

**The poor of Zambia speak  
Who would ever listen to the poor?**

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## Foreword

We live in a period of rapid change, some visible, some largely unseen. For those wealthy and privileged enough to be connected with it, the most visible example is communications technology. Largely unseen, except by themselves, are rates of change in the lives of many poor people. Yet, as this book so eloquently and credibly shows, in recent years the poor of Zambia have suffered sharp shocks and downturns with appalling and dramatic effects on the lives and livelihoods. Few countries in the past century can have experienced in peacetime the brutal reversals of economic fortune that have battered Zambia. As so often, the poorer people have been hardest hit. And it is they whose devastating realities are least perceived by those with wealth and power. Nor is this true only in Zambia. To varying degrees it applies to all elites and in all countries in the world.

This points to a newly perceived challenge. It is for those concerned with development policy and practice, wherever they live and work, to keep in touch and up-to-date with the life and conditions of the poor; to appreciate their realities, and to minimize harm and maximize gains and benefits for those who are most at risk.

Fortunately, in parallel with the revolution in communications technology, but again much less visible, the 1990s have seen a quieter but perhaps no less significant revolution in the development, spread and acceptance of participatory approaches and methods for learning and action. These make it easier to policy-makers to be in touch and up-to-date. As this book shows, participatory appraisals can now enable poor people to express, analyse and share with others their complex and diverse realities. In this revolution, Zambia has been one of the countries in the lead. This has been, not least through the pioneering work of John Milimo and his colleagues in the Participatory Assessment Group (PAG).

In the many participatory studies which contribute to this book, they applied and evolved a versatile and varied repertoire of techniques, both verbal and visual. Through these they have gained insights, many of which would have been inaccessible through means of more traditional research. These shed light on poor people's livelihoods and means of coping, and on health services and conditions, education, community-level participation and much else.

The compilation of policy-related insights from participatory research presented here is probably without precedent anywhere in the world. There have been many Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs). That facilitated by the PAG in Zambia in 1994 was, after Ghana's, only the second to use PRA methods of visualization. It had a major influence in establishing these in PPA practice, in South Africa, Mozambique and now many other countries and in continents beyond Africa. In Zambia itself the PPA was only one of a whole series of participatory studies conducted by the PAG. They include beneficiary Assessments, the PPA itself, time series evaluations with revisits, and studies which were sector and group-specific. As the reader will quickly gather, the findings are full of interest and value, and highly credible.

To give a taste, they include: the pervasive effects significance of seasonality; the bad behaviour and attitudes of many (but not all) health service providers and teachers; the painful details of social change such as declining willingness to take in orphans; the abuse and discrimination which many orphans suffer; the cruel poverty of time and energy when many households cannot cultivate for themselves because they must meet their daily needs by working for others; the evidence that the poorest do not get treated at clinics; the increasing burdens on women as they do more of the breadwinning. There is also the positive trend of a perceived improvement in some health services.

There are lessons here for other countries, both North and South. One is how a group of researchers/facilitators like the PAG, once trained in participatory approaches and methods, can become a national asset as they have been in Zambia, able over the years to make such a substantial contribution to up-to-date knowledge and understanding. Another is that some findings can lead to changes in policy and practice.

This book makes a further contribution by pointing to frontiers now facing participatory poverty research. Credibility is now less an issue than it was: the findings presented here carry conviction. More critical is influence on policy and action. Of their nature the influences, causality and processes that change policy are dispersed and opaque. This makes it all the more impressive that the authors are able to point to heightened awareness in Zambia of factors and changes affecting the poor, not least the pervasive importance of seasonality.

Let us hope that this book will reinforce participatory learning and action in Zambia. And that it will inspire other in other countries. Let us hope that its fruits will not only be good things that happen in Zambia. Let us hope that there will be more books like this, in countries of the North and South. For almost everywhere poor people need to be enabled to express and communicate their realities, perceptions and priorities credibly and with force to those in power.

“Who would ever listen to the poor?” remains a critical question. Beyond this, the crux is to make a difference. For policy makers to be informed is one thing. For them to listen is another. For them to change policy is yet another. And for that policy to be implemented and to make a difference for the better for poor people is a further and often weak link. All those along the chain of policy and implementation need to be influenced and then committed. A frontier here is to involve policy-makers and implementers themselves directly in the field of facilitation and learning. For this, participatory approaches and methods have a special potential: they are interested and even fun; they generate insights; and to those who take part, face-to-face with poor people, are often touched and moved. Personal and face-to-face interaction and learning from poor people is powerful for generating commitment. Can Zambia, having been a leader in policy-related participatory research, now also pioneer transformative experiences for those with power to act and to make a difference?

Robert Chambers

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Poverty in Zambia in the 1990s: a decade of change**

From being one of the most prosperous countries of sub-Saharan Africa, Zambia has experienced a very sharp decline, a crash, of its economy, which has had a great adverse impact on the quality of life of its 10 million people.

The decline started with the rising oil prices of the mid 1970s, which co-incided with the drop in world copper prices – copper being the mainstay of the Zambian economy. The droughts which were experienced in the early 1980s have persisted in the 1990s, and their impact, combined with rising cattle morbidity and mortality rates, has contributed to a decline in agricultural production. Liberalisation and structural adjustment of the economy have, at least in the short run, denied the farming community access to markets, both for agricultural inputs and for the sale of produce, and this has in many areas reinforced the tendency towards declining production. In addition, adjustment has led to increased unemployment and livelihood insecurity, due to retrenchment in public service and mining.

Zambia's external debt, US \$6,5 billion at December 1999, is both a consequence of the economic decline and a further cause of it, as the country has to spend almost US\$ 150 million in debt repayments and servicing every year.

The result of these combined economic difficulties has been a very big drop in the quality of life as the situation increasingly worsens, as illustrated by the poverty indicators summarized below. The fall in living standards is felt most acutely by the most vulnerable people who, even before the economic crisis, had difficulty providing the basic necessities for their families and by those people who had known good times and were expecting even better ones.

The picture of economic decline has taken place in a context of political change. Zambia gained its independence in 1964, having been under British rule since the beginning of the century. President Kenneth Kaunda and his United National Independence Party (UNIP), which led the struggle for independence, assumed supreme power. Originally, the political regime was based on a multi-party system. In 1972, however, the constitution was amended. Zambia became a one-party state under the leadership of President Kaunda and the UNIP. Dissatisfaction among the population with the one party state and its policies forced President Kaunda to permit the formation of an opposition party in 1991. The Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) was founded by a number of grass roots groupings including businesspeople, trades unions leaders, students, Church leaders and discontented UNIP politicians. It aimed to replace the one-party regime and to liberalise the economic systems. Elections called in 1991 resulted in a victory for the MMD, and a new President, Frederick Chiluba.

In accordance with its electoral promises the new government initiated a programme of economic reforms shortly after entering office. This programme aimed to restrict the state's role in economic life so that the private sector would become the driving force of economic development. Eliminating the budget deficit, phasing out subsidies, price control, curbing inflation, privatizing state companies and deregulating foreign trade and the foreign currency market were the instruments used by the government to revive the economy. The government promised that this programme would be combined with increased commitment to safeguarding the most exposed groups of the population against the immediate negative effects of the economic reform.

When the Government changed in 1991, the social sector, in the areas of health and education, was on the verge of collapse. Many years of worsening government finances had precluded investment in buildings, equipment and training. From the outset the MMD government set the stage for extensive change in the way the social sector was managed, especially in the delivery of agricultural supplies and the education and health care services. As was the case with economic reforms, there was a political commitment to the protection of the most vulnerable from the effects of institutional and economic reform.

### **Why this book?**

This book is a summary of the findings of a decade of research on poverty which had relied on a range of participatory research tools. The objective of such research has been to accurately represent the perceptions and analyses of poor people concerning their situation, their objectives and their priorities. In the light of this kind of research, the purpose of this book is four-fold:

- To bring out poor people's perspectives of the changing situation in the 1990s
- To report on how ordinary people cope with and adjust to an increasingly difficult situation
- To Report on the actions and approaches of community based institutions which are working to assist the poor
- To contribute to the ongoing process of national and international reflection about how best to reverse current trends.

Poor people, despite often having little formal education, are capable of extremely complex analyses of poverty. Their opinions and understandings can frequently add a great deal to other kinds of information, thereby increasing the accuracy of knowledge about poverty and contributing towards the elaboration of appropriate solutions.

Who are the poor in Zambia? The Consultations with the Poor study, which took place in 1999, asked focus groups of men, women and young people in a range of villages and informal urban settlements to describe different categories of well-being in their communities, and to estimate the proportion of people falling into each category today, and in the past. Their responses are summarized in Table 1.2 (rural) and Table 1.3 (urban). The first column gives the local words used to describe a particular class of

well-being or poverty, while the second summarises the indicators of that class identified by different focus groups.

The different criteria used to describe categories of the poor quickly reveal that, for poor people, poverty is about far more than just income. Having money is frequently mentioned, in contrast with having access to a range of assets needed to gain a livelihood. Physical appearance, state of health, mobility and social position all appear as important indicators of relative wealth or poverty. The frequency with which a person is able to eat meals in an indicator in almost every category in both rural and urban settings. Several indicators appear in more than one category. Because the Tables are summaries of several discussions in a range of settings, this repetition of indicators reflects that people's perceptions of what it means to be poor, or very poor, or suffering, are not the same in every place, and that such perceptions cannot always be easily organized into categories with clear boundaries.

Most of the criteria chosen reflect the changing economic and political situation in the country. In the urban sites, the class of "those who suffer a bit" includes those who "are in formal and informal employment, but earn too little to afford regular meals, health and education costs". In a context of retrenchment, rising inflation and increased costs for health and education, the number of people in this class is generally held to have risen.

The right hand columns of both Tables show local people's estimates of how the proportion of households in their community in each category has changed over time. A range of estimates is given, because each Table presents a summary of the discussion of several focus groups. All responses fall within the ranges given. As with the criteria for different classes, there is a diversity of opinions about change, particularly concerning the middle groups. Even within this diversity, however, some noticeable trends exist. In both rural and urban areas, the number of in the wealthiest class is broadly seen to have decreased, and the number of people in the poorest classes in broadly seen to have increased. In both rural and urban areas, this translates into an increase in the numbers of people who are not only poor but destitute, those who not only cannot eat regularly but do not even have a blanket to sleep under, or who wholly depend on other for food.

Many of themes which are introduced by the definitions of poverty and wellbeing in the two Tables below are pursued in the different chapters of this book, following a discussion of the methods which were used to do the research.

- **Livelihoods** are discussed in Chapter Three, with a particular emphasis on how changes and shocks, such as liberalization and drought, have had an impact on the way that ordinary Zambians find a living. Poor people's analysis of the causes and impacts of their situation are presented, as well as a range of strategies for coping with an increasingly difficult situation.
- **Health** is the subject of Chapter Four, which first looks at an overview of contemporary health issues, placing an particular emphasis on the HIV/AIDS pandemic and its reported impacts. Secondly, there is a discussion of the



impacts of the changes that the government has made to health service provision.

- **Education** is discussed in Chapter Five. The discussion here focuses on two central questions: access and quality.
- **Institutions** are the subject of Chapter Six. A case study is used to illustrate the factors that influence the success of projects managed by a development agent.

The common threads from these four chapters are drawn together in the Conclusions, which discuss both the implications of specific findings, and reflect more generally on the contribution that this kind of research can make in the present-day environment of poverty reduction policy in Zambia and beyond.

**Table 1.1: Change in selected indicators of poverty, over time**

Life expectancy at birth	46.1	1990	39.0	1999
Persons living below the poverty line	5 527 000	1991	6 589 000	1996
Persons living in extreme poverty	4 612 000	1991	5 068 000	1996
Human development index	0.460	1990	0.431	1997
Real GDP growth rate	-2.3	1993	-2.5	1998
Inflation rate	17.2	1997	30.6	1998
Debt servicing (domestic resources, US\$)	60.7	1996	143.0	1998
Number employed in formal sector	544 200	1990	465 000	1998

**Source: Central Statistics Office, Zambia**

**Table 1.2 Wellbeing categories, criteria and proportions of households in each category, six rural sites. Consultations with the Poor, 1999.**

Category	Criteria	Range of % households (Now)	Range of % households (Before)
Abakankala (the rich) Abekala bwino (who live well)	Have big farms; have livestock, eat well; employ other people on their farms; can afford to educate children; have fertilizer; have good health; have good houses; can travel easily; have hammer mills	0 – 30%	10 – 90%
Abakanala panono (who are rich a bit) Abalibwino panono (Who are well a bit)	Have few cattle; cultivate fairly large fields; can afford a bit of fertilizers; some have hammermills; send their children to school; eat two meals a day; harvest enough to eat	2 - 40%	14 - 50%
Incushi (who suffer) Bapina (the poor) Balanda (the suffering poor)	Do not have proper meals; cannot afford to educate children; do not have good cloths; cannot afford health costs; cannot afford to buy soap; can hardly cultivate fields	20 - 90%	0 – 20%
Balanda (the very poor and suffering) Bapina sana (the very poor)	Lack food; eat once or twice in a number of days; poor hygiene; flies all over them; cannot afford school and health costs; lead miserable lives; dirty clothing; poor sanitation, access to water; look like mad people; live on vegetables and sweet potatoes	3 – 85%	2- 25%
The blind, widows, orphans, disabled, dumb, chronically ill, the aged	Cannot cultivate fields; depend on others (churches and neighbours) for food; have no children/dependent to work for them	10 – 40%	2 – 10%



**Table 1.3: Wellbeing categories, criteria and proportions of households in each category, six urban sites. Consultations with the poor, 1999.**

Category	Criteria	Range of % of households (now)	Range of % of households (before)
Bakankala (very rich)	Eat from morning till bedtime; easily afford health and education costs; own and drive cars; own individual boreholes; satellite dishes for TV; big business enterprises; afford private medical care services	0 – 2%	0 – 20%
Abalibwino (well off) Olemela (the rich) Bakankala (the rich)	Own and live in big houses; in formal employment; have lucrative private businesses; eat three meals a day; afford education and health costs for their own families	0 – 15%	0 – 10%
Abaikala bwiino panono (who live a little bit well)	Eat three meals a day; are in formal employment; can afford health and education costs; are well dressed; some have own businesses; have radios and television costs	5 – 50%	5 – 70%
Abaculapanono (who suffer a little bit)	Some are in formal, others in informal employment but earn too little to afford regular meals; health and education costs; some depend on piece work, some in prostitution	15 – 70%	10 – 60%
Bacula (who suffer) Bapina (the poor)	They work for the rich; have no shelter; they do not bath because they	15-70%	5 – 30%

	cannot afford water; they look like made people and are not respected in the community; cannot afford health and education costs; no regular meals; do not have money; children turn into street kids.		
Otsaukilatu (who suffer through and through)	Cannot do piece work; survive through begging; cannot afford health or education costs; no houses of their own; own meal in a number of days; no blankets	10 – 70%	4 – 30%

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Conclusions**

This chapter draws together lessons learned from ten years of participatory work with the poor. The lessons cover four broad areas that are closely inter-related, and they point to pragmatic implications for the development process. The four areas are policy formulation and implementation, decentralisation of service provision, contribution to national poverty reduction strategies, and the usefulness and appropriateness of using participatory methods for making the above three major areas of recommendation operational.

### **Policy formulation and implementation**

Participatory methods have over the years pointed to and improved understanding of several areas of Zambian life that have often been ignored or neglected in processes of policy formulation and implementation. These are the issues of seasonality, context specificity, changing social relationships and the interlinked nature of poverty.

#### **Seasonality**

Participatory research has clearly shown that poverty and many of the factors that influence well-being have seasonal dimensions. This means that the severity of poverty is experienced differently during the different periods and seasons of the year or the month, when food insecurity, illness, heavy labour demands and peak expenditure patterns coincide/

The lesson learned from these issues of seasonality is the need to take into serious account issues of seasonality when formulating and implementing policy. The stress period of December to February may not be the ideal time to start an activity that requires the participation of the community, and is perhaps the worst time to levy any kind of fee or payment from community members. Conversely, the months between June and early August, when some money from the sale of crops may be saved, are likely to represent the time of peak income.

#### **Context specificity**

Participatory reflection and action in Zambia has repeatedly shown the need to take into account the context in which people live and experience poverty. This context can mainly be defined by a combination of influences including the type of agroecological zone, cultural background and sources of livelihood. For example, poverty reduction strategies in a pastoral area will necessarily differ from those areas and districts which do not keep large livestock, or which use them only for draft power. In a like manner, predominantly millet or cassava growing areas will need different interventions from those that apply to maize or high input cash crops.

Similarly social factors make a difference. The organisation of household labour in a matrilineal society will differ from that in a patrilineal one. The development agent who translates national policy to, and spearheads development at, the local level should be aware not only of those differences but also of the factors affecting people's livelihoods which lead from them, such as inheritance practices and bridewealth.

Both quantitative and qualitative research can contribute to understanding these complex patterns and relationships. Using quantitative research methods, the national Central Statistics Office observed large differences in poverty levels between communities which appear similar in many aspects, including ethnicity and agroecological zone. Using participatory research methods, the PAG was able to investigate and explain these differences. A critical mix of human, social and natural capital combined with an appropriate economic activity – often the cultivation of high value cash crops – defined the differences between relatively more and less poor communities. This particular study suggests the potential importance of partnership between different kinds of research for understanding poverty and therefore developing policies which stand a good chance of alleviating it.

### **Changing social relations**

While it is important to understand and appreciate the culture of the various communities that the development practitioner and the policy maker encounter, it is also important to take into account the rapid changes that are taking place in terms of social relations.

The extended family, organised along either matrilineal or patrilineal lines, has acted as the traditional safety net in Zambian society. The orphan, the widow, the old and the retrenched were usually assured of a home among their parents' relatives. This is no longer the case, especially in urban areas where there is a proliferation of child-headed households and street children. People no longer look after their deceased relatives' children and there are now more of these orphans, largely because of the effects of AIDS.

Due to the process of urbanization that has created third generation urban dwellers, the links between the latter and the homes of their fore-parents have been in most cases severely eroded. Rural-urban relationships are weak, and the pattern of exchange of remittances and food between rural and urban areas that is often a feature of other southern African economies is relatively less apparent in Zambia.

Every Zambian language abounds with sayings that extol the virtues of good hospitality, but the tradition of hospitality is another area of social relations that has altered under the impact of increased poverty. During the early 1990s, PAG researchers were generously offered food by research participants on many occasions. However, during the last two years of the 1990s, communities often told the research team, with deep regret, that they were unable to offer them anything due to poor harvests.

The participatory studies carried out during the 1990s have revealed an increasing concern over rising levels of crime in both rural and urban areas. Crop and cattle theft are the most common crimes in rural areas. While cattle rustling has been known about for

years, crop thefts have only become prevalent towards the end of the 1990s when agricultural production fell dramatically. In urban areas, petty theft, child abuse, prostitution, and drug abuse are well perceived to be increasing.

While men have, by and large, continued to enjoy a social status that is higher than that of women, two major developments in gender relations have been identified by the PAG studies, particularly towards the end of the 1990s:

- The female voice is increasingly being heard in important project committees. Many donor assisted development activities, like the Microprojects Unit, demand that up to 50% of committees should be made up of women. The public profile has been raised to the extent that they now regularly act as organisers and managers rather than passive recipients. However, these changes are far from being universally accepted.
- Women are increasingly becoming the major, and in some cases the sole, breadwinner of their respective households. Credit schemes like those supported by DfID and CARE International, and skills training such as that organised by the YWCA have greatly empowered women to effectively assume the role of breadwinner. As such, women's standing both in the household and the community at large has improved. This is a great asset that development practitioners should take into full account when promoting community-based development that requires the participation of all.

Such changes in social relations are an important element of understanding why poverty reduction policies succeed or fail. Social relations – whether in terms of stealing food if you are hungry, or sheltering the orphaned child of your dead brother – are linked to poverty. Policymakers need to reflect seriously on the best ways of taking into account such important areas, and consider the changes which might be necessary to incorporate learning about social changes into on-going plans and strategies for poverty reduction.

### **The interlinked nature of poverty**

The PAG research has revealed the importance of understanding the holistic nature of life for the poor in Zambia. This points to the interlinkage between the various aspects of life. Thus, for example, health is never seen in isolation from other aspects of living, like poverty. Poverty is not just a lack of food, money or clothing, but also incorporates vulnerability, insecurity, and exclusion. Since poverty is one interlinked whole, isolated interventions by sector-based external organisations (for example, the health or extension departments) are unlikely to achieve the comprehensive impact on poverty reduction that is desired. An integrated approach is needed where all development actors, including the poor communities themselves, work to analyse the impact of potential and actual interventions across a range of sectors, and where the multidimensionality of poverty is taken into account at all levels of the policy process.

### **Decentralisation of service provision**

Central government line ministries, led by Health, have achieved varying levels of success in the process of decentralisation. In the case of ministries, decentralisation refers to the national headquarters handing over power for service provision to the district level.



To work effectively, this implies that all stakeholders, including the traditionally passive recipients of these services, should play their appropriate roles in service provision. However, the decentralisation of responsibilities is not always matched by the decentralisation of the resources that are adequate to fulfil these responsibilities. The PAG's experience suggests the need to pay attention to the following points:

### **Information provision**

There must be a continuous flow of information, both vertically and horizontally. The case study in Chapter six of this book shows the importance of information dissemination, which encourages full participation of all stakeholders, promotes transparency and accountability, and assists in conflict resolution. The notion of horizontal and vertical linkages refers to the need for partners at different levels of government to share information among themselves, in addition to ensuring that such information also flows from government to community and from community to government. The particular types of information that should flow more freely concern resource availability, policy pronouncements, and people's rights and entitlements.

### **Provision of an enabling environment**

The process of decentralisation has involved service providers beginning to devolve the power of decision-making to service users. It is argued that these users have an incentive to improve the services that they receive. The mechanism for decentralisation has been described in terms of participation in all development activities, from the initiation and planning stage, through to implementation and monitoring. In order for such participation to occur, all stakeholders, including service providers, NGO personnel, community members and their leader, need to be able to share not only factual information, but also their experiences and concerns. Facilitating such an enabling environment presents a challenge to all those involved.

### **Capacity building**

In order to achieve the enabling environment described above, capacity at both district and the community level needs to be built. Participatory methods have proved most effective in this capacity building process, especially when a participatory process emphasises attitude and behaviour change.

For District level service providers, capacity building through public participation means supporting staff to take into account local people's views in development activities, through letting go of the top-down approaches most are used to, and instead working towards a more community-based approach.

At the community level, attitude and behaviour change focuses on adopting more self-reliant attitudes, through enhancing the capacity of community members to participate in planning and implementing development activities. Where training is given efficiently, the skills gained by respondents become vital to a project's sustainability and success. However, the capacity to offer training of sufficiently high quality does not invariably exist at the District level and even less frequently at the local level.

## **Contribution to National Poverty Reduction Strategy**

A National Poverty Reduction Action Plan (NPRAP) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) have already been drawn up. PAG's experience with participatory approaches would suggest taking into account the following in the implementation of the Plan:

### **Context specificity**

The documents made comments and recommendations that applied to the whole country. The Plan remained at this general level because bringing it down to provincial, district and sub-district level would have turned it into a huge, unattractive volume that would have put off those who should read it. However, PAG findings suggest that this Plan be unbundled and sections of it made applicable to the various agroecological areas, taking into account present sources of livelihood as outlined in Chapter Three of this book. Issues of seasonality also need to be taken into account.

### **Participation**

The NPRAP appears as a government document to be implemented by government departments with the occasional participation of other stakeholders, such as NGOs, Churches, donors, the private sector and communities. PAG experience is that successful and sustainable development activities need full partnerships between and among all the stakeholders. The Micro Projects Unit evaluation called these tripartite partnerships, consisting of beneficiary communities, the District level service providers, and the Microprojects Unit itself, representing Central Government. In the wider sense of national poverty reduction efforts, the process of elaborating a nationally owned poverty reduction strategy will require an innovative approach to building a partnership of all stakeholders, in order that they can sit together, share all the relevant information, and plan and execute development activities.

### **Civil society involvement in monitoring**

The NPRAP suggested that actors representing the broad base of civil society should be involved in monitoring the use of funds that may accrue from debt relief and should also be involved in future external loan negotiations and the planning of specific projects. However, two problematic issues remain:

- The form of communication used is crucial to the success of any dialogue. Attempts to allow comments on national plans by district and community level reviewers may be rendered less successful by an overly academic language used at the national level.
- Priorities for action may diverge at national and local levels. In terms of poverty reduction, at the national level the promotion of economic growth may be perceived as paramount while at the district level reduction of the vulnerability of the very poorest may be viewed as more important. This implies the need for mechanisms to resolve differences over resource allocation.

## **The Participatory Approach**

This book has shown that participatory methods are not just about generating information. By helping to establish a genuine commitment among all actors in the development process, the value of interventions designed to improve the well being of poor people can be increased. This increase in value may be achieved through seeking sustainable contributions from project beneficiaries, or through avoiding expensive mistakes that are based on misunderstanding between local residents and the organisations that represent them.

Participation is also about sharing information and about responding to it with changes in attitudes and behaviour. Poverty reduction will require the participation of all stakeholders. Some of these stakeholders have become accustomed to top-down approaches in which officials make decisions and tell others what they should do. Those less powerful people are in turn used to being the passive recipients of services delivered from the top. It is important to realise that all people can learn from one another and that the sensitive deployment of participatory methods can contribute to supporting changes in both of these mindsets. However, powerful people need humility in order to allow others to inform their opinions.

Collaboration between researchers and respondents, policymakers and programme implementers has been very important in the process of sharing findings. The information generated through participatory research can be used by all concerned with developing strategies that benefit the poor. Similarly the process of exchange between qualitative and quantitative methods has demonstrated the relevance and robustness of each school of thought. This process of sharing could be continued and scaled up.

The series of participatory studies that this book is based on have influenced national level policies in a number of ways that have been detailed under the relevant chapters above. These include:

- **Health:** contribution of methods to identify vulnerable groups for exemption from user fees.
- **Education:** revision of the mandatory requirement for all pupils to wear official school uniforms and of the necessity to pay school fees in cash at a certain time of year.
- **Organisations:** improved techniques for identifying key stakeholders, targeting the type of assistance to local needs and seeking sustainable levels of appropriate kinds of contribution to project costs.

These processes speak well both of the researchers and the officials who took time to listen to the voices of poor people that emerge from the original documents. However, the process of producing regular participatory appraisals of social conditions to allow poor people the opportunity to provide feedback so that services and projects can be improved

is on-going. Consultation alone does not bridge the information gaps between local and national levels; what is needed is on-going critical reflection on methods and interventions, pragmatic action and sustained follow-up.

## About the authors

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