

Evaluation of DFID Support to Poverty Reduction

DRAFT

**Spin-off study:
Impact Assessment for Poverty Reduction**

This paper does not necessarily represent
DFID's thinking on this area

Alicia Herbert
with Andrew Shepherd

**School of Public Policy
The University of Birmingham**

April 2000

Evaluation of DFID Support to Poverty Reduction

DRAFT

Spin-off study:

Impact Assessment for Poverty Reduction

Table of Contents

<u>Section</u>		Page
	Preface	
1	Introduction	1
	1.1 Impact assessment for poverty reduction: what is it?	1
	1.2 The problem of attribution	3
	1.3 The problem of aggregation and synthesis	5
	1.4 When to do impact assessment?	6
2	Approaches to impact assessment for poverty reduction	8
	2.1 The goal: accountability or lesson learning?	8
	2.2 Top-down or bottom-up (participatory) approaches?	9
	2.3 External or internal assessment?	10
	2.4 Objectivist versus interpretive approach?	11
	2.5 Low or high frequency assessment?	13
3	The choice of conceptual frameworks	16
	3.1 What model of change is to be examined?	16
	3.2 What unit(s) of impact are to be assessed?	16
	3.3 What type of impact is to be assessed?	19
4	Methods and tools at the programme and sector levels	21
	4.1 Assessing the poverty impact of country programmes	21
	4.2 Assessing sector programmes	26
5	Assessing the socio-economic impact of economic growth and programme aid	28
	5.1 Orthodox approaches	28
	5.2 Participatory approaches	30
6	Impact assessment tools and methods at project level	33
	References	

Table of Tables

Table 1.1	The ‘scientific’ method and the problem of attribution	4
Table 1.2	Humanities tradition and the problem of attribution	4
Table 1.3	Participatory Approaches and the problem of attribution	5
Table 2.1	The goals of impact assessment	9
Table 2.2	Examples of ‘third’ countries/regions with particular expertise Useful for IA	11
Table 2.3	Comparative strengths and weaknesses of internal/external	12
Table 2.4	Conditions under which high/low frequency assessment Appropriate	13
Table 2.5	Compatability of different approaches to goals of Impact assessment	14
Table 2.6	Compatability of approaches to impact assessment	15
Table 3.1	Advantages and disadvantages of different units of assessment	18
Table 3.2	Key areas of change for projects	20
Table 4.1	India Case Study	23
Table 4.2	Uganda case study	24
Table 4.3	The Zambia Country Programme	25
Table 4.4	Requirements for the different approaches to country Programme assessment	26
Table 4.5	Pro-poor education sector plan	27
Table 6.1	Common impact assessment methods	34
Table 6.2	Strengths and weaknesses of key methods of Ias for Poverty reduction	35

Table of Figures

Figure 5.1	Evaluating the Poverty Impact of Programme Aid	29
------------	--	----

Table of Boxes

Box 1a	Example of complex chain of cause and effect	3
Box 1b	The approach to synthesising the results of the DFID Poverty evaluation	6
Box 3a	Approach from different perspectives	17
Box 5a	Implications of economic reform for India’s poor	30
Box 5b	Bridging the local and the official	31
Box 5c	Uganda: poverty in the context of macro economic reform	32
Box 6a	The ‘classic mix’	37
Box 6b	Participatory Impact Assessment – watch out for the pitfalls!	38

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Impact assessment for poverty reduction: what is it ?

Impact assessment for poverty reduction is fundamentally about assessing change. It is about trying to understand what, how, why and when significant and sustained change takes place in the lives of people living in poverty as a result of an intervention - policy, programme or project intervention. These changes are likely to be experienced differently by different stakeholders; to be both qualitative and/or quantitative in nature; intended and/or unintended and both negative and positive.

But change itself is a 'messy business'. We now know that the linear concept of change which underpinned so many of our development models in the past is flawed. It is rarely, if ever the case, that a combination of inputs or activities, A, will lead to an output B and an outcome or impact C. There are no 'magic bullets', no combination of ingredients, if applied in the right proportions, that will guarantee the reduction of poverty.

In fact, change tends to be highly 'contingent' or dependent on specific events, conditions or context of a given situation **as well as** the action or activity that is undertaken. Hence the change that occurs in poor people's lives is the result of a number of factors which combine to produce it. The same inputs into a project or elements of a policy intervention will not necessarily produce the same results in the future. Given the nature of development interventions and the organisations that support and implement them (organisations which involve people with their own ideas, aspirations and interests), it is particularly important to recognise the contingent nature of the change that they effect.

Change may also be sudden, discontinuous and unpredictable rather than drawn out, smooth and predictable. Manmade and natural shocks could provoke changes in a society, economy or political system which would have seemed unlikely or impossible. Moreover, given the growing interdependence of economies, communication systems and environments, the possibilities for systemic shocks - shocks and changes which have ripple effects and reverberate around the world - are becoming greater. At the local level, sudden shocks such as change in leadership of a community organisation may also bring unexpected changes.

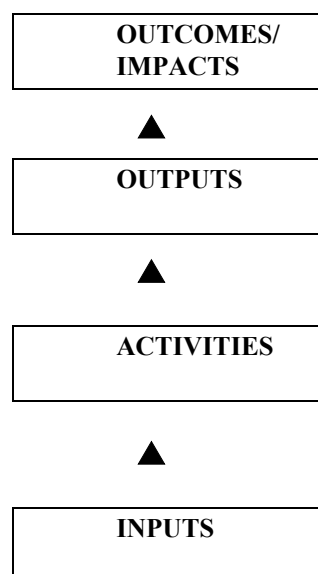
Levels of Change: The Impact Chain

The impact chain illustrates the relationship between inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact. It is depicted simply in Figure 1.1. For example, a set of training inputs (trainers, female trainees, resources) combine to produce an activities (legal rights awareness training courses) which in turn produces an output (people aware of their rights). The outcome or effect of the training could be that those legally aware people could now defend and claim their rights. The extent to which people successfully claiming their rights would lead to a change in the quality of their lives would be considered the impact (Oxfam, draft, 1999).

Reality is usually more complex. A more detailed conceptualisation would have shown a complex set of links as each ‘effect’ becomes a ‘cause’ in its own right generating further effects (see box 1a for an example). A range of contextual factors could also influence the course of events. Indeed, they tend to have greater influence as one goes up the impact chain. Going back to the training example given earlier, whether the course results in trainees’ awareness of legal rights being increased is not only dependent on the trainers’ skills but such as factors as whether the trainees’ husbands would allow them to attend the course. At the level of outcomes and impact, whether the women would be able to access the legal system would depend on how the legal system functions in that context, whether it tends to discriminate against women, and whether support and funding are available.

In addition, the impact chain for some interventions is relatively long, making it difficult to attribute change. Assessing the impact of macroeconomic reforms on poor households is a case in point. Such reforms tend to be difficult to assess and particularly quantify since they are filtered through a variety of social and economic institutions before they reach households. Moreover, understanding these links is complicated and subject to numerous confounding influences (Sahn, 1995).

Figure 1.1: Simple Impact Chain



Box 1a : Example of complex chain of cause and effect

In a conventional microfinance intervention, for example, a package of technical assistance and capital changes the behaviour (and products) of a microfinance institution (MFI). The MFI subsequently provides a range of services to a client, most commonly in the form of a loan. These services lead to the client modifying her/his microenterprise activities which in turn leads to increased or decreased microenterprise income. The change in microenterprise income causes changes in household income which in turn leads to greater or lesser household economic security. The modified level of household economic security leads to changes in the morbidity and mortality of household members, in educational and skill levels and in future economic and social opportunities. Ultimately, perhaps, these changes lead to modifications in social and political relations and structures.

Adapted from Hulme, 1997

1.2 The Problem of Attribution

The most challenging methodological issue that confronts impact assessment and poverty analysis is that of attribution or causality. At the heart of impact assessment is the attribution of specific effects (i.e. impacts) to specific causes (i.e. interventions). But as we saw earlier, the nature of change is such that it could be difficult to unravel what has brought it about. The following tables detail how the three main paradigms of impact assessment: the scientific method; the humanities tradition and the participatory learning and action approach¹ attempt to address this problem. There are strengths and weaknesses in the way each of these approaches attempts to deal with attribution. But, in practice, approaches tend to be combined (particularly scientific and humanities approaches) and this makes for more robust design.

¹ This classification is borrowed from Hulme, 1997.

Table 1.1: The ‘scientific’ method and the problem of attribution

Description of method	How attribution is addressed	Comments
<p>Derives from natural sciences</p> <p>Quantitative in orientation - depends on surveys and statistical analysis</p>	<p>Seeks to ensure that effects can be attributed to causes through ‘experimentation’.</p> <p>Two main approaches:</p> <p>(a) Seeks to compare ‘with and ‘without’ scenarios - commonly used in assessing impact of macroeconomic reforms and adjustment on the poor</p> <p>(b) Use of control groups - a ‘before and after’ comparison of a group involved in the intervention and an identical group that was not involved (the control). Used widely in project assessments</p>	<p>Difficult to identify and sample rigorously a matched ‘control population.’ Hence complex statistical procedures usually have to be carried out to adjust for differences in groups adding to the complexity, time and expertise needed.</p> <p>Difficulties in overcoming ‘reverse causality’ - impact affecting intervention.</p> <p>Withholding support to a control group in order for it to remain ‘uncontaminated’ may be unethical in some situations for example in emergency situations.</p>

Table 1.2: Humanities tradition and the problem of attribution

Description of method	How attribution is addressed	Comments
<p>Roots in humanities</p> <p>Inductive approach with a focus on key informants, recording by notes or image and analyst usually directly involved in data collection</p>	<p>Seeks to provide an interpretation of the processes involved in the intervention and of the impacts that have a high level of plausibility. Recognises that there are usually different and sometimes conflicting accounts of what has happened and what has been achieved by the intervention.</p> <p>Causality is inferred from the information about the causal change collected from beneficiaries and key informants and by comparison with data from secondary sources in/out of the project/programme area.</p>	<p>Studies using this approach tend to have considerable difficulties with respect to the attribution of cause and effect - cannot usually demonstrate the causal link</p> <p>Though this method may not provide the degree of confidence in conclusions as the fully resourced scientific method, the approach can yield, in many instances conclusions may be more valid than those derived from scientific methods which have not been conducted with adequate rigour.</p>

Table 1.3: Participatory Approaches and the problem of attribution

Description of method	How attribution is addressed	Comments
<p>Based on a range of tools and methods which allows beneficiaries to influence the assessment.</p> <p>This approach is still in its infancy.</p> <p>Increasingly used by NGOs eg Proshika in Bangladesh have begun using PLA methods extensively for their assessment and planning exercises.</p> <p>Recent research by Goyder et al on PIA also takes the debate and methodology forward.</p>	<p>No significant attention paid to attribution. Literature only partially addresses the issue.</p> <p>However, subjective perceptions of causality are especially useful in understanding the motivations, incentives and perceived situations of poor people, and designing programmes which fit with those perceptions and are therefore more likely to work.</p>	<p>From the scientific perspective, PIA has grave problems with attribution. This arises out of the subjectivity of its conceptualisations of impact; the subjectivity of the data used to assess impact; the variables and measures used vary from case to case and do not permit comparison. Pluralist approach may lead to a number of mutually conflicting accounts being generated about causality. Also the assumption that because lots of people are taking part in an exercise means that all are able to voice their concerns (so that opinions are representative) is naïve about the nature of local power relations.</p> <p>But for some this is not problematic since it reflects the complexity and contingency of causality in the real world.</p>

1.3 The problem of aggregation and synthesis

Another challenge which impact assessment and poverty analysis have to take into account is that of summarising the findings in a form or forms that are useful and relevant but that don't lose the richness, diversity and complexity of the 'story' that is being told. This is particularly pertinent where the views and perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders have been sought. There are a number of ways to ensure that any synthesis or summary of findings does not omit or misrepresent important views. These include cross checking with different stakeholders and circulating draft reports and findings for comment. Box 1b details the approach to synthesising results in the DFID Evaluation.

Box 1b: The approach to synthesising the results of the DFID poverty evaluation

There was a total of five syntheses in the poverty Evaluation - one for each of the country studies and another pulling together the results and findings of all the case studies - a 'meta' synthesis. The case study syntheses were developed in slightly different ways - in two instances, country teams held a 'synthesis workshop' where ideas and issues were debated and key lessons, findings distilled. These were then shared through presentations with the country steering committees comprising DFID staff. Draft synthesis reports were also circulated widely among DFID staff. In the other two instances, the synthesis was mainly the work of the country team leader in consultation with team members. Key findings were also verbally presented to country steering committees and draft reports circulated.

The 'meta' synthesis evolved from a series of workshops and round table discussions with the core team members of the Evaluation including country team leaders and an 'external' resource person who, at that stage, brought a 'fresh pair of eyes' to the work. The key findings were also verbally presented to DFID staff and the draft report circulated.

Though the process of synthesising the results and findings of the Evaluation involved wide consultation within DFID (and rightly so), it did not engage the partner organisations and governments with whom DFID works. There was no 'external verification' of the synthesised findings.

1.4 When to do Impact Assessment?

Much clearer assessments can be carried out if a baseline study has been conducted, indicators have been monitored efficiently and clear objectives have been defined with logically corresponding activities and indicators.² To achieve this, impact assessment should be embedded in the cycle of the intervention and carried out throughout. However, there are probably moments when more intense reflection and analysis of impact are appropriate. The first is during the design and appraisal stage of the intervention when the exercise of impact assessment would be largely anticipatory assessing likely impact and collecting baseline data.

Wherever possible IA would rely on existing data collection and analysis, avoiding duplication and unnecessary fieldwork. This would be especially likely for sector or policy support interventions. If there is no adequate or appropriate data collection process, consideration should be given to developing a parallel project focused on generating the necessary knowledge in a sustained way which could be institutionalised.

The second is during key moments of the lifetime of the project, for example at the end of one phase and the planning of another. This could be combined with lighter more frequent reviews, say on an annual basis. In contexts of high uncertainty and fluctuations, frequent impact monitoring would be very important so as to adapt the intervention to the changing context and situation. The advent of the process project

² In those instances where baseline studies were not conducted at the start of the intervention, the methodology exists for the reconstruction of baseline data.

has also had implications for the frequency and nature of impact assessment during the course of implementation. The emphasis of the impact assessment may also change during the course of implementation. For example, in those instances where the intervention is being scaled up from a pilot, the IA would focus on learning lessons. Finally there are 'terminal' evaluations which may occur soon after the intervention finished or several years later.

At the programme level, assessment may be carried out at strategic moments. For example, in the case of DFID, the timing of assessments may be dictated by the Country Strategy cycle. There may also be a need for 'mini-assessments' of the country programme in order to appraise its content and direction against the stated aims and objectives - a midstream 'reality check'. However, this is more like a country programme review, which would need to synthesise available IAs, and generate others where there are knowledge gaps.

Chapter 2: Approaches to Impact Assessment for Poverty Reduction

Before embarking upon the design of an impact assessment study for poverty reduction, decisions would have to be taken regarding the broad approach to the exercise. The following sets out the key issues which influence approaches to impact assessment and which should be borne in mind during the decision making process.

2.1 The goal: Accountability or Lesson Learning?

The central issue to be resolved when initiating an IA is whether its goal is that of ‘proving’ the impact of the intervention (accountability agenda) or ‘improving’ practice (lesson learning emphasis). In practice, IA studies commonly incorporate both ‘proving’ impacts and ‘improving’ interventions.

But there are inherent tensions between accountability (upward) and lesson learning. Upward accountability implies critical judgement, may be perceived as threatening to the future of the intervention and is therefore likely to induce people to over-emphasise success in a distorted manner. In contrast, lesson learning implies people acknowledge and embrace error. The emphasis in this approach on weaknesses as well as strengths, failure as well as achievement may make those who are closely associated with the intervention vulnerable to those who would use the information against them. This implies that lesson learning requires a high degree of transparency and trust (Montgomery et al, 1996).

Of particular relevance to impact assessment for poverty reduction is *downward accountability* - accountability to ‘the poor’ and disadvantaged in whose name development interventions are being implemented. It could be argued that these ‘customers’ or ‘beneficiaries’ would have the most interest in ‘impact’ and therefore their position should be strengthened to define and influence how the impact of the interventions should be assessed, as well as what should be assessed. There has been far less emphasis placed on downward accountability by development agencies - the pressure to ‘prove’ impact in the other direction is greater. However, the more recent attempts to develop participatory ways of assessing impact of interventions aimed at poverty reduction do hold out some hope (see for example, recent ActionAid/DFID research).

The emphasis on ‘proving’ or ‘improving’ has implications for the choice of approach(es) to be taken in an IA study. Table 2.1 highlights the approaches associated with the pole positions of ‘proving’ or ‘improving’ and these are discussed in detail below. Table 2.5 comments on the compatibility of these approaches to the goals of upward, accountability, downward accountability and lesson learning while table 2.6 shows the (in-)compatibility of the approaches themselves.

Table 2.1: The Goals of Impact Assessment

	PROVING IMPACTS	IMPROVING PRACTICE
Primary Goal	Measuring as accurately as possible the impacts of the interventions	Understanding the processes of the intervention and their impacts so as to improve those processes
Main Audiences	Academics Policy makers Evaluation Departments Programme Managers	Programme Managers Donor field staff NGO personnel Intended beneficiaries
Associated Approaches/ Factors	Objectivity Theory External Top down Generalisation Academic research Long timescales Degree of confidence	Subjectivity Practice Internal Bottom up Contextualisation Market Research Short timescales Level of plausibility

Adapted from Hulme, 1997

2.2 Top Down or bottom up (participatory) approaches?

Although poor people are often described as the primary stakeholders of development interventions, it is only recently that there have been efforts to develop approaches and mechanisms which include their voices and which give them the space to influence what will be assessed and how. According to advocates of this approach, the challenge is to enable local people ‘to identify their own indicators, establish their own participatory baselines, monitor change and evaluate causality’ (Chambers, 1997:123). It is believed that by this means two objectives may be achieved (1) better impact assessments and (2) intended beneficiaries will be ‘empower[ed] through the research process itself (Mayoux, 1997:2).

In practice, the art of participatory impact assessment (PIA) is still in its infancy and a pragmatic rather than a purist approach has been common. Agencies such as Proshika in Bangladesh use PLA methods extensively for their assessment and planning exercises (see Hulme, 1997, also see Goyder et al, 1998 and Martyn-Johns (1996) for a comprehensive review of PIA)

The reliability of participatory methods, like that of conventional approaches, vary widely, depending ‘largely on the motivation and skills of facilitators and those investigated and the ways in which informants’ perceptions of the consequences of research are addressed (Mayoux, 1997:12-13). Nevertheless, it is argued that ‘a number of rigorous comparative studies have shown that when well conducted, participatory methods can be more reliable than conventional surveys (ibid and see Chambers, 1997:141-146)

The recent study of PIA carried out by ActionAid also cautions that ‘we cannot assume that involvement in the assessment of impact will always be in the interest of poor people or be inherently ‘empowering’.’ It was noted that while this may be a ‘desirable effect’ the evidence is not substantial. In fact, the involvement in participatory approaches have an immediate cost in terms of poor people’s time but benefits and visible improvements may be long in coming. One of the study conclusions was that the amount of immediate empowerment derived from participating in certain participatory exercises is not likely to be high when they become routine or when people have repeated exposure to the same exercises. It is important, therefore to be clear about whether participatory approaches are meant to be ‘empowering’ in itself or as a means to help an agency or group reach conclusions about impact (Goyder et al, 1998)

2.3 External or internal assessment?

Another decision to be made at the outset is whether the assessment team/personnel should be ‘internal’ or ‘external’ to the particular intervention being assessed, or mixed.

It is important to note that the definition of ‘external’ varies widely. For example, the external consultant could be (a) a local i.e. of the country where the intervention has been implemented; (b) from the donors home country eg UK in the case of DFID or (c) from a ‘third country’ with particular expertise in a relevant issue/approach. Indeed, the latter option tends to be under-explored. Table 2.2 provides a list ‘third countries’ with particular expertise.

The need for external assistance often arises from poor local capacity (in terms of both technical expertise and analytical skills). Though there are valid reasons for calling in external assistance, in practice, the contracting out of impact assessment studies have led to many common problems. Lessons include:

- Executing and co-ordinating agencies need to have mechanisms for reviewing reports to avoid long delays in considering and acting upon recommendations
- External consultants should be encouraged to make direct recommendations and draw attention to delicate issues
- Reports need to be presented in a format that is useful for decision makers and should contain the level of detail than managers are able to absorb
- External assessors should be involved in building capacity for impact assessment in the executing or planning agencies

Internal assessments are also not without problems. For example, internal assessors may find it difficult to challenge existing orthodoxy or practices or may find it difficult to appear impartial due to their own interests or staff relations. The decision of whether ‘internal’ or ‘external’ is therefore not a straightforward one. Table 2.3 highlights the comparative strengths and weaknesses of each (see also Rubin, 1995)

Table 2.2: Examples of ‘Third’ countries/regions with particular expertise useful for IA

Country/Region	Area of Expertise
East Asia	Land reform
India	Employment schemes
Bangladesh	Micro-finance
Zimbabwe	Resettlement and community wildlife management
Philippines	Participatory irrigation management
Indonesia	Equitable economic growth
Ghana	Agricultural market liberalisation

2.4 Objectivist versus interpretative approach?

Conventional approaches to impact assessment are primarily concerned with the collection of standardised (quantifiable) data; with the measurement of changes attributable to the intervention. These approaches are typically based on sample surveys, complemented by qualitative investigations to provide the ‘why’. This approach can be complex and time and resource consuming. They also require expertise and therefore tend to be dependent on external assistance. Their main perceived advantage is that they produce ‘robust’ and ‘objective’ claims of impact explicitly due to the intervention and can provide the data needed for cost benefit analysis.

Interpretative approaches are relatively new to impact assessment and poverty analysis and the examples in the field are fairly recent. The literature on ‘participatory’ and ‘fourth generation’ evaluation is instructive in this regard. This literature argues that ‘objectivist’ studies are of dubious use, not just because of their complexity and resource requirements but also because even the best designed and executed study produces findings which are open to debate. It is also maintained that the objectivist approach reduces causality to simple unilateral chains rather than complex webs; it measures the irrelevant or pretends to measure the unmeasurable and, it empowers professionals, policy makers and elites thus reinforcing the status quo and directly retarding the achievement of development goals. (Chambers 1997)

Those advocating this approach believe that there is value in the different interpretations of impacts of a programme/project of primary and secondary stakeholders. These different views should be documented and the areas of agreement and disagreement highlighted. They should also be systematically compared and reconciled. The interpretative approach implies a more participatory approach, associated with bottom up learning which may contribute to building stakeholder capacity.

Table 2.3: Comparative strengths and weaknesses of internal/external assessment

‘Experts’ used	Strengths	Weaknesses
Internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiar with history of the intervention, context and key issues; sensitive to political dynamics (within implementing agency and in the wider environment) which an outsider may misunderstand • Accessible to other staff involved in the intervention • Can present findings in an acceptable way to management so that results have more impact • Low cost – though cost may be difficult to quantify when assessment carried out with other duties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May find it difficult to challenge existing orthodoxy of practices • Difficult to appear impartial due to own interests and staff relations • May have problems addressing the needs of the donor • May lack methodological expertise and lack sufficient critical and analytical skills • Access to information may be constrained due to position in hierarchy • If carried out in conjunction with other duties, may be overburdened.
External (local)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culturally sensitive and should have no language difficulties.* • May provide technical and analytical expertise which is otherwise unavailable • More accessible to project partners and depending on project, DFID. • Will be seen as more ‘legitimate’ by intervention partners who may therefore be more willing to learn from results • Costs lower than UK based consultant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not be familiar with the needs, priorities and culture of the donor agency eg DFID • May have difficulty in presenting results in an acceptable format for donor (DFID) • Staff involved in the intervention may perceive them as a threat • May be perceived to have social or political loyalties which compromise objectivity
External (third country - in the South)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May provide a fresh perspective to the intervention • May provide technical and analytical expertise which is otherwise unavailable • May provide credibility to the study if well known (with other donors) • May have certain degree of ‘legitimacy’ since also from the South • Costs less than UK based consultant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be steeped in a particular perspective based on home country experience and have limited experience of working elsewhere • Likely to suffer from linguistic and cultural constraints on rapport building and understanding • May not lead to the development of local capacity • May not be familiar with the needs, priorities and culture of the donor agency eg DFID • May have difficulty in presenting results in an acceptable format for donor (DFID)
External (UK)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May provide a fresh perspective to the intervention • Familiarity with DFID needs and priorities • May provide technical and analytical expertise which is otherwise unavailable • May provide broader perspective if experienced in other interventions in other countries • May provide credibility to the study • Likely to present findings in an acceptable format for higher level authorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely to suffer from linguistic and cultural constraints • Likely to be perceived by intervention staff as de factor representatives of DFID and by staff involved in the intervention as a threat • May not lead to the development of local capacity • May be influenced by desire for future consultancy work and avoid offending DFID or intervention partners • More costly

Adapted from Montgomery et al (1996). *In multi-lingual societies, language could be a problem even for locals.

2.5 Low or high frequency assessment exercises?

The answer to how often IAs should be carried out depends on a number of factors, among them:

- (1) nature of the intervention - for example, process projects by their nature may require more frequent assessment than blueprint projects
- (2) What is being monitored - interventions with longer term impacts such as education interventions would be monitored less frequently
- (3) Methods used: the length of the cycle of data/information collection would also affect the frequency of the conduct of exercises
- (4) Related to (3) - the availability of staff time and resources

Table 2.4: Conditions under which high/low frequency assessment appropriate

Frequent impact assessment is likely to be appropriate when:	Low frequency impact assessment is likely to be appropriate when:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Changes due to the intervention are expected to occur in the foreseeable future* There is a need to identify problems or errors quickly so that relevant adjustments can be made* The environment is unstable or rapidly changing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Demands on staff time and energy are already considerable* Changes are expected in the long run* The environment is relatively stable or unchanging

(Adapted from Montgomery et al, 1996)

Table 2.5: Compatibility of different approaches to goals of impact assessment

Approaches	Lesson Learning	Upward Accountability	Downward Accountability
Internal assessment	Compatible but there may be questions around the ability of internal staff to stand back and take an 'objective' view	Results may be questioned as distorted by interests of programme/project staff to emphasise achievements	Compatible as is likely to provide feedback required.
External assessment	May be regarded by programme/project staff as inappropriate	Compatible. Likely to be familiar with agency's needs and priorities. Also likely to present findings in a format acceptable to higher level authorities	Incompatible since likely to be 'removed' from the local context and the needs and priorities of lower level staff.
Bottom up	More likely to get lessons agreed and accepted	Potential tensions between demands for data at different levels of aggregation	Compatible. Allows for local level monitoring and evaluation
Top down	Difficult to get lessons agreed, understood and accepted by primary stakeholders and lower level staff	Compatible	Incompatible
Interpretative	More challenging to distil lessons but the diversity of views more likely to be reflected	Can be difficult to provide standardised data and generalisations to those who have little knowledge of the intervention. Uniform agency data information unlikely to emerge from interpretative approaches only	Compatible.
Objective	Ideally central to lesson learning. In practice may result in the use of methods which do not reflect the diversity of stakeholders' priorities	Able to provide standardised data and generalisations.	Incompatible
High frequency	Compatible particularly for process projects and those requiring regular review	? Enhances accountability. May lead to too much data too often	May enhance accountability. Frequency of data collection may become burdensome especially in terms of time.
Low frequency	Learning process may be constrained if reflection on impact is not regular	Compatible - able to provide feedback at key moments in the programme/project cycle	Has the advantage of being less 'taxing' on beneficiaries and low level staff.

Table 2.6: Compatibility of approaches to impact assessment

	External	Top down	Objective	Low Frequency
Internal	Possible mix but potential tensions	Compatible as long as data collection is managed or overseen by senior staff	Compatible but likely to require external validation of methods used for data collection and analysis	Compatible since programme/ project staff may be interested to minimise workload.
Bottom up	Potential tensions unless external assessors devote considerable time and effort to participatory design and use of participatory methods	Opposed in principle, but in practice may be a useful combination, giving different perspectives which may be compared.	Potential tensions because of difference in emphases in approaches	Compatible (participatory assessment can be periodic)
Interpretative	As above	Likely to be incompatible because of the lack of emphasis on participatory and open ended methods	Very different methodological approaches. Results from different approaches can be compared for same project/ programme	Compatible
High frequency	Compatible but more likely to be seen as interference and a threat to programme/ project management	Compatible if assessment is internal; tensions if external consultants involved	Compatible but likely to threaten programme/ project staff	Opposed

Chapter 3: The Choice of Conceptual Frameworks

All impact assessments have a conceptual framework at their heart. In well planned and well resourced impact assessments with long ‘lead in’ times such frameworks are usually explicit (Hulme, 1997). By contrast, in many smaller IAs the framework may be implicit and seen as common sense. There are three main elements to a conceptual framework :

- a model of change - what has changed and why?
- the specification of unit(s) or levels at which impacts are assessed and
- the specification of the types of impact that are to be assessed.

3.1 What model of change is to be examined?

Underlying all impact assessment processes are assumptions (explicit or implicit) about how change happens and why it has occurred or will occur in the future. In the case of assessments of poverty impact, these assumptions are usually underpinned by theoretical frameworks relating to poverty or well being. For example: is the assessor/researcher starting from the premise that poverty is essentially about the inadequacy of income and related to deficiencies in individual capacity such as low educational status or alternatively from the perspective that it is a multidimensional concept and related to structural inequalities? Whatever the starting point, it has implications for what is assessed and would ultimately influence the conclusion(s) about the performance of the intervention. Box 3a contains three case examples drawn from a recent Oxfam study which highlight how very different perspectives on poverty influenced the assessment.

3.2 What unit(s) of impact are to be assessed?

An important decision for any impact assessment is to determine the level(s) at which the assessment needs to be carried out. Would it be, for example, the individual, household, community, organisation or combination of these? This is important since different aspects of poverty and deprivation apply at different levels of social organisation. For example, the lack of street-lighting, electricity, water, access to education , access to markets may apply predominantly at the level of the settlement or community while food security and income may be seen as issues that apply to the household level. Moreover, people within households may experience poverty or the impacts of interventions differently by virtue of their age, gender etc.. To focus on any one of these levels to the exclusion of others may therefore lead to important gaps in the analysis and provide only a partial understanding of what has transpired. Assessment or analysis at different levels would also allow any inter-linkages between them to be explored. Table 3.1 highlights the advantages and disadvantages of different units of assessment.

Box 3a: Approach from Different Perspectives

The Bangladesh study which was carried out by BRAC took a conventional consumption and expenditure approach to poverty measurement though they recognise it to be a multi-dimensional. However, they believed that 'its characteristics are sufficiently well correlated with consumption and expenditure to allow [a focus] on these two variables.

The Kenya study team on the other hand, building on the programme documents, assumed that the reduction of poverty and vulnerability in a remote pastoral zone in North Eastern Kenya is dependent on strengthening and diversifying pastoral livelihood strategies and that this will be best achieved by improved access to market and state services, a policy and legal framework that endorses common grazing and enforces existing property rights and strengthened pastoral associations that can undertake collective action and demand and defend their rights. As a result, the study explored the inter-linked levels of change (a) at the level of pastoral livelihoods (b) whether there are any differences in pastoral livelihoods in project and non project sites, that may explain differences in welfare and (c) in the performance of service delivery by local state and non-state institutions.

Finally the Pakistan study which explored the impact of a number of micro projects, started from an assumption that human development or well being is multi-dimensional, that we need to be explicit about what those dimensions are so that important elements are not missed and that we need to focus on the ends of development. The study therefore took a number of dimensions of human development from the field of ethics and which are considered universal (based on the most basic reasons why we act) and irreducible (i.e. the list cannot be made shorter) and non-hierarchical (any of these dimensions may be considered more important than others at any point in time). These included: life, knowledge, excellence in work and play, relationships, beauty/environment, inner voice/peace, religion, empowerment. The study focused on exploring the extent to which the projects produced change in these dimensions and which were considered to be most important by beneficiaries. This was done without prior judgement of the relationship between the dimensions nor the relationship between the project and its stated objectives.

Adapted from Oxfam, draft, 1999

Table 3.1: Advantages and disadvantages of different units of Assessment

Unit of Assessment	Advantages	Disadvantages
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easily defined and identified • Allows social relations to be explored • Allows inter-household relations to be explored • Can allow more personal and intimate issues to emerge • Permits an exploration of how different people by virtue of their gender, age, social status etc. experience poverty/the effects of the intervention. • Permits understanding of political capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most interventions have impacts beyond the individual level • Difficulty of attribution through long impact chain • Difficult to aggregate findings
Household	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively easily identified and defined • Permits appreciation of household coping and survival strategies such as income, asset, consumption and labour pooling • Permits appreciation of link between individual, household and group/community • Permits understanding of links between household life cycle and well-being 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exact membership sometimes difficult to assess • The assumption that what is good for the household is good for all its members is often flawed.
Group/CBO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permits understanding of collective action and social capital • Permits an understanding of political capital • Permits understanding of potential sustainability of impacts • Permits understanding of potential community level transformation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exact membership sometimes difficult to assess • Group dynamics often difficult to unravel and understand • Difficult to compare using quantitative data
Community/Village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permits understanding of differences within the community • Permits understanding of community level poverty and of changes in provision and access to produced capital such as water, electricity. • Permits understanding of collective action and social capital • Permits an understanding of political capital • Permits understanding of relations between different groups/factions in the community eg. clans. • Permits understanding of potential community level transformation and beyond • Can act as a sampling frame for individual/household assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exact boundary sometimes difficult to assess • Within community dynamics often difficult to understand • Difficult to compare
Local NGO/ Development Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permits understanding of potential sustainability of impacts • Permits understanding of changes brought about by capacity building • Allows performance especially of effectiveness and efficiency to be assessed • Allows relationship with community, group and individual changes to be explored. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within NGO dynamics often difficult to understand • Difficult to compare across local NGOs
Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permits broader change and influence to be assessed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater problems of attribution • Internal dynamics and processes difficult to explore or understand

Adapted from Hulme, 1997 and Oxfam, draft, 1999

3.3 What type of impact is to be assessed?

Conventionally the assessment and analysis of poverty was dominated by economic indicators such as levels of income, levels and patterns of expenditure and consumption and assets. In the eighties, however, social indicators such as educational and health status and nutritional levels gained currency. More recently these have been extended into the socio-political arena as broader conceptualisations and definitions of poverty have been embraced. There is now, for example, an increasing emphasis on the measurement of such issues as individual control over resources, involvement in and access to household and wider decision making structures, social networks and electoral participation. But while these extensions of the types of impact permit IAs to be more sophisticated and to shed light on the expanding goals of development, they add to the complexity of IA work. Moreover, they require the skills of assessors who are experienced at making judgements on social relations (Hulme, 1997). Continuing on from the example above, Table 3.2 outlines the areas of change which the Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Kenyan studies sought to assess.

While the circumstances of particular interventions and the objectives of the interventions will influence what is assessed, it may be helpful to search for “integrative outcomes” to measure. For example, it can be argued that child health indicators reflect the outcomes of many different social and economic development processes including changing income, education levels, women’s status and inter- and intra-household differences.

Table 3.2: Key areas of change for projects

Bangladesh Study	Pakistan Study	Kenyan study
<u>Economic well-being</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • land holding • occupation • assets • housing status • household expenditure and consumption • food security • credit and savings • ability to cope with crisis 	<u>Economic empowerment</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • indebtedness • assets • income • savings • investment • market mobility and power 	<u>Change in welfare/livelihood</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • animal mortality • occurrence of per-urban destitution • need for food aid • quality of diet • rate of return to new investments provided through credit • law and order
<u>Social aspects of well being</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • literacy • health, sanitation and family planning • demographic and other household characteristics 	<u>Social empowerment</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • literacy • health education and awareness • family planning • environmental awareness and practice • infant mortality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school attendance rates • parental satisfaction with education quality • reliability of water supply • child mortality
<u>Women's empowerment</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • involvement in income generating activities • ownership and control over assets • perceptions of own well being • economic dependence on their husbands • mobility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • women's empowerment • access to public resources • participation in local institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • perceptions of changes in quality of life

Chapter 4: Methods and Tools at the Programme and Sector Levels

4.1 Assessing the poverty impact of country programmes

At the level of country programme and strategy, impact assessment is essentially an appraisal of the composition, overall design and logic of the programme with respect to poverty reduction. The country studies in the Evaluation used different benchmarks against which to carry out this appraisal.

In the case of the India country study, programme impacts were assessed with the aid of a matrix which incorporated the major poverty reduction strategies pursued in India (x axis) and a multi-dimensional view of poverty (y axis). Material from the various impact assessment studies was important in constructing the picture illustrated in table 4.1. But the information used went well beyond the IAs. Plausible inferences were also made and where some degree of implausibility was suspected, this was marked by one or two question marks.

This approach to 'impact assessment' at this level proved useful since it not only drew attention to the goal level of the programme (poverty reduction) but also situated interventions in the context of the multi-dimensionality of poverty and the strategies the country (in this case India) has evolved to reduce it.

But such an approach was not possible in the Uganda case, since, unlike India, it does not have a history of relatively clearly defined anti-poverty policies and approaches. In this instance, a 'capital matrix' was developed and used. This entailed an analysis of the poverty situation in Uganda with respect to the various types of asset/capital held by the poor: economic, human, produced, social, political. The country programme was then examined and mapped onto the matrix; highlighting the gaps and emphases in the programme. Unlike the India case, the starting point for this framework was not the local context but rather the researchers' conceptualisation of poverty - that of being multi-dimensional in nature. But country specific information and data did play an important role in so far as the poverty situation was analysed against the framework (see table 4.2).

The matrix developed and used in the Zambia evaluation had elements of both the India and Uganda approaches - rooted to some extent in the analysis of poverty in the local context and adopting aspects of the capital /asset framework. For example, on the x axis, the World Bank's Action Plan for addressing poverty in Zambia (derived from the Zambia Poverty Assessment) was used as the starting point. But the Action Plan which essentially advocated safety nets, the building of human capital and the provision of a pro-poor economic environment was considered too narrow; the framework was extended to create room for the consideration of social capital and gender relations and the consideration of state, politics and power - issues believed to be relevant to the analysis of poverty in Zambia. The other axis of the matrix distinguished interventions in terms of the institutional level at which the in-country partnership is primarily focused. (table 4.3).

The various components of the programme were placed on the basis of what the researchers believed to be their principal potential contribution to the reduction of

poverty or human deprivation. Some of the components had several potentially important contributions, in terms of either directness of impact or level of partnership and therefore spread across more than one cell of the matrix. Mapping the country programme onto this matrix did not provide insights into the impact of DFID's programme in Zambia but rather provided a suitable framework for characterising the coverage of the programme and for guiding the researchers in raising 'relevant, non-banal questions about design and effectiveness'. It also provided the basis for the selection of interventions for case study in the evaluation (Booth et al, 1999).

Table 4.1: India Case Study

Figure 1 Outcomes of major DFID activities in relation to poverty reduction

<i>Major Strategies</i>	<i>Growth</i> Public investment especially irrigation; Liberalisation	<i>Human Development</i> Minimum Needs Programmes	<i>Safety Nets</i> Employment Guarantee Schemes; PDS; insurance	<i>Direct income</i> Subsidised credit Training, Inputs	<i>Social Organisation</i> Women's groups Self-help Groups
<i>Trends</i>					
<i>Income</i> (1987/8-1993/4) INCIDENCE ABSOLUTE NUMBER DEPTH and SEVERITY	EN Public investment especially irrigation; Liberalisation	HE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> time savings from new /functioning health centres reduced loss of earnings from improved curative service 	URB: improved access to employment preventing loss of employment URB/NR: Women's production groups/savings and credit	URB: improved access to employment preventing loss of employment URB/NR: Women's production groups/savings and credit	URB: improved access to employment preventing loss of employment URB/NR: Women's production groups/savings and credit
<i>Assets and vulnerability</i> LAND HOME - PLOTS CPR	NR Programme aid stabilised prices, reducing asset loss URB: slum stabilisation NR Social forestry: CPR improvements JFM? Groundwater recharge through Soil and Water Conservation	HE/ED: improved services prevent loss of assets URB: shared sanitation?? Drains Roads Water supply WATSAN: water supply? [institutional doubt]	URB: Cochim: vulnerable groups "packages" NR: CPR/forest improvements NR/URB: Women's savings and credit groups	URB: Cochim: vulnerable groups "packages" NR: CPR/forest improvements NR/URB: Women's savings and credit groups	NR: CPR/forest improvements NR/URB: Women's savings and credit groups
<i>Human capital</i> eg Literacy Life expectancy	EN: PSR release of funds for social sector?? Urban infrastructure: less diarrhoea Rural Infrastructure: less diarrhoea??	ED: Children grow up literate? HE: TB/polio reduction in mortality/morbidity URB: skill training pre-schools - better child nutrition, more demand for education? HE: reproductive health: increases women's health, reduced child mortality ED: women's literacy, status, fertility	URB: improved access to employment preventing loss of employment URB/NR: Women's production groups/savings and credit	URB: improved access to employment preventing loss of employment URB/NR: Women's production groups/savings and credit	URB: improved access to employment preventing loss of employment URB/NR: Women's production groups/savings and credit
<i>Social and political</i>					WATSAN: Strengthening village organisation (KWDP)? URB: Neighbourhood Groups?

<i>capital</i> 1. Voice 2. GEM: gender empowerment measure 3. Social organisation: family relations, caste, religion 4. Social movements <i>Quality of life</i> eg time, leisure, convenience	ED: Village Education Committees? NR/URB: group formation HE: Sex workers' co-operative (WBSHP) JFS projects
---	---

EN: Time, leisure for women URB: Reduced drudgery, reduced flooding, more security	ED: social exclusion reduced OHFWP: Time savings from new health centres URB: Convenience of nearby immunisation/services	URB: Cochin women's shelters
---	---	------------------------------

? (??) implies (strong) doubts about the intended outcome being achieved. No question mark implies the outcome is judged plausible.

KEY: EN = ENERGY; NR = NATURAL RESOURCE; URB = SLUM IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME; PSR = POWER SECTOR REFORM; HE = HEALTH; ED = EDUCATION; WATSAN = WATER & SANITATION; OHFWP = ORISSA FAMILY HEALTH AND WELFARE PROJECT; JFS = JOINT FUNDING SCHEME; CPR = COMMON PROPERTY RESOURCES

Table 4.2: Uganda Case Study: An approach to poverty reduction using an Asset/Capital framework: DFID’s actual and potential involvement.

Type of Asset/Capital	Elements of the Country Programme
Income capital	Very low in Uganda, limited evidence of trickle down from growth to some groups. Historic and current DFID involvement at macroeconomic level. Roads project example of limited direct impact. From 1997 DFID commitment to work in small business sector and RNR to increase productivity to increase incomes
Social capital	Very low and major critical issue in Uganda from history of conflict - fractured social relations; marginal area of DFID involvement through NGO work. Need to recognise the importance of this in Uganda; without work on this capital other poverty strategies will be undermined. Improving the status of women is now an important area for DFID.
Human and Environmental capital	Appalling social indicators showing resistance to change despite growth. Major area of DFID spend in health and education. Problems of strategy, linkages and targeting, especially around gender. Civil service reform has not yet markedly increased service delivery but is part of the new emphasis. Little work on RNR including environmental protection, little work on water and sanitation.
Political capital	the situation of political capital is strong: the constitution, local government act, PEAP all commit GoU to participation in politics to gender equality, decentralisation and local accountability. Aspects of DFID’s good governance has contributed to strengthening political capital (Judiciary and police projects). Potential new area of work is associated with democratisation and accountability
Produced capital	Varies by region, access to land is poor for women, in areas of conflict and in the west of the country. Limited DFID involvement through NGOs until recently. DFID now involved in Land Bill and increase access to small scale credit.

Table 4.3 The Zambia Country Programme circa 1996 by Approaches to Poverty Reduction

<i>Means and Ends</i>		INDIRECT						
		Safety nets	Improving returns to labour (access to natural/produced capital and markets)	Building human capital (nutrition, health and education)	(Re)construction of social/political capital of the poor and/or poor women	Providing a pro-poor economic environment (markets and institutions)	Influencing underlying state structures and behaviour	
<i>Partners</i>								
Government					Programme aid and policy dialogue	TA to ZRA, privatisation	Commissions	
Sector ministries			AIEMS/Min. of Education	ZHPSA				
Districts/Councils					LOGOSP			
NGOs/CBOs		PULSE						
								PUSH2

Table 4.4: Requirements for the different approaches to Country Programme Assessment

Poverty Outcomes Matrix (India)	Asset/Capital Matrix (Uganda)	Approaches Matrix (Zambia)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly defined country level anti-poverty approaches to poverty Programme/project impact assessments Information on the country programme which would allow for a detailed analysis and understanding of it. Information could be obtained from official reports as well as interviews with staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detailed information/data about the nature and level of poverty within the country Information on the country programme which would allow for a detailed analysis and understanding of it. Information could be obtained from official reports as well as interviews with staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear analysis of different approaches to poverty reduction relevant to the country (grounded in rigorous analysis of the causes of poverty) Information on the country programme which would allow for a detailed analysis and understanding of it. Information could be obtained from official reports as well as interviews with staff.

4.2 Assessing Sector Programmes

Unlike the micro or project level, there are no well established and developed methodologies for assessing poverty impact at the sectoral level. But the involvement of DFID at the ‘sector’ rather than project level in some instances necessitated the assessment of impact this level. The Evaluators therefore devised their own methods or approaches.

The case of the Education Sector Investment Plan (ESIP) in Uganda

The ESIP in Uganda presented a particular challenge to the evaluators since it was a relatively new ‘type’ of intervention - a sector wide approach - and had not been fully implemented at the time of the Evaluation. As a result of the latter, only the ‘potential’ impact could be assessed. As indicated in table 4.5, this was carried out by developing a number of criteria which would constitute a ‘pro-poor’ ESIP and then appraising the Uganda ESIP on that basis. This involved the subjective judgement of the evaluator with respect to the choice of criteria and a sound knowledge and understanding of the content of the Uganda education system, the constraints on the poor in accessing education and the content of the ESIP.

Table 4.5 Pro-poor Education Sector Plan - How does the Uganda ESIP measure up?

Elements of a Pro-poor Education Sector Plan	Uganda Education Sector Investment Plan (ESIP)
Resource allocation which focuses on the sub-sectors more likely to be accessed by the poor - eg primary education; adult literacy; non-formal education	Strong focus on primary education - ESIP re-iterates the government's (and donors?) commitment to UPE. Far less focus on other aspects of 'basic education' eg literacy. Recognition of the importance of secondary education - at least to absorb the increasing numbers entering primary education. Fundamental constraints on access to secondary education not tackled.
Resource allocation which addresses inequity - gender; geographical location etc.	<p>Plan pays particular attention to closing the gap in the gender disparity in access and achievement; focus on the disabled, orphans and other disadvantaged groups. Also focus on rural areas - where provision is poor.</p> <p>Experience of UPE so far does not look too promising for closing gender gap. Also no strategy to address the key constraints on girls' education.</p> <p>Plan to build classrooms in rural areas - should improve PHYSICAL ACCESS in these areas - but there are many other barriers.</p>
Plan based on detailed social analysis/appreciation of the constraints of the poor in accessing/continuing education	Focus on the financial constraints to accessing education - particularly at the primary level - other 'non-financial barriers' not dealt with.
Plan based on consultation and wide participation of various levels – involving the poor themselves.	Little consultation with parents, teachers, representatives of political and civil society organisations, district level officials, other government departments.
Plan which builds capacity at local level to demand more/better quality service; to manage at the local level.	ESIP aims to decentralise education management and delivery - yet little consultation at this level. Long history of community provision and management of education in Uganda - no firm details in Plan to strengthen this. No details of strengthening the capacity of other non-state providers eg the missions.

Chapter 5: Assessing the socio-economic impact of economic growth and programme aid support

The Evaluation drew on both participatory and ‘orthodox’ approaches to assess the impact of stabilisation, economic reform and the programme aid which has supported it. On occasion DFID has also commissioned impact work at this level. Household surveys were also used in the Uganda study to assess what had happened to poor people under conditions of macroeconomic reform. The following reviews the utility of these different approaches.

5.1 Orthodox Approaches

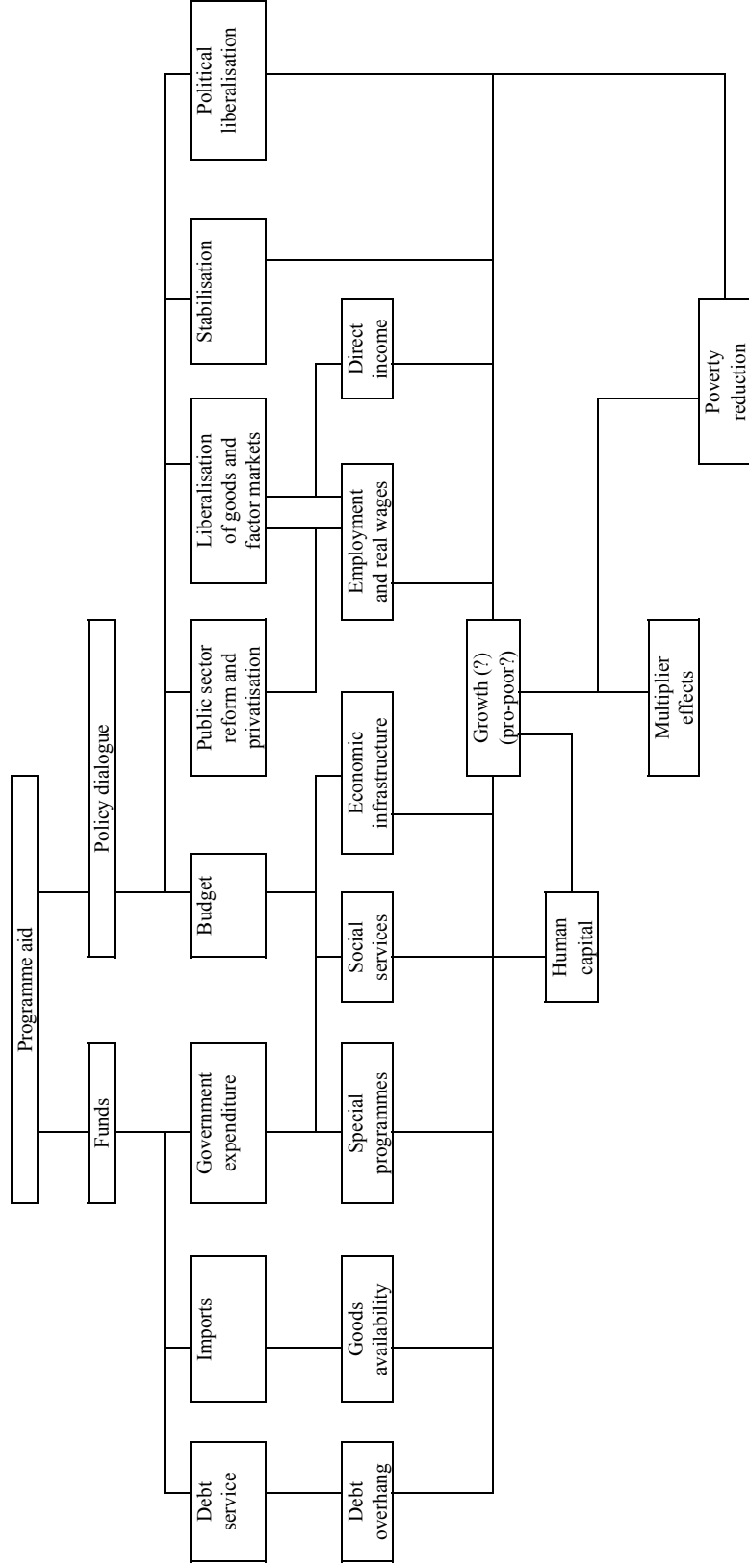
The Zambia case study of the Evaluation used a conceptual framework developed by Howard White for assessing the poverty impact of programme aid (White, 1998). As indicated in figure 5.1, this framework proposes that programme aid can reduce poverty through two channels: (a) the effects of policy changes supported by the aid and (b) the macroeconomic impact of the funds provided. With respect to the policy impact, two questions are deemed to be relevant: (i) what is the social impact of the policy measures taken? (ii) what difference has donor involvement made to the policies which have been implemented? The impact of programme aid funds is assessed through with/without analysis - the construction of counterfactual balance of payments and external accounts. The ‘bottom line’ for the poverty reducing impact of both policy change and the impact of funds is the rate and pattern of growth achieved.

A recent study³ of the potential impact of economic reforms on the poor in India did not engage in an analysis of the counterfactual, however. Instead, it relied heavily on the literature from which a detailed analysis of the trends and structure of the Indian economy was conducted. This in turn formed the basis upon which the possible implications of the reforms for the poor were worked through.

This approach is largely anticipatory and the results can be useful to those trying to influence the shape and course of the reform process. It also has the advantage over the other approaches in that it is relatively quick and not too data dependent. But its credibility and depth of analysis very much depends on the skills, knowledge and capacities of the researchers involved. In this study, for example, the intra-household, particularly gender implications of the reforms were spelled out. This was probably more a reflection of the composition of the research team than the methodology per se.

³ This study was commissioned by the Social development Department of DFID in 1992. It was carried out by John Harriss, Barbara Harriss-White, Meghnad Desai and Purna Sen.

Figure 5.1 Evaluating the Poverty Impact of Programme Aid



This approach also cannot ‘prove’ impact and so its capacity for influencing could be undermined if not dismissed.

Box 5a: Implications of economic reform for India’s poor

A 1992 study by Harriss et al spelt out a range of possible implications for India’s poor of the reform process. They included:

A fairly sharp increase in the level of unemployment among marginal urban communities surviving on low paid informal sector jobs during the stabilisation period leading in turn to a greater incidence of poverty, heightened distress and social tensions in urban areas.

An increase demand for female labour (usually lowly paid and with little worker protection and security of income) as devaluation and deregulation increase production for export.

Poor prospects for agricultural output and employment

Worsening standard of living for the poor with the removal of the food subsidies since the majority of the poor are dependent on markets for their livelihoods and provisioning. This in turn is likely to increase the economic participation of women and children so as to protect consumption levels

Reductions in social welfare budgets, particularly health and education likely to have adverse effects upon those requiring access to such services.

5.2 Participatory Approaches

In recent years participatory poverty assessments (PPAs) have become increasingly important in the analysis of poverty and the assessment of the impact of macroeconomic reform on the poor (see for example, Booth et al 1998, Holland with Blackburn, 1998, Robb, 1998, Chung, 1996, Malawi study). For example, a recent PPA exercise in Malawi detailed the effects of market liberalisation and the accompanying restructuring of parastatal companies. It showed that the take-over of the supply of fertiliser by private companies from state companies have led to irregular supplies and increased prices beyond the reach of the poor. The liberalisation of the tobacco market has also increased growers’ dependence on the private traders who they claim cheat and exploit them. The only positive effect of the liberalisation process felt by some of the local communities was the improved access to second hand clothing and to mini-bus transport.

Overall PPAs have proved useful in bringing the voices and perspectives of the poor into the policy arena and in some instances have been used to effect change. But this should not be taken as a given; steps need to be taken to ensure that this occurs (see box 5b). It is also notoriously difficult to aggregate the perspectives and priorities of local communities up to the national level. The information derived from PPAs is by its very nature context and location specific. And this is where it compares particularly unfavourably with more conventional (quantitative) approaches to policy impact analysis. Also, as is the case with all participatory approaches to date, the problem of attribution remains a particularly difficult one.

Box 5b: Bridging the local and the official

The recent study by Holland and Blackburn (1998) outlined mechanisms to bridge the gap between local issues and voices and abstract policy directives. These included:

- a) *Putting in place 'participatory intermediary structures'* - individuals or agencies that feed the results of participatory research into the policy process. In the recent South African Participatory Poverty Assessment, for example, the researchers became 'strategic activists' sequencing and strategizing interventions. Skilled at translating discourse from the local to the official, they became filters in the flow of information from the field to the policy process, categorising, identifying causal relationships, systematising and disseminating results, while drawing out the implications for policy makers.
- a) *Merging discourses: bringing policy makers and local people together* - In this instance, the participation of the intermediary structures is minimised and official s and local people are brought together whereby facilitating the merging of official discourse with that of the local. During a PPA exercise in Guinea, for example, government officials drawn into the process from the beginning and brought face to face with local people, were provided with an opportunity to discover their own solutions to tenure and land reform challenges. Moreover, throughout the process, the officials were encouraged to question their behaviour and attitudes and learn through their own experiences as part of the study team.

Using micro-level data

The Uganda case study of the Evaluation used micro level quantitative and qualitative information to track the situation of the poor under conditions of macro adjustment and policy reform. This approach while innovative, does not allow causality to be 'proved'. At best only inferences could be drawn but this is highly dependent on the quality of the data available (box 5c).

Box 5c: Uganda: Poverty in the context of macro economic reform

The quality of the quantitative and qualitative poverty data in Uganda was such that it was difficult for the evaluators to confidently infer, let alone conclude what had happened to the poor under conditions of macroeconomic reform. The study concluded that the poverty information is short term, often anecdotal and much of the qualitative data lacks rigour. Different data sets are conflicting, figures appear differently in different publications and much of the qualitative information is not on a form where it can be debated in the public arena. Overall, the data are scanty and contested.

Chapter 6: Impact Assessment Tools and Methods at Project Level

Project impact assessments, generally, and for poverty reduction specifically, have over the years, moved from a single method to multi-method approach. Indeed, the introduction of participatory approaches to impact assessment in the last few years have expanded the methodological menu for data collection and knowledge creation (Hulme, 1997) (see table 6.1). While sample surveys are still common, rather than being used on their own, they are now often combined with participatory and other qualitative approaches. It is also the case, particularly among NGO implemented projects, that assessments are increasingly carried out using qualitative methods (rapid appraisal, participant observation, PLA) only.

Each of the key methods has its strengths and weaknesses (see table 6.2) and this has led to a growing consensus among impact assessors and analysts that the central methodological question is no longer ‘what is the optimal method for the study?’ but rather ‘what mix of methods is most appropriate for the study and how should they be combined?’ By mixing the different methods, the studies now 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.).

The choice of method(s), the extent to which they are mixed and the scale of their application will depend on a number of factors, namely 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). For example, for an IAs which is well resourced and required to provide independent corroboration of a small scale programme and strengthen aspects of its implementation, a comprehensive mix of a small scale survey and qualitative approaches may be more appropriate. Boxes 6a and b give case examples.

There is a series of basic questions which the assessor/analyst should ask in deciding which method(s) to choose, the answers to which should be matched with the information given in tables 6.2 and 6.3. These questions include:

- What are the objectives of the IA? - Proving/Improving??
- How complex is the project, what type is it (blue print or process), what is already known about it?
- What information is needed?
- When is the information needed?
- How is the information to be used and by whom?
- What level of reliability is required?
- What resources are available (time, money and human)?
- Who is the audience of the IA study?

Table 6.1 Common Impact Assessment Methods

Method	Key Features
Sample Surveys	Collect quantitative data through questionnaires. Usually a random sample and a matched control group are used to measure pre-determined indicators before and after the intervention
Rapid Appraisal	A range of tools and techniques developed originally as rapid rural appraisal (RRA). Involves the use of focus groups, semi-structured interviews with key informants, case studies, participant observation and secondary sources
Participant Observation	Extended residence in a programme/project community by field researchers using qualitative techniques and mini-scale sample surveys
Case Studies	Detailed studies of a specific unit (a group, locality, organisation) involving open-ended questioning and the preparation of 'histories'.
Participatory Learning and Action	The preparation by beneficiaries of a programme of timelines, impact flow charts, village and resource maps, well being and wealth ranking, seasonal diagrams, problem ranking and institutional assessments through group processes assisted by a facilitator.
Specialised methods	Eg. Photographic records and video.

Adapted from Hulme (1997) and Montgomery et al (1996)

Table 6.2 : Strengths and weaknesses of key methods of IAs for poverty reduction

Method Criteria	Surveys	Rapid Appraisal	Participant Observation	Case Studies	Participatory Learning and Action
1. Coverage (scale of applicability)	High	Medium	Low	Low	Medium
2. Representativeness	High	Medium	Low	Low	Medium
3. Ease of data standardisation, aggregation and synthesis	High	Medium	Medium to Low	Low	Medium to Low
4. Ability to isolate and measure non-intervention causes of change	High	Low	Low	Low	Low
5. Ability to cope with the problem of attribution	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
6. Ability to capture qualitative information about poverty reduction	Low	High	High	High	High
7. Ability to capture causal processes of poverty and vulnerability	Low	High	High	Medium	High
8. Ability to capture diversity of perceptions about poverty	Low	High	High	Medium	High
9. Ability to elicit views of women, minorities and other disadvantaged groups about poverty	Low	Medium??	High	High (if targeted)	Medium??
10. Ability to capture unexpected negative impacts on 'the poor'	Low	High	Very High	High	High
11. Ability to identify and articulate felt needs	Low	High	High	Medium to Low	High
12. Degree of participation of 'the poor' encouraged by the method	Low	High	Medium	Medium	Very High

Method Criteria	Surveys	Rapid Appraisal	Participant Observation	Case Studies	Participatory Learning and Action
13. Potential to contribute to building capacity of stakeholders with respect to poverty analysis	Low	High	Low	Medium to Low	Very High
14. Probability of enhancing downwards accountability to poor groups and communities	Low	High	Medium	Medium	High
15. Ability to capture the multidimensionality of poverty	Low	Medium	High	Medium	Very High
16. Ability to capture poverty impact at different levels eg individual, household, community	Low	Medium	High	Low	High
17. Human resource requirements	Specialist supervision, large numbers of less qualified field workers	High skilled practitioners who are able to analyse and write up results	Medium skilled practitioners, with good supervision, who are prepared to commit for a lengthy period	Medium skilled practitioners with good supervision	High skilled practitioners
18. Cost range	Very high to Medium	High to Medium	Medium to Low	Medium to Low	High to Medium
19. Timescale	Very high to Medium	Medium to Low	High	High to Medium	Medium to Low ⁴
	Surveys	Rapid Appraisal	Participant Observation	Case Studies	Participatory Learning and Action

Adapted and extended from Montgomery 1996 and Hulme, 1997

⁴ It is important to note that participatory methods could consume a lot of poor people's time.

Box 6a: The 'classic' mix

The Andra Pradesh Primary Education Project (APPEP) impact assessment study is an example of the classic mix of methods and tools. It was based on survey methods collecting standardised quantifiable data before, during and after the project and also using control groups. These surveys were complemented by qualitative case studies and more targeted impact assessments on specific innovations within the project, for example, textbooks. The design was also methodologically interesting since it was adapted to a rolling programme covering Andra Pradesh schools in a phased manner and also because of the way the data was cross checked through the use of multiple data collection instruments.

The design allowed for the quantification of impacts attributable to the project and was able to identify changes caused by non-project factors. The study generated findings of use to project managers for resource allocation and the design of training programmes for teachers. It also produced important policy related results.

But this IAS, like most of its type was very time consuming. For example initial study design, data collector training, pilot survey and questionnaire took over one year. And once fieldwork was carried out for the first survey, it took seven months to input, clean and carry out basic data tabulation. The draft report took another three months. Thus each annual survey's results were only emerging just as the next round annual was being executed. In this instance, given the long term nature of the expected project impact and the need to evaluate the quality of project implementation concurrently, these time delays were deemed an acceptable trade-off.

Another characteristic of this approach is that it tends to be highly reliant on external consultants and expertise. However the relationship between external consultants and local staff was such that the capacity of local staff was built in the process.

The cost of the study was also high - overtly £305,000 over seven years but given the results, it was deemed to provide value for money.

Box 6b: Participatory Impact Assessment - watch out for the pitfalls!!

A recent India IAs which formed part of the Action Aid/DFID research into PIA is instructive in the sense that it highlights some of the possible pitfalls of PIA.

Different priorities: It was found that the process raised expectations in the communities. This raised questions about the extent to which the same donor who was promoting the methodology would be prepared to commit funds so that the preferences expressed in the participatory exercises could be realised. Further dilemmas arise if the priorities of the communities do not accord with the local NGO or government. It is important to manage expectations in the course of the exercises.

Time: the process was particularly intensive in the use of poor people's time. Assessors need to be very conscious of this and be aware that poor people's time is valuable. There may be a need to modify the methods and tools and find more time efficient means of gathering information.

Comprehensiveness: the study sought to be very comprehensive in the identification of indicators of change and this contributed to the time consuming nature of the process. An alternative might have been to focus on the single most important category of change reported by the groups and then move on immediately to the identification of indicators within this category and then attempt to measure them.

Scale: the study was intended to work with a sample of people selected from a number of villages with the intention of developing indicators that applied across a number of villages. But it was found that in this and other countries in the research project that this objective of generalisation is not always consistent with the desire to develop more locally specific indicators and a greater diversity of desired changes.

Differences within communities: though the study was designed to capture the views of different groups within the villages, in practice four categories were applied across the board (adult men and women, male and female youth). And these turned out not to be the most important differences within many villages in terms of the alignment of preferences. Issues of caste and land ownership (or not) proved to be important differences in some contexts. An alternative would have been to identify the most important difference in concerns and preferences between people in a village and work with each group to elaborate the indicators and other means of assessing achievement and impact of those changes.

Filtering: The value of PRA (or other techniques) could be limited if the effects of interpretation and filtering of information that takes place within the organisation afterwards are not closely monitored and problems addressed. For example, in this study, pictures drawn by women showing changes in cultural practices were copied and labelled as 'having no special meaning.'

Aggregation and summation: the aggregation, putting together and summing up of information from various sources can result in the loss of information from various sources. It is important to ensure that key messages/preferences or the diversity of views eg around gender, are not lost in the process.

Link persons: the study did not make adequate use of the link persons between the NGO and the communities. The use of link persons make for more efficient use of data/information gathering.