



Local investigation - community profiling

Community profiling involves building up a picture of the nature, needs and resources of a community with the active participation of that community. It is a useful first stage in any community planning process to establish a context upon which there is broad consensus.

A range of methods is used to enable the community to *develop an understanding of itself*.

The methods combine group working and group interaction techniques with data collection and presentation techniques.

The focus can be on methods that are visual in order to generate interest and make the process accessible to the illiterate and those not used to verbal communication.

The results are in the public realm. Reports include as many of the words, writings and pictures of local people as possible.

Good facilitation is particularly important to avoid manipulated or simply poor results. A strategy is often needed to prevent domination by the more powerful or aggressive. Facilitators should listen and learn at all times. Even when relaxing, insights into local dynamics can be gained.

Closer attention and differing sessions may be needed to obtain the views of children, women and any under-represented groups.

Informal observation is a powerful source of information on local dynamics.

It is cost effective compared with conventional analysis by outside consultants.

Some investigation methods

Activity chart - Plotting people's activities each day, or each week. Useful for understanding divisions of labour, roles and responsibilities in a community.

External relationship profiling - Examining the roles and impact of external organisations.

Gender workshop - Separate sessions for girls (or boys) to analyse their situation, needs and priorities.

Historical profile - Identifying and listing key events, beliefs and trends in a community's past and their importance for the present.

Informal walk - Walking in a group without a definite route, stopping to chat and discuss issues as they arise.

Mapping - Making maps showing various characteristics, e.g. local resources, places to play, etc.

Organisation review - Review of existing groups and organisations to assess their roles, membership, plans and potential.

Personal history - Recording detailed accounts of individuals' lives, perhaps asking them to emphasise specific issues.

Problem tree - Analysing the interrelationships among community issues and problems using a graph based on a tree.

Role play - Adopting the role of others and acting out scenarios.

Seasonal calendar - Exploring changes taking place throughout the year, e.g., in work patterns or production.

Semi-structured interview - Conversational open discussion using a checklist of questions as a flexible guide instead of a formal questionnaire. Different types include: individual, group, focus group and key informant.

Simulation - Acting out a real event or activity in order to understand its effect.

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