

WORKSHOP REPORT

Participatory Poverty Assessments in the Context of Tanzania's Poverty Monitoring Framework

**A Report Prepared by the Vice President's Office for
the Research & Analysis Working Group on Poverty Monitoring**

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I. Background

A consultancy is currently being conducted under the Research and Analysis Working Group to help Government plan the design of routine PPAs in Tanzania's Poverty Monitoring System. According to the TOR for this consultancy, a Stakeholders' Workshop would be convened in order to discuss options and develop consensus around the way forward. This Workshop was held 7th March 2001 in the Courtyard Hotel, Dar es Salaam (see Appendix I for a complete list of attendees).

In preparation, participants were sent a comprehensive Background Paper outlining and assessing possible roles and institutional arrangements for the PPA. This Paper is extremely valuable to the decision-making process because it presents and responds to insights and concerns voiced by stakeholders.

Prof. Idris Kikula (UCLAS) and Dr. Charles Ehrhart, the consultancy's Team Leader, facilitated the Workshop. Critical support was provided by two other members of the consultancy team, namely Dr. Claude Mung'ong'o (Institute of Resource Assessment) and Mr. Joshua Shadrack (Vice President's Office).

II. Purpose

The core objectives of the Stakeholders' Workshop were to facilitate stakeholders:

- A. Sharing and discussing with one another their diverse ideas about PPA
- B. Understanding each others' concerns and learning from each others' insights
- C. Using this experience to identify 'best bet' roles and institutional arrangements for PPA in the context of Tanzania's Poverty Monitoring System.

III. Activities

The Workshop began at 8:45 a.m. with opening remarks from Mr. Paschal Assay, of the Vice President's Office. Prof. Kikula then introduced the consultancy team and presented an outline of the day's agenda.

Dr. Ehrhart reviewed the various roles for the PPA suggested by stakeholders in interviews during the consultancy's first phase. Following a period for Questions & Answers, participants were given ten minutes to walk through the workroom reading wall charts and reflecting on the single role they saw as most important.

Participants then formed four small groups to listen to each other's ideas and then build bridges towards consensus. Once consensus on a "package" of research roles was reached, each team wrote the most compelling reasons behind their vision.

After coffee break, the small groups took turns presenting their package of roles. Prof. Kikula then began a plenary session with support from Dr. Ehrhart. This discussion lasted almost until lunchtime. However, before breaking for lunch, Dr. Ehrhart presented the basic principles underlying tradeoffs between research agendas and roles. In sum, he explained, the more roles are chosen – and the more difficult the chosen roles – the more focused the research agenda would need to be in order to ensure quality results. Following further discussion, participants broke for (a much deserved) lunch.

Dr. Claude Mung'ong'o began the afternoon proceedings with a presentation of the various institutional arrangements suggested by stakeholders in interviews held earlier in the consultancy.

Rather than breaking up into small groups to discuss the merit of various options, stakeholders moved from Questions & Answers to open debate and analysis of the alternatives. This, eventually, led to consensus and conclusions about 'best bet' institutional arrangements for the PPA.

Two additional issues were then discussed, namely 'best bet' models for organizing the PPA's implementing consortium and next steps towards operationalising the PPA.

The Workshop concluded at 4:30 p.m.

IV. Conclusions

1. Research Roles

Stakeholders agreed that the primary roles of PPAs in Tanzania's Poverty Monitoring System should be to:

- A. Enhance, through in-depth description *and* analysis, understanding of key poverty issues
- B. Explore the impact of policies on diverse social groups in order to develop 'best bet' recommendations for poverty alleviation.

In other words, stakeholders agreed that PPAs should investigate, analyse and explain poverty-related phenomena. There was also strong consensus that research results should be presented in such a way as to illustrate the significance of abstract, quantitative figures, in human terms.

According to some stakeholders, poor people have a fundamental "right" to inform and participate in shaping those policies that affect their lives. Though other stakeholders emphasized different reasons why poor people should be involved in the analysis and production of policy proposals, they all agreed that PPAs must be designed with this end in mind.

As such, future PPAs in Tanzania will explore the likely outcome of policies, the different (and sometimes competing) priority needs of poor people, and tradeoffs and potential compromises between diverse interests. This will allow informed debate about the costs and benefits of various approaches to poverty alleviation and, ultimately, better choices to be made.

Some stakeholders proposed yet another role for PPAs. Neither of those already mentioned entails gathering data for poverty *monitoring*, per se. Indeed, their purpose is more akin to evaluation. However, some means must be found to track important changes in poverty and people's wellbeing typically missed by surveys. Workshop participants could not agree as to whether or not PPAs should – or perhaps more to the point, whether or not they even *could* – play this role. The Research & Analysis Working Group will make a final decision on the matter.

2. Research Agendas

If PPAs are used for poverty *monitoring* purposes, then they must routinely ask the same questions. If, however, they are used to understand poverty and identify appropriate policy responses, then their research agenda (i.e. topic of investigation) can be flexible. Most Workshop participants preferred a Flexible Research Agenda. Regardless, the Research & Analysis Working Group in partnership with key data-users will determine this Agenda.

Implementing Institutions will prepare Research Plans (i.e. specific questions for investigation) in light of gaps in data/understanding and policymakers' priority needs. As a central feature of the methodology, fieldwork will necessarily include investigation of key subjects identified by grassroots participants.

3. Institutional Arrangements

Stakeholders proposed that PPAs be “executed” by a Government Agency and “implemented” by a consortium of:

- A. Research institutions
- B. National non-governmental organizations
- C. International non-governmental organizations.

This arrangement would have several advantages, including greater:

- Ownership of (even controversial) research results by Government
- Understanding of and appreciation for participatory research
- Capacity for policy analysis in Government and Civil Society Organisations.

Notably, this institutional arrangement would also encourage and facilitate better working relations between Government and Civil Society.

4. Organisational Model

Alternative organisational models for the consortium were briefly discussed. However, stakeholders felt these arrangements should be determined by negotiation between the Research & Analysis Working Group, the executing agency and implementing institutions.

5. Way forward

It was agreed that the consultancy's Phase II should assess:

- Scope/geographic spread of sites
- Criteria for site selection
- Optimal frequency of PPAs
- Advantageous links between PPAs and other data collecting instruments

Also, a broad outline of tasks leading up to and spanning implementation of an initial PPA, as well as their likely costs, should be provided.

The actual means (perhaps a coordinating individual or institution) to move from the consultancy to a PPA will be decided by the Research & Analysis Working Group.

V. Key Issues

Workshop participants raised several important issues, including:

1. The relationship between PPAs and PRAs

The primary purpose of Participatory Poverty Assessments is to help policymakers understand the causes and consequences of poverty. In doing so, PPAs “empower” them to make effective pro-poor decisions. In contrast, the primary purpose of Participatory Rural Appraisals, or PRAs, is to help villagers understand their own circumstances and mobilise resources/responses at the local level (frequently in the form of Community Action Plans). As a result, the two methodologies are profoundly synergistic. Indeed, knowledge and understanding developed through one can be used to inform and greatly enhance the use value of the other.

Some PPAs have sought to address ethical concerns about extractive research by developing and supporting Community Action Plans. This entails substantial costs. According to villagers in Tanzania, these ethical concerns can also be addressed by ensuring that policymakers listen and respond to research results.

It would be easier for PPAs to avoid entanglement in Community Action Plans. Moreover, Government and its development partners are currently working hard to institutionalise Participatory Planning/PRA throughout the country. This process could be undermined if PPAs include an acontextual participatory planning component. The majority of stakeholders consequently felt that routine PPAs should not develop or support Community Action Plans.

2. The quality of survey data

As one participant pointed out, surveys are imperfect instruments. A research team in India, for example, found that conventional questionnaire surveys using outsiders’ “professional classifications” were only 57% accurate in identifying the economic level of households. In contrast participatory research was 97% accurate. In Zimbabwe, an analysis of results generated through questionnaire surveys and participatory methods led researchers to conclude that participatory data tends to yield more complex, nuanced and, in some cases, more *valid* data. As a result, it was suggested that PPAs be used to check surveys.

Though reservations about the reliability of surveys are justified, and though participatory research can (in some cases) provide more accurate data, PPAs are incapable of nationwide, statistically representative coverage. Therefore, they can neither replace nor verify large surveys.

3. Participatory and survey-based research

Stakeholders were very interested in the relationship between PPA and survey data. It was suggested that, despite the strengths of the two previous PPAs in Tanzania, neither could be used as an appropriate baseline against which to measure data streaming from surveys. There are, however, many points of synergy between participatory and survey-based research that should be explored in the design of future PPAs.

4. The use of PPAs to provide poverty monitoring data

In broad based consultation with its development partners, Government has created an extensive list of 75 indicators reflecting the complex, multi-dimensional nature of poverty (see *Poverty and Welfare Monitoring Indicators*. VPO 1999). However, it remains unclear as to how many of them will be reliably monitored.

Some participants in the Stakeholders' Workshop repeatedly suggested that PPAs be used to gather this data. This would entail every PPA revisiting the same sites (since they are not statistically representative) and asking the same questions in the same way. This is incompatible with stakeholders' majority recommendation that PPAs have a Flexible Research Agenda.

5. Flexible Research Agendas

So long as PPAs are not being used to monitor changes in poverty and welfare indicators, their Research Agendas can change. Stakeholders agreed that the focus of PPAs should be crosscutting issues/themes, such as good governance, livelihoods security, etc.

These issues/themes should, according to Workshop participants, be determined in light of PRSP and other policymaking needs.

