

## **EMPOWERING ENQUIRY: A NEW APPROACH TO INVESTIGATION<sup>1</sup>**

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### **CONTENTS**

**Introduction: Empowerment and impact assessment: why empowering enquiry?**

**Section 1: Empowering enquiry: basic principles and key steps**

**Section 2: Stakeholder representation and voice: Rethinking sampling**

**Section 3: Visioning Change: Rethinking indicators**

**Section 4: Empowering questioning: Rethinking surveys, interviews and focus groups**

**Section 5: Negotiating change: Rethinking analysis and dissemination**

**Section 6: Empowering institutions: key challenges**

### **INTRODUCTION: EMPOWERMENT AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT: WHY EMPOWERING ENQUIRY?**

Impact assessment, monitoring and evaluation take-up people's time and resources. They also take-up the scarce resources of development programmes and funding agencies which could be spent on development implementation. As argued by the author in [Strategic Sustainable Learning](#) the demands and expectations currently being placed on impact assessment mean that there is now a need to move on from one-off external 'policing' exercises to participatory multi-stakeholder assessments which:

- are capable of **capturing the complexity** of impacts of enterprise interventions over a range of development goals, different stakeholders and at different levels. This involves not only looking at impact on the individuals, enterprises and households directly affected but also markets, communities and institutions and over different time frames.
- not only measure outcomes but **make useful recommendations** for increasing the development contributions of enterprise interventions.
- **contribute to the setting up of sustainable learning processes** between stakeholders to increase the long-term accountability of the development process and contribute to pro-poor development itself.

Individual assessments would then be part of an ongoing process of **sustainable strategic learning** involving grassroots program participants/beneficiaries, program staff at all levels, local research institutes. Donor

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<sup>1</sup> This paper contributed to and draws heavily on parallel interlinked work funded by Hivos with Kabarole Research Centre in Western Uganda. This is developing a 'Sustainable Participatory Action Learning System' (SPALS) of which the Empowering Enquiry methodology discussed here is a significant part. Further details of SPALS can be obtained from the author:

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reviews and evaluations would have Terms of Reference of donor reviews and evaluations ensuring that these costly exercises also contribute to existing Information Systems.

This paper discusses ways in which the investigation process itself can make a significant contribution towards empowerment and hence also towards poverty reduction, within the broader framework of strategic learning. It proposes a new approach to investigation processes and methodologies, called here 'Empowering Enquiry' which would underlie investigation facilitated by external researchers and/or practitioners. The approach builds on discussions of methodologies and tools elsewhere on the EDIAIS web site<sup>2</sup> and brings them together into a series of practical steps. The approach discussed would not significantly increase time or costs of the investigation process. It requires rather:

- a **change in attitude and power relationships** throughout the investigation process
- a **rethink of the basics of investigation design**: selecting indicators, sampling, questioning procedures and analysis and dissemination.
- a **reversal of the sequencing of different methodologies**, with the main focus being on participatory methods supplemented by rigorous qualitative investigation. Quantitative survey methods would then be very carefully focused on specific practical issues arising where quantification of narrow indicators is needed, but credible impact chains and relevant indicators and sampling methods have been identified by the participatory and qualitative research.

The paper does not focus on 'empowerment impact assessment' as such, although empowering inquiry can be used to assess contribution of development practice to empowerment processes. Frameworks for assessing women's empowerment are given elsewhere on this web site in [Poverty Elimination and the Empowerment of Women](#). The implications of Empowering Enquiry for grassroots-level participatory learning will be discussed in a separate forthcoming paper on the EDIAIS web site.

## **SECTION 1: EMPOWERING ENQUIRY: BASIC PRINCIPLES AND STEPS**

Empowering Enquiry assumes that the investigation process itself can contribute to empowerment. DFID's understanding of empowerment in relation to gender uses an interrelated set of three concepts: empowerment, equality of opportunity and equity of outcomes. It therefore balances the agency and choice dimensions of empowerment with broader concerns of balancing the rights of all individuals in society in accordance with justice and fairness. The aim is therefore not the empowerment of particular groups at the expense of others, but empowering those who are most vulnerable to challenge existing inequalities and injustice in a process of social

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<sup>2</sup> EDIAIS web site is at [www.enterprise-impact.org.uk](http://www.enterprise-impact.org.uk)

transformation. There is also a clear role for development agencies and those currently with power in supporting the empowerment process through providing an enabling environment of equality and equity<sup>3</sup>. In what follows these three interlinked principles of empowerment, equality and equity underlie the understanding of empowerment in relation to all dimensions of inequality and discrimination.

### **WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT, EQUALITY AND EQUITY: DFID'S INTERLINKED DEFINITIONS**

#### **EMPOWERMENT**

'individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercise choice, and to fulfil their potential as full and equal members of society.' Following UNIFEM DFID includes the following factors:

- acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the ways in which these relations may be changed
- developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life
- gaining the ability to generate choices and exercise bargaining power
- developing the ability to organise and influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

#### **EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY**

'Women should have equal rights and entitlements to human, social, economic, and cultural development, and equal voice in civil and political life'.

#### **EQUITY OF OUTCOMES**

'the exercise of equal rights and entitlements leads to outcomes which are fair and just, and which enable both women and men to have the same power to define the objectives of development'.

Source: DFID Target Strategy Paper *Poverty Elimination and the Empowerment of Women*

Empowering Enquiry aims to contribute to this process of empowerment in a number of key ways as indicated in Box 1. This builds on the DFID definitions and also Rowlands' definition of empowerment in terms of changes in power relations (Rowlands 1998). Firstly it aims to contribute to empowerment of participants through increasing their confidence, knowledge, networks and voice in decision-making. Empowering Enquiry also has potential to substantially improve relations between intervention participants, development practitioners and policymakers. It does however require commitment to a

<sup>3</sup> This relationship between "bottom-up" empowerment in relation to enterprise development is discussed by the author in more detail elsewhere (Mayoux 2003).

number of underlying principles of mutual respect and equality between participants in any investigation and investigators. These are radically different from current common practice in much donor-led impact assessment, monitoring and evaluation. This includes a commitment to a broader process of empowerment and poverty reduction through including those vulnerable groups who may be excluded and/or further disadvantaged by the intervention.

### **BOX 1: EMPOWERMENT AND EMPOWERING ENQUIRY**

#### **FOR PARTICIPANTS THEMSELVES**

##### ***Power within***

- providing a forum for participants' articulation of their aims and objectives
- developing or reinforcing a sense of self-confidence and self-worth in what participants have achieved

##### ***Power to***

- contribute to participants' knowledge and understanding of their choices and opportunities
- contribute to participants' knowledge and understanding of their constraints, including power relations
- contribute to knowledge and understanding of how these choices can be realised and these constraints overcome

##### ***Power with***

- providing a forum for networking as a basis for collective action for change

##### ***Power over***

- ensuring that the voices of the most vulnerable are heard and listened to
- increasing the awareness of the currently powerful of the results of their actions and behaviour and the need for change

#### **RELATIONS BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS AND DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS AND POLICYMAKERS**

- increasing understanding of the needs, priorities and strategies of the people they are expected to serve
- increasing grass-roots understanding of programmes and policies
- increasing informed grassroots participation in decision-making
- increasing the motivation and job satisfaction of programme staff

#### **UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES**

- All peoples' time is precious. People should benefit from the time they give to the action learning process

- Any assessment full take full account of the development priorities of those whom the intervention is intended to benefit
- It is more useful and empowering to focus first on the positive and constructive before proceeding to 'problems' and 'challenges'. This encourages self-confidence, self-reliance and collective action rather than dependence.
- Any investigation must be guided by action priorities and linked to decision-making if it is to justify the resources and time diverted from development implementation
- Any investigation must be part of an ongoing action learning process and contribute to developing capacities and networks to this end.
- The voices of the poorest and most vulnerable must both heard and given priority at all stages.

The underlying principles of Enquiring Enquiry are not new. They echo the underlying reversal principles of participatory learning and action methods, (PLA) learning and prioritise use of [participatory methods](#). They also draw on the elements of an organisational change methodology called Appreciative Inquiry. Here the focus is on starting with what people value and appreciate now, rather than starting from the stance that the world is overridden with 'problems'. This leads to a much more energised and grounded exploration of possibilities for change which is also more likely to enjoy consensus and be realised in practice.

#### **PARTICIPATORY LEARNING AND ACTION: FOUR REVERSALS**

- **Reversals of frames:** a shift from the categories and values of outsiders to those of local people, enabling them to help define the frame of investigation
- **Reversals of modes:** the greater use of group work rather than individual informants; the use of visual rather than verbal techniques; and using comparison as a means of finding out quantitative data rather than direct measurement;
- **Reversals of relations:** establishing rapport and involvement with local people rather than reserve and distance from them;
- **Reversals of power:** enabling local people to enhance their own capacities for finding out and using and improving their own knowledge, rather than investigators extracting information for use elsewhere.

(Chambers 1994c)

**APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY**

'Appreciative Enquiry' is a methodology for organizational change. It was first formulated in an article by Cooperrider and Srivastava (1987) as a critique of what they termed a 'problem-centred approach' to inquiry where the focus is on problems to be solved by a change agent whose main role is as problem finding, solution designer and prescription giver. Appreciative inquiry in contrast adopts an appreciative stance towards organisational change to lead to more innovative and long-lasting transformation. It consists of four main steps:

- **Discovery:** where bottom-up open interviews bring out stories of the 'peak moments of achievement' which the community or organization values most.
- **Dream:** where the interview stories are combined to create a new dream for the future.
- **Dialogue:** where all those involved openly share exciting discoveries and possibilities. Through this sharing of ideals social bonding and shared vision occurs.
- **Destiny:** construction of the future through innovation and action. Because the ideals are grounded in past realities, there is confidence to make things happen.

(Barrett and Fry 2002)

Empowering Enquiry combines the basic principles underlying these two approaches into a framework of principles and key steps which can be applied throughout a process of participatory action learning. It differs from Appreciative Inquiry in making a conscious effort to address issues of difference, conflict and power relations as well as valuing consensus and social inclusion. It differs from PLA in that it applies the same principles not only to participatory investigation, but also to qualitative and quantitative methods where these are necessary to address sensitive issues, investigate conflicts of interest and increase rigour and credibility.

**BOX 2: EMPOWERING ENQUIRY: KEY STEPS AND CHECKS****KEY STEPS**

- 1) **Stakeholder analysis** to identify lines of difference, consensus and conflict of interest: Who is to be empowered? What is the role of external agencies and the currently powerful? Who is to be represented in the investigation process?

Then with different key stakeholder groups:

- 2) **Visioning change:** What do people want to be changed?
- 3) **Appreciating achievements:** What positive changes are occurring and how?
- 4) **Identifying challenges:** What negative changes are occurring and what challenges need to be addressed?
- 5) **Exploring the future:** How can positive changes be further increased? How can negative changes be avoided? By whom?

Then bringing together different stakeholder representatives and ensuring that the poorest and most vulnerable are adequately represented and supported:

- 6) **Negotiating change:** How can the different views and potential conflicts of interest be negotiated in practical programme or policy change?

#### **'CRYSTALLISATION' CHECK**

- 1) What are the precise practical questions and issues which the investigation is designed to address?
- 2) Why do we need to know? Who will use the information generated and how?
- 3) Are the methodologies, indicators, structures for representation and steps in investigation adequate to address these questions?
- 4) Are any of the questions or elements in the investigation redundant? Can they be omitted to decrease time and costs?

#### **EMPOWERMENT CHECK**

- 1) Does the investigation process really build the capacity, skills and learning of programme participants and increase their understanding?
- 2) How is learning linked to action?
- 3) Are the most disadvantaged and vulnerable stakeholders adequately represented at all stages?

The different key steps are discussed in more detail below. The initial basis of the investigation is the use of well-established participatory methods in a series of participatory workshops with key stakeholders. Depending on the

nature of the particular investigation and the outcomes of the participatory workshops, qualitative and quantitative methods would then be specifically focused on particular areas of enquiring arising. At each stage the aim is to obtain reliable information relevant to different stakeholder groups, but prioritising the poorest and most disadvantaged. In order to ensure clarity and focus on practical outcomes, there is a need for a series of 'crystallisation checks'. At all stages there is also a need for an 'Empowerment Check' questioning both methods and details of design in order to ensure the investigation is empowering particularly for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable stakeholders.

## **SECTION 2: STAKEHOLDER REPRESENTATION AND VOICE: RETHINKING SAMPLING**

Empowering inquiry is concerned with:

- ***ensuring representation of different stakeholders in both the assessment process and decision-making*** in order to link impact assessment with practice and policy.

and particularly with:

- ***countering the inherent biases against the poorest and most disadvantaged individuals and communities*** whose views and participation are essential to reaching credible and reliable conclusions about policies for poverty elimination.

Preceding and paralleling the investigation itself, therefore, there needs to be a progressive investigation of differences and potential conflicts of interest between stakeholders to:

- identify and define the characteristics of primary, secondary, institutional and key stakeholders;
- assess the manner in which they might affect or be affected by the programme/project outcome;
- understand the relations between stakeholders, including an assessment of power relations and the real or potential conflicts of interest and expectation between stakeholders;

Stakeholder analysis is summarised Box 3 and described in detail elsewhere on this web site in [Stakeholder analysis](#). The first stage is preliminary stakeholder analysis to identify the main stakeholder groups relevant to the investigation. It is important even at this stage to go beyond simplistic analysis in areas like gender difference to look at differences between women. It is also important to identify very vulnerable secondary stakeholders. The second stage is to assess the capacity of different stakeholders to participate followed by analysis of the information needs of the different stakeholders,



their potential contribution to the investigation and any support or facilitation which may be required for these. This stage must include identification of any other key secondary and institutional stakeholders with power and influence who need to be included in the investigation process in order to either get reliable information or ensure that policy recommendations are implemented. The investigation must then progressively identify and analyse not only dimensions of difference, but potential conflicts of interest relevant to how the intervention is affecting people's lives and how it can be improved.

### **BOX 3: STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS**

#### **1) PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS**

Who are the:

- **primary stakeholders:** those who are the envisaged beneficiaries of a project
- **secondary stakeholders** affected by the project: those who are not directly targeted but in the same households, communities or markets as the primary stakeholders
- **institutional** stakeholders involved at different stages of implementing a programme or policy e.g. donors, local government staff, trades unions, banks, Ministry of Finance, local government, export promotion agencies, business service providers

Who are the **key stakeholders:** those who can significantly influence the project, or are most important if the project's objectives are to be met. These may be primary, secondary or institutional stakeholders.

#### **2) IDENTIFYING INFORMATION NEEDS AND INFORMATION CONTRIBUTIONS**

- What are the main information needs of each stakeholder in relation to the particular issue involved?
- What are the main information contributions?
- What are the main forms of support needed in order to address these needs and facilitate these contributions?

#### **3) PROGRESSIVE INVESTIGATION OF DIFFERENCE AND CONFLICT**

- What are the main dimensions of difference between these groups?
- Are there any further differences within these groups?
- Which are the main potential lines of conflict of interest?

This stakeholder analysis then underlies the design of participatory workshops and sampling methodology in qualitative and quantitative

investigation. As the main aim is to ensure representation and voice and counter bias against the poorest and most vulnerable stakeholders, [sampling](#) is mainly purposive rather than random.

Statistical random sampling is only used where it is absolutely necessary because of serious shortcomings. The small samples possible within limited budgets rarely permit the type of complex analysis needed in order to reach realisable and credible practical recommendations. The small print in most impact assessments indicates that even for small samples randomness is rarely achieved. Those originally selected who are least likely to be interviewed are often the most vulnerable: migrant workers, women who have been divorced and sent away, children sent to work for relatives and so on. Where statistical sampling methods are used it is important to go beyond simple aggregation to careful analysis of statistical differences to identify those differences which are likely to be the most important for practical improvement.

### **SECTION 3: VISIONING CHANGE: RETHINKING INDICATORS**

As discussed elsewhere on this web site in [Selecting Indicators](#) there are no blueprint recipes for selecting indicators, no easy checklists which can be assumed to yield relevant, credible and useful information for all purposes in all contexts:

- *any indicators are inevitably partial and selective.* This is as true of economic indicators as social indicators, as true of quantitative as qualitative ones. The selection of any particular set of indicators from the total possible range of relevant indicators is inevitably based on an underlying theoretical, and often political, understanding of what types of impacts are important.
- *different stakeholders will have differing priorities,* different levels of knowledge and ability and/or willingness to respond. There are inevitably tricky questions about how the relative significance of indicators is to be weighted and trade-offs to be assessed.
- *the selection of impact goals is inevitably a political process.* This is as true of economic goals like poverty reduction as it is of social goals like empowerment.

The key task in selecting indicators is not therefore to attempt to provide a total picture of 'reality' where all possible impacts are rigorously quantified. This is impossible even in large-scale longitudinal academic research. Nor is it to narrow down the numbers and types of indicators in a preconceived straightjacket. This is unlikely to yield credible or useful information for policy improvement. The key tasks are rather how to make the selection of indicators and their analysis:

- *more useful*
- *less arbitrary*

- *more accountable.*

This must be done in relation to:

- a **credible model and set of hypotheses** about the ways in which particular interventions fit into and contribute to a complex process of change
- the **aims, needs and aspirations** of those which the intervention is intended to benefit

In Empowering Enquiry the starting point is an open-ended scoping of development goals which can then be progressively refined into different types of indicator. This is similar to 'indicatorless reporting' (Davies 1998). It can be done by any of the methods indicated in Box 4, or by standard participatory preference ranking and preference matrices. It should be done with different stakeholders to clarify differences and potential conflicts in expectations. Throughout this process facilitators must be aware of the dimensions of difference and power relations identified in the stakeholder analysis.

#### **BOX 4: VISIONNING CHANGE: DIFFERENT METHODS**

##### **'DARING TO DREAM': CROSSING THE RIVER**

In a focus group bringing together one or more selected stakeholder representatives, 10 wavy lines are drawn on the ground representing a river. Participants are asked in stages:

- How would you characterise success? (e.g. a healthy community, a good group, a successful enterprise, good household relations)
- How would you characterise failure? (e.g. a destructive community, a weak group, a failing enterprise, bad household relations)
- If these two poles are seen as extremes with ten rivers to cross between them, where do you think you would place yourself?

The different characteristics and discussion are noted and analysed, including differences of opinion between individuals and stakeholder groups.

Source: Gupta 2002

##### **DRAWING CHANGE**

Here individuals or stakeholder groups are asked to draw contrasting images of success and failure e.g. a successful entrepreneur/failed entrepreneur, powerful woman/subordinate woman, rich man/woman or poor man/woman. Discussions justifying particular characterisations used and differences of opinion are noted and analysed.

## **OPEN SPACE BRAINSTORMING/DRAWING**

This method is particularly suitable for large workshops. At least four blank sheets of paper are pasted on different walls of a room to allow at least two different opinions of success and failure. People are then asked to wander around each of the sheets and contribute to discussions. On each sheet either characteristics of success or failure are listed and/or drawings are made. A 'silent' moderator for each flipchart, or participants themselves, would note why particular characteristics are chosen, by whom, and differences of opinion.

The focus of empowering enquiry is on increasing people's awareness of the range of choices and opportunities and making these visible and articulated in order to identify indicators of change relevant to primary stakeholders, including the poorest and most vulnerable. However differences and potential conflicts of interest are likely to affect which views can be openly expressed in public gatherings, the ways in which consensus is reached, and hence any analysis, practical outcomes or conclusions. The focus on participation does not therefore preclude comparison of the outcomes of visioning exercises with indicators derived from external analysis. These can be introduced into the process once participants have had the full opportunity to express spontaneous views. The importance of introducing indicators and issues based on external analysis is indicated by the experience of a participatory lateral learning process in Gujarat facilitated by ANANDI and a network of other NGOs.

ANANDI works with the poorest women of the tribal and other backward communities in Saurashtra and Panchmahals-Dahod district in Gujarat. A key initiative was a 'mela' (fair) in 1999 bringing together over 600 women leaders from 211 SHGs and NGO organizers. The mela was designed to provide a forum for:

- Sharing experience on women's journey of self development and community development
- Giving women's collectives exposure to a wide range of strategies for securing basic rights
- Initiating a process of horizontal networking between rural women's groups

The objective was to highlight issues concerning women, highlight the contribution made by SHGs in development, showcase positive trends and emerging role models, disseminate strategies used by mandals/ sanghatans to address concerns and counter mainstream patriarchal stereotypes about what constitutes women's development. Above all, it was an effort to provide a platform where information, experiences and perspectives of the SHGs/mandals combined to give them an enhanced understanding of their mandate.

A list of problems facing poor women was drawn up after consultation with field workers and from secondary sources (See Box 1). In the preparatory phase, listing untouchability, alcoholism and violence against women had raised some debate amongst members of the organising committee. The NGO representatives felt that women would not list these problems as they belonged to new groups and would feel hesitant about discussing sharing these issues. After much discussion, it was felt that only if this opportunity was given to women would the extent of these problems amongst the SHGs be clear. Although women hardly ever articulated these social problems in the group meetings, in the large gathering a large number of SHGs identified violence against women, alcoholism and untouchability as priority concerns.

Source: Dand 2002

#### **SECTION 4: EMPOWERING QUESTIONING: RETHINKING SURVEYS, INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

Reliability of information is frequently a problem in any investigation, whichever methodology is used – see [Collecting Information](#). This is particularly the case where investigation is explicitly and directly linked with practical changes within programmes or policies. Those questioned may falsify information depending on what they expect the outcomes to be. It is therefore crucial that if direct linkages between the assessment and outcomes is to be made, that the importance of obtaining accurate information is stressed. Where no direct outcome is likely for the particular respondents concerned, this should be made clear to them from the outset and their participation in the investigation must be encouraged through other means. Where very detailed information is needed on particular topics, the reasons for such detail must be explained to respondents.

In Empowering Enquiry the aim of the investigation is not only to obtain reliable information relevant to the practical issues being addressed, but also to increase the understanding of participants about their situation and how to change. This can be done in different ways depending on the particular issues, the people involved and the wider context. The underlying principle is however that if people are giving up their time and energy to try and answer questions in sufficient detail to be useful, they themselves should also benefit. Direct benefit from programmes or policy improvement may not materialise for various reasons. Nevertheless, it is possible to design questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions in such a way that people that people learn immediately from this process. It is also important that possible ways forward are discussed with different stakeholders in order to make any recommendations made by the investigation more realistic, systematic and accountable.

Building on Appreciative Enquiry methodology, the starting point for questioning is a discussion of what people think they themselves and the programme have achieved. This in itself is likely to highlight what people are

actually aiming at and what they value most. This line of questioning then leads into more detailed discussion of things which still require to be addressed. The main focus initially is however not on what outsiders can or should do, but what people themselves have tried to do or could do. This creates confidence in people's own strategies and initiatives rather than assuming that development interventions are the main forces for change in people's lives. This in turn prevents raising unrealistic expectations from the investigation. All these stages should start off with open-ended questions, but could then refer to a checklist derived from the visioning exercises and/or any parallel enquiry with other stakeholders and/or secondary sources with brainstorming by practitioners and policymakers.

#### **BOX 5: EMPOWERING QUESTIONING: STAGES OF ENQUIRY**

The individual or group are asked the following open-ended questions but with wording adapted to specific subjects e.g. community development, group activities, enterprise development, household relations. This questioning can be immediately preceded by the visioning exercise above and/or the answers to the open-ended questions compared with a checklist of indicators/issues identified in previous visioning with different stakeholders.

##### **1) APPRECIATING ACHIEVEMENTS**

- What are the key things you think you have achieved?
- How far and in what ways do you think the programme intervention has helped you?

##### **2) CLARIFYING CHALLENGES**

- What are the main things you would like to change?
- What has been stopping you from changing them in the past? (This could lead into problem tree analysis –see [Thinking Through Diagrams.](#))

##### **3) EXPLORING THE FUTURE**

- What steps do you think you could take to achieve your dream and/or address these challenges?
- What do you think other people in your household and community could do?
- Are there any wider changes needed e.g. in society, attitudes, legislation etc
- Are there any things which you think the programme/policy makers could do?
- Do respondents have any questions or worries which need to be addressed in follow-up? E.g. the need for confidentiality, timing etc.
- Do respondents have any suggestions as to how the policy recommendations they suggest could be implemented? How will this be followed up?

If these steps are followed by investigators or facilitators with good interpersonal skills, then the discussions should of themselves be useful and interesting to respondents:

- It helps people to appreciate their achievements and feel good and confident about what they have already done, however great their problems may be
- It also clarifies where people wish to go next and their priorities for change
- It clarifies why they have already not been able to get there
- It begins by identifying what they themselves and others around them can do before looking at how external interventions can support this process.

This is particularly the case with participatory focus groups.

Whatever methods are used Empowering Enquiry, like all questioning, requires good interpersonal skills on the part of the investigating agencies and also an understanding of context. It requires:

- treating all respondents and their needs with respect and appreciating their generosity in giving their time for the assessment
- sensitivity to the respondents' mood, body language and time constraints and to the different cultural norms that may shape these;
- making interviews and discussions fun through using humour and personal experience to lighten up long list of questions, bring up sensitive issues or to challenge a response
- respect for any fears or reservations which they may have about potential outcomes from the investigation.

Where very detailed information is needed, there are ways in which questions can be structured in order to increase people's understanding of their situation and possible options for change.

## **SECTION 5: NEGOTIATING CHANGE: RETHINKING ANALYSIS AND DISSEMINATION**

Many monitoring and evaluation exercises or impact assessments have little influence on practical change within projects, programmes of the policy environment. This is partly because analysis and dissemination are often seen as a one-off event, rather than a strategic and ongoing process which progressively involves all or most key stakeholders. It is only through the

involvement of a range of stakeholders that the findings of any assessment will come to be generally accepted. In the real world this is also likely to involve negotiation of potentially conflicting interests. In particular it will involve the participation of intended beneficiaries in order to ensure downward as well as upward accountability and implementation of pro poor changes.

As improving practice is one of the key aims of Empowering Enquiry there is therefore a need to develop new approaches to the analysis of information and its dissemination. Detailed discussion of information analysis and dissemination can be found elsewhere on this web site - see [Analysis and Dissemination](#). In Empowering Enquiry analysis and dissemination of information are integral to the investigation process. Use of participatory methods and empowering questioning ensure that respondents are directly involved in questioning and analysing the information they provide and that this is immediately fed back to participants.

Complementing this immediate feedback to participants there is also a need for more periodic reflection and analysis which will synthesise and disseminate information for all the different stakeholders including local, national and international policy makers as well as grass-roots representatives. A convincing and academically credible report is needed for ultimate reference and justification, preferably accessible through the Internet as well as in hard copy. However considerable thought also needs to be given to how this analysis can then be made understandable and accessible to very busy policymakers and practitioners. It must also be accessible, possibly in a different form, to grass-roots representatives who are likely to be key in ensuring accountability of implementation of recommendations.

Dissemination may take a number of different forms:

- synthesis of the information findings in written reports of different length and style depending on the needs of the particular user
- photography and video
- face-to-face dissemination through participatory workshops with institutional and other key stakeholders
- 'intensive networking' through annual fairs and other public events (see the experience of Anandi above which served both as a process for reflection and possessing progress towards their development goals)

## **SECTION 6: EMPOWERING INSTITUTIONS: KEY CHALLENGES**

Empowering Enquiry thus presents the possibility of an investigation process which involves all stakeholders, including the very poor and vulnerable, in the whole process of investigation design, implementation, analysis and dissemination. No investigation process is ever completely reliable, no matter how apparently 'scientific' its design. However Empowering Enquiry



increases the likelihood of reliable information, realisable recommendations and ultimate implementation. The investigation process itself is also empowering for those involved, rather than being a mechanical extractive process which many, if not most, of those involved wish to get over as quickly as possible in order to get on with ' real development ' or their everyday lives.

Empowering Enquiry does not necessarily involve more costs than conventional approaches to impact assessment. It requires a more focused approach to practical questions and the engagement of interest of the different stakeholders to exchange their experience, views and suggestions of ways forward. It requires careful facilitation of the investigation process by people with good interpersonal skills. It also requires analytical skills in participatory methods as well as qualitative and quantitative methods and good communication skills for dissemination to different audiences. These do not necessarily however entail more costs on skilled staff or consultants, but the combination of different skills and more explicit Terms of Reference.

Perhaps the biggest challenge is attitudinal in prioritising what is practically useful over what is 'scientifically respectable'. Most impact assessments, however apparently rigorous, have inevitable shortcomings in the limitations of indicators used and/or actual samples interviewed and/or interviewee reliability. Even in-depth academic research which has produced credible analysis and some realistic recommendations often has very limited impact on policy<sup>4</sup>. Given limited resources, there is a need to think through carefully what sorts of levels of reliability and credibility of information are necessary in order to make practical decisions. As discussed elsewhere on this web site, even quantitative information can be collected reliably using qualitative and participatory methods with carefully selected purposive samples. Videos and photography often have more impact than long academic reports. There is a need therefore to carefully think through the balance of different methodologies and different methods for dissemination.

There is also a need to build structures for grassroots learning around economic and enterprise issues as part of civil society development. This is the only way in which grassroots accountability in programmes and policy change can be achieved. Although it will require considerable energy and innovation in the short term, ultimately it will decrease the costs and increase the reliability of impact assessment. This is in itself also a valuable contribution to empowerment and development.

## REFERENCES

Cooperrider, D. L. and D. Whitney (1999). Appreciative Inquiry. San Fransisco, Berrett-Koehler.

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<sup>4</sup> For a useful discussion of the way in which UK-funded research could have more policy influence see a report by id21 <http://www.id21-info/index.html>. This stresses the need for more local rather than international research, better non-academic dissemination and better links between researchers and users of information.

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