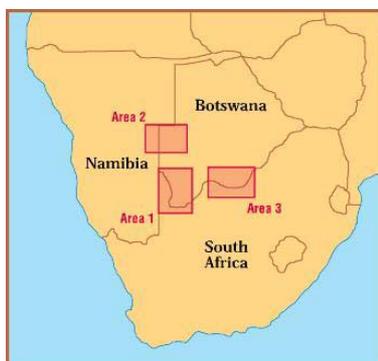


Investigating policy, poverty and livelihoods: methods for social research

Key points

- A range of different methods should be used when investigating policy, poverty and livelihood issues
- Combining social and environmental methods gives a fuller picture of rural life
- Participatory methods complement more traditional interviewing techniques effectively
- Attention should be given to issues of scale and definition of units of analysis



Research areas:

1. Arid southwest:
 - a) Mier, South Africa
 - b) SW Kgalagadi, Botswana
2. Semiarid northwest:
 - a) Ghanzi Dist, Botswana
 - b) Omaheke, Namibia
3. Dry sub-humid southeast:
 - a) NW Province South Africa,
 - c) Barolonas. Botswana

No. 1A

PANRUSA Briefing Notes

PANRUSA, Poverty Policy and Natural Resource Use in Southern Africa. A DFID funded research project at the University of Sheffield UK.

This briefing outlines the way in which PANRUSA research has investigated issues of policy, poverty and livelihoods in its three study areas. It outlines the social methods that were adopted, including policy documents analysis, semi-structured interviews, participatory appraisals, and questionnaire surveys. The PANRUSA project has taken a dualistic approach, integrating social and environmental data collection, and this aspect is explored in more detail in Briefing Notes 1B.

Analysing policy documents

The language used in policy documents often makes repeated use of terms such as *target group*, *community* or *stakeholders*. Alternatively it might label people as *rural poor*, *peasant* or *landless*. These terms often lack precise definitions and can be both stereotyping (over simplifying) and homogenising (treating all people as the same) to both individuals and groups. For example, the DFID White Paper on International Development makes repeated use of the term *rural poor* without any real definition of who these people are. On the other hand, South Africa's Rural Development Framework specifically outlines who and where the *rural people* are located. In contrast again, Botswana's policy documents all refer to *poorer rural dwellers*, and the *human population* in some of the environmental documentation. Overall, few attempt to identify the *poor people* and use such terms as *including women and children* indiscriminately (for example, in the CCD).

Within the PANRUSA project, it is recognised that there is a need to identify the different sets of policy language used across the regions and sectors of government, specifically, within the context of the different local and global government development agendas. The PANRUSA project involves several aspects of policy critical to understanding the requirements for effective, equitable and sustainable participatory management of natural resources in dryland areas. These include: policy document analysis for Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, as well as for international agreements and directives; assessments of policies 'in the field' from the perspectives of individuals communities, governments, NGOs etc; analysis of policy institutions (and the different people working within them) and in particular the chains of communication which link these diverse levels.

Data collection & interpretation

Within the different research areas a range of different methods were adopted to address the aims of the research.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted around a set of questions relating to livelihoods, natural resource use and flexible adaptations to both policy and the environment. These fairly informal interviews lasted between 30 minutes to 2 hours. They were usually conducted in the respondent's own compound, on their farm or at their cattle post. Most interviews were conducted using a translator. Notes taken during the interview were written up and coded, by theme, as part of the analysis.

Questionnaire surveys were used in one area by a collaborator. Twenty five percent of the population of Area 1a was interviewed using a structured set of pre-determined questions. This data was then analysed using simple statistical techniques. These results can be linked to environmental data.

Group discussions around specific topics were held in some areas. These allowed different groups of people (e.g. women, recent settlers) to express their views and reflect upon key issues such as land rights, drought coping strategies or environmental change. Notes from these meetings were written up and coded, by theme, as part of the analysis.

Participatory mapping occurred both as a social method (distribution of households) and as an integrated social and environmental method (distribution of resources). It also provided a focus for wide ranging discussions about social and environmental issues.

Case studies were selected after detailed analysis of data collected from one field visit was analysed prior to the follow up fieldwork. Areas 1a, 2b, 3a and 3c were visited in 1999 and 2000. Area 1b was visited more intensively in 2000 (combining social, environmental and in-depth studies). Area 2a had been visited in a previous Sheffield University research project and additional data was collected in 2000.

Time scales

This research project spans three years with most data collection occurring within a two year period, 1999-2000. The data must be interpreted with this in mind. The picture presented by the data reflects processes and events outside this time scale of the project which have an impact upon the data which may not be easy to identify. In particular, when relating policy practices to environmental changes and livelihoods, care needs to be taken to understand the different temporal and spatial scales.

Definitions

The main unit of analysis during the surveys was the **household**. This was defined as those living within the same compound who worked and contributed food or income to unit. There are inherent difficulties and limitations in such a definition which is used across countries and cultures. Not all households regard themselves in the same way and these difficulties need to be made clear.

Households in were divided into **categories** to aid comparison. These categories were based on the purpose of farming as a livelihood rather than on wealth or status.

Large-scale commercial farming household: large scale farming operation growing cash crops and/or having large herds of livestock.

Small-scale commercial farming household: household growing cash crops only and sells all of crop to co-operative or marketing board. Many have medium levels of livestock some of which are sold commercially. Even if low level of overall income, still a commercially based livelihood.

Semi-subsistence farming household: household grows some cash crops but may keep proportion for themselves or grow other less commercial crops. Keep some livestock mainly for own consumption. May use farming as a supplement to other livelihoods e.g. waged work.

Subsistence farming household: household grows crops or keeps animals for own use only, selling very little if any of their produce. Again, may be as a supplement to other livelihoods, or farming may be main livelihood activity.

Non-farming household: household does not farm either because of lack of interest/need, other work commitments or lack of access to land, livestock, labour and machinery.

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