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4. Ethnographic Methods: Concepts and Field Techniques

Stuart Kirsch

Poverty is not a certain small amount of goods, nor is it just a relation between means and ends; above all it is a relation between people.
Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (1972:37)

Poverty is much more than a lack of income. Poverty also means [the poor] having no "voice" in influencing key decisions that affect their lives, or representation in state and national political institutions.
World Bank (2000)

This chapter provides guidance on the application of qualitative methods developed by anthropologists for ethnographic research to World Bank project design, implementation, and evaluation.[1] It offers task managers practical guidelines for using ethnographic methods of participant-observation, qualitative and semistructured interviewing techniques, and case study analyses. It also encourages task managers to use ethnographic methods to supplement quantitative data collected by the World Bank.[2]

Ethnographic methods may be used at the level of local institutions as well as in processes that transcend local contexts. These methods can also be used to "study up," to provide information about development projects and the workings of capital.

This chapter recommends that task managers supplement ethnographic research methods with two additional techniques. The first are the participatory research methods that are normally used in rapid appraisal exercises. These methods, which emphasize local participation and making research results accessible to community members, can be used to assist the poor by providing them with valuable knowledge and skills. The second recommendation is derived from the model of community-based research, in which the skills and resources of the researcher are put in service of community goals. The resulting collaboration can increase local understanding of, and control over, the processes of development. These methods can be used to stimulate the following innovations in development policy and practice:

- Developing agendas that are responsive to community needs
- Integrating complementary knowledge bases
- Providing information and research tools to local communities and encouraging them to develop their own analyses.

While *listening to the poor* is an essential strategy for analyzing the causes and consequences of poverty and devising appropriate interventions, it poses new methodological challenges for Bank task managers. Ethnographic methods, with their focus on local knowledge and understanding, provide important analytical tools to help address the problems of poverty. Applied in conjunction with participatory research methods and the model of community-based research, these methods can provide the poor with new skills and information that will help them to analyze, understand, and alter their predicaments.

This chapter is organized in the following sections:

1. Use of ethnographic research methods
2. Key principles in conducting ethnographic research
3. Limitations of ethnographic methods
4. Identification of the right data for one's needs
5. Appropriate interview strategy
6. How to conduct effective ethnographic interviews
7. How to organize an ethnographic account
8. The case study method
9. How to combine ethnographic methods with participatory research analysis
10. How to combine ethnographic methods with community-based research

1. Use of Ethnographic Research Methods

Ethnographic research methods may be productively employed by World Bank task managers in the following contexts: (a) preliminary research to assess differences within and among communities, especially the unequal distribution of power, (b) project planning, and (c) project implementation and monitoring.

Assessing Difference within Communities

Existing rifts and fault lines in a community may well become impediments to successful project implementation if they are not clearly identified in advance. Ethnographic investigation can reveal local sources of power and inequality, including gendered differences in political participation, unbalanced land distribution, local alliances and class interests, and controls over information. Projects may also inadvertently transform these differences into new forms of inequality or exacerbate existing inequalities. These differences may occur along:

- Gender lines, for example, increasing women's workloads or restricting their autonomy.
- Generational lines, for example, providing the younger generation with the means to challenge the authority of their seniors.
- Class lines, for example, landowners may oppose land reforms favored by peasants, or agro-industry may object to water diversification projects.
- Linguistic lines, for example, creating barriers in the flow of critical information.
- Religious lines, for example, non-Catholics may resent support for Catholic community organizations.

Project Planning

Ethnographic research can also assess local responses to program assumptions, objectives, and techniques. If incorporated in the early stages of planning, ethnographic research can have beneficial impact on decisionmaking and results. Successful applications of participant-observation and other ethnographic methods in development contexts include primary health care planning in Nepal (Justice 1986), the problems of involuntary displacement (Cernea 1993), and the evaluation of a World Bank-sponsored public housing project in Ecuador (Salmen 1987).

Ethnographic investigation may be particularly useful in identifying problems inherent in planning assumptions, as Gardner and Lewis (1996:147-51) argued in their analysis of a project to construct a fish farm in rural South Asia. The initial project was strongly biased toward the introduction of new technology and failed to adequately investigate the social context. Yet, "by opening up avenues for discussion with local people, and identifying some of the potentially contradictory interests and needs of different classes and groups, better decisions [were] made about . . . what the project has to offer to specific categories of person" (p. 150). By integrating local knowledge and technologies in project planning, the anthropologists also increased the acceptance—as well as the efficacy—of the proposed project.

Project Evaluation

Ethnographic methods may also be used to evaluate ongoing development projects, as Gardner and Lewis (1996:140-41) observed in reference to a training program for rural cooperatives in South Asia. Their analysis focused on how the hierarchical organization of power within the development project impeded the distribution of knowledge about different aspects of the project. They recommended building stronger relationships between expatriate and local staff, as well as between project staff and their clients. They also advised the project to develop stronger links between the contextual knowledge of project clients and the complementary desk-based knowledge of project staff. Furthermore, their analysis of how local interests affected participation created the opportunity for enhancing participation in the project.

2. Key Principles in Conducting Ethnographic Research

There are six basic principles of ethnographic research: (a) research should be conducted primarily outside of formal contexts, (b) direct observation should be combined with interviews, (c) research should emphasize local knowledge and categories, (d) direct personal engagement with community members is essential, (e) all of the major segments or factions of the group under study should be included; and (f) researchers must ensure that informants are not harmed by the research.

Research Should Be Conducted Primarily in Natural Settings

Ethnographic research should be conducted wherever people are actually engaged in the process under study. Research on agriculture, for example, should take place (at least in part) in the fields and the marketplace. Information gathered in natural settings such as these is richer and more contextualized than data obtained solely through formal and structured approaches.

Direct Observation Should Be Combined with Interviews

What people do and say are often different (see Bernard and others 1984). This requires a focus on *practice*, on behavior and action, in addition to how people describe their own actions or explain their motivations. The distance that comes from being an external observer may reveal patterns of behavior that may not be visible to the participants themselves. Because people do not always describe their own behavior accurately, observation is an important corrective to research methods that rely on self-reporting in questionnaires, surveys, and interviews.

Focus on Local Knowledge and Categories

Ethnographic methods focus on local concepts and understandings. Development initiatives should be responsive to local knowledge and perspectives, rather than recapitulating and imposing the views of external observers. Framing projects in local terms also facilitates participation.

Direct Personal Engagement with Community Members Is Essential

Ethnographic research relies on direct contact with the subjects of study, rather than indirect interaction through a research instrument such as a survey or a questionnaire. Rapport with

Box 1. Reversing roles

By wagging the finger, holding the stick, sitting on the chair behind the table; by dominating and overwhelming thought and speech; by being rushed and impatient; by demanding information and answers; by believing that we know and they are ignorant, that they are the problem and we are the solution; by failing to sit down with respect and interest and listen and learn—in these ways we have impeded expression of knowledge and creative analysis by rural people.

R. Chambers (1992: 298-99)

informants in ethnographic research differs significantly from the standards of objective formality and distance that characterize the relationships between other social scientists and the persons that they study. These relationships can be facilitated by explaining the objectives of the research project to community members and soliciting their input. Such two-way communication is the cornerstone of ethnographic research and is an appropriate starting point for any form of collaboration, including development initiatives.

Include All of the Major Segments or Factions of the Community under Study

This may require meeting separately with different groups of people, for example, with youth, women, or political leaders. The views of laypersons must be considered in addition to those of local experts. This makes it possible to map or track the distribution of local knowledge, paying attention to divergent views as well as bottlenecks in the flow of information, rather than to simply the dominant (or most common) understandings.

Ensure That One's Informants Will Not Be Harmed by the Research

The most important tenets of the American Anthropological Association's code of ethics is that the ethnographer: (1) is obligated to ensure that the research will not cause any harm to the subjects; (2) must respect local rights to privacy; and (3) is required to make public the results of his or her research (American Anthropological Association 1998; see also Association of Social Anthropologists of the Commonwealth 1999).

3. Limitations of Ethnographic Methods

The relatively small sample size of ethnographic research projects means that these studies do not provide the same guarantees of generalizability as large, controlled studies. Furthermore, ethnographic research is not generally replicable, given differences between researchers and the fact that research settings continually undergo change. Thus, the principles of reliability and generalizability must be conceptualized differently by focusing on corroboration and consistency within ethnographic accounts.

Another way to overcome these limitations is by making use of complementary methods, including surveys and questionnaires. These methods may be applied after one has carried out preliminary ethnographic research to establish the most important issues and questions. Alternatively, ethnographic methods can be used to collect and interpret data in selected locales following the implementation of rapid assessment or participatory appraisal exercises. Ethnographic research methods can also be used to supplement quantitative studies by ground-truthing or spot-checking more generalized findings. They can also be used to interpret key research results.

4. Identification of the Right Data for One's Needs

Ethnographic research produces several kinds of data. It is important to identify one's needs in advance.

- *Methodological* conclusions indicate how to collect relevant data on a particular subject. For example, what variables will give one an efficient measure of household poverty in a particular community? Data collection can then be replicated in other project areas to identify regional variation or to monitor change over time.
- *Relational* data consider how different factors or variables are interconnected. For example, how does the price of fuel affect the decisions that people make regarding the marketing of produce?
- *Sociological* data examine who participates in particular social processes and why. Such information may be critical in identifying the factors that inhibit participation in the formal economic sector as well as relative rates of success.
- *Interpretive* information considers the meanings given to specific actions or behaviors by the actors themselves, providing an impor-

tant middle ground between raw data and analytical models.
- *Explanatory* data provide information on how a particular process works. For instance, how are prices determined by competing individuals in a market? It is important to note that on their own, ethnographic methods cannot determine causality, that is, that one behavior is the cause or consequence of another. They can, however, be used to formulate hypotheses that may be scientifically tested.

5. Appropriate Interview Strategy

Qualitative interviewing is one of the primary techniques employed in ethnographic research. Ethnographic studies depend on smaller sample sizes than questionnaires or surveys, which may interview larger numbers of people in less depth. In comparison with these other methods, however, participants in qualitative interviews may provide a substantial quantity of information. There are important choices that must be made by the analyst, including structured versus unstructured interviewing, individual versus group interviewing, and multiple, in-depth interviews versus a larger sample size.

Structured vs. Unstructured Interviews

In structured interviews, one plans the questions in advance. Structured interviews generate standardized kinds of information; for example, they are particularly useful for collecting census information, genealogies, and data on exchange practices. They are most often used when collecting information from either the entire population or a representative sample. Research to identify the appropriate questions should always be undertaken first, followed by constructing and field-testing a preliminary questionnaire, which should be revised until the appropriate data are elicited. These interviews are perhaps most appropriate for topics that are already well defined. These interviews can be structured using the Focus Group methodology.

In contrast, unstructured interviews allow the informants to shape the discussion, so that they direct the researcher toward the most important issues from their perspectives. Successful ethnographic research design should retain the capacity to surprise the researcher with unexpected results. The contribution of the researcher is in identifying the relevance of this information. Comparability and focus are compromised with this interview strategy, although this method has the potential to produce the most novel results. This type of interview strategy is used in Appreciative Inquiry and Scenario Analysis.

Single vs. Group Interviews

Interviews with individuals provide the opportunity to learn about their personal circumstances and perspectives in detail and to discuss issues that would be difficult (or inappropriate) to address in group situations.

In contrast, group interviews reduce the pressure on the informant to respond to every question. Participants can build on the remarks of others and may encourage one another to contribute more. A wide range of views can be recorded in a relatively brief period.

The disadvantage of group interviews is the loss of privacy for informants. Another is that subjects will respond in part to their peers rather than to the researcher, reducing the researcher's control over the interview process, particularly when working with an interpreter. Groups may be assembled randomly or selected systematically to allow for a more focused discussion of a particular issue.

Multiple Interviews vs. Larger Sample Size

The interviewer must also choose between conducting in-depth interviews with a limited number of subjects and opting for a wider range of participants. Multiple interviews with the same person can enhance rapport and encourage the subject to respond more naturally to questions. The process may also teach key informants about the information that the researcher seeks, enabling the informant to become a better source of information. However, these benefits must be balanced by the need to obtain a sufficiently large and diverse sample.

Optimizing Interview Strategies

For development contexts, semi-structured interviewing that combines both structured and unstructured elements is generally recommended (Rietbergen-McCracken and Narayan 1997a). Sanal Ece **[Q need date of publication]** describes semi-structured interviews as a "low-cost" and "rapid" way to collect information "from individuals and small groups," recommending that they be kept "conversational enough to allow participants to introduce and discuss issues that they deem to be relevant." Group interviews are an efficient means of documenting a wide range of views in a short time. This technique can be supplemented with one or more interviews with several carefully chosen individuals. These secondary interviews are particularly useful in drawing out the full implications of the material presented in the group interviews.

The best approach to interviewing is to combine strategies. One suggestion is to begin research on a new project by carrying out unstructured interviews that generate a list of questions and topics to be pursued further. These initial interviews can be very time-consuming, but generally reveal unanticipated but critical variables. Subsequent interviews should be started with a several short questions that elicit background information for comparative purposes. Next, several questions (derived from the preliminary research) could be used to facilitate the transition to an open-ended interview. Unlike formal survey methods, it is appropriate to use information from previous interviews to guide the discussion and even to solicit commentary on this information.

6. How to Conduct Effective Ethnographic Interviews

The major factors in conducting effective ethnographic interviews are: (a) the setting, (b) interviewer strategies, (c) recognizing cultural differences, (d) choosing the right informants, (e) recording the information and (f) reporting the results.

Setting

The interview itself should be relaxed and comfortable, not confrontational. A neutral setting is desirable. An institutional setting may make the subject uncomfortable, whereas if the setting is too relaxed, it may hinder productivity.

Interviewer Strategies

It is helpful to present oneself as informed, but independent. The interviewer should avoid talking too much, as an interview is not a conversation, although some turn-taking, that is, sharing of examples from other research contexts, may be warranted on occasion. This can also be helpful in terms of illustrating the kind of information that one seeks.

Recognizing Cultural Differences

The researcher should keep in mind that there may be culturally appropriate or inappropriate strategies for asking appropriate questions, for example, that Euro-American executives like to be asked about what they have accomplished, or that people are often reluctant to divulge "private" information about their earnings. Seek clarification of what one does not understand, but do not restrict the responses of one's informants only to terms with which one is already familiar. (A common mistake in interviewing strategies is to ask informants how they would define Euro-American categories, for example, leasing of land, before investigating local property models).

Choosing the Right Informants

A good informant has a formal role in the community and/or regularly participates in activities that expose him or her to the information being sought, for example, the person who takes goods to the market in a project on marketing, or the user of a particular service. (Violation of this principle is a common cause of gender bias in research). In addition to being knowledgeable on the subject, the informant must be willing to share this information and be able to communicate effectively. The responses of a good informant should also be internally consistent. Rather than select informants on the basis of their impartiality, the interviewer must learn to evaluate the interests and stakes of the persons participating in their research.

Recording the Information

Semi-structured interviews generate more information than it may be possible to record by hand. Write notes as the conversation develops, trying not to interrupt the flow of the discussion, although it may be necessary to slow the pace. An interview should be directed back on track when the subject speaks in general terms about things about which he or she lacks first-hand knowledge. Many anthropologists tape their interviews, although working with tapes and transcripts is very labor-intensive. Leave time after each interview to write up the results while they are still fresh, including questions that one did not think to ask.

Reporting the Results of Qualitative Interviews

The interview material may be difficult to categorize, with the result that the analysis relies more on interpretation, summary, and integration than quantification and correlation. Findings are usually supported by quotations and case descriptions rather than statistical summaries and tables (Weiss 1994:3). While organizing interview data, keep the following organizational frameworks in mind:

- Qualitative interviewing can produce *detailed descriptions* of events and processes.
- It permits the *integration of multiple perspectives* that no single individual can possess in totality, for example, how the welfare system works from the perspective of legislators, case workers, and recipients.
- It can document *the steps in a process*, for example, the operation of a collective irrigation system.
- It can produce a *holistic account* of a process or an event, for example, how a particular commodity is produced, marketed, and consumed.
- It can examine *how events are interpreted*, for example, how rural villagers view pollution caused by a mining company, in contrast to scientific assessments of the damage downstream.
- Qualitative interviewing can *bridge intersubjectivities,* conveying a situation from the insider's perspective, including the use of first-person narrative description and analysis.
- Finally, qualitative interviewing can *identify variables* and *frame hypotheses for subsequent quantitative research* (Weiss 1994:9-11).

7. How to Organize an Ethnographic Account

Ethnographic description relies on discerning the "experience-near" concepts that people naturally and effortlessly use to define what they think, feel, or imagine, in contrast to the "experience-distant" categories that specialist observers use to advance their scientific or practical objectives (Geertz 1983:57-58). Discrimination, poverty, and hunger are conditions that people experience directly, whereas social stratification, structural inequality, and economic disincentives to production are examples of concepts formulated by analysts. For example, consider the presumably straightforward task of collecting economic data from families in a rural community. It is critical that research take local definitions, such as for "household," into account. In a village census in Papua New Guinea, for example, one may obtain very different answers to the simple questions of "Whose lives in this house?" and "Who sleeps in this house?" The answer to the first question includes all of those persons who have the *right* to live in a particular house, even if they were born and reside elsewhere, whereas the second question will elicit a list of current occupants.

Here are some guidelines for organizing an ethnographic account of a specific behavior or event:

- Analysis of the specific behavior or event starts with the *identification* of the behavior in question as well as related questions about the form(s) that it might take.
- Then one determines the *frequency* of the behavior, how often it occurs, as well as its *magnitude,* strength, or importance.
- One should also investigate the place of this practice within a larger *sequence* of events, including its origins (looking backward in time) and consequences (projecting forward in time), or in both directions through longitudinal study (from beginning to end).
- Also important is the *complementarity* of related events, whether *symmetrical* (a change in one prompts a comparable change in the other) or *asymmetrical* (the change in one prompts an equivalent change in the other, but in the opposite direction).
- Finally, there are the *contributing* or *associated factors*, the conditions under which the behavior is more or less likely to occur.

Consider a hypothetical study of women marketing produce from their gardens. One must investigate how often this practice occurs, and its economic significance to the participants (measured in terms of resources gained as well as their effect on female autonomy) and their households. It is also necessary to consider which events encourage direct marketing by women, including questions of origins (for instance, planting with surplus production in mind) and consequences (whether women control the money they earn), as well as longitudinal study for the long-term consequences of this behavior. What is the relationship between these behaviors and other related events? For example, how does the marketing of agricultural produce affect women's workloads, including child-care responsibilities? Finally, what factors assist women in marketing produce directly, for example, improving safety at the marketplace, the effects of government subsidies or price supports, or the accessibility of microcredit schemes targeted to individual women?

Ethnographers also employ a variety of heuristic devices that assist them in organizing complex information in a manner parallel to the problem at hand. This list is suggestive rather than exhaustive or exclusive:

- Use specialized local vocabulary that suggests different concepts or categories.
- Structure the material in terms of the steps of the analysis.
- Organize the argument by following a sequence of events.
- Use social hierarchy as a frame of reference, for example, from lower to upper class, or from workers to management.
- Organize the analysis with reference to spatial organization.
- Track the process under study, for example, the steps involved in agriculture, from preparing the soil to harvest.
- Trace the social life of a particular object from raw material to manufacture to sale to use to discard.
- Focus on life histories (of a person or a family) or social history (of an institution or a period of time).
- Emphasize the boundaries and borders that define groups and difference, or the criteria for entering and leaving a group.

8. The Case Study Method

The case study method "involves the investigation of a *relatively small* number of *naturally occurring* (rather than researcher-created) cases" (Hammersley 1992:185). It follows the parties involved, including their interactions and reactions, as well as the consequences of the events on the people and their activities. Kane (1995:176) presents a detailed and very useful example of how the case study method operates:

> Suppose you have found that while most girls from poor rural backgrounds grow up to live in poverty and to do the same work that their parents performed, others become professionals, large-scale entrepreneurs, political figures, and so on.

> What made the difference in these women's lives? Case studies use almost all the research techniques in the social scientist's tool kit. Let us say that you did a survey of these women and found certain patterns emerging: they had a dynamic headmistress at school, a supportive parent, were good at a particular subject, took a particular approach toward life, and so on. One factor is unlikely to be the cause. This is what a case study is good for: showing how factors and circumstances come together over time. You can select your case studies from among women who seem to illustrate the pattern, and build a picture of them. Interview the women, their families, their teachers, and anyone else who seems relevant. Look at documents such as their old school records. Not only can they give you information, they can tell whether the timing was important. Was a particular headmistress present at a particular stage in their schooling? Observe how the women behave, their attitudes, how they go about things now. Do these give you any insights into the qualities that have helped them? Using material from all these techniques and sources, you try to show how these factors worked in real life.

The case study method focuses simultaneously on structure and agency, or practice (van Velsen 1979). In other words, it takes into consideration both the structural—political, organizational, legal, economic—factors in a society and individual choices, which combine to produce particular outcomes. The concreteness of the case study method makes it particularly relevant for research in applied settings.

Returning to the question of poverty, consider the following observation made by an Indian activist:

> In Maharashtra, where I live, farmers are not permitted to follow traditional methods of separating cotton lint from seeds under the Cotton Monopoly Purchasing Scheme; in sugarcane areas a special permit is now required to make jaggery (unrefined sugar lump) by traditional methods rather than to give cane to the sugar factories. Peasants trying to build a small dam by selling some of the sand from a dried-up river running through their village had to engage in a four-year struggle with the state government to get the rights to prevent the sand being auctioned off to contractors (Omvedt 1993: 119).

Presumably the economic policies that Omvedt describes were well intentioned, although their impact on the poor may not have been adequately understood when they were implemented. Using case study methods, anthropologists can document the processes that create and perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

9. How to Combine Ethnographic Methods with Participatory Research Analysis

When ethnographic research methods are combined with participatory techniques (Chambers 1992, 1998; Rietbergen-McCracken and Narayan 1997a), important information can be shared with community members (box 2). Mascarenhas (1992) and Chambers (1992) described a number of strategies to involve community members in the research process. Local research assistants and other community members can map primary resource use (land, water, and forests) and other economic patterns. These variables can be given historical depth by constructing a time line of events that can be applied to past resource use. This information can be gathered in part by interviewing older people about changes to the landscape at different points in time. Seasonality can be documented by diagramming patterns of rainfall, employment, income and expenditure, credit and debt, food and nutrition, and disease. Value ranking techniques may be constructively applied to the economic importance of plants and animals or different economic activities. Wealth and inequality may be documented by establishing the economic position of community members. By participating in the data-gathering, community members

Box 2. Participatory research methods (PRA)

Interviews/discussions. Individuals, households, focus groups and community meetings

Mapping. Community maps, personal maps, institutional maps

Ranking. Problem ranking, preference ranking, wealth ranking

Trend analysis. Historical diagramming, seasonal calendars, daily activity charts

Source: Rietbergen-McCracken and Narayan (1997: 4).

have the opportunity to learn about these issues, a process that can be enhanced by visually sharing the research results in the form of maps, diagrams, and graphic representations of quantified data.

While Kane (1995) argued that "rapid assessment and participating learning approaches" produce "reliable, timely and culturally sensitive information," these methods have been critiqued on several grounds. Harris and others (cited in Ervin 2000:195-97) have identified several potential shortcomings:

- They questioned the *accuracy* of the resulting data. By focusing on objective, tangible criteria—things that can be mapped, measured, and diagrammed—they may neglect local meanings, interpretations and motivations. By choosing the village as their unit of analysis, they may downplay or overlook the important interconnections to regional, national, and international political and economic systems.
- They also raised questions about *utility and feasibility*. By operating rapidly, they rarely have the time to follow through on ambiguous or anomalous findings that might signal key issues. They do not provide the opportunity to interact with local informants on a sustained basis that is the cornerstone of ethnographic methods. Data collection exercises by outsiders may not always be well received, particularly when the researchers' requests for assistance precede any sort of a relationship and little or nothing concrete is offered in return.
- Harris and others also raised questions of *propriety*. The rubric of participation has been criticized by anthropologists for masking differences within communities and for legitimizing project objectives rather than empowering project participants (Gardner and Lewis 1996:110-16).

These shortcomings suggest that the *practical techniques* associated with PRA–rather than their rapid application–should be integrated within a broader plan for ethnographic research and in project preparation and implementation.

10. How to Combine Ethnographic Methods and Community-based Research

World Bank task managers may also put ethnographic methods in service of local communities themselves. Here I follow the innovative agenda for community-based research proposed by Sclove and others (1998), which may be applied to development contexts. They note that "community-based research processes differ fundamentally from mainstream research in being coupled relatively tightly with community groups that are eager to know the research results and to use them in practical efforts to achieve constructive social change." This takes the popular notion of "participation" to its logical conclusion, by putting research—and development initiatives—in service of the poor. Community-based research can be used to stimulate the following innovations in development practice:

Agendas That Respond to Community Needs

Ethnographic research can document the needs of community members, paying attention to differences as well as shared interests. It can identify the factors that prevent community members from achieving their goals. These may be:

- *Institutional*. For example, the inability to resolve conflicts, requiring training in conflict resolution and/or the establishment of structures that can mediate future disputes

- *Informational*. For example, lacking crucial knowledge of markets or how to succeed in the context of free trade
- *Infrastructural*. For example, lacking key resources, such as start-up capital, or the opportunity to learn skills in demand.

Ethnographic research can be applied in social audits and participatory monitoring and evaluation that help to make sure that development projects are responsive to the needs of their stakeholders.

Integration of Complementary Knowledge bases

Community members may have greater experiential knowledge that will be crucial to a project's success or failure, while World Bank task managers may have greater technical and theoretical knowledge. Integration of the two types of information will provide important resources for both groups. Community members will have the opportunity to see and think through alternatives, while task managers will be able to ground-truth their proposals. Setting up a partnership or a collaborative relationship between the two groups may also limit concerns about dependency, while maximizing the contributions of task managers.

Providing Information and Research Tools for Local Communities to Develop Their Own Analyses

Involving the poor in ethnographic research can provide them with new ways to understand local as well as translocal processes. Research results should be made accessible to local communities, rather than monopolized by the institutions or agencies responsible for their production, so that community groups may use them in practical efforts to achieve social change. Experimentation with format (for example, emphasizing graphic or pictorial representations, along with oral presentations) may be necessary to facilitate access. Ethnographic research organized in response to community concerns may also contribute to more appropriate project design.

Notes

1. This chapter benefited substantially from the recommendations of Daniel Friedheim, Ashraf Ghani, Lynn Morgan, Elisha Renne, and especially James Trostle. Thanks also to Clare Lockhart and Alicia Hetzner. The views represented here are those of the author and not the World Bank or the University of Michigan.

2. For additional information on ethnographic methods see Agar (1996), Bernard (1994), Pelto and Pelto (1988), and Schensul (1999). For references on anthropology and sociology in development, consult Cernea and others (1994). On rapid assessment procedures, see Chambers (1998).

General References

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