



Participation in Poverty Assessments

The Bank's approach to country poverty assessments (PAs) is increasingly stressing the involvement of stakeholder groups, with the aim of building in-country capacity to address the problems of the poor. The participation of government and other institutional stakeholders in all aspects of the work increases sensitivity to poverty issues, enhances analytical skills, and builds allegiance to the measures proposed for poverty reduction. In addition, conventional statistical analysis is complemented by qualitative information from participatory social assessments, known as "PPAs", which reveal the concerns voiced by the poor. Some early lessons for task managers have already emerged from this experience.

Rationale

Poverty assessments (PAs) are now an essential component in the Bank's country economic and sector work, contributing to the wider process of poverty related analysis and the formulation of all aspects of country strategy. Making PAs participatory requires more time and resources but can yield important benefits.

Involving a range of stakeholders, including the poor themselves, can help

- improve understanding of the cultural, social, economic and political dynamics which perpetuate poverty in a given country;
- ensure that strategies identified for poverty reduction reflect the real concerns voiced by the poor;
- promote ownership of the proposed solutions by a variety of stakeholders; and
- build in-country institutional capacity for ongoing analysis of poverty and the design of measures to reduce it.

A distinction is made between "participation in poverty assessments" – the subject of this paper – and "participatory poverty assessments", known as "PPAs". The latter term has come to refer to the use of specific qualitative research techniques to discern the perceptions and attitudes

of the poor themselves. PPAs, however, are only one component of the wider PA. This paper argues that most components of the PA – from defining the agenda and designing the research program, through data gathering and analysis, to report writing and formulating policy prescriptions – can benefit from broad stakeholder participation.

Making the PA More Participatory

The methods used to broaden stakeholder participation in PAs have varied enormously, depending on the time allowed, the funds available, the local research capacity and the level of government interest in discussing poverty issues. It has also become clear since the initial flurry of poverty assessments in 1993, that to increase participation, task managers (TMs) need somewhat more time and resources to complete the PA.

Involving Institutional Stakeholders

It is the institutional stakeholders – from senior government officials and a variety of actors in civil society to service providers and development workers at the community level – who are responsible for defining poverty reduction policies and for translating them into programs and services. The collaboration of these groups at each step of the PA helps to promote consensus, ownership and commitment to the strategic conclusions among those whose support

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Box 1
Broad Stakeholder Participation in Cameroon

Cameroon's Poverty Assessment was carried out with extensive Cameroonian participation, involving the National Statistical Office in preparing the poverty profile and the Centre for Nutrition Research in addressing food insecurity issues. The PPA was carried out by local NGOs and research institutes.

To share the research results and broaden participation in dialogue on the policy implications, a four-day technical workshop was sponsored by the government and the Bank, with financial support from several key donors. Participants included representatives of donor agencies and some 45 Cameroonians with interest in related research and civic or government activities—from the government, university, research and advocacy groups, journalism and NGOs. Women participants were funded by UNICEF. Despite the breadth of different interests represented, some important areas of agreement emerged, including the potential benefits of decentralizing decisionmaking. By the end of four days, there was agreement on the form the recommendations should take and considerable enthusiasm for the final report.

The workshop was followed by a one-day conference to provide wider exposure of the findings to both government and the general public. The immediate impact of this conference was to raise consciousness concerning poverty issues, to generate widespread public interest and concern, and to put poverty reduction higher on the public policy agenda.

will be needed for effective implementation. It also helps to build the institutional capacity for ongoing, iterative policy analysis and formulation for poverty reduction.

So far, most institutional stakeholder involvement in Bank PAs has been limited to government officials and local researchers. Innovative approaches such as those used in Cameroon (see Box 1), are needed to involve other actors, including opinion leaders, journalists, civic or religious leaders, public interest groups and indigenous NGOs in preparing the PA.

The scope for collaboration in defining the research agenda depends on political and institutional conditions in the country concerned. Especially in the early PAs, it was also constrained by tight deadlines facing TMs for completing the work. Close consultation and agreement between the Bank and the government from the outset can reduce the risk of later misunderstandings and acrimony over politically sensitive issues, especially the controversial question of establishing a poverty profile and poverty line to serve as benchmarks against which progress can be measured.

Drawing as widely as possible on local skills and knowledge in the analytical work of the PA, contributes to the quality of the conclusions. It also spreads the ownership base. Analytical studies and report writing have been contracted to local researchers and/or assigned to collaborative teams of Bank and local researchers. To broaden participation, TMs have also used workshops or retreats, and established in-country task forces or steering committees.

Box 2
Policy Formulation in Peru

In the Peru Poverty Assessment, the Bank team opted to hold back on defining a poverty alleviation strategy, waiting until the government produced their own strategy. Two things which helped this approach to work were: (i) that most of the survey analysis had been done in Peru, making it easier for Peruvians to incorporate the results into a policy document; and (ii) government officials were aware that presentation of their strategy for poverty alleviation would be key to an effective Consultative Group meeting, which was to be hosted by the Bank to raise funds for social programs. Bank staff worked closely with government staff on drafts of the strategy. The resulting government document is quite strong, setting specific goals in several areas, and should serve as a good base for measuring progress in reducing poverty in Peru.

Collaboration in formulating policy prescriptions can be more difficult and most TMs have faced the quandary of how best to reconcile the interests of senior officials and vocal stakeholders with the results of research and analysis. The most participatory PAs in this respect have been those for Peru (see Box 2) and Morocco: in each case, the PA was presented as supporting research and analysis to help the government in the policy formulation process; the government took full responsibility for preparing the policy document, discussing successive drafts with Bank staff before final publication; and the Bank has integrated the government's poverty strategy in the lending program of the country department as a whole.

Incorporating the PPA

The participation of the poor and other groups through PPAs can contribute to the overall PA by complementing, informing or validating the results of more conventional analysis based on household survey data and government statistics. To date, PPAs have been designed specifically to:

- enrich the poverty profile by illustrating local experience and understanding of poverty and vulnerability;
- improve understanding of the impact of public expenditure by eliciting the perceptions of the poor on the accessibility and relevance of services;
- expand analysis of factor markets by illustrating the operation of constraints on disadvantaged social groups to realizing market based opportunities;
- contribute to policy prescription on the economic and regulatory framework by demonstrating the impact of regulations on poor households and communities;
- support policy analysis of “social safety nets” by examining local experience of the operation of formal and informal safety net systems and the coping strategies used by the poor;
- assess the capacities of the poor to act independently through community organizations. (Box 3 provides an example from Kenya.)

The participation of the poor has been elicited through various data gathering and consultative mechanisms. The main methodologies – *beneficiary assessment* and *participatory rapid appraisal* – share many core techniques, including conversational and semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and participant observation. Participatory rapid appraisal, which focuses on analysis at the community rather than household level, also uses thematic mapping, wealth and preference ranking, institutional diagramming and other techniques by which participants generate their own analyses of key elements of their livelihoods.

The choice of methods has depended in practice on the particular experience of the TM or supporting specialist, as well as on available resources and the role intended for the PPA within the overall PA. The costs have ranged from well under \$50,000 to over \$150,000. Achieving reasonable coverage for a national scale

Box 3 PPA Highlights Potential of Women’s Groups in Kenya

The coping strategies of the poor (the vast majority of whom do not have access to credit) depend on diversifying their livelihoods and on the strength of their social networks and informal groups. Because their livelihoods are so diversified, no single employment program will reach the poor. The informal groups and associations, on the other hand, engage in a wide range of economic and social welfare activities. The PPA in Kenya highlighted the untapped potential of these groups to reach the poorer segments of society.

The PPA study estimated that there are at least 300,000 groups and associations in rural Kenya, including more than 23,000 registered women’s groups. It found that every village had from 5 to 17 different types of groups, and more than one active or defunct women’s group. The following are some of the findings which emerged about these women’s groups.

- During discussions of coping strategies at the individual, group and community levels, women’s self help groups were mentioned frequently in every district. They were a particularly important part of the coping strategies of female headed households.
- In addition to income generation, group objectives frequently included welfare activities: raising cash to pay school fees, meet hospital expenses or assist with transport costs to bring the dead back to the villages for burial.
- Most groups levied membership fees and monthly contributions.
- Although the poor were excluded when membership fees were high, many groups targeted their activities specifically to assist the poor with food, schools fees and housing construction.
- Women’s groups were often formed along clan or kinship lines, and often had men as members. Generally, they were supported by village men and the community at large.

Based on the findings of the PPA, proposals to reach the poor through strengthening women’s groups include legal registration so that groups are eligible for credit; technical and business management training of group members; and the extension of micro-enterprise credit to groups.

assessment to investigate a range of issues typically requires at least six to nine months work. Rapid appraisal, using less than one month of field work, has been used in five of the 22 countries where PPAs have been undertaken.

Some early lessons have already emerged from this experience. In defining objectives of the PPA, there is a temptation to overload the agenda with a large number of questions important to the PA as a whole. Most TMs feel in retrospect that results of the PPA would have been richer if the research

focus had been narrower. The PPA can provide an important new perspective on the issue of poverty, complementing but not substituting for quantitative data. The key challenge is to integrate the two approaches within the PA framework, appreciating the limitations of each.

Identifying and selecting field sites and participants (a representative sample of “the poor”) is a critical issue for the PPA, especially when societies and the communities within them are highly stratified. This can be approached either through participatory methods, using local perceptions of key groups for analysis, or through sampling based on household survey results. Researchers need to be clear about which they are using as results may differ.

There are good reasons for selecting a broad range of people, from different technical and institutional backgrounds, for the PPA research teams. Including NGO and government staff as well as academics broadens ownership and enables the team to draw on wider institutional experience. However, the more diverse the backgrounds of team members, the more vital is a rigorous training input to generate a unified and coherent approach.

Another lesson learned on the early PPAs is that it is easy to underestimate the time and skills

required for analysis and synthesis of qualitative research material. TMs should plan for some of the analysis to be carried out in the field and also allow for inputs from experienced social scientists (from within or outside the Bank).

Since the PPA is only one of the inputs influencing the recommendations of the PA, and since the PA document, in turn, is only one of the factors influencing actual policy change, it can be difficult to measure the policy impacts of specific PPAs. Nonetheless, policy relevance should be the guiding criterion in the design of methodology and process for the PPA. Evaluation by the Country Department of the impact of the Zambia PPA, as summarized in Box 4, has found that the PPA strongly influenced both the conclusions of the PA, especially the Action Plan, and national policy formulation.

Evaluation of the Zambian experience (the first national-scale PPA to be completed) also points to some measures which could have increased the value of the PPA in policy formulation: a stronger focus on the institutional mechanisms by which needs and problems could be resolved; completing the PPA earlier, to allow for follow up of the priority areas identified; and sharpening methods to investigate local perceptions on specific policy issues, such as food marketing.

Box 4 Policy Impact of Zambia PPA

The impact of the Zambia Participatory Poverty Assessment on the conclusions of the Poverty Assessment was clearly strong—especially on the Action Plan. Specific elements which influenced the Action Plan included the emphasis on rural infrastructure investments (roads and water), and on urban services (mainly water supply). Other parts of the Poverty Assessment which drew heavily on the findings of the PPA included the Poverty Profile (especially for community-based identification of the ultra-poor) and the chapter dealing with coping strategies, safety nets and targeted interventions.

The Task Manager for the PA gave the following assessment of the overall impact of the Zambia Participatory Poverty Assessment on policy formulation in Zambia to date:

- Government has been influenced by the priorities expressed by the poor in ranking exercises in the PPA (through reinforcing the current emphasis on agriculture and health, stressing the importance of rural infrastructure and environment issues to the poor, and emphasizing ongoing problems with the delivery of education services).
- The Ministry of Health has been using the results of the PPA and the Poverty Assessment as a whole extensively in policy development. For example, one of the authors of the PPA has been participating in a committee looking into the issue of exemption from user fees for the poor.
- Observations from the PPA related to the timing of school fee payments (which coincide with the period of maximum seasonal stress for most rural communities) have contributed to ongoing work in the education ministry on school fees. A new policy is in preparation which will address these issues.
- The very positive feedback from communities in the PPA on the functioning of the emergency safety net during the southern Africa drought of 1992 influenced policy recommendations on ongoing provision for the vulnerable in the Poverty Assessment.