

# The Uganda Participatory Poverty and Environment Assessment (PPEA)

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## Interacting with Policy Processes and Actors

### Origins of participatory policy research in Uganda

During the development of the PEAP in 1996, it became noticeable that the poor themselves had not been consulted. A short consultation with the poor resulted in a major shift of approach and the development of UPPAP (the Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Project). UPPAP was funded by DFID and the World Bank, but housed in the Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development (MFPED) and run jointly by them and Oxfam. UPPAP conducted a series of Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPA1) across the whole of Uganda. With over 36 research sites in 9 districts, UPPAP became central to informing the revision of the PEAP (1999) and subsequent underlying policies such as the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA).

### The policy framework and evolving entry points

The policy and institutional context has undoubtedly been favourable in seeing the institutionalisation of UPPAP in Government. Since the inception of UPPAP poverty has remained at the heart of the Government's agenda. For example, the Poverty Monitoring Analysis Unit (PMAU) has been established in MFPED to oversee the Government's poverty monitoring function. The opening up of the budget process saw the creation of sector working groups (SWGs) comprised of civil society, government and donor representatives to develop Budget Framework Papers for the MTEF. A specific Poverty Eradication Working Group (PEWG) was established to ensure the poverty focus of these SWGs. There has also been an increase in resources allocated to poverty focused expenditure with the newly created Poverty Action Fund (PAF) being a channel for this. Sector wide working has been adopted as a key principle by Government providing room for greater collaboration between sectors and integration of cross-cutting issues such as poverty, environment, gender and HIV/AIDS. And lastly, decentralisation has put the responsibility of service delivery to the poor in the hands of local government. This is designed to allow local decisions and priorities to influence the way services are delivered.

### Driving forces for an environment PPA

In the first participatory poverty assessment (PPA1) conducted by UPPAP, the poor identified many issues relating to the environment such as decreasing soil fertility and poor sanitation, as important to their well-being. At the time, researchers did not have the necessary skills to explore these issues in depth, and many questions remained unanswered. During the design of the second PPA, UPPAP decided that specific case studies were needed to look in greater depth at a number of key areas that emerged and had remained unexplored from PPA1. The environment was one of these.

## Background

Uganda is a landlocked country in Eastern Africa, with an estimated population of 23.4 million people. With a growth rate of 2.5% per annum the population is expected to double within 30 years. While Uganda remains a very poor country, ranked 158 out of 174 countries in terms of the UNDP's Human Development Index and with a GDP per capita of US\$ 320 in 1997, recent GoU figures have given encouragement. The proportion of people living below the income-based poverty line has declined steadily from 56% in 1992 to 35% in 2000.

Poverty eradication has remained central in government policies, budgeting processes and planning systems over the last decade. With the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) guiding this agenda, Uganda has remained focused in its drive to reduce poverty. Poverty monitoring has also been a key aspect of this paradigm shift, shaping policy revision and the quality of information on poverty in Uganda. This has been as a direct result of GoU's willingness to embrace new tools for monitoring poverty such as participatory poverty assessments and openness to combine traditional quantitative data collection methods with newer qualitative approaches.

## Seizing the moment

Although the environment was seen by UPPAP as key for deepening the understanding of poverty, it was questionable whether the necessary skill base to take this topic further existed. With support from CARE International, DFID and experienced researchers from the Centre of Basic Research (CBR) a small core team was established to develop a specific Participatory Poverty and Environment Assessment (PPEA). Key to the success of this process was that the team leader worked both in PPA2 and the PPEA team ensuring cross fertilisation of the two processes. This importantly ensured that the PPA2 site reports contained a lot more information on environmental issues compared to those of PPA1.



## Ensuring the link to policy processes

If the PPEA was to have an impact on policy processes it needed to take place concurrently with the PPA2 research. PPA1 had already effectively influenced the revision of the PEAP and PPA2 was set to pave the way for its next revision (2003). It was critical that PPEA sites should be selected from those sites that the PPA2 were visiting. This would enable triangulation of the findings and would be key in ensuring integration of the case study within the main PPA2 national report, ensuring a wider dissemination amongst key policy makers.

*Integrating  
Environment Thinking  
into the participatory  
research exercise*

## From vision to reality

Research had shown that whilst PPA's were becoming a common tool for governments to use in the formulation of poverty focused strategies, omissions were common with regard to the environment in the collection, analysis and reporting of data (Brocklesbury & Hinshelwood 2001). It was clear from the outset that the PPEA case study would need to refine existing PPA tools and use experienced researchers, knowledgeable in environment and natural resource issues, if it was to be able to really deepen the understanding of the linkages between the poor and their environment.

In light of the above, a technical core team was established, led by Government, to work closely with the researchers in developing the study. Throughout, the core team provided guidance and technical support and proved a key link to many of the ongoing policy processes. UPPAP, as a semi-autonomous entity, was able to provide the necessary linkages between the core team and key government organisations lending the necessary legitimacy to the process. Without this link, opportunities to disseminate the findings as they emerged would have been missed.

## The process

The study was carried out in three phases. The first included a desk literature review of the nine district reports from PPA1 to identify the unexplored issues surrounding the environment. It was seen as critical for the researchers to consult with key policy makers across government at this early stage, to further identify knowledge gaps around how the environment and poverty are linked. If the research was to influence government policy and planning processes, it was key for the study to have a clear understanding of what these processes were. From the consultations above and input from the core team, a framework was established. This provided a clear timeframe of milestones the study would need to reach if it was to have this positive impact. Concurrently, a specific environment focused field manual was being developed, drawing from the desk research and experience of the researchers. Key to this design was ensuring that the whole environment was captured and not just natural resource sub sectors.

The second phase involved collection of primary data using participatory tools and methodologies. A specific field guide was developed for collecting information and exploring issues on environmental change through tailored participatory approaches. The aim of this approach was to establish from the poor themselves how they perceived their environment to be changing how they interacted with their environment and how, if at all, it impacted on their well-being. Once the information had been collected, the researchers carefully analysed their findings producing a range of reports from individual case studies, to consolidated policy analysis and lastly the production of specific sector briefing papers. Key findings of the PPEA are highlighted in Box 1.

The final stage involved assimilating and crystallising the findings of the PPEA into clear sector specific policy briefs. This was essential for targeting specific audiences and ensuring that key policy makers were not overwhelmed with unnecessary information.

## Integrating the PPEA and PPA

An important opportunity that arose from the PPEA study was that the lead researcher was invited by Government to join the main report writing team of PPA2 at UPPAP. Tasked with reviewing all 12 district reports (comprised of 60 individual site reports), the researcher was able to consolidate the findings of the PPEA with findings from the PPA2 and a specific chapter on the environment and the poor was added to the overall PPA2 national report.

## Lessons learnt

Overall the PPEA was seen as a success. The researchers managed to adapt an existing approach to deepen the understanding of poverty-environment linkages in Uganda and ensure that this was captured in the overall PPA2 report. At the same time all involved accepted that there had been many challenges along the way, with clear lessons emerging. These are described in detail overleaf:

## BOX 1

### Why the environment matters to the poor...

Strong messages are coming from the poor that the quality of the environment and natural resources on which their livelihoods depend is declining. This is having negative effects on their livelihoods and their health, and is making them more vulnerable to risks and shocks, so they are less able to move out of poverty.

"In the 1950s, the soils were still fertile, the village was still covered with natural vegetation. We had plenty of food in this village. Generally the world was good. Yields from the garden were very high and food security was guaranteed. Hunger and famine were unheard of".

**Participant, Mukungu, Kisoro**

"The youths are the most desperate because they are poor. They deliberately go out to catch the immature fish because they know that is all that is remaining and they should catch it before another person gets it"

**Community member, Hamukungu.**

"My father allocated me a very small piece of land which has now become infertile. I am now getting money by working with two other people pit-sawing timber on other people's land"

**Young man from Bushenyi farming community**

**And that they have limited access to and involvement in decision making over the environmental resources and services on which their well-being and livelihoods depend**

"People are wondering how to abide by the fisheries laws when one catches very few fish legally"

**Maseruka Adonia, Katunguru**

"The Uganda Wildlife Authority contradicts itself. It has carved out land for the community, but at the same time restricts them from cultivating it"

**Community Development Officer, Bushenyi Sub-county**



### From the process

The process itself had provided challenging obstacles. The speed at which the PPEA had to take place in order to keep parallel with the PPA2 was one important factor that determined the success of the process. Being a new area of research, there were no lessons to be drawn from elsewhere and the study had to learn from its mistakes as it progressed. Ownership of the process by Government was seen as fundamental to the success of the PPEA, yet in a fast moving policy arena such as Uganda, this often meant that the PPEA was not a priority. There was also an assumption that the dissemination of the PPEA had been built into the wider PPA2 dissemination and this was not the case.

### From the study

In undertaking the study itself there were many lessons to be learnt. Most fundamental was the lack of time given to testing the field guide. This was undoubtedly due to the tight timeframe yet additional time and focus in developing the field guide would have benefited the researchers. The team itself felt pulled and constrained by time. Whilst it was ensured that the team comprised an environmental specialist, gender specialist and economist, they were not all able to visit the same research sites at the same time and therefore unable to provide technical backup as originally envisaged. Lastly, too much had been expected from this small team of researchers. As the study moved from research to policy advocacy it became clear that a good editor was needed to turn often complex research findings into simple clear advocacy messages.

## Dissemination Processes

### Ownership

For the PPEA to have impact on policy makers it was key to ensure Government held ownership of the dissemination process. As such, all publications resulting from the study were published through Government, however ownership of the policy briefs remained questionable given the drive for the briefs remained fundamentally with the core team. Undoubtedly there were trade-offs and challenges along the way. To begin with it was seen as key to get line ministries involved in the process before field work began, however this was not always easy particularly given the time constraints as outlined above. It also proved challenging for the Core Team to keep the PPA2 process actively involved in the study which was understandable given their remit of researching and analysing 64 sites.



## Windows of opportunities

The framework of milestones set the scene for opportunities to disseminate the findings of the PPEA, with the annual GoU National Budget Workshop providing the first key opportunity. Through this workshop all planners in the local government and nationally were able to obtain copies of the briefing paper, and hear from the Ministry Water Lands and Environment (MWLE) why the environment is paramount in planning for poverty reduction in the MTEF.

The production of the Poverty Status Report (2003) in preparation for the revision of the PEAP has provided another key opportunity for informing the poverty debate in Uganda. The production of this report will inform the direction of PEAP revision and already drafting teams have been requesting information and background papers on the PPEA.

With the launch of the PPA2 national report later this year further opportunities will arise for disseminating the PPEA findings. It is key that dissemination is regarded as an ongoing process, with new opportunities continually being identified and added to the framework.



## so what next?

The PPEA is still in its infancy and the UPPAP PPA2 national report still to be launched. Findings of the PPEA have only been publicly available for the last four months and dissemination and policy advocacy is ongoing. Opportunities have been identified to use the information generated in wider policy making processes, such as the revision of the PEAP, yet there is still much to be done if the study is to influence planning processes at the local government level.

However there is an increasing interest in the study being expressed by donors, civil society and wider government. With dissemination ongoing, the PPEA still has the potential to reach an even wider audience. With lessons learnt being documented there is an increasing interest in undertaking a second PPEA to build up a timeline of environmental change in Uganda.



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- ♦ Overall: Why the environment matters
  - ♦ MAAIF: Environment and natural resources – Essential for Health and livelihood
  - ♦ MEMD: The careful management of energy and
  - ♦ MTTI: People and wildlife – Conflicting demands on the same environmental resources
  - ♦ MWLE: A quality environment – An essential for health and livelihood
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