

# THE PPA APPROACH

## The Nature of PPAs

The PPA is a qualitative social research approach that is designed to find out what perceptions the poor have toward poverty, the issues that concern them and how they would like to see these issues resolved.

The PPA is an approach (and family of methodologies) for shared learning between local people and outsiders to enable the local people, government officials, civil society groups and development specialists to plan together appropriate interventions for poverty reduction. The PPA belongs to that family of participatory approaches (which have a history dating back nearly two decades to the introduction of participatory forms of rural appraisal) commonly referred to as participatory rural appraisal (PRA). The PRA was intended to complement methodologies associated with the rapid rural appraisal (RRA) that had been used in the socioeconomic analysis of rural communities.

Beginning with the work of Robert Chambers at the Institute of Development Studies (Sussex) in 1992, it was recognized that survey instruments associated with the more traditional socioeconomic surveys, and increasingly the RRA, were largely passive in nature and researcher-based with local people being treated as subjects to glean data from rather than as partners in the research process.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the PPA is an approach that does not only rely on extracting information from local communities but also on facilitating processes whereby local communities can develop their own perspectives on poverty.

<sup>3</sup> See, Robert Chambers, 1992, *Rural Appraisal: Rapid, Relaxed and Participatory*, Sussex: Institute of Development Studies; Jules Pretty, 1995, *Participatory Learning and Action: A Trainer's Guide*, London: International Institute for Environment and Development; M. Sconhuth and U. Kievelitz, 1994, *Participatory Learning Approaches: Rapid Rural Appraisal, Participatory Appraisal. An Introductory Guide*, Frankfurt: German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ); and Jennifer Rietbergen-McCracken and Deepa Narayan, *Participation and Social Assessment*, Washington: World Bank.

The following table compares PPA, RRA and surveys to illustrate the differences among the three methodologies.

**Table 1: Comparison of PPA, RRA and Surveys**

Feature	PPA	RRA	Surveys
Duration	Short	Short	Long
Cost	Low to medium	Low to medium	Medium to high
Participation	Medium to high	Low to medium	Low to none
Methods	Basket of tools	Basket of tools	Standardized methods
Major research tool	Focus groups	Semi-structured interviewing	Formal questionnaires
Sampling	Small to medium purposive	Small to medium purposive	Large random
Statistical analysis	Little or none	Little or none	Major part
Analysis	In the field	Back in office	Back in office
Validation	Preferred	Not necessary	Not necessary

To increase the PPA's representativeness, linkages, where possible, to quantitative poverty assessments can even further deepen our understanding of poverty. Identifying poor villages using nationwide socioeconomic surveys and census data along with other research can provide the basis for a more targeted setting for the PPA. Drawing on targeted sites using this approach can prove to be very effective in the broader context of designing poverty-reduction measures that benefit the poor. The qualitative portion of the PPA can provide "ethnographic flesh" that quantitative poverty assessment lacks.

In Cambodia, a variety of NGOs have utilized a variety of methodologies associated with participatory researching for much of the 1990s in selected sites, most notably where they have been active. However, this PPA is the first time the Government has supported forms of participatory research on a nationwide basis. If we take

into account the relatively short period of peace Cambodia has enjoyed in recent times, this must be considered a major step forward. How the process was designed by the stakeholders to facilitate Cambodia's first national PPA is described below.

## Planning for Cambodia's PPA—The consultative process

As part of the PPA process, a Participatory Poverty Assessment Questionnaire Workshop was conducted in Phnom Penh in mid-October 2000. The workshop was designed to provide an opportunity for stakeholders, including the poor, to be involved at the start of the PPA process. The objective of the workshop was to discuss the criteria for village selection and access PPA methods and questions. In addition, a stakeholder questionnaire was distributed to civil society groups with invitations to the workshop. This questionnaire asked individuals and organizations to explain the nature and understanding of their involvement in poverty reduction efforts, including their definitions of poverty.

There were more than 90 participants in the workshop, including government officials of the relevant ministries (a first for the Ministry of Planning (MoP)), bilateral and multilateral organizations, NGOs and other representatives of civil society, the private sector and the poor. Originally, invitations were extended to 10 villagers to attend the workshop, but only four were able to participate due to the heaviest flooding in Cambodia in more than 40 years that blocked road access.

What the few villagers who did attend had to say about the meaning of poverty and how it affects their priorities and other discussions about practical interventions to reduce poverty highlighted the workshop. Making their observations heard took considerable courage and introduced an important dimension to the proceedings. Hearing the voices of the poor is the key concern of qualitative researchers who seek coherence (the extent to which methods meet the goals), openness and discourse (the extent to which researchers are allowed to discuss the researched data and interpret them together).

The workshop reached consensus on appropriate issues the PPA should cover. These issues included:

- Definitions of poverty;
- Categories of households in targeted villages;
- Criteria of each category;

- Number or proportion of households in each category;
- Causes and effects of poverty;
- Gender-related poverty issues; and
- Views of the poor for poverty reduction.

The workshop participants also agreed that the following methods, based in part on their own experiences to date in Cambodia, should be used as part of the PPA process:

- Focus group discussions (FGDs);
- Listing;
- Scoring/ranking;
- Prioritizing;
- Cause-effect solution analysis; and
- Individual case studies.

The PPA Steering Committee strongly believed that the ethnic dimension of poverty should also be focused upon, the argument being that ethnic groups as stakeholders also have a right to participate in and benefit from poverty reduction strategies.

The PPA coordinators decided that despite the acceptance of these methods, it was also important to retain a degree of flexibility and to utilize the best participatory practices available, depending on the local context. People familiar with rural activities have found that large numbers of uninvited villagers tend to mill around a particular discussion and actively interject unsolicited opinions. This kind of behavior was to be expected in the PPA proceedings, and the coordinators insisted these situations should be treated positively but in a way that doesn't disrupt the discussion. At the subsequent training workshop for the PPA facilitators (team members), it was stressed that where possible, FGDs should be facilitated but not dominated by the team members, this being the main participatory component of the assessment. (Throughout this report, FGDs and PPA will be used interchangeably to connote the sessions where villagers talked and shared their views and experiences.)

Participants at the workshop also discussed the selection of villages for the PPA. A consensus emerged that only households from villages specifically identified as being poor should participate in the PPA and that selection should be based on:

- Remoteness;
- Absence of accessible road;
- No school or other educational facility;
- Absence of marketplace;
- No health center;
- Lack of potable drinking water;

- Absence of irrigation system;
- No development project; and
- Lack of arable land.

During the actual PPA, these criteria were utilized in the selection process in addition to other criteria described in the following section.

## Criteria Utilized for Selection of Poor Villages

For the purpose of the PPA, the Cambodian territory was divided into four regions: Northeastern Mountain, Tonle Sap, Central and Mekong Basin. Four teams of three facilitators were each assigned a region, and the number of villages to be included were approximately equally for each region.

The PPA was designed to maximize the participation of all stakeholders in the processes associated with it. The PPA used WFP's poverty mapping work to link the selection of potential PPA sites to the quantitative socioeconomic surveys and the National Census. The Government defines poor households as those with consumption expenditure below KR54,050 per capita per month, which is similar to WFP's description. This definition is based on the necessary poverty-line expenditure to afford a 2,100-calorie food basket per day and other minimal basic expenditures. Additionally, WFP used five other criteria for constructing indicators to determine where poor communes would be found in Cambodia: (i) cropland per household, (ii) forestland per household, (iii) female literacy, (iv) dependency ratio and (v) access to safe drinking water.

It is interesting to look more closely at the poverty mapping exercise and what this actually meant in the context of utilizing WFP criteria to assist in the selection of poor villages for the PPA.

WFP utilized the National Census of 1998, which was not only the first census since 1963 but it was also more comprehensive together with the Cambodian Socioeconomic Survey (CSES) of 1997 to identify areas of poverty in Cambodia. However, WFP discarded the first round of the CSES because of data problems. WFP instead relied on the second round of the 3,000-household socioeconomic survey, which it was satisfied was sufficiently in-depth to complement the other stand-alone surveys. The WFP could not identify poor households in specific villages because the results at the village level

were statistically insignificant. Also, poor communes in most parts of Oddar Meanchey province were not identified by the WFP poverty mapping due to missing information. The PPA sought to identify poor households as per the recommendations of the October workshop and found the WFP work in identifying poor communes to be of great use.

As part of the poverty mapping exercise, WFP predicted consumption expenditure for 2.1 million households. This is how WFP came up with consumption expenditure below the poverty line. WFP calculated this to be KR54,050 per capita per month. This estimate was then compared to the 1997 WFP poverty index of a pre-selected 550 communes, the 1998 WFP selected high priority districts (41 out of 173 districts accounting for a total of 412 communes) and the 1999 WFP five-indicator poverty index for 1,600 communes described above.

Three different categories of communes were selected by WFP as being poor. The first category had the following characteristics: 40 percent of households classified as poor by the WFP analysis, the poorest 25 percent of communes in the 1997 poverty index, the 1998 analysis of communes within the high priority districts and the poorest 25 percent of communes in the 1999 five-indicator poverty index. According to this analysis, communes that met these criteria would have a projected March 2001 population of 505,000 people. The second category of commune was similar to the first except that it did not include an analysis of the 1999 five poverty indicators. There were 198 communes in this category with a projected March 2001 population of 1,502,000 people. The third category of poor communes were those where more than 50 percent of households were classified as poor, their projected March 2001 population being 424,000 people.

According to this analysis of the various databases and indicators, the total number of communes classified as poor was 358, totaling 2,431,000 people, or 20 percent of the population. Due to the lack of data, 27 other communes were also automatically classified as poor. These were communes that were not under government control until early 1999 (following the outcome of the 1998 elections), and prior to then, the Census and CSES could not be conducted in these communes.

The lists of poor communes were developed for poverty mapping, based on the combined work of WFP and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development staff in the field. The following criteria were identified as what

the WFP field staff had to keep in mind when selecting poor communes:

- Poor agricultural production and lack of potential;
- Access to natural resources severely diminished in the past few years;
- Ratio of rice-indebted households to nonkinship based households;
- Few development agencies or NGOs working;
- Problems with land mines and other land clearing difficulties;
- Comparison with other regions in Cambodia; and
- High positive-growth possibilities in the next three years.

The field staff then came up with a list of 424 communes, and the two lists (analysis involving 358 communes and field staff list of 424 communes) were then compared with each other. The following results were found: In 166 communes, both lists overlapped; in 206 communes the analysis suggested those communes as poor, while the field staff had not selected them for consideration; and in 248 communes, the field staff had selected them as poor, but the analysis had not. The differences are also in part due to the fact that in remote areas, an NGO or a WFP partner selected the poor commune and in certain provinces the staff had selected specific villages that had recently suffered from displacement, mines or other civil insecurity related problems but when analyzed according to WFP criteria, were not classified as poor.

How did the WFP poverty mapping influence the PPA? Where possible, the PPA was based on identifying the poorest communes in each of the provinces where WFP data was available. However, WFP did not have data for all the provinces so it was not possible to exclusively rely on WFP data. Moreover, because the PPA had to be undertaken in all 24 provinces it was not possible simply to focus on the poorest communes in Cambodia. For the most part, the WFP analysis has proven to be correct at the commune level. As WFP did not claim to identify specifically poor villages or households within these poor communes, it was necessary for the PPA teams to identify the poorest villages. A decision was made not to identify poor households because of the time factor involved but members of the poorest households in these villages were encouraged to participate in the PPA.

The PPA teams facilitated the participation of provincial authorities, most of whom could identify the poorest communes but not necessarily the poorest villages. This was complemented by the participation of local authorities at the district level who were able to identify the poorest

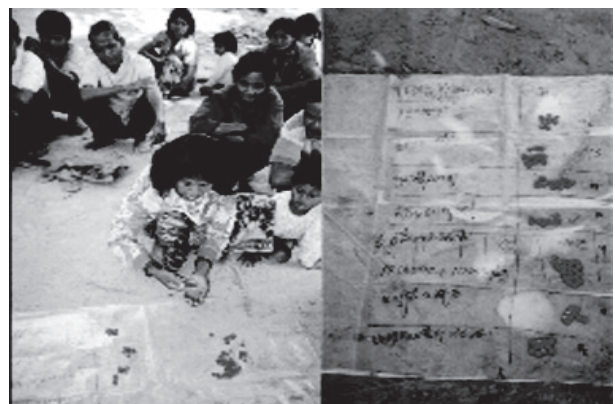
communes, except for some district level authorities who for their own purposes chose to identify some communes that were not necessarily the poorest. The PPA teams substantiated this information with existing data and with local authorities at the commune level. Where there was some doubt, PPA team members conducted a rapid observational appraisal of all communes. Where development agencies and NGOs, such as the Cambodia Area Rehabilitation and Regeneration program, had a good knowledge of specific communes, their advice was keenly sought by the PPA team.

## Training for the PPA

Before deployment into the field on 25 October 2000, a one-week training course for PPA teams was conducted in Phnom Penh. To ensure that the MoP had an important stake in the PPA and to provide them with the learning experience necessary to participate in any subsequent PPA, six staff members, divided equally by gender, were selected from the MoP, with the other team members being selected by the PPA coordinators.

During the week of experiential training, there was classroom-based instruction in participatory research approaches with emphasis on the FGD technique and understanding the criteria for identifying poor villagers. The PPA teams rehearsed the way they would conduct the PPA in the field, particularly how to facilitate the FGD, which is the central component. The facilitators were told to introduce themselves to the participants and to elaborate about why the PPA was required and how the findings would be used and translated into actions. PPA team members decided they would rather let the FGD participants talk about poverty first, take part in ranking exercises next, and finally the facilitators would raise

**Figure 1: A woman in Mondol Kiri using plastic symbols to rank her individual preferences as to how she would solve the problem of poverty as it affects her and her family.**



issues that were not covered by the FGD participants. PPA team members were also told that they should cover gender-related issues, those associated with good governance and where relevant, ethnic minority issues. The PPA teams were also tutored on how to encourage FGD participants to talk about their own solutions to poverty.

For the ranking exercise, participants were to first be asked to list the problems in their community in terms of seriousness, frequency, causes and influences. Then they were to rank their problems in order of importance. This would enable a prioritization of issues to be made during the synthesis of the PPA's findings.

Because many participants would likely be illiterate, team members were to resort to using visual techniques as well. The PPA team members designed pictures and symbols in the classroom, though in the field they usually had to rely on plastic objects for participants to use to make their listings and rankings. Preference ranking works well as a technique because it can reveal interesting discrepancies among group members. It is also good for identifying gender differences. Team members were instructed to have separate discussions with women at each PPA site if gender issues could not be explored openly in the FGD.

To ensure that the teams had some hands-on experience, a pilot FGD was conducted among garbage collectors and streetchildren in Phnom Penh. On completing the pilot, the findings were synthesized in the classroom and then discussed with both participant groups.

The PPA team members also interviewed three people at random in the streets of Phnom Penh on the meaning of poverty. This was intended to give the team members some experience in conducting semi-structured interviews with people at the PPA sites. The results of the random interviews were discussed back in the classroom, and PPA team members were guided on how to write up the findings from interviews.

The PPA needed to be synchronized with the requirements of the first draft of the Second Socioeconomic Development Plan (SEDPII) Workshop in March 2001. The training period was deemed sufficient because the PPA teams would become more competent as they gained additional field experience. To ensure a consistent and proficient approach, a quality assurance monitoring system was employed. The Cambodian team leader randomly monitored approximately 50 percent of the PPAs while the international consultant hired to coordinate the assessment monitored another 10 percent and provided advice and guidance when needed.



**Figure 2: Even by motorcycle it was difficult to access the flooded PPA sites like this one in Siem Reap.**

## Deployment to the Field

On moving to the field, there was a major logistical problem with which the team members had to contend: Cambodia's worst flooding in four decades. The PPA coordinators initially thought the timing could be mitigated by quick deployment to the Northeast Mountain region. The flooding proved to be overwhelming in some provinces, and the teams soon discovered that in order to access some villages they could only use a motorcycle, buffalo cart, small boat, bicycle or proceed on foot. Identification of and access to some of the villages took more than three times the length of time planned. This was in part because prior to deployment to the field, the names of specific villages were unknown (data from the National Institute of Statistics only identified villages by a code, not by their actual name).

Taking an optimistic view, the PPA teams decided the unfriendly weather situation presented an ideal opportunity to see how flooding impacted upon the poor. What they observed was echoed in the PPA findings, that the poor are more likely to be severely affected by natural disasters than nonpoor Cambodians.

The PPA team's initial visit to the field was to consult with the provincial level authorities to check if they agreed with WFP's assessment of poor communes. In most instances, this involved dealing with provincial MoP officials. At other times, it also involved dealing with Provincial Rural Development officials who had considerable experience with WFP. Consulting with provincial authorities added considerable traveling time for the PPA teams because most of the poor communes are located some distance from the provincial capitals. As the PPA progressed, it became increasingly clear that the

provincial authorities did not always know where the poor communes were located so the four teams decided to bypass consultations with provincial officials. Had they not done so, the PPA would not have been completed in the time scheduled by the MoP.

The next level of collaboration involved working with officials in the districts and communes that WFP had identified as poor and explaining to them the poverty criteria. While all district authorities could identify the poorest communes, they did not necessarily know the poorest villages within these communes. It was then necessary for the teams to have the commune authorities identify those villages.

Yet, there were some instances when commune officials identified villages that were not among the poorest and attempted to direct the teams to these villages. To counter this bias, at least one team member would undertake a visual appraisal of each village, noting the quality of housing, market-based activity, the quality and quantity of maturing rice in the field (early season rice was being harvested in the latter part of the PPA), whether there was a school and the quality of clothing worn by villagers. This was a very cursory appraisal, but given the lack of any existing data based on poor villages, this form of substantiation seemed necessary. While the teams were not always successful at countering local bias, as was discovered during monitoring visits, in general they only targeted the PPA in the poorest villages.

When selecting FGD participants, the teams relied on both their own assessment and that of village authorities. Sometimes commune authorities or even district authorities, and in even more rare instances, provincial officials from the MoP were involved in the selection process. Team members exercised the power of veto when the selection process resulted in too many of any group, such as men or older people.

In other instances, team members asked for volunteers from among the villagers and were inundated with too many volunteers (contrary to the prediction made during the questionnaire workshop that local people would be reluctant to participate). Of course, many of them thought the teams were interviewing for emergency assistance because of the floods; it took some time to explain that this was not their purpose.

The typical FGD involved one team member acting as facilitator, another as note-taker and the other doing a combination of things, such as recording the views of participants who could not read or write. To ensure that illiterate participants were not disadvantaged or that the points they were making were not put into the note-taker's



**Figure 3: Focus group discussion by candlelight with the ethnic Phnong in Mondol Kiri.**

language, they were asked to use plastic objects to rank and prioritize poverty issues they considered important.

It was a deliberate intention of the facilitators not to pre-empt the participants during an FGD. For instance, if someone raised the issue of his or her household having too many children, the facilitators did not suggest that family planning and birth spacing might be of assistance; instead they only listened to and recorded the participant's comments.

In addition to the FGDs, the team members conducted semi-structured interviews with key informants, often village, commune or district authorities, but sometimes with older people, including a small number of Buddhist monks and Muslim imam. These interviews were designed into the PPA methodology to clarify issues that appeared unclear in the review of the FGD, which was always done the same day or the morning after. It was sometimes necessary to schedule the FGD in the late afternoon or evening, particularly among upland ethnic minority groups, because they would spend all day hunting and gathering. In most instances, the PPA teams tried to analyze the findings of the PPA on the spot, with participants joining in the analysis.

As had been expected, there were times when it was nearly impossible to conduct the FGD with selected individuals because many nonparticipants kept adding their opinion. To avoid turning the FGD into a community-based discussion dominated by the most talkative members, it was sometimes necessary for one of the team members to distract the nonparticipants in a separate conversation, which also provided useful information. Given the fact that this was a PPA, it seemed unnecessary to exclude people at a particular site because they were not formally involved in the FGD. By stepping out of the

formal arrangement and talking with other groups, a team member still gathered useful assessments, particularly from women, and the FGD could smoothly continue.

There was only one occurrence (Stung Treng) when a team was denied permission to initiate a PPA. The village authorities were in an intoxicated state and told the team members to leave the village immediately even though they were in a very remote location. The team decided it would be counter-productive to argue and left quite discouraged as this turned out to be one of the poorest villages in the entire PPA.

The four teams were able to complete the PPA in every province of Cambodia. The last discussion took place with monks in Phnom Penh on 20 December 2000, 57 days after the assessment process began.

## Codification and Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a quantitative software package, was used as a supplementary tool for data preparation, counting, grouping, presentation and relating the disparate data.<sup>4</sup> The most productive use for SPSS was in generating frequency tables based on qualitative variables in order that the cross-tabulation of various observations could be aggregated from the four regions in Cambodia. For instance, the frequency table demonstrated that 26 percent of all FGD participants considered domestic violence to be a major issue affecting the poor. But through cross-tabulation it was found that this was a larger issue in the Mekong Plain region at 32.1 percent compared to 25 percent in the Northeastern Mountain region, 20.5 percent in the Coastal region and 7.1 percent in the Tonle Sap region.

During the FGDs, particularly when women participated without men present, there was often more complex accounts of domestic violence than provided in mixed groups. Using cards, women could also identify whether they ranked domestic violence as a major problem. This was helpful for women who did not want to be outspoken;

no one except the facilitator knew how these women ranked the causes of violence in the household or village. The sequence ranking revealed the seriousness that domestic violence was given as an issue. The frequency of domestic violence was fixed; women estimated the number of days in the previous month (30 days total) that they had been physically or verbally abused by their husbands.

In another example, the PPA tried to determine what physical infrastructure projects the poor think need to be funded. Participants were asked to draw a matrix on either the ground or on paper with the options (roads, bridges, irrigation schemes, community wells) along the horizontal axis and the elicited criteria (food-for-work, micro-finance, paid labor, voluntary labor) along the vertical axis. The participants were asked to assign scores to each of the items, according to their relative merit, distributing a fixed number of plastic objects among the different items. When the matrix was complete, the ranking results were cross-checked by asking participants if they could pursue only one of the choices, which would they choose. SPSS was used to tabulate the frequency of these rankings from all PPA sites.

As noted earlier, preliminary analysis of the PPA occurred in the field and involved both the PPA team members and the local communities. In some instances where local officials accompanied the PPA teams, they also participated in this preliminary analysis. The results of this preliminary analysis, where possible, were discussed with all FGD participants and any necessary amendments were made. The synthesis of all the findings from the national PPA was then compiled in Phnom Penh. Ideally, once this synthesis has been completed, via this report, it would be useful to return to the PPA sites to validate the findings with the community, not just with those who participated.

This PPA has incorporated both qualitative and quantitative techniques to draw out findings, deepen, and clarify the understanding of poverty in the Cambodian context. By their very nature, PPAs are characterized by their methodological flexibility. What follows in this report is the synthesis of the findings.

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<sup>4</sup> For an account on the uses of SPSS, see S. Saranatakos, *Social Research*, Melbourne: MacMillan, especially pp. 319-27.