

Combining Methodologies to Improve Pro-poor Public Policies in Tanzania

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Acronyms

AMC	Arusha Municipal Council
ESRF	The Economic and Social Research Foundation
IC	Implementing Consortium for the 2002/3 PPA Cycle
LAMP	Land Management Programme
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MTEF	Medium Term Expenditure Framework
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
NPES	National Poverty Eradication Strategy
PER	Public Expenditure Review
PLA	Participatory Learning and Action
PPA	Participatory Poverty Assessments
PPR	Participatory Policy Research
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
TAS	Tanzania Assistance Strategy
TSED	Tanzania Socio-economic Database
TzPPA	Tanzania PPA Process
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPPAP	The Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Process
VPO/PED	Vice President's Office, Poverty Eradication Division

1. Introduction

Since the second half of the 1980s, public institutions have developed increasingly sophisticated multi-topic surveys as their preferred means to measure, analyse and learn about poverty. In contrast with single-topic surveys (such as Employment, Income and Expenditure Surveys), these multi-topic Household Surveys are designed to generate information on a wide range of issues intimately linked to household welfare. At the same time, private development aid institutions and, to a lesser extent, academic institutions were rapidly pioneering a “participatory approach” to developing information and understanding about poverty.

In their current forms, both methodologies involve poor people in the production of data. The primary difference between participatory and survey-based research is that the former systematically involves poor people in the organisation and complex *analysis* of its findings. It is this analysis, as much as the raw data, which is then synthesised to inform pro-poor policies. Some of the advantages to Participatory Policy Research are obvious. First, data analysis does not depend on speculation by urban elites about the conditions poor people face. Instead, it is the result of ordinary people reflecting on, theorising about, debating and explaining the world in which they live. Second, Participatory Policy Research contributes to social democratisation by engaging ordinary citizens in policymaking processes.

For both these reasons, the Government of Tanzania has decided to incorporate routine Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs), as a form of Participatory Policy Research, in its national Poverty Monitoring System.

This paper explores how stakeholders in Tanzania initially envisioned and ultimately decided to combine PPAs with other, more conventional means of gathering data to inform pro-poor policies. In doing so, the paper covers such issues as:

- The value of participatory policy research *as distinct from* participatory public planning processes
- Potential points of complementarity between “contextual” and survey-based policy research¹
- Strategic considerations to ensure rigorous and effective implementation

Section 2 sets the stage for this exploration by describing Tanzania’s national Poverty Monitoring System. Section 3 then provides essential background information, including the history of and key concepts surrounding PPAs. Section 4 builds upon this base by explaining the diverse visions stakeholders initially had of the role for routine PPAs in the Poverty Monitoring System. Section 5 discusses how these differences were resolved to fashion the “Tanzania PPA Process” (TzPPA), which is itself discussed in the next Section. Conclusions are presented in Section 7.

¹ Booth *et al.* (1998) helpfully suggest a characterisation of research approaches based upon the degree to which they “attempt to capture a social phenomenon within its social, economic and cultural context” (*ibid.*, xvii). Accordingly, ethnographic research, participatory action research and even survey-based longitudinal studies of a single village would all be described as “contextual.” In contrast, non-contextual research is typified by large-scale surveys (such as Household Budget Surveys) specifically designed to “collect information untainted by the particularities of the context in which it is collected” (*ibid.*).

2. Poverty Monitoring in Tanzania

2.1 Background

Both public and private institutions committed to poverty alleviation have ideas about why it occurs, why it persists and how it can be overcome. The best ideas – that is, those with the greatest positive impact – are based on reliable information about cultural, social, environmental and economic realities.

In many other countries around the world, well-intentioned institutions and actors have lacked sufficient information to design, monitor, evaluate and evolve highly effective pro-poor policies. The Government of Tanzania became aware of this situation's seriousness in the process of drafting its National Poverty Eradication Strategy (NPES) in 1997 and Tanzania Assistance Strategy (TAS). Nonetheless, remedial steps did not start in earnest until late 2000; when the process of working towards HIPC completion-point provided compelling motivation to mobilise the necessary resources (Evans & van Diesen 2002).

2.2 Overview of the National Poverty Monitoring System

2.2.1 Purpose

A wide range of stakeholders were subsequently involved in the genesis of a National Poverty Monitoring System. In October 2000, a key Consultative Workshop was held to agree on guiding principles and operational responsibilities.² This culminated in a novel approach bringing Government, Civil Society and others together in a web of complimentary partnerships to investigate, analyse and communicate their understanding of poverty trends.

Operational and organisational elements of the Poverty Monitoring System came on-line in a fluid manner throughout 2001 and were completely in-place by the beginning of January 2002. As such, it is already helping policy makers to assess the impact of poverty alleviation strategies, identify shortcomings and make necessary adjustments. Ideally, it will also allow Government and its development partners to identify particularly successful initiatives so that they can be given adequate support and (where feasible) replicated. Thus, the purpose of Tanzania's National Poverty Monitoring System extends far beyond the provision of data and information to Monitor & Evaluate PRSP progress. Indeed, it is intended as a powerful resource for thinking about and forging ever-better pro-poor policies at all levels of Government and beyond.

2.2.2 Processes and Products

The Poverty Monitoring System coordinates implementation/collection, analysis and dissemination of:

- National and sub-national surveys

² Consultative Workshop Held on 9th October 2000 at White Sands Hotel (Dar es Salaam) on "Monitoring Systems and Institutional Framework in the Context of Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper."

- Administrative data provided by local government and sector ministries
- In-depth, “contextual” research on (1.) aspects of poverty about which we know too little to be able to identify the most pertinent indicators, (2.) information about causality, (3.) information about the impact of poverty reduction strategies and programmes, (4.) the assumptions underlying approaches to poverty alleviation (and particularly those of the PRSP)

As such, Government’s overall approach to poverty monitoring emphasises combined methods. Most components of the Poverty Monitoring System have been operating (though sporadically and to different standards) for decades. In order to compensate for their limitations, stakeholders initially chose to add two new research tools to its repertoire. These were:

- A light quantitative survey designed to provide policymakers with a constant (and cost effective) stream of data tracking poverty trends
- Regular Participatory Poverty Assessment providing “The poor’s perception of trends in poverty and [the] impact of policy changes under the PRS” (National Bureau of Statistics, 2000).

Ultimately, the light quantitative survey was dropped, but PPAs remain as a key element in the Poverty Monitoring System and the single most significant mechanism generating contextual data and information.

Information from these varied sources is synthesised and presented in an *Annual Poverty and Human Development Report*. This Report, which combines quantitative and qualitative data, is the major annual product of Government’s Poverty Monitoring System.³

2.2.3 Organisational Arrangements

The Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) Technical Committee is responsible for the Poverty Monitoring System as a whole, but four small Technical Working Groups direct activities. These are:

- The Working Group on Surveys and the Census (chaired by the National Bureau of Statistics) has established a multi-year household survey programme and annual poverty monitoring surveys
- The Working Group on Routine Data Systems (chaired by the Ministry of Regional Administration and Local Government) is improving systems of administrative and routine data collection by various ministries
- The Working Group on Research and Analysis (chaired by the Planning Commission) is setting strategic priorities for research and analysis on poverty. This Working Group is also responsible for writing Government’s *Annual Poverty and Human Development Report* and overseeing the implementation of routine Participatory Poverty Assessments
- The Working Group on Dissemination and Sensitisation (chaired by the Vice President’s Office, Poverty Eradication Division) is developing and spearheading a strategy for the effective dissemination and use of results from the Poverty Monitoring System

³ Carvalho and White (1997:v) use the term “merging” to describe the analysis of qualitative and quantitative information to derive one set of policy recommendations.

3. Participatory Poverty Assessments

3.1 Overview

Tanzania's Poverty Monitoring System is remarkable in the degree to which it was conceived through, and is now operating under, the guidance of institutions with diverse worldviews and *modus operandi*. Thus, it may be somewhat unsurprising that widespread agreement to include PPAs in the Poverty Monitoring System barely masked disagreement about the role(s) they should play. These different ideas are linked to the history of PPAs in Tanzania and elsewhere.

The first Participatory Poverty Assessments were conducted in Africa during the early 1990s. Together with information generated through surveys and individual interviews, their findings were meant by the World Bank to show the complex relationship between poverty profiles, public policies, expenditures and institutions.

PPAs quickly spread beyond the Bank to other agencies, where they continued to evolve and develop in terms of methodology and objectives. As a result, there are many different definitions of what a PPA is and no apparent agreement on what a PPA is not. One of the most contentious issues is the question of whose views they should be represented. According to the World Bank, PPAs should document the perspectives and priorities of multiple stakeholders – including local elites and donors. The U.K. Department for International Development (DfID), amongst others, disagrees. It argues that these voices are *usually* heard in policy fora. Thus, DfID suggests that PPAs should focus on bringing the insights and concerns of poor people into these spaces.

In the midst of continuing debate, the many goals of PPAs have grown to include:

- The provision of critical supplementary data (particularly qualitative data) to inform effective pro-poor policies
- Improving the accuracy of 'poverty assessments' based on conventional research methodologies (and thereby improving the quality of poverty alleviation policies)
- Providing information about the perceptions and attitudes of poor people – particularly about the nature and experience of poverty
- Explaining the causes and consequences of poverty
- Engaging a range of stakeholders in the research process so as to stimulate local activities for poverty alleviation (i.e. up-scaled participatory planning)
- Building poor people's capacity to analyse and solve their problems
- Raising poor people's awareness of their rights and responsibilities (particularly vis-à-vis good governance)
- Changing policymakers' understanding of and attitudes towards poor people by involving government officials in the research process
- Building governments' capacity for poverty analysis and policy design
- Contributing to good governance by ensuring that Poverty Reduction Strategies reflect the priority needs of poor people
- Promoting wide ownership and partnership in the implementation of Poverty Reduction Strategies

Not all PPAs aim to meet all these goals, nor do all PPAs meet their goals. However, many are realised and have made important contributions to poverty alleviation efforts at local, national and international levels.

3.2 Participatory Poverty Assessments in Tanzania

The two most commonly recognised PPAs in Tanzania are the 1994/5 PPA, instituted by the World Bank, and the 1997 Shinyanga PPA, conducted by the Regional Government of Shinyanga as part of a UNDP funded Human Development Report Project.

The World Bank PPA illuminated aspects of poverty and wellbeing important to poor people themselves. It also showed how surveys can distort our understanding of poverty by papering-over the unequal access to economic and non-economic resources experienced by individuals in the same household. Indeed, findings from this PPA contributed to growing recognition of poor communities and households as heterogeneous units whose members face an array of circumstances demanding a range of policy responses.

The 1997 Shinyanga PPA worked in a single Region (the largest sub-national administrative unit in Tanzania). It built the capacity of local government staff to engage in participatory public planning and provided key information for a Human Development Report.

Both these “First Generation PPAs” were designed to collect information about the nature, causes and consequences of poverty from the perspectives of poor people. They did this well and have provided policymakers with essential information about the complexity, seasonality, etc. of poverty in Tanzania. Unfortunately neither PPA was designed as a comprehensive process to inform and influence national policy. As a result their impact was limited.

Other PPAs have been conducted in Tanzania, including the PPA Study commissioned by the Arusha Municipal Council (AMC) in 2001. This PPA attempts to “understand the poverty situation so as to contribute to enhancing the living conditions and the lives of the people of AMC in general and the poor in particular” (Equitable Community Development Foundation 2001:12).

These three experiences are markedly different from yet another group of exercises – also called PPAs – conducted in four Tanzanian Districts by the SIDA funded Land Management Programme (LAMP) in 2000/1. Indeed, the purpose of these PPAs was primarily to enable participating districts to plan and budget the Programme’s Second Phase (Simanjiro District Council 2001:2).

This last example illustrates a fundamental distinction between “PPA” types. That is, between those primarily designed to inform policy (international, national or sub-national) versus those primarily intended as a scaled-up PRA/PLA-type public planning tool.

3.3 Key Concepts and Distinctions

There is a lot of misunderstanding about the differences between participatory and other forms of research. This is understandable, as some of their attendant concepts are complicated. However, the confusion is magnified by the published misuse (frequently by senior researchers) of common technical terms.

3.3.1 Methodologies and Methods

For example, a “methodology” is different from a “method,” though these words are often used interchangeably. Indeed, a methodology is a way of trying to gather information and learn about reality. It entails explicit rules and many implicit assumptions about the nature of knowledge, where it comes from and who can get it. In contrast, methods are the nuts and bolts, or mechanics, of data collection and interpretation. Accordingly, participatory research is a “methodology” while the tools it employs in the field – such as transects, Venn diagrams, etc. – are “methods.”

This methodology and its attendant epistemology are significantly different from both “non-contextual” (Booth et al. 1998) survey-based research and from conventional, professional-based, “contextual” research.

3.3.2 Qualitative and Quantitative Data

Quantitative data is information expressed in terms of an amount (e.g. an amount of food consumption), while qualitative data is information about the nature of things (e.g. the nature of ill health and its consequences for poverty). An example of a quantitative question is: ‘How many times have you seen a health care professional this year?’ In contrast, the question ‘Does your house have a thatched or tin roof?’ is qualitative. Of course, matters get confusing when qualitative information is rendered in quantitative form; as when the National Bureau of Statistics says that 53% of Tanzania’s rural population uses water from unprotected sources (NBS 2002:6).

Just as surveys frequently generate qualitative information, so, too, does participatory research routinely yield quantitative data. For example, the current Tanzania PPA worked with community members in Semtema ‘A’ sub-ward (Iringa Municipality) to produce a reliable map indicating the total number of local households (369), number of households with orphans (48), child-headed households (8) and widow-headed households (74). In light of this, “the habit of referring to non-survey enquiries as ‘qualitative’ is unhelpful” (Booth, et al. 1998:xvii). Actually, speaking of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g. Carvalho & White 1997) is misleading and, in practice, deeply counter-productive to designing a combined approach to poverty monitoring. Indeed, in most cases, it is far more accurate to speak of participatory versus professional-based, or conventional (including contextual and non-contextual) approaches to research.⁴

⁴ In the context of this paper, participatory research is defined as a process wherein professionals and ‘everyday-experts’ (that is, ordinary people themselves) collaborate to gather, order and analyze information. In contrast, conventional research is defined as a process in which information is ordered and analyzed solely by elite professionals.

3.3.3 Open- and Close-ended Questions

One of the main differences between participatory and non-contextual research approaches is that the former typically uses open-ended, rather than close-ended questions. An example of a close-ended question is: ‘Was the care you received in the health clinic satisfactory?’ An example of an open-ended question is: ‘Why didn’t you go to the clinic when you had malaria?’

Close and open-ended questions have different, and complementary, strengths and weakness. For example, close-ended questions have a finite list of possible responses. These can be readily tallied, compared and monitored for change. The answers people give to open-ended questions, on the other hand, are difficult to tally. However, the responses they generate can be profoundly telling – particularly when their conclusions were wholly unanticipated by researchers.

3.3.4 PPA Types and PRA

Participatory research can, at various points in its processes, ask both quantitative and qualitative close-ended questions. In these and other cases, what distinguishes it from conventional, professional-based research is that the results are then analysed with ordinary people. Though this feature is common to all “participatory” research, important differences remain between participatory methodologies.

There are significant differences in the goals and, hence, methodologies of contemporary PPAs. Initially, PPAs were a part of World Bank Country Poverty Assessments. As such, these early PPAs were a form of “Participatory Policy Research” – that is, participatory research designed to inform policy decisions. These PPAs, as examples of Participatory Policy Research, documented basic features of poverty from the perspectives of poor people themselves. This information continues working its way into policy debates and decisions.

More recent PPAs can be divided into those whose primary function is:

- Participatory Policy Research (for example, the current Uganda and Tanzania PPAs)
- Participatory Public Planning at Higher Administrative Levels, such as Districts or Provinces (for example, the 2000/1 LAMP PPAs in Tanzania and the Pakistan PPA) and institutionalised wide-scale Participatory Planning at the Village Level (for example, the Rwanda PPA)

Though they are practical expressions of the same beliefs and values, these two functions imply distinct methodological necessities and forms. For example, the goal of Participatory Public Planning (i.e. scaled-up PRA/PLA) is to generate effective, locally owned action plans. As a result, the methodology places a lot of emphasis on village assembly-sized meetings in which a critical degree of consensus can be fashioned around a specific course of action. In the process of pursuing this worthwhile goal, marginal perspectives and agendas for change are frequently left behind.

In contrast, Participatory Policy Research does not need to develop “community consensus.” In order to fulfil its mandate and contribute to well-informed, effective

policies at various levels of Government, PPR typically seeks to learn about the *range* of conditions people face as well as their concerns, competing priorities, success stories, etc. Instead of determining a single course of action, PPR can – on the basis of such rich information – recommend hundreds. This is an ideal outcome that would significantly undermine the likelihood of planning exercises leading anywhere at all.⁵

3.4 Summary Assessment of PPA Experiences

Past PPAs in Africa and further abroad have demonstrably:

- Identified priority development needs at local and national levels
- Improved policy makers' understanding of poverty by revealing, for example, important distinctions between the nature of rural versus urban poverty
- Catalysed and facilitated pro-poor planning in line ministries
- Improved relations between Government and Civil Society Organisations
- Tapped poor people's creative problem-solving skills by asking them what policies could be instituted/transformed in order to improve their lives

This is not to say that PPAs are without their limitations. Several are worth mentioning:

- It would be counter-productive (and logistically impossible) to involve *all* stakeholders in PPAs informing Government policy. Selective “representation” is necessary... and dangerous because some points of view may (wittingly or not) be excluded
- PPAs are time consuming and expensive in comparison with the process of elites meeting behind closed doors, speculating about the lives of poor people and setting policy
- Many development issues are extraordinarily complex and far removed from the direct experience of poor people. Therefore, it might, in some cases, be impossible to rigorously examine an issue through participatory research without demanding too much time from people struggling to survive
- PPAs are most effective when used in combination with other techniques suited to capturing the broad spatial dimensions of phenomena. In other words, participatory research can generate qualitative and quantitative information, as well as explain why people do what they do. However, it cannot identify the scope of certain conditions and practices across a region or country
- Participatory research does not necessarily “help” conventional decision-makers. To the contrary, it is much easier for them to make decisions without the information provided by PPAs. Good research exposes competing interests, challenges orthodox assumptions and reveals complexities that make decision-making very, very difficult
- Not everyone in a community will want to invest their time in the process of participatory research – particularly when they expect a welfare relationship to government or lack faith that their efforts will be heard and listened to

⁵ Both Participatory Policy Research and Participatory Public Planning have immense (and highly complementary) use-value vis-à-vis poverty alleviation. Therefore, it is not a matter of which one to prefer over the other. By extension, their methodological differences are not ‘correct vs. incorrect.’

4. PPA's in the Context of Tanzania's Poverty Monitoring System

In recent years, key stakeholders in Tanzania's Poverty Monitoring System have reflected on and weighed the relative significance of these points. By October 2000, this had culminated in consensus that the advantages to combining Participatory Poverty Assessments (as a form of PPR) with professional-based methodologies outweighed the challenges. Therefore, in February 2001, the Vice President's Office/Poverty Eradication Division (VPO/PED) initiated a two-month consultancy to facilitate discussion and agreement amongst stakeholders about the exact role routine PPAs should play in Tanzania's Poverty Monitoring System.

During its first month, the Consultancy Team interviewed stakeholders in National and Local Government, Civil Society (including NGOs and academic/research institutions) and a range of other development partners. This culminated in an inclusive list, with analysis, of the alternatives envisioned by stakeholders (Ehrhart, et al. 2001).

The formal expectations of Government were outlined in the 2000 PRSP (United Republic of Tanzania 2000:56-57)

The integration of a regular PPA in the PRSP monitoring system... will provide invaluable qualitative data, which will serve to cross-check quantitative data, help us judge the effectiveness of policy measures and more generally will help us understand the causal links between the action programmes of the PRSP and changes in poverty. But most importantly, it will help us listen to the concerns, perceptions and opinions of the poor themselves.

and again in a presentation by the Vice President's Office:

[PPAs] allow the poor themselves to express their views on how poverty is evolving, what the causes are behind changes in the level and nature of poverty and how different policies and strategies are having an impact on the poor. The data and information coming out of the PPAs will be invaluable to put the quantitative data in context and to enhance our understanding of them.

Clearly, the Ministry of Finance (responsible for writing Tanzania's PRSP) and the Vice President's Office (responsible for Government's Poverty Monitoring System) envisioned routine PPAs as a means to inform public policy rather than as a public planning tool. In particular, these institutions envisioned PPAs complementing other data gathering mechanisms by fulfilling *descriptive* and *analytical* functions within the National Poverty Monitoring System. In the course of interviews for the VPO/PED Consultancy, other stakeholders (both within and outside Government) proposed a *proscriptive* function. In other words, they suggested using PPAs to develop appropriate policies in partnership with poor people.

Within the context of these three broad functions, stakeholders proposed several specific roles for PPAs to play. Each pertained to a perceived gap in information that interviewees thought could more effectively be filled through participatory than conventional research. The following section presents each role and, drawing on PPA

experiences from around the world, analyses their strengths and weaknesses. The roles are placed in rough order of increasing technical complexity and demands.

4.1 Descriptive Function

4.1.1 Rendering Data in Human Terms

Proposal: Some stakeholder contingents prioritised the use of PPAs to describe the significance of abstract, quantitative figures in human terms – that is, what Booth *et al.* (1998:viii) call “bringing to life” statistics and other poverty measures.⁶ They argued, for example, that while surveys can tell us roughly how many child-headed households there are in Tanzania, this does not help policymakers know what this means in terms of lost opportunities and real human suffering. Nor, quite frankly, did these stakeholders believe abstract figures and ratios of affected populations capable of inspiring policymakers towards timely action to the same degree that richly textured life-stories, etc. can.

Analysis: These are both accurate and compelling concerns. Nonetheless, relegating routine PPAs to the collection of such information would have grossly under-utilised their powerful methodology. This is, at least in part, why other stakeholders proposed that PPAs should add unique information to the output of conventional research.

4.1.2 Describing Processes

Proposal: For example, it was pointed out that participatory research can uncover the story behind data and measure aspects of phenomena – such as their intensity and differential impact on certain social groups – that are typically missed in surveys.⁷ In other words, PPAs could have been used within Tanzania’s Poverty Monitoring System to describe:

- The events and complex circumstances that led to how things are
- What specific changes imply for individuals, households and communities

Analysis: It is fair to say that surveys can only capture a certain type of descriptive information; namely, outcomes. In contrast, PPAs can capture *processes* (see Baulch 1996). Thus, this proposal reflected greater understanding of participatory research, as well as what it can and cannot offer.

4.1.3 Generating Data for Poverty Monitoring Purposes

Monitoring depends on the routine production of descriptive information for comparison in order to reveal changes over time. The main purpose of monitoring is to help us determine whether or not our activities are progressing as planned. Take the example of a car trip between two towns. When passengers look out the window, they can monitor progress by observing the landscape, reading road signs and watching the sun. This information helps them determine if they are travelling in the right direction and whether or not they will reach their destination on time.

⁶ For example, see page 50 in the 1998 *Shinyanga Region PPA Report*.

⁷ The issue is explored in some depth by Deepya Narayan in Chapter 4 (Gender Perspective: Development for Whom) in the 1995 *Voices of the Poor Tanzania PPA*.

As illustrated in previous citations from the Ministry of Finance and VPO/PED, key stakeholders hoped that routine PPAs would provide similarly descriptive information capable of helping Government see where its poverty alleviation programs are going and if and when they will reach their objectives.

Further probing showed that, even within this camp, there were different ideas about what type of information PPAs should seek.

4.1.3.1 Qualitative Data

Proposal: For example, some interviewees spoke of critical gaps in qualitative data about people's productive/reproductive assets, the social services they access, etc. The Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) and Public Expenditure Review (PER) processes, amongst others, largely depend on having this type of data. Therefore, the argument went, Tanzania's Poverty Monitoring System needed to produce it.

Analysis: Surveys typically leave significant gaps in descriptive data sets, and some of these holes could have been plugged by PPAs. However, *both* PPAs and surveys can collect qualitative data. This is well illustrated by the Tanzania Social Action Fund's Community Service Delivery Survey. Indeed, it collects a wide range of quantitative (e.g. "How many households are there in this community?") and qualitative data (e.g. "What type of latrine is used by most households in this community?").

The advantage to collecting this data through surveys is that their results are statistically representative. PPAs cannot generate statistically representative data. Instead, their findings are indicative. So, a carefully crafted sampling framework for PPAs can result in learning the range of circumstances, some of which are necessarily missed by surveys focusing on the middle ground, that people face.

If PPAs had been used to generate qualitative data for Tanzania's Poverty Monitoring System, they would probably have pursued some of the same data as surveys. This would not have implied redundancy, since PPAs would have generated information through a wholly different process. Such "triangulation" (i.e. asking the same question in a different way to see if the results tally) would have enhanced the reliability of poverty monitoring data. However, a problem would have arisen if PPA results were used – as a number of key stakeholders initially proposed – to confirm or refute, rather than enrich, survey-based findings.

This important distinction is addressed at some length by Ehrhart et al. (2000) and, later, by Appleton and Booth (2001) with regards to the Uganda PPA Process. In sum, reservations about the reliability of surveys are justified. However, while participatory research can (in some cases) provide more accurate data, PPAs are incapable of nationwide, statistically representative coverage. Moreover, to try using PPAs in this way requires such standardisation that many of the methodology's greatest strengths would be sacrificed. Therefore, using them to replace or verify large surveys would have been ill advised.

4.1.3.2“Hard to get” Data

Proposal: Other stakeholders suggested that PPAs should focus on specific qualitative and quantitative data gaps. In 1999, the Government of Tanzania created a list of seventy-five indicators reflecting the complex, multi-dimensional nature of poverty (URT/VPO 1999). However, two years later, when the role of routine PPAs was being debated, it was still unclear how many of these indicators could be reliably monitored. Therefore, it was proposed that PPAs – with their innovative tools to tease out otherwise inaccessible data – be used to track important indicators that cannot be captured through surveys.

Analysis: It is likely that PPAs could have accessed at least some of this information. However, tracking changes over time would have required a novel (and probably quite problematic) *modus operandi* since PPA data and information is not ordinarily representative.

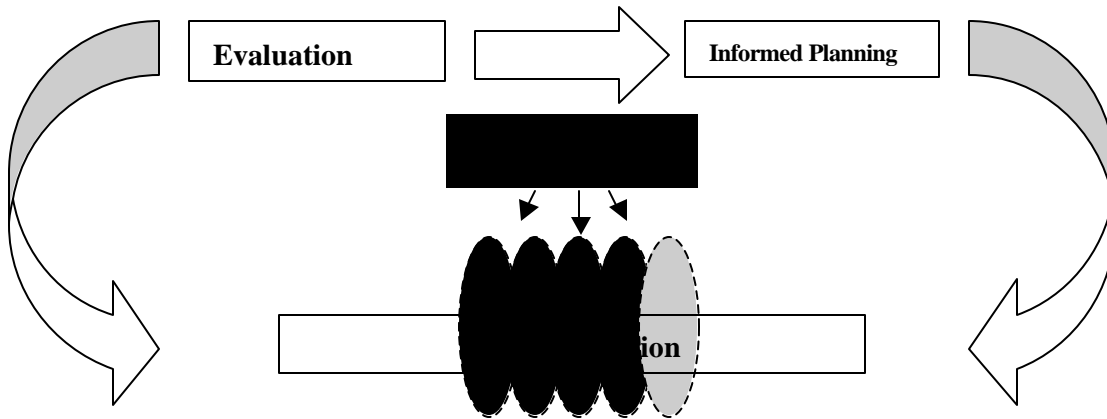
Zambia is the only place where PPAs have been used for poverty monitoring. In 1993, an initial PPA was conducted in ten communities as part of a World Bank study. In 1994, the original research team formed a Participatory Assessment Group to monitor changes wrought by the implementation of Structural Adjustment Policies. The Group returned to nine of the communities where they used the same participatory methods to ask the same questions every year until 1998. This allowed it to track changes both in the scope and degree of poverty.

PPAs could have been used to similar ends in Tanzania.⁸ However, doing so would have failed to capitalize on the greatest comparative advantage of participatory research; namely, its capacity to analyse complex data in partnership with poor people themselves.

4.2 Analytical Function

Evaluation is not the same as monitoring, but they are related. Evaluation is the point at which one pauses to take stock of where they are, how they got there and what steps must be taken to get where they want to go. Evaluation is about comprehensive analysis of the past in order to make wise decisions about the future. In the context of poverty alleviation, evaluation should determine whether specific objectives are being met but also whether realizing those objectives is still the best way to get where you want to go.

⁸ There is broadly perceived need to complete the circle of participatory development by enabling groups and communities to conduct their own monitoring and evaluation (M&E) through their own baselines and indicators. However, it remains unclear how this approach could be reconciled on a large scale with the need for standard indicators and information (see Robert Chambers. 1998. Foreword. In J. Blackburn and J. Holland (eds.) *Who Changes? Institutionalising Participation in Development*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications).



Evaluation typically draws on descriptive information collected through monitoring.

Both participatory and survey-based studies can generate quantitative and qualitative information. Yet, the restrictions surveys invariably place on interviewees' answers make for much easier comparison than the complex answers derived from good participatory research. At the same time, PPAs are exceptionally effective at explaining phenomena (such as changes in poverty profiles, social service provision, public perceptions, etc.) precisely because of their open-ended questions and processes that encourage poor people to guide investigation (Narayan 2000).

4.2.1 Explaining Data from Other Sources

Proposal: Some stakeholders in Tanzania's Poverty Monitoring System envisioned the use of routine PPAs to explain data gathered through other research tools, such as Household Budget Surveys or the Education Management Information System.

Analysis: PPAs have been constructively used to this end. For example, the 1993 Human Resources Development Survey identified but could not explain why the school enrolment of girl children drops as they move into higher grades. Through its participant-driven processes, the 1995 World Bank PPA in Tanzania found:

20% of parents in the villages it studied preferred educating their boys over girls because sons could bring in more income; 25% considered educating their daughters a poor investment because they would get married and leave home; and 24% feared their daughters would get pregnant if they went to school versus being kept at home.

These findings suggest that, even if secondary school fees were abolished, girls would still face many obstacles to staying in school – obstacles that can be targeted for policy intervention once they are known.

4.2.2 Explaining Original Data

Proposal: Still other stakeholders proposed that PPAs should be used to explore data and information generated through their own research processes. For example, it was argued that PPAs could be designed to learn whether women's participation in village-level government is increasing or decreasing and then ask, "Why?"

Analysis: This suggestion reflects the understanding that participatory research has powerful methods at its disposal that can be used to explore and explain aspects of poverty inaccessible to surveys.

4.3 Proscriptive Function

NGOs and government initiatives around the world have demonstrated the advantages – in terms of enhanced suitability, efficiency and sustainability – to engaging the intended beneficiaries of development projects/programs in decision-making processes. The point of engagement has, over the years, moved steadily backwards in the project cycle. Beneficiaries were initially involved only in making decisions about *how* to operationalise initiatives conceived of by others. Increasingly, they are being involved in decisions about *what* to operationalise and how to assess its outcome.⁹

PPAs have been defined as “an instrument for including poor people’s views in the analysis of poverty and the formulation of strategies to reduce it” (Norton et al. 2001: 6). To the degree that this definition is valid, the primary purpose of PPAs is to engage a wide variety of stakeholders (but, most importantly, poor people) in the process of determining development ends and means. This goal is motivated by an interest in increasing the efficiency of poverty alleviation efforts and by the belief that people have a right to influence decisions affecting their lives. However, PPAs generally engage poor people only in the production of descriptive information and/or its analysis. Thus, the translation of research results into policy recommendations remains the sole prerogative of elite professionals.

4.3.1 Creating Policies in Partnership with Poor People

Proposal: A few stakeholders emphatically prioritised the use of routine PPAs to develop policies in partnership with poor people.

Analysis: The “Bitter Seeds” and “Tender Shoots” studies conducted for the Ministry of Education, UNICEF and World Bank in The Gambia, were designed to assess the viability of formulating policies in partnership with poor people (Kane *et al.* 1998). They “indicate that communities are capable of devising and assessing socially acceptable and culturally sensitive ‘best-bet’ initiatives to address their educational problems [and] that innovative ideas come from all sectors of the community...” (*ibid.*, 35-36). In other words, poor people can make sound policy recommendations; especially when they are provided with important information (particularly about constraints) through dialogue and debate with conventional policymakers.

PPAs could also be used to help assess conflicting interests amongst poor people and tradeoffs between development needs. No one wants to waste their time receiving or producing fanciful wish lists that cannot be met. Like central planners who are forced to make tough choices in the face of limited resources, poor people make tradeoffs every day in order to survive. And like government planners, poor people know that

⁹ Participatory Impact Assessments are a common method for evaluating poverty alleviation efforts that emphasizes the collaborative problem solving by professionals and their intended beneficiaries through the generation of knowledge and its use.

every problem cannot be solved simultaneously. Previous PPAs have engaged poor people in debate over these complex issues. Doing so on a regular basis, stakeholders argued, would improve tough decision-making processes by ensuring that they are wiser and more widely owned.

There are many significant challenges to creating policies in partnership with poor people. The magnitude of these challenges does not, however, diminish the advantages to struggling through them. The challenges are technical, ethical and attitudinal. The last is frequently overlooked with fatal consequences. Indeed, elite policymakers who do not perceive the knowledge of everyday-experts (i.e. poor people themselves) as authoritative, effectively prevent the participatory production of development policies. But even when experience helps them overcome such prejudices, "...we cannot afford to ignore the impact of development history nor the legacy of poverty. Many communities suffer from a lack of confidence, low self-esteem, and do not experience themselves as empowered to make decisions, put forward suggestions, or implement courses of action" (*ibid.*, 42).

To overcome these circumstances, PPA field teams need an exceptionally high order of skills and a good deal of knowledge about specific policies. Multi-disciplinary teams can be designed to meet these demanding criteria. Even so, other concerns would remain. For example, such an ambitious programme would be at risk of manipulation to legitimate pre-determined policy prescriptions.

5. Stakeholder Deliberations

Following the identification and assessment of suggested roles for the PPA, a "Stakeholders' Workshop" was held to review the options and determine a way forward.¹⁰ The event was provocative. Indeed, as some stakeholders listened to their colleagues' hopes for the PPA, they grew concerned and confrontational – particularly in response to the proposal that ordinary people be involved in developing policies. This led an important public official to repeatedly strike his desk for emphasis and say, "It is the place of Government to make policy and the place of the people to carry it out." In other words, ordinary people have no part to play in policy formation, only in its implementation. In answer, another key stakeholder stood to say, with equal conviction, that people's participation in policymaking is a fundamental human right.

Though such intensely opposing positions led to tension, they did not end in complete deadlock. Through frank debate, many fears were allayed and some consensus reached. Thus, the majority of stakeholders agreed that PPAs, within the context of Tanzania's Poverty Monitoring System, should fulfil analytical and proscriptive functions by:

- Developing and explaining original information
- Exploring the impact of policies on diverse social groups in order to develop 'best bet' recommendations for poverty alleviation

Achieving complete consensus about the role of routine PPAs proved elusive. Indeed, despite warnings from the Workshop facilitators that significant technical hurdles stood in the way, some stakeholders continued to insist that PPAs should be used as a

¹⁰ This Workshop was held 7th March 2001, in the Courtyard Hotel Dar es Salaam.

means of monitoring poverty trends. The matter was, therefore, referred to the Research and Analysis Technical Working Group. Following further debate, this Working Group decided to endorse the majority view and initiate a programme of routine PPAs to evaluate, rather than monitor, poverty related phenomena. It was then agreed that the subject of enquiry would be flexible, as again suggested by a majority of stakeholders. At present, the PPAs are expected to take a “thematic” approach rather than concentrate on particular sectors or policies.

This outcome suggests that selecting one role for PPAs to play in the context of integrated poverty monitoring & evaluation strategies, whether in Tanzania or elsewhere, does not necessarily preclude others. Indeed, a number of them fit well together. The trade-off is simple: the more roles assigned to a PPA, the narrower its subject should be. This is particularly true of initial PPAs. As institutions and individual researchers become more comfortable with the methodology, they may be able to take on additional responsibilities.

6. The Tanzania PPA Process

6.1 Goals

The goals of the TzPPA continue to unfold but currently include:

- Enhancing, through in-depth description and analysis, research participants’ and policymakers’ understanding of key poverty issues
- Exploring the (a.) different and sometimes competing priority needs of poor people, (b.) likely impact of policies and (c.) tradeoffs and potential compromises between diverse interests in order to develop ‘best bet’ recommendations for poverty alleviation
- Facilitating the constructive engagement of civil society in pro-poor policymaking processes

6.2 Research Theme

Because PPAs are not being used to monitor changes in poverty and welfare indicators, their Research Theme can change. Stakeholders agreed that PPAs in the context of Tanzania’s Poverty Monitoring System should focus on crosscutting themes, such as good governance, livelihoods security, etc. determined in light of PRSP and other policymaking needs.

This decision represents a significant deviation from previous Participatory “Poverty” Assessments in that it recognises these studies as having already told us a lot about how ordinary people perceive poverty. Of course, additional work on this topic will always be useful. Nonetheless, stakeholders in Tanzania felt that enough is now known to move on – to move on to new themes promising new insights and understanding.

The theme for the 1st TzPPA Cycle, determined through an independent evaluation of priority research needs, is “vulnerability.” In other words, the PPA is examining what makes people poor (both in terms of shock triggers, such as droughts, and slow impoverishing processes, such as soil erosion) and people’s responses to them.

6.3 Organisational Arrangements

A consortium of fifteen institutions, including Government and independent research institutions, national and international NGOs is implementing the 1st Cycle of the TzPPA. This Implementing Consortium (IC) is coordinated by the Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF), which is a Tanzanian NGO with more than eight years' experience conducting research, often at the behest of Government, to inform public policies.

The placement of ESRF in the role of Lead Implementing Partner, as well as other aspects of the PPA's organisational arrangements, are not incidental but strategic. For example, the PPA is being "executed" by the President's Office, Planning Commission rather than farmed out as a consultancy. This is key to ensuring that policymakers at all levels can be brought to see the PPA and its conclusions – no matter how provocative they might be – as belonging to them and, therefore, a "legitimate" influence in policymaking processes.

It is also important that, due to its historic links with Government, many stakeholders perceive ESRF as a legitimate player in policy circles. Without this, its efforts to bring research results into policymaking processes might have been rebuffed as inappropriate incursions by an outsider. Due to the quality of past work, ESRF also has a large amount of credibility (that is, the capacity to inspire belief in what it says) amongst key policymakers.

In Tanzania today, neither national nor international NGOs have the same degree of perceived legitimacy or credibility as research institutions like ESRF. Thus, it is an appropriate anchor point for the PPA. Nonetheless, ESRF lacks experience in participatory research and pro-poor policy advocacy. For this reason, including NGOs with these experiences and attendant skills has been equally important.

The Ministry of Finance, National Bureau of Statistics and Planning Commission are also full-time members in the Implementing Consortium. Their presence entails many opportunities. For example, the representative from the Ministry of Finance ordinarily works in the unit responsible for updating and writing progress reports on Tanzania's PRSP. During his five months of fieldwork, he is being trained to see and understand poverty from the perspectives of the people now around him; that is, ordinary villagers rather than elite, urban-based theorists. In sum, the PPA is engaging strategic Government officials for a protracted two-year period in order to transform their way of thinking about poverty.

6.4 Timing

The TzPPA is being implemented in two-year long Cycles calculated to feed into the PRSP and other policy review processes. The first Cycle began in January 2002 with an intensive training programme in Participatory Policy Research. Fieldwork began in March and will continue through the beginning of July.

From July through December 2002, the PPA will undertake further analysis and write-up its research results. This period will lead to the production of a National Report and an as of yet undetermined number of special policy briefing papers.

From January 2003 through June, the PPA will concentrate on disseminating its findings, ensuring their incorporation in key policy documents and facilitating the participation of various stakeholders in pro-poor policy processes. These activities will continue through December. However, during the second half of the year, the PPA will also plan and prepare for its 2nd Cycle.

6.5 Methodology

Many aspects of the TzPPA's methodology – including its core beliefs, principles and methods – are typical of participatory research, in general, and previous PPAs conducted in Tanzania. Thus, the methodology is founded upon:

- The belief that ordinary people are knowledgeable about, and are capable of particularly reliable and insightful analysis of their own life-circumstances
- The principle that *all* people, irrespective of age, gender, level of formal education, etc., have a fundamental right to participate in informing the decisions that shape their lives
- The use of proven methods, such as Seasonal Calendars, Venn Diagrams, etc., to facilitate the meaningful involvement of people in the research process
- A commitment to sharing ownership of research results with local people and facilitating – through Community and District Workshops – the identification of practical measures that Local Authorities can take to reduce vulnerability

Nonetheless, the 2002/3 PPA's methodology is less than typical in:

- The number and nature of steps taken to ensure that a wide variety of people are aware of, encouraged and supported to participate in the research process
- Its focus on people's "successes" and "strengths" rather than "problems" and "weaknesses"
- The way it weaves research and advocacy work together rather than treating them as temporally discreet steps

Some of these innovative directions are elaborated upon below.

6.5.1 Positive Inquiry

During the PPA Training Programme, researchers discussed the pros and cons of various approaches to participatory research and concluded that they needed to make something new... something that met their needs, answered their concerns and belonged to them. This discussion is ongoing. Nonetheless, key elements of their methodology-in-the-making have been agreed upon. For example, researchers believe they must focus on uncovering people's "success stories" rather than producing lists of urgent problems to be solved by Government. With regards to the 2002/3 PPA, this implies:

- Learning about effective coping strategies employed (now and in the past) at individual, household and community levels
- Exploring how Government can encourage, facilitate, buttress and complement grassroots initiatives to diminish vulnerability
- Helping research participants see themselves as key actors in poverty alleviation rather than dependent upon inadequate and often unreliable Government support

Each of these elements reflects real world experiences and lessons learnt (oftentimes, painfully). As such, the IC's decision to structure a methodology around them is

reasonable but full of formidable challenges. Perhaps chief amongst these is the possibility that Research Teams will not shift from the “problems-based approach” that characterises most participatory planning processes to a style of “positive inquiry” better suited to policy purposes.¹¹

6.5.2 Interweaving Research and Advocacy Processes

An observable shift in thinking about the relationship between Participatory Policy Research and advocacy is currently taking place. Advocacy, for example, was not included in the design of first generation PPAs. In contrast, advocacy activities have been written into the log-frame of more recent PPAs, such as the 2000/1 Uganda PPA Process (UPPAP).

If we were to assess past PPAs on the basis of their policy impact, the UPPAP model would clearly be a step in the right direction. Nonetheless, there is room for improvement. UPPAP’s advocacy activities began only after research and writing-up had ended. Indeed, each of these was conceived of as discreet, sequential step in the PPA process. The Tanzania PPA Process is different. It is incorporating compatible advocacy activities in, and creating advocacy tools through, the research process itself.

7. Conclusions

Reservations about the capacity and reliability of surveys are well justified. Contextual research processes in general, and participatory research in particular, can in many cases provide important supplementary and more accurate data. However, these studies are necessarily incapable of nationwide, statistically representative coverage. Therefore, they can neither replace nor verify large surveys.

In recognition of the different strengths and weaknesses of contextual versus non-contextual research, stakeholders have included both in Tanzania’s Poverty Monitoring System. This approach of combining different methodologies seeks

ways of linking quantitative and qualitative information and analysis. This can, and should, reveal new insights for policy makers. The basic cornerstone of the approach is that quantitative and qualitative information will interrogate each other, providing opportunities for trends and issues to be more deeply explored, for “why” questions to be addressed, and for policy assumptions to be scrutinized (United Republic of Tanzania 2001:3)

Stakeholders have also chosen to incorporate the unique strengths of participatory research processes in the Poverty Monitoring System. At present, this is only in the form of routine PPAs. There is, however, evidence suggesting that other (smaller) contextual research projects initiated through it will increasingly be participatory.

Government has only just begun to implement these forward thinking plans for poverty monitoring and evaluation. While many good decisions have gone into their design, as attested to in the above citation, the ultimate test is practical. In other words, will the Poverty Monitoring System achieve all that it promises? Of course, it

¹¹ For more information about the TzPPA, see <http://www.esrftz.org/ppa>

is too early to answer this question. However, it is almost certain that some ambitious goals will be missed; at least in the early days of implementation.

The same holds true for the Tanzania PPA Process. Some observations can, however, already be offered. As noted, the PPA is ambitious. Indeed, it has set a number of goals for itself – some of which are extremely challenging. In particular, the objective of formulating ‘best bet’ policy recommendations in partnership with poor people is proving elusive. This is not due to the impossibility of doing so but, perhaps, the need to select a policy rather than theme-based subject. Having done so would have encouraged the selection of more specialised researchers. Also, a policy-oriented agenda would have allowed critical time to discuss and debate policy possibilities with research participants.

Despite this setback, there have been many achievements in the design process and first steps in implementing the TzPPA; not the least of which is conceptual clarification of the differences between PPAs as a form of Participatory Policy Research versus scaled-up participatory public planning. In Tanzania, stakeholders are currently content to keep these two distinct. Therefore the TzPPA is being conducted within the framework of Government’s Poverty Monitoring System while planning-type PPAs are taking place under the Ministry of Regional Administration and Local Government. In the case of Tanzania, there are advantages to promoting both these processes *and* to keeping them separate.

The TzPPA is, also, achieving important (though still initial) steps towards opening up political spaces in Tanzania and improving the working relationship between Government and Civil Society. The significance of this should not be overlooked since the Poverty Monitoring System, as a tool for good governance, largely depends on increasingly constructive engagement between them. Stakeholders’ inclusion of this goal in the TzPPA suggests a mature understanding of the opportunities and challenges in the country’s ambitious plans for monitoring and evaluating its Poverty Reduction Strategy.

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