

Summary

This thesis evaluates past development projects and estimate the impact of the best projects on five wealth categories in a participatory and holistic way. The successes and pitfalls of the new methodology implemented within the PDA research project are also evaluated. In addition, the World Bank Participatory Poverty Assessment (WB PPA) from 1995 is compared to the present perception of poverty of the people in Northern Ghana in order to find out whether, after thirteen years, there have been any significant changes and differences in Ghanaian people's perception of their poverty. Moreover, this research recognizes and respects the articles 12, 13 and 14 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which stand for freedom of expression and thought of all children. Therefore, children's perception of poverty is also included in this thesis. Furthermore, because most demands for poverty assessment come from policy-makers and institutions, and traditionally there is a bigger demand for quantitative, rather than for qualitative research towards poverty assessment (Brannen 1992; Carvalho & White 1997), in this thesis an attempt will be made to suggest possible future indicators for quantitative assessments of poverty based on qualitative data.

The research was conducted in three villages in East Mamprusi District: Wundua, Kasape and Gbangu. The villages were chosen because of their geographical position– similar to those developed during the PDA workshops – areas of North-East, North-West and South of the Districts. All in all, six focus groups were carried out with community representatives, and three with the youth from Junior Secondary Schools. A sample adult group should consist of twenty male and female representatives of all major social and cultural categories of the community, yet in practice the groups were much bigger. As a target youth, pupils from third grade of JSS were chosen, as children that age were expected to understand the principle of our discussion, to speak fluent English and have no problem with writing basic sentences in English. This research adopted the participatory and holistic methodology developed during PDA workshops. The outcome of the meetings was examined and compared in order to search for some commonalities and to reach a combined conclusion.

The findings indicated that, apart from many positive sides of the new participatory and holistic methodology, it was not possible to overcome the most common problem related to the participatory methods, meaning a proper representation. Therefore, it is plausible that the assessed impact of development interventions in the area was dominated by the more powerful members and was not reflecting the views of *all* local wealth groups of the society, but was biased towards elites (during the PDA workshops) and middle class (during my own focus group discussions) groups.

The East-Mamprusi District is an area mostly populated by poor people, where many development interventions took place. Participants in the researched communities came up with long lists of development interventions. The majority of projects were initiated by Faith-Based (Christian) NGOs and were related to agriculture, health and education. It was also important to add voices of the youth to the research, as many new projects, especially related to youth and education were identified. When identifying the five best projects, participants tended to rank highly projects related to health, education, water, farm and livestock, food provision, infrastructure as well as PAS-L. It was, however, indicated that these projects primary benefit the very rich, the rich and the NP/NR. During the research process, characteristic of five wealth groups: very rich, rich, NP/NR, poor and very poor were assessed. In addition, the indicators of people's wealth, such as: means of transport, size of the family, level of education, quality of housing and clothes, eating habits, size of the farm, number of animals, access to healthcare, scope of the ceremonies, position in the society, and state of mind were distinguished.

A comparison of the list of projects made during the PDA workshops and the one made by the participants of the focus groups confirmed that the participants of the PDA workshops were representing the "local elites". This bias might also influence the outcome of the impact evaluation exercise, since the participants of the PDA workshops were ranking the projects that reached primarily the "higher" wealth classes, meaning very rich and rich, and partly NP/NR. Certain projects whose impact actually managed to reach the poor were mentioned only during the focus group discussions by representatives of the NP/NR wealth class. This bias did not influence, however, the outcome of the poverty assessment exercise. The picture of five wealth classes did not vary much between the participants of the PDA workshops and the focus groups,

nor from the outcome of the WB PPA from 1995. As far as the dynamics of poverty are concerned, the findings show that despite many interventions over the years, problems within the same domains: agriculture, water, health, and education remain unsolved, giving the impression that not that much has changed.

The findings confirmed the bias towards higher and middle-classes, thus the participants of all meetings were representing mostly NP/NR, rich and very rich wealth groups. The question thus arises: whether the problem lies in the methodology or in the society? This research project made a strong attempt to reach all wealth groups in the community, however, even in the less formal student-community meeting, it was not possible to overcome the dominating power relations and the problem with social exclusion. Therefore, it can be argued that the problem lies more in the society than in the methodology. Still though, the developing methodology should therefore acknowledge this problem and try to find a solution to overcome the existing biases caused by such social behavior. This is even more important, as the East-Mamprusi District is an area populated mostly by poor people and this wealth group is also the main excluded group. Participants often said that *“the poor are invisible”* – how do they finally become visible and how can NGOs properly reach these groups, if the society itself isolates them? These questions will be addressed in the recommendation on the issue of methodology section below.

Recommendations

In this thesis it has been argued that a clear definition of poverty and a valid methodology are two major requirements to properly assess poverty and reach the excluded groups. Therefore, the recommendations are given on these two issues.

On the issue of poverty assessment

In order to properly target developmental projects, a proper and widely-accepted definition of the wealth classes is necessary. Lack of such definition leads to the identification of different individuals and groups as poor and consequently influences different policy solutions for poverty reduction. It was important to distinguish five wealth groups: very rich, rich, NP/NR, poor and

very poor, as this allowed researchers to capture certain nuances that were lost in the WB PPA Report, especially related to the extreme groups of the very rich and the very poor. It was also important to add voices of the youth by conducting participatory poverty assessment with school children. The outcome of such meetings indicated that children perceive poverty in a very mature way. Furthermore, the categories of people's wealth were distinguished in a participatory way. Such categories are having a very universal character, as all people at some point analyze the poverty using the same subjective categories. Therefore, it is actually believed that wealth categories distinguished by the participants of the PDA workshops and the focus groups could be relevant not only in the area of Northern Ghana, but also in other geographical locations. They might well constitute the future indicators for the large-scale surveys, which would measure poverty in a quantitative way.

Dittoh (2008) said, that “poverty is largely time-specific, place-specific and people-specific”. A systematization of the concept of poverty might help in proper identification of beneficiaries, thus improving the targeting of the poorest and most needy groups of a society while designing development projects, hence indirectly alleviating poverty.

On the issue of methodology

The new methodology works very well in practice, however it is still not bias-free. The findings confirmed the bias towards higher and middle-classes representatives. The fact of reaching numerous middle-class representatives should be considered a success of this research, however the poor and the very poor people still constituted the main excluded groups. It should be mentioned though, that it happened also because the society itself excludes those people from social life. Since a very clear picture of the poverty in Northern Ghana was produced by this research, these definitions might be used in further research which would use both quantitative as well as qualitative techniques. For that purpose, a survey based on the distinguished categories of poverty could be constructed and conducted in one of the villages. It should then cover the whole village. This will help to identify and map households that belong to one of the five wealth categories, and it minimizes the necessity of working with PAS-L and make the position of a researcher more independent. Afterwards, a qualitative research that would use the same

participatory and holistic methodology, could be conducted on the sample groups of people from previously identified (very) poor households. Not only focus group discussions and project ranking exercises would be performed, but it will also involve analysis of life histories of the participants. This perhaps would enable the researcher to identify certain trends and reasons why people in this area are moving in and out of poverty. An additional exercise, should also include school children. The discussion about poverty and development interventions should be prolonged for another day. Children would receive a home assignment to talk about the wealth groups and development projects with their parents, relatives and neighbors after school. Such an extra input might be a valuable and interesting contribution to already existing and collected data. Above all, the categories of wealth that were distinguished and broadly discussed in this thesis might be useful criteria to identify the potential participants who would represent *all* wealth groups when organizing PDA follow up meetings in 2010-2011.

There is a concern, however, that it would be still impossible to reach the poor. Even if included in the workshops, the contribution of the poor and very poor will be limited if the discussion is dominated by the “higher classes”. It is hard to determine the local power structures and relations; for that a separate anthropological research is required, by a person who would stay long enough to develop intensive contacts with the (very) poor, and become trusted.

Of course, we should –at the end of this study- add an important remark. On a global scale, even the rich and NP/NR people in Northern Ghana can be considered as poor, and the positive impact of development projects on their lives certainly is also a contribution to the development of this very poor region. Development projects that do not succeed to reach the (ultra) poor in a poor region, are not ‘bad projects’, which ‘failed’. They only failed if their explicit intention had been to reach/include the (very) poor in that particular area. However, as ‘poverty alleviation’ is an explicit goal of many development agencies, it is not enough to alleviate poverty of relatively well-off people (although belonging to the global poor), and hope for their indirect spread effects towards the very poor in the same area. Poor and very poor people should be targeted directly as well, but then they first have to become visible.