



## Helpdesk Research Report

# Participatory methods for community consultation

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## Question

*Please identify literature outlining the details of specific participatory methods and tools for community consultation that may be suitable for use by a bilateral aid agency in country strategy-level consultations (rather than project level).*

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## 1. Overview

This annotated bibliography identifies literature about specific participatory methods and tools for community consultation.

Some donors have used particular participatory methodologies to inform country level strategy – such as Participatory Poverty Assessments by the World Bank and a donor staff immersion approach by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. However, in general, the literature does not make a distinction between methodologies used at the strategic country strategy level, project planning level, monitoring and evaluation, or the project level. It is clear that a number of methods are used for community consultation, and these may well be adapted (in scope, size or substance) to the different purposes of the consultation, but the methods are fundamentally the same.

This issue was particularly popular around 2000 – notably the year of the seminal 2000 World Bank study ‘Voices of the Poor’ – therefore much of the literature found during the course of this report ranges from between 8 to 15 years old. This paper focusses primarily on more recently published research.

There is a significant amount of literature evaluating individual participatory studies for community consultation. A comprehensive report published by the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) by Leavy and Howard (2013) identifies 84 participatory research studies involving community consultation published over the last seven years. Most of these papers refer to some practical aspects of the methodologies employed; fewer give concrete details about the type of expertise needed to run the processes, the logistics, the identification of participants, or the type of data collected. This report identifies six methodological tools and approaches that were particularly emphasised in the literature, and highlights the practicalities detailed about these approaches. Specifically this paper reviews:

- **Reality check approach.** This is an ‘approach’ rather than a formal methodology or a strict set of tools or methods. It differs from other approaches by focussing on the household, informal interactions and immersion, rather than group-based participatory methods. It is a hybrid approach that also draws on other information.
- **Donor staff immersion approaches.** A predecessor to the reality check approach – this also focusses on the household level. A key principle is immersion of donor staff in local households.
- **Voices and portfolios of the poor.** These were two seminal large scale data projects, with a global scope.
- **Participatory Poverty Assessments.** This survey method was developed by the World Bank to develop country programs. It is an iterative, participatory process that seeks to understand poverty in local, social, institutional, and political contexts. It includes the perspectives of a range of stakeholders – including poor people, government and civil society groups – and involves them directly in planning follow-up action.
- **Community score cards and citizen report card surveys.** Citizen Report Cards are participatory surveys that provide quantitative feedback on user perceptions of public services. Community Score Cards involve a hybrid of the techniques of social audit, community monitoring and citizen report cards – they are used for local level monitoring and performance evaluation.
- **Beneficiary Assessment.** This involves systematic consultation with beneficiaries and other stakeholders to identify, design and get feedback on development activities. It includes a mix of: in-depth interviewing; focus groups; and direct observation.

## 2. Methods for consulting with the poor

### Reality check approach

Of the 84 participatory research studies identified by Leavy and Howard (2013), 12 are based on the reality check approach (RCA). RCA was developed by Sida in 2005-06, to support the Swedish country strategy to Bangladesh 2007-12 and in response to Swedish policy seeking views of development beneficiaries. Sida has also commissioned reality checks in Mozambique (consultancy Orgut are managing) and has just started an evaluation of civil society organisations in Pakistan, Nicaragua and Uganda (IDS are implementing). AusAid has used reality checks in Indonesia. DFID has used it in Nepal.

The RCA is a qualitative approach that focusses on detailed conversations and interactions with a small number of households through staying with families in their own homes (Jupp, n.d. AusAid, 2010). Immersion provides opportunities to understand the context for opinions and experiences, allows for detailed observations and aims to provide a relaxed and trusted environment (Jupp, n.d.; AusAid, 2010).

RCA is best understood as an ‘approach’ rather than a formal methodology or a strict set of tools or methods. It is a hybrid approach that draws on other information including qualitative ethnographic research, participant observation, monitoring and evaluation, and participatory methods (Jupp, n.d.).

It differs from other approaches by focussing on the household, informal interactions and immersion, rather than group-based participatory methods. In particular, it focusses on and combines: living with rather than visiting participants; conversations rather than interviews (with no note taking); learning rather than finding out; household-centred (focusing on families rather than communities); experiential methods (researchers help out with the daily household activities); inclusion of all members of households; using private space rather than public space disclosure; gathering diversity of opinion (multiple realities rather than public consensus); ordinary interaction; cross sectoral; and longitudinal change (Jupp, n.d.; AusAid, 2010; Embassy of Sweden in Maputo, 2011).

### ***Reality Check Approach: A ‘why and how’ Guide***

Jupp, D. (n.d.) 1st draft (Nov 2012). Unpublished.

This draft forthcoming guide to RCAs is based on experience of undertaking several RCAs in different contexts in Africa and Asia for different donors. It synthesises the reflections of RCA participants – including team members, advisors and households.

**Expertise.** The independence of the RCA team is important – they should make arrangements to stay with the families directly and must be seen to be independent, for example, from the government or donor agencies (Jupp, n.d.). This may be difficult if approval from local authorities is necessary.

**Selection of participants.** Selection of host households is usually purposive – with focus on poorer households (Jupp, n.d.). Households may also be selected according to the family members present – for example, ensuring there are children or elderly people present. The selection of participants and subsequent data is kept confidential. RCAs do not aim to provide representativeness – this keeps the costs lower. Jupp (n.d.) emphasises that despite not being representative, this doesn’t mean that the data isn’t generalizable as the data is collected and analysed in a rigorous way (by in-depth probing and triangulation, and through being longitudinal).

**Data.** The RCA participants do not produce individual field reports, instead detailed debriefings with the RCA team leader provide the basis for the team leader to write the reports based on the sharing and comparing of experiences (facilitating triangulation). The debrief session may also uncover observations which have not been documented during the experience (Jupp, n.d.).

### ***Indonesia Reality Check Main Study Findings: Listening to Poor People’s Realities about Basic Education***

AusAID. (2010). Canberra: AusAid.

[www.aid.gov.au/Publications/Documents/aibep-reality-check-report.pdf](http://www.aid.gov.au/Publications/Documents/aibep-reality-check-report.pdf)

This RCA – commissioned by the Contractor Strategic Advisory Services (CSAS) to the Australia-Indonesia Basic Education Program (BEP) – examines ‘on the ground realities’ resulting from the BEP. The study both complements and supplements other forms of evaluation undertaken by the Basic Education Program, and builds on data gathered in an earlier pilot RCA. Notably, the AusAid report emphasises that the evidence provided by RCAs cannot be made from the study sample to the whole Basic Education Program or to education in Indonesia overall.

**Sample and logistics.** Three areas of Indonesia were selected as representative of different geographical regions of Indonesia with a cross-section of social, ethnic and geographical characteristics. The selection was made in consultation with AusAID and the BEP to ensure priority regions were targeted. A random selection of schools supported by the BEP, where the construction had commenced before 2007, was made from each of the regions. Households were identified based on discussions with a range of community members – to identify the poorer families of the area. A total of twenty nine households were included in the study and all included children of basic education age.

Study team members stayed in the homes of a total of 29 households living in poverty (and conversations were conducted with more than 600 people). Each team member spent a minimum of two nights and three days staying in the homes of three families (one in each of three villages).

### ***Reality Checks in Mozambique – Inception report***

Embassy of Sweden in Maputo (2011). Stockholm: Orgut

<http://www.cmi.no/publications/file/4095-reality-checks-in-mozambique-inception-report.pdf>

This report sets out the methodology for a longitudinal series of five RCAs that will take place from 2011 to 2016, focussing on the dynamics of poverty and well-being with a particular focus on key sectors in Swedish development cooperation with Mozambique.

**Sample selection.** Swedish cooperation has a particular focus on one region – the Niassa province. This study therefore has selected three regions, including Niassa, for its research. The three regions have been selected to be as representative as possible in terms of the situation of poverty and well-being in Niassa. Other factors considered include: population density, ethnic populations; border issues; religion; and the presence of traditional institutions, NGOs and other community-based organisations.

**Timing and logistics.** The RCA will be done for a total of 360 households with 120 households in each location. A team of nine enumerators will be trained (primarily recruited locally). Thereafter the enumerating team will split into three groups to work in the three locations, supervised by the relevant field team leader. The survey will be done in parallel with the main fieldwork (over a period of approximately two weeks).

**Data.** The RCAs will have the following deliverables: Field reports from the three study sites; an annual report (including a section on the methodological issues and concerns); and an updated electronic archive.

**Other methodological tools** used to complement the RCA data include: histograms, community mapping, forcefield analysis, venn diagrams, community problem matrix, mapping of the daily duties, house map, matrix of ceremonies, leadership matrix, self-assessment through photos, most important change, and extended case studies.

### ***Other documents:***

Sida. (2010). Reality Check Bangladesh 2009 – Listening to Poor People’s Realities about Primary Healthcare and Primary Education – Year 5, Stockholm, Sweden: Sida. Retrieved from: [http://www.sida.se/Global/Countries%20and%20regions/Asia%20incl.%20Middle%20East/Bangladesh/SIDA61258en\\_Reality%20Check%20Bangladesh\\_%20Web%20.pdf](http://www.sida.se/Global/Countries%20and%20regions/Asia%20incl.%20Middle%20East/Bangladesh/SIDA61258en_Reality%20Check%20Bangladesh_%20Web%20.pdf)

Sida. (2011). Reality Check Bangladesh 2010 – Listening to Poor People’s Realities about Primary Healthcare and Primary Education –Year 4, Stockholm, Sweden: Sida. Retrieved from: <http://www.swedenabroad.com/SelectImageX/193243/Realitycheck2010.pdf.pdf>

## Donor staff immersion approaches

### *Views of the Poor*

Jupp, D. (2007). Participatory Learning and Action 57. December. <http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/G02894.pdf>

### *Views of the Poor: some thoughts on how to involve your own staff to conduct quick, low cost but insightful research into poor people’s perspectives.*

Jupp, D. (2004). Berne: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Unpublished.

This brief journal article by Jupp (2007) is based on extensive methodological notes by Jupp (2004), in her role as lead trainer/facilitator for a Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) participatory research study in Tanzania called ‘Views of the Poor’. The papers examine the background, design considerations, process and results of the intervention. The SDC Views of the Poor study model was influential in the development of the reality check approach.

**Background.** The 2002, SDC in Tanzania commissioned a four-week participatory research study with the aim to deepen SDC staff and partners’ understanding of the lives of the poor and to inform the process of reformulating its country strategy. Uniquely, this

**Logistical arrangements.** Each staff member spent 6.5 days away from work to take part in the study – this included time for training and orientation (2 days), field work (including travel to villages) (3 days), debriefing (1/2 day), and a final reflection workshop (1 day). The researchers spent between 8 and 10 hours with each household, and helped with daily tasks to ensure the household tasks would not be disturbed and also to build trust.

**Costs.** Excluding the costs of the international consultants, costs are modest and include: travel to the rural sites (project vehicles); overnight accommodation at training venue; overnight accommodation near the villages in field bases; food allowance for researchers, small gifts for the households; materials, including disposable cameras (one per household); and fees for the trainer/mentors (Jupp).

**Expertise.** The use of **SDC staff** based in-country – that were not experts in participatory techniques or used to working at village level – prompted certain design decisions: (a) Each staff member would be involved with only two households (to give depth of experience rather than breadth); (b) The focus of the study would be on the family unit – this meant there would be no need for special facilitation skills, required for working with focus groups, for example. Different family members would allow for triangulation; (c) the emphasis on visual tools – like disposable cameras and drawing pictures – meant that the staff did not need special facilitation skills; (d) each staff member was assigned a mentor – an experienced participatory researcher who gave advice before and after. The SDC staff member would debrief the mentor at the end and the mentor would write the final report; and (e) the families would benefit from the visit – with food and help with household/farming chores.

In the Tanzania study, four experienced field researchers formed the core team of trainers/mentors. The team leader was an international consultant and the others were Tanzanian freelance researchers.

## Voices and portfolios of the poor

### ***Methodology Guide: Consultations with the Poor.***

World Bank. (1999). Poverty Group, PREM, Washington, DC.

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPOVERTY/Resources/335642-1124115102975/1555199-1124138742310/method.pdf>

This methodology guide outlines in detail the selection of thematic focus, sampling technique, timetable, preparation, fieldwork and documentation process involved in the World Bank's seminal, and well documented, 'Voices of the Poor' study.

The study was carried out in two parts – the first was a review of participatory poverty studies conducted in the 1990's covering 40,000 poor people in 50 countries around the world. The second part involved primary research by the World Bank in partnership with local research institutes, universities and NGOs and resulted in a series of new studies undertaken in 1999 in 23 countries with 20,000 poor people. Research methods included focus group discussions and individual case studies (via one-to-one discussions).

### ***Portfolios of the Poor: How the World's Poor Live on \$2 a Day.***

Collins, D. Morduch, J. Rutherford, S. Ruthven, O. (2009). Princeton University Press.

<http://www.portfoliosofthepoor.com/>

This extensive study included interviews and the analysis of financial diaries – tracking every financial transaction of individual households – in rural and urban areas of Bangladesh, India, and South Africa during the period 1999 to 2005. Households were interviewed every two weeks over the course of a year.

## Participatory Poverty Assessments

### ***Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA). Webpage.***

World Bank. (n.d.). Washington D.C.: World Bank.

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/EXTPCENG/0,,contentMDK:20507689~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:410306,00.html>

The Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) survey method was developed by the World Bank to prepare and develop country programs. It has been used throughout the world, since the 1980s. This World Bank webpage explains that a PPA is an iterative, participatory process that generates information about poverty in its local, social, institutional, and political contexts (World Bank n.d.). It includes the perspectives of a range of stakeholders, and involves them directly in planning follow-up action.

Poor people are the central stakeholders involved in the research process. PPAs can also include stakeholders from government, civil society, etc. to broaden the understanding of different interests and perspectives. PPA methodology should include gender and social exclusion dimensions. PPAs address national policy – therefore large amounts of micro-level data are collected to help view patterns across

social groups and geographic areas (World Bank n.d.). Various tools and methodologies can be used as part of a PPA – including well-being rankings or venn diagrams (World Bank n.d.). An example is presented below.

### ***Participatory Poverty Assessment Niger***

Office of the President of the Republic of Niger. (2003). Washington D.C.: World Bank.  
<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPCENG/1143333-1116505707719/20509329/ba-larry-NigerFinal.pdf>

This Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) paper explains the methodology and results of a PPA study in Niger. It includes both qualitative and quantitative elements. In terms of sample, the approach used a representative population sample in all regions of the country – with 49 sites selected. A total of 3,950 persons were interviewed. The sampling is categorised and allows analysis according to the following categories: type of interview format (individual interview or focus group); by type of person (local actors, administrative authorities, women’s leaders, etc.); age; rural/urban; gender and ethnic groups.

## **Community Score Cards and Citizen Report Card Surveys**

### ***Citizen Report Card and Community Score Card. Webpage.***

World Bank (n.d.) Washington D.C.: World Bank.

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/EXTPCENG/0,,contentMDK:20507680~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:410306,00.html>

This World Bank webpage explains that Citizen Report Cards provide quantitative data from participatory surveys of perceptions of public services. Citizen Report Cards initiatives often include campaigns involving media and civil society advocacy, to ensure wide engagement. Citizen Report Cards are often used when demand side data (like user perceptions) on quality and satisfaction with public services, is not available.

Community Score Cards generate qualitative data used for monitoring at the local level and performance evaluation of services, projects and government administrative units (World Bank n.d.). The process involves a mix social audit, community monitoring and citizen report cards techniques. By including a platform between service providers and the community, they allow immediate feedback.

### ***The Community Score Card Process in Gambia***

World Bank. (2005). Washington D.C.: World Bank. Retrieved from:

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPCENG/Resources/CSC+Gambia.pdf>

This short briefing examines the Community Score Card (CSC) process in Gambia, which was developed following a commitment in it Poverty Reduction Strategic Papers (PRSP). The CSC pilot project was carried out in two priority sectors of the PRSP – health and education. Approximately 3,500 stakeholders participated in the process at the community level – including teachers, pupils, health workers and community members. The CSC process entailed the following activities: a national workshop, refresher trainers, step-down training, input tracking, service provider self-evaluation sessions, interface meetings, and advocacy and dissemination activities.

### ***Citizen Report Card Surveys – A Note on the Concept and Methodology***

World Bank. (2004) Washington D.C.: World Bank.

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPCENG/1143380-1116506267488/20511066/reportcardnote.pdf>

This short briefing provides a short summary of the concept and key phases involved in implementing a citizen report card (CRC) survey. In terms of **project design**, the briefing advises to, first, identify the scope of the evaluation: a sector, industry, or unit of service provision. Then, second, to identify credible organisations that can undertake the work. In terms of **sample size**, it notes that while a larger sample size is better, this is a trade-off against budget and time constraints. The key is to aim for greater representativeness, rather than just higher numbers.

In terms of **expertise**, survey personnel or enumerators should be trained, and informed about the purpose of the project. If multiple languages are being used, instruments should be re-translated back to English (or the primary language) to check for consistency. Random spot monitoring of interviews should be undertaken.

## **Beneficiary Assessment**

### ***Beneficiary Assessment***

World Bank (n.d.). Washington D.C.: World Bank.

[http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPSIA/Resources/490023-1121114603600/beneficiary\\_assessment.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPSIA/Resources/490023-1121114603600/beneficiary_assessment.pdf)

Beneficiary Assessments (BA) involves systematic consultation with beneficiaries and other stakeholders to identify, design and get feedback on development activities. This evidence can then be included in project/policy formulation. BA can give voice to poor and other hard-to-reach beneficiaries. BA is a qualitative method of investigation and evaluation that relies on: (1) In-depth conversational interviewing around key themes or topics; (2) Focus group discussions; (3) Direct observation and participant observation (in which the investigator lives in the community for a short time). The World Bank (n.d.) notes that BAs are generally low cost, particularly in relation to project costs, with the majority of them costing less than \$100,000 (under 0.05% of the total project cost). They are normally implemented by host-country nationals.

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## Key websites

- International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) – Participatory Learning and Action journal: <http://www.iied.org/download-participatory-learning-and-action>
- IDS – Participation Power and Social Change team publications:  
<http://www.ids.ac.uk/team/participation-power-and-social-change>
- World Bank – Participation at Project, Program & Policy Level:  
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/EXTPCENG/0,,contentMDK:20507658~menuPK:410312~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:410306,00.html>

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## About this report

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