

Summary Description of the 2002/3 PPA Methodology

1. Background

Institutions committed to poverty alleviation must have ideas about why it occurs, why it persists and how it can be overcome to guide their work. Indeed, they have always operated on the basis of specific theories about poverty that reflect their understanding of cultural, social and economic realities.

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 *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.

On the basis of these characteristics, the Government of Tanzania has decided to make Participatory Policy Research, in the form of Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs), a routine part of its Poverty Monitoring System.

The 1st PPA Cycle began in January 2002 and will run through December 2003. Research will be conducted from March to July 2002 in thirty sites distributed throughout mainland Tanzania (see <http://www.esrftz.org/ppa/about.htm> for further details). Writing-up will take place from July to December, while work during 2003 will focus on pro-poor public policy advocacy and planning the next PPA Cycle.

2. Introduction to the 2002/3 PPA Methodology

The Methodology for the 2002/3 PPA was developed through a process involving members of the Implementing Consortium (IC) and “external specialists” (see: [Design Group TOR](#) and [Minutes from 17th –18th January Design Group Workshop](#)).¹ Working together over a two-day period, Design Group members established an initial framework further fleshed out by researchers during their two-week Training Programme (see: [2002/3 PPA Methodology: A Field Guide](#)) and the subsequent Planning Workshop (see: [2002/3 PPA Procedures Manual](#)).

2.1 Foundations

Many aspects of the PPA’s methodology – including its core beliefs, principles and methods – are typical of participatory research, in general, and previous PPAs conducted in Tanzania

¹ “External specialists” were drawn from government and academic institutions, the UN and national and international NGOs.

(i.e. the 1994/5 Countrywide PPA and the 1997/8 Shinyanga Region PPA). 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 process²
- ❑ 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

2.2 Significant Differences

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

These innovative directions are elaborated upon below.

3. Ensuring Diversity

Participatory Policy Research (PPR) and participatory planning processes (exemplified by PRA and PLA) are very different. Though they are practical expressions of the same beliefs and values, their respective roles in poverty alleviation imply distinct methodological necessities and forms. For example, the goal of 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 is fashioned around a specific plan of action. In the process of pursuing this worthwhile goal, marginal perspectives and agendas for change are frequently left behind.

PPR 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 must 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 PRA or PLA exercises leading anywhere at all.

The 2002/3 PPA has taken the following steps to learn about the breadth of people’s circumstances, experiences and lessons learnt:

3.1 Diversity at the Community Level

Research sites were specifically selected to illustrate inter-community diversity in terms, for example, of:

- ❑ Core livelihoods
- ❑ Prevalence of HIV/AIDS

² PPA Research Teams have been trained in a wide variety of participatory research methods. These are detailed in *The 2002/3 PPA Methodology: A Field Guide*.

- ❑ Differential access to markets and social services
- ❑ Environmental conditions (e.g. susceptibility to drought, floods and unreliable rains)
- ❑ Degree of reliance on volatile versus relatively stable-priced products

Selection criteria and their weighting were determined through a participatory process involving a wide variety of stakeholders from Government, Civil Society and other development partners (see: [TOR for the Stakeholders' Site Selection Workshop](#)). The geographic dispersal of sites is illustrated in: [2002 Sites](#).

3.2 Diversity at Household and Individual Levels

The legitimacy of Participatory Policy Research depends on capturing the diversity that exists *within*, as well as between communities. Thus, the two-week long PPA Training Programme examined and repeatedly emphasised the necessity of engaging different “categories of vulnerable people” in the research process.

A sequence of activities has been developed to identify locally relevant “categories of vulnerable people” (a.k.a. social groups) and systematically involve them in the PPA.³ Decisions and practical measures taken to facilitate this engagement include:

- ❑ Establishing gender- and age-diverse Research Teams
- ❑ Holding a special training session on *Researching Sensitive Subjects* (e.g. HIV/AIDS and illegal livelihoods like poaching) so that Team members would be prepared to identify, approach and work with particularly vulnerable people without undermining their social status or otherwise increasing their stress
- ❑ Holding special training session on *Conducting Participatory Research with Children* (facilitated by UNICEF and Save the Children, U.K.) and *Conducting Participatory Research with Elderly People* (facilitated by Help Age International)
- ❑ Commissioning an “introductory video” to communicate the PPA’s purpose and nature. This novel means of self-introduction serves several purposes. One of the most important is to attract a large and diverse audience to an initial meeting with Research Teams. Then, core concepts (such as “policy” and “research”) are demystified through an educational story so that individuals can make an informed decision about whether or not to become involved in the PPA
- ❑ Spending ten working days in each site so that Teams can meet people with little freedom to reorder their lives (e.g. wage labourers and women responsible for watching after children, livestock and cooking fires)
- ❑ Coordinating with locally active NGOs and CBOs to better work with HIV/AIDS affected households, “street children,” commercial sex workers, etc. (i.e. people in stigmatised social groups that frequently face extraordinary barriers to engage in the research process)
- ❑ Encouraging Research Teams to “think out of the box” and experiment with new approaches to involving different social groups in the participatory research process
- ❑ Equipping researchers with a heuristic device/check-list to explore topics and issues in relation to different categories of vulnerable people (see: [PPA Research Matrix](#)).

4. 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:

³ These activities have been designed to provide reliable information without the risk of stigmatising individuals or households.

- 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
- Help research participants see themselves as key actors in poverty alleviation rather than dependent upon inadequate and often unreliable Government largess
- Help research participants develop a better understanding of the circumstances they and their neighbours face
- Create useful information for policymakers operating at village, district, national and international levels
- Avoid raising false expectations (e.g. the construction of a new school house or well as a result of the PPA) by using methods better suited to the participatory production of local action plans

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.

5. Interweaving Research and Advocacy Processes

An observable shift in thinking about the relationship between PPR 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 2002/3 Tanzania PPA is different. Upon the recommendation of Design Group members, it is incorporating compatible advocacy activities in, and creating advocacy tools through, the research process itself. This forward-thinking approach includes:

- Involving a broad range of stakeholders in all aspects of the PPA process (including development of an apt methodology, Research Agenda and the selection of sites) so as to build broad ownership and commitment to action
- Collaborating with the Poverty Monitoring System’s Dissemination, Sensitisation and Advocacy-Technical Working Group to build and maintain targeted interest in the PPA (through, amongst other means, the early creation of a web site and the regular distribution of *Updates*)
- Conducting “District Workshops” to share *Site Reports* and explore practical changes – identified through the research process – that can quickly be made by Local Authorities to reduce vulnerability
- Inviting a small number of strategically placed policy-shapers, makers and approvers to spend 2-3 days with Research Teams so that they can understand the methodology and learn, first hand, about “vulnerability”
- Producing a “rap song” by urban youth to communicate their experience of “vulnerability” (researchers have already made arrangements with popular stations to play

and discuss the song's message on prime-time radio. Television interviews are being discussed)

- Producing, together with people in the PPA's study sites, a 30-minute documentary video on the significance of "vulnerability" for poverty alleviation
- Tape recording particularly poignant messages by research participants for (consensual) use on websites, radio, etc.