

Combining Methodologies to Improve Pro-poor Public Policies

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What's in store...

This presentation is going to take **Tanzania's Poverty Monitoring System** as a *case study*. It will then use this case study to:

- Review a number of key concepts already defined by others
- Suggest a meta-distinction above “contextual” vs. “non-contextual research”

Poverty Monitoring System

In many countries around the world, well-intentioned institutions & actors have lacked sufficient information to design, monitor, evaluate and evolve highly effective pro-poor policies.

The Government of Tanzania became aware of the situation's seriousness in the process of drafting its National Poverty Eradication Strategy (1997). Nonetheless, remedial steps did not begin in earnest until late 2000 – when working towards HIPC completion point provided compelling motivation to mobilize necessary resources.

What does the Poverty Monitoring System do?

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

- National and sub-national **surveys** & the **census**
- **Routine administrative data** provided by local government & sector ministries
- In-depth “**contextual**” **research**

“Contextual” Research

It has been suggested that research approaches can be usefully characterized on the basis of the degree to which they “attempt to capture a social phenomenon within its social, economic and cultural context” (Booth, *et al.* 1998). Accordingly, ethnographic research and even survey-based longitudinal studies of a single village would be described as **contextual**.

In contrast, **non-contextual** research is designed to “collect information untainted by the particularities of the context in which it is collected” (*ibid.*)

“Contextual” Research in Tanzania’s Poverty Monitoring System

- Aspects of poverty about which we know too little to be able to identify pertinent indicators for survey-based exploration
- Information about causality
- Information about the impact of Poverty Reduction Strategies & Programs
- The assumptions underlying approaches to poverty alleviation

“TSED”

Information from the Poverty Monitoring System’s different branches is assembled in a one-stop shopping site called the **Tanzania Socio-economic Database** (TSED)

This interactive database is on the web and on CD-ROM. It is (in theory) accessible to all stakeholders...

Annual Poverty & Human Development Report

Information and key conclusions generated through the Poverty Monitoring System are also compiled in an Annual Poverty & Human Development Report. This is the main annual output of the Poverty Monitoring System

The Report “merges” (Carvalho & White 1997) different **data types** collected through different **research methodologies**.

Organizational Arrangements

A “Poverty Reduction Strategy Technical Committee” is responsible for the Poverty Monitoring System as a whole. However, activities are directed by four small technical working groups. These are:

- The Working Group on **Surveys & the Census**
- The Working Group on **Routine Data Systems**
- The Working Group on **Research and Analysis**
- The Working Group on **Dissemination, Sensitization & Advocacy**

The Working Group on Research & Analysis

The Research & Analysis Working Group is responsible for directing:

- Implementation of “contextual” research
- Implementation of routine Participatory Poverty Assessments
- Production of the Annual Poverty & Human Development Report

What can this case study offer us today?

- Distinction between data-types and methodologies
- Distinction between methodologies & methods
- Distinction between professional-controlled & participatory methodologies

Data-types

Data can usefully be characterized as **quantitative** or **qualitative**.

Quantitative data is data expressed in terms of an amount...

Qualitative data is data about the nature of things...

Conclusions about Data-types

- Both contextual and non-contextual research regularly collect quantitative *and* qualitative data
- Participatory research regularly generates, as a step in its processes, both quantitative and qualitative data
- The “habit of referring to non-survey enquiries as ‘qualitative’ is unhelpful” (Booth, et al. 1998)...

Actually, speaking of qualitative and quantitative research “approaches” or “methodologies” is misleading and, in practice, deeply counter-productive to designing a combined approach to poverty monitoring.

Methodologies & Methods

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.

Methods are the nuts and bolts, or tools, of data collection and interpretation.

Professional-based & Participatory Methodologies

Participatory research is a methodological process wherein professionals and “everyday experts” collaborate to gather, order and analyze information.

In **professional-controlled (i.e. conventional) research** processes, information is ordered and analyzed solely by elite professionals.

Hmmmm....

So, participatory research can:

- Use methods such as Venn Diagrams and “Magnitude Estimation”
- To generate qualitative *and* quantitative data

What defines it as “participatory” is, therefore, not its data-type or even the methods it uses. Instead, the key question is who gets to work with the data and transform it into meaning and action...

Research that uses **visual methods**, such as Seasonal Calendars, is not “participatory” if it does not involve ordinary people in the ordering and interpretation of data. This is why it has been and remains useful to distinguish between “RRA” and “PRA.”

More “Conclusions”

- Data-types are routinely merged in both professional-based and participatory research
- Participatory research is a *process* (much like a dance) in which different groups (e.g. professional researchers & everyday experts) can alternate “taking the lead”
- It is possible, and often helpful, to use the results of conventional survey in participatory research
- It is possible to undertake participatory surveys (i.e. “grassroots surveys”)