



Section 3

Designing research

3.1 Types of poverty-oriented research

Within the development field, practitioners and policy-makers draw upon many different kinds of research in order to better inform their understanding of development processes and intervention design. Types of research commonly used are below.

Each of these roles that research can play in the development process can be undertaken via any research approach and using any research method.

Situation analysis

Generally, going in to a specific context as 'blank' as possible - i.e. with few preconceived notions about the nature of the interactions between and among people, institutions and ecosystems - and attempting to understand the key issues and processes relevant to the context. While generally understood to be the first stage in the project cycle, situation analyses are rarely done in great detail, often because development agencies have a preconceived idea of the type of intervention they would like to implement. Because the nature and processes of chronic poverty are so poorly understood, much initial CPRC research is situation analysis - not imminently or directly linked to an intervention, but aiming to provide an understanding of the broader context within which chronic poverty exists.

Needs assessment

This type of research is aimed at determining the needs of a community, usually in terms of a particular sector - e.g. health care needs or agricultural extension needs. It has some similarities to the market research done in the business world. In the context of chronic poverty research, needs assessments may be employed once a specific issue of particular relevance to the chronically poor has been identified. For instance, if a situation analysis suggested that ill health of the breadwinner is a major factor behind pushing households into



chronic poverty, a needs assessment may be undertaken to determine the specific health care needs of breadwinners.

Feasibility study

These studies determine whether a specific intervention is feasible, i.e. do all stakeholders have the required skills and resources, and will the intervention achieve the intended goals?

Baseline study

Baseline studies are undertaken to develop a set of indicators from which to monitor change after an intervention or policy change. They tend to be quantitative in nature. Like needs assessments, baseline studies are usually specifically directed towards the intended outcomes of an intervention, although it is important to take into account potential unintended consequences as well. The methodology exists for the reconstruction of baseline data where baseline studies were not conducted at the start of the intervention (Herbert and Shepherd, 2001).

Pilot projects

These are used to test an intervention on a limited scale, or in a few different ways, in order to confirm feasibility and/or to fine tune the intervention design.

Monitoring, evaluation, and impact assessment

During and after an intervention or policy change, the situation needs to be monitored and evaluated to determine whether all stakeholders are fulfilling their commitments, and if not, why; to determine whether the intervention seems to be having the intended effects and any unintended effects; and to determine whether changes can be attributed to the intervention.

See the toolbox [Section on Impact assessment](#).

Policy analysis

Through analysing the means by which policy decisions are made and implemented, researchers can gain an understanding of the interaction between policy and outcome, and of the manner in which different actors can influence policy formation. As CPRC has a strong policy focus, in terms of better understanding the exclusion of certain groups of the poor



from the benefits of mainstream policy processes and the development of pro-poor policy options, researchers are likely to be undertaking a measure of policy analysis.

Organisational analysis

This involves generating an understanding of the norms, processes and organisational culture of, for example, CBOs, NGOs, donor agencies or government departments. Organisational analysis can feed into policy analysis and other forms of research, but even in isolation a strong organisational analysis can say a lot about the manner in which an organisation understands its role and its target groups and stakeholders. If 'the poor' are targeted but the chronically poor excluded, an organisational analysis can suggest institutional reasons for this exclusion



3.2 Selecting a unit of analysis

Should analysis take place at the level of the individual, household, community, organisation or a combination of these? Different aspects of poverty and deprivation are evident at different levels of social organisation. For example, the lack of street-lighting or access to markets may apply predominantly at the level of the settlement or community while food security and income may apply to the household level, or even at an intra-household level due to differentiation based on age, gender or relationship to household head (Herbert and Shepherd, 2001).

Focus on a particular level of analysis may lead to important gaps in understanding. Assessment or analysis at different levels would also allow any inter-linkages between them to be explored (*ibid*). Table 1 (from Herbert and Shepherd, 2001; adapted from Hulme, 1997 and Roche, 1999) highlights the advantages and disadvantages of different units of assessment. Gosling and Edwards (1995) have a useful section in their book on recognising and dealing with discrimination and difference, which suggests ways of working with children, women and minority ethnic groups.

**Table 2: Advantages and disadvantages of different units of analysis**

Unit of Assessment	Advantages	Disadvantages
Individual	Easily defined and identified Allows exploration of social relations, including inter-household ones Can encourage 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. Enables an understanding of political capital	Most interventions have impacts beyond the individual level Difficulty of attribution through long impact chain Difficult to aggregate findings
Household	Relatively easily identified and defined Permits appreciation of household coping strategies Facilitates analysis of links between individual, household and group/community Enables investigation of links between household life cycle and poverty. Permits understanding of political capital	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	Enables a focus on collective action, social and political capital Permits investigation of the sustainability of impacts Enables investigation of community level transformations	Exact membership sometimes difficult to assess Group dynamics often difficult to unravel and understand Difficult to compare using quantitative data
Community/Village	Permits understanding of community level poverty including changes in provision and access to services such as water and electricity. Enables investigation of differences within the community and relations between different groups/factions e.g. clans. Includes investigation of community level transformation and beyond Enables a focus on collective action, social and political capital	Exact boundary sometimes difficult to assess Within community dynamics often difficult to understand Difficult to compare



	Can act as a sampling frame for individual/household assessments	
Local NGO/ Development Agency	Permits understanding of sustainability of impacts and any changes brought about by capacity building Allows effectiveness and efficiency of interventions to be assessed	Within NGO dynamics often difficult to understand Difficult to compare across local NGOs
Institutions	Permits broader change and influence to be assessed	Greater problems of attribution Internal dynamics and processes difficult to explore or understand