

## Assessing Development from the Bottom-up: End Users' Perceptions of Change

On 3 June 2013 ASC, ICCO, Woord en Daad, Prisma, KIT and UvA organized a seminar to take stock and explore future possibilities of Participatory Assessment of Development (PADev): a beneficiary centered, holistic, impact evaluation and local history writing tool.

The seminar brought together approximately 130 guests. Most of them Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) experts from Dutch or international NGOs, researchers interested in development effectiveness from the perspective of the end users, project managers from a diverse set of development agencies, as well as master and PhD students. We were also lucky to have Ghanaian and Burkinabe research team members amongst us as well as the other PAdDev research team members and Lau Schulpen (CIDIN), our devoted moderator<sup>1</sup>. What follows is a summary of the key items touched upon and the lessons learned from an interesting and full afternoon programme.

### The "PADev Story" and brief responses by the PAdDev coordinators in Ghana and Burkina Faso

*Prof. Ton Dietz (ASC and UvA), Dr. Francis Obeng (UDS) and Adama Belemvire (EAC)*

Prof. Ton Dietz, coordinator of the PAdDev research project, kick-started the seminar with a video about the PAdDev methodology made by Roger Bymolt (KIT). The video summarizes the different exercises of the PAdDev approach and gives a good picture of the type of "knowledge creation spaces" that are fostered throughout the PAdDev workshops. The atmosphere is one that is conducive to learning from and sharing of local knowledge.

After this, prof. Dietz discussed the rationale behind the creation of the bottom-up evaluation approach which originates from two key questions: How do Africans themselves perceive recent developments and changes? And how do they assess the impact of development initiatives on their lives from a long-term perspective? In addressing these questions PAdDev steps away from the tunnel vision usually adopted in evaluation exercises which want to know if intervention C has been the cause of effect E? PAdDev asks which effects E1, E2, E3 have occurred and which of the causes C1, C2, C3 contributed to these. By doing so, PAdDev creates a holistic "big" picture of development based on beneficiaries' perceptions of impact of various initiatives on development and change in their environment. Prof. Dietz went on to address the challenges of PAdDev, namely, the creation of a dissemination strategy which fosters both local learning as well as uptake by relevant development actors. This is closely linked to the need to expand participation throughout the entire evaluation process. Prof. Dietz also stressed that PAdDev is not a straightjacket and the exercises can be used flexibly, in combination with other methods, on smaller or larger scale and by adopting random or purposeful sampling techniques.

The presentation also focused on the different ways in which PAdDev can be used. The beneficiary-centered knowledge can be used for: local history writing; creating an overview of wealth categorizations; discovering niches, gaps and saturated sectors per type of development agency; conducting a value-oriented assessment of agencies and as a basis for community development planning. Prof. Dietz ended his speech by emphasizing the importance of incorporating the voices of the so called "voiceless" in the post-2015 development framework.

Adama Belemvire, the local coordinator in Burkina Faso and director of *Etudes Action Conseils* (EAC), a Ouagadougou-based consultancy firm, discussed the use of PAdDev in his own experience. He applauded the method for generating high-quality data in an efficient way and the added value of PAdDev in comparison with other qualitative approaches, due to its possibility to generate quantitative data. Mr. Belemvire went on to give some application examples in Burkina Faso. He mentioned that over 10 Community Development Plans (CDPs) were generated on the basis of PAdDev data. Additionally over 20 evaluations were conducted which adopted

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<sup>1</sup> PAdDev research team members: Ton Dietz (ASC and UvA), Fred Zaal (KIT), Roger Bymolt (KIT), Nicky Pouw (UvA), Dieneke de Groot (ICCO), Wouter Rijnveld (Woord en Daad), Kees Van der Geest (United Nations University Bonn), Francis Obeng (UDS), Saa Dittoh (UDS), Richard Yeboah (UDS), Adama Belemvire (EAC) and Nadege Compaore (EAC). Also present were former PAdDev students Anika Altaf (currently ASC), Agnieszka Kazimierczuk (currently UvA) and Zjos Vlaminc, (currently ASC) who made this seminar report.

some aspects of PAdEv and baseline studies were also conducted in Burkina Faso, Benin, Sierra Leone and Thailand in co-operation with partners of Woord en Daad. Finally, Mr. Belemvire gave his views on future possibilities of the approach. He stated that EAC is lobbying the government of Burkina Faso to consider incorporating PAdEv in the national guidelines for CDPs. Besides this EAC is also engaged in providing trainings to NGOs on the use of PAdEv for CDPs and evaluations and he suggested that NGOs should incorporate PAdEv as a fixed component in their terms of reference for evaluations.

Dr. Francis Obeng, the local supervisor of the Ghanaian team and senior lecturer at University of Development Studies (UDS), complemented the previous presentations and discussed the use of PAdEv in teaching. Dr. Obeng accentuated the usefulness of the PAdEv guidebook, which supports teaching on the use and function of evaluation methodologies at UDS and beyond. Although some exercises were already part of the curriculum at the UDS, the guidebook will make it easier to incorporate all exercises. He stressed that participatory evaluation approaches are and should be part and parcel of any evaluation course and his experience is that students make ample use of it during their fieldwork. Dr. Obeng also stressed that there is need for creating training courses for development practitioners on PAdEv.

### Questions

- 1) How are the results synthesized, analysed and disseminated locally?

A: Prof. Ton Dietz: Through the data templates that can be found on the PAdEv website synthesizing the information has become quite time efficient. The analysis takes more time, a person with a little bit of experience can do it in 8 or 10 working days. With regards to the dissemination, we have tried to go back with a draft report to the communities, to cross-check the data with key stakeholders and hold discussions on how the data can best be used.

- 2) How are the communities selected?

A: Dr. Francis Obeng: PAdEv started with communities which have been selected on the basis of the presence of the donor NGO, either currently or in the past. Later PAdEv exercises have also been conducted in communities without any involvement of the Dutch donor agencies. Participants are selected over a range of criteria: for instance men and women, young and old, Christian, Muslim or traditional believers<sup>2</sup>.

- 3) What can't PAdEv do?

A: Prof. Ton Dietz: PAdEv cannot correct big tensions in a community. It is therefore not suitable in communities where there is a lot of conflict. And PAdEv is not an alternative to Randomised Control Trials (RCTs).

- 4) Did you choose counterfactual villages?

A: Dr. Francis Obeng: The design of the PAdEv 'rounds' of fieldwork was such that in the last round communities were chosen, of which people in NGO circles said that these were neglected villages, a kind of counterfactual to 'intervention villages'. However, in fact it was very hard to find a village that was not affected by any intervention at all.

A: Prof. Saa Dittoh: Sometimes it is even the case that a community where no intervention took place benefits more from a project than the intervention community. Because they learn from what is happening there and they want to learn quickly in order to be incorporated in the next community selection round. This makes choosing a counterfactual difficult and at the same time participatory methods necessary in order to determine what is actually happening.

### KIT<sup>3</sup> Experiences Adapting PAdEv and the African Agricultural Capital Fund (AACF)

*Dr. Fred Zaal (KIT) and Roger Bymolt (KIT)*

Dr. Fred Zaal and Roger Bymolt were both involved in the PAdEv project from the start. This presentation however is their more recent use of PAdEv. In combination with other evaluation methods they used PAdEv to assess the impact of the African Agricultural Commodity Fund (AACF), which supports small and medium size

<sup>2</sup> The communities had approximately 60 000 inhabitants.

<sup>3</sup> KIT = Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam. Fred Zaal used to work at the University of Amsterdam when PAdEv started. Roger Bymolt was one of the Master's students at that University.

enterprises active in the agricultural sector in Kenya. The mission was to assess the impact of the fund on the level of the company, the producer households and the value chain in order to understand the impact within the broader institutional landscape. They used a mixed method approach, combining quantitative surveys with key informant interviews and PAdDev exercises.

Surveys were used to measure change but PAdDev was incorporated in the toolbox to gain insight in the valuations of and the reasons behind the observed changes. Dr. Zaal also mentioned that PAdDev can contribute to attribution questions from a beneficiary perspective. Roger Bymolt emphasized the flexibility of the method by exemplifying how it can be adapted due to time and resource constraints. For the AACF evaluation they choose a number of exercises best suited to answer the questions they had and adjusted one of the exercises in order to capture additional information that would not have been captured by the basic PAdDev exercises. Roger Bymolt emphasized the importance of understanding the complex and dynamic contexts in which interventions take place and the added-value PAdDev can give for this contextualizing by gaining understanding in the processes through which a specific intervention has an impact on a community. In conclusion, Dr. Zaal argued that a qualified local team leader is important for ensuring good facilitation, especially when there is little time for preparing and coaching the local facilitators. Additionally, he mentions that the strengths of PAdDev might be lost to a certain extent by focusing on one intervention. Nevertheless, in their opinion PAdDev strengthens the attribution and contribution claim and provides interesting results beyond data gathered through conventional surveys.

### Questions

- 1) Can PAdDev be used to assess a single intervention?

A: Dr. Fred Zaal: Yes, it can be used but it should be adjusted and applied in combination with other methods.

- 2) I found it interesting to hear about the trade-offs between the wider context and having to focus on a specific activity and wondered what this implies for participant selection. Which farmers were involved in the PAdDev-type workshops?

A: Dr. Fred Zaal: We talked to three sets of farmers: ones that were already supplying to the fund, ones that were supposed to be involved in the near future and ones that were at the point of becoming active.

- 3) Can you pick any exercise out of the PAdDev toolbox at random?

A: Roger Bymolt: It depends what you want to use PAdDev for. When you are evaluating a single intervention you have to choose specific exercises. It is also not only about choosing certain exercises but also limiting the exercises in scope by, for instance, not taking into account all the capabilities when it is not necessary.

## Methodological Challenges for Impact Evaluations of Development Interventions

*Dr. Barbara Befani (IDS Sussex)*

Dr. Barbara Befani is an evaluation methodologist and an “outsider” to the PAdDev project. She gave an interesting presentation on different evaluation methods, approaches to causal inference and the place of PAdDev within current debates.

She started with placing the evaluation debate within the Paris Declaration framework which encompasses five principles: ownership, alignment, harmonization, management for results and mutual accountability and transparency.

According to Dr. Befani, countries are expected to be in the lead, which has consequences for our definition of impact: What impact are we talking about and for whom? The second challenge is the uncertainty of the future; success can also be avoiding a number of pitfalls instead of reaching a specific goal. The third challenge of defining impact is the attribution problem. How can an intervention be attributed to a specific impact? And do we want to know the *average* impact, although this often does not make sense and it is far more interesting to look at the distribution and the range of impacts?

Dr. Befani argued that there are multiple gold standards of evidence in science, implying that RCT (Randomized Controlled Trials) is not the only one. She then went on to address the key point of the famous Stern et al. (2012) paper for DFID, namely, that there is no single method that suits all situations. How we choose and maximize

the rigor of our methodological choices is a key question that needs to be addressed by the evaluator, according to the aforementioned paper. It argues that two elements should be taken into account when choosing a specific evaluation approach: the type of impact question one is asking and the programme attributes.

- Examples of impact questions are:
  - o How much impact is there?
  - o Does the intervention make any difference?
  - o How and why does or doesn't an intervention work? Why does it work? Perhaps there is a difference but for the wrong reasons?
  - o Where will it work?
  - o What is the impact of intervention x at this moment; what is the impact of intervention x after 1 year when the intervention has been finalized, etc.?
- Programme attributes are characteristics of programmes that influence the choice of methods. Examples are: conflicts or natural disasters, chaos, unreliable institutions, indirect delivery and multiple delivery, long-term non-linear change or multiple dimensions of change. These attributes should influence the choice of evaluation designs. However in the current debate too much focus is placed on the gold standard of RCT. This is partly caused by the fact that developments in social sciences have not yet been translated to the toolkit of development practitioners.

With regard to qualitative versus quantitative designs, the question we should ask is how we maximize validity in a specific context. The distinction between both is also less clear than what is generally portrayed, according to Dr. Befani.

The rest of Dr. Barbara Befani's presentation focused on three causal models.

- Successionist: observation of simultaneous presence of cause and effect. This causal model looks into one cause, one effect attribution and argues that the causal impact does not change, dependent on the context.
  - o Impact question: Did it work? How much did it work?
  - o Programme attributes: single, linear change processes.
- Generative: description of the causal process, of "inner workings" of causal mechanisms. This model does not investigate what triggers change, but how we can prepare the ground for change and it makes a description of the entire change mechanism. It is more about explaining and less about attribution.
  - o Impact question: How or why did it work? Did we do the right things? How did the cause transform into the effect?
  - o Programme attributes: Change that requires multiple changes, unpredictable feedback loops, long-term, non-linear change
- Configurational: inner workings described as presence and absence of conditions to facilitate comparison and cross-case systematic synthesis. Is in between successionism and generativism and it is about attribution and contribution.
  - o Impact question: Did it make a difference? Under which circumstances did it work better?
  - o Programme attributes: Indirect and multiple delivery.

Dr. Befani then elaborated on the lists of possible causes and methods to exterminate alternative explanations which all causal models create. Kahneman & Tversky have shown that thinking about possible causes is subject to availability bias, so involving as many different perspectives as possible is important. This implies that during the construction of the list of possible causes we must be as open as possible and participatory approaches are very useful in this respect. So, according to Dr. Befani, participatory approaches are not only useful for knowing which outcomes are most relevant but also for constructing a broad list of possible causes.

Barbara Befani concluded with justifying certain evaluation choices by linking them to the 5 Paris Declaration principles.

- Ownership justifies the questions, what impact for whom and participatory approaches
- Alignment justifies joint and multi-stakeholder evaluations
- Harmonization justifies multiple donor evaluations and holistic approaches and case studies

- Management for results justifies evidence-based and research-oriented evaluations (in-depth and rigorous)
- Mutual accountability and transparency justifies causal attribution and contribution and rigour in choice and application of methods.

### Questions

- 1) Can you give some practical examples of these concepts?

A: If we take the level of income as an example:

- Successionist approach: a quantitative study on a large sample will be used to try and understand how different variables correlate to income: level of education or family background attributed to a certain extent and you measure the significance of these correlations.
- Generative: gives an idea of the specific context where for instance getting an education influences your income, but maybe in another context this does not occur. There is an interaction effect and the interaction effect can be articulated very clearly in narrative approaches.
- Configuration approach: this gives an idea of the interaction in a more symbolic way. For example in one configuration you can find men with a certain level of education and high income but in another you will find women with the same level of education but no interaction with high income.

- 2) How to balance different voices and perspectives, not only basing oneself on the average?

A: How can we make sure the different attribution covers all the stakeholders? You conduct different studies for the specific groups you are interested in and combine the results in your analysis.

- 3) Where does PAdEv fit with regards to the three causal models?

A: You can see it as an example of the generative approach, because this shows the different mechanisms and you can compare different cases in this approach. But the more cases you have (and you do in PAdEv), the closer you are to the configuration approach; this enables you to compare limited cases rigorously. The successionist approach is not useful because in PAdEv there is never one single outcome linked to one specific cause.

- 4) What is the risk of PAdEv?

A: The most common risk is the general bias related to participatory approaches. But I believe qualitative methods come with their own standards to minimize bias and I think it is good practice to apply the quality standards that are already out there. Robert Chambers always says that good facilitators are very important. There are skills that they need to learn and there is literature on how to minimize the risk by being not a good facilitator.

### Panel discussion: Strengths and Challenges of Beneficiary-Centered Evaluation Approaches

*Piet de Lange (IOB), Jan Van Ongevalle (HIVA), Corina Dhaene (ACE-Europe), Dr. Fred Zaal (KIT) and Prof. James Copestake (Bath University)*

- 1) Please state one main value of PAdEv or one point of critique.

A: Dr. Fred Zaal: I believe the open process in which the PAdEv methodology has been developed is an important value. We have always been transparent about our results and the raw data we gathered and have invited people to comment on the method.

A: Corina Dhaene: One important value is the differentiation of groups. A point for further exploration is finding a tool that digs deeper into the problem of exclusion and inclusion of certain interventions.

A: Jan Van Ongevalle: When I read the guidebook I was pleased because I felt that I could choose exercises that would make sense to the beneficiaries in the field. I felt I could adopt PAdEv, without being an expert, and gather relevant beneficiary-centered data.

A: Prof. James Copestake: I was first upset because I realized some people were able to crack the puzzle we have been trying to solve for over a year in our Assessing Rural Transformations (ART) project. But then I was enthusiastic because I had found people which managed to tackle the pro-project bias which many evaluations suffer from. I'm also pleased to discover

that there is more innovation in The Netherlands with regards to qualitative M&E than I first thought. The one version of history that is created through PAdEv is maybe one critical point I would like to raise. Which version of history are we bringing forth? But we could do a meta-evaluation on the basis of the nine workshops and show the different histories that have been created by different groups.

A: Piet de Lange: I am in favour of this approach and believe PAdEv can strengthen the development planning of southern NGOs. As an evaluation tool I believe it could be the first step in designing a quantitative evaluation because it can inform the evaluators of the issues that are important. But how can you use it to evaluate budget support, it seems to be more geared to projects? And should we not be careful to base an entire evaluation on the memory of people? Because these have proven to be not so reliable. In short, it is valuable but in addition to other approaches.

2) How can we use PAdEv in a post-conflict situation?

A: Prof. James Copestake: Based on my research in Peru in a post-conflict area, I have found participatory methods very useful to reconstruct the stories of the past in a more nuanced way.

A: Dr. Fred Zaal: There were areas that we worked in that experienced conflict in the past, but contrary to our expectations we gained detailed information on the conflict. But in a recent post-conflict situation, you might rekindle the conflict again by opening up the discussion. And you should take into account the migration patterns of people after conflicts. The perceptions of change might not be related to the area they are currently staying in.

A: Corina Dhaene: It is important to have a clear idea of what is defined as the community. In urban situations a community might be quite different than in rural settings.

A: Prof. Saa Dittoh: It depends on trust. If a good facilitator can establish this on both sides of the conflict then it can work in a post-conflict situation.

3) How would you compare PAdEv to ART and are there specific exercises that you would like to use in ART?

A: Prof. James Copestake: We want to design a protocol in which an evaluator does not know which project he is evaluating. So the data is volunteered by the community and not biased by prior conceptions. I would like to learn more about how PAdEv used visual methods for instance for developing time-lines.

4) I wonder how language is used during PAdEv and how this was related to the abilities of a skilled facilitator.

A: Dr. Fred Zaal: Language is indeed very important and it takes time to train the facilitators in the careful use of concepts that are locally meaningful. Everything has to be explained, so instead of a dollar sign you use a cedi sign in Ghana for instance. PAdEv tries to ask questions about changes in the environment. Instead of using dates we use timeframes and this takes a lot of time. If you do not have a lot of time you should work with an experienced local partner.

5) I would like to know more about the methodology used with children?

A: Agnieszka Kazimierzczuk: The time frame is presumed to be shorter. Nevertheless children spend a lot of time with their grandparents and they are in fact messengers of oral history. Although children mainly mention more recent projects it is also apparent that old projects are also mentioned. In addition it is much easier to conduct the wealth group assessment because the power relations are less strong at their age.

6) Prof. Ton Dietz started with the comment that PAdEv starts with the communities and then moves on to the projects. But can PAdEv also be used ex-ante?

A: Dr. Fred Zaal: In the AACF evaluation we used it as a baseline and we wrote a quite descriptive report but it takes time for the intervention to create positive outcomes. It is used for making a description of the local context and to develop variables that can be quantified in future evaluations.

7) How do you manage the expectations that are created throughout the process?

A: Dr. Fred Zaal: The principle of the whole PAdEv exercise is that you go into the area without linking yourself to a certain NGO or other development agency. There is no link between you and any interventions and you should not promise anything.

8) But what about expectations in terms of recognition? Giving the voiceless a voice has consequences beyond the evaluation in my opinion!!

A: Prof. James Copestake: If you succeed in bringing the message across that it is a local history writing approach it can also be used as a tool for collective action. What experience did you have with the people that were not part of the workshops?

A: Zjos Vlamincx: During my fieldwork in Ghana it became clear that PAdEv workshops have an influence on non-participants as well. Local evaluation influence did occur after the PAdEv workshops. There was an increase of community meetings, it has been used in local history classes and it has been used in Burkina Faso as a community action planning tool.

A: Somebody in the audience: The ex-ante approach is very important and I believe we know what the problems are for several sectors. So the ex-ante approach is different for different sectors and you need context-specific information before planning an intervention. PAdEv can be useful in creating this knowledge and in line with the post-2015 debates it is also important.

9) Is PAdEv worthwhile to fund?

A: Piet de Lange: My opinion is that any organization that is ready to accept public money should accept to be held accountable to tax payers and they therefore should be as innovative as possible. I believe that PAdEv is part of these innovations.

10) What is the relation to outcome mapping (OM)?

A: Jan Van Ongevalle: Something that resonates to OM is that PAdEv is actor focused. The risk, however, lies in how much the learning aspects remain with the people whom you involve in the workshop. Is it more than an extractive process and is there a learning aspect built into the approach? I believe further research could be done on this issue.

## Conclusions

**Ton Dietz**

The word project in PAdEv is 'project' between brackets. We do not only focus on NGO-type (or other institutions-type) interventions but also local, individual initiatives. For instance in Islamic regions, where not a lot of NGOs were present, we asked what the Mosque did in the area and this gave more diverse answers to the changes that occurred. Close to half of the interventions are not traditional 'projects', reliant on 'donor' or foreign funding.

**Prof. Saa Dittoh (UDS, moderator), Dienneke de Groot (ICCO), Wouter Rijnveld (Woord en Daad), Jean Noel Kalwoule (CREDO) & Daniel Sandow (PAS)**

1) How did PAdEv start?

A: Dienneke de Groot: PAdEv started with Ton Dietz's story about his previous research in Kenya using a PAdEv-type approach. At that time (around 2007) we were thinking about how to conduct impact evaluations and how to get a beneficiary perspective into the evaluations, after which we decided to start a follow-up research building on Ton Dietz's preliminary findings.

A: Wouter Rijnveld: The idea came up during a walk in the woods around the MDF offices. We knew about beneficiary-centered evaluations which stated that 95% of the beneficiaries were happy with the project and they only wanted a little bit more of this and a little bit less of that. We wanted to create an approach which overcame this beneficiary and project bias.

2) What effect did PAdEv have for your organizations?

A: Daniel Sandow: Evaluations are important in a material sense but also for the inner-satisfaction of beneficiaries. When we go to our ground beneficiaries and try to assess what they think about the interventions we feel that the farmers experience inner-satisfaction because they realize that people care for them and come to find out how we are managing the aid that is meant to benefit them.

A: Jean Noel Kalwoule: PAdEv was beneficial for us on different levels. It enabled us to follow-up on our projects and to see on which groups our actions had a real impact. We also used the results to design new projects and we could take into account what the beneficiaries really need. For instance in a specific project we learned that women did not participate in the compost-pits. They are not strong enough to dig the pits, so we decided to introduce different compost methods in which women could participate.

## 3) What surprised you about PAdEv?

A: Jean Noel Kalwoule: We have learned that not everything is going well all the time. Beneficiaries are not only in need but they have to be involved in the planning of projects as well.

A: Daniel Sandow: We realized we generated a lot of information of the people and we can use it for future planning and they also find it valuable.

## 4) What are ICCO and Woord en Daad going to do with PAdEv?

A: Dienneke de Groot: We will use PAdEv workshops instead of focus group discussions. PAdEv makes it possible to discover the un-expected.

A: Wouter Rijnveld: We will re-emphasize the importance of values and Woord and Daad got a stronger awareness that our contribution is relative. And I think we should change the discourse of "we change people", it is more about contributing somewhere in a bigger process. We also learned that listening in itself is very valuable and that the very poor benefit least from most activities. This was quite shocking because this was our mission. We are also doing a follow-up research, conducted by Anika Altaf to find out who the very poor are and if we should target them, and if so: how.

Prof. Saa Dittoh: We are calling ourselves better-agents. We try to better the situation instead of believing we can genuinely change the situation. PAdEv teaches development agencies and agents to be more modest, to be more inclusive, and to look at project environments in a more holistic and participatory way.

And then there were drinks!