



Chronic Poverty
Research Centre

CPRC Methods Toolbox

<http://www.chronicpoverty.org/page/toolbox>



CPRC Methods Toolbox

Despite growing consensus that poverty is multi-dimensional and complex, much research is based on using approaches and methods that cannot capture a full picture. To deepen the understanding of poverty, research needs to be multi-disciplinary and involve a mix of quantitative, qualitative and participatory approaches.

This toolbox provides a guide to the variety of approaches and methods available and how they can be mixed to produce both rigorous and policy relevant research. Through identifying further resources (especially websites) for exploring methodological tools and issues in greater detail, the toolbox allows researchers to check that their research designs reflect 'good practice'.

The toolbox should be considered as a set of resources to draw upon within the context of particular research requirements. It also discusses cases in which the nature of chronic poverty has a bearing on the methodological approach chosen and the way which it is employed.

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Section 1

Overarching issues

1.1 The ethics of poverty research

'The rich get richer and the poor get researchers' (Stuart Rutherford)

Anyone researching poverty should think carefully about the ethics of their research and about their actions and those of their research assistants and survey teams. Five particular issues must be borne in mind:

1. Researchers, interviewers and enumerators can reinforce existing social relationships (that keep poor people poor) by not treating poor people as social equals.
2. Research can be intrusive and, at times, generate conflict within and between households and more widely.
3. Research takes up poor people's time. This is often a scarce resource especially at 'peak' times of the year, during market/trading periods and for 'triple burdened' women.
4. The objective of policy relevant research is to produce policy advice – a public good for 'all' poor people. However, the poor's input is private time.
5. You are almost certainly being rewarded (in terms of money, status and education) through your specific research activities – what's in it for the woman/man at the receiving end of your questions?

To deal with these issues, the CPRC has a 'bottom line' principle and a list of 'good practice' guidelines:

The minimum requirement of CPRC research activities at individual and household level is that it does not damage the social and economic conditions and prospects of people being interviewed, observed or participating in research. If there is any doubt about this (people may lose income, be embarrassed, conflict may be generated) then the researcher should cease activity as quickly and tactfully as possible.



1.1.1 *Practice guidelines*

- Always introduce yourself and explain clearly what you are doing and why.
- Check that people have the time to talk/meet with you.
- Before you ask any questions/commence any exercises ask if people have any questions for you. Always conclude by letting people ask you questions about yourself and the research.
- Treat people (men/women, young/old, able bodied/disabled, 'uppers'/'lowers') as your equals – within prevailing social conventions.
- If people indicate that they 'need to leave' do not delay them.
- Be sensitive about issues that may cause shame and embarrassment.
- Think carefully about public discussions - it is generally not good for villagers to publicly identify 'their poor'!
- Whenever feasible, share research findings with the people involved in the research (see section on Dissemination for ideas how).
- Be careful with being entertained – the cold drinks or cigarettes you are given might have been spent on school fees instead – but also be careful not to offend.
- If you are taking up significant amounts of a person's/household's time think about 'rewarding' them. In rich countries focus group participants are paid cash – you could consider this, or something more appropriate (e.g. in Bangladesh giving long term researchers a sari or shirt to show you appreciation of their assistance). At the same time, paying can introduce bias - paid respondents may be more inclined to try to say what they think the researcher wants to hear. Consider which types of respondent payment encourages to participate.
- Bias can also be introduced by the type of questions researchers ask, who they talk to and the timing of interviews and surveys.
- Where donors or other 'outsiders' specify the selection of impact assessment indicators or the use of specific methods of data collection or analysis important unanticipated benefits or changes may be missed.

Key ethical issues then relate to confidentiality, the costs of people's time (not wasting it on unnecessary research) and ensuring that power differentials are not used to push people into situations, or answering questions, with which they feel uncomfortable. When working with children and young people, it is also important to obtain informed consent from both the children and their parents/guardians, and to allow adequate time for them to prepare themselves for the research.



1.2 Including vulnerable groups in research

1.2.1 *Research with children and young people*

Child protection

In any research with children and young people, concern for their safety and wellbeing should be of paramount importance. It is vital that at an early stage, researchers recognise that all children and young people are potentially at risk from physical and emotional abuse and exploitation by adults. This could include physical or sexual abuse, social or psychological harm, where questions may be intrusive and result in a child's distress, or physical harm where for example a child is taken to an unsafe place or made to undertake an unsafe journey. Research could also lead to challenges to power dynamics in a family, leading to tension between older members and children or between the genders in the longer term. While it is not possible to foresee every possible consequence for a child of taking part in research, researchers should attempt to prevent children being placed in a difficult situation as a result of having taken part.

All researchers working with children and young people should be aware of how to prevent these types of problems. Research projects should consider establishing a code of conduct, which would apply to everyone involved in the project. As part of this code, it should be made clear that researchers will be supervised and held accountable for practices that discriminate, abuse or exploit children and young people. Equally important, children and young people themselves should be made aware of their rights and of what is unacceptable behaviour by researchers.

Another key element of child protection is that researchers and other staff should understand their obligation to protect and support children and young people who are abused or who are at risk of being abused. This includes being trained to talk to and behave sensitively with these children and young people, being aware of any legal obligations to act, and of what support services, if any, may be available. Where children reveal they are at risk of abuse or harm, the researchers concerned must take into account the child's view and wishes, in deciding how to act. Where the research project is with children who are by definition abused, such as child sex workers, it may be necessary to draw up special procedures, ensuring that those involved are clear about the limits of confidentiality.



Choice of methods

In the past, much research with children and young people cast adults in the role of experts and children as the subjects of research. In recent years, researchers are increasingly attempting to work in a participatory manner, involving children and young people at various stages of a research project. Thus in some projects children and young people have been involved in developing research agendas, as interviewers and peer researchers, in analysis and dissemination. Clearly the most appropriate kind of participation will depend on the focus and objectives of the project concerned.

Effective research with children depends on engaging them in an age and culturally appropriate manner. This may involve a range of techniques including;

- **Visual techniques**, which enable children, including those who are not literate, to describe their environments, life situations, preferences and past histories. Mapping is a commonly used visual technique, which can give information about a local environment or a child's view of their place in a community. Other techniques include weekly timetable charts showing work, school, domestic chores and play, seasonal variation charts, drawings of scenarios and card games. Working with a group of children can help them not to feel intimidated and means they can share ideas with each other and bring up key issues of concern to them.
- **Writing about experiences**, where children and young people feel comfortable writing, asking them to write about an issue can be another means of eliciting their views and experiences. Writing can enable shy children who don't feel comfortable with group work to express their views.
- **Interviews**, both semi-structured and unstructured interviews can provide vital insights into children's lives, their interests and needs. As in every day conversation, interviews with children and young people can take the form of life stories, testimonies or 'key informant' interviews about specific topics. Life stories of teenagers and older children may be a particularly useful way of examining perceptions of thinking, for example, about the impact of poverty in earlier childhood.

Interviews with children and young people are rarely the first method used in a research project, as it is important to build up some rapport with them first. Children and young people themselves too can make very good interviewers. This may make talking about difficult



issues easier and they may well use more appropriate language and ask more relevant questions than adults. This however cannot be assumed and children and young people will need training and briefing like any new interviewers. Children and young people who have been involved in well thought out research have reported finding it an interesting and empowering experience.

Including children's perspectives in research

Children and young people often have helpful insights into a variety of issues and it can be useful to include their perspectives in work which, on the face of it, does not have an obvious child focus. Many policies, programmes and institutions have direct and indirect effects on children, either through their households, or as recipients of services and members of society. These effects are of course mediated by gender, age, ethnicity and disability, among other factors.

Clearly, at household level, children and young people may have different experiences, perspectives and priorities than adults and these differences can be illuminating. For example, in research about how local social relations sustain, or help people escape from, chronic poverty, adult household members may see contributing to family funerals to ensure future social support as a top priority. A child or young person who has had to drop out of school, or start working, to finance this contribution may give a very different perspective.

Children and young people are also directly affected by policies and institutions, as recipients of services (health, education etc), or as members of wider society. This is self-evident in relation to key social services. Thus research examining the role of education in preventing chronic poverty, might want to contrast the experiences of children today, with those of young adults or older people who attended school in the past.

As members of wider society there may be less obvious impacts. For example, how have efforts to promote security affected children? Are they less afraid of being attacked on the way to school, or to fetch water? Are girls now less vulnerable to sexual violence? Have police reduced their harassment of young men?

In some cases statistical data can be reconfigured to reveal additional information about trends in childhood poverty. This has successfully been done with Vietnam's Living Standards Measurement Survey data to reveal changes in the proportions of children living in income/ expenditure poverty over time, and relative to other groups in the population. Analyses of this sort may inform the development of research agendas on chronic poverty.



1.2.2 Research and impairment and disability

'The real repositories of local knowledge on disability in particular countries are the disabled people that live there' (Metts, 2000: xv)

Impairment: An individual's condition – physical, sensory, intellectual or behavioural.

Disability: A complex system of social restrictions imposed on people with impairments resulting in a denial of rights and equal opportunities.

The WHO estimates that 10% of any population is disabled. The proportion of disabled people living in chronic poverty is likely to be considerably higher. Therefore any research that does not include disabled people as at least 10% of respondents will not be a representative sample of those living in chronic poverty. Whilst few research or development organisations would consider working with all male respondents or beneficiaries, it is still common practice to work with only non-disabled people.

Traditional research often involves wealthy non-disabled outsiders questioning people about their lives. This is not a reliable way of getting information where there are big power differences and where questioners are not trusted or known friends. To obtain consent is not sufficient as few people in situations of poverty and exclusion will refuse to be questioned by those with more power and authority. It is therefore essential that disabled people set and control the agenda for research.

It is rare that the exclusion of disabled people is intentional. Generally it is because of a lack of experience in using inclusive methods. Possible ways in which disabled people may be excluded:

- Disabled people are frequently excluded from basic health care/education/employment. It is therefore not easy to find representative numbers of disabled people if these places are used to gather respondents. A number of different venues should be used and attention be paid to asking who else is a household member who is not present at a gathering.
- Members of a community may deny the existence of disabled people, as disability is often considered a stigma and disabled people are often not considered as whole people. Furthermore as disabled people are frequently excluded from the day-to-day activities of the community, they may easily be forgotten by other members. Box 1



highlights the difficulties of collecting statistics on disability using household-level questions.

- The chosen **venue**, which may not be physically inaccessible, not a place where disabled people are used to going or not a location where disabled people are socially accepted or feel comfortable. Any research that relies on respondents getting to a particular location is unlikely to be accurate. Many disabled people living in chronic poverty do not get out of their homes *let alone* reach the regular meeting places of the community.

Box 1: Collecting data on disability

Different approaches to gathering statistics on disability result in huge variations in prevalence rates of disability, depending on the type of question that is asked.

Countries that have used questions addressed to household members individually are five times as likely to find high prevalence rates than those that have used household level questions. In many societies there is a stigma attached to reporting disability.

Respondents are therefore often reluctant to admit the presence of disabled people in the household and interviewers tend not to ask about disability unless a disabled person is clearly visible during the interview. The choice of response categories should be evaluated to ensure that respondents are not forced to associate themselves with a stigma.

Sliding scales should be considered rather than a simple yes/no option. The wording of the question has a great effect on the output. The same words have different connotations in different cultures.

To increase the policy relevance of data on disability, the census recommendations urge countries to go beyond simple tabulations of numbers of disabled people to include also information on e.g. socio-economic characteristics, levels of education and the living conditions of disabled people in comparison with non-disabled people.

Source: paper prepared by Margaret Mbogoni and Angela Me of the United Nations Statistics Division for the 1st meeting of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics (Feb 2002).



Methods

PRA often depends on visual methods and therefore excludes those with visual impairments. Verbally asking questions of respondents will exclude those with hearing impairments unless an interpreter is also present. Furthermore, many of those deaf people living in chronic poverty may not have had access to learn sign language. Therefore communication will take longer and will be more difficult. However it is possible if time and effort is put in and friends or relatives of the deaf person are willing to help.

People with learning difficulties will be excluded unless simple, clear information is given. This may involve communicating with other members of the household as well as the disabled person themselves.

It is important then, that a mixture of different methods and venues are used in order to include everybody. It may take extra time and resources to ensure that disabled people are included. However if this is not done, the research will not be representative of those living in chronic poverty.

In some cases it may be appropriate to get help from other members of the household when trying to communicate with a person with learning difficulties or a deaf person. However this should be an aid to, never instead of, communicating with the person themselves.

A medical classification system of impairment, but not disability, can be found at the [World Health Organisation's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health](#).



1.2.3 *Research and older people, HIV/AIDS, and conflict*

- [Access for All - Helping to make participatory processes accessible for everyone.](#) Save the Children (2000)
- [Participatory research with older people: a practical guide.](#) HelpAge International (2002).
- [Tools Together Now. 100 participatory tools to mobilise communities for HIV/AIDS.](#) International HIV/AIDS Alliance (2006).
- [Qualitative methods: a field guide for applied research in sexual and reproductive health.](#) Ulin, P. R., Robinson, E. T., Tolley, E. E. and McNeill, E. T. (2002). Family Health International.
- ['Violent conflict, poverty and chronic poverty'.](#) Goohand, J. (2001). CPRC Working Paper 6.

See [Resources section](#) at the end of the toolbox.



1.3 Developing international research partnerships

Partnerships are widely recognised as an attractive alternative to working in a hierarchical or highly formalised contract mode. They are deemed by many to be 'a good thing' in their own right. However, developing and maintaining effective international partnerships is difficult. Substantial efforts can go into the 'process' of maintaining good quality communication and working in a 'partnership mode' rather than a contract mode. Individual partners must feel that they will achieve more by developing and maintaining a partnership than they could alone. If this is not the case the effort necessary to maintain the partnership over time may erode good will. Partners also need mutual trust, a common vision and jointly agreed objectives (shared and individual). Unless partners provide complementary resources and skills and are willing to share power, benefits, risks and responsibilities then the partnership will struggle to survive.

These principles are true for all partnerships but international research partnerships have been found to be uniquely complex and difficult to maintain. The effort invested in the 'process' of good communication and partnership maintenance produces intangible outputs. These may or may not feed into improving the quality of research and policy engagement outputs. The quality and effectiveness of international research partnerships are assessed by reviewing their tangible outputs. High quality research outputs and policy briefs are expected. Balancing the sometimes competing objectives of maintaining good quality partnerships and delivering high quality tangible outputs can be a challenge.

[Developing a 'Competency to Collaborate' Research Partnerships](#), by Michael Warner leads the reader through a set of exercises which will help them to assess the necessary ingredients for effective research partnerships .

[North-South Research Partnerships: A Guidance Note on the Partnering Process](#) by Shem Migot-Adholla and Michael Warner provides a set of general principles for effective international research partnerships.



Section 2

Approaches to research

2.1 The qualitative-quantitative distinction

Whether to take a qualitative or quantitative approach to research is often presented as an either-or debate. In reality, the approaches are not only complementary but are often two sides of the same coin. Data collected, presented and analysed in a quantitative manner is not by its nature any more reliable or generalisable than qualitative information. The assumptions and biases of the researcher inform both types of research, and one type is often convertible to the other. As Trochim (2000) writes:

‘Typically data is called quantitative if it is in numerical form and qualitative if it is not. Notice that qualitative data could be much more than just words or text. Photographs, videos, sound recordings, and so on, can be considered qualitative data. ... In some areas of social research, the qualitative-quantitative distinction has led to protracted arguments with the proponents of each arguing the superiority of their kind of data over the other. The quantitative types argue that their data is hard, rigorous, credible, and scientific. The qualitative proponents counter that their data is sensitive, nuanced, detailed, and contextual. For many of us in social research, this kind of polarized debate has become less than productive. Additionally, it obscures the fact that qualitative and quantitative data are intimately related to each other. All quantitative data is based upon qualitative judgements; and all qualitative data can be described and manipulated numerically.’

For instance, think about a common quantitative measure in social research – a self-esteem scale. The researchers who developed such instruments had to make countless judgements in constructing them: How to define self-esteem; how to distinguish it from other related concepts; how to word potential scale items; how to make sure the items would be understandable to the intended respondents; what kinds of contexts they could be used in; what kinds of cultural and language constraints might be present, and so on. Researchers who decide to use such a scale in their studies have to make another set of judgements: how well the scale measures the intended concept; how reliable or consistent it is; how appropriate it is for the research context and intended respondents; and so on. Believe it or



not, even the respondents make many judgements when filling out such a scale: what various terms and phrases mean; why the researcher is giving this scale to them; how much energy and effort they want to expend to complete it, and so on. Even the consumers and readers of the research make judgements about the self-esteem measure and its appropriateness in that research context. What may look like a simple, straightforward, cut-and-dried quantitative measure is actually based on lots of qualitative judgements made by many different people.

On the other hand, all qualitative information can be easily converted into quantitative, and many times doing so would add considerable value to your research. The simplest way to do this is to divide the qualitative information into categories and number them ... even that simple nominal enumeration can enable you to organize and process qualitative information more efficiently. As an example, you might take text information (say, excerpts from transcripts) and pile these excerpts into piles of similar statements. When you perform something as easy as this simple grouping or piling task, you can describe the results quantitatively.'

Within the CPRC, researchers are both expected and encouraged to collect, present, and analyse both qualitative and quantitative data. Many of the most interesting discoveries occur when findings based on one type of data seem to contradict findings based on the other.

See Report on [Workshop on Panel Surveys and Life Histories Methods](#) (eds. Baulch and Scott, 2006)

See [Commissioning Q2 Research](#), A tailored training programme for Save the Children UK (Kate Bird, 2010)



2.2 Participatory approaches

As well as referring to a set of methods, participatory research refers to a methodological approach, which is influenced by the attitudes, training and political orientation of researchers.

Core features of participatory research include the following:

- *Concern with relations of power:* emphasis on the perspectives of poor and disadvantaged people and offsetting biases in dominant or outside paradigms.
- *Analysis by local people:* researchers facilitate local analysis in order to learn with and from local people. This requires analysing the process of discussions and interviews as well as the data these produce. Learning takes place face to face and on the spot.
- *Continuous analysis and progressive, systematic learning:* the process of inquiry is cumulative. These approaches favour use of open questions and semi-structured interviews rather than pre-set questionnaires. Joint analysis takes place in several phases and these are context specific.
- *Seeking multiple perspectives:* recognises complexity and looks for diversity of individual and group perceptions to understand contradictions and differences. This can involve purposive sampling rather than statistical sampling for participant selection.
- *Triangulation:* cross checking by using different methods, disciplinary perspectives, sources of information, and entities sampled.
- *Visual medium:* forms of diagramming that are visual and open to groups can encourage participation of marginalised people. By making the process open to those who do not read, are not used to verbal communication or do not share languages, diagramming can have an equalising effect. Visual techniques include mapping, time lines, seasonal analysis, matrix ranking and scoring.
- *Context specific:* researchers are encouraged to use methods flexibly, to innovate and improvise with conscious exploration in different circumstances. No research process is ever the same so there is no blueprint for researchers. The adaptability of methods and possibilities for different sequencing according to local conditions encourages greater sense of ownership.
- *Leading to change:* the process of inquiry embodies a strong capacity building element for local participants, the research team and other stakeholders. Dialogue and joint analysis help to define changes and motivate people to act. Depending on commitment of participants and stakeholders, action can include further capacity strengthening for



implementation of desired changes, or for increased participation in advocacy, decision making and policy development.



2.2.1 Strengths and weaknesses of participatory approaches

Strengths

- **Eliciting people's own analysis of their poverty** and wellbeing provides a deeper understanding of dimensions of poverty other than income and consumption indicators. This has potential for identifying key factors of chronic poverty within and between different settings.
- **Understanding complexity and diversity** of livelihood strategies, including the impact of structural economic and political factors over time on people's impoverishment and ability to become less poor. Establishing causality. Identifying barriers to participation, factors of social exclusion and assessing social capital of different groups according to gender, age, caste, ethnicity.
- **Highlighting areas for further detailed research** using other methods and comparative analysis.
- **Adaptability and flexibility** of methods provides potential for working in emergency situations and politically difficult environments, although links with community members and entry points may need to be firmly established.
- **Capacity building** of local people (as well as external researchers) in participatory approaches to research, advocacy and for increased participation in policy development.
- **Influencing policy and practice** - the in-depth and context bound nature of participatory research approaches can provide insights for policy and practical actions with high benefits for poor people in their own terms (at relatively low cost?).
- **'Scaling up'** - The process of participatory research emphasises the linking of information from communities to broader policy dialogue with stakeholders including, CBOs, NGOs, local and national government officers providers, academics, trade unions, business and insurance institutions, international NGOs, donors, UN agencies.

Weaknesses

- **Amount of time required out of the field.** Experience has shown that for effective outcomes, preparation time, (including training and stakeholder identification) and follow up time (including dissemination and policy linking) is equal if not greater than time spent on research activities in communities.
- **Generating statistical data.** Although some methods can produce quantitative data, the focus of the approach is to provide in depth analysis within locally identified contexts. Information generated in participatory research at household level can provide insights to



guide the collection and disaggregation of broader nationally and regionally generated statistical data. See [How to generate statistics and influence policy using participatory methods in research](#) from the Statistical Services Centre.

- **Comparability and generating commensurable information.** Information gathered and shared in different contexts may be hard to synthesise for central planning. However, comparison of findings across a range of contexts can enable central planners to distinguish between policies that are relevant for local and national formulation and implementation.

2.3 Livelihoods approaches

The phrase Sustainable Livelihoods can be traced from the work of Robert Chambers and others, through a research programme undertaken by the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex, involving work in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Mali in particular.

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base (DfID, 1999 see also Scoones, 1998, and Carney, 1998, p. 4).

This approach was adopted by the Department for International Development (DfID) and a range of other development agencies and is therefore described here as the 'official' or dominant framework. DfID (1999, 2000) issued detailed 'guidance sheets' which are useful to explicate what rapidly became a familiar framework in the late 1990s, shown in the accompanying [diagram](#). Within a particular 'vulnerability context', defined for example by shifting seasonal constraints, short-term economic shocks and longer-term trends of change, people deploy five types of 'livelihood assets' or capital in variable combinations, within circumstances influenced by institutional structures and processes, in order to pursue diverse 'livelihood strategies', with more or less measurable 'livelihood outcomes'.

A series of 'core concepts' are defined. Firstly, the approach is 'people-centred', in that the making of policy is based on understanding the realities of struggle of poor people themselves, on the principle of their participation in determining priorities for practical intervention, and on their need to influence the institutional structures and processes that govern their lives. Secondly, it is 'holistic' in that it is 'non-sectoral' and it recognises multiple influences, multiple actors, multiple strategies and multiple outcomes. Thirdly, it is 'dynamic' in that it attempts to understand change, complex cause-and-effect relationships and 'iterative chains of events'. Fourthly, it starts with analysis of strengths rather than of needs, and seeks to build on everyone's inherent potential. Fifthly, it attempts to 'bridge the gap' between macro- and micro-levels. Sixthly, it is committed explicitly to several different dimensions of sustainability: environmental, economic, social and institutional. Conflicts between these dimensions are, however, recognised.



Principles of livelihoods approaches include:

- Livelihoods research, of its nature, is essentially carried out at the micro-level: that of 'households' and 'communities'. It involves empirical investigation of combinations of modes of livelihood and, above all, of the relationships between them. It also involves pushing to the limit of their potential various methods of understanding changes that have taken place over time.
- For research into changing livelihoods to be illuminating and useful, however, it is essential to define the structural, historical and institutional elements of what may for convenience be called its macro-context. A time-frame must be specified, key variables identified, important trends of change discerned.
- In so far as livelihoods research is directed to the diagnosis of the causes of chronic poverty, the circumstances of poverty and the reasons for poverty should be understood through detailed *analysis of social relations* in a particular historical context. This implies a structural or relational view of poverty, and, in turn, that understanding of its 'persistence' or its intractability or its 'deepening' should be driven by questions about inequalities of power.
- It also implies that livelihoods research and discussion of its implications for 'policy-making' should contain explicit reflection on the particular, relevant, contexts in which 'policy' is made, with reference to key questions such as the following. Who makes policy? How is it made? For what purposes? For whose benefit? With what outcomes?



2.3.1 *Strengths and weaknesses of livelihoods approaches*

Strengths

- They seek to understand changing combinations of modes of livelihood in a dynamic and historical context.
- Explicitly advocate a creative tension between different levels of analysis.
- Acknowledge the need to transcend the boundaries between conventionally discrete sectors (urban/rural, industrial/agricultural, formal/informal, etc.).
- Recognise the necessity to investigate the relationships between different activities that constitute household livelihoods, which in turn requires attention both to intra-household and to extra-household social relations.

Weaknesses

- Elements of the 'vulnerability context', such as rampant inflation and extreme conflict and ripples of mass redundancy, are surely much more important than would appear to be allowed for.
- The language of 'multiplier effects' predominates, as does the presumption that it is possible to expand people's 'asset pentagons' in a generalised and incremental fashion. Inequalities of power and conflicts of interest are not, perhaps, sufficiently acknowledged, either within local 'communities' themselves or between 'communities' and, for example, regional elites and government agencies.
- The notion of 'participation' that dominates the discourse of intervention - with typically unresolved tension between these two words - presupposes heavy investment in 'community' on the part of donor agencies and thence a rhetorical tendency to disguise or weaken the probability that, in one way or another, enhancement of the livelihoods of one group will undermine the livelihoods of another.
- The qualifier 'sustainable' begs many questions which are not resolved even by positive 'livelihood outcomes' of the kind indicated in the framework. 'Sustainable' for whom? By what criteria? In the short term or the long term?

More generally, equating 'assets' theoretically with varieties of 'capital', through the 'asset pentagon' inscribed in the diagram, intellectually distorts our understanding of capital and politically distorts our understanding of the causes of poverty. On the first point, capital is properly a social relation between people, not an attribute of rich or poor households or



individuals, respectively. On the second point, attention is displaced from the inequalities of power that must surely be invoked to explain the persistence or the worsening of poverty. For a powerful critique of the notion of 'social capital', in particular, as it has been adopted by the World Bank and other agencies see Ben Fine's book *Social Capital versus Social Theory* (2001)



2.3.2 *Examples of the livelihoods framework in practice*

This section draws heavily on Murray, C. (2001). [Livelihoods Research: Some Conceptual and Methodological Issues](#), CPRC Paper 5, which gives more in-depth examples of the uses of livelihoods approaches.

Some examples of disparate and partly overlapping methods of studying livelihoods are briefly outlined here. In view of the prevailing emphasis of the CPRC, they express a clear bias toward the study of rural livelihoods. It is important to recognise that this is not disconnected, however, either conceptually or methodologically, from the study of urban livelihoods along lines elaborated, for example, by Beall and Kanji (1999). The reader's attention is also drawn to the following work that is specifically relevant (see also Resources at the end of the toolbox):

- [Livelihoods Connect](#) is a resource for recent work on livelihoods including country case-studies and comparative reviews;
- the Sustainable Livelihoods Working Paper series and the [Natural Resource Perspectives](#) briefings published by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI);
- the mass of country studies carried out in sub-Saharan Africa in the mid-1990s under the auspices of the De-Agrarianization and Rural Employment project (DARE) co-ordinated by the University of Leiden (for an overview, see Bryceson, 1999);
- Elizabeth Francis' book *Making a Living* (2000), in which she explores the dynamics of struggle over livelihoods through comparative study of change in eastern and southern Africa.

This summary gives some indication of the complementary use of diverse methods of investigation in practice, on a relatively small scale, and also raises a question of general importance. Just as household livelihoods themselves straddle the boundaries between conventionally discrete economic sectors (industry/agriculture, formal employment/informal economic activity) and often the boundaries between conventionally discrete geographical spaces (urban/rural), so livelihoods research must transcend local 'communities' in order to comprehend both intra-household relationships and significant inter-household social relationships as these change over time. Both forms of relationship may be geographically 'stretched' over considerable physical distances. Neither form is readily susceptible to proper investigation through the conventional methods either of household survey work carried out within specified communities or of 'participatory' workshops confined to such communities. This immediately begs the question of an appropriate trade-off between work in one



‘community’ that purports in one way or another to be representative of that community, and work of a more dispersed but intensive kind that seeks to investigate at first hand disparate economic activities, and the relationships between them, that together comprise any one household livelihood but that often ‘stretch’ far beyond the physical boundaries of the community. A vital part of the effectiveness of this kind of work was following up the same individuals and families at different points in time, scattered as they often were in different places, with repeated (small-scale) household surveys to plot demographic turnover and the trajectories of individuals’ experience. It could not, however, be claimed in any serious sense to be ‘participatory’.

Four in-depth examples of uses of livelihoods approaches are:

1. Frank Ellis: combining sample surveys and participatory techniques (eastern Africa)

Frank Ellis, an agricultural economist at the University of East Anglia, is an important contributor to recent thinking on livelihoods, diversity and vulnerability, through influential articles (in 1998) and his book *Rural Livelihoods and Diversity in Developing Countries* (2000). In Part III of this book he elaborates the combination of survey and participatory methods that, in his view, opens up the possibility of a better understanding of rural livelihoods.

He outlines a critique of large-scale income surveys, on largely familiar grounds, with reference to studies undertaken in Ghana, Kenya and Tanzania in particular, and concludes that they are of very limited use in understanding changes in rural livelihoods over time. Smaller-scale sample surveys relating to particular communities or regional populations are of rather more use. He also advocates various different PRA methods (key informants, semi-structured interviews, informal group discussions, focus group discussions, Venn diagrams) ‘for discovering, quite quickly, the mediating processes within which livelihood strategies are adopted’, relating to social relations, institutions and organisations. He then offers a useful summary of the typical characteristics of different field methods, under the headings of large-scale sample surveys, small-scale sample surveys, semi-structured or participatory enquiry, and case-studies (Ellis, 2000: 196-7).

Ellis illustrates the practical application of these disparate methods through a case-study carried out in three villages in northern Tanzania in 1997. An experimental combination of methods was applied, guided by ‘considerations of cost-effectiveness and timeliness in obtaining policy-useful research results’ (Ellis, 2000: 200). They were:



- Semi-structured focus group discussions
- A participatory wealth-ranking exercise
- A sample survey of household demography and remittance income, farm incomes, non-farm income sources and household assets [30 households interviewed in each of three villages]

Typologies of livelihood strategies were derived from these exercises, and households were 'mapped' according to the relative robustness of income contributions derived from each mode of livelihood. With some qualifications and reservations, the expectation of the study was broadly confirmed: that focus group discussions and other participatory methods were well-suited to discovering the 'vulnerability context' of rural livelihoods; while sample survey methods were better suited to 'examining more concretely how the assets and activities of the poor differ from those of the better-off' (Ellis, 2000: 227).

2. Khanya: the 'vertical transect' methodology (southern and central Africa)

<http://www.khanya-aicdd.org/>

Khanya-African Institute for Community-Driven Development, based in Bloemfontein, South Africa, has committed much of its work towards developing the applications of a livelihoods framework in the context of poverty reduction strategies. The Sustainable Livelihoods approach, in their view, does help to structure analysis of the support required to assist the poor. Particularly important are 1) a holistic analysis of strengths and 2) an understanding of macro-micro linkages. 'Decentralised approaches are needed, in which the district level acts as the interface between micro-level understanding of clients, with macro-level policies, and provides the key intermediation in terms of matching poor people's preferred outcomes and strategies with appropriate service delivery... At levels higher than district the complexity of achieving effective co-ordination and integration of services and programmes becomes too great' (Goldman *et al.*, 2000: 4).

Khanya identified the advantages of the approach as follows (Goldman *et al.*, 2000: 3): its participatory methodology; the opportunity and need for pre-project ownership creation; developing a common methodology. Four levels were identified: the community level; the local service-provider level; the meso-level; the centre. Through their experience in three countries in southern Africa, they laid out a series of phases in developing a poverty reduction strategy using the Sustainable Livelihoods approach:

- Developing an interest in and commitment to such a strategy



- Organising a detailed study
- Conducting and writing up the study
- Developing the strategy
- Implementation of the strategy

The main political requirement was a sense of 'ownership' and commitment in appropriate departments of government at a fairly high administrative level. The principal methodological approach, however, was a variety of PRA exercises undertaken directly with local people. 'The approach used builds from what we see (and don't see) in the reality of people's lives - so the focus of the study is on learning from people on the ground, the micro-level, understanding what impacts on their lives from that level, and how successive levels above support (or don't) the operation at micro-level' (Khanya, 2000: 5).

Khanya offers the experience of a vertical transect methodology, proceeding from an overview of policies at the centre to rapid assessments at village, district and provincial levels and then return to the centre. Such a vertical transect, they recommend, should involve an intensive study of about six to eight weeks, with a multi-disciplinary team of three to five people for efficiency and economy. The team proposed the following more detailed schedule: a few days at the centre; one week on PRA investigations in case study locations; moving through layers of government service and support with workshops, semi-structured interviews and key informants; returning to case-study locations for at least one day to validate and triangulate, as well as further to explore specific identified issues; and arrangements for involving local people in the production of the report. Much weight was attached to the analysis of rural livelihoods in case-study areas. Some basic quantitative data could be gathered from participants, but the principal techniques were those associated with PRA, with an emphasis on 'the community themselves' defining their circumstances, needs and desired outcomes.

One problem with such an approach is that constituencies defined separately for the purpose of setting up focus groups, such as 'farmers', 'women', 'youth', 'pensioners', often overlap in practice. The whole point of livelihoods research, after all, is to understand the ways in which diverse modes of livelihood are inter-related through the management of complex household portfolios in circumstances of structural change, not simply to identify the supposedly discrete concerns and interests of distinguishable social categories of the population.



3. Livelihood trajectories (western Nepal and eastern India)

See: Bagchi *et al.* (1998)

The explicit research aim of the ESCOR-funded project on Long-Term Change and Livelihoods, initiated by the Overseas Development Group (ODG) at the University of East Anglia, was to describe and explain trajectories of change for individuals and groups over time, through fieldwork in 1996-7 in 15 villages in Western Nepal and two villages in West Bengal and Bihar. The comparative base for the work in Nepal was a sample survey of 667 rural households in Western Nepal carried out by the ODG in 1974-5. The team drew on other survey work undertaken in the mid-1970s to support the comparative longitudinal work in the other two areas.

Livelihood trajectories, according to the team:

- provide insights into the changing welfare and capabilities of individuals and of groups;
- can illuminate the process of change by revealing the ways in which negotiation, bargaining and struggle can alter circumstances;
- make it possible to 'bridge the supposed micro-macro divide' by a process of aggregation upwards from the lives of individuals;
- combine insights, in a seriously inter-disciplinary spirit, from the many different paradigms prevalent in development studies.

On the third point above, 'progressive aggregation admittedly moves away from the rich and revealing, life-as-lived from day to day embeddedness of [Livelihood Trajectories], but increasingly makes possible generalisation and structural explanation as one moves upwards from households to local communities, districts, regions and states'. Livelihoods analysis 'starts from daily lives and experiences' but moves on 'to explore not only 'how people make history' but also the constraints that limit their functioning and capabilities'.

This project was explicitly 'longitudinal' in pursuit of its principal objectives, although not - for the most part - in the strict sense of following up the same individuals over time. Such research, while fraught with methodological problems, is potentially very valuable because of the time-scale of comparison. It is also highly unusual in practice, largely because of the massive wastage incurred through the familiar phenomenon of 'loss of institutional memory' over much shorter periods of time than the two decades considered here. A particular virtue of the article cited (Bagchi *et al.*, 1998) is its explicit discussion of these methodological



problems: for example, the difficulties of replication of the original sample(s) against the need for random sampling of population(s) 20 years later; the ‘gain’ of pursuing ‘original’ households against the ‘loss’ of a demographically unrepresentative range of households, etc. In the Nepalese case, the team found, only about 40 per cent of the original 1974-5 respondents were still living in 1996-97. However, without access to reliable baseline studies in West Bengal and Bihar that suited the particular purposes of the study, the team had to adopt ‘a more opportunist and eclectic construction’ of livelihood trajectories, through the use of various studies carried out at different times and for very different purposes.

The team used a variety of research techniques, such as village mapping, wealth-ranking, formal randomised sample household surveys and life histories. They also experienced major tension between quantitative and qualitative techniques. ‘The quantitative data provided the basis for showing *what* and emphasising what was representative, while the qualitative was able to reveal *how* and *why* and to highlight differences and variety within the range of human experiences in the areas studied - experiences that could help explain, problematize, and contextualize differences and changes in average values of variables from the quantitative survey’ (Bagchi *et al.*, 1998: 461).

4. Changing livelihoods: life histories and ‘cluster’ analysis (South Africa)

The objectives of the ESCOR-funded Multiple Livelihoods and Social Change project (life-span 1998-2001) were as follows:

- to analyse socio-economic differentiation in two densely populated but relatively remote (former ‘homeland’) areas of South Africa;
- to identify the intervening socio-economic, political and institutional variables that affect efforts to alleviate poverty through improved livelihood opportunities;
- to develop a distinctive combination of methods for the study of multiple household livelihoods as they change over time, and for relating changes at the micro-level to changes at the macro-level.

Fieldwork was undertaken in the Central District of North-West Province and ‘greater’ Qwaqwa, Free State. Elizabeth Francis worked for three months in two adjacent villages in North-West in March-June 1999. She conducted forty-one life history interviews with people in forty different households in these two villages and with farmers on nearby state land. She used a unified interview framework that included questions about contemporary livelihoods. Interviews lasted around two hours. She also conducted interviews dealing with the local and



regional institutional context with chiefs, headmen, local councillors, other local political activists, members of local community-based organisations, district council officials, provincial government departments and the National African Farmers' Union.

Her sample was constructed in order to capture differences in livelihoods, resource access and income levels. She used snowball sampling, in order to understand inter-household relations through looking at clusters of associated individuals and households. Commercial farmers led her to people they had employed, members of other households introduced her to their kin and in-laws, to people they brewed beer with, people who herded their stock or helped them regularly, people who paid them to do domestic work, or to people who fostered their children. In following up relationships between individuals in different households, there was a tension between her wish to explore these further and her understanding of the importance of keeping the sample as widely-based as possible, in order to avoid potential biases. She asked informants about dispersed household members, kin with whom there was a lot of contact, and other people with whom there were relationships which impinged on livelihoods.

By placing these changes in the context of local and national transformations, it was possible to relate some of the household-level changes to socio-economic, political and institutional changes at the regional, provincial and national levels.



2.3.3 Undertaking livelihoods research

1. Collect relevant secondary data

An overview of the types of data which this may include is given in Box 3.

Box 3: Secondary data relevant for livelihoods research

Agro-ecological zone (may not be relevant for urban and peri-urban areas)

- Rainfall (average amounts, localised spatial, annual and seasonal variability)
- Temperature (seasonal variation, averages)
- Local geomorphology (including depth of water table, presence of aquifers, soil type)
- Climax vegetation type and forest cover

Contextual information

- Significant political, historical and cultural background

Infrastructure

- Road, rail and waterway connections
- Does the area have a good, reliable and affordable power network? What proportion of enterprises and households are connected?
- Does the area have a good, reliable and affordable telecommunications network?
- The proportion of households with water and sanitation access. Who provides this?

Social services

- The enrolment and retention rates for girl and boy children in the area
- The key health risks in the area
- Literacy, mortality and morbidity rates
- What services are available, and what do different types of people use?
- Who provides the health and education services and how are they paid for?

Existing development interventions

- By national and local government as well as CBO, NNGO, SNGO and donor involvement

Market information

- Functioning of markets for agricultural inputs (including land and labour) and outputs.
- Functioning of markets for other significant local industries/ enterprises/ livelihood activities.
- Do markets conform to neo-classical expectations? If not, what are the main causes of market failure? (e.g. they suffer from monopsony and monopoly or there is differential access)

Main economic activities

- List of main activities (by importance in generating food security, protecting households from vulnerability, generating employment, income, export from district or region?)

Livelihood activities and coping strategies

- Overlaps with the above, but includes *all* non-monetised activities and coping strategies

Socio-economic information

- What are the important determinants of poverty in the area?
- Have participatory poverty assessments been conducted in the area and what useful information do they provide? Do you need to conduct local wealth ranking and other participatory exercises to understand the nature of poverty in the local community?
- What proportion of people are below the poverty line? Is this information disaggregated by poverty severity and household/ individual characteristics?

Possible sources:

- (Government) Central Statistical Office reports (Household Survey Reports)
- Local government statistics – held at the municipal and district level
- Participatory Poverty Assessments
- World Bank Reports, held or produced by the country office
- Bilateral donor reports
- Grey cover reports held by NNGOs and SNGOs, local universities, in-country research teams



2. Collect basic primary data

Some of the information above will not be available in secondary sources. Researchers need to identify *key informants* to provide them with this, through structured or semi-structured interviews. These interviews can be followed up with participatory methods (including focus groups) to deepen an understanding of the context of local livelihoods. This should provide the researchers with sufficient information to identify the main livelihood activities.

3. Decide on an approach for collecting more in-depth data

Researchers then need to adopt an approach for the collection of further data. They may decide to purposively select households based on their *level of poverty* (wealth/ wellbeing rank or income decile?) and their *main livelihood activity* (importance in protecting food security, income, allocation of labour time, allocation of land or other capitals to production?). This will allow the research team to develop a number of in-depth case studies. This can be triangulated with findings from community level participatory exercises and sample surveys.

One possible approach is using in-depth case studies:

1. Select household using a mixture of wealth rank and livelihood
2. Interview household members at their home/ enterprise (increases researcher's understanding of the household)
3. Interview more than one household member, if possible (to increase understanding of intra-household dynamics and access to and control of resources)
4. Interview on more than one occasion, if possible (this allows cross-checking, probing and follow-up)
5. Use a semi-structured interview approach to build up an understanding of:
 - size and structure of the household (including migrants in and out, servants, adopted children, joint household structures etc.)
 - intra-household allocation of tasks and responsibilities
 - inter and intra-household borrowing/ lending/ giving
 - traditional and non-traditional safety nets
 - role of remittances
 - endogenous and exogenous risks
 - shocks
 - trends



- household responses to shocks and trends – coping and adaptation
- main household assets, (inventory of human, natural, social, physical, financial capital, plus political capital, if desired) (owned, held in common, available through reciprocal arrangements etc.)
- calls on household assets
- differentiated list of livelihood activities – differentiated by gender, relationship to household head, age, seasonal, occasional, regular, constant. Differentiated by level of returns. Which activity is main income earner, most significant for food security? Which are coping strategy activities, ‘accumulation activities’ (those aimed at enrichment)? Which are natural resource based/ non-NR based? Which are reliant on common properties? Which are dependent on relationships with others? Which are reliant on markets? Are any illegal or frowned on?
- the key constraints for these livelihood activities (including barriers to entry, like level of capitalisation needed, required skill level, high social and political capital necessary)
- the key risks/ problems/ constraints faced in each of these activities. Which have drudgery associated with them?
- asking the respondent: What are the livelihood activities of the poorest in the community? Why do they do these activities? What are the livelihood activities of the richest? Have these activities made them rich? If not, how did they accumulate wealth? What are the main barriers to entry for these activities?

The case study can be written up using the Livelihoods Framework as an organising principle, but might also include other issues, such as: intra-household differentiation, livelihood constraints, vulnerability to shocks, coping, and capabilities to escape poverty. The findings can be cross-checked with participatory and survey findings for representativeness.



2.4 Political science-influenced approaches

Political science uses a number of broad theoretical approaches and methodologies, including: normative theory; institutional approaches; behavioural analysis; rational choice theory; feminist perspectives; Marxist theory; critical theory; discourse theory; qualitative analysis; quantitative methods; comparative approaches and structure and agency debates. Certain aspects of each of these theoretical schools can be found in documents produced *about* chronic poverty, and it is important for the researcher to recognise these underlying assumptions. They can cause development projects to fail or succeed.

- Normative theory: describes how something should be, its ideal type and properties. Normative work covers, for example, the mode of theoretical analysis we might use to conceptualise how a democracy should work. Some research on governance in the south has included normative assumptions about western liberal democracy which may not have been relevant, and sought to test a political structure by whether it had recognisable 'good' features, such as an independent judiciary or multi-party elections. The advantages of normative approaches are that a particular institution, political system or set of social relationships can be judged or measured against an ideal type, which may serve to clarify weaknesses. The disadvantages of this approach are that it is ahistorical, inevitably judgmental and can cause offence.
- Institutional approaches: an example would be the widely used institutional appraisals which seek to test the efficiencies or otherwise of governmental systems. The weaknesses of institutional appraisal are that fundamental power relationships can be obscured in states which have been 'hollowed out' (Holloway), or where an institutional façade (Richards, 1996) hides other, often patrimonial types of resource allocation.
- Rational choice theory: this asserts that individuals behave in ways which are determined by their own self-interest, based in cost-benefit analysis of how they believe they will materially benefit from a choice of option open to them. However, the weaknesses of this approach as it relates to chronic poverty analysis is that people make more complex choices based in assessment of other collective identities such as family and community. They may not choose an option which represents the maximisation of material reward, or might make an inaccurate assessment of what that might be.
- Feminist perspectives: have been particularly important in demonstrating the weaknesses of assuming that individuals are motivated by self-interest and material concerns and have also shown that household-based quantitative research is particularly



inaccurate in terms of significant intra-household differences in income and consumption between the genders

- Marxist theory: stresses the role of classes in historical change, whereby capitalist accumulation leads to contradictory interests held by different groups in a society. Stakeholder analysis is used in poverty research to reflect the idea that different groups have competing interests and that unless these can be analysed and negotiated certain groups may harbour reasons to prevent particular outcomes of poverty reduction policy.
- Discourse theory: has established that people's identities are critical to their forms of behaviour and participation in development. Identities are also actively constructed for them by power-holders seeking to recruit political support by appealing to a particular collectivity: a region, ethnicity or historical identity. Ideas of participation, empowerment and ownership by the subjects of research are partly a response to the writings of discourse theorists.
- Structure and agency debates: are at the core of much political science analysis although more obviously prominent in Marxian accounts. These remind us that the process of political change and the positioning of the poor are a complex outcome of how different people(s), or agents, relate to and within institutions, or structures. Institutions are formed at particular times by an expressed need of a group of human agents. Over time they can develop 'institutional interests' which prevent them from changing to meet the requirements of a new circumstance. This is important to bear in mind when, for example, a governmental institution is failing to deliver services or perform its role. This could be because the function it actually serves, (such as providing livelihoods for its employees), prevents it performing its 'proper' governance function, (since there is then, perhaps, insufficient resources left to provide services).
- Political economy: this is an important theoretical tool since it recognises the intimate relationship between economic and political factors in processes of change and development. At an international level political and economic factors shape the boundaries of what is feasible and possible in the context of poverty reduction.

Political scientists also share many of their tools for political enquiry with social scientists more generally, including ways of designing research projects, the use of hypotheses and argument, literature reviews and content analysis, interviewing and participant observation, survey research, case studies and data analysis through the use of descriptive statistics, cross tabulation and regression analysis. Qualitative analysis; quantitative methods; and comparative approaches are also shared with other social scientists.



As well as these tools and forms of analysis, political scientists also use more complex concepts which describe the subjects of, types, and patterns of historical political change. However, most of these 'big' ideas are contested. Using concepts can, however, allow us to explore historical questions and development trajectories. For example, the concepts of 'nationalism', 'socialism', 'democracy' and 'secularism' have contested, but constructed meanings in political theory. However, when applied to processes in India, as in Box 4, it becomes clear that they can be used in widely different contexts and from different points of view to describe what a commentator might think has happened.

Source for above section: Morris Szeftel, course materials, 'Government and Politics in India' (University of Leeds, 2001)

**Box 4: How key concepts can have differing meanings**

Compare the following alternative arguments. To what extent are any of them accurate?

- Nationalism: **either** provided a nation-building ideology to unite India's disparate societies **or** legitimised state-led industrialisation and the fostering of an indigenous capitalist class.
- Socialism: **either** expressed an Indian commitment to greater equality, abolishing poverty and removing social discrimination **or** provided a rhetorical smokescreen behind which new privileged classes could develop and consolidate.
- Democracy: **either** reflected a commitment to parliamentarism and multi-party electoral competition **or** represented the reality of trying to meet local and regional demands through the use of government patronage.
- Secularism: **either** represented a commitment to religious tolerance and cultural pluralism within a united nation **or** was a means of suppressing and excluding a whole range of legitimate traditional and local interests.

Source: Szeftel (2001)



2.4.1 Political capital

‘Political capital’ is increasingly recognised as the missing dimension of livelihoods approaches, and as one potential remedy to the limited use of political analysis in studies of development and poverty. To a large extent, political capital is proposed as a means of overcoming some of the problems of using ‘social capital’ as a catch-all concept for explaining the importance of non-material factors in poverty. For example, John Booth and Patricia Richard (1998: 782) argue that in order for associational activism to have political significance, it needs to go beyond social capital and ‘foster attitudes and behaviors that actually influence regimes in some way’. Carole Rakodi (1999: 334) makes a case for political capital because of ‘the significance attached to powerlessness in the poor’s own definitions of poverty’ and defines it as ‘based on access to decision-making’ in the political process (ibid 318).

In a strongly argued paper, Pari Baumann (2000: 6) states that political capital ‘is one of the key capital assets on which people draw to build their livelihoods’. Claims and assets are defined as ‘rights’ that are politically defended, and that ‘how people access these assets depends on their political capital’ (op. cit.). As such, political capital acts ‘as a gatekeeper asset, permitting or preventing the accumulation of other assets upon which successful poverty-reducing growth depends’ (Booth *et al.*, 1998: 79 cited in Rakodi, 1999: 318). Political capital also helps to explain where local people are situated in terms of the balance of power in relation to other groups (Baumann, 2000: 6).

The most extensive elaboration of political capital as an operational concept comes from Regina Birner and Heidi Wittner (2000: 6), who propose a distinction between ‘instrumental’ and ‘structural’ political capital.

- Structural political capital ‘refers to the structural variables of the political system which influence the possibilities of diverse actors to accumulate instrumental political capital and condition the effectiveness of different types of political capital’. This includes not only democratic political institutions, political openness, devolution, and civil rights, but also ‘perverse political capital’ such as institutions of repression (which can catalyse activism and demand-making).
- Instrumental political capital ‘consists of the resources which an actor...can dispose of and use to influence policy formation processes and realise outcomes which are in an actor’s perceived interest’.



As yet, studies of political capital have tended to dwell on the links between political capital and poverty reduction, rather than those between low levels of political capital and poverty itself, chronic or otherwise. Research has so far focused on the transformation of social into political capital, particularly in terms of how local communities and groups can influence policy (Birner and Wittner 2000, Booth and Richards, 1998), on the links between political capital and levels of democracy (Booth and Richards 1998), and also on elaborating the analytical, conceptual and practical relationship of political capital to other capital assets within the sustainable livelihoods framework (Baumann 2000; Rakodi, 1999).

Following the distinction between structural and instrumental types of political capital, a number of key researchable variables emerge (Box 5). Rakodi (1999: 318) notes that levels of political capital are highly gendered at the local level, a finding that reinforces the need to examine political capital in terms of its relationship to key dimensions of social difference, including age, ethnicity, class and caste.

Box 5: Researchable variables for political capital**Structural political capital**

- Political party system/level of competitiveness
- Political ideologies
- Freedom/presence of the press
- Political openness
- Devolution/decentralisation
- Political relevance of poverty problems in political decision-making
- Participatory elements in political decision-making
- Level of state institutionalisation
- Discretionary administrative authority
- 'Perverse political capital': institutions of repression, 'money-politics', vote-buying, patron-client links
- The political settlement: the balance of power that enables the definition of a structure of rights
- Political accountability and political leadership

Instrumental political capital/political capital as an asset

- Political and civil rights (e.g. of association, voting)
- Rights over natural resources
- Disruptive leverage (rallies, protests, cultural 'weapons of the weak')
- Access to press
- Access to decision-making processes
- Use of scientific knowledge and ideological resources in political discourse
- Level of associational participation
- Contacts/links with public officials
- International resources that can be used in local and national political processes (financial resources, international conventions)

Source: adapted from Birner and Wittner (2000: 20, 24), Booth and Richard (1998: 785) and Baumann (2000)

Macro- and meso-level research is clearly required at the level of 'structural' political capital. One study of political capital uses large-scale cross-sectional survey data of six Central American countries, focusing on items relating to political participation, political attitudes and values, and democratic norms (Booth and Richard, 1998: 784-5). The UNDP's 'Political freedom index' (2000) could also be of use here, as could its work on making the links between human rights and development.

One community level study uses newspaper-based and documentary research, along with key informant interviews, in the context of specific case-studies (Birner and Wittner, 2000). Some of the methods used to explore levels of social capital at community level may also be appropriate. For example, social mapping could be adapted to 'political mapping' of people's access to decision-making institutions, while timelines could be used to track changing levels of political capital, particularly in relation to wider events (e.g. elections, constitutional change). Participatory approaches have also been used to explore people's rights over resources (Slocum *et al.*, 1995).



Researching the politics of chronic poverty

This section includes a series of suggested themes and questions to investigate how politics relates to the reduction and reproduction of poverty. It is not intended to be a universal toolbox as politics needs to be understood within particular contexts and in relation to specific historical and socioeconomic trajectories. However, it does provide entry points for more detailed investigations into how politics relates to the causes, characteristics and eradication of chronic poverty.

'Politics' is considered here at a number of levels within the boundaries of the state, and as pertaining to aspects of political science, political sociology, and, to a lesser extent, political economy. There are at least three different ways to approach politics in this context;

1. Examine the key features of national level political systems. This pays particular attention to aspects of the political system that have proven relevance to poverty (Table 4).
2. A 'bottom-up' perspective investigating the political assets, and the agency, that is required for poor people to influence policy, and politics more broadly, in ways that increase their capacity to accumulate assets and devise sustainable livelihood strategies.
3. A 'citizenship' approach, arising from a particular strand within the growing terrain of politics and poverty research, which suggests that poverty and poverty reduction can be conceived of in terms of 'citizenship', as defined within the parameters of a social and political contract between state and citizen in particular contexts.

Table 1: The political system

Themes	Key questions	Potential links to chronic poverty
Authority	Does the government:	
	Have a monopoly over violence and coercion?	Conflict; instability; respect for govt will influence citizen mobilisation
	Control its borders?	Illegal trade, migration
	Levy taxes widely?	Connection between state and citizens; accountability
	Do any groups benefit from 'disorder'?	Does impoverishment suit certain groups?
Geo-strategic and territorial features	How much confidence do people have in the ability of government to solve the main problems confronting society?	Influences extent to which citizens will pressurise state for pro-poor policy change
	Population size and distribution/density?	Affects capacity of state to reach people, achieve economies of scale, convert economic resources into human development, pool of human resources to draw on
Internal distribution of power	How is policy-making influenced by external actors? (Other governments, regional bodies, aid donors)	Locate intervention points
	Where does authority reside within the political system? (e.g. balance of powers between legislature and executive; role of the military; level of decentralisation)	Influences accountability, restraint on predatory government
	To what extent does legislation originate in the legislature rather than executive?	Scope for wider representation of interests/ideas; breadth of political debate; control over corruption.
	Does the judiciary have the authority to challenge the executive?	e.g. social movements have achieved success by targeting courts; land
	Do sub-national levels of government have significant levels of autonomy?	Complex links between decentralisation and poverty (see below)
Institutionalisation	What role do leaders play at different levels of the system? What is their social background?	
	What mode of operation typifies government conduct? (e.g. do institutional or clientelistic imperatives govern the distribution of resources, appointments etc?)	Influences (mis)use of public resources; shapes political action; scope for reciprocity
	To what extent is politics and policy-making either informal or routine?	
Responsiveness	What are the procedures for recruitment, promotion, and remuneration of staff?	State efficiency; access to different groups; reflects contract
	How accessible are elected representatives to their constituents?	Extent to which poor groups can influence politicians
	How systematic is consultation with users over service delivery?	Relevance, appropriateness of services
Representation/	What degree of political priority is given to issues relating to poverty?	
	What is the constituent basis of each of	



Competition	the main parties? (socioeconomic, ethnic, caste, region, urban/rural)	
	To what extent are poor groups represented within the main political parties?	Strongly informs likelihood of a pro-poor political agenda
	How accessible are the main parties?	Informs possibility of broad pro-poor coalitions
	How broad is the ideological spectrum?	Room for 'alternative' social projects
	How is political competition organised?	
	Are their fair electoral laws?	
	Is there a realistic opportunity for opposition parties to gain power through elections?	
Participation	Are any parties interested of taking ownership of a poverty reduction agenda?	For long-term, cumulative poverty reduction
	What are the main axes of participation/inclusion in system? (e.g. regionality, religion, ethnicity)	Cross-reference with spatial and social distribution of poverty
	How far do women participate in political life and public office at all levels?	Women as over-represented among chronically poor
Resource base	How equal is access for all social groups to public office?	
	To what extent does the state depend on its citizenry for its fiscal base?	Increased responsiveness, social contract
	Is the state heavily dependent on oil/mineral resources?	Politicians reluctant to lose control of access to resources, linked to military rule, disconnect
Accountability	Is the government a recipient of large amounts of aid from multiple donors?	Aid dependency reduces connection with citizens; donor competition can reduce policy-making coherence
	To what extent can the government be held to account by (a) other aspects of the system, (b) its citizens?	
Constitutionality	Are different parts of the state apparatus accountable to each other?	
	To what degree are the actions of the political executive constrained by law and constitution?	
Rule of law	How easily can the government amend the constitution to suit its own purposes?	
	Does the rule of law generally prevail/what are crime levels?	Impact on economic activity, electoral behaviour, protection of physical assets etc.
	How reliable, effective and lawful are the police?	Security as key aspect of poverty
Capacity	How affordable, impartial, and consistent are the courts?	Can poor protect themselves?
	How accessible and reliable are public services for those who need them?	
	What capacity does the state have to formulate and implement national policy initiatives?	
	Can the state raise, manage and deploy public revenue?	
	Does it have the capacity to monitor socioeconomic trends and activities	



	within its borders?	
	How high is the quality of personnel and organisation in the civil service?	
	How high is the quality of personnel and organisation in the military?	
Political elites	How is poverty conceptualised (e.g. are different categories of the poor identified) and prioritised amongst elite groups?	Extent of action on poverty; which poor groups targeted and how.
	What is the character and level of interdependence between elite and poor groups (e.g. exploitative, few links, reciprocity)?	Extent to which political power relations cause and/or reproduce poverty; constraints on elites
	What are the key modes of economic accumulation employed by elite groups? What resources do they rely on?	Poor less likely to be represented where economic and political power is closely entwined
	Is there a culture/code of reciprocity that could catalyse pro-poor action?	e.g. nationalist, ethnic, religious, regional obligations
	In what ways might elites perceive themselves as benefiting from poverty reduction?	e.g. fear of cholera in C19 th European cities generated elite action
	How do politicians interact with market actors?	If ec & pol elites are entwined, less scope for 'progressive' politics
	What is the degree of inter-elite conflict? (e.g. low/medium/high)	Greater conflict / less cohesion allows other groups access
Decentralisation and poverty	How far do sub-central tiers of government have the powers and resources to carry out their responsibilities?	
	How far are these levels of government subject to free and fair electoral authorisation, and to the criteria of openness, accountability and responsiveness in their operation?	
	Is the ruling party at local level 'owned' by an elite group? Does it represent the interests of poor groups?	Strongly informs likelihood of a pro-poor political agenda
	Does the poverty in the decentralised zone result from internal/local or external/national inequalities?	If local inequalities, then decent. is unlikely to benefit poor.
	Which groups are best placed to take advantage of resources and decision-making powers that are devolved?	

Source: Hickey (2002) *The Politics of Chronic Poverty: Towards a Research Agenda*

The themes and variables in Table 4 are compiled from two types of sources: existing governance and/or democracy indexes, and lessons drawn from wider literature on the links between politics and poverty. The most useful sources have been the *International IDEA Handbook on Democracy Assessment* (Beetham et al. 2002) and Mick Moore's (2001b) paper on political systems.



2.4.2 *Social exclusion and poverty*

At its broadest level, social exclusion is defined as ‘the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from the society in which they live’ (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 1995 cited in de Haan and Maxwell, 1998: 2). Social exclusion is not coterminous with poverty (e.g. it is possible to be excluded without being poor), but seeks to provide a broader view of deprivation and disadvantage than poverty. More specifically, social exclusion can be viewed as an analytical concept which directs us to the way in which social structures can generate poverty, but which extends beyond explanations of social or material deprivation to include an analysis of the way in which social institutions function and develop (Gore and Figueiredo, 1997: 41).

In comparison to other poverty debates, social exclusion can be strongly linked to notions of ‘relative poverty’, Amartya Sen’s work on ‘entitlements’ and the ‘vulnerability’ approach forwarded by Robert Chambers (de Haan, 1998: 14-15). There are also links to social and political capital, particularly in terms of working towards policies and programmes for challenging socially-related aspects of poverty. However, social exclusion is more firmly focused on deprivation than either of these concepts [op. cit.]. The World Bank (2000: 117) has adopted the discourse of social exclusion, explicitly recognising the importance of sociopolitical factors in causing poverty – including chronic poverty: ‘Discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, race, religion, or social status can lead to social exclusion and lock people into long-term poverty traps’.

In economic terms, exclusion from labour markets, credit and other forms of ‘capital asset’ are the key processes. Socially, exclusion may take the form of discrimination along a number of dimensions – gender, ethnicity, age – which effectively reduces the opportunity for such groups to gain access to social services and limits their participation in the labour market (See Box 6).

**Box 6: Dimensions of exclusion**

People might be excluded from:

- land and other natural resources (because of scarcity, landlessness and lack of legal entitlement)
- agricultural livelihood (due to lack of access to inputs or labour availability)
- formal and informal employment (relating to patterns of labour absorption, education and social identity)
- organisation and representation (due to patterns of political inclusion)
- social services (distance, usage costs)
- physical infrastructure (distance, usage costs)
- credit
- family and sociability
- housing

'Women', the 'elderly' and the 'young' might be considered to be particularly at risk from exclusion along some or all of these dimensions.

Source: Adapted from Silver (1994) and Gore (1994).

However, in terms of politics, the discourse of social exclusion has been criticised for being apolitical, in that it allows politicians and other officials to avoid discussing 'poverty', a somewhat harsher term (Gore and Figueredo, 1997: 44). Against this, it can be argued that it is arguably social exclusion's incorporation of the political dimension that makes it distinctive. Social exclusion attempts to analyse the political nature of deprivation, in that it examines the links between people's exclusion from political communities – i.e. a lack of citizenship status – and their levels of poverty. 'Political' aspects of exclusion include the denial of political rights such as political participation and the right to organise, and also of personal security, the rule of law, freedom of expression and equality of opportunity (Bhalla and Lapeyere, 1997: 420). More broadly, however, social exclusion is better understood not as a specifically political concept, but as an attempt to 'ground the understanding of deprivation firmly in traditions of social science analyses' (de Haan, 1999: 1).

Social exclusion has also been criticised for emphasising the residual rather than relational aspects of poverty, and thus detaching the study of poverty from a more political understanding of how power relations within society relate to and cause poverty. This is a valid criticism to the extent that a key argument implied by the concept of social exclusion is that exclusion has replaced exploitation as the main process by which people are impoverished, or 'actively underdeveloped' (Byrne, 1999: 44-59). However, other research within the social exclusion paradigm stresses that exclusion is part and parcel of social relations (de Haan, 1999), and needs to be analysed alongside the terms of incorporation



(e.g. adverse incorporation, subordinate inclusion, domination). For Silver (1994: 543), 'exclusion arises from the interplay of class, status and political power' in a way that benefits the included. An example of research that explores this approach would be a study of the Sans in Botswana, who have been conceptualised as being in 'extreme' long-term poverty as a result of being both excluded and structurally incorporated at a low level of socioeconomic reproduction (Good, 1999).

Further criticisms of social exclusion include that in societies where deprivation and political exclusion are mass phenomena that there is little value in labeling the majority of the population as 'excluded'. Social exclusion is also a too broad a notion of deprivation.

Researching social exclusion

Regional studies of social exclusion include sub-Saharan Africa (Gore, 1994) and South Asia (de Haan, 1995). Country studies have been carried out on India (Nayak, 1994; Appasamy *et al.* 1996) and Tanzania (Kaijage and Tibaijuka, 1996), and also Brazil, Yemen and Peru (ILO 1996). Three methodological approaches have so far been adopted in the country case-studies, focusing on *rights*, *groups*, and *institutions* respectively (ILO 1996: 17).

1. Rights-focused studies examine the factors or events which determine whether people are able to secure those rights which affect livelihoods. For instance, the study of social exclusion in India focuses explicitly on T.H. Marshall's concept of 'social' rights, specifying the dimensions of health, education, housing and social security (Appasamy *et al.*, 1996: 2-3). Bhalla and Lapeyre (1997) suggest that the political dimensions of social exclusion can be explored in terms of Marshall's trilogy of citizenship rights (civil, political and socioeconomic).
2. Group-based investigations identify specific social categories and detail their relative deprivation (ILO, 1996: 17). This involves examining the:
 - links between the group's relative deprivation, the working of social institutions and personal attribute's/social identity;
 - relationship of these links to national development trajectories.
3. Institutional approaches seek to draw links between: 'the ability of certain categories of persons to participate in social life (and) the evolving nature of:
 - the economic organization of production and exchange;



- the political order which regulates the exercise of power, lays down standards and duties, and guarantees rights, and
- culture – codes values and aspirations by means of which people communicate amongst themselves, interpret reality and direct practices, and which are transmitted through primary relationships, education, religion and the various means of communication’ (ILO, 1996: 19).

It is possible to merge approaches. For example, the group- and institution-based approaches can be pursued at the same time by examining the participation and interaction of a particular social group in and with a series of institutions.

Social exclusion can be measured through using both quantitative and qualitative methods. De Haan (1999: 11-12) argues that social exclusion can be measured in quantitative terms, while so far the following quantitative approaches have been taken:

- Bhalla and Lapeyre (1997: 426) suggest using the UNDP’s political freedom index, which incorporates personal security, rule of law, freedom of expression, political participation and equality of opportunity, may serve as a proxy indicator for the political dimension of exclusion. Quantitative measures of participation and citizenship rights (voter registration, educational enrolment, land ownership) are sometimes available.
- The UNDP 1998 *Human Development Report* operationalised social exclusion as a key concept for its study of high-income countries, and examined levels of unemployment.

More generally, Silver (1998) suggests a number of approaches to monitoring social exclusion. Also see Room (1995) and Lee and Murie (1999).



Section 3

Designing research

3.1 Types of poverty-oriented research

Within the development field, practitioners and policy-makers draw upon many different kinds of research in order to better inform their understanding of development processes and intervention design. Types of research commonly used are below.

Each of these roles that research can play in the development process can be undertaken via any research approach and using any research method.

Situation analysis

Generally, going in to a specific context as 'blank' as possible - i.e. with few preconceived notions about the nature of the interactions between and among people, institutions and ecosystems - and attempting to understand the key issues and processes relevant to the context. While generally understood to be the first stage in the project cycle, situation analyses are rarely done in great detail, often because development agencies have a preconceived idea of the type of intervention they would like to implement. Because the nature and processes of chronic poverty are so poorly understood, much initial CPRC research is situation analysis - not imminently or directly linked to an intervention, but aiming to provide an understanding of the broader context within which chronic poverty exists.

Needs assessment

This type of research is aimed at determining the needs of a community, usually in terms of a particular sector - e.g. health care needs or agricultural extension needs. It has some similarities to the market research done in the business world. In the context of chronic poverty research, needs assessments may be employed once a specific issue of particular relevance to the chronically poor has been identified. For instance, if a situation analysis suggested that ill health of the breadwinner is a major factor behind pushing households into



chronic poverty, a needs assessment may be undertaken to determine the specific health care needs of breadwinners.

Feasibility study

These studies determine whether a specific intervention is feasible, i.e. do all stakeholders have the required skills and resources, and will the intervention achieve the intended goals?

Baseline study

Baseline studies are undertaken to develop a set of indicators from which to monitor change after an intervention or policy change. They tend to be quantitative in nature. Like needs assessments, baseline studies are usually specifically directed towards the intended outcomes of an intervention, although it is important to take into account potential unintended consequences as well. The methodology exists for the reconstruction of baseline data where baseline studies were not conducted at the start of the intervention (Herbert and Shepherd, 2001).

Pilot projects

These are used to test an intervention on a limited scale, or in a few different ways, in order to confirm feasibility and/or to fine tune the intervention design.

Monitoring, evaluation, and impact assessment

During and after an intervention or policy change, the situation needs to be monitored and evaluated to determine whether all stakeholders are fulfilling their commitments, and if not, why; to determine whether the intervention seems to be having the intended effects and any unintended effects; and to determine whether changes can be attributed to the intervention.

See the toolbox [Section on Impact assessment](#).

Policy analysis

Through analysing the means by which policy decisions are made and implemented, researchers can gain an understanding of the interaction between policy and outcome, and of the manner in which different actors can influence policy formation. As CPRC has a strong policy focus, in terms of better understanding the exclusion of certain groups of the poor



from the benefits of mainstream policy processes and the development of pro-poor policy options, researchers are likely to be undertaking a measure of policy analysis.

Organisational analysis

This involves generating an understanding of the norms, processes and organisational culture of, for example, CBOs, NGOs, donor agencies or government departments. Organisational analysis can feed into policy analysis and other forms of research, but even in isolation a strong organisational analysis can say a lot about the manner in which an organisation understands its role and its target groups and stakeholders. If 'the poor' are targeted but the chronically poor excluded, an organisational analysis can suggest institutional reasons for this exclusion



3.2 Selecting a unit of analysis

Should analysis take place at the level of the individual, household, community, organisation or a combination of these? Different aspects of poverty and deprivation are evident at different levels of social organisation. For example, the lack of street-lighting or access to markets may apply predominantly at the level of the settlement or community while food security and income may apply to the household level, or even at an intra-household level due to differentiation based on age, gender or relationship to household head (Herbert and Shepherd, 2001).

Focus on a particular level of analysis may lead to important gaps in understanding. Assessment or analysis at different levels would also allow any inter-linkages between them to be explored (ibid). Table 1 (from Herbert and Shepherd, 2001; adapted from Hulme, 1997 and Roche, 1999) highlights the advantages and disadvantages of different units of assessment. Gosling and Edwards (1995) have a useful section in their book on recognising and dealing with discrimination and difference, which suggests ways of working with children, women and minority ethnic groups.

**Table 2: Advantages and disadvantages of different units of analysis**

Unit of Assessment	Advantages	Disadvantages
Individual	<p>Easily defined and identified</p> <p>Allows exploration of social relations, including inter-household ones</p> <p>Can encourage more personal and intimate issues to emerge</p> <p>Permits an exploration of how different people by virtue of their gender, age, social status etc. experience poverty/ the effects of the intervention.</p> <p>Enables an understanding of political capital</p>	<p>Most interventions have impacts beyond the individual level</p> <p>Difficulty of attribution through long impact chain</p> <p>Difficult to aggregate findings</p>
Household	<p>Relatively easily identified and defined</p> <p>Permits appreciation of household coping strategies</p> <p>Facilitates analysis of links between individual, household and group/community</p> <p>Enables investigation of links between household life cycle and poverty.</p> <p>Permits understanding of political capital</p>	<p>Exact membership sometimes difficult to assess</p> <p>The assumption that what is good for the household is good for all its members is often flawed.</p>
Group/CBO	<p>Enables a focus on collective action, social and political capital</p> <p>Permits investigation of the sustainability of impacts</p> <p>Enables investigation of community level transformations</p>	<p>Exact membership sometimes difficult to assess</p> <p>Group dynamics often difficult to unravel and understand</p> <p>Difficult to compare using quantitative data</p>
Community/Village	<p>Permits understanding of community level poverty including changes in provision and access to services such as water and electricity.</p> <p>Enables investigation of differences within the community and relations between different groups/factions e.g. clans.</p> <p>Includes investigation of community level transformation and beyond</p> <p>Enables a focus on collective action, social and political capital</p>	<p>Exact boundary sometimes difficult to assess</p> <p>Within community dynamics often difficult to understand</p> <p>Difficult to compare</p>



	Can act as a sampling frame for individual/household assessments	
Local NGO/ Development Agency	Permits understanding of sustainability of impacts and any changes brought about by capacity building Allows effectiveness and efficiency of interventions to be assessed	Within NGO dynamics often difficult to understand Difficult to compare across local NGOs
Institutions	Permits broader change and influence to be assessed	Greater problems of attribution Internal dynamics and processes difficult to explore or understand

Section 4

Research methods

This section first gives key features of the main research methods (Table 2) and then discusses a selection of these in greater-depth.

Table 3: An overview of main research methods

Method	Key Features
Sample Surveys	Collect quantitative data through questionnaires. Usually a random sample and a matched control group are used to measure pre-determined indicators before and after the intervention
Panel Surveys	Return one or more times to the same households or individuals, to create 'panels' of respondents who have been followed over time. This enables a much stronger assessment of change over time.
Focus Groups	Group discussions exploring people's attitudes and opinions towards a particular topic.
Interviews	These can be structured, open-ended or conversational.
Life History Interviews	Centre the interview around the respondent telling his/her own story. This can be focused on the whole life, a portion of the life, or specific aspects, depending on the purpose of the research, but the best results are often obtained from more open ended, interviewee-driven approaches.
Rapid Appraisal	A range of tools and techniques developed originally as rapid rural appraisal (RRA). Involves the use of focus groups, semi-structured interviews with key informants, case studies, participant observation and secondary sources. This is one form of participatory approach.
Participant Observation	Extended residence in a programme/project community by field researchers using qualitative techniques and mini-scale sample surveys
Case Studies	Detailed studies of a specific unit (a group, locality, organisation) involving open-ended questioning and the preparation of 'life histories'.
Participatory Learning and Action	The preparation by beneficiaries of a programme of timelines, impact flow charts, village and resource maps, well being and wealth ranking, seasonal diagrams, problem ranking and institutional assessments through group processes assisted by a facilitator.
Specialised methods	E.g. Photographic records and video.



4.1 Focus group discussions

Focus groups are an exploratory research tool - a 'structured group process' to explore people's thoughts and feelings and obtain detailed information about a particular topic or issue (Sherraden, 2001). Focus group discussions generally last from an hour and a half to two hours, longer than this and the discussion loses momentum (Sherraden, 2001). If the discussion is well managed, it allows deep-seated feelings on a subject to emerge naturally.

Groups are usually composed of seven or eight people, selected purposively, based on a set of criteria, plus a recorder, and led by a trained moderator. This size yields a variety of viewpoints and good participation. Groups can have a larger size range, e.g. four to 12 members, but smaller groups tend to be dominated by one or two people and larger groups inhibit the participation by some members (Sherraden, 2001).

The focus group moderator's job is to facilitate the discussion and to encourage all respondents to contribute their thoughts, feelings and ideas. The discussion is usually semi-structured using a checklist of issues constructed iteratively by the research team.

Focus groups are used widely by product marketing companies and in health related research. In development-related research, focus group discussions are often seen as being a participatory-type method. While they can be used alongside participatory methods, they can be used as a single self-contained method or alongside quantitative research.

Focus group discussions are useful early on in a study when the researcher wants to gain a rapid understanding of key themes or issues of controversy. Use focus groups when you are not sure of the exact questions you want to ask. They can be useful for:

- Generating qualitative data (insights into needs, expectations, attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and feelings of participants)
- Broadening the research field – surprise issues may emerge
- Identifying key issues – for follow up later using other research methods
- Developing emergent themes
- Generating hypotheses for testing later in research
- Developing interview schedules (for key informants or sample surveys)
- Corroborating or triangulating findings generated earlier - by quantitative or qualitative methods (including individual sample questionnaires, structured or semi-structured interviews with key informants, and participative research tools)



- Providing clear and expressive vignettes to support quantitative findings
- Getting reflective feedback for impact assessments or on government policies or interventions



4.1.1 Advantages and disadvantages of focus groups

Advantages

- Relatively easy to undertake
- Efficient – including the views of a number of people at the same time
- Quick - results can often be obtained in a reasonably short time span.
- People often express views that they might not express in other settings, or if interviewed as individuals. Social interaction within the group can yield freer and more complex responses, when there is interactive synergy, spontaneity and security of participants within the group (Sherraden, 2001).
- Flexible - the researcher can probe for clarification or greater detail. Unanticipated lines of discussion can be pursued.
- Responses have high ‘face validity’ due to the clarity of the context and detail of the discussion.
- Work well a range of different populations, including people who may have limited education, modest verbal skills, and low self-esteem, and lack of prior experience expressing personal views.
- Low cost
- Require a moderate to low preparation time and a moderate time for analysis.

Disadvantages

- Moderator requires special skills - stimulating and managing a guided group discussion is not as easy as it sounds. The skill of the moderator can have a tremendous impact on the success of the group, i.e., whether discussion flows freely (Sherraden, 2001). ‘Moderating focus groups is much like writing poetry: anyone can do it, but few do it really well’ (Ellison Research, 2001).
- Groups can be difficult to assemble. It is difficult to persuade people to give up their time and to find a time suitable for all participants.
- The setting and conditions must be conducive to discussion - individuals must feel secure and confident within the group.
- Individual responses are not independent of one another and group dynamics can vary considerably.
- The evaluator has less control than in an individual interview.
- Data can be difficult to summarise and analyse. There is a lot of specific information, some of it very tangential to the topic (Sherraden, 2001).



- Conformity effects – the pressure in groups is to conform to the group norm and so important opinions may not be expressed.
- Participants are not randomly sampled so findings are not generalisable.



4.1.2 Undertaking focus groups

The goal is to obtain as much useful information as possible. Confidentiality helps. Group interaction can bring out additional information. The moderator stimulates the group discussion and keeps it on course, as necessary. S/he should not take a position on anything, but should listen. Every response is considered valid. There is no attempt to support or criticise any response, resolve any issue, address any individual problem or concern or reach any conclusion. Both concrete information and opinions are relevant (Sherraden, 2001). The moderator should not be concerned if the group is silent at any point. It may be the first time that participants have thought about the issue you are discussing.

Basic sequence of events:

1. Formulate the research question
2. Identify and train moderators
3. Generate, pre-test, and revise the interview guide
4. Develop the sampling frame
5. Decide what incentives to use to encourage people to attend. Choose one or more from: payment, food and drink, childcare, feedback on findings, a token gift, transport to and from the site
6. Recruit participants - use local contacts to identify people
7. Make necessary arrangements (setting, equipment, food and drinks, and childcare)
8. Schedule the groups – check that they are at an appropriate time for participants.
9. Introduce everyone – give name badges if it is locally appropriate
10. Explain the purpose of the focus group, how long it will take, and what feedback they will get. Explain that what participants say will be confidential
11. Give the participants time alone together to talk, if you think that would be appropriate
12. Sit everyone down so that everyone can see everyone else.
13. Start the discussion, starting with easy topics first, but make sure that the topics that you most want to cover are towards the beginning of the session
14. Keep a record - tape recorder (audio tape with multi-directional microphone) and/ or a systematic recording form
15. Prepare data and analyse
16. Report



Identifying and recruiting participants

The sampling frame is developed by identifying key population groups whose opinions you are interested in hearing. This may follow a stakeholder analysis exercise, a participatory wealth ranking exercise or some other method of identifying differentiated groups. This may result in the 'population' being divided by characteristics such as age, wealth, gender, ethnicity, health status, etc. The research team will need to decide how many 'levels' of each characteristic are meaningful for the purposes of the study (e.g., perhaps four income levels, two for gender, three for age) and form a group for each level of each important characteristic.

Take care when recruiting participants in order to avoid systematic bias and friendship groups. Systematic (even random) procedures may be desirable. The membership of each group should be as homogenous as possible, representing a particular segment of the population, but group members should not be close friends (Sherraden, 2001). The aim is to 'create conditions that promote both comfort and independence of thought, in order to maximise discussion and self-disclosure' (ibid).

The researcher will need to make initial contact with the prospective participant, assure them of confidentiality and then ask them several questions to ensure that they fit within one of the groups that are being recruited for. The researcher will also need to clarify the participant's expectations and find out whether they are willing to participate in the focus group discussion.

In reality the identification and recruitment function may need to be delegated to local NGO or research assistant. If this is the case, it is important that they follow guidelines agreed by the research team.

Designing an interview guide for focus groups

The purpose of the interview guide is to provide an overall direction for the discussion. It is not the equivalent of a survey instrument and is not to be followed in detail or even necessarily in order. The guide provides the moderator with topics and issues that are, to the extent possible, to be covered at some point during the group discussion. The guide is loosely structured and does not suggest potential responses (Sherraden, 2001).

The guide should proceed logically from one topic to another and from the general to the specific. It is often useful to have broad questions at the start, to enable the moderator to get



the feel of the group, and to contextualise later and more specific responses. Questions that are more important to the research agenda should be presented early in the session, if possible (ibid). Questions should be unstructured, unbiased, non-threatening, and very simple. Specification should almost always be left to the participants, unless the discussion is decidedly 'off track' at which time the moderator should gently redirect it.

The guide should not be overly detailed or have too many questions. A good focus group interview guide consists of twenty questions or less. Pre-testing the guide with several 'mock' focus groups is essential. The aim is to structure questions so that they are clear and stimulate discussion. Several stages of revisions may be necessary before the guide is ready to be used (ibid).

Facilitating the discussion and recording

Each focus group should have a moderator and a recorder or note taker. It is ideal if the moderator is fluent in the local languages, but if absolutely necessary s/he can work through a research assistant/ translator. It is essential that the recorder/ note taker is fluent in the local languages, as the discussion may contain nuances which will be missed otherwise. Even where local people are fluent in English or the national language, they should be encouraged to hold the discussion in their local mother-tongue.

The moderator's task is to make participants feel at ease and to facilitate open communication on selected topics by asking broad, often open-ended questions, by probing for additional information when necessary, and by keeping the discussion appropriately focused. The moderator should generally follow the interview guide, but participants should be able to express opinions, experiences, and suggestions and should be allowed to lead the discussion in new directions as long as they are relevant to the research in general (Sherraden, 2001). As a result the discussion may not follow the interview guide in the order suggested. The moderator should control the discussion to an appropriate level. Too much control and the discussion is stifled, too little and leaders will emerge from the participant group. The moderator should avoid getting drawn into discussing issues her or himself.

A recorder should tape record the discussion and keep notes of comments in the local language (for later translation, as necessary) on a 'recording instrument' form. Ensure that you have participant's permission to record the session. Check the equipment will pick up all voices at the venue. Much detail can be lost by attempting to simultaneously translate into English or another non-local language, and verbatim quotes may be required later for



inclusion in reports. The 'recording instrument' is similar to the interview guide, except probes are removed and plenty of blank space is inserted between questions to provide room for comments. Because the recorder is unlikely to be able write down all comments as they occur, it is important to tape record the session. Soon after the session, the recorder will use this tape to fill in key comments and quotations on the recording instrument.

However, some researchers prefer not to use recorders, as these can be distracting or off putting for the interviewee. Where they make interviewees anxious they should probably not be used.

In all cases the quality of subsequent analysis depends on the quality of the data stored, so the notes taken, or transcripts made are critical. This is one of the main reasons that a high calibre of researcher is required to make this approach work well.



4.2 Interviews

Much of the discussion about focus groups, particularly on designing the interview guide and recruiting participants has relevance to interviews. In addition, though, researchers need to decide which type of interview is the most appropriate for the objectives of their research (Box 2).

Box 2: Types of interview

Standardised, structured interviews:

Ensures that questions are asked in the same way across a sample population by different interviewers. But risks losing important, unanticipated information.

Guided or open ended interviews:

Keeps interaction focused, covering the same ground with respondent sets, while allowing individual experience to emerge. But cannot divert far, or long, from the agenda without losing part of 'the story'.

Informal, conversational interview:

Allow the interviewer to respond quickly to individual difference and situational changes. But a great deal of time is needed to get systematic information .

Source: Herriot Watt (2000)

Note: a life history interview can include elements of all three types of interview.

4.2.1 Undertaking interviews¹

Conducting an effective interview requires skill in four key areas:

1. Listening
 - Sit or stand still where you are
 - Look at the speaker, make a note of non-verbal communication
 - Listen for basic fact and main ideas
 - Listen for attitudes, opinions, or beliefs
 - Do not interrupt the speaker
 - Use positive, non-verbal communication to prompt the speaker

¹ This section draws from Higginbotham, J.B., and Cox, K.K. (Eds.) (1979) 'Focus Group Interviews: A Reader.' Chicago: American Marketing Association.



2. Paraphrasing

- Repeat your understanding of their comments in your own words
- Ask the speaker if what you have said is correct and ask for any clarifications
- Make sure key points by the speaker are captured
- Ask as a check to verify understanding
- It can be useful to summarise discussions onto flip charts (etc.) and points during the discussion. This allows participants to correct any misunderstandings, and also to discuss ideas disconnected from the original speaker. This may allow them to be more honest and/ or critical.

3. Probing questions

- Open probe: Questions that begin with how, what, which, when, and who. Effective to encourage responsiveness and reduce defensiveness.
- Compare and contrast: Questions which ask the other person to look for and discuss similarities or differences. These types of questions help the responder to develop and express ideas while allowing the interviewer to steer the direction of the interview.
- Extension: A question that builds on information already provided.
- Clarification: Questions designed to get further explanation about something already said.
- Laundry list: Techniques where the interviewer provides a list of choice options to the interviewee. This encourages the other person to see beyond a single choice and to state a preference.
- Imagining: Any question which allows the individual to imagine or explore an alternative reality by giving themselves a different viewpoint or perspective.

4. Note taking



4.3 Life histories

[Life Histories Resource Pack](#) – Kate Bird

This Resource Pack presents guidance on using life histories for research on chronic poverty in low income developing countries. It is partially based on a Chronic Poverty Research Centre workshop in Senegal in 2006, where life history and biographical methods were discussed. The core materials presented there have been adjusted and used in training and research design workshops by the CPRC and the Overseas Development Institute since then.

Example Life History Database, based on Ugandan 'Q2' Research - David Lawson, David Hulme and James Muwonge (May 2006)

The purpose of the example database is to highlight how following up a quantitative panel data set with life history data collection of the same households can assist in understanding some of the main propagators, maintainers and interrupters of chronic and transitory poverty. Here, life history data collection was based on two wave, nationally representative, Ugandan quantitative panel data.

- [Overview](#)
- [Example of chronically poor household](#)
- [Example of household moving into poverty](#)
- [Example of household moving out of poverty](#)
- [Example of never poor household](#)
- [Sample semi-structured life history questionnaire](#)

Further References:

- [Report on CPRC Workshop on Panel Surveys and Life History Methods](#) (eds. Baulch and Scott, 2006).
- [Financial Diaries](#), research work undertaken in Bangladesh within the context of *Finance for the Poor and Poorest* research project. The *Financial Diaries* are the result of 42 in-depth case studies undertaken via fortnightly interviews over one year, and incorporate a life history element.
- PANOS [Oral Testimonies Page](#)
- Worthman, C. M. and Brown, R. A. (2005) [Models of the life-course and the youth-to-adult transition: the life trajectory interview.](#)



4.4 Participatory methods

Participatory research refers to both a set of methods and a methodological approach. Research strategies that emphasise participation have evolved from several sources. Models of development theory and practice that evolved in the 70's and 80's required new research techniques capable of gaining understanding of social complexity in rapidly changing and uncertain environments. These new methods drew upon features of *applied anthropology* and *ethnographic research*, to understand and validate different perceptions of reality, and the benefits of unhurried participant observation. Other origins include Freireian inspired *action-research approaches* that emphasise empowerment of poor people to take action, and use experiential learning to challenge theory and practice. The principle of local people's participation in research also owes much to *farming systems research*, which seeks to understand farmers' own decision making processes, especially in complex and risk prone farming environments. Many of the visual analysis techniques applied in participatory research today, stem from *agroecosystem analysis* which uses informal mapping and diagramming, ranking and scoring methods to explore patterns of time, space, flows, relationships and decisions affecting livelihood systems.

Some of the most influential methodological approaches developed since the late 1970's include RRA, PRA and PLA:

- RRA: Rapid rural appraisal: flexible progressive learning, multi-disciplinary research teams, community participation, outsiders gain information from rural people in a timely and cost effective manner
- PRA: Participatory rural appraisal: shift from extractive mode to empowering and facilitating active local participation in planning activities
- PLA: Participatory learning and action: more emphasis on mutual learning, attitudes and behaviour of researchers, and taking action on the outcomes



4.4.1 Guides for methods specific to participatory research

Mapping

- [Integrated Approaches to Participatory Development \(IAPAD\)](#).
- [Mapping Dialogue](#). A research project profiling dialogue tools and processes for social change. Prepared by Pioneers of Change Associates for GTZ (2006)
- [PPgis.net](#). Open Forum on Participatory Geographic Information Systems and Technologies.

Venn diagrams

- [IISD Venn diagrams, webs and trees](#)

Others

- Estrella *et al.* (n.d.) [Learning from Change: Issues and experiences in participatory monitoring and evaluation](#) (introductory chapter)
- Norton *et al.* (2001) [A Rough Guide to PPAs](#)
- Kanji and Greenwood (2001) [Participatory approaches to research and development](#). IIED
- [Participatory Action Research: A Menu of Methods](#)
- [Participatory Methods Toolkit: A Practitioner's Manual](#). Joint publication of King Baudouin Foundation and the Flemish Institute for Science and Technology Assessment (2005)
- [People and Participation](#). Involve (2005)



4.4.2 *Practicalities and difficulties in applying participatory methods*

- Raising expectations - one of the dilemmas of researchers working intensely with poor and powerless people to analyse their situation concerns mediating the stages between research and supporting those communities in taking action they have identified. Research facilitators need to express clearly the purpose of the inquiry and what role, if any, they will play in future activities. Experience has shown that people are prepared to 'risk' participating and remain enthusiastic when there is honest communication about what can (and cannot) be expected as a result of the research.
- Skills and attitudes - the accessibility and simplicity of some of the techniques makes it possible to apply them mechanistically without understanding of their use. Successful application requires good communication, facilitation and conflict negotiation skills. Users who are sensitive to local gender and power differences will bring these dimensions into analysis and reflect them in outcomes.
- There's no blue-print - choice and sequence of methods needs to be adapted to each situation. This requires good team working skills and has implications for training of researchers.
- Getting the right team - requires networking and preparation. Team building is crucial when combining local people, professionals, external researchers, government staff, decision makers
- Staying in the community - logistical practicalities if there is a high proportion of external researchers on the team
- Depth and spread - there are payoffs in terms of time, cost and outcomes in deciding between detailed research in fewer research sites and spending less time in a greater range of communities.



4.5 Choosing which methods to use

Herbert and Shepherd (2001) suggest that before embarking on an impact assessment study, the researchers ask themselves the following questions. The questions below can be usefully adapted for any type of poverty-oriented research.

- What are the objectives of the impact assessment? Is it about 'proving' impact or 'improving' the project or service?
- How complex is the project, what type is it (blue print or process), what is already known about it?
- What information is needed?
- When is the information needed?
- How is the information to be used and by whom?
- What level of reliability is required?
- What resources are available (time, money and human)?
- Who is the audience of the impact assessment study?

Quantitative research methods can be used to collect data which can be analysed in numerical form. They pose the questions who, what, when, where, how much, how many, how often? Things are either counted or measured or a set questionnaire is used. Answers can be coded and statistical analysis used to give responses in the form of averages, ratios, ranges etc (Gosling and Edwards, 1995). See Gosling and Edwards for an introduction to using surveys. Qualitative research methods provide greater flexibility and pose questions in a more open-ended manner. This can make analysis and synthesis more difficult.



4.5.1 *Strengths and weaknesses of different methods*

Different research methods then, have different strengths and weaknesses which need to be taken into account when deciding which methods best suit particular research objectives. Table 3 gives more information.



Table 4: Strengths and weaknesses of key impact methods

Method Criteria	Surveys	Life History based Qualitative Work	Participant Observation	Case Studies	PLA
Coverage (scale of applicability)	High	Low	Low	Low	Medium
Representative-ness	High	Low	Low	Low	Medium
Ease of data standardisation, aggregation and synthesis	High	Low	Medium to Low	Low	Medium to Low
Ability to isolate and measure non-intervention causes of change	High	High	Low	Low	Low
Ability to cope with attribution	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Ability to capture qualitative information about poverty reduction	Low	High	High	High	High
Ability to capture causal processes of poverty and vulnerability	Low	High	High	Medium	High
Ability to capture diversity of perceptions about poverty	Low	High	High	Medium	High
Ability to elicit views of women, minorities and other disadvantaged groups about poverty	Low	High	High	High - if targeted	Medium?
Ability to capture unexpected negative impacts on 'the poor'	Low	High	Very High	High	High
Ability to identify and articulate felt needs	Low	High	High	Medium to Low	High
Degree of participation of 'the poor' encouraged by the method	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Very High
Potential to contribute to building capacity of stakeholders with respect to poverty analysis	Low	Medium	Low	Medium to Low	Very High



Method Criteria	Surveys	Life History based Qualitative Work	Participant Observation	Case Studies	PLA
Probability of enhancing downwards accountability to poor groups and communities	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	High
Ability to capture the multidimensionality of poverty	Low	High	High	Medium	Very High
Ability to capture poverty impact at different levels- individual, household, community	Low	High	High	Low	High
Human resource requirements	Specialist supervision, large numbers of less qualified field workers	High-skilled practitioners who are able to analyse and write up results	Mid-skilled practitioners. Long time commitment. Need good supervision	Mid-skilled practitioners. Need good supervision	High-skilled practitioners
Cost range	Very High to Medium	High to Medium	Medium to Low	Medium to Low	High to Medium
Timescale	Very High to Medium	Medium to Low	High	High to Medium	Medium to Low



4.5.2 *When are certain methods appropriate?*²

Sample Surveys are appropriate when:

- The intervention affects large numbers
- Accurate estimates of impact are required
- Statistical comparisons must be made between groups over time and/or between locations
- Delivery/implementation mechanisms are operating well, thereby justifying investment in the assessment of impacts
- The target population is heterogeneous and it is difficult to isolate the factors unrelated to the intervention

Rapid Appraisal and/or PLA are appropriate when:

- The intervention is promoting participatory principles in (re)-planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation
- An understanding of motivations and perceptions is a priority
- One of the purposes of the study is to assess whether or not felt needs are being addressed by the intervention
- The impact of community-based organisations or other institution building activities are of importance
- There is a need to understand the quality of the data collected through surveys
- There is a need for contextual studies before designing more complex monitoring or impact assessment exercises (e.g. case studies or surveys)

Participant Observation and /or Case Studies are appropriate when:

- An understanding of motivations and perceptions is a priority
- Other methods are unlikely to capture the views of women, minorities and other disadvantaged groups
- One of the purposes of the study is to assess whether or not felt needs are being addressed by the intervention

² Source: Herbert and Shepherd (2001)



- The impact of community-based organisations or other institution building activities are of importance
- There is a need to understand the quality of the data collected through surveys or rapid appraisals (e.g. causal processes of poverty)
- There is a need for contextual studies before designing more complex monitoring or impact assessment exercises (e.g. before carrying out rapid appraisals or before designing a survey)

Sample Surveys are usually not appropriate when:

- An intervention affects a small number of people
- Policymakers are mainly concerned about the outcomes of the intervention e.g. how many people use the health clinic?
- Implementation is recent and untested and it is likely that the way in which the intervention is implemented will have little impact in the present time
- The purpose of the assessment is to study complex activities or processes (e.g. the development and operation of community-based organisations in poor communities)
- The purpose of the assessment is to document easily observable changes in the physical environment or other tangibles
- The purpose of the assessment is to understand whether or not the intervention is meeting the felt needs of the beneficiaries

Rapid Appraisal and/or PLA are not usually appropriate when:

- Interventions are relatively un-complex, in which bounded locations are not units of analyses (e.g. health centres serving a wide catchment area)
- Indicators of impact are uncontroversial and negative impacts are unlikely
- Standardised and statistically representative generalisations for large and diverse populations are regarded as the sole priority
- Participation of beneficiaries is not a priority

Participant Observation and/or Case Studies are usually not appropriate when:

- The intervention is small and 'uncomplicated' providing a specific service or limited intervention which is unlikely to affect community dynamics beyond a few specific effects (e.g. diseases specific health facilities or campaigns)
- Bounded locations are not units of analysis



- Indicators of impact are clear and easily measurable or assessable (by survey or rapid appraisals)
- Indicators of impact are uncontroversial and negative impacts are unlikely
- Information is needed quickly, and standardised, statistical representative generalisations are regarded as the sole priority



4.6 Combining methods and triangulation

Impact assessments at the project level and other forms of poverty-oriented research have moved increasingly from single method to multi-method approaches (Herbert and Shepherd, 2001). Greater use of participatory approaches in impact assessment has also expanded the toolbox (Hulme, 1997 in Herbert and Shepherd, 2001). Although sample surveys are still common, they are now often combined with participatory and other qualitative approaches, as each key method has its own strengths and weaknesses (see Table 3). Qualitative methods (rapid appraisal, participant observation, PLA) are also often used on their own, particularly for NGO implemented projects (Herbert and Shepherd, 2001).

As a result studies are now able to benefit from the advantages of sample surveys and statistical methods (quantification, representativeness and attribution) and the advantages of the qualitative and participatory approaches (ability to uncover approaches, capture the diversity of opinions and perceptions, unexpected impacts etc.; Herbert and Shepherd, 2001). Which method(s) is/ are chosen depends on the nature of the project, the type of information which is needed (or given priority), the context of the study and the availability of resources (time, money, human) (ibid).

Triangulation is simply using different methods to research the same issue with the same unit of analysis (i.e. an in-depth unstructured interview with each member of a household on health care needs following a survey of household heads on the same topic), thus cross-checking one result against another, and increasing the reliability of the result. Contradictory results often bring up important problems with question design, as well as fundamental issues surrounding researcher understanding of a topic.



Section 5

Analysing data

5.1 Coding and analysis of focus groups or interviews

The researcher can choose how to analyse output of the focus group discussions. This might be qualitative, ethnographic, or based on systematic content coding. Even when using a systematic coding method it is a mistake to use focus groups as though they were questionnaire surveys, and to try to use the results to generate quantitative findings. The group members are not randomly selected, they are purposively selected and too small a number to generate statistically valid findings. In addition, the responses given may be influenced by ‘the experimenter effect’ whereby respondents tell the researcher what they think s/he wants to hear and by ‘the conformity effect’ whereby the group norms influences what is and is not said. The best approach to analysing focus group results appears to be thematic.

Most methods of analysis are based on transcriptions of the focus group discussion. The researcher will need to decide whether these notes need to be verbatim or summarised against pre-determined criteria. Researchers may simply wish to extract selected comments, and use selected material to generate short case studies to illustrate findings generated using other methods. This loses a lot of detail, but the detailed coding and analysis of the output from focus group discussions can be very time consuming due to the quantity of detailed information and the diversity of opinions (Sherraden, 2001). Researchers may instead choose to use only some of the information the discussions generate.

Researchers can choose between two systematic approaches:

1. the coded key word approach, or
2. searching the text for particular phrases or words.

This latter approach is often taken by ethnographic research, but the coded key word technique allows for more precision in identifying comments and does not risk ‘losing’ a comment merely because your search for particular words fails to pick up phrases with a



similar meaning. Risks of this increase where your 'population' includes individuals from a wide range of backgrounds, as their language patterns and choices of words may be highly varied.

The coded key word approach involves reading the focus group notes thoroughly and assigning a code/ key word to each comment in order to identify themes or categories within the text. Coding sets the stage for systematic analysis of focus group comments through the application of a 'text management' or 'ethnographic retrieval' program. CAQDAS – computer assisted qualitative data analysis software – can be used to support data analysis. GoFer, NUD*IST, Ethnograph, CODE-A-TEXT. The GoFer (as in 'go for this and go for that') program has been found it to be very suitable for analysing and summarising focus group records. It permits work on multiple files of several thousand pages simultaneously. GoFer will operate on raw text or on coded text, applying logical operations of 'and,' 'or,' or 'nearby.' It will produce a count of instances in which the desired combinations occur, and it will, if desired, show each one on the screen and allow transfer to another document. GoFer is a 'resident' program, i.e., it can operate simultaneously with a word processing program. This makes it ideal for counting types of comments and locating examples for illustration. CODE-A-TEXT can be used with digitised sound files, instead of transcribing and coding the written material. Coding, 'memoing' and analysis can be done in the software while listening to the sound file. CODE-A-TEXT can also be used for content analysis with transcribed data.



5.2 Quantitative analysis

The quantitative analysis of poverty is particularly developed in terms of the monetary dimensions of poverty; poverty in this dimension is viewed as a situation of inadequate income or insufficient consumption relative to an appropriate norm or threshold (a poverty line). A number of standard points can be made in this context, among others:

- The standard of living (income or consumption) is most naturally and easily measured at the household level – meaning that it will not take account of intra-household variations.
- The income or consumption standard of living measure needs to take account of differences between households in their size and composition, and in the prices they face.
- The absolute approach to defining a poverty line views this as representing a situation of minimum subsistence needs.
- Various summary poverty indices can summarise its main characteristics (incidence, depth etc.); the *P* class of poverty indices proposed by Foster, Greer and Thorbecke (1984) are very widely used.

Absolute poverty lines are widely used in low income developing countries, but it should be recognised that establishing a poverty line is not a precise scientific exercise; poverty lines are usually guided by considerations of nutrient (often calorie) requirements. Poverty is related to the concept of inequality, though distinct from it in that it focuses only on those with inadequate living standards; poverty and inequality are more closely related though if poverty is defined in relative terms (i.e. with reference to the population as a whole).

Quantitative analysis of poverty and deprivation though is not limited to monetary dimensions of living standards (e.g. the Human Poverty Index at the national level). Household surveys typically collect information on other important dimensions of living standards including education, health and nutrition, and this is amenable to quantitative analysis. Such analysis is probably most developed in terms of the use of child anthropometric data in studying malnutrition, a key dimension of deprivation. An important advantage of many of these measures of non-monetary dimensions of living standards is that they are frequently measured at the individual level, overcoming one limitation of commonly used monetary measures. For some dimensions though it may be difficult to establish a concept of deprivation analogous to a poverty line.



Other dimensions of poverty are less amenable to quantitative analysis, in particular using the types of data sets discussed here. The *World Development Report 2000/01* stresses the importance of powerlessness and vulnerability as key dimensions of poverty. Standardised surveys are unlikely to be the best tools to collect information on individual and household experiences of powerlessness. And though data from such have sometimes been used in analysing vulnerability, the dimensions of vulnerability they typically capture (often fluctuations in consumption levels) only represent one aspect of a much more complex issue (see the discussion in the *World Development Report 2000/01*).

5.2.1 Poverty as a dynamic phenomenon

Poverty is fundamentally a dynamic phenomenon, and how it evolves over time for countries, groups within countries and individual households are key dimensions. Such dynamics are fundamental in considering chronic poverty, generally based on a notion of persistence. To consider the changing nature of poverty will require either:

- observations of living conditions and poverty at several points in time; or
- measures of living conditions that capture dynamic aspects even if they are only measured at one point in time – e.g. retrospective questions.

Collecting information based on one-off visits will not generally achieve the former (e.g. measuring income); but often will collect the latter (e.g. finding out about past school attendance or attainments). Repeating the exercise at a later date can achieve the former if the data collected (e.g. to measure income or consumption) is consistent.

Collecting retrospective data is a complex exercise and it is especially difficult to collect quantitative data covering a long period of recall in this manner. Most quantitative analysis of poverty dynamics has been based on repeated household surveys. These can take two forms:

- i. **Panel data**, where some or all of those surveyed in the first round are surveyed again in subsequent rounds;
- ii. Repeated **cross sections**, where a new sample is selected each time.

Approach (i) enables the different experience of each individual or household included in the panel to be considered, which can provide information on the factors behind the different experiences of different individuals or groups. Approach (ii) enables an examination of the



differing experiences of different groups within the country, where these groups can be defined in different ways (e.g. by geographic residence, by main economic activity). It enables a comparison between the different groups identified, focusing necessarily on the average experience of each group. But the fact that groups can be defined in many different ways enables a detailed picture to be drawn of different experiences of different groups.

Each approach has its advantages and disadvantages. The great strength of panel data is that they enable household specific factors to be identified and taken account of, factors that are lost in the averaging required in analysing repeated cross sections. The household level focus means that panel data does enable distinctions to be drawn between the chronic and transient poor. However, put precisely because it does not involve averaging across different households, household level comparisons within a panel will be more affected by random measurement error than comparisons between group-level averages from repeated cross sections. Measurement error issues are likely to be particularly acute when the analysis is based on already difficult to measure data such as income or consumption; it is difficult to measure the level of such variables accurately but still more difficult to measure accurately their changes between two points in time. Similar points though apply to other data, such as anthropometrics.

An important point about either approach is that the time periods over which dynamics are considered are usually of necessity quite short; this means for example that most panel data is not suitable for addressing life cycle aspects of poverty dynamics at the individual household level. Information on life cycle experiences of individual households will generally be more effectively captured using retrospective techniques with a qualitative focus – see the toolbox note on life histories.

Finally note that some important dynamic dimensions of poverty, notably vulnerability, may be different to capture adequately using a quantitative approach; qualitative approaches may provide richer information on many important dimensions of vulnerability.

5.2.2 Measuring and studying chronic poverty based on panel data

Chronic poverty can be thought of as persistent deprivation of capabilities. There are many dimensions to this, but much of the analysis to date has focused on monetary dimensions of poverty, using panel data sets. In this line of work, two distinct approaches are generally adopted in defining chronic poverty (Yaqub, 2000):



- i. identifying the chronically poor based on the number or length of spells of poverty they experience (e.g. Baulch and McCulloch, 1998) – so that all poor households are classified chronically poor or not (the latter generally referred to as the transient poor); or
- ii. defining for each household transient and chronic components to poverty (e.g. Jalan and Ravallion, 1998). The transient component of poverty is that due to variability in consumption levels, while the chronic component summarises what the poverty level would be if consumption did not vary about its mean value.

The first approach appears more intuitive, though suffers from the disadvantage that many different criteria might be applied: for example, how many spells does a household have to be poor to be identified as in chronic poverty? In any case the answer will depend on the number of time periods for which data are available. More generally the range of different approaches makes it difficult to compare estimates of chronic poverty across studies that have adopted different approaches – in the way that for example dollar per day poverty levels are compared across countries.

Having distinguished chronic and transient poverty, two key issues of prospective policy relevance that can be addressed using survey data are:

- Examining the characteristics of chronic poverty (e.g. Jalan and Ravallion, 1999, 2000; Gaiha and Deolalikar, 1993)
- Examining the factors associated with poverty transitions – movements into and out of poverty, or those that fail to escape poverty (e.g. Bane and Ellwood, 1986; Stevens, 1994; Baulch and McCulloch, 1999). In the UK CMPO at the University of Bristol are analysing issues of poverty dynamics based on the British Household Panel Survey.

Most quantitative analysis of chronic poverty has been conducted based on consumption or income based standard of living measures, however similar concepts can also be applied to studying malnutrition based on child anthropometric data – for which a clear concept of deprivation can be defined.

Analysing dynamic poverty issues based on repeated cross-sectional data

Analysis of a time series of cross sections is based on the principle of following groups of people from one survey to another, where the focus is on average or aggregate



characteristics of these groups. Deaton (1997) discusses the types of issues that can be addressed using a time series of cross sections.

5.2.3 Sample surveys and their analysis

This section concerns the analysis of chronic poverty based on existing large-scale (often nationwide) household survey data, which are generally conducted by Statistical Offices and other agencies with the expertise and competence to conduct such surveys effectively. Thus this does not discuss the collection of survey data, which is a major issue in its own right. See [Resources section of the toolbox](#).

Traditionally many such surveys took the form of household budget surveys, which focused predominantly on collecting information on households' incomes and expenditures. However, over the last twenty years or so, large numbers of countries have collected multi-purpose household surveys that collect information on many different dimensions of the living conditions and characteristics of households and their members. These have developed as a result of various initiatives including the UN Household Survey Capability Project, the World Bank's Living Standard Measurement Study (LSMS) project, and its Social Dimensions of Adjustment (SDA) initiative in sub-Saharan Africa. The World Bank volume edited by Grosh and Glewwe (2000) provides a detailed discussion of the developments and issues in designing household surveys.

Here the focus is on the analysis of such data, for which two important issues need to be considered.

- i. It is important to take account of sample design in using results based on the survey to draw inferences for the population – often some groups of households are oversampled (have a higher probability than average of inclusion in the sample), while others are undersampled. This is achieved using sample weights.
- ii. Analysis based on such data must always be preceded – and accompanied – by an assessment of the quality, strengths and weaknesses of the data. Though there are few scientific procedures for assessing the quality of quantitative data, most commonly used methods take the forms of either:
 - Assessing the quality of the survey operation (covering aspects such as questionnaire design, supervision, training of enumerators, sampling etc.)



- Assessing the consistency of the data collected with other credible sources (e.g. age structure of household members compared with that in a recent population census)
- Judging the internal consistency of the data set, to the extent that the available information allows this to be judged (e.g. are levels of household incomes estimated broadly compatible with the estimated levels of household expenditures, or is there evidence of overestimation of one or underestimation of the other).
- The conclusions of such an analysis obviously have implications for the relative reliability of different types of data collected.

Read the report on [CPRC Workshop on Panel Surveys and Life History Methods](#) (eds. Baulch and Scott, 2006)

5.2.4 Testing and adjusting for attrition in Household Panel Data

Download the Toolkit Note: [Testing and adjusting for attrition in Household Panel Data](#)

This note describes the use of a simple procedure to correct for attrition due to observables in household panel survey: inverse probability weights. The procedure involves estimating two probit regressions, one with and one without variables that are significantly associated with attrition, and using the ratio of predicted probabilities from these regressions to reweight the observations. The procedure is illustrated in Stata using data from part of the CPRC-DATA-IFPRI panel in rural Bangladesh.

- [Attrition weights](#) (Stata .do file)
- [Bangladesh example](#) (Stata .dta file)

5.2.5 Creating and Interpreting Contour plots using DASP and GNUPLOT

Download the Toolkit Note: [Creating and Interpreting Contour plots using DASP and GNUPLOT](#)

This note describes how contour plots, which are two dimensional representations of welfare distributions that can be regarded as a continuous analogue to transition matrices, can be creating using the Stata package DASP and the graphics package gnuplot. The procedure is



illustrated with panel data from the Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey from 2002 to 2006. Also related source data:

- [VNexample.dat](#)
- [VNexample.dta](#)



Section 6

Dissemination

Policy Influencing and Media Engagement: Resource Pack

Researchers and civil society organisations face challenges when attempting to use research-based evidence to influence pro-poor policy change. Researchers and civil society organisations came together at ODI in early 2005 to draw on their experiences to identify some of the necessary steps in dealing with these challenges effectively. The resource pack produced following this workshop is aimed primarily to support researchers in the Chronic Poverty Research Centre influence policy but is likely to be useful to other researchers and research users.

The resource pack is introduced by an overview paper. The pack then proceeds to highlight the role of policy entrepreneurs in getting issues onto policy agendas. It presents material which highlights the importance of understanding the political and policy context when designing research and constructing research dissemination strategies. Case studies from the Chronic Poverty Research Centre are presented that address the opportunities and challenges in international and national level advocacy. Papers produced by Panos examine the issues faced by researchers when they attempt to use the media to disseminate research results and build domestic and international constituencies for pro-poor action, and provide participants with systematic advice on interacting with the media.

- [Download the Resource Pack](#)
- See also [Resources section](#) (on Dissemination)
- [ODI Civil Society Partnership Programme website](#)
- [Panos Relay Communicating Research website](#)



Section 7

Impact assessment

Impact assessment is a broad field. The impact of the full range of development interventions (projects, programmes, sector wide support and donor country strategies and macro economic growth and programme aid support) can be assessed using qualitative or quantitative approaches or a mix. The objectives of the impact assessment exercise may differ, as may the intended end user of the information. This summary provides a simple overview of key issues and approaches.

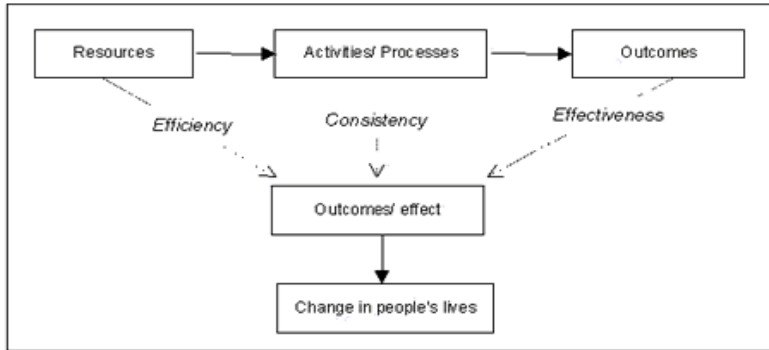
Defining impact:

Forms of impact assessment (IA) vary. IA can focus on whether an intervention has succeeded in terms of its original objectives, or it may be a wider assessment of overall changes caused by an intervention – positive and negative, intended or unintended (Roche, 1999:21).

In order to conduct an effective impact assessment one must first be clear about what one considers to be an impact. Roche defines impact as *'the systematic analysis of the lasting or significant changes - positive or negative, intended or not – in people's lives brought about by a give action or series of actions.'* (1999:21). It can be useful to distinguish between the *impacts* of an intervention and its *outcomes*. For example outcome or effect of a legal rights project might be increased use of the legal system to claim a right whereas its impact might be the change in an individual's quality of life (Roche, 1999:22).

Impact assessments might also wish to examine the efficiency, effectiveness, consistency or impact of an intervention (Roche, 1999:22, see Figure 1 and Table 5).

Figure 1: Distinguishing between efficiency, effectiveness, consistency and impact



Source: Roche, 1999: 23, adapted from Willot, 1985.

Table 5: Efficiency, effectiveness, consistency and impact

Focus of impact assessment	Purpose
Efficiency	Relates inputs to outputs Could the same results have been achieved more cheaply? Would a few more resources achieved much better results?
Effectiveness	To what extent has the intervention achieved its objectives?
Consistency	Were intervention methods/ approaches consistent with the outcomes achieved? E.g. using non-participatory project design and implementation would not be consistent with empowerment objectives
Impact	To what extent has the intervention changed the lives of the intended beneficiaries?



Section 8

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