

Livelihoods Impact - Reaching the Poor

Key Lessons Summary

The Primary Sources of lessons in this paper are projects within DFID's Rural Livelihoods Programme (RLP)*. The evidence for these lessons come from evaluations of the projects carried out by the Rural Livelihoods Evaluation Partnership (RLEP). The full version of the Thematic Lessons

Thematic Lessons Papers (TLP) are intended for stakeholders who are involved in policy or programme design and influencing, in order to assist them in making informed decisions in

The TLPs draw together experiences of livelihoods programme in a particular thematic context. This paper focuses on Livelihoods Impact- Reaching the Poor. The lessons in this document are grouped under the following key issues:

- Project Design.
- Poverty Targeting and Entry Points.
- Political Economy.
- Participation.
- Monitoring and Impact

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1. Poverty and equity objectives must be agreed by stakeholders and clearly expressed in project design, indicators, and expected outputs. Also the process of equity and rights analysis should become central to project design and poverty criteria clearly articulated.
2. Projects need to include a capacity for social analysis to improve their poverty targeting and understanding of the poor (traditionally omitted from natural resource technical projects).
3. More time and human resources need to be allocated to project design and overall duration to deal with elites and the local political economy. Capacity to handle conflict management and understanding of local power structures should become a priority project activity.
4. There are positive examples of services that reach the poor and excluded groups, some evidence of tangible gains for certain groups of poorer people, and some anecdotal evidence of livelihood changes. Most change has been in extension approaches where elite capture is not such an issue, and several extension models proved their effectiveness in reaching poor people.
5. Risk assessment that considers the risks for poor participants or target groups should be mandatory before project inception.
6. Building social capital and knowledge increases demand from the poor for their rights and at the same time improves accountability of the public sector to the poor people. Strengthening social capital for the poor should come before providing resource inputs.
7. Poverty analyses needs to capture broader concepts of well-being and an understanding of social empowerment and not just focus on incomes and physical assets. Changes in social or gender empowerment need to be documented and reflected in monitoring and evaluation.
8. Projects tended to overlook the quality of participation and wider livelihoods impacts, placing more emphasis on quantitative achievements.
9. Regular monitoring systems need to capture differential benefits-how different categories of stakeholder are impacted, particularly different categories of poorer households, and differences between categories of people - women and men, children and elderly, etc. Poverty is fundamentally an issue of power and entitlements to resources which projects may not be ready to address because few people are skilled in political economy analysis and projects with limited life-spans may be unable to afford the necessary time, attention and resources.
10. Before project inception, projects need to translate the process of how inputs should lead to expected benefits to the beneficiaries. Process monitoring should be encouraged with M&E becoming more empowering rather than traditionally extractive.
11. Few projects have captured evidence of livelihood or attitudinal changes among their poor target groups, and there is no shared analysis of wider poverty concepts among projects or with partners and communities.
12. Making the government more accountable for its service provisions, requires a programme approach working on both 'push' and 'pull' factors simultaneously.
13. Experiences suggest a poor record of collaborative working, particularly NGOs working with

*8 projects within DFID's Rural Livelihoods Programme (RLP)

1. Fisheries Training and Extension Project- II (FTEP II)
2. Agricultural Services Innovation Reform Project (ASIRP)
3. Research and Extension in Farm Power Issues (REFPI)
4. Poverty Elimination Through Rice Research Assistance (PETRRA)
5. Support For University Fisheries Education and Research (SUFER)
6. Fourth Fisheries Project (FFP)
7. CARE Rural Livelihoods Programme (CARE RLP)
8. Community Based Fisheries Management (CBFM2)

Introduction

A “livelihood” refers to the capabilities, assets and strategies that people use to make a living to achieve food and financial security through a variety of productive economic activities.

Livelihood structures are complex, usually revolving around the incomes, skills and services of all members of the family in an effort to reduce the risks associated with living near subsistence.

In Bangladesh nearly half of its population of 135 million still lives below the poverty lines measured by income, consumption, and ability to meet basic human needs.

Poor people in Bangladesh have a low level of education and limited access to land and hold low-paying and physically demanding occupations of low social status such as wage labour.

Hunger and poverty are the result of various factors that limit the ability of individuals, families and communities to meet their most basic needs. Efforts to improve livelihoods and food security among the poor are premised on: understanding the root causes of their poverty and hunger; enhancing their capabilities, assets, and activities; and contributing to transformation of the structural

Thematic Lessons

Project Design

Project and programme design needs to look at what factors will motivate actors at all levels to bring change. As projects still tend to be inflexible in design, greater importance and improved clarity must be given to aspects of social issues and livelihoods impact at the outset and clearly stated in all project documentation, including GoB project guidance document-Technical Assistance Pro-

Key lesson for 'better practice'

Donors need to be confident that partner organizations already have, or will be able to introduce, the necessary incentives and checks to ensure that agreed poverty and equity objectives are not diluted and that their poverty targeting is clear.

Lessons Learnt

- **Common goals.** Common goals and expectations need to be clarified from the outset so as to achieve the desired developmental objectives of programmes/projects. All stakeholders - DFID, GoB and Ministry, implementing NGOs, contractors and researchers - need to agree and commit to poverty and equity objectives. Social and political concerns need to move much higher up the programme agenda, with those responsible for social analysis given sufficient power and resources in project implementation.
- **Clear poverty targeting and outcomes.** Vagueness about intended beneficiaries very often results in poor targeting. Specific criteria need to be developed to identify the poor and their particular needs; including disparities due to ethnicity, religion or disability. In general, weak poverty criteria have been used in project design; and in particular, the poorest have not been separated from the moderately poor. If target groups are well defined, it becomes easier to ensure focus. An analysis of who the poor are, and what a more inclusive approach implies, needs to be clearly understood at the outset in order for development benefits to flow equitably to the poor.
- **Equity and social change.** Equity and rights should be a starting point, not simply an add-on to technological interventions. Social and gender equity objectives and change need to be articulated in project design, reflected in Objective Verifiable Indicators. Then, management commitment and incentives are needed to make sure these objectives are translated into

Poverty Targeting and Entry Points

Projects need to be clear about exactly who and how they are reaching intended beneficiaries such that the entry point used, and that the methods adopted, do address the needs of the poor through a process of participatory engagement involving a committed multi-agency partnership. Within the RLP there are positive examples of services that reach the poor and excluded groups, some evidence of tangible gains for certain groups of poorer people, and some anecdotal evidence of livelihood changes. Most change has been in extension where elite capture is not such an issue, and several extension models proved their effectiveness in reaching poor

Key lesson for 'better practice'

NGOs are usually chosen to work with the poor, but their approach must meet the needs of the poor by avoiding risks and using participatory approaches. Special attention needs to be taken in designing support to the extreme poor.

Lessons Learnt

- **Entry points.** Very often, the poorest and vulnerable are not being reached or are dropping out because their needs and their limited capacity for risk and investment are not addressed. Specific measures are needed to ensure that the resource poor benefit.
Exclusion of the poor is more likely if the intervention is high risk and requires investment from participants. Projects involving use of common property resources or providing free or subsidised inputs or services are more likely to attract elite capture.
Even NGOs with a strong track record of poverty-focused work may not ensure benefits reach the poor.
- **Participatory approaches.** Participatory tools such as well-being analysis, which should enable projects to understand communities' own ranking and select participants, have not always been used effectively in poverty targeting and identifying entry points.
- **Group membership.** Vulnerable groups are less likely to be selected, and are less likely to sustain their involvement and reap benefits from their participation. The very poor tend not to belong to groups, and self-exclude because their labour productivity is low and the opportunity cost of their time high.
- **Social analyses & risk assessments.** Potential impacts on the poor should be identified through economic, social and political analyses in project inception, and competitive grant scheme proposals in order to be able to target the appropriate categories of the poor. Baseline data and systems to collect poverty data need improvements in timing, appropriateness and methodology.
- **Partnership.** Many government departments and technical research institutes do not have the necessary knowledge, skills or resources to analyse social difference.
Channelling research through NGOs, which tend to be more aware of the needs of the poor, is one way of ensuring better analysis. However, NGOs are not always inclusive in their targeting and service delivery, nor are they automatically capable of providing extension services to the hard-core poor.

Political Economy

One of the greatest challenges faced by projects working towards equitable common property management is understanding the political economy, issues of social mobilization, conflict resolution and in many instances the elite capture of higher value

Key lesson for 'better practice'

If partners are given much more time and resources to build up their capacity and expertise they will be better equipped to deal with elite capture and conflict. And, this needs to be built into project inception.

Lessons Learnt

- **Socio-political analysis.** Socio-political changes and the need to address potential conflicts are rarely analysed in projects, even though securing access to land or water-based rights involves shifts in power at the local level. Understanding the political economy and issues of elite capture in particular, underlines the importance of clarifying what is meant by equity - if a project wants to get beyond equity of inputs, then entry points may be different e.g. staff training on understanding elites and conflict resolution, research into roles and impacts of elites and engagement by influential government officers.
- **Building social capital.** Social capital assists poor people to counteract elite influence, and to influence local administration and service providers. Risks of elite capture can be reduced if projects develop support mechanisms to improve social capital of the poor.

Having more homogenous members in a CBO can enable more equitable relations within the membership. In FFP, *'Fisheries*

Management Committees (FMC) mostly have diverse types of members, more homogenous fisher-based management tends to be more equitable.”

Where technology opens access to common property resources for the poor, there is the danger of the poor losing control of groups unless other support is provided to build up their social and organisational strength to withstand outside pressures and elite capture.

- **Understanding and involving elites.** Elites are part of the reality of poverty in Bangladesh, and their role needs to be understood and addressed in strengthening social capital and enhance responsiveness of local governance.

Elites can play a positive and constructive role if they are engaged in the process in an advisory or support capacity; they can increase the 'bridging' social capital of poor group members, enable them to deal with more powerful stakeholders - government, NGOs and the wider community.

When elite interests threaten to dominate, however, strategic links with government can help ensure that project objectives are not derailed.

Providing support for alternative income generating activities and savings can help break down patron client relations and help groups to be less reliant on elites

Participation

Participation is more than just the application of participatory tools and techniques. People's motivations, and the benefits and costs of participation are central. Participation is central to public sector accountability, and to rights based programming: the rights of all citizens to have a voice in policy making, to hold government and service providers to account.

Key lesson for 'better practice'

Participation in research projects should ensure that user influences design and assessment, but long term activities are needed if participation is to bring direct and social benefits together.

Lessons Learnt

- **Appropriate inputs.** Participatory approaches in needs assessments and monitoring help to ensure that research is carried out, that technology is developed and that it responds to client needs. Good participatory research and analysis requires skills and longer timeframes; and this again underlines the need for partnerships with organizations more experienced in participatory approaches.
- **Social change.** Participation is strongly linked with empowerment and social change. If the difference between participation for material incentives and interactive participation is clearly understood then projects with a strong rights focus can demonstrate participation for social empowerment, and not just material gain.
- **Institutional barriers.** Whilst the use of participatory methods and even the concept of participation is “alien” to many government institutions, the involvement of NGOs is still not enough to ensure effective participation of poor women and men. There may be commitment and rhetoric from the top for participatory methods, but these do not match with realities at the community level. In demand-led research, stakeholder participation requires considerable capacity building in participatory appraisal techniques at different levels; and this needs to be budgeted for.
- **Benefits to the poor.** Participatory Research Appraisal (PRA) should not just be carried out for PRAs sake: projects need to

Monitoring and Impact Assessment

Multidimensional poverty analyses which get beyond a description of economic or income based poverty, to capture well-being, livelihood and attitudinal change, will enable projects to better distinguish between different categories of the poor and to monitor

Key lesson for 'better practice'

All projects need to better understand and document the nature of exclusions, the qualitative nature of social change and the political economy. To achieve this, human resource skills and reward mechanisms, need to focus on facilitation rather than delivery, and inputs that seek empowerment rather than behavioural change.

Lessons Learnt

- **Monitoring poverty impacts.** More attention is needed to ensure that poverty criteria, livelihood changes and less tangible and secondary impacts are reflected in project baselines and monitoring systems from inception. Currently, Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVIs) do not usually require indicators of social change, data has not been collected, and social analysis not systematically built into impact assessments.
- **Disaggregating outcomes.** If project monitoring systems captured differential impacts the managers would improve their understanding of how different social groups and strata in heterogeneous communities benefit differently from project interventions.
- **Monitoring wider changes.** Changes in social or gender empowerment need to be documented and reflected in monitoring and evaluation. The increase in social status within the family and the community is often equally significant but rarely documented but these changes were not sufficiently captured through normal processes. Future programmes should invest in training and systems for structured social observations and analysis to ensure a more comprehensive analysis of impact.
- **Multidimensional analyses.** Analyses which go beyond income poverty and capture wider well-being help projects to

Rights and Demand Creation

In response to the limitations found with typical projects, there is a growing emphasis on strengthening the demands of users on service providers, and recognition that can be addressed not only by government projects but also by private sector and NGOs.

Key lesson for 'better practice'

Long term programmes and partnership are needed if the entitlements of the poor are to be changed and general services made accountable. Demand led services may develop faster through a combination of private sector and government support.

Lessons Learnt

- **Demand creation and responsiveness.** A rights focus, emphasising obligation and entitlements, requires long-term involvement and commitment on the part of all stakeholders; and a programme rather than project approach that engages with both sides of the demand-supply equation.
- **Accountability requires long term change.** 'Projectised' donor support to government departments has led to a focus on short-term goals. Better understanding of government commitment and incentives is needed if effective engagement of poor people in large government programmes is to become a reality.
- **Role for private sector and NGOs.** A combination of private sector and small NGOs taking on roles of service provision for agriculture, fisheries and livestock services does work but the right formula for 'pull' and 'push' needs to be in place and

Way Forward?

1. Programme design needs to reflect the importance of improving the responsiveness of government institutions, so that extension services, local administration and local government bodies respond to the needs and interests of the poor.
2. Donors need to be confident that partner organizations already have, or will be able to introduce, the necessary incentives and checks to ensure that common poverty and equity objectives are not diluted. Programme design needs to look at what factors will motivate actors at all levels to bring change.
3. To bring about significant attitudinal change among the actors a system of proper incentives and other motivational activities such as arranging exchange visits for them and allowing them to participate in workshops etc. should be planned.
4. The process for proper accountability of all stakeholders should be generated. Cross monitoring system for activities and finance would be agreed and determined through participatory method.
5. There may be a greater understanding of social and political realities (elite capture, local drivers of change, political capture of government departments) and exclusion and disparity, but the fact that building social capital takes time ought to be recognised and taken care of.

6. Furthermore, improving livelihoods requires fully integrated approaches (such as the BRAC programme on Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty).
7. A number of the projects have shown how, given sufficient resources, it is feasible to make a significant improvement in the livelihoods of small numbers of people, particularly through extension activities. Future uptake of this should address several issues:
 - Department of Agricultural Extension and Department of Fisheries need to use knowledge and experiences of the past projects they must institutionalise organisational learning.
 - Ways to incorporate lessons from pilots into future programmes need to be found. Scale up of the project on the basis of pilot project experience needed to be done with care and with local resources. Project exit strategies do not address scale-up/out adequately.
 - Government departments must try to sustain such improvements through participation of the local stakeholders and paying more attention to the local knowledge and needs.
 - Projects may create false expectations among users and providers. But by being used to higher standards from projects, target groups may keep up pressure and demand more from government.
8. The reviews underlined the importance of improved coordination between government providers, NGOs and private organisations; and better interagency coordination, to reflect the multidimensional nature of poverty and to enable rights based work that addresses the push and pull sides. To do so:
 - Better collaboration and link, particularly between NGOs and government have to be developed. NGOs are funding dependent and GoB project driven better incentives are needed for collaborative work and policy influencing. Both GO and NGO need to coordinate more effectively on the same issues.

Further Reading

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*More information on these themes & issues can be found in Project Output to Purpose and End of Project Review documents accessible at RLEP.