

AGEING IN ASIA: A RAPID APPRAISAL

**PARTICIPATORY APPROACH FOR ASSESSING
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES FOR OLDER PERSONS
AT COMMUNITY LEVEL**



United Nations
ESCAP



*Old man attending a town meeting,
Bangladesh.*

Content

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Old woman leaving offerings at Swayambu temple, Nepal.

I. Introduction

Active participation: Assistance to older people has diverged from a welfare approach to a development approach.

Worldwide, the emphasis of efforts aimed at helping older people is shifting. It is moving away from a welfare approach to a development approach that makes the elderly active participants in programs to help them live less poverty-stricken, healthier and more socially supported lives. This paper proposes to take that participatory approach one step farther: enlisting older people to help measure the impact of those programs. It describes a “bottom up” Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) system and the Rapid Appraisal Methodology (RAM) on which it is based. But first it presents the demographic background, beginning with the two key factors that must be considered in ageing: (1) increasing longevity, and (2) decreasing fertility.

A. Increasing longevity

Among the revolutions that began during the 20th century, the rise in longevity has been one of the most important but least heralded. Globally, average life expectancy at birth increased by 20 years since 1950, from 46 to 66, and is expected to reach 76 by 2050 (United Nations 2003:9). By that year, people over 60 will have increased to 21% of global population, nearly 2 billion individuals. This is up from about 10% of the world’s people, or 600 million, in 2000. Most of the projected growth of people over 60 will be in developing countries, where their numbers are expected to quadruple, and their proportion is expected to almost double, from 10% to 19% of the total population (ibid.).

B. Decreasing fertility

But rapid ageing cannot be understood without taking into account the sharp drop in fertility levels registered not only in highly industrialized nations, but also in much of East and Southeast Asia. Overall, as Gubhaju (2003:2) notes:

During the last half century, the world has witnessed a remarkable decline in total fertility rates from a high level of 5 children per woman in the period 1950-1955 to 2.8 in the period 1995-2000...Asia, in general, had very high fertility in the early 1950s, with the fertility transition first occurring in Eastern Asia in the late 1950s. However, a sharp drop in fertility occurred between the period 1965-1970 and 1975-1980, with a record decline in the number of children by more than one child every five years.

By the early 1990s, fertility in East Asia was below replacement level (a Total Fertility Rate of 2.1). By 1995-2000, 14 countries in Asia reached replacement level fertility – or below: Specifically, Hong Kong and Macao were at 1.2, Japan and Armenia were at 1.4, Republic of Korea at 1.5, Singapore and Georgia at 1.6, China at 1.8, Azerbaijan at 1.9, Cyprus at 2.0 and four countries at replacement level, 2.1: Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Kazakhstan, Sri Lanka and Thailand (ibid.:Table 1). As a result, the rapid ageing process in much of Asia “is driven largely by sharp declines in fertility in recent decades” (ibid.:3).

C. The result: Ageing in Asia

In fact, Asia and the Pacific, the world's most populous region, now is also its most rapidly ageing region: In 2002, fully 52% of the world's population of persons 60 and above lived in Asia and the Pacific; this is predicted to increase to 59% in 2025 (ESCAP 2003:1). Rising life expectancy in the region is another one of the key factors driving that growth. The latest data, for 2003, show that life expectancy in the region is up to 66 for males and 70 for females and both figures are projected to continue increasing.

Accordingly, between 2000 and 2050, people 60 and older are expected to increase from 9% to 23% of the Asian total; concurrently, those under 15 are expected to fall from 30% to 19% of the population – as the 60+ group grows at almost twice the rate as the total population (Gubhaju 2003:8). Actually, by 2040, much of Asia will be experiencing the effects of “*crossover*” – more people 60 and over than those 15 and under. In fact, this already has occurred in Japan, where, by 2000, those 60 and up comprised 23% but “15 and down” only 15% of the population. By 2050, Japan's 60+ population will represent 42% of the total (ibid.). Needless to say, the economic consequences will be profound. These include a decreasing number of workers in prime labor force years to support the growing proportion of elderly, unless policies change concerning income-earning by the elderly, or immigration by foreign workers (more on this below; Japan may turn increasingly to robots as its population ages but machines don't pay into a retirement system...).

D. Women and 80+: Two growing groups of ageing in Asia

Two other demographic groups are critical for future initiatives aimed at improving the lot of older people: *First*, women will further increase their majority among those 60+, both worldwide and in Asia. In Asia, for example, there were 89 men/100 women 60 and above in 2000; by 2050, the ratio is expected to be 87/100 (United Nations 2002). Other data (Rajkhan 2004) show that in Asia, women 60+ are 53% of their age group, 54% of those 65+ and 62% of those 80+. This is relevant because in these older age groups women have much higher rates of illiteracy and lower rates of labor force participation and income-earning than their male or younger female counterparts. In a word, they are more vulnerable, so the “feminization of ageing” has crucial policy implications.

Second, the fastest growth will take place among the “oldest old,” 80 and above. They numbered 70 million in 2000 but are projected to increase five-fold, reaching 350 million by 2050 (ESCAP 2003). Clearly, females and the oldest are among the most at-risk subgroups within the overall population of persons 60 and up. And more of them are – and will be – found in Asia and the Pacific than elsewhere.



Old man selling fruits at a market, Bangladesh.

E. The potential support ratio: From “demographic bonus” to “demographic dearth”



Old women making pottery, Bangladesh.

How well these elderly live, and their impact on the economy, can be affected not only by policy decisions taken now, but also by the number of people potentially available to help support them. Currently, Asia is above the global average (9 persons in the working age group per older person), with a relatively high 11 working age persons per elderly one. Indeed, Gubhaju (2004) calls support ratios of 10 or above the “demographic bonus.” Fertility in such countries may be coming down but the extant elderly population still has a large number of economically active adults potentially contributing to their support. However, the trends toward lower fertility and greater longevity will soon play havoc with this ratio: for Asia as a whole, it is expected to fall to 3.8 by 2050 (Rajkhan 2004). China, for example, will see its support ratio fall from 10 in 2000 to 2.7 in 2050 – it will go from a “demographic bonus” to a “demographic dearth.” And it won’t be the worst: Japan, at 4 in 2000, will plummet to 1.4 in 2050, with another 8 Asian countries projected to fall between these numbers. The two countries where we carried out field research (described below) are China and Sri Lanka. China, as mentioned, is at 10; Sri Lanka in 2000 had 10.8 and is expected to drop to 2.9 by 2050. (In the case of Sri Lanka, however, the situation is further complicated by the high rate of emigration – usually temporary – of younger adults for work abroad (Vickerman 2005); although their absence may appear to further shrink the pool of potential support, the great majority of these emigrants send remittances back to Sri Lanka to help support their families, presumably including elderly members.)

Given the implications of the demographic trends presented above (including the “demographic dearth”), a focus on “active ageing” is an emerging approach that makes sense. This is an especially attractive approach in light of the fact that in most countries where the demography of ageing is causing the most concern, the great majority of those 60+ remain healthy and active. Making them part of the solution, rather than part of the problem, could be critically important. One way to do so is by facilitating their continued employment/income generation, as such low-fertility Asian countries as Japan, Korea and Singapore have been trying to do (Gubhaju 2003:12; he also claims, citing Katsumata 2001, that “[t]here is growing evidence that older persons are willing to accept continued employment, mainly to maintain good health and obtain an income”). Moving to an “active ageing” emphasis makes particular sense in Asia and the Pacific, where older people are most numerous.

Thus, the region is a logical place to test initiatives aimed at making those older people more productive, healthier, and better integrated with social support systems. In fact, the Madrid Plan of Action, produced by the Second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002, designated precisely these aims as the three priority areas for efforts focusing on ageing. The Plan calls for (a) integrating older persons in development (and income opportunities), (b) advancing their health and well-being, and (c) ensuring enabling and supportive environments (United Nations 2003:v). In addition:

The Madrid Plan of Action signifies a move away from a “welfare approach” that tended to overemphasize the care and benefits needed to support older persons while excluding them from the development policy dialogue. The Plan states that policies on ageing deserve close examination from the developmental perspective of a broader life course and a society-wide view...It is now increasingly recognized that national development goals will not be reached when a fast growing segment of the population remains excluded from the process of development (United Nations A/58/160 2003:5).

In short, as the above quote indicates, the Plan of Action is aimed at the macro level of mainstreaming and capacity building. But the UN’s subsequent “road map” calls for a “bottom up approach...that envisages that older persons will be active participants in the review and appraisal process” (ibid.:10). The bottom up approach is seen as linking local and national activities with supra-national ones (ibid.).

This paper proposes a way to achieve the bottom up approach called for in the “road map.” Its overall goal is to explore the three main dimensions called for in the Madrid Plan of Action but to do so at the grass roots level.

- (1) It utilizes a Rapid Appraisal Methodology (RAM), with a particular emphasis on using twice-yearly focus groups to measure progress;
- (2) It builds on the abilities and interests of the elderly at the community level;
- (3) It incorporates incentives for both the elderly and other members of the community (such as grandchildren who are in school and literate) to carry out a “bottom up,” participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) scheme that also promotes empowerment and better community integration for the elderly, and
- (4) It was field-tested in Sri Lanka and then in China but can be further refined and fine-tuned to be applicable in a variety of Asian countries and contexts.

F. Organization

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows:

- (1) The **rapid appraisal model** is defined, discussed and detailed.
- (2) The paper spells out just how a gender-sensitive rapid appraisal model is **useful in initiatives on ageing**: to measure the position of the elderly vis-à-vis the three emphases of the Madrid Plan, as well as the impact of ageing initiatives on their situation.
- (3) The paper discusses how the rapid appraisal model could incorporate a **participatory M&E system** that (a) is based on the abilities and interests of the elderly, and (b) provides low-cost incentives to those – of all ages – who help carry it out.
- (4) Some additional points about **gender** are presented.
- (5) A **step-by-step outline for pilot focus groups in Sri Lanka** is delineated. This was written prior to the Sri Lanka workshop.
- (6) The paper summarizes the actual rapid appraisal field research process

*“The doctor told me I have high blood pressure and so I must take tablets and traditional medical treatment. But I feel healthy.”
Beaghami Nundi,
75, female,
Bangladesh.*

and findings. The contrast between the *fifth* and *sixth* sections illustrates the great flexibility and adaptability of the methodology: we were able to accommodate double the number of focus groups originally contemplated and we were able to modify the original, tentative topic list to take advantage of these “targets of opportunity.”

- (7) We further refined the model in China and the results are presented in this section. It is relevant that the economic situation of the elderly in the village near Beijing where the research was conducted was exponentially better than was the case in Sri Lanka (the Chinese village was exceptionally prosperous) – yet the methodology and list of questions were easily adapted.
- (8) We present some **draft guidelines for a training module**. This is based on the organization and content of the Sri Lanka research and workshop presented in May 2004 and replicated in China in July 2004. In theory, this can be replicated in future workshops. This is because the guidelines build on (a) the workshops held in Sri Lanka and China, (b) the rapid appraisal fieldwork undertaken in both places as part of the workshops, and (c) the suggestions of participants at the workshops. Even so, the guidelines should not be considered as “cast in concrete.” It should be stressed that there is no definitive “one size fits all” set of guidelines. This is because, on the one hand, the evolving module should progressively incorporate the results of further field-tests and workshops elsewhere in Asia, and craft some general guidelines. But on the other hand, it should leave space for adaptation to local conditions, including cultural and governmental sensitivities.



A home care volunteer in the Republic of Korea brings new meaning to life for an elderly woman who lives alone .

II. Rapid Appraisal: Fast, cheap, and valid?

Development aid aims to improve lives. How to measure the impact of that aid when budgets are tight has been a major problem for many development agencies. But an increasingly popular solution has been evolving since the late 1970s: rapid appraisal.

A. History and advantages of Rapid Appraisal Methodologies

The first rapid appraisal methodology was named Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) at a conference at the University of Sussex in 1978, and proposed the concept of “triangulation” for establishing validity. Triangulation entails working with a short, tightly focused list of variables and issues and, for each of them, gathering data from (at least) two sources, preferably using (at least) two different research techniques (say, focus groups and key informant interviews). Today, there is a growing family of rapid appraisal methodologies, including Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Rapid Assessment Procedures (RAP). All rely on the principle of triangulation for validity. It is precisely this systematic attempt at cross-validation that raises the rapid appraisal methodologies above journalistic accounts, or “quick and dirty” research (Blumberg 2002 (much of the discussion in Section II is based on this source); Beebe 2001).

Even with triangulation, rapid appraisals produce data that are not as rigorous as random sample survey research. But because of their better ability to handle contextual data, rapid appraisals may have comparable – and sometimes better – levels of validity.

In addition, they are far superior with respect to both cost and time. Both are likely to be tight in the average development project. This is especially likely to be the case when the project involves the vulnerable, poor and powerless – such as older people.

It is also worth mentioning five other potential advantages of rapid appraisals (RAs) that are relevant for development projects:

- RAs are extremely useful for measuring results or impact at any point in the life of a project, and RAs can be integrated into any Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system.
- Moreover, RA focus group discussions with various subgroups of both clients/target group and control groups can be used to supplement quantitative indicators; these focus groups also provide the prospect of a more participatory way of creating and periodically measuring indicators of progress and impact.

RAM encourages older people to be involved in assessing the impact of development programmes.

*"I am happy. I am a brick breaker and my husband pulls a rickshaw."
Puheema, 65,
Bangladesh.*

- Furthermore, RAs are particularly suitable for exploratory research involving new target groups and/or new approaches to aiding them.
- Additionally, RAs are potentially more sensitive to gender issues than traditional development research techniques.
- Finally, RAs usually can be carried out when it is not possible to do a random sample survey. (The four main reasons why surveys may not be feasible are discussed in Endnote 1.¹)

B. A typical rapid appraisal sequence

As a caution, note that not all the steps presented here must always be done, nor must they be done in the following order; sometimes two or more steps can take place concurrently. What is important is that the information obtained is triangulated, or cross-validated. This means using two or more techniques, comparing the vision of “insiders” and “outsiders,” and (where projects or other interventions already are under way) contrasting the experiences of both clients and control groups.

The typical steps of a rapid appraisal for a development project, program or other initiative are:

1. Review of secondary data

This includes two types of **literature/documents**: **outside** literature (e.g., social science studies, government reports, donor studies, “gray literature,” etc.), and **inside** literature (those documents, reports, etc. related to the organization’s project cycle, from initial formulations to final evaluations).

It also can include **re-analysis of existing data**. Again there can be **outside** sources (such as national account statistics, household surveys, census, and/or quantitative data generated by bilateral or multilateral agencies, such as the World Bank LSMS series), and/or **inside** sources (e.g., rerunning tables to disaggregate them by gender, age groups, region, economic sector, etc.). The idea behind re-analysis of extant data is to use variables: (1) for which information had been collected, and (2) are important to you, but (3) had not been (fully) analyzed in the past. A good example of such re-analysis is rerunning tables on health visits in order to disaggregate them by gender and age because these dimensions are important to you, even though the original researchers weren’t interested in them.

2. Gathering of primary data

Here are the main techniques:

Key informant (KI) interviews

These make use of a flexible semi-structured “**topic list**,” rather than a rigid questionnaire, and this topic list can and should be continually adapted/modified as new insights and topics emerge. This topic list is one of the principal ways in

which rapid appraisals are more flexible than surveys. Science is generally defined as (1) cumulative, and (2) self-correcting. Topic lists in rapid appraisals meet these two criteria. If, for example, new information emerges in the phase of key informant interviews, the topic list can and should be modified. It can be fine-tuned to accommodate cultural, gender, class and other differences, with new questions added and old ones dropped or modified as needed – and as the researchers deem fit. (In contrast, once a survey questionnaire has been finalized, it is cast in concrete. If new information surfaces during the interviews, there is no easy or inexpensive way to modify the questionnaire and re-interview everyone.)

- Typically, KI interviews begin at the top, at the national level, and then work their way down to the grass roots level.
- KI interviews also should involve both **outsiders** (e.g., the staffs of NGOs that compete with the one(s) involved in the project or initiative; locally knowledgeable people such as teachers, health post workers, etc.) and **insiders** (various levels of project or NGO staff).

Focus group discussions

These can be conducted in a participatory manner by a trained facilitator, so that participants interact and discuss topics among themselves, often arriving at new insights and recommendations. Focus groups are almost invariably a part of rapid appraisals (RAs) because of their flexibility and the sometimes astonishingly rich data obtained in a very brief time. Another advantage of this technique is that many empathetic and intelligent people can be trained as facilitators fairly easily even if they don't have a formal social science background.

- The following points describe the best use of focus groups for development-related research, as opposed to market research, political preference investigations or mock jury research, all of which use focus groups differently. These points are distilled from the author's experience in 40 developing countries worldwide:
- The most essential thing is that focus groups should be **homogeneous**. One should never combine people with conflicting interests in the same focus group (e.g., labor and management; large landlords and tenant farmers, and – in most situations – men and women). Neither side will be forthcoming and honest. (In contrast, marketing and political preference studies use heterogeneous focus groups.)
- Focus groups also should be **small**. Groups of a dozen or more often are used in market and political preference research. But based on the author's experience around the world, the ideal size for development research, especially with vulnerable groups, seems to be **five**. In practice, up to eight can be manageable with a fully trained facilitator running the discussion and a second person recording; conversely, the occasional group of four (or even three) may be necessary if there are “no shows.”
- **Why five?** Social psychology research has established that when group size goes above five, a clear leadership structure begins to emerge: one or two dominate the group and one or more tend to withdraw, saying little or nothing. And based on my experience around the world, five is indeed the “magic number” for interactive, insight-producing discussions that can be



Old man in bicycle with old woman, Bangladesh.

managed by one facilitator (aided, if possible, by one assistant to help record answers).



Old street vendor waiting for customers, Nepal.

- Focus groups can collect two kinds of data: (a) on the **issues**, and (b) **socioeconomic and socio-demographic** information. The social data (e.g., literacy/years of schooling) can be collected at strategic moments when the issues discussion is veering off on a tangent, or being monopolized by one or two people. The facilitator announces that it is now time “to go around the circle,” and asks everyone, in turn, e.g., years of education, marital status, how many children they have, etc. This breaks up the unwanted discussion pattern and the facilitator can pick up with a new topic or ask for a comment from someone who had not spoken.
- During the project implementation phase, focus groups should be conducted not only with **insiders/clients** but also with **outsiders/controls**. It is necessary to have separate control group meetings in order to find out what other factors (exogenous variables or externalities) may have been affecting the people in the area, independent of the program/project.

Supplemental techniques

These include:

- **Follow-up individual interviews** with a few people from the focus groups to clarify points remaining in doubt.
- **Observation.** This can be a powerful tool for cross-validation, especially for agricultural or conservation/natural resource management projects. One can walk a farmer’s fields and see what he/she actually is doing, vs. what the person may claim to be doing in an individual interview or focus group.
- **Content analysis** of newspapers or other media (TV, radio, magazines) or even donor or project documents can be very revealing. This technique is especially well suited to reveal often subtle biases – e.g., not mentioning vulnerable sub-groups, such as women, landless, widowed elderly, the disabled, etc. – or presenting them in a stereotyped way.

A last-step mini-survey

Such a technique is useful if, after all the above:

- We still cannot predict what the people in the next focus group are going to say on a particular topic from the by-now highly polished topic list, or
- We need quantitative data, either to convince skeptics or because the consequences of loose estimates for a particular issue/variable could be detrimental to the clients/target group as a whole or to vulnerable sub-groups.

But this “last step” survey need not include all the items for which clear patterns have emerged. For example, if we already know the main crops and livestock in the area, the gender (and age) division of labor vis-à-vis those crops and livestock, as well as any variation in that gender division of labor by ethnic group or level of wealth, we do not have to include these items in the survey instrument.²

To reiterate, the mini-survey questionnaire need contain only the questions that remain in doubt. By this time, we probably know enough about even those issues to be able to make most of the questions in the “last step” survey “closed end.” (This means that we can write a coherent set of “closed end” alternatives

that fully describe the answers people are likely to give. For example, in an area marked by great poverty and widespread malnutrition and disease, “obesity” is not going to be one of the closed-end alternatives to a question about the most common health problems faced by people in the area.³⁾

Finally, it may be feasible to conduct a random sample “last step” mini-survey even where it would have been impossible to undertake a “first step” random sample baseline survey (for reasons discussed in Endnote 1). For example, it may be that the unsettled issues turn out to be confined to a small sub-sector of the original geographic area. If so, the cost of constructing the “sampling universe” and then drawing a random sample from that “universe” could be greatly reduced.

A warning about relying on group meetings as a “participatory device”

One of the earliest rapid appraisal methodologies is called “Participatory Rapid Appraisal,” or PRA. Since fostering client participation in development initiatives has been an important goal of most development agencies in recent years, many have attempted to apply this particular rapid appraisal methodology. Often, they use a printed PRA guidebook that has been widely circulated. It should be noted, however, that the background of some of the initial creators of PRA was more agricultural than social science. Some of the techniques they advocated have since been criticized by social scientists as being prone to capture by local male elites, to the detriment of women, minorities and the very poor. The reasons are as follows:

- First, large group meetings were an initial component of the methodology. Unfortunately, people with more power and affluence tend to dominate such gatherings. This is because the others tend to be afraid to speak their minds in these forums, especially to criticize these local (usually male) elites. Their reluctance to be forthcoming about their own and the local situation is especially likely if the elites have power to affect the livelihood, housing, etc., of the less powerful attendees.
- Second, some of the research operations called for in a PRA involve a heavy investment of time over as much as two weeks (e.g., “walking the transects,” in which volunteers walk the different gradients in the target village and its environs). Some social scientists who followed up PRAs conducted in this manner found that a disproportionate number of the volunteers who were generating the “participatory” data turned out to be the adolescent and post-adolescent sons of the local elites who dominated the group meetings (and set an agenda for action that largely addressed their own concerns and interests). These young males often were not yet involved in full-time employment and could spare the time – since their families were supporting them, in any event. In contrast, other groups, such as poor women, could NOT spare the time, so their viewpoints and concerns were hardly reflected in the “participatory” product that emerged.
- Third, these problems sometimes lead researchers to conclude that most villagers are apathetic and uninterested in working for change. They also attribute poor rapport to the attitudes of the villagers rather than structural problems with the methodology.



Old man selling vegetables in local market, Bangladesh.



*“Everyday I visit the temple. I was a good soccer player and a carpenter. I stopped working since my cardiac. But I can still carry 70 kg and would carry more if I had better eyesight.”
Abunokanto Tobal, age 86, Bangladesh.*

- In contrast, I have found that using the small, homogeneous focus groups discussed above tends to promote both rapport and participation, and at a much lower level of time commitment by poor people who can't afford to take time off from trying to make a living.
- There is a place for group meetings in the rapid appraisal approach advocated here, however: On the one hand, it is a good device for getting information about things that can easily be quantified by having people raising their hands (e.g., “have you ever attended school?”) or by giving a single number (e.g., “what was the highest grade you completed in school?”) On the other hand, it is a good vehicle to provide feedback to a large group of villagers about the results of those small, homogenous focus groups. This brings us to the next point, feedback.

3. Feedback

In order to help the various stakeholder groups feel a sense of ownership in a project, it is necessary to encourage their participation in decision-making related to that project. One key step is to consult periodically with principal stakeholders about an on-going initiative's progress and/or problems. This is enormously facilitated where a twice-yearly M&E system utilizing focus groups has been introduced. The general sequence for sharing feedback – and disseminating the most recent M&E/focus group results – is to reverse the original process and “go back up the pyramid.” In short:

- One would start with some of the grass roots people who had been focus group participants and/or key informant interviewees.
- Then one could hold a community-level meeting, even though those with less power would be unlikely to participate freely (as noted above, this is one of the main defects of the original Participatory Rural Appraisal model: it used large group meetings, which typically were dominated by local elites; the poor and powerless would rarely tell the whole truth in the presence of those who had power over their livelihood). But it is useful for the whole community to hear the results of small focus groups whose participants are drawn from subgroups of the poor and powerless.
- There also should be feedback meetings with project staff (front-line workers as well as project management).
- Finally, feedback meetings also could be convened at the national level where deemed appropriate (e.g., with top management of the project or NGO, relevant donors, government officials, etc.).

In sum, rapid appraisals can provide data that generally can be defended scientifically and provide them more quickly and cheaply than any comparable method. As a final bonus, RAs are particularly suitable for typically under-funded development sectors, such as ageing.

III. Rapid Appraisal: A useful, participatory tool for the Ageing?

Development initiatives present a major dilemma: they attempt to ameliorate conditions among the poor in countries of the Global South but they rarely have the time and money to assess whether they are having their desired impact or, worse, are violating the Hippocratic Oath that stipulates: “First, do no harm.” Unfortunately, the poorer and more powerless the group, the more vulnerable its members to well-meaning projects that make their situation worse, not better. This already has been amply demonstrated in the annals of Women in Development and, more recently, Gender and Development: poor women may end up being victimized rather than helped by “gender-blind” programs.

The elderly are another group that is generally vulnerable, poor and powerless – and it is one that in almost all countries is disproportionately female.

Activities aimed at the ageing are newer and, thus far, fewer than those with a Gender and Development (GAD) focus. But they share with GAD initiatives a high probability of being “financed on a shoestring.” Because they are on small, tight budgets, and often involve the efforts of overextended NGOs rather than powerful government ministries, there rarely is funding to carry out what still is held up as the “gold standard” for development research: random sample surveys. Such surveys are not only very costly, they generally take too long to come up with data about a project until it is much too late to correct its inefficiencies or eliminate elements that are hurting, not helping, many of those it was supposed to assist.

Consequently, this paper takes another tack. It contends that RAs are highly appropriate for a “bottom up” participatory approach to M&E that would empower the elderly while improving the quality of initiatives aimed at them and enhancing a country’s ability to successfully address the three main goals of the Madrid Plan of Action. As indicated above, the particular type of rapid appraisal advocated in this paper avoids the potential pitfalls of relying on large, heterogeneous group meetings, where the less powerful are unlikely to speak up – or tell the “whole truth” about their situation if they are called upon to speak. Let us now see how such an approach might work in the field.

Rapid appraisals are highly appropriate for a “bottom-up” approach to M&E that would empower the elderly and enhancing a countries ability to successfully address the three main goals of the Madrid Plan of Action.

Utilizing the interests and abilities of both the elderly and other community members to carry out a rapid appraisal-based M&E effort can create a win-win scenario

IV. An elderly-empowering, sustainable, and participatory M&E system

Given the budget constraints facing the typical initiative aimed at the elderly, elaborate M&E systems are out of the question. Fortunately, utilizing the interests and abilities of both the elderly and other community members, such as their literate grandchildren, to carry out a rapid appraisal-based M&E effort, can create a “win-win” scenario. The ability of the elderly to measure and affect the programs proves empowering. Other community members also benefit through modest **incentives** to help with the collection, recording and forwarding of needed information. And intergenerational solidarity in the community also can be increased by the cooperation of age groups suggested in the system proposed here:

In this section, a possible M&E system of this nature is briefly discussed.

A. Setting up a participatory system and conducting twice-yearly focus groups

In overview, the system being proposed involves training not only a facilitator (who may be aided by another person who helps record answers) but also older people who can take over the task of convening and running twice-yearly focus groups in return for a very modest stipend. In order to assure that there would be someone available to carry out this periodic monitoring, several older people would have to be trained in each community.

The best way to go about this is to recruit those people from the initial participants in the first set of focus groups in a given community. The facilitator who conducts the first round of focus groups cannot be an amateur. Hopefully, as one outcome of the Workshop, a “Training of Trainers” (TOT) model will be created in which a cadre of facilitators will be taught the techniques. These facilitators presumably will be staff of the NGO (such as HelpAge) that is running the initiative aimed at older persons in the target communities. This trained facilitator will choose the most promising participants from the pilot round of focus groups and ask if they would like to be trained to run future groups.

It is recommended that they observe a minimum of one and preferably two additional rounds of focus groups before taking charge of their own round. It also is recommended that there be some method of assuring that the findings of each round of focus groups are transmitted to the NGO or other entity that is in charge of the program. This implies that trained facilitators from the sponsoring NGO be involved in the first couple of rounds of the proposed semi-annual focus groups, and periodically after that. This is a crosscheck on

the community facilitators. As a crosscheck on the facilitators from the sponsoring NGO, it would be useful to build in one outside evaluation (e.g., by those who set up the system, or other outside consultants).

Recall that focus groups should be homogeneous. If it is not possible to recruit several future facilitators from each subgroup (e.g., from each focus group with that subpopulation), then it is doubly important to ascertain that the volunteer future facilitators have credibility with people from each of the subgroups whose focus groups the facilitators will be running. As further discussed below, facilitators with limited literacy will be assisted by volunteer schoolchildren, such as their grandchildren. These helpers will help in recording the answers and in preparing any visual summaries of progress (these, too, are discussed below). Anyone who participates in running or recording a focus group will need some sort of incentive.

B. Creating Incentives to Make the Twice-Yearly M&E System Sustainable

One reason for making the M&E system semi-annual is because it will be maintained by people who are essentially volunteers, except for a small incentive. Asking them to update the information more frequently probably would be counter-productive. The twice-yearly frequency for focus groups is generally in line with the report needs of the NGO or agency behind the project or program. And every six months or so is usually frequent enough to measure both exogenous variables (such as economic downturns or upturns, major natural catastrophes, etc.) and predictable variations in the yearly cycle (e.g., a hungry season vs. a season of relative abundance, heightened business activity, etc.). What sort of incentives would motivate them?

Target group (service recipients)

Let us start with the people who are receiving services from the project (vs. control groups, discussed below). Let us consider, in turn, each of the two groups for which incentives will be needed: (a) the elderly who help facilitate the focus groups, and (b) the schoolchildren who help them record the results, update any resulting graphic record of progress, and make sure the information gets to the right people in the sponsoring NGO or agency. Just what might motivate the facilitators and the young recorders do their task is one of the questions that can be discussed in the pilot focus groups. It will vary by cultural factors as well as the gender, age, class and ethnicity of the individuals involved.

But it bears noting that in El Salvador, where we attempted to set up an environmental monitoring system in rural areas undergoing environmental degradation, we found that junior high school students were the most willing: they said they would (1) keep track of the indicators of environmental degradation that the sponsoring (USAID-funded) Green Project would formulate, and (2) undertake some local projects suggested by Green Project, supervised by a teacher-volunteer. What they said would motivate them to do so would be an annual trip to an environmental “campout” near the capital



“Although I have been a widow for 40 years, I am happy because I have a farm that generates enough income to support myself.” Hashna Banee, 100+, Bangladesh.

city, San Salvador, in which they would live in tents, learn more about conservation and compete for prizes for their group's work during the year. The prizes involved education: school materials, books, and other related needs (although public education is free, books and supplies typically are not).



Old man transporting a younger man in a rickshaw, Bangladesh.

What we are proposing is much less elaborate and time-consuming. This is because regardless of the frequency of the activities offered by the sponsoring NGO, the focus groups would have to be convened only twice a year. Under those circumstances, hopefully, the student volunteer would be happy with **school supplies** and, perhaps, books and/or uniforms. If the project really takes off, it would be an excellent idea to **gather together the volunteers every year or so** to share ideas on how to help the elderly and how to record progress in doing so. Promising new indicators and/or visual progress reporting techniques could be shared and outstanding performance recognized, e.g., by an additional **small prize (cash)** would probably be the most appreciated).

On top of these modest incentives for the student recorders, there should be liberal use of **fancy-looking certificates**, suitable for framing for BOTH the facilitators and the student recorders. These are inexpensive but, in most cultures, quite appreciated by recipients. The certificates could get fancier (finally turning into plaques) with length of service.

Both groups (facilitators and student recorders) also might respond positively to **contests** among the local programs in different communities on innovations they had made in the contest period vis-à-vis group activities in support of the Madrid Plan goals (and/or a health/HIV/AIDS initiative), as well as in effectively measuring progress.

Control groups

The first consideration is to find people in communities similar enough to the target groups to make a viable comparison group. As noted above, having a control group permits you to sort out the influence of exogenous or external factors that may affect both target group and controls in a given area. Since the controls are not getting benefits, it is harder to design incentives that will motivate them, since these can't be costly.

If the project has a positive reputation in the potential control community, one incentive is to extend project activities to their community within a reasonable period of time (two years or less). Then the facilitators and their schoolchildren recorders (see below) could be recruited in a first round focus group. Whereas focus group participants from the target groups generally receive only refreshments and travel reimbursements, focus group participants from the control groups will require a little more of a sweetener. One always popular and inexpensive gift is **school supplies for their grandchildren/relatives**. Cheap ballpoint pens can be purchased in bulk for the proverbial song. School notebooks are a little more but, again, purchased in quantity at wholesale, they should be feasible.

The two or three persons who agree to be trained to be facilitators for twice-yearly focus groups will need, at minimum, the following: (a) a small reward

for organizing the group and gathering participants together in a well-located meeting center; (b) a small stipend for actually running the focus groups; (c) some recognition, such as **certificates and/or plaques**.

If no future project activities can be promised to a community, the level of these rewards might have to be raised. This is why, typically, there are far fewer control groups than target groups in the sort of participatory M&E system being proposed here.

Using literate grandchildren as recorders

Schoolchildren recorders are needed where the level of literacy among the elderly in a given location is insufficient to guarantee finding facilitators within their ranks. (But, given the long-standing tradition of high levels of education in Sri Lanka, it is likely that most subgroups of the elderly in the country would have good candidates for the positions of facilitator and recorder.) Where schoolchildren are used they, too, need incentives. Again, these incentives need not be costly – but they should be appropriate for their age group and culture. To give an example, posters of pop culture figures might be sufficient in one culture and irrelevant or resented in another. Sometimes, a more substantial reward might be needed, such as a CD player (boom box), with subsequent rewards of CDs and batteries for continuing participation. It is important to find out from the potential student recorders themselves what they might like, once they understand that the incentives the project can provide are, of necessity, inexpensive. If there is any suspicion that literacy among the elderly is quite low in an area, it makes sense to seek contact with their literate grandchildren and/or other relatives. This may mean meeting with schoolchildren during the same field visit where the pilot focus groups with the elderly are carried out.

Incidentally, although there is little or no gender gap in education in Sri Lanka, this is not the case in most other areas of South Asia (the Indian state of Kerala excepted). So problems of literacy and the need to find alternative recorders (e.g., literate grandchildren or other kin) are gendered: such difficulties are much more likely to emerge among female elderly – typically, the substantial majority of the target group.

This highlights the need for: (a) setting up an M&E system that disaggregates people-level indicators by sex and incorporates gender analysis, as well as (b) conducting gender-sensitive rapid appraisals as part of that system. The next section deals with these issues.



Old woman strolling on the streets of Nepal.

It is necessary to incorporate a gender sensitive approach in RAM because women are overly represented among the older population and caregivers.

V. Toward a gender analysis via a Rapid Appraisal approach: General considerations

Attention to **gender** includes incorporating gender sensitivity into our Rapid Appraisal-based participatory M&E system. In conducting ageing research that is gender sensitive, for example, one would begin by insuring that older women are represented as participants and leaders in proportion to their percentage of the population, not their average status in the community. A gender sensitive approach also requires that all “people-level” indicators are disaggregated by age and sex.

But because women are not only the **majority** of the elderly almost everywhere in the world, including Asia and the Pacific, but also the primary **caregivers**, including of the elderly, it is important to understand more about the gender situation in each community and country where activities will be attempted.

As it happens, I have a general theory of gender stratification (Blumberg 1984, 1988, 1998, 2001a, 2004a) and a still-evolving theory of gender and development (Blumberg 1989a, 1989b, 1995, 2001b, 2004b). These theories offer guidance about the sorts of data to collect in a rapid appraisal that includes a **gender analysis**.

The level of gender stratification varies enormously in Asia and the Pacific; arguably, no other region of the world has as wide a range of variation. There are groups with gender equality/near-equality at the local level in all areas of life except for two that originate outside the locality: organized world religion and government entities. Examples in Asia include (1) villagers in Northeast Thailand (Isan), (2) their co-ethnics, the “Lao Lum” or “lowland Lao” of the Lao PDR (Blumberg 2004c), as well as (3) the Yunnan Province ethnic group that the Chinese government terms “Mosuo” but who call themselves “Nazeh” (Blumberg 2001a). At the other end of the continuum of gender equality, some of the world’s most patriarchal peoples also live in the region. Examples may be found in parts of Pakistan and neighboring areas of Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, etc.

In order to understand the level of constraints and opportunities facing older women in particular, we have to explore their **relative economic power**. This is based on the central hypothesis of my gender stratification theory: that the most important factor affecting the level of gender equality in a given group is the relative control by women vs. men of key economic resources, including income (Blumberg 1984). For example, research on elder abuse shows that it is not only more likely to be directed against older women but also is more likely to be directed against older women who also are economically dependent (Coltrane and Collins 2001).

The following discussion presents a more elaborate set of dimensions than are likely to be investigated in a given rapid appraisal. But in order to have an idea of what are the key dimensions, it is worthwhile presenting the following overview. This overview lists five guidelines for a gender analysis that can be carried out via Rapid Appraisal techniques. Then it presents a conceptual framework concerning the importance of economic power in understanding gender – at any age. The final heading in this section delineates and discusses the specific types of variables called for in a gender analysis conducted at the community level using a Rapid Appraisal Methodology.

The first point to emphasize is that a gender analysis looks at both men and women, and the interrelationships between them. A gender approach is not just a new term for looking only at women.

Second, the main point is that gender relations between men and women involve a system of **stratification** – i.e., a relative ranking or position of men of different subgroups vs. the women of those subgroups, as well as of both genders in the society as a whole.

Third, accordingly, it is not enough to concentrate on "gender roles" and/or the "gender division of labor." This tells us about discrete activities of men and women but not how they are interrelated and how power and resources are distributed among them.

Fourth, the newest approaches to "gender and development" (GAD) look not only at the activities carried out by males and females but also at **empowerment**. In particular, they look at such things as the gender division of **income**, the gender division of tangible and intangible **resources** (including time), and the differential **power** of husband and wife within the household – as well as how this power differential manifests itself in who prevails in specific types of decisions.

Fifth, there are conceptual and empirical reasons for concentrating on relative male vs. female control of economic and other resources. It is to these reasons that we now turn, drawing on my theories and research on gender stratification and gender and development.

A. Control of economic resources

In my general theory of gender stratification, I argue that of the five main sources of power – economic, political, force, ideology and information – economic power is, empirically, the most achievable for women, as well as being the most important for theoretical reasons (see, e.g., Blumberg 1984).

If we look at the sweep of human evolutionary history, the range of variation in gender stratification runs from male-female equality (what Eisler 1987



Separated seating for old men and women at a town meeting, Bangladesh.

terms "partnership societies") to high levels of male dominance/female subordination. We know of no human society where women exercised hegemonic power and men were subordinated.



*"I have my own land to work, breed chicken, and milk the cow. That's why everyone tells me I look happy."
Mujita, 80, Bangladesh.*

But there is one form of power where women have gone above the "50-50 line" of equal partnership: **economic**. At one extreme, we can find societies where men have so monopolized economic power that even women's personal jewelry and possessions are theirs only at the sufferance of whatever male – father, husband, eldest son, etc. – controls them at any given time. But at the other extreme, we can find societies where it is women who control the economy, virtually "lock, stock and barrel." This was true of the Iroquois of Colonial times in North America (see, e.g., Brown 1974), as well as such contemporary groups as the Mosuo (they call themselves Nازه) of Yunnan Province, China or the Bijagos of the offshore islands of Guinea-Bissau (Blumberg 2001a). Also, it turns out that there are a substantial proportion of societies where women approach or exceed men's level of economic power (including one-sixth in a random sample of 61 pre-industrial societies I studied in the 1970s (Blumberg 1978)).

In contrast, women fare worse on the other major forms of power:

- With respect to **ideology**, there are some societies that proclaim gender equality, and many others that maintain ideologies embodying varying degrees of male supremacy. But there is no known society whose ideology proclaims women to be superior.
- With respect to **political** power, we don't have any hard data on societies where women reached the "50-50" line of equality. Today, with the exception of the case of Rwanda, where the election of September 2003 resulted in a Parliament that is 48.8% female, women come closest to political parity in the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands: Sweden has 45.3% female Members of Parliament (MPs), followed by Denmark with 38.0%, Finland with 37.5%, Netherlands with 36.7% and Norway, with 36.4% (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2004).
- **Information** power has not been studied across evolutionary history to the same extent as the other four major types of power. But we have considerable data about gender and education in today's world. On the one hand, we know that there are some contemporary societies (including the United States) where women are the majority of graduates at varying educational levels (see, e.g., Sivard 1995). But on the other hand, we know of no society where women clearly control more of the most important – and revenue-generating – information.
- Finally, with respect to the power of **force**, women are much more likely to be the victims rather than the wielders of force – a fact that harks back to the facts that men have one-third to one-half more upper body strength and have historically dominated control and use of heavy weapons.

My theory also argues that economic power (defined as control of key productive resources, including income, especially, surplus income) is the most important form of power with respect to gender equality for theoretical reasons as well. I hypothesize it as positively affecting one's: (a) self-confidence, (b)

overall household power and (c) “voice and vote” in several kinds of household domestic, including (i) well-being decisions (such as which children should be sent to school for how long, and how this might differ for sons and daughters), (ii) economic decisions (concerning the acquisition, allocation or alienation/sale of assets) and (iii) fertility decisions (which are particularly important for women, given the impact of the number and timing of births on most other aspects of a woman’s life). In addition, I hypothesize that economic power enhances (d) say in land use/conservation decisions in rural areas, and even, to some extent, (e) voice in community decisions.

B. The Key "Gender Division" Variables for a Gender Analysis

Based on the above, it is recommended that a thorough gender analysis include:

Gender division of labor in productive activities

This is the most frequently collected data about gender in Third World development research, especially that undertaken in rural areas. Fortunately, there is often a short cut available. As it happens, within a given agro-ecological area, the gender division of labor tends to be fairly uniform within a given social class and ethnic/religious subgroup (Blumberg 1990). This means that the gender division of labor makes an ideal variable for rapid appraisal research, since one needs only a relatively small number of focus groups with different subgroups of men and women to get a good idea of male and female labor in a given geographic area. This is much more economical and efficient than asking all respondents in a sample survey about their work activities.

There are other short cuts that further reduce the time and cost needed to gather these data. For example, in a rural setting, one need ask only about the two or three main crops and the two or three main animals. For each, the researcher would trace the phases of the production cycle all the way through to final use or sale. For each phase or stage, the researcher would ask who does what (differentiating adult males, adult females, male vs. female children and/or adolescents). Where relevant, the researcher also would ascertain whether family or hired labor does the activity. Hired labor also would be disaggregated by gender and age.

Gender division of income

It is difficult or impossible to ask about the absolute amounts earned by one's informants, male or female. But it is often fairly easy to have them roughly approximate the relative proportion of family income each spouse contributes. It also isn't hard to get focus group members to discuss their subgroup's main patterns of women and men's income-generating activities and the proportion of income each contributes. This seems to be true for both urban and rural populations.

- In *rural areas*, the last steps in documenting the gender division of labor involve learning which gender decides the proportion of a given crop or



Women gathered to attend awareness meeting, Bangladesh.



Old woman carrying water kettles, Nepal.

animal to be sold vs. consumed, and who actually does the selling. Identifying “who sells what” makes a good starting point for asking about male-female income patterns: one would begin by ascertaining who controls the subsequent income. Then one would inquire about other sources of income, e.g., from animal or crop by-products, from off-farm sources including seasonal trading income, etc.

- In *urban areas*, one must be careful to ask about informal sector income as well as formal sector earnings.
- For *both* rural and urban areas, it also is important to ascertain if each spouse’s income involves surplus or just bare subsistence. This is because one gets more power from allocating surplus than “mere subsistence.” The latter must be devoted to survival needs. In fact, this is one reasons why poor women in developing countries, who often contribute substantial proportions of household subsistence, get little leverage from it: few earn enough to have any real discretion in allocating it.

Gender division of resources, particularly productive resources

This is the overarching, umbrella variable under which the gender division of income falls. It involves control of assets, especially capital (income-generating) assets. In the rural context, this includes land, animals, economically valuable trees, etc. In a number of societies where women are important farmers (e.g., in the horticultural societies that predominate in sub-Saharan Africa), but the kinship system concentrates resource ownership in males, women get short-term use rights over the land or animals they are using, and some level of control of the resulting income. But control of the productive assets themselves usually eludes the women's grasp. This can leave them vulnerable to gender-blind development projects that heedlessly undercut their access to income from their labor, turning them into de facto serfs on their husbands' holdings (see Boserup 1970 for the classic initial formulation of this problem).

Gender division of time

This involves not only a typical 24-hour day, but also variations throughout the year. The gender division of time must be ascertained for “normal,” “peak” and “slack” times. In general, research has shown that women work longer hours than men (Carr and Sandhu 1988). Not only do they spend long hours on productive activities in most societies, they almost always bear responsibility for – and do – most of the labor in reproductive activities. Specifically, this extends beyond childcare and actual housework to other activities that really should be classified as productive labor, such as fetching water for humans and animals, gathering firewood, tending kitchen gardens, etc. The net result is that women are disproportionately likely to suffer from another form of poverty: “time poverty.”

Gender division of constraints/opportunities

For most development projects, it is the gender division of **constraints** that is most important. If, for example, married women are not allowed to talk to a project worker of the opposite gender, or it is not socially acceptable for an unaccompanied woman to go out at night, or ride public transportation, etc., then any project components which would require women to do the socially disapproved activities in order to participate will unwittingly exclude them.

This is a classic example of "gender-blind" development. It just never occurred to those who designed the project that women might not be able to participate in whatever they had planned. (Another classic example is scheduling the activities in which women are most expected to participate right during the middle of their busiest times of day, week, month or season.) An example of a gender-differentiated **opportunity** is the opening of a new agribusiness processing plant that (a) is engaged in tasks that traditionally fall on the female side of the division of labor and (b) explicitly goes about recruiting female labor. (This could also be seen as a gender constraint for men.)

Gender division of sociopolitical and "community management" roles

This is another useful form of information, although for many projects, this is an extra, not a core requirement to explore.

The discussion above about constraints and opportunities can lead to what is known in the gender analysis/gender and development literature as project adaptation. It is one of the main reasons for including gender in monitoring and evaluations (M&E) of an ongoing project. If the M&E revealed that particular subgroups of women or men were being undercut or harmed by the project, timely action can be undertaken to correct those aspects of the project that turned out to be causing the negative impact. Then, subsequent M&Es can measure how successful a given project adaptation was in reducing gender inequity and in enhancing the achievement of the project's overall objectives. Indeed, those subsequent M&Es can use some of the rapid appraisal techniques described above.

As a final note, it is obvious that unless all data are gathered in a gender-disaggregated manner, it is impossible to track gender-disaggregated impact of development efforts. Yet despite two decades of lip service to the ideal of disaggregating all people-level indicators by gender, few of the agencies that carry out development activities practice what they preach. A rapid appraisal of the sort discussed above offers a chance to remedy the problem. In the context of the elderly in Asia and the Pacific, it can mean the difference between success and failure where programs are to be applied to groups as diverse as, say, the gender-egalitarian villagers of Northeast Thailand and the gender-stratified and highly patriarchal villagers of Northwest Pakistan.

"I run a small shop with the help of my son. I'm proud to have been able to pay back money borrowed from RIC." Ocharari, 65, Female, Bangladesh.

VI. Initial focus groups: Procedures and topic list for pilot focus groups in Sri Lanka



Town meeting for villagers facilitated by UN ESCAP and HelpAge International in Bangladesh.

In order to illustrate the flexibility and adaptability of the proposed methodology, this section is presented just as it was written BEFORE we went to Sri Lanka; the next section then presents what ACTUALLY occurred with respect to the rapid appraisal fieldwork and the findings:

At present, HelpAge International is running two types of projects for the elderly in Sri Lanka:

1. Home care service (or voluntary home care): service is provided at home for the elderly.
2. Day care service: the elderly come in during the day and go back to their homes in the afternoon.

These two types cover nine sub-services:

1. Basic nursing
2. Old age related diseases
3. Health problems in old age
4. The ageing process
5. First aid for the elderly
6. Counseling
7. Needs and habits of the elderly
8. Cultural differences of different elderly groups
9. Active ageing and income generation activities.

We need to find out which of these services actually are being received in a given community. We also have to ascertain focus group participants' relative degree of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with each of the services provided. Since this may vary among the different subgroups (e.g., poor women, poor men, and their less impoverished counterparts), we have to ask about this in each focus group meeting.

With these points in mind, let us consider (1) procedures for the pilot focus groups, and (2) a very preliminary version of a "topic list" for those meetings:

A. Procedures

- On our "research day," we would work with 1-2 representatives of HelpAge International who would accompany us to observe and be trained.

- We previously would have had them recruit for us some elderly for as many homogeneous focus groups of around five as would be needed given the degree of internal stratification (or planes of cleavage) in the pilot community.
- We previously would have acquired some small presents and arranged for refreshments for participants, and set up a convenient meeting place AND time.
 - o This means that we first have to make sure that there is no competing event that is taking place on our “research day.”
 - o It also means that we have to schedule our men’s and women’s groups in accordance with their schedules: When is it most convenient for the different subgroups of men to interrupt their day to see us? For the different subgroups of women?
 - o When could we have access to the schoolchildren – and would we interview them at school or in the place where we will hold the other focus groups?
 - o Because of local customs, would we have to begin our “research day” with a courtesy meeting with community leaders? If so, we can treat this as a brief courtesy call. Or we could consider the meeting a “key informant(s) interview” and use it to crosscheck background information we also will get from the focus group participants. If time permits, the “key informant” approach is preferable.
- Although top management of HelpAge International may accompany us, it is desirable that they NOT be present during the focus group discussions (FGDs). Otherwise, it is less likely that we will get the information we are looking for. Obviously high-ranking observers who are identified as coming from the supporting agency will almost never be told bad news by recipients of their largesse. It is also a problem to have even lower-ranking HelpAge representatives present but we will have to overcome this by a really strong initial assurance of confidentiality:
 - o In order to maximize honest information, the FIRST thing we have to do in explaining our presence is GUARANTEE CONFIDENTIALITY. We will tell them our first names and assure them that we will ask them only for a first name – and this can be a fictitious name if they don’t to give us their real first name
 - o We also will have to stress that the observers from HelpAge are technical staff whose job it is to measure the success or failure of aspects of their program in order to improve it.
 - o We also must reassure them that there will be no negative consequences on the level of services they are receiving if they give us negative information.



WHAT, Bangladesh.

B. Content

The following is only a rough idea of what will transpire, and an even rougher idea of the preliminary topic list

- The facilitator(s) will: (a) introduce us and explain the purpose of our visit; (b) assure the confidentiality of their participation; (c) spell out for them the incentives – transport, refreshments and, perhaps, a small token gift (I used to give out those plastic “bubbles” filled with shampoo to both males and



WHO, WHAT, Bangladesh.

- females, and/or very cheap ballpoint pens), then (d) give an overview of the issues AND the procedures. This is the time when (e) it will be explained that we will have a combination of questions addressed to the entire group and periodic questions where we “go around the circle” and ask each of them about something like how many children they have (our example must be culturally innocuous for that group).
- The participants in the focus group will introduce themselves by whatever first name they choose to provide.
 - The **topic list** always begins with an “**icebreaker**” (or sometimes two if necessary to establish rapport). The idea is to get everyone talking about a topic all feel qualified to discuss.
 - o Two possibilities are: (1) What is the **biggest problem** in this community for older [men, women] in economic circumstances like your own and/or your ethnic group – recall that depending on the planes of cleavage in the community, we will be having separate focus groups with each critical subgroup? (2) How are **economic conditions** for people like yourselves [older people of their subgroup, as described above] now as compared to a year ago – are they the same, better or worse?
 - Next, once rapport seems established, we could ask if any of them are involved in any of HelpAge’s local activities, reading from the list of projects and nine sub-services.
 - Then we could ask them about: (a) their level of access to each service, and (b) how useful each service mentioned is.
 - This could be followed by asking them for suggestions for fixing problematic services OR leaving that for later (when rapport presumably will be even stronger).
 - We could then proceed directly to which of those services they would rank as most important.
 - If income-generating opportunities are not offered, but our icebreaker has indicated economic concerns as important for this subgroup (as is almost invariably the case), we could ask them if they would like to have help in earning (additional) income through HelpAge-sponsored initiatives.
 - o If the answer is yes (unless everyone is very old and very sick, I imagine that in Sri Lanka it will be), we could ask them if there are any activities that older people in the community engage in to earn money and what they are.
 - o Once we identify some activities, the HelpAge representatives can subsequently find out about their economies of scale, start-up costs, degree of dexterity and strength needed, etc. to see if any of them appear feasible for HelpAge intervention.
 - o We might also ask about extant microfinance activities in the community because there could be coordinated or “piggybacked” programs. This might be especially important in any future HIV/AIDS initiative: the caregivers may be desperate for ways to earn income (a number of activities I evaluated in East Africa when I was team leader of a four country assessment combined microcredit and HIV/AIDS).
 - Time permitting, we could ask about the three dimensions of the Madrid Plan, over and above the services discussed, to ascertain their views about help with any dimension that wasn’t being offered in the community (e.g., community social capital support services).

- Then they would be asked to discuss whether they would be interested in helping **measure** the impact on people like themselves of any HelpAge services being offered, and recording suggestions concerning additional services.
- It would be explained that this would be a twice a year commitment and that we are looking for up to three people who would like to be trained to be **facilitators** of future focus groups.
- We would explain about using schoolchildren relatives as **recorders** if literacy constraints exist in the focus group in question.
- We would explain about the small **incentives** we would offer to both facilitators and student recorders and any contest elements we're considering.
- We would explain that the same people need not participate in each round of focus groups (if we insist on this, it's called a "panel study" and it's a lot harder and more expensive to carry out because of attrition problems among a population of older, potentially sick and dying respondents), but that we would welcome the continued participation of anyone present who might not want to be a facilitator but might like to join future focus groups. (We would explain about the very small incentives they could expect to receive for being members of future focus groups.)
- We also would briefly explain several possible **display methods** for the measurements of progress that each focus group would generate. Some preliminary ideas include: (a) a scale shaped like a vessel that can hold more or less of something (e.g., a thermometer, a pitcher), and be appropriately numbered; a new container would be drawn for each semi-annual round, and the level and date recorded; (b) a bar chart or graph, again arrayed on a timeline (for the x axis) and displayed in terms of levels (on the y axis), or (c) other devices that might be culturally meaningful (we'd need to consult with local key informants on this). [We would select the display methods later, after deciding what we want to measure and how people responded to our brief discussion on this issue.]
- But regardless of method, the data **must be disaggregated by age and sex**.
- We can have one or two **concluding questions**. We might ask, for example:
 - Whether it is harder for men or women to grow old in their community (specify this as men or women "like themselves" if class and/or ethnic divisions are sharp, and/or
 - Whether they have a concluding suggestion or complaint they want us to transmit to top management at HelpAge International.
- Although we wouldn't have time to do more than one (if we're lucky), it would be good to try one **control group FGD** (focus group discussion). The easiest way to obtain a control group is to randomly choose one focus group and ask participants if they know "people like themselves" who are **NOT** receiving any HelpAge services. If we have enough time, we could try to have a quick FGD with 3-5 such older people. Since they presumably would not be receiving any special services aimed at the elderly, the control group FGD should be a lot briefer – but their incentives have to be a bit more generous.
- For **BOTH** the target subgroups and the control groups, a common core of



Old man weaving, Bangladesh.

socio-demographic and socioeconomic data must be collected about each participant, using the “going around the circle” technique.

- o The list includes age, sex, education/literacy, occupation and/or income-earning activities (previous if retired), number and ages of children and which (if any) remain in the community, and other dimensions to be determined. Sex would be recorded by **observation**; other sensitive dimensions, such as **ethnicity and class/economic level** would be recorded in the way that local key informants tell us would be least objectionable.
- o It usually is more efficient to ask social data questions two or three at a time, at several well-timed points during the FGD, in order to keep it on track.

- Finally, since we are using a **topic list**, not a questionnaire, we could alter the order of these items to take advantage of openings provided by the flow of the discussion.



Mr. Osama Rajkhan from UN ES-CAP, observing old woman making baskets, Bangladesh.

VII. Fieldwork findings in Sri Lanka

A. Overview

Tissamaharama is located on the southeast tip of Sri Lanka. Tragically, it was right in the path of the tsunami of December 26, 2004. But even during our visit, we saw a modest village that has benefited from government social and health programs but long has suffered from a precarious economic base. Government social investment helped create the long-lived population, but continuing economic difficulties have left the elderly villagers we interviewed relatively poor and needy. Accordingly, they were pleased with the activities and services provided to them by the Sri Lankan affiliate of HelpAge International.



Town meeting, Bangladesh.

Table 1: Summary of Rapid Appraisal Interviews

1. Colombo, Sri Lanka

Key informant 4 men, 4 women

2. Tissa Village

Key informant 1 woman*

Focus groups

A. Target groups:

- Group 1 5 men (source of male statistics in Table 2)
- Group 2 6 women*
- Group 3 30-woman group meeting: 28 gave data (T. 2)
- Group 4 6 women*

B. Control

- Group 1 4 men
- Group 2 5 women

C. Project “inside angle of vision

Caregivers 1 man, 5 women

Outside angle of vision

- a. MDs 1 man, 3 women, plus:
- b. Public 2 men

TOTAL IN 17 MEN, 55 WOMEN = 72*

* 13 women participated in more than one group or interview



Town meeting, Bangladesh.

Table 2: Averages (Means) for Selected Elderly Target Group Interviewees

A. 5 men in focus group (1 blind man, age 54, was not in target age group)

Mean Age: 69.7 with blind man; 73.2 without him

Mean Education: 1.4 grades with blind man; 1.8 without him

Living With: 3=female relatives (2=daughters; blind man w/mother, 2 sisters)
 1=male relatives (son)
 1=alone

B. 28 women who gave data in group meeting

Mean Age: 68.2

Mean Education: 3.3, including 5 who never attended; 4.0, with attendees only

Living With: 21/28 still lived in own home; most had co-resident children:
 8=with female relatives (in own or daughters' homes)
 9=with male relatives (in own or sons' homes)

Work History: 25/28 used to work as casual labor (mostly in agriculture)
 1/28 is still working as casual labor (mostly in agriculture)

Note: 100% of both the men and women expressed interest in participating and/or acting as facilitators in future twice-yearly focus groups; all focus groups involving the elderly had people able to serve as recorders (N=1 for the men; N=at least 1 in each of the women's focus groups);

As is frequently the case with rapid appraisals, the research “evolved” in response to changing circumstances and “targets of opportunity.” We worked harder than we expected, but were able to do far more than we had anticipated, as the following summary of the research indicates in Table 1.

In total, we carried five focus groups with the elderly (three target group and two control groups), one large group meeting of elderly women, and two focus groups with non-elderly representing inside and out outside angles of vision. In total, the fieldwork focus groups, key informant interview and group meeting lasted about 10 hours. This was after we spent six hours driving from our hotel to the town of Hambantota, where after only a few hours of sleep, we left for Tissamaharama (known as Tissa village) to begin the grueling 10 hours of interviews. Our return took seven hours, due to heavy rain and bad roads,

leaving us only a few hours of sleep before the workshop reconvened on Thursday morning.

In order to give a better idea of the characteristics of the elderly men and women who participated in the focus groups, some statistics were calculated about the five men in the first Tissa focus group and about the 28 women who provided data in the large group meeting. These are summarized in Table 2.

Finally, we wish to point out the special situation of the volunteer caregivers: of the five women, four had O-levels and one had A-levels; the one man had O-levels. The mean time they had worked with HelpAge was 1.5 years. All had previously worked as Family Health Volunteers (FHVs – they were completely unpaid in this capacity, vs. the 1,000 rupee stipend they now receive from HelpAge for transport). They had worked as FHVs an average of 8.25 years. In sum, **these six well-educated young people had an average of 9.75 years of unpaid work as volunteers because they couldn't find paid employment, despite their high levels of education.** How did they live? Two of the women were married and supported by their husbands. The other three women and the man were still living with, and being supported by, their families. This gives an idea of the disjuncture between high levels of social indicators in Sri Lanka and a slow-growth economy that cannot provide enough employment.



Old age allowance recipient in Bangladesh.

The researchers and the observers

Although the typical focus group should have only one or two facilitators/ recorders, we brought a total of five outsiders to every meeting. The researchers were myself and Osama Rajkhan of UN-ESCAP, who organized the workshop. In addition, there were three “observers,” all Sri Lankans, so that they could help with translation as well as confirm that we actually were following the methodology detailed in this report. Despite the fact that the focus group participants were matched 1:1 by the researchers/observers, rapport was soon established. It should be noted that HelpAge management chose the village in which we worked, and the HelpAge Day Center team arranged the focus groups – very successfully and efficiently, in fact.

The evolution of the Topic List

Although the “icebreakers” described above remained the same, other questions did emerge, while some were dropped. Here is a “bare bones” summary of the evolution of the Topic List.

First, we cut the number of times we “went around the circle” to collect socioeconomic and/or sociodemographic data to the bare minimum. Basically, we asked for age, education, living arrangements, and, sometimes, work history and number of children. This was due not only to time constraints but also because the HelpAge volunteers assured us that the participants from Tissa village were fairly homogeneous in economic situation (poor, mostly retired/ semi-retired from agricultural labor), as well as ethnically and religiously homogeneous (Sinhalese Buddhists).

Second, we probed more deeply on income-generating activities. Once it became clear that they were not raising dry season vegetables for consumption and sale because they didn't save runoff rainwater from the rainy season, we

began to explore how they might begin to grow high value, nutritious vegetables (such as chilies) during the dry season. One possibility would entail using appropriate technology to trap roof and other runoff water so that it could be used for irrigating the vegetable crops. We encountered considerable willingness among the women for trying a pilot project in the HelpAge Day Center. Some of the elderly women said that if the pilot project proved successful, they would be willing to do it at home (if the cost of any devices for catching the runoff was affordable – either because it was part of a microcredit scheme, or subsidized).



“Though I am old and helpless, young people respect me and visit me.” Aduribeguna, 75, Bangladesh.

We probed even further about the possibility of raising dry season vegetables after the MDs, in their focus group, told us that Type 2 diabetes was the third most prevalent health problem among the Tissa elderly, and that it was exacerbated by a diet with too much starch and not enough vegetables.

Third, we began asking them how elderly people like themselves helped their families, as well as how their families helped them. The picture that began to emerge showed the women to be younger, healthier, and much, much busier: most were still shouldered heavy loads of domestic chores that left them with little time for “extras,” such as having the leisure to endure the long waits required for government-provided health care or to attend the HelpAge Day Center more often.

Fourth, we asked them if and how they helped other elderly people in the village and found that such help was quite common – and frequent. Fifth, we elaborated on the questions about whether they’d be willing to participate in twice-yearly focus groups to measure project results: in each focus group, we asked if there were people willing to facilitate and people able to record. Invariably, we found that everyone proclaimed their willingness to participate. We also found at least one potential volunteer facilitator and one potential volunteer recorder in every focus group.

Sixth, there were few suggestions or complaints about HelpAge, perhaps because of the potentially intimidating presence of so many researchers and observers (one of the observers was from HelpAge, in fact). We didn’t notice any other topics, however, where discussion was “thin.” So, in general, it appears that rapport on the other items was not affected by the presence of so many outsiders.

Seventh, in every focus group, we asked if it was harder for women or men to grow old. This came about because we added it to the topics in the first focus group and got a lot of discussion. As it happened, all of the focus groups concluded that it was harder for women than men to grow old. The main reasons involved women’s continuing domestic burdens. The men were able to devote more time to what is seen as the ideal activity for the elderly – turning to religion, and, especially, contemplating their situation vis-à-vis the next reincarnation.

Eighth, we tried to add a question on whether the people in this village could be trusted. But most answers said that some people were trustworthy while others

were not, and there was not much discussion. Consequently, this question was not asked in every focus group.

The present discussion of the evolution of the Topic List already has previewed some of the findings and conclusions. But before presenting the 20 points that the researchers presented to the entire workshop when we reconvened, it should be noted that the three observers performed an unexpected and supremely helpful service: one of the first activities we carried out when the workshop reconvened on Thursday morning was a role playing exercise, in which each of the three observers (all women) created the persona of an elderly female, and then responded to the questions from the final Topic List from that imaginary person's point of view. The three observers also discussed among themselves, just as the actual participants had done during the Tissa focus groups the previous day. This gave the other workshop participants, who had visited various HelpAge activities on Wednesday, when the fieldwork was being carried out, the "flavor, smells and taste" of the rapid appraisal. The following is reproduced verbatim from the materials presented to the workshop and then critiqued and edited by the other workshop attendees:



"I have arthritis, but I am still strong. I have my own land and produce crop. I like my community. I have many friends and contacts." Sherroj Miga, age 80, Bangladesh.

Conclusions and recommendations flowing from the focus groups in Tissa village

1. The main problem that emerged in all of the focus groups was lack of income.
2. The existing income generating schemes offered by HelpAge are not very viable because of a lack of markets.
3. We are developing an idea of using runoff roof water to irrigate chillies and other high value vegetable crops that can be grown in a demonstration plot at the Day Center.
4. All of the focus groups endorsed this idea.
5. Specifically, since there is not a strong tradition of innovation and entrepreneurship among these Sinhalese, the idea would have to be introduced carefully in order not to be rejected by the target group.
6. There will have to be technical assistance from the Ministry of Agriculture and a relevant water NGO, both of which have developed innovative methods to irrigate horticultural crops in dry zones, such as Tissa.
7. Since all of the focus groups agreed that it's harder for women than men to grow old in Tissa, the project should be targeted primarily at older women – whose two biggest problems were lack of income and excessive household chores. This means that the project cannot be too time consuming; fortunately, the new approaches do not involve high levels of labor – and the women proved to be younger and more appropriate for "active ageing" interventions than the men.
8. After vetting the technology in the demonstration plot at HelpAge's Day Center, it would be extended to interested participants. At this time, there would be an attempt to link

up with or “piggy back” onto microcredit schemes such as those offered by Janus Shakti in the area.



Old women with traditional ornaments, Nepal.

9. We propose extending Help Age’s “adopt a granny” program to support equipment needed for the vegetable schemes, over and above linking up with microcredit initiatives.
10. We also propose extending the “adopt a granny” program to incorporate an “adopt a geriatric health care volunteer.” This would provide money for bikes and higher travel stipends to the volunteers. Scholarships that would permit selected volunteers to study a field, such as a nursing specialty, in which there is employment, also could be incorporated.
11. Since some of the vegetables would be used for consumption, this initiative could have a positive impact on the third most serious health problem in the area, according to the MDs – Type 2 diabetes brought about by a diet with too much starch and too few vegetables.
12. Men tend to seek medical attention more than women since the average wait in government health care facilities is about 6-8 hours – the men have the time to wait but the women have too many chores to do so.
13. These recommendations are specific to the area in which we worked: they are located in a rain shadow which makes cultivation even more problematic than in the rest of the southern dry zone.
14. We found that these elders – especially the women – were less debilitated than the stereotypes: women were the overwhelming proportion of the participants and were younger, healthier and better educated than their male counterparts. Once we learned this, we began to modify our original Topic List, so that it better measured the empirical reality we encountered. This flexibility is one of the key advantages of this Rapid Appraisal/participatory Monitoring & Evaluation approach.
15. The participants in the Day Center have formed their own organization (we interviewed both the president and the secretary) and we also found a significant proportion (about 1/3) of the women who demonstrated leadership traits.
16. We found that all of the target groups endorsed the idea of twice-yearly focus groups in order to discuss progress and new problems that might have emerged in the HelpAge program in the area; the control groups were willing to discuss what had happened with “exogenous variables,” so that we could better attribute impact to HelpAge interventions vs. external factors. In every female focus group, we found not only several volunteers to be facilitators of these meetings but also at least one woman with enough education to serve as the recorder for the focus group discussion. Thus, it didn’t prove necessary to ask about involving their literate grandchildren in this village.
17. We therefore conclude that the Rapid Appraisal was successful: in a single, long day we interviewed a total of 72

people (17 men and 55 women). We were able to interview both those with an “inside angle of vision” and an “outside angle of vision,” in order to facilitate more “triangulation” and thereby enhance the validity of our findings.

18. We also conclude that the Rapid Appraisal/participatory Monitoring and Evaluation approach is viable in this area and would result in better programs because they could be aligned continuously with empirical reality based on the twice-yearly replications. This approach would be able to identify emerging successes and/or problems so HelpAge could adapt its strategy accordingly. There is no “one size fits all” approach to elderly programs and this approach enables a program to customize its efforts to adapt to the specific situation in a given area.
19. Therefore, we urge the participants in our workshop to seek funding for more extensive Rapid Appraisal training, including setting up the twice-yearly participatory Monitoring and Evaluation discussed in the workshop and demonstrated in our pilot test.
20. We also urge that participants also seek funding for periodic future meetings to share results and lessons learned from application of this approach, in order to enhance their own programs and develop an empirically tested approach to “active ageing” initiatives.



Old man sewing, Bangladesh.

VIII. Replicating and refining the model in China



WHAT, China.

A. Overview

Gaobaidian, the village chosen by the lead Chinese agency on ageing, the CNCA (Chinese National Commission on Ageing) proved to be conveniently located near Beijing and exceptionally well-off. Its prosperity and current demographic structure, plus government policies, combine to make it an apparent paradise for those in their “golden age.” Gaobaidian is over 1,000 years old. For centuries it prospered as a stop on the Grand Canal, which brought grains, furniture and other products from South China to Beijing and its Forbidden City.

Gaobaidian provided lodging and services to the boatmen but several centuries ago, its people decided they could earn more by producing furniture themselves, instead of watching it float by. Now it is famous as a place that produces furniture both for export and for direct sale to foreigners who come to its elegant showrooms. Geography also has been kind to Gaobaidian. The spectacular urban expansion of Beijing has brought the metropolitan area to the village doorstep: across the expressway there are blocks and blocks of modern high-rise apartments and abundant shopping. There’s even a metro station.

That prosperity has showered wealth on the village government as well. The previous year, the village received RMB 12 million as taxes on furniture sales; it expects to receive 15 million on sales of 400 million for the current accounting year. This has permitted the village to provide its own pensions of RMB 300-350 to men and women who were farmers and aren’t getting government or factory pensions of RMB 1000 or so. And although the “one child policy” has been in effect since 1979, there still are many people in prime working age to provide a solid base of support for the elderly. Gaobaidian is clearly benefiting from what Gubhaju terms the “demographic bonus.”

In order to interpret the results of the rapid appraisal we conducted in Gaobaidian, all the above should be kept in mind. The fact that the composition of the focus groups was not under the control of the researchers also should be taken into account. Caveats aside, however, the interviews and fieldwork show a program that is wonderfully comprehensive and a target group that claims no economic problems whatsoever and expresses delight at the multitude of activities undertaken by and for them.

The fieldwork was carried out on July 27, 2004. On arriving, we found a greeting ceremony of colorful waving banners and were given an initial orientation by village notables (including the woman Director of the Village Committee and two MDs, a man and a woman). Facts were crisply presented: the village consists of 2,533 households and 5,716 individuals (2.26 persons/household). There are 360 households that sell furniture.

The elderly comprise 13.5% of the total (about 772 people, 45% male, 55% female). They are supported by pensions from their prior employer or the village. In addition to the pension, most also receive additional support from their children, and some also rent out part of their house for extra income. All have health insurance. There is a home for the tiny number of older people who don't have family care. The principal medical problems are cardiovascular/hypertension and diabetes. The principal focus for the elderly is the day center.

Among the elderly, 85 households are “empty nests,” with no resident children – although in most cases, at least one child lives somewhere in the vast, sprawling Beijing metropolitan area, and is able to visit at least 1-2 times a month. These “empty nest” (EN) households are a principal focus of the activities of the village and the other elderly. There are special programs for them, e.g., each of their households has a special “doorbell” (some sort of buzzer) that is monitored so it can be used to bring help in case of an emergency. We were told that about 4/9 of the EN people were “frail.” The rest were healthy and active.

When we arrived, our interviews all had been efficiently set up. Our two main focus groups with the elderly were comprised of six women and five men, respectively, from the EN group. We also carried out a focus group with six women who were 60+ but not living in “empty nests.” This was intended as a “control group,” although all were active participants in the village program for the elderly.

Focus Group 1 (5 men)

Their average age was 70.8 and they had an average of 3.6 children each. All were literate although one had never gone to school; the remaining four had an average of 4.75 years of education (the average for all five was 3.8 years). Occupationally, one had been a farmer but the others included three retired skilled workers and a construction administrator. Of the rich cornucopia of activities offered for the elderly, three men mentioned liking chess and one calligraphy. Despite their “empty nest” status, they had no complaints and stated that they had no money problems – they didn't need to earn income because they “had enough.” Two of the five thought men and women were about equal in problems of ageing but three thought that women were better off.

Focus Group 2 (6 women)

The average age of these female “empty nesters” was 68.3; as in Sri Lanka, the female focus group participants seemed to be not only younger but also more vigorous. Since these were not random samples, however, no inference is possible to a larger population. Nevertheless, women in China retire earlier than men (women=55 for government workers/teachers; 50 for all others, vs. men retiring at 60 from government/teaching jobs, 55 from other employment). This factor helps explain the younger age at which women begin participating in the activities of the elderly center. The six in this focus group had an average of 3.7 children, about the same as the five men in the previous group. Three of the women never had been to school, the other three averaged 7 years of education, or 3.5 years for all six. Four had been farmers (and hence received the village



Old man and his son in China.

pensions); two had been workers. With respect to preferred activities, singing and dancing was the clear favorite, along with sports/exercise; all told, the women named many more favorite activities than the men. None wanted to earn income – they wanted to enjoy their retirement. All felt that men and women were about the same in ease of ageing – all were living a good life.



UNESCAP/CNCA National Training Workshop: Applying Indicators to Improve Preparations for an Ageing Society,

Focus Group 3 (6 women)

This was the “control group” in the sense that they did not live in an ‘empty nest.’ But they participated just as much in the center and activities for older people. They averaged 62.3 years and had an average of 3.0 children. This was a more educated group, with a mean of 9.5 years of schooling. Their occupations reflect it: two were ex-directors of village organizations, one was a retired teacher, another a retired manager and two were ex-workers. They also disclaimed any economic problems because of their pensions and the fact that the “village takes great care of us” (though they might not shun an income opportunity). All six named singing and dancing as a favorite activity, along with exercise, a health course and travel. (It should be noted that the village is affluent enough to pay for trips for all the elderly every year; at least one recent trip was to another province.) These women thought men had a harder time with ageing because if they didn’t have a wife to care for them, they couldn’t take care of themselves. And all six women had served as volunteers, helping out frail elderly.

The two remaining focus groups were comprised of key informants on the one hand and caregivers on the other. The first involved five women and four men, mostly village officials (ages 32-52; with an average of 9.9 years of education; note that having a “too large,” and mixed gender, focus group is generally less of a problem with key informant-type specialists than with members of the target or control groups). The second involved two men in their early 50s who were in paid positions and three retired people who were volunteers – two women and one man, averaging 60 years of age. All five had finished junior high school.

The picture these two focus groups presented of the “empty nest” elderly and the other older people corresponded exactly with what we heard in the focus groups with elderly participants. All enthusiastically praised the village center and its programs for the elderly. All groups enumerated the available activities and services in detail. All also emphasized that everyone has paid health care and that the frail elderly are helped with daily life activities, such as shopping, obtaining prescriptions, etc. In addition, all groups mentioned that attention also was paid to the emotional needs of the elderly – including home visits just to chat.

Finally, all groups agreed that the elderly did not need income-generating activities: As one woman key informant stated, “they don’t need money, what they need is happiness – and the volunteers are helping to spread happiness.”

IX. Toward a training module

This section provides a general guideline for designing and facilitating a training module that incorporates client participation to evaluate the impact of development programmes based on the experience in Colombo, Sri Lanka and Gaobaidian, China. The framework, however, is not a “one-size fits all” structure, but only a rough guideline for future reference. The structure for assessment must be flexible and adaptable to the dynamic contextual changes, such as the economical, political, social, and cultural environment, that are specific to each region or country in which the programme is implemented.



Visit to XX by HelpAge International.

A. Understanding main objectives

The underlying objective of community-based programmes on ageing is aligned with the three dimensions of the Madrid Plan of Action - to promote development, enhance health and well-being, and establish an enabling environment for older persons.

The criteria for determining a programme’s success are (1) whether initial objectives have been met and (2) whether there has been a true impact on the target population, in this case, old persons. In other words, we must inquire whether a development programme has delivered the intended service and produced the anticipated outcomes for the targeted people.

B. Implementation strategy

The proposed research method for measuring the impact of a development programme is Rapid Appraisal Methodology (RAM). This bottom-up approach encourages active and liberating participation of beneficiaries in the review and appraisal process (for details of RAM and its sequence, refer pp. 7-17).

The general sequence and imperative elements of a RAM for development programmes are as follows. Before elaborating, it should be stressed that the suggested strategy is not a strict linear process, but rather a circular process where reviews identify progress and concerns, feedbacks develop new ideas and solutions, that are then incorporated back into the development programme for adjustments and improvements (Figure 1).

1. Advocacy

Increase awareness of the programme participants by informing them of the objective, sequence, responsibilities/rights, and potential contribution of the evaluation study. This stage is crucial in the RA, which is a bottom-up methodology that requires voluntary and dynamic participation of beneficiaries (e.g. local elders and school children) of the development programme under review.



Monitoring follow-up meeting, Bangladesh.



2. Review of secondary data

Collect secondary data from literature, documents, and communications artifacts. Also disaggregate and reanalyze existing data to generate new information that specifically focus on the research study. Utilize information from both internal sources (e.g. reports from previous studies, distil existing data) and external sources (e.g. statistics from other NGOs, national accounts, and international organizations).

3. Gathering of primary data

Obtain primary data through triangulation. Also utilize information from both internal and external sources (mentioned above).

<Triangulation>

Implement different research techniques based on several sources (min. two). If possible, combine interviews (e.g. key informant interviews, target & control focus groups), (oral) questionnaires, and observation.

This cross-validation method can provide information with greater accuracy because it first compares various data on collective issues that are approached from multi-faceted aspects, and then converges the information to derive a single middle-point, which has greater validity and reliability (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Triangulation – Convergence of information (example)



Awareness meeting, Bangladesh.

<Main techniques>

Icebreaker

As an opening, choose one or two eliciting questions from the topic list that are of broad interest and can easily be answered by any member of the community. Replies for icebreaker questions will provide implicit, but invaluable information that reflect the world view of programme participants. This stage is particularly important in cultures where public discussion is uncommon and discommoded. Therefore, when used as the first step of any information gathering process, icebreakers contribute to inducing active and liberating participation as well as effective introduction to facilitating the more probing techniques that will follow, such as interviews and focus group discussions (mentioned below).

Key informant interviews

Use flexible and semi-structured topic lists that can be promptly and easily modified at the research field when necessary. Typically, these interviews begin at the national level and work their way down. Examples of interviewees include: national/municipal civil workers, outside NGO staffs of a similar project, locally knowledgeable teachers and health clinic workers, and inside NGOs staff. Organize questions by importance, topic, function (e.g. probing questions) and structure (e.g. open-ended questions). Ask neutral and non-directive questions that induce elaborative answers.

Focus groups discussions

Focus groups should be composed of members that are participating or have experience participating development programme. Focus groups should be small in size (about 5 persons) and homogenous, with members who have similar economic, social, and political interests. This will foster a more open

discussion by mitigating the tension between potentially conflicting views and opinions. Employ trained facilitators to administer the focus groups. Most often, facilitators will not need to have a formal research background, as long as they are familiar with the development programme. It is best when they have previously participated in the programme themselves. Facilitators will interact and discuss topics with other focus group members to induce creative ideas and suggest new recommendations. Facilitators should not impose anything on the discussants and encourage them to articulate their opinions and observations.



Monitor visit, Bangladesh.

Supplemental techniques

- Conduct follow-up interviews with few individuals from the focus groups to clarify or obtain elaborate information on a certain topic.
- Conduct community interviews during public meetings which are open for all members of the local community to obtain general information.
- Observe one's actions and words at the program site and make records on a prepared observation form in order to detect inferences. This technique is useful when an interviewee is unwilling to reveal certain information during an interview.
- Conduct content analysis using communication and media resources (e.g. books, newspapers, speeches, letter, songs) to obtain indirect information.

Last-step mini-survey

Clarify issues in doubt through a structured mini-questionnaire.

<Data measurement>

Qualitative

Identify complaints and issues of interest through interviews and focus group discussions (e.g. ways to improve income, degree of interdependence amongst multiple generations in the household).

Quantitative

Collect demographic data through focus groups, surveys, interviews and existing data (e.g. age, years of education, number of members in the family, work history, level of income).

<Resource utilization>

Existing resources

Utilize local resources as much as possible instead of drawing in new resources. Hold group discussions at municipal schools after class-hours or empty community halls instead of the expanding the NGO office and meeting area. Seek help from literate grandchildren and local student volunteers to record proceedings of the focus group meetings instead of paid adult workers. Small incentives, such as school supplies will be sufficient for luring these students. Based on our experience, the most motivated and effective student helpers are around the age of XX.

4. Indicators

Establish performance and outcome indicators as benchmarks to measure progress towards the goal of the development programme. Indicators should be designed on the basis of the programme's main objective (i.e. Programmes with the goal of income generation for old persons can develop economic indicators such as level of income, ownership of family enterprise, number of livestock, etc. Programmes that aim to enhance the wellbeing of older persons can develop social indicators such as, literacy, family composition, number of hours spent in intergenerational communication, etc.). These indicators are a useful tool for providing tangible data to programme designers, administrators, stakeholders, and researchers to examine its impact.



WHO, WHAT, Bangladesh.

5. Sustainability

Create incentive schemes to make the appraisal system sustainable. Provide contributors (e.g. facilitators and note keepers of focus groups) with incentives for long-term commitment. This aspect is imperative for a review and appraisal system that emphasizes a circular and continuous development process.

6. Feedback

Improvement

Provide feedback to persons involved in programme design and implementation, beneficiaries, and participants of the appraisal process. This stage is necessary for adjusting and further improving the development programme.

Ownership

Consult periodically with various stakeholders about the progress and problems of the programme and inform them of any changes the programme structure and content in the process to establish a sense of ownership and responsibility.

7. National level

Influence policy

Transcend findings to government level where the results of the impact study can give innovative directions for developing national policies. Establish strong links with different government agencies, national coordinating bodies, and academia that will be effective in helping to translate and disseminate findings into a pragmatic recommendation that will have a greater impact at the national level in the long-run. Strong ties with the government may secure financial resources for activities, but may also increase the risk of government interference and manipulation.

C. Additional concerns

1. Ethical issues

Misperception

Refrain from deceiving or suggesting overly positive promises of the research benefits. Disappointment derived from high expectations is difficult to relieve and furthermore, hinders the work of other researchers that may conduct a study in the future.

Voluntary participation

Inform about the purpose of the interviews and receive full consent from participants before engaging in any research activities. This is especially crucial for interviews that require participants to reveal personal information on their socioeconomic status and express political/ideological views.

Confidentiality

Guarantee confidentiality (furthermore, anonymity, if necessary) of participants outside the discussion room. Such environment will allow participants to provide accurate information and also protect them from harm.

Safety

Protect participants from economic, social, and political danger and notice early warning signals. Respecting individual rights should be fundamental to any social research studies.

Reporting results

Report all results, including negative findings, which may even be detrimental for sustaining the programme. In the long-run, this will provide greater opportunity for improvement.

2. Biasness of data

Acknowledge the possibility of biased opinions due to voluntary nature of participation (i.e. dissatisfied workers may overwhelmingly show up at the discussions). Also, interviews and focus groups are “intrusive” research techniques because they require the presence of a researcher (facilitator or workshop observer) at the field. Any direct or indirect interaction with the participants in the process of research may result in biased answers. Triangulation attempts to mitigate the problem of biasness by converging information from different sources (Figure 2)



Old age allowance recipient, Bangladesh.

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WHAT, Afghanistan.



*Old man wetting clay,
Bangladesh.*

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Old woman receiving banking service, Bangladesh.

