices are heard. This requires careful attention to the participatory process: who participates which may require particular attention to location and timing, how they participate which may require separate meetings or special allocation of time to particular participants.

- ***the differences and also potential conflicts of interest may be difficult to resolve*** and may require careful skills of negotiation. Recognising and addressing these differences and potential conflicts is nevertheless still essential to ensuring that the impact assessment is a reliable representation of contribution to poverty reduction.

2.4 WHY are particular impacts are occurring? Reliability of findings

Participatory methods are therefore useful at the initial stages of an impact assessment for identifying impact goals, indicators and stakeholder categories for sampling. Participatory methods can also be used for impact assessment itself to obtain a rapid visual overview for a broad range of impacts. Methods commonly used include:

- ***mapping techniques*** including for example wealth and/or social mapping of specific communities or localities. Credit mapping can identify the extent of poverty targeting all social inclusion of credit programmes. Market mapping can identify types of enterprises, access to services and impacts. Controlled experiments comparing the use of these techniques with quantitative surveys have found them at least as accurate if not more so and much quicker and more cost-effective (Chambers 1997:141-146). Mapping techniques can include before and after data to get a rapid overview of the impact of a particular project or macro level policy. These can either compare a baseline and post-project mapping, or be based on recall. Participatory methods based on recall are likely to be more reliable than individual survey or qualitative information based on recall because it is possible to identify and investigate discrepancies in memory between people in groups.
- ***voting techniques*** in group or community meetings or workshops. These can be open or secret ballot and can use visual as well as written questionnaires. Voting techniques can be used effectively in for example group based credit programmes, in end of training evaluations or community meetings to discuss the impact of macro level policy. They can be used to identify which people among the participants have been affected in which ways, or to reach a broader consensus on estimates of impact.
- ***time trends analysis and seasonal calendars*** can be used to identify important dates for comparison and compare changes in seasonal dimensions of poverty and impact.
- ***drawing, role play, photography, video and grass-roots diaries*** also have a useful role to play here.

Quantitative techniques are frequently inadequate to understand causal processes and many qualitative techniques conducted at the individual level are limited in their coverage. Participatory methods are very useful for investigating development processes and complex interactions between grass-roots perceptions and strategies, institutions and interventions. Commonly used techniques for analysing both context and interventions include:

- **diagram techniques** like flow diagrams to explore causal processes, Venn diagrams to identify power relations and institutional analysis
- **ethno classifications and proverbs** to explore attitudes and perceptions leading to particular outcomes

Participatory methods have a particularly useful role in indicating issues to be further investigated through quantitative and qualitative techniques to ensure that these are cost-effectively targeted to specific hypotheses and/or the relevant persons. Participatory methods are also useful for investigating issues which emerge as relevant in the course of an assessment but which it is not possible to cover as a central point of investigation.

There are nevertheless a number of limitations:

- **scale and representation beyond easily identifiable physical communities.** The mapping and voting techniques can be applied when there are physical communities or groups which can be easily accessed or convened for the purpose. It is much more difficult to use these techniques where populations are scattered geographically or where user groups do not exist. It is possible sometimes to use other types of groups and networks e.g. neighbourhood associations which can act as a random sample with some users and some controls. Such situations may be better dealt with through other types of quantitative survey or informal qualitative targeted interviews.
- **skills, contextual knowledge and experience required to meaningfully record and analyse the visual outputs and participatory process.** This is probably the greatest challenge of all for participatory methods. When badly conducted and recorded the visual outputs often appear arbitrary and meaningless, albeit rather quaint, to people who were not present during the meetings. This seriously jeopardises their reliability and credibility. These problems are not unique to participatory methods. Quantitative methods also oversimplify complex responses in order to fit them into predetermined boxes. Interviewer subjectivity inevitably influences the recording and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative information. In using participatory methods to some extent interviewer bias can be countered by the greater numerical strength of those interviewed and cross checked by them. It is nevertheless crucial when using participatory methods to keep detailed notes on the process of investigation, how the findings compare with information from other sources, who participates and who does not and how particular diagrams are generated. Key questions to be documented are summarised in Box 4.

Participatory methods have a useful contribution to make in analysis of the findings of impact assessment. They provide a useful means of investigating and crosschecking information gained by quantitative and qualitative methods at appropriate stages during the assessment. At the same time information obtained through participatory methods should also be cross-checked through triangulation with other methods to test their validity and increase their credibility.

BOX 4: KEY ELEMENTS TO RECORD DURING PLA

Objectives and organization of PLA exercises

- Who initiated the PLA and why?
- What exercises were used? Why were these particular exercises selected in preference to others? For each what was their objective/s?
- Who conducted the exercises? facilitators/researchers present; language issues (translation etc)
- Where were they conducted? Are any particular characteristics of the location significant? e.g. accessibility to different stakeholders, public space or private?
- At what time were they conducted? Date, time of day, duration of the exercise? Are any particular characteristics of the timing significant? e.g. accessibility to different stakeholders
- What materials were used? Are there any possible implications for their acceptability to different stakeholders?

Recording the process

- Who was present? (numbers, gender, poverty status, ethnicity, generation, names where appropriate, specific key individuals present) Who was not present? Do we know why?
- For each exercise: who participated? How did they contribute to the discussion? Did this change during or between exercises? Were there any people who remained silent? Do we know why?
- What exactly was the content of the discussion generated while the exercise was being carried out? What were the key quotations from participants?
- Are there any points of interpretation essential to understanding the visual output? e.g. degrees of consensus, whether the diagram was jointly produced for the product of combining a number of separate diagrams, points of disagreement
- Were any of the exercises changed to respond to circumstances? What and why?

After the PLA exercise

- Are there any relevant aspects of the context which are key to understanding the process of investigation? e.g. aspects of the social context known to be relevant, power relations. Do any of these require further investigation?
- Which of the findings are considered reliable and credible in themselves? How do we know?
- Which of the findings require further investigation by other methods? Which and how?
- Which of the findings clearly indicate possibilities for improving the intervention/s under investigation? How can this be followed up?

2.5 HOW can projects and policy be improved? Credibility of practical inference

Quantitative and qualitative impact assessment frequently make inferences about the practical implications of their findings. However inferences cannot always be drawn from the information obtained, in which case recommendations are often

based on the particular views of the researcher or in some cases of selected interviewees. Although these are often useful, they are rarely a systematic investigation of the feasibility of different options.

Participatory methods have an important contribution in ***the systematic identification of realistic ways forward*** based on the information obtained from the impact assessment. As noted above, diagramming techniques are frequently used in management consultancy for this purpose. In addition the participatory process facilitates communication between donors, policymakers, development practitioners and those affected by interventions. The different stakeholders therefore both have their own opportunity to present their views and recommendations, and also to comment on those presented by other stakeholders.

This participatory process needs to be carefully facilitated in order not to raise unrealistic expectations or create tensions which cannot be resolved. It is crucial that the potential limitations on change are clear to all those concerned, particularly in relation to resources available and the skills of development agencies. It is also important again to ensure fair representation of different stakeholders through the detail of focus group and workshop design. These issues are discussed in detail in the manuals sited at the end of this paper.

A particularly important contribution of participatory methods is their role in capacity building of the different stakeholders. Where sufficient attention is paid to this participatory methods have the potential to ***build up the necessary information resources and networks for a learning process which will be sustainable beyond the term of the one particular impact assessment.*** This can include:

- Group-level learning
- Ongoing participatory monitoring and evaluation
- Multi-stakeholder networks for policy assessment

Thus the costs of integrating participatory methods can be seen as a contribution to development in themselves, leading to much longer term benefits. These benefits have included reducing the costs of project administration, reducing default in micro-finance programmes, making training programmes more attractive to clients prepared to pay for services. This is therefore also a contribution to longer term financial sustainability of interventions.

3: GUIDELINES FOR COMMISSIONING PARTICIPATORY ASSESSMENT

Participatory methods have an important contribution to make at all stages of an impact assessment:

- ***initial identification*** of impact goals, indicators, categories for sampling and analysis and initial exploration of hypotheses
- ***during the impact assessment process*** for crosschecking and further exploration of issues raised by other methods
- ***towards the end of the assessment*** to systematically identify and test the possible implications of any recommendations for improvement in projects or policy with different stakeholders

Although there are inherent challenges faced by the use of participatory methods, these are no greater than for quantitative or qualitative methods. Much of the problem with participatory research in the past has been because of under resourcing, leading to mechanical use of tools by people with insufficient experience or understanding of context. Participatory methods cannot be seen as a cheap option. They must be treated as a serious and integral part of impact assessment requiring management by people with the skill and experience to flexibly adapt the different techniques to the particular issues, contexts and institutions being assessed. In many contexts a skilled facilitator would be able to train programme staff, local investigators and/or grassroots leaders to replicate selected simple exercises to extend the scope and coverage of the participatory investigation. This is particularly the case for longer term impact assessments and/or where at least some local people already have experience of participatory methods as co-facilitators or participants. Skilled participatory facilitators would also be able to identify any limitations in the information obtained and indicate ways in which the information obtained through participatory methods can best be triangulated with other quantitative and qualitative methods.

The reliability and credibility in the use of participatory methods can be increased if those conducting the assessment are asked to carefully plan the assessment in advance, identifying which particular techniques are to be used, their aims, who is to be involved. There should also be an account of the potential risks and the ways in which the participatory process may need to be adapted to accommodate these. Although participatory methods will require to be flexible to circumstances and the contributions of participants, if there is a clear plan at the start it is easier to identify why changes were necessary and how these affect the assessment. It is also necessary to identify early on, and then at each successive stage, the limitations of the methodologies and how these are to be addressed through triangulation with other methods. A checklist of questions to be asked when commissioning a participatory assessment is given in Box 5.

BOX 5: CHECKLIST OF QUESTIONS

FACILITATORS

- What skills and experience do the facilitators have of using participatory methods?
- What experience do the facilitators have of the particular context and organisations involved? Do they have the required language skills?
- Is there a good representation of local facilitators? A good gender and ethnic balance?

USE OF PARTICIPATORY METHODS

Which participatory techniques are to be used at which stage?

For each technique:

- what are their objectives? How will they contribute to the relevance and reliability of the assessment?
- who is to participate? How will participation contribute to representation, particularly of the disadvantaged? How will it contribute to or?

How will the participatory process feed into project improvement and/or policy change?

What are the potential risks? How will these be dealt with?

What limitations of the participatory methods are foreseen?

How are participatory methods to be integrated with quantitative and qualitative methods?

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

Overviews of PLA methods

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Chambers, R. (1994b). "Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA): Analysis of Experience." *World Development* **22**(9): 1253-1268.

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Manuals for using PLA tools

Narayan, D. And Srinivasan, L. (1994) *Participatory Development Toolkit: Materials to Facilitate Community Empowerment*. Washington: World Bank

Pretty, J N, Guijt I, Thomson, J and Scoones, I (1995) *A Trainer's Guide for Participatory Learning and Action* IIED

SEEP Network (2000). *Learning from Clients: Assessment Tools for Microfinance Practitioners: Draft Manual*. Washington DC, AIMS/MSI.

For detailed discussion of methods see also the following web sites:

Institute for Development Studies Participation Programme, Sussex
www.ids.ac.uk/ids/partic/index

International Institute for Environment and Development <http://www.iied.org/>
particularly the journal *PLA Notes*

MYRADA PALM series <http://www.myrada.org/>
Critiques of PLA

Guijt, I and Shah, K eds (1997) *The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development*, Intermediate Technology

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Brocklesby, M. A. and J. Holland (1998). Participatory Poverty Assessments and Public services: Key Messages from the Poor. London, DFID.

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Estrella, M., J. Blauert, et al., Eds. (2000). Learning from Change: Issues and experiences in participatory monitoring and evaluation. London, IT Publications.

Multistakeholder initiatives

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McKay, V. and C. Treffgarne (2001). Education Research: Evaluating Impact. London, DFID.

Tennyson, R. (1998). Managing partnerships: tools for mobilising the public sector, business and civil society as partners in development. London, The Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum.

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