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.

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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.

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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

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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.

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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

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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 l*et al*one 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 conlflict, 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.

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