African Studies Centre Leiden

Missing the very poor with development interventions:
Results from the PADev methodology in Burkina Faso

Participatory poverty assessment in rural Burkina Faso

When asking people in rural Burkina Faso to characterize their own living conditions, income is rarely mentioned first. To small farmers, valuable assets, land and livestock and educated children are much more important to differentiate

Research location
Province boundary
Department boundary
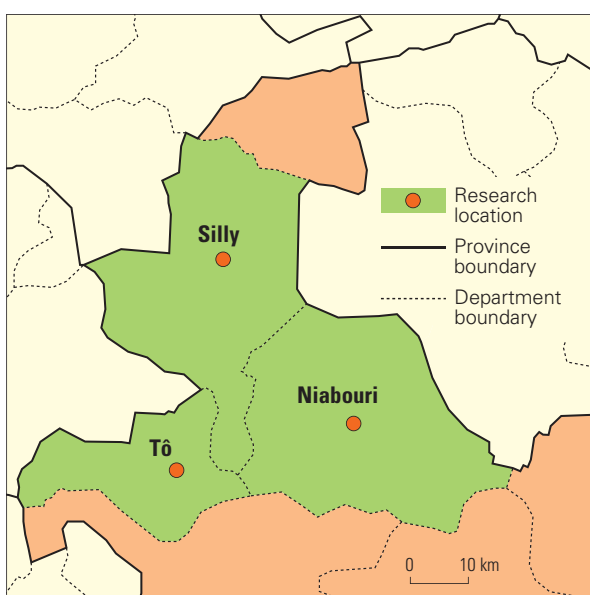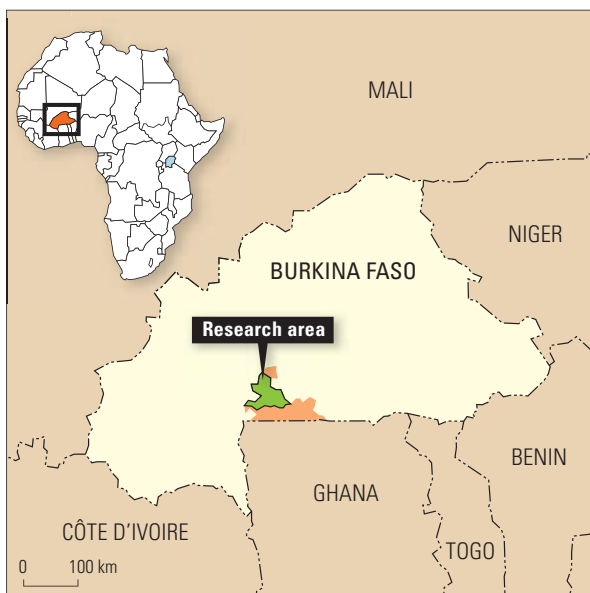
the better off from the poor and marginalized. Participatory poverty assessment is a core tool of the Participatory Assessment of Development (PADev) methodology that is used to evaluate development interventions in a holistic and bottom-up manner. Participatory poverty assessment is used to evaluate the varied impact of development interventions on the different wealth groups in a community. People's own perspective, experiences and interpretations are leading in doing these kinds of evaluations. The approach runs counter to impact evaluation as we know it, which is often top-down, focussed on single interventions at the time, and based on external experts' knowledge and valued indicators.

The PADev methodology was field-tested in three rural communities in Burkina Faso (apart from Ghana) between 2008 and 2012: in Niabouri, Silly and Tô in the Midwest region (see Map). In each community, a three-days workshop was organized to field-test the PADev methodology. The country coordinator of PADev, through a trusted local organiser, was in charge of selecting 50 to 60 participants from the local community. The coordinator saw to it that the following sub-groups were equally represented: women, men, young, elderly, and the officials. The poorest members of the community were difficult to mobilize because of inability to attend, social exclusion or self-exclusion. PADev team members experienced this before in the Ghana field-study as well.

Wealth groups

The workshop participants identified five wealth groups per community (the very rich, rich, mid-

dle, poor, and very poor) and described them in terms of their salient characteristics:

- The *very rich*: a lot of land (sometimes in Côte d'Ivoire), permanent housing, a trading business, large cattle herds of 100-500 animals, a large family, multiple assets and vehicles, tools and equipment e.g. for intensive animal traction, abundant crops, well-educated children, a smooth skin and good diet, high social standing, iron sheets rooftops, multiple bank accounts, hired labour, they can assist the whole community.

- The *rich*: also large land plots, at least one permanent house, large family, food secure, hire in labour, access to bank credit, children are educated, multiple assets, own motorbike, keep sheep, goats and poultry, large cotton producers, retired, civil servants, breeders, traders, assist children in times of scarcity, lofts are full (with food), highly respected, can solve other people's problems, well-dressed and shiny skin, iron sheets rooftops, cement walls.

Photo 1: Focus group with elderly men in Tô, March 2012
[Photo: Nicky Pouw]

- The *middle*: small farmers, petty traders, shop keepers, tailors, mechanics, state officials, carpenters, mostly self-sufficient, production provides sufficient food twice a day, small herd of cattle (20-30), 1-2 oxen, 5-7 goats and 10-50 chickens, house of 20-40 metal sheets, they are selfish, clothing is just average in quality and quantity, simple clothing, capable to help others with small grants (100 FCFA), have children in school but will not reach high level, funerals are much shorter than the rich and very rich, can attend health centres.

- The *poor*: subsistence farmers (0.5-1 acre of land), no transport, polygamous with many dependents, with children abroad who cannot send money back home (unable to help them to return), few assets, some own a bike, unable to help others, production insufficient, look thin and dirty, work land with traditional tools, not enough food (two meals per day in 8 months of the year, go hungry in the other months), children's education is limited (primary only), cannot attend health centres, their weddings and funerals are short, mud house, unlucky, constantly in debt, cannot resolve own problems.

- The *very poor*: on their own, elderly, lazy, miserable, disabled (physically and/or mentally), orphans, homeless, without wife, no property and equipment, needy of food, straw or mud house, look very dirty and poorly dressed, no shoes, sleep on the floor, have no one to confide in, physically weak, children physically weak because of malnutrition, unable to produce one daily meal, red sorghum producers, their funerals are usually organized by the municipality.

Whereas most women emphasize family structure, access to adequate housing, food and clothing, men tend to emphasize labour for income, assets and livestock. Where the elderly emphasize land and livestock, the young mention employment and assets as an important wealth indicator.

Comparison with existing poverty assessment approaches

In comparison to the UNDP multi-dimensional poverty index (MPI), the PADev methodology to poverty assessment brings the advantage of being more locally specific and pointing out subjective aspects of quality of life (e.g. feeling depressed, or having no one to confide in). As such, the national level MPI can be usefully complemented by the PADev methodology. Both approaches have in common that they highlight the multiple dimensions of poverty, including lack of assets, access to facilities and services, and impoverished living conditions (e.g. housing, employment, access to land and credit). Education stands out as an important factor of moving out of poverty in both the MPI and PADev.

The headcount rate of poverty counts the percentage of poor below the official poverty line. Poverty is then defined on a uni-dimensional scale as "a lack of income". The official poverty line in Burkina Faso is set at the level of 108,454 BFCFA a year – which amounts to US$ 216/year, or US$ 0.59/day (2011 prices). The official poverty data are collected at the regional level. This allows us to categorize the population into five wealth groups down at the regional level (see Table 1). We use these five wealth groups as a basis for comparison with the subjective PADev poverty data down at the community level. Because official data on poverty are not available at community level, this comparison is not a perfect match.

Table 1:   Percentages of wealth groups in three selected communities according to the official poverty data and the PADev subjective data

Wealth groups based on annual household consumption in US$ (INSD 2009)*	% of population in Midwest Burkina Faso	Wealth groups based on subjective data (PADev 2012)	% of population in Niabouri	% of population in Silly	% of population in Tô
<200	3.8	Very poor	10.0	20.0	5.0
200-499	29.3	Poor	10.0	27.0	17.5
500-999	40.9	Middle	17.0	20.0	30.0
1000-1999	18.6	Rich	36.5	20.0	35.0
2000+	7.4	Very rich	26.5	13.0	12.5

* Annual total household consumption expenditure (1 US$ = 496 FCFA). Source: INSD (2009), *Annuaire Statistique 2009*. Ouagadougou: Institut National de la Statistique et de la Démographie.

According to the official poverty data the percentage of very poor is much lower (3.8%) than according to the subjective PADev data in Niabouri (10%), Silly (20%) and Tô (5%). The number of people who are poor or in the middle is overestimated according to the official data, compared to the subjective data in either one of the three municipalities. The subjective data indicate higher population shares to be rich or very rich. In short, the official poverty data seem to *under*estimate the percentage of very poor, rich and very rich consistently in the three municipalities,

and *over*estimate the number of people who are poor or in the middle categories.

Development impacts across wealth groups

Community members were also asked to assess the relative benefit of the five best and worst (self-selected) development interventions across wealth groups, and make a comparison between ten years ago or the start of the intervention, and the present day. Ten stones were given to each community workshop group to be distributed over the different wealth categories. This gener-

ated a lot of discussion between the group members. In the end, they agreed on what they perceived as the dominant outcome.

In all three communities, we found that many of the best interventions start out with benefits for the very poor and poor at the time of their inception. This is also in line with the stated aims of most development interventions. However, these benefits tend to decrease considerably over time. *Vice versa* the rich and very rich are reported to experience increased benefits over time in most of the selected best interventions. The reasons provided for this were that the rich and very rich have the means and assets to take advantage of an intervention. For example, if a road is constructed, the rich and very rich benefit more because they have transportation means and business activities and are in a position to travel more often. Benefit biases and elite capture by people with more resources and higher social status is not an uncommon phenomenon, and has been reported in the development literature before.

These patterns are even stronger when considering the five development interventions that were selected as 'worst' by the community members. We found that the benefits to the rich and very rich are relatively higher from the start, and continue to stay so over time. The reverse is again true for the poor and very poor. This leads us to draw the discomforting conclusion that if we take PADev's subjective data as the yardstick, even greater shares of the targeted population are excluded/marginalized from development interventions than according to the official money-metric poverty data, and greater shares of the rich and very rich are included. These findings might explain part of the weariness and suspicion regarding development interventions on the side of the poor often encountered during field visits. It may even foster self-exclusion by the poorest of the poor from development projects as they do not expect lasting benefits to come their way.

Photo 2: Impact on wealth categories exercise using stones, Tô, Burkina Faso, March 2012
[Photo: Nicky Pouw]

Selected PADev Publications

Bélemvire, A. & F. Zaal (2009), *PADev Rapport Atelier de Tô*. PADev Working Paper no. W.2009.3.

Bélemvire, A. & F. Zaal (2009), *PADev Rapport Atelier de Silly*. PADev Working Paper no. W.2009.5.

Bélemvire, A. & F. Zaal (2010), *PADev Rapport Atelier de Niabouri*. PADev Working Paper no. W.2010.3.

Dietz, T, R. Bymolt, A. Bélemvire, K. van der Geest, D. de Groot, D. Millar, F. Obeng, N. Pouw, W. Rijneveld & F. Zaal (2013), *PADev Guidebook*. Amsterdam / Leiden: KIT Publishers / African Studies Centre.

Dietz, T. *et al*. (2013), *The PADev story. PADev 2007-2013 end-of-project report*. Leiden: African Studies Centre.

Zaal, F. (2009), *PADev Synthesis Report Round 1*. PADev Working Paper no. W.2009.4.

For more PADev reports, videos and other published materials, see the PADEv website: www.padev.nl