
Social Impact Assessment tools and methods

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Stakeholder Analysis is an entry point to SIA and participatory work. It addresses strategic questions, e.g. who are the key stakeholders? what are their interests in the project or policy? what are the power differentials between them? what relative influence do they have on the operation? This information helps to identify institutions and relations which, if ignored, can have negative influence on proposals or, if considered, can be built upon to strengthen them.

Gender Analysis focuses on understanding and documenting the differences in gender roles, activities, needs and opportunities in a given context. It highlights the different roles and behaviour of men and women. These attributes vary across cultures, class, ethnicity, income, education, and time; and so gender analysis does not treat women as a homogeneous group.

Secondary Data Review of information from previously conducted work is an inexpensive, easy way to narrow the focus of a social assessment, to identify experts and institutions that are familiar with the development context, and to establish a relevant framework and key social variables in advance.

Community-based methods

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) covers a family of participatory approaches and methods, which emphasises local knowledge and action. It uses to group animation and exercises to facilitate stakeholders to share information and make their own appraisals and plans. Originally developed for use in rural areas, PRA has been employed successfully in a variety of settings to enable local people to work together to plan community-appropriate developments.

SARAR is an acronym of five attributes -- self-esteem, associative strength, resourcefulness, action planning and responsibility for follow-through -- that are important for achieving a participatory approach to development. SARAR is a philosophy of adult education and empowerment, which seeks to optimise people's ability to self-organize, take initiatives, and shoulder responsibilities. It is best classed as an experiential methodology, which involves setting aside hierarchical differences, team building through training, and learning from local experience rather than from external experts.

Consultation methods

Beneficiary Assessment (BA) is a systematic investigation of the perceptions of a sample of beneficiaries and other stakeholders to ensure that their concerns are heard and incorporated into project and policy formulation. The purposes are to (a) undertake systematic listening, which "gives voice" to poor and other hard-to-reach beneficiaries, highlighting constraints to beneficiary participation, and (b) obtain feedback on interventions.

Observation and interview tools

Participant Observation is a field technique used by anthropologists and sociologists to collect qualitative data and to develop in-depth understanding of peoples' motivations and attitudes. It is based on looking, listening, asking questions and keeping detailed field notes. Observation and analysis are supplemented by desk reviews of secondary sources, and hypotheses about local reality are checked with key local informants.

Semi-structured Interviews are a low-cost, rapid method for gathering information from individuals or small groups. Interviews are partially structured by a written guide to ensure that they are focused on the issue at hand, but stay conversational enough to allow participants to introduce and discuss aspects that they consider to be relevant.

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Focus Group Meetings are a rapid way to collect comparative data from a variety of stakeholders. They are brief meetings -- usually one to two hours -- with many potential uses, e.g. to address a particular concern; to build community consensus about implementation plans; to cross-check information with a large number of people; or to obtain reactions to hypothetical or intended actions.

Village Meetings allow local people to describe problems and outline their priorities and aspirations. They can be used to initiate collaborative planning, and to periodically share and verify information gathered from small groups or individuals by other means.

Participatory methods

Role Playing helps people to be creative, open their perspectives, understand the choices that another person might face, and make choices free from their usual responsibilities. This exercise can stimulate discussion, improve communication, and promote collaboration at both community and agency levels.

Wealth Ranking (also known as well-being ranking or vulnerability analysis) is a visual technique to engage local people in the rapid data collection and analysis of social stratification in a community (regardless of language and literacy barriers). It focuses on the factors which constitute wealth, such as ownership of or right to use productive assets, their relationship to locally powerful people, labour and indebtedness, and so on.

Access to Resources is a tool to collect information and raise awareness of how access to resources varies according to gender, age, marital status, parentage, and so on. This information can make all the difference to the success or failure of a proposal; for example, if health clinics require users to pay cash fees, and women are primarily responsible for accompanying sick or pregnant family members to the clinic, then women must have access to cash.

Analysis of Tasks clarifies the distribution of domestic and community activities by gender and the degree of role flexibility that is associated with each task. This is central to understanding the human resources that are necessary for running a community.

Mapping is an inexpensive tool for gathering both descriptive and diagnostic information. Mapping exercises are useful for collecting baseline data on a number of indicators as part of a beneficiary assessment or rapid appraisals, and can lay the foundation for community ownership of development planning by including different groups.

Needs Assessment draws out information about people's needs and requirements in their daily lives. It raises participants' awareness of development issues and provides a framework for prioritising actions and interventions. All sectors can benefit from participating in a needs assessment, as can trainers, project staff and field workers.

Pocket Charts are investigative tools, which use pictures as stimulus to encourage people to assess and analyse a given situation. Made of cloth, paper or cardboard, pockets are arranged into rows and columns, which are captioned by drawings. A "voting" process is used to engage participants in the technical aspects of development issues, such as water and sanitation projects.

Tree Diagrams are multi-purpose, visual tools for narrowing and prioritising problems, objectives or decisions. Information is organized into a tree-like diagram. The main issue is represented by the trunk, and the relevant factors, influences and outcomes are shown as roots and branches of the tree.

Workshop-based methods

Objectives-Oriented Project Planning is a method that encourages participatory planning and analysis throughout the project life cycle. A series of stakeholder workshops are held to set priorities, and integrate them into planning, implementation and monitoring. Building commitment and capacity is an integral part of this process.

TeamUP was developed to expand the benefits of objectives-oriented project planning and to make it more accessible for institution-wide use. PC/TeamUP is a software package, which automates the basic step-by-step methodology and guides stakeholders through research, project design, planning,

Social Impact Assessment tools and methods

implementation, and evaluation.

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