



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.