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From input to influence

Participatory approaches to research and inquiry into poverty

Fran Bennett with Moraene Roberts



The **Joseph Rowntree Foundation** has supported this project as part of its programme of research and innovative development projects, which it hopes will be of value to policy makers, practitioners and service users. The facts presented and views expressed in this report are, however, those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The Homestead, 40 Water End, York YO30 6WP
Website: www.jrf.org.uk

Fran Bennett, principal author of the report, works half-time as a research officer and departmental lecturer at the Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of Oxford, and half-time in a self-employed capacity on poverty, benefits and gender issues. She was involved with the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power as secretary/policy adviser when working for Oxfam GB, and has been a long-term supporter of ATD Fourth World.

Moraene Roberts, co-author of the report and consultant to the project, is an activist with the international human rights organisation ATD Fourth World, and writes and speaks regularly on poverty and rights issues. She also helps to train social workers, by enabling them to better understand the situation and views of families living in long-term poverty. She has direct long-term experience of living in poverty herself.

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First published 2004 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

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ISBN 1 85935 177 8 (paperback)
ISBN 1 85935 178 6 (pdf: available at www.jrf.org.uk)

A CIP catalogue record for this report is available from the British Library.

Cover design by Adkins Design

Prepared and printed by:
York Publishing Services Ltd
64 Hallfield Road
Layerthorpe
York YO31 7ZQ
Tel: 01904 430033; Fax: 01904 430868; Website: www.yps-publishing.co.uk

Further copies of this report, or any other JRF publication, can be obtained either from the JRF website (www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/) or from our distributor, York Publishing Services Ltd, at the above address.

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Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to Anne Harrop at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation for her advice and support throughout this project, and to other Foundation staff, including Sue Bracewell, Chris Goulden, Alex O'Neill and Louise Ross, for their help. The publications team dealt with our queries and comments with great patience. Many thanks also to Sue Balloch, Alison Barnfather, Peter Beresford, Karen Brock, Becky Buell, Clare Evans, Ruth Evans,

Sylvia Francis, Kathy Kelly, Peter Kelly, Ruth Lister, Rosemary McGee, Liz Richardson, Jo Rowlands, Teresa Smith and Moira Stanley, and especially to Matt Davies and ATD Fourth World, for their contributions. We are also grateful to all those who responded to a request for information about work in the UK using participatory approaches to research on poverty. We remain responsible for the views expressed, and for any errors or omissions.

Summary – key messages of the report

Aims of the report

- The report aims to explain the ‘added value’ of participatory approaches, and to explore some of the debates; to give an overview of participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty in the UK; and to propose next steps forward.

Participatory approaches: what they are and what is needed to make them work

- Participatory approaches to research and inquiry into poverty mean that the knowledge of people with lived experience of poverty is respected; and they have more control over research processes and influence over how findings are used.
- Basic requirements for participatory approaches to work include support (financial and other) and opportunities for personal exchange for participants.

Reasons for using participatory approaches to research and inquiry into poverty

- Participatory approaches to research and inquiry into poverty recognise the particular expertise of people with experience of poverty to put forward their own realities – and their right to do so – and can also make research more effective and improve its impact on policy.
- Participatory monitoring and evaluation can improve understanding of the perspectives of those affected and more complex processes of change.

- Not all research has to be participatory; but participatory elements can be introduced into most, including quantitative research, and would improve it.

Influences shaping debates on participatory research and inquiry into poverty

- Various influences have shaped the debates around participatory research and inquiry into poverty, including ‘user involvement’ and emancipatory research.
- The most significant influence within research on poverty itself is the development of participatory methods in the ‘South’, which more recently have grown into broader participatory research processes influencing national policy.

Examples of participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty

- Four examples of experiments using participatory approaches in research processes and joint inquiry into poverty are used to demonstrate the interaction of participatory aims with constraints of time, resources and human relations.

Overview of participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty in the UK

- Participatory approaches are not yet fully embedded in the mainstream social research tradition in the UK, though recent developments provide a bridge linking traditional approaches with participatory research on poverty.

- There is growing interest in ‘South–North’ exchange, and a network exchanging mutual learning about introducing participatory practice from the ‘South’ in the UK.
- There is also a range of other participatory work, by government (including the devolved bodies), academics and non-governmental organisations.

Participatory approaches to research and inquiry into poverty: some key issues

- Unpacking the ‘who, how and what’ of participatory research and inquiry into poverty involves engaging with a series of complex issues. It means thinking about ‘optimum’ participation – what makes sense for different purposes and contexts; recognising that all stakeholders in participatory research have different interests, rather than claiming that the ‘voice’ of people in poverty is just being listened to and transmitted in a pure form; and being ready to cross-check information from participatory research with other data. A major challenge is moving from the margins to the mainstream by feeding into national level processes and linking up with wider policy change.

Conclusions and recommendations

- Participatory research on poverty cannot achieve social change on its own; but it can provide opportunities for people living in poverty to have an influence.
- Social research funders should take account of the additional funding required for participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty.
- More opportunities should be provided for social researchers to use participatory methods, and to exchange experiences with others.
- Government should become more open-ended about research and evaluation agendas, and ‘own’ efforts to support participation by people in poverty.
- Opportunities for people living in poverty and their organisations to come together, develop strategies and take part in public policy debate should be strengthened.

1 Introduction and background

Poverty in an age of affluence is being unable to write and having others write about you.

(From postcard, quoted by Corden, 1996)

This chapter introduces the central message of this report – that people with direct experience of poverty should have greater authority, control and influence in research and inquiry into poverty.¹ It also explains the background to this project, how it came about and how it was carried out.

The report focuses on the participation of people with direct experience of poverty in research and inquiry into poverty. The central role of research in legitimating knowledge (Evans and Fisher, 1999b) – in shaping what kinds of knowledge count – means that this is a particularly important activity for people living in poverty. But it should also be seen as part of a broader agenda, about the right of people living in poverty to participate in society more generally, especially in debates and decision making, and to have greater control over their lives.

We are often told that we are living in an information age and a knowledge society: that the most important resources for the future will not be land, capital or work, but human knowledge (Godinot, 2001). But, at the moment, people living in poverty are often excluded from this knowledge-based society. They have little opportunity to make their voice heard or their views known. They are often accused of having nothing to contribute. And the rest of society in turn misses out on their knowledge, based on the lived experience of poverty:

Every human being, every group, is a researcher, in search of their own independence, by achieving an understanding of themselves and of

their situation ... Those who think that human beings who have been reduced to the state of extreme poverty are apathetic, and therefore do not reflect – that they settle into dependency, or into the sole effort of survival – deceive themselves utterly.

(Father Joseph Wresinksi, founder of ATD Fourth World, addressing UNESCO meeting, December 1980)

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has long been admired for the effective ways in which it spreads the messages emerging from its research. But, more recently, it has put more energy into exploring how to achieve real and lasting changes in policies and practice as a result of research. This means it has become more interested in how knowledge relates to change, and how it can help to bring about change. This project can be seen as part of that endeavour, in discussing how to draw more effectively on the knowledge of people with lived experience of poverty themselves.

The project came about because the Foundation has become increasingly interested in recent years in more participatory ways of working, in particular in its research projects and programmes. The Foundation has been actively involved in exploring the potential of ‘user involvement’, especially in health and social care, in which users have more voice in the design, development and evaluation of services. It also took a leading role, especially in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in discussions about ‘emancipatory research’, promoted by the disabled people’s movement (Barnes and Mercer, 1997). Its housing and area-based work has included research and action on tenant participation and community development for many years.

The specific idea of exploring more participatory forms of research on poverty is more recent, however. It is linked to the Foundation investigating more generally how it might work in more participatory ways in its work on poverty and income. A recent research report, which was published with the support of the Foundation and which touched on these issues (Eames with Adebowale, 2002), was produced by the Sustainable Development Research Network. It suggested that, if the challenges ahead for sustainable development were to be met, there would be a role for research activity that engaged people who bore the greatest burden of 'unsustainable' policies 'in both the development of the research agenda and the research itself' (Eames with Adebowale, 2002).

The Foundation also supported the work of the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, which could be described as a form of joint inquiry that included people with direct experience of poverty (see Chapter 6). This report is the next stage in the Foundation's exploration of participatory research on poverty.

The report was produced over a relatively short timescale. Although it examines the links with recent developments in other fields of research – such as the emancipatory research of the disabled people's movement (see Chapter 5) – it is directed primarily at people interested in participatory approaches to research on poverty; although some observations will be transferable to other areas of research, therefore, others may not be. The report was planned principally as an overview of what is going on in participatory practice in research and poverty in the UK, though also placing this in a wider context. It is addressed to researchers, and to social research

funders in particular, to argue for embedding participatory approaches more firmly in mainstream social research on poverty. But the authors also hope that it will be used by people with direct experience of poverty themselves and their organisations, to argue for participatory approaches and to explore them further.

The report was not planned as a participatory research exercise in itself – although the close involvement of Moraene Roberts, as co-author in a consultancy role, ensured consistent input from someone who herself has direct experience of poverty; she is also an activist with ATD Fourth World, an international human rights organisation working with people with long-term experience of poverty. In addition, although the project was not large-scale enough to have a formal project advisory group, a consultation meeting was held on 4 June 2003, at a relatively early stage of the project, to seek the views of a range of people who were involved in various ways in participatory work on poverty, including participatory research and inquiry. Their contributions were a key influence on the content of the report, and in particular on the ideas for 'next steps' (see Chapter 9). This group included some people who had been grassroots members of the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power (see Chapter 6), and others who are family members of ATD Fourth World (see Chapter 6), all of whom have had direct experience of poverty themselves. Thus, although the authors would make no claims to having conducted this research in a fully participatory way, there has been some input from people with direct experience of living in poverty and of fighting for their right to participate.

2 Aims of the report

This chapter explains the aims of this report, and what it does and does not cover.

The *aims* of the report are to:

- provide information about participatory practice in research and inquiry involving people living in poverty in the UK, and what is written about this
- look at the connections with other related work, such as participatory research on poverty in other countries, ‘user involvement’ in design and evaluation of services and ‘emancipatory research’ conducted by the disabled people’s movement
- give examples of participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty
- discuss the potential and the pitfalls involved in work of this kind
- suggest next steps for taking this agenda forward.

Although much participatory work goes on at local rather than national level – and some examples of this local work are mentioned here – the focus in this report is largely on *national-level research on poverty*. This is in part because one of the major challenges facing participatory forms of research is ‘scaling up’ – how to introduce participatory approaches into research exercises on a larger scale than within a local community or with a specific group of people (see Chapter 8). And in part it is because, if the aim is to mainstream participatory approaches in more traditional research on poverty – and if this is going to lead to real changes in the conditions keeping people poor –

it will need to link up with national level processes and wider policy change.

The core topic of the report is *participatory research and inquiry into poverty in the UK*. This means that it does not in general include discussion of:

- participatory research or inquiry focused on other issues (such as service provision, or more wide-ranging community needs assessments)
- other participatory ways of working (used in training, capacity building, etc.)
- evaluations of specific projects or policy interventions
- action to tackle poverty, even if this is carried out in a participatory way.

But it does try to discuss forms of participatory research and inquiry into poverty in the UK in the context of all of these related activities. And it looks at the possibilities of introducing participatory practice across a range of different kinds of poverty research, from traditional research exercises to evaluations and inquiries into poverty issues.

In particular, the report examines participatory research on poverty elsewhere in the world, especially in what is often called the ‘South’ (mostly countries in the southern half of the globe, often called ‘developing’ or even ‘poor’). This is because it contains valuable learning for the UK.

Although the reality of poverty may be very different in Glasgow or Bangladesh, what people in poverty say is very similar – in other words: ‘nobody asks us; they may tell us something, or

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give us something – but they don't ask us'. The importance of research is that someone is asking. Or perhaps people in poverty are demanding to be heard!

(Moraene Roberts, co-author of report, at project meeting, 4 June 2003)

The next chapter goes on to describe briefly the meaning of participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty as used in this report.

3 What is participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty?

People on low income and with first hand experience of poverty have generally had little voice in this discussion [about poverty], except to illustrate it.

(Beresford et al., 1999)

This chapter explains what ‘participatory practice’ in research and inquiry into poverty means in the context of this report; and it sets out the minimum requirements in order for participatory practice in research and inquiry to work.

What does ‘participatory’ mean?

In this report, ‘participatory’ means ways of working which result in people with experience of poverty having more voice in discussions about poverty – from defining issues to working out solutions – both in research and elsewhere:

Although some writers make it sound as though there is a separate ‘participatory’ research method, this is misleading. The idea of participation is more an overall guiding philosophy of how to proceed than a selection of specific methods. So when people talk about participatory research, participatory monitoring and participatory evaluation, on the whole they are not discussing a self-contained set of methodologies, but a situation whereby the methods being used have included an element of strong involvement and consultation on the part of the subjects of the research.

(Pratt and Loizos, 1992)

Participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty is not ...

Participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty is not about using qualitative as opposed to quantitative research methods, or about producing qualitative rather than quantitative data. A participatory approach can be applied to produce quantitative data and/or used as a part of quantitative research exercises (see Chapter 8). And, although it shares many of the same characteristics as conventional qualitative research, and raises many of the same issues, participatory research and inquiry go beyond traditional qualitative methods to give more control to research participants. In addition, participatory research aims not to be ‘extractive’. This means that researchers try not to use people taking part in research only as sources of information, but to establish relationships with them and also give something back, with a view to achieving some positive change. This can be described as ‘interactive’ rather than ‘extractive’, and is seen as part of a more inclusive way of working.

Participatory research on poverty is not about adding the ‘subjective’ feelings of people living in poverty to the researcher’s ‘objective’ knowledge. It is not about adding colourful quotes to an existing report which already has its own agenda – although this can certainly enliven many texts and demonstrate the limits of ‘policy speak’ on its own. Nor is it just about people living in poverty telling their life-stories:

[They] *should not be mere witnesses in the court, asked to describe their lives so that professionals and the jury can decide the solutions to their problems.*

(Regis de Muylder, ATD Fourth World Belgium, speaking at a meeting in Brussels organised by ATD Fourth World and Futuribles, January 2002)

In fact, one of the signs of a life lived in poverty is having to tell your story over and over again – which can often be experienced as demeaning and insulting.

People sometimes use the phrase ‘participatory’ just to mean that those people being researched become more actively involved (Beresford, 2002; Fisher, 2002) – or even that the researcher him/herself participates more actively (for example, in ‘participant observation’, where the researcher takes part in everyday activities in the community being researched at the same time as observing them). Some people therefore criticise ‘participatory research’ because of these limited meanings and contrast it unfavourably with other kinds of research. But these are not the meanings used here.

Participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty is ...

What participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty *is* about is putting into practice the belief that people in poverty have a right to participate in analysing their own situation and how to tackle it. It also means that the perspectives and ideas of people experiencing poverty themselves are seen as key to achieving a more all-round and in-depth understanding of poverty. People in poverty should be seen as *having a right to take part in the debate and a particular expertise in doing so.*

It means that people with direct experience of poverty:

- are recognised as having *authority*: their knowledge is respected and is seen as legitimate
- have greater *control* over the various stages of the research process
- have more *influence* over the way the results of the research are used.

The authors of *Poverty First Hand* (Beresford *et al.*, 1999) – see Chapter 6 – provide a checklist, listing the key components that characterised their own research approach:

- people in poverty playing a part in shaping the research agenda
- people in poverty going beyond reporting their personal experience
- people in poverty offering their own analysis, ideas and proposals
- the use of group discussions, rather than individual interviews¹
- enabling participants to include their own concerns in discussion
- attempting to involve participants in editing the research report
- prioritising the research as a basis for action by people with direct experience of poverty.

The authors of a recent review of ‘residents’ consultancy’ for the UK government (Taylor *et al.*, 2002) – see Chapter 7 – distinguished different levels of involvement, which may all be labelled ‘participatory research’:²

- Local people may be trained to act as interviewers and/or to help with statistical analysis – usually on a one-off basis.
- Local people may be asked for their opinions before the research is formulated, but it is then carried out by others.
- Researchers and local people work together on projects, but the control of the research is managed by researchers.
- Researchers and local people work together as colleagues with different skills: ‘local people are brought into the research as owners of their own knowledge and the role of the professional is one of facilitator’ (Taylor *et al.*, 2002).

They note that participatory research is in theory located at the final level of participation listed here – but that, until recently, this has rarely been achieved in the UK (Taylor *et al.*, 2002). So, in practice, there is a continuum of ‘participation’ and different numbers of people may be involved in one or more stages of the research process, and to a greater or lesser degree. (This is explored further in Chapter 8.)

Building blocks and basics for participatory practice in research and inquiry

People living in poverty emphasise certain key elements as building blocks and basics for participatory practice in research and inquiry to work. One crucial factor is *support for participants*. This means providing the necessary financial support, including expenses – which often need to be paid in advance – and often

also some form of payment for people’s time. It may mean paying for someone to accompany them, especially if they are travelling to participate in something for the first time. While additional expenses and arrangements for disabled people may now usually be recognised as legitimate, it is much rarer for adequate funding to be granted for the kind of needs described here. When funding is inadequate, this often has an impact on how participatory the research can be.

But ‘support for participants’ may also mean other kinds of support, for example to:

- help individuals unused to participating in this way to feel confident enough to do so, and to do so at their own pace
- enable people in poverty to meet together to discuss the issues at stake, rather than just being involved as isolated individuals
- help deal with other aspects of participants’ lives that make it difficult for them to participate actively in the research. In particular, it is important to understand the fragility and insecurity of some people’s lives, and their anger about what is happening to them, and in particular to their children. In some cases, therefore, researchers may need to work through organisations which in turn can support the participants because they already work with them. In a longer-term project, when what is happening in some people’s lives means that their participation cannot be sustained, their views can still be accurately conveyed if they have such support.

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People living in poverty also often highlight the importance of *opportunities for personal exchange* with others through the research or inquiry process. Participants in both the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power and the Pooling Knowledge on Poverty experiments stressed this aspect (see Chapter 6). So, although participatory forms of research may be seen as different from 'humanistic' or 'co-operative' inquiry, in which genuine

exchange on the personal level is emphasised as the central element of the process (Reason, 1994), people with experience of poverty, and other participants, often say they value this form of exchange.

Having looked at the meaning of participatory practice in research on poverty, and the basics needed in order for it to work, the next chapter examines the reasons for doing research on poverty in a participatory way.

4 Why use participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty?

The arguments that are put forward in favour of using participatory approaches in research and inquiry into poverty are set out in this chapter. They range from those that emphasise the value of participatory approaches in improving the quality of research, and its potential to affect policy, to those that lay greater emphasis on the rights of people living in poverty to engage in research as part of their struggle against poverty; they are listed here in that order. Arguments for participatory practice in monitoring and evaluation are also examined. Different people will see each of the arguments as having different weights. The order used here does not necessarily imply an order of priority.

These arguments should not be seen as undermining the value of other forms of research into poverty, but as promoting the case for an increased emphasis on participatory approaches. As many practitioners themselves agree, 'not all methods or groups are equally amenable to participation' (Pratt and Loizos, 1992); participatory research and inquiry cannot fulfil every need, and should not be expected to do so. In practice, in addition, the research agenda may often be set initially by someone other than people living in poverty themselves. However, even when this is the case, there is scope in most research and inquiry into poverty for more of a participatory element. This chapter gives the reasons why that would 'add value'. They include the impact of participatory processes on the nature and quality of the research itself; their immediate results in terms of gains for those people taking part and longer-term results in establishing relationships for the future; and their broader rationale in terms of

furthering the rights and citizenship of people living in poverty.

Improving research

Participatory approaches increase the effectiveness of research

It can be argued that people will be more likely to take part willingly in research if they have some control over how it is done. Research subjects are more willing to co-operate, 'compliance' increases and dropout rates fall (Evans and Fisher, 1999b). Marginalised groups, who are often inaccessible to those using conventional research methods, can be contacted and involved by people they trust using more participatory methods. A participatory approach also means refining research issues and posing questions in a more effective manner, because their impact on the research subjects can be gauged in a more informed way.

In relation to poverty specifically, the founder of ATD Fourth World, an organisation working with people living in poverty (see Chapter 6), questioned the capacity of researchers to understand the realities of extreme poverty on their own – especially the constant humiliation suffered by those living in long-term poverty. They need people in poverty to help them:

The best researchers can hardly imagine these things; as a result they have difficulty in formulating the hypotheses and asking the relevant questions.

(Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World, addressing UNESCO meeting, December 1980)

Participatory approaches produce a different kind of message – enriching knowledge about poverty

Sensitive or surprising information can be discovered that is difficult to obtain in more conventional ways (Chambers, 2002a). A fuller and more nuanced analysis of poverty can be achieved when these findings are used alongside other evidence. A participatory analysis will often give a picture not just of what the situation is, but also of why and how it came to be that way (although good quality qualitative research can produce similar insights). In particular, participatory approaches in research may result in findings that stress interconnections between different aspects of poverty; and how power relationships may structure access to resources. What comes out may often be more challenging for policy makers, because they then have to think about how to change power relations at the community, household or intra-household level. These may be seen as more difficult to change via public policies. But they may provide more effective ways to tackle the realities of poverty as described by people living in poverty themselves (McGee with Norton, 2000).

Participatory approaches result in certain aspects of poverty being highlighted

People with direct experience of poverty tend to highlight certain aspects that they see as key, such as lack of dignity and respect, dependence on others and having no voice or choice:

The worst thing about living in poverty is the way it gives others permission to treat you – as if you don't matter, as if your opinions don't count, as if you have nothing to contribute.

(Participant from Church Action on Poverty Scotland, speaking to All Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty, 27 February 2002)

This can influence the order of priorities that policy makers and others have in the direction which people living in poverty themselves would prioritise.

Participation means improved policy effectiveness and 'ownership'

The input of knowledge and thinking from people affected by poverty can help to ensure that any proposals for changes in policy or practice arising from the research are relevant to their situation. Their input can also result in more accessible findings, which are therefore appreciated by a different, and wider, body of people. Discussion about possible policy changes can also be increased – *if*, that is, the findings are linked in closely enough to policy processes. Whether such research provides information only, or has a more strategic impact on policy making, depends on the context (Norton with others, 2001). If people have participated in the research or inquiry process, especially if they have been involved in determining the subject of inquiry, they are more likely to feel they 'own' it, and therefore are also more likely to help ensure that its findings are both usable and used.

Gains for those taking part

Participation results in gains by those individuals or groups taking part

Participation results in gains by those individuals or groups taking part in terms of confidence, experience and learning. Some would add to this 'empowerment', on an individual or community level. When people living in poverty are involved from the beginning, they will identify these needs for themselves. A sense of empowerment can come from 'being recognised and respected as equal citizens and human beings with a contribution to make' (Karl, 1995); and involvement in research can be one way to experience this (Evans and Fisher, 1999b):

... an inclusive research process can contribute to this task of strengthening the cultural and political capital of those in poverty.

(Lister and Beresford, 2000, p. 292)

What is not recognised so often is that those involved who are *not* living in poverty can also benefit significantly from this exchange (see, for example, Del Tufo and Gaster, 2002). Some may initially feel threatened by the experience in anticipation. But they often see it in retrospect as having provided an opportunity not only to acquire new knowledge, but also to re-evaluate the knowledge they learned by more traditional methods. The personal experience of meeting and engaging with people living in poverty is also crucial in changing the perspectives and behaviour of policy makers (McGee, 2002). This can be experienced as a real learning process.

Participation can be the beginning of a process

Sometimes, initiating participatory forms of research, particularly in a local community where there has not been much organised activity before, can be a catalyst to further change; or it can be a way to include groups which have been excluded before, by bringing them into a collective process of identifying problems and solutions. In this way, it can help to make a community more cohesive.

Participatory practices in research, by empowering participants, can also lead to further follow-up action, either by individuals or by a wider group or community. In such cases, the 'outcomes' of the research *process* can be more significant than the narrower product of the research itself. The 'outcomes' are not just the research findings, but can include other spin-offs, in terms of their effects on the lives of individuals and groups.

Participatory approaches help to establish trust between the various participants in the research process

This is sometimes seen as a by-product, although some would see it as a main goal. In fact, without establishing trust between those taking part, the research process is unlikely to work. For people living in poverty, this includes overcoming the fundamental barrier that they often expect that they will not be believed. This is one reason why adequate time is needed for more participatory forms of research.

Participation can lead to the formation of new relationships and networks

Even if it does not always provide entirely new information, participatory forms of research or inquiry into poverty can result in the forging of new relationships. For example, several people who were involved in the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power (Chapter 6) are now working together on poverty issues, even though most had not met before.

Right to a voice

Participatory forms of research embody the principle that people living in poverty have a right to a voice (Lister and Beresford, 2000)

This could be argued in relation to many different groups who are the 'objects' of research. But it is particularly important for groups who tend to have least power in the research relationship (and in other relationships too), and whose contributions are often dismissed or despised; non-governmental organisations such as Oxfam often describe this as 'voice poverty'. The focus on 'voice' is part of an approach that emphasises issues of status and power, not just material goods, in the definition of poverty (Lister, 2002). Participatory approaches can give people in poverty more power in defining their experiences. This is part of a more general argument about the rights of people in poverty – including their right to influence public images and debate about poverty (Lister, 2002) and the policies, practices and decisions affecting their lives (Norton with others, 2001).

Participation in research can increase awareness of broader rights

The group working on participation issues at the Institute of Development Studies (University of Sussex) links participatory poverty research to the rights of people in poverty in general, not just the right to participation:

... participatory research can enhance people's awareness of their rights and strengthen the poor's claims.

(Institute of Development Studies, 2001b)

In fact, those organisations most committed to promoting a participatory approach to working with people in poverty are also those that tend to define poverty as the denial of rights – rather than, for example, seeing it as 'underdevelopment'.¹ This mirrors the perspective of many people living in poverty themselves.

Participation respects the rights and citizenship of people living in poverty

The authors of *Poverty First Hand* (Beresford *et al.*, 1999) argue that including people with experience of poverty in poverty debates and policy development respects their rights and citizenship, and is part of an inclusive approach. It accords them respect and status as full social partners (Lister, 2002). It can also be seen more broadly as part of a 'more open and democratic process of knowledge production' (Brock, 2002):

You speak, and you will be heard. I speak – but will I be heard?

(Grassroots member of Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, quoted in Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, 2000; see Chapter 6 of this report)

And why use participatory practice in monitoring and evaluation?

As long as the poor are not listened to ... measures taken to alleviate their situation will be erratic, superficial and opportunistic.

(Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World, writing in 1965)

The focus of this report is participatory practice in *research* and inquiry into poverty, rather than *evaluations* of more specific policies or interventions. So few examples of evaluations will be described. But many of the participatory approaches used in monitoring and evaluation are very similar to those used in research and inquiry into poverty. In fact, regular participatory poverty research exercises are a way to monitor people's experience, which is in turn a basis for better evaluation. Policies cannot be said to have 'worked' if the perceptions of those people directly involved are very different from those of the 'experts' or policy makers. So – providing lessons from evaluation are fed back and policies adjusted accordingly – participatory forms of monitoring and evaluation can be key elements of *evidence-based policy making*.

A difficulty with using participatory approaches in evaluations can be that, because disadvantaged service users often have low expectations of a service, they may not propose changes they think are unlikely to be adopted (Platzer, forthcoming, 2004).² The extent to which participatory practices in evaluation are a real possibility may depend on how far the projects being evaluated have themselves embraced participatory approaches from the start.

A contrast is often drawn between 'summative' evaluations – usually carried out at the end of a project, often by a detached outside consultant – with a 'formative' approach, which is more like a review process and requires the involvement of stakeholders such as staff and users (Smith, 2002). 'Formative' evaluations may have more potential to be participatory. A fully participatory approach to evaluation would involve the people who are meant to be benefiting from the policy or project in *deciding on the criteria by which to judge it*.

An example of community monitoring in the United States is the Learning Initiative, which involved residents in a 'learning team' developing their own criteria to assess the outcomes of the local 'empowerment zone/enterprise community' which *they* considered important. This process was said to have altered the power balance in the community, as well as the analysis (Morrissey, 2000, cited in McGee with Norton, 2000).

In a guide to participatory evaluations, Roche (1999) notes that the criteria for judging outcomes may in fact change during the course of the intervention and that a participatory approach is more likely to pick this up. Such an approach is also more likely to identify unintended consequences and/or new factors arising since the beginning of the policy or project. Richardson says that this may occur partly because of a circular process that is going on – the 'outcomes' of one stage become the 'inputs' to the next stage (for example, when community groups organise small activities which are ends in themselves, but which could lead to increased confidence to become more involved in neighbourhood decisions). And in community activity, for example, 'one thing

leads to another' and *objectives change in response to changing circumstances* (Richardson, 2003).

This is not always taken into account in conventional evaluations, which expect outcomes to be specified precisely at the start. But it could be seen as evidence of a welcome ability to adapt. Putting more emphasis on evaluating the *how* as well as the *what* – the process of getting there, as well as the outcomes – is a way to value these developments positively. If the nature of any change in

objectives is monitored, this can also give a good idea of what is going on under the surface.³ Listening to those involved explaining how *they* see change happening also leads to a better understanding of complicated processes of change (Richardson, 2003).

This body of thinking about participatory practice in research, monitoring and evaluation on poverty has been influenced by many other trends and debates, which are described in the next chapter.

5 Influences shaping debates about participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty

Many influences have shaped the debates about participatory approaches to research on poverty, in the UK and elsewhere. They are described in outline in this chapter. However, although they are examined one by one below, they have to some extent developed together, and there has been much exchange between them. Many researchers and practitioners would claim to support, and to have been influenced by, several of these strands of thinking. Each has different strengths, and each has brought something different to the debates and practice of participatory approaches to research and inquiry into poverty.

The adult education movement

The adult education movement believes in the liberating power of education for all. Adult education focuses on learning from experience and the different sorts of knowledge resulting from different perspectives, and relates these to principles of democracy and equality. This has often been a 'bottom-up' movement, led by people who themselves have been through adult education; and it has been important in the development of various political and social movements, including trades unions. Paulo Freire (1974) has been a key influence in both 'North' and 'South', emphasising the importance of power and oppression, and introducing a political perspective on literacy training, which he saw as education for liberation (Flower *et al.*, 2000). One relevant method is Reflect (see Chapter 7), in which participants use visual materials to analyse their local environment.

Feminists and other researchers

Feminists and other researchers questioned whether the 'objectivity' of the researcher was an ideal to aspire to. Instead, they said that it might be positively helpful, rather than harmful, to identify with the people you are interviewing. This allows the interviewer to exchange information with their research subjects on a more equal footing, rather than the information (and the power) being all one way (Oakley, 1981). This suggestion results from a challenge to the idea that knowledge is objective:

... researchers or observers are necessarily part of what they observe, and ... their own attitudes, beliefs and behaviour will determine, at least in part, the information gathered.

(Roche, 1999)

Research is therefore seen as more of a two-way process – an interchange. It is seen as a process of producing, not discovering, something:

An active research relationship then involves the exchange of ideas and understanding, and is a shared enterprise.

(Birch and Miller, 2003)

Research ethics

A lively debate about research ethics in recent years has resulted in various sets of ethical guidelines, including those published by the Social Research Association (2002) – used by researchers funded by the Foundation. Being

clear with participants about what research can and cannot do is seen as crucial. A key minimal principle of research ethics is to obtain 'informed consent' from participants: they must know what the research is about and what they are committing themselves to. Usually, this is seen as something that happens at the beginning of a project; but it is increasingly argued that it should be seen as relevant to all stages. In particular, negotiating agreement or 'informed consent' about who owns the information produced, and who decides what is done with it, is key. Seeing research 'subjects' as co-producers of knowledge is a more far-reaching and demanding ethical position.

Action research

Action research, which was often used in community development in the 1970s in the UK, involved researchers working in the communities in which projects were sited and helping them to identify issues and solutions:

However difficult it might be, we believed that it was possible to create a dynamic relationship between research and action, where research could be systematic and authoritative and yet of immediate practical relevance.

(Taylor, 1985)

Action research could include researching the issues initially, right through to evaluating the programmes to tackle them; so the researchers often became involved with the action teams and felt themselves accountable to local people (Smith, 1978). 'Action research' can also involve working with practitioners such as teachers, or with organisations, with the emphasis on agenda setting and solving practical or

organisational problems together (Newman, 2000). One version, often involving teams working as co-researchers on a problem, is known as 'co-operative inquiry' (Reason and Heron, 1999). Labels can also be combined, as in 'participatory action research' (Wadsworth, 1998).

Community development

Community development has been described as moving from 'top-down and bureaucratic' approaches in the 1950s to 1970s to 'an emphasis on people's participation, empowerment and participatory learning approaches', which 'continues to dominate community development practice' (Brocklesby and Fisher, 2003). 'Community research' is also a label for a variety of approaches for researchers working with communities (usually understood in this context as people living in defined areas, rather than communities of interest). The Institute for Community Research in the United States, for example, lists 'participatory action research' as one of the various methods it uses (Institute of Community Research, 2003). But, often, community development means 'working at the grass-roots level, not ... focusing on the policy level' (Brocklesby and Fisher, 2003); and findings at local level may not be seen in the perspective of a framework for bringing about wider change.

Emancipatory research

In developing emancipatory research to 'break the mould of disability research' (Barnes and Mercer, 1997), the disabled people's movement argued that, for research to be liberating, it had to be part of their struggle:

... the issue is the role of research in the process of emancipation. Inevitably this means that research can only be judged emancipatory after the event.

(Oliver, 1997)

Discussion of research *methods* is therefore not so central in emancipatory research as it often is in participatory research on poverty. More important is the attempt to change the 'social relations of research production', so that the researcher puts 'their knowledge and skills at the disposal of their research subjects' (Oliver, 1992). Disabled people commission the research and are in control of how the findings are used. It is about creating a different kind of research 'game', rather than allowing previously excluded groups to be included in the existing 'game' (Oliver, 1997).

This approach was developed initially by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation, and more recently by the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People and the Disability Research Unit at Leeds University:

We as a Union are not interested in descriptions of how awful it is to be disabled. What we are interested in is the ways of changing our conditions of life.

(Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation, 1976)

Barnes and Mercer (1997) also criticise the dominance of:

... interpretative studies of the experience of 'illness', which focus on individual coping mechanisms, including the management of 'stigma'.

(Barnes and Mercer, 1997)

These last two quotations may remind us of much research on poverty.¹ However, there is at the moment no self-conscious national political movement of – rather than for – people in poverty, to parallel the disabled people's movement. This means that researchers may not in practice be able to put themselves 'at the disposal of' such a movement. In addition, poverty divides and isolates people, often causing shame and stigma because of the judgements of others, making it more difficult for people living in poverty compared with those in other groups to come together to develop an informed and influential voice. And there may not be one clear voice from people in poverty, who are often keenly aware themselves of there being many 'poverties'.

'User involvement'

'User involvement' has developed since the early 1990s, especially in health and social care. It means users of services getting actively involved in examining problems and proposing solutions in the area of service provision. There are now several user involvement networks. The government is also taking this on board, in the National Health Service and elsewhere (Consumers in NHS Research Support Unit, 2000). A recent article argues that user involvement improves the quality of research – especially in defining the problem, ensuring that appropriate information is sought and is accessible, defining outcome measures and recognising what is relevant (Fisher, 2002).

Some people have argued that 'user involvement' can mean seeing users as individual consumers, rather than citizens – although users themselves may nonetheless be

able to exploit this to exert some influence (Beresford, 2002).

A new book looks at some of the issues involved in working with service users as researchers, especially in a context in which many stakeholders do not believe in users' abilities in this area (Ramon, 2003). In a recent report, the Shaping Our Lives project and other user groups saw current practices around 'user involvement' as patchy and tokenistic (Turner *et al.*, 2003). Another report from the same project emphasises the need for users to meet together to strengthen their own voice in achieving the outcomes they value (Shaping Our Lives National User Network with others, 2003). This could be seen as moving towards more emphasis on the rights of users to have a say and to control, rather than just improving service effectiveness. The guide produced by the Consumers in NHS Research Support Unit (2000) distinguishes between consumer 'consultation', 'collaboration' and 'control' in research, and says that different types of involvement will be appropriate for different kinds of projects.

'User-led' or 'user-controlled' research

In 'user-led' or 'user-controlled' research, as well as greater involvement, users have more control over the different stages of the research (see, for example, Evans and Fisher, 1999a), and there is 'accountability of research to service users and their organisations' (Beresford, 1996). Evans and Fisher argue that 'user-controlled research' is a means of increasing the power of service users over the way their experiences are defined (Evans and Fisher, 1999b). The Citizens' Commission on the Future of the Welfare State

was a research inquiry controlled by service users (Beresford and Turner, 1997). Another study (Evans and Carmichael with others, 2002) gives an example of a user-controlled research project commissioned by a user network, listing the principles followed and describing what happened.

Recent developments in research on poverty

More specifically, in relation to research on poverty, the following influences have developed recently:

The ethics of researching poverty

There has been some more specific discussion of the ethics of researching poverty (see, for example, Corden, 1996). This has often revolved around whether to use the term 'poverty', or how to use it without stigmatising either poor individuals or poor areas. But it has also involved recognising that:

... principles [of research ethics] such as confidentiality and informed consent ... are ultimately negotiated, not in a vacuum, but within specific relations of power.

(Dean, 1996)

And there has been 'a growing concern that the research process can actually contribute to the disempowerment of ["the poor"]' (Dean, 1996). And proponents of participatory principles would go further than this – for example, by recognising the commitment of valuable time by people in poverty involved in a research project, and examining the possibility of giving something more tangible back to them.

The 'agency' of people in poverty

There has been growing recognition of the 'agency' of people in poverty. Rather than seeing people in poverty as passive victims, or concentrating only on what they lack – often known as a 'deficit model' – they are seen as actively coping with their situation and trying to change it, and as capable of making a valuable contribution to society (Lister, forthcoming, 2004). Participation can increase people's sense of their own 'agency' (Lister, 2002).

Development work and debates about the 'South'

The thinking around participatory research on poverty has probably been developed most comprehensively by those involved in development work and debates about the 'South' (meaning countries mostly in the southern half of the globe, often described as 'developing', or even 'poor'). It is based on a view that progress in tackling poverty will be achieved in a sustainable way only if people in poverty themselves have more say:

This approach moved away from the concept of 'outsiders' as researchers learning about another culture, and instead emphasised their role as facilitators of a community-led process of listening and interactive learning.

(David and Craig, 1997)

These participatory methods of inquiry started to be widely used in the 'South' in the 1970s, when they were known as 'rapid rural appraisal', and later 'participatory rural appraisal', as they were often applied to rural communities. Their aims included:

... to combine something of the representativeness of the large-scale survey with the openendedness of anthropological participant observation.

(Albaladejo and Howes, 1997)

Similar methods are today more commonly called 'participatory learning and action', using techniques known as 'participatory appraisal', or 'PA'. The move to 'participatory learning *and action*' was meant to emphasise that those being researched should also be involved in any resulting action, and that research and inquiry were integrally linked to the idea of taking action.

A key principle of these methods is the need to value people's own knowledge, and to try to engage on a level playing field. This allows room for using different kinds of information and analysis rather than traditional written material. These tools can therefore be used with all age groups and people who are not confident of their literacy. So visual methods, such as making maps and walking round an area to trigger discussion, often play a central part. Other tools commonly used are listed in various guides (Pratt and Loizos, 1992; Pretty *et al.*, 1995; Norton with others, 2001).

For some, using these methods was about improving development projects – although in practice their effects often spilled out 'beyond the boundaries set by the projects' (Cornwall, 2000). Others saw them as applicable at a much larger scale. More recently, these approaches have developed beyond a project-oriented focus into broader participatory research on poverty, which is aimed at building up networks and influencing policy, and is often used at national level. It is often when used in combination with

other participatory methods that these tools are said to be most effective (Cornwall, 2000).

'Participatory poverty assessments' have helped governments in the 'South' to discover more about the nature of poverty in their countries and to devise more nuanced policies to combat it. They are now also being built into the national 'poverty reduction strategy papers' needed to qualify for debt relief from international financial institutions (Brock *et al.*, 2001).

Conclusion

There are differences between, for example, emancipatory research and participatory approaches to research on poverty (see earlier in

this chapter). And 'user' focused research is often about one part of someone's life (their use of services), rather than the whole of it. (Some people would also argue that we may all be service 'users', but with differing degrees of power.) But, while some practitioners expend a great deal of energy in trying to distinguish each approach from all the others, one writer reminds us that 'activists are not nearly as concerned with the labels as academics' (Stoecker, 1998). The four examples of participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty described in the next chapter demonstrate that it is often difficult to categorise such exercises, especially when they are essentially experimental in nature.

6 Some examples of using participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty

The examples chosen here are largely national, rather than local, in character; the World Bank project is international. Two are drawn from overseas experience and two from the UK. The first two are both examples of participatory approaches to research into poverty as seen by people who experience it. The other two are processes of joint inquiry into poverty issues by a mix of people from different backgrounds, including those with direct experience of poverty. The aim of describing these four case studies is to give practical examples of what went wrong, as well as what worked, in experiments that all strove in different ways and to varying degrees to be participatory in their

approach, while also struggling with different kinds of constraints and difficulties.

The first two case studies are very different from each other, but are both recognisable as examples of 'research' understood in the usual way. The first was a national research project using participatory approaches to explore the nature and meaning of poverty with people in groups identifying themselves as involved in poverty issues. The second was a much larger exercise conducted by the World Bank, bringing together both new and existing studies using participatory methods to draw out key messages about poverty as seen by those experiencing it.

Poverty First Hand

The 'Poverty First Hand' project (Beresford *et al.*, 1999) is a rare example in the UK of trying to use participatory research processes to explore poverty at a national level.¹ The authors describe it as 'in many ways ... a pilot project'. It grew out of a meeting in York, held in 1990, to discuss the participation of people living in poverty in action to tackle poverty (Lister and Beresford, 1991). The issues identified at that meeting – the causes of poverty, definitions of poverty, the effects of poverty, images of people in poverty and campaigning involving people with experience of poverty – were taken as the starting point for this project. A series of 20 discussions took place in 1994 and 1995 with groups across the country who were sought out on the basis of their likely current or past personal experience of poverty 'on conventional definitions'. The researchers described the project as taking 'an inclusive approach' (Lister and Beresford, 2000).

Other elements seen by the researchers as key to their participatory approach were:

- holding group discussions, which meant people had opportunities to exchange views and discuss topics in a more sustained way (see Chapter 3)
- organising the questions into semi-structured discussions, so that groups tackled the same issues, but people could make their own categories and connections

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- sensitive facilitation of the discussions by the project worker, so that all views could be expressed, and no one individual dominated or was left out
- returning the transcriptions of the taped discussions to participants, so that they could comment, and remove anything they did not want to be included
- allowing the discussions/ comments to be reported word for word in the text of the report, with only minimal comment from the researchers
- showing the draft report to participants, for them to remove or change things they had said, and for them to decide whether they wanted to be named or not.

This meant, according to the authors, that:

... the focus here has gone beyond the effects of poverty, so that people in poverty can become actors able to engage in discussions about the meaning and politics of poverty and not simply victims able to talk only about the personal impact of poverty.

(Beresford *et al.*, 1999, authors' original emphasis)

Although, in one exercise, the researchers used newspaper articles,² no visual methods such as those often used in the 'South' are described. But – apart from the later stages – this did not mean that a high level of literacy was assumed, as the main research method was facilitated group discussions; and the newspaper articles were read out.

Lister, who was involved in this research, notes the negative reactions to the 'p word' (poverty) from many of those with direct experience of poverty. She points out that we also use 'poor' to mean 'inferior' (about the quality of goods). To call someone 'poor' is to attach the label to the person, rather than recognising that poverty is a circumstance that someone falls into, not a personal quality (Lister, forthcoming, 2004). And, indeed, many participants did not want to identify with the 'p word', though opinion was divided about whether it was stigmatising (Beresford *et al.*, 1999). The authors are also clear that there is no 'typical' poor person, or one view or voice about poverty. People with experience of poverty may have the same interest in being heard, but different concerns; and there were disagreements within the groups.

The researchers say that it was not possible to conduct their project exactly as they had intended, putting participatory principles fully into practice at every stage:

As originally conceived the project would have involved a number of stages which would have enabled the involvement of poor people in the drawing up of the original research agenda, bringing them together to work out how they wanted to undertake the research, their areas of interest and perhaps carrying out research themselves, but we could not get funding to do this.

(Beresford *et al.*, 1999)

So they put forward proposals to ensure that other similar projects could be carried out. To their knowledge, this has not happened to date.

World Bank 'Voices of the Poor'

The Voices of the Poor study is different from all other large-scale poverty studies. Using participatory and qualitative research methods, the study presents directly, through poor people's own voices, the realities of their lives.
(Short and Wolfensohn, 2002)

The 'Voices of the Poor' exercise (originally called 'Consultations with the Poor') was undertaken by the World Bank to provide information about the perspectives of people living in poverty for the authors of the World Development Report 2000/2001, which focused on poverty. Three books were produced (Narayan *et al.*, 2000a, 2000b; Narayan and Petesch, 2002). The work consisted of reviewing existing national poverty assessments and more local level work on poverty and 'ill-being', as well as conducting new studies.

Many of these assessments, and the new studies, were described as 'participatory' – as presenting the 'realities' of the lives of people in poverty in their 'own voices'. But the introduction to the third volume does not in fact claim that the methodology was participatory through and through. Indeed, it admits that the new studies were driven by a mix of different factors: the use of participatory research practices, certainly, but also tight timetables and – crucially – the research traditions in the World Bank. These are described as 'quantitative'. This led to a demand that, though participatory methods would be used, the research should be sufficiently large-scale to be taken seriously by those used to quantitative methods and findings (Chambers, 2002b).

But the initiating brief given to researchers in 1998 certainly sounds participatory:

The poor are the true poverty experts. Hence, a policy document on poverty strategies for the 21st century must be based on the experiences, priorities, reflections and recommendations of poor children, women and men.
(Quoted in Narayan and Petesch, 2002)

Feedback of the research results to the communities taking part was a requirement in all research contracts. A few communities also received further help after the study finished. The whole project was described as the 'largest-scale attempt ever at poverty research using participatory methods' (McGee and Brock, 2001). (This description, however, carefully does not claim that the process was participatory throughout.)

For the new studies, the researchers selected a mix of countries, to reflect the most prevalent poverty groups and a diversity of experiences – though the editors point out that those who have escaped poverty, or the most marginalised groups, are unlikely to be represented. An 'inductive' approach was used to undertake systematic analysis of the studies, which were aggregated and synthesised and cross-checked. So the people whose 'voices' were included in the report had no further input beyond that, in terms of analysis or use of the information. And

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they had no influence over the key themes (McGee and Brock, 2001). The process was therefore not participatory in all its stages.

The themes emerging from the new research that the editors pick out include:

- the importance of assets (different forms of 'capital', including social networks and skills, etc. as well as financial assets) and capabilities (the ability to choose to be and do things)
- the often adverse impacts of economy-wide shocks and policy changes
- the culture of inequality and exclusion in institutions that mediated between people in poverty and those in power
- the widespread nature of gender inequality and vulnerability.

Existing research showed that men saw poverty mainly in material terms, whereas women mentioned non-material aspects as well; and that access to income can depend on power relationships with other people, in the home or outside it (Brock, 1999).

The third volume, written after publication of the 2000/01 World Development Report, says the World Bank did use the results of these studies. And it concludes:

... poverty can be reduced only if we build strategies around what we have learned from poor people, from their realities as they experience them.

But the editors also argue:

More generally, the study has helped qualitative and participatory methods³ to become more widely recognised as a credible research tool for understanding poverty and for informing the design, undertaking and evaluation of actions to reduce poverty.

(Narayan and Petesch, 2002)

This World Bank exercise is used as an example here partly because participatory methods used in the 'South' are extensively drawn on in this report. Indeed, some authors see them as a 'magic bullet', at least as described by some practitioners (Cornwall, 2000; Smith, 2002). So it is important to know that development models using participatory methods such as those described here are *not* perfect blueprints to be copied slavishly (see also Adan *et al.*, 2002). Just like examples of participatory forms of research on poverty in the UK, they can demonstrate a similar mix of things that went wrong and things that worked. They suffer from many of the tensions familiar to researchers and participants in the UK, such as tight timetables and conflicting demands. On the one hand, they may use participatory research methods or tools – but only to gather information, without building participatory principles into the research process throughout, or involving people in poverty in policy debates.⁴ And, on the other hand, they can also employ these participatory methods without exploiting their potential as a focus for self-critical reflection by the more powerful actors involved in such research processes.

The second two case studies are rather different from traditional research exercises. Instead, they can be seen as processes of joint inquiry, undertaken by people with direct experience of poverty and others, into key issues of concern to those living in poverty. The first examined barriers facing people in poverty that prevent them taking part in decision-

making processes; the second explored common understandings of poverty itself. The co-authors of this report were involved more closely with these experiments than with the other two case studies described above, and the account of the second one has been written by Moraene Roberts (see 'Pooling Knowledge on Poverty' below).

Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power⁵

The key is what locks people out of participation ...

Well, the key should be handed over!

(Exchange between two Commissioners at a meeting of the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, 2000)

The Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power was set up following 'Voices for Change', a two-year UK-wide consultation with people experiencing poverty to investigate the barriers preventing them taking part in decision-making processes. The Voices for Change consultation involved the use of participatory methods developed in the 'South', and involved capacity building as well as evidence gathering. It was organised by the UK Coalition Against Poverty (UKCAP), a UK-wide alliance of organisations working against poverty and committed to promoting participation:

People with little or no power are made to believe that there is no point in raising their voices, as it will make no difference. That they will not be listened to by those who have power and control. This habit becomes so strong that some people almost forget that they have opinions of their own, and so they just endure the hardships they suffer.

(Cathy McCormack, People's Parliament, Voices for Change Scotland, 1999, cited in Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, 2000)

Originally, only the Voices for Change initiative was funded. But then the Joseph Rowntree Foundation supported UKCAP with funding to set up the Commission. This was seen as no ordinary Commission: it was made up of half and half 'grassroots' people and those from 'public life'; and it was not 'someone's' Commission – in fact, there was no formal Commission chairperson.⁶ It examined evidence from Voices for Change and elsewhere in a series of meetings, visited local communities and met policy makers. And it produced a report which examined the barriers to people living in poverty taking part in decision-making processes. A key finding was that, for participation to work, the behaviour and attitudes of policy makers

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and officials towards people in poverty must change. Despite its origins in Voices for Change, however, the Commission found it difficult to maintain links with the grassroots groups originally involved, especially after the Voices for Change staff left when funding ran out. Commissioners were not well linked in with the area groups.

The Commission's report, *Listen Hear: The Right to be Heard* (Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, 2000), was also different, however. There were tensions around what audience it was aimed at – policy makers, or grassroots groups, or both – and therefore what style and language it should adopt. There was a sometimes tortuous process of drafting and redrafting. The report emerged from intense, and often challenging, exchanges between the 'grassroots' and 'public life' Commissioners, and reflects those encounters in its vivid language and its grounding in real-life experience. A grassroots Commissioner recently explained:

... tensions and conflict are normal and an essential part of the process and the only way for change to occur ... compromise may be necessary in order to achieve something with which everyone can feel a degree of pride/ satisfaction.

(Letter from Moira Stanley, grassroots Commissioner, 28 June 2003)

Although the Commission's report was about participation in decision-making processes and policy debates, its main messages were also relevant to research:

'Participation' is not enough by itself. It can just involve the same people all the time. And it can reinforce the status quo. It can operate as an echo, reflecting back the voices of those people organising the participation, even if they have learned new techniques. If it is not to work like this – if it is to be genuine – participation must first of all be inclusive. And it must involve accountability – it must make a real difference.

(Summary of *Listen Hear: The Right to be Heard*, Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, 2000)

But the Commission itself can also be seen as a collaborative research exercise, or inquiry. The Commissioners were engaging in a joint investigation. And they were bringing different kinds of knowledge together, from their very different backgrounds. They were sharing, reflecting on and analysing their experiences and forms of knowledge.

The Foundation provided funding for the experience to be evaluated (Del Tufo and Gaster, 2002). The Commission process was an experimental one and precedents did not really exist. Support staff and participants alike were feeling their way, and mistakes were made.

The summary of the evaluation findings describes the mix of Commissioners as 'people sharing the same commitment, but with different expertise and knowledge'. The differences between Commissioners were not only along the 'public life' / 'grassroots' axis. The Commission process was both formal and informal, 'an engagement at both personal and professional levels'.

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Some examples of using participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty

Lessons for similar processes included ensuring open and accountable recruitment of participants, and clarity about what they were signing up to. Participatory processes were not agreed with Commissioners in advance and were unfamiliar to many – though some were used, especially by an experienced facilitator from Oxfam who was part of the staff team. Some Commissioners felt ‘silenced’. One major lesson was that participatory processes need to be negotiated and clarified from the start, so that all participants feel involved on equal terms.

Lessons emerged about involving people with experience of poverty such as the grassroots Commissioners – including the need for efficient and practical support. The evaluation also found that ‘development and social time for discussion, reflection and mutual knowledge would have been helpful, particularly at the start’. A grassroots Commissioner makes this point:

Participation – full participation – can only take place in an environment which is safe for everyone. This means time, space and resources are needed in order to break down barriers and prejudices before the work can be done.

(Letter from Moira Stanley, grassroots Commissioner, 28 June 2003, author’s original emphasis)

The evaluation concluded that ‘most participants felt that the experience of the Commission had been difficult but also creative, exciting, energising, producing a good and “different” result and much personal learning for all’:

This was no ordinary set of meetings but a series of dynamic, unpredictable and often exhausting encounters, with a constant tension between seeking good processes and achieving intended outcomes.

And in particular:

... this Commission was about dealing with exchanges between Commissioners and learning from that. Personal experience and academic theory had the same status ... It became clear to the ‘public life’ Commissioners that ... if they were really going to tackle power relations, there was an unexpected personal aspect.

(Findings 7102, giving summary of evaluation findings, 2002, authors’ original emphasis)

One ‘public life’ Commissioner has written about her experience on the Commission:

... in the early stages, ‘public life’ Commissioners were sometimes challenged [by the grassroots Commissioners] as to what they knew about poverty, a sobering experience for those normally treated as ‘experts’. Yet, for all the very real difficulties, there was always an incredible energy in what were pretty long meetings, and much was achieved ... For some of the ‘public life’ Commissioners the experience has been transformative.

(Lister, 2002)

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At the follow-up meeting held in January 2002, participants' views about the experience were more positive than before. And all the Commissioners there were making use of their experience, and their report, in their own lives and activities. The evaluation has also been used by, for example, the Poverty Alliance in developing proposals for a community-based network to be known as Scottish Poverty Watch (see Chapter 7). The Commission's proposals influenced the setting up of a 'participation working group', including people with direct experience of poverty, by the Department for Work and Pensions, to explore how to involve people with experience of poverty in debates about the UK government's National Action Plan on social inclusion, which it had to produce as a member state of the European Union. One grassroots Commissioner also spoke at a Social Exclusion Unit conference in March 2003. She was asked to say what she thought would make the biggest difference to whether people in poverty would be prepared to participate in decision-making processes. Her answer was: feedback on whether their contributions had made a difference (Nilaben Tailor, address to Social Exclusion Unit conference, 5 March 2003).

Pooling Knowledge on Poverty:⁷ an ATD Fourth World project (by Moraene Roberts)

This project grew from a method of working with people living in poverty that originated with Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World. Born into poverty, Joseph Wresinski arrived in 1957 as a penniless priest at Noisy le Grand, a camp for the homeless near Paris. He recognised in the atmosphere of hopelessness and abandonment that he found there the scars of poverty and exclusion. He chose to stay there, among 'his own people', in order to share their life and to work alongside them to build a better future. He believed that the first partners in the fight against poverty must be those who experience it; and that with them lies the knowledge of the causes and effects of poverty, and the means to eradicate it. With the help of the people of this shanty town, a group of local friends and a handful of people who came to join him full-time, he formed an association called Aide à toute détresse (Help to All in Distress), which later became ATD Fourth World International.

After removing the soup kitchens, and building a nursery school, laundry and workshops, one of the first initiatives was the setting up of a Bureau of Social Research. This aims to discover and record the history and lives of people living in poverty, to document their efforts to overcome their circumstances, to build on their knowledge, and to support their struggle to contribute to their families, communities and wider society by this documentation. Wresinski also set up the Fourth World People's Universities. (Other aspects of the work of ATD Fourth World are described in Chapter 7.)

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Some examples of using participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty

Now active in 32 countries around the world, ATD Fourth World is a non-religious, human-rights-based anti-poverty organisation, which aims to promote the rights and participation of the poorest people in each community where they have a presence, and to constantly learn from them. Vital in this work are the individuals and families who live in poverty and fight against it every day; the friends of ATD Fourth World, who give their time and energy; and the full-time volunteers who are committed to live and work alongside the poorest, opting to receive only a small salary for their work to show their solidarity with those experiencing poverty.

In 1980, Joseph Wresinski challenged the academic world by stating that the function and duty of academics dealing with research on poverty must be to:

- make room for the unique, indispensable and complementary knowledge of those experiencing poverty and exclusion
- consolidate the knowledge of those who live and work alongside people living in poverty; and
- bring to bear the knowledge of the researcher, the external observer.

The reason he gave for this challenge was that:

... academic knowledge can only be partial, indirect, informative and explanatory. It lacks the firm footing in raw reality that turns knowledge into a mobilising force capable of leading to action.

(Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World, addressing UNESCO meeting, December 1980)

In 1995, ATD Fourth World brought together 32 people from diverse backgrounds to explore the concept of the full participation of people living in poverty in research on poverty and exclusion. The three-year project, based on Joseph Wresinski's challenge, was called 'Pooling Knowledge on Poverty'.

For the first year, a working group met to familiarise themselves with the work of ATD Fourth World, especially the People's Universities, which were regular meetings that brought together people experiencing poverty – often lifelong and intergenerational – and others, to learn from one another, and to build their skills and capacity. These were meetings in which people living in poverty were not just recipients of other people's knowledge but also a source of knowledge, based on their experiences, that could be shared and discussed. The People's Universities take place in various areas across Europe, and the participants in the project who had direct experience of poverty had been involved in these for some time and were activists in ATD Fourth World.

The working group also re-examined the challenge that Joseph Wresinski had posed to academics and found background material for this experimental research and training project. The aim of the project was to 'produce new knowledge and understanding out of the fight

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against persistent poverty', based on academic knowledge, knowledge gained from experience and knowledge gained through action.

The project itself brought together, from France and Belgium:

- 15 people experiencing poverty who were ATD Fourth World activists
- 12 academics from different disciplines and universities
- five full-time volunteers from ATD Fourth World.

They were to research the themes:

- history: from shame of poverty to pride in 'belonging to a movement'
- family: the projects, dreams and aspirations of families
- knowledge and learning: knowledge for freedom, gained through life, school and action
- work: daily activity, employment
- citizenship: representation and its relationship with deep poverty.

Support was given by a team of teachers to assist with learning, and an advisory group who offered ongoing support and mediation. There was also an academic council, to validate the process and the findings of the project. The rules agreed by the participants were: listening, confidentiality, discretion, sharing knowledge and collective ownership (of published materials).

Project members were called 'participant authors' and met for three days each week, in sub-groups of three, for 22 months. For half a day each week, a teacher worked with them, especially to support those who felt less confident of their literacy. Every two months, a three-day seminar (ten in all) allowed for the presenting of collective work. Between seminars, the thematic groups met for one day every two months.

The activists went out to interview families living in long-term poverty. All the participant authors brought other materials and information to contribute to the joint work. Writing consisted of 'memoirs', records kept by each participant author and collective work – to ensure fair and equal representation of views. The process and content of each of the five thematic areas were overseen by a member from the academic council. At the conclusion, there was one general assessment done by the whole council. Where different ways of thinking came into conflict, the advisory group had to intervene and regulate the dialogue.

In the early stages, more focus was put on helping the participant authors who had backgrounds of poverty, due to their higher initial needs. Assistance for the academics and the full-time volunteers developed gradually and responsively as time progressed. The challenging of deeply held beliefs often proved emotive and stressful, but it enhanced the dialogue and built better understanding. Sometimes it was very difficult for the volunteers to find their place between the worlds of the activists and the academics.

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Some examples of using participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty

What scared us and got on our nerves were our differences. What enabled us to go forward and get some outcomes were our commonalities.

(Jacques Fierens, an academic, speaking at the launch of the project report at the Sorbonne in Paris, 23–4 April 1999)

Pooling knowledge meant overcoming prejudices, breaking down barriers and building respect. This could only be achieved at the level of sharing human experiences. It was vital for the participants to find common ground in spite of their very diverse backgrounds and lives. Each of the participants had their own history and did not expect to find similar experiences in the lives of others; but human beings bring similar feelings and actions into their relationships with the world and one another. It was at the level of common human bonds that the participants were able to find mutuality:

The pooling of knowledge is not just the confusion of roles – in this project we also learned how to be ourselves.

The final reports on the five themes are currently available only in French, but will soon be available in English from ATD Fourth World, as funding has been obtained for translation and other follow-up. Some of the conclusions are as follows.

- *History*: it was only by coming together and achieving a feeling of belonging that people could move from the shame of being blamed for their poverty to a position of being active in the fight against poverty and exclusion. To be seen as part of the solution instead of the source of the problem, to have validation, people have formed associations around the issue of fighting poverty. People in poverty cannot eradicate it on their own; people outside poverty cannot eradicate it without the knowledge and partnership of those who live it.
- *Family*: the need to acknowledge that even the poorest families have dreams and projects. It is easier to work towards achieving your projects at times when you are not in poverty. Families in poverty live in a different time frame to agencies, and need extra time to change things. Academics felt that time for the poorest moved in a static circle of misery; the activists, however, felt that their families experienced time as a line moving slowly forward that, at times, looped backwards. They felt that movement and progress were possible in a family in poverty, but that things would cause loops (or setbacks) that made progress much harder for them. Families in poverty suffer many short-term emergencies, but the moral judgement heaped on them and the psychological effects of poverty created conditions that maintained the states of emergency over long periods.
- *Knowledge*: for months, arguments raged in this group, as the academics believed that, for the activists living in poverty, life knowledge was seen as important, but school learnt knowledge was not. The activists in fact felt exactly the opposite. There was a general acceptance that knowledge gained by being active had value. Eventually, this was seen as the link between the other two forms of knowledge and this afforded an agreement that

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knowledge learned in school is enhanced by life experiences, and this then enables active involvement. There is no freedom without knowledge and the means to be active.

- *Work*: even those who have work are not necessarily out of poverty. Quality of work, wage levels and access to training are all important. Having paid employment changes your status, how you are viewed by others. Much of the work done by people living in poverty is unpaid and unrecognised. Daily activity such as childcare, household duties, helping and supporting others is not seen as work by society.
- *Citizenship*: a person is not seen as a citizen unless they are recognised as belonging to a human community. There needs to be a conscious relationship between people in poverty and others that is not based on dependency but on the taking of action together, trusting one another and knowing one another's capacities and potentials. Poverty creates isolation and prevents you from accessing your rights or meeting your obligations as a citizen. It prevents your actions from being seen and recognised as acts of citizenship. Representation by others always leaves some people on the side. Representation must make the people who are absent present in every place that decisions are made. We must look for the most excluded of the excluded and find a way for them to be included in order to improve democracy and build citizenship.

The evaluation included phrases from participants such as: 'learning humility'; 'coming to awareness'; 'a new way of understanding'; 'a rediscovery of myself'; 'fear and dread'; 'misunderstandings'; 'holding on desperately to our own perspectives'; 'a personal transformation'; 'reality wake-up'; 'inspirational experience'; 'increased my desire to fight poverty'.

What was the value of this experiment as a piece of research? It has changed the lives of those who took part. It demonstrated that mutual working between academics, people in poverty and those who work in the field of poverty is possible and beneficial. For example, in the UK, ATD Fourth World and the Family Rights Group are now working with universities and professionals to design a module for use in the training of social workers, with people who are living in poverty as trainers. It showed – to the participants and others – that knowledge of different kinds was of equivalent and equal value. It has changed how some universities present modules of work in their courses. It has inspired other countries to explore the potential of this method.

Conclusion

The messages that emerged from all the case studies described above have been written up, and the case studies have also been evaluated or analysed as processes elsewhere. Some of the key learning from these experiments has been drawn out above. None of them proved to be easy experiences, and each faced obstacles of time and resources. But each of them also provided valuable insights and understanding to advance debates about the nature of poverty

and how to tackle it. And each affected the lives and perspectives of those people who took part in them. One academic involved in the Pooling Knowledge on Poverty experiment said that, as a result, he now had 'peripheral vision'. This is a vivid description of the long-lasting impact that living such experiences can have.

The next chapter gives an overview of the current state of participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty in the UK.

7 Participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty in the UK: the current state of play

Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty in the UK today. It is a mapping exercise and therefore is primarily descriptive. However, it does offer some observations. It is divided into two main subsections: bringing practice from the 'South'; and other participatory approaches to research and evaluation on poverty issues. Within each, it examines work by government, academics and non-governmental organisations. It is not comprehensive, but focuses on some of the main players in this area, especially at national level; it does not include analysis of the funding of participatory research, or the work of private research consultancies. Within each subsection, there are profiles of particular pieces of work in rather more detail. The final section sets the UK in the context of the European Union.

Participatory practice is not yet fully embedded in the mainstream social research tradition in the UK. For example, a new qualitative research guide contains no chapter specifically on participatory approaches, though a few chapters make some references to them (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) – though see Laws (2003); and another publication contains material exploring how far policy recipients, especially as 'users', can be involved in the research process (Barnes, 2004). The Economic and Social Research Council, one of the major funders of social research, encourages increasing knowledge transfer between social scientists and the 'users' of their research, but

does not usually seem to prioritise the subject of research themselves as 'users'.

However, participatory practice in research and inquiry involving people living in poverty – even if it is not always labelled in this way – is expanding in the UK, some of it inspired by practice from the 'South'. The government's sponsoring of such methods is limited largely to the local level, or to evaluations of community initiatives. But, among the devolved administrations, Scotland in particular has been more prepared to experiment. And many community groups, voluntary organisations and teams of academics are pursuing participatory approaches to their work on poverty, though not necessarily in a co-ordinated or networked way, across the UK.

As noted in Chapter 3, participatory approaches should be seen as a continuum, rather than 'all or nothing'. Viewed in this way, recent research on poverty in the UK *has* asked people in poverty more about their views – though this is limited mostly to exploring the effects of poverty on them, with the research agenda still being set by outside researchers. A further development provides a bridge linking more traditional methods with participatory approaches to research, by using more qualitative research; enabling people in poverty to offer their own interpretations; and drawing on research by groups with particular experiences of poverty (Beresford *et al.*, 1999). Rarely is research fully participatory; but much research aspires to a greater degree of involvement than would have been the case 20

years ago. It is important not to ignore, or undermine, examples such as these by labelling all research except the most fully participatory as its opposite.

In addition, although there are still only a few examples of participatory practice in research on poverty on a national scale, local examples are multiplying. This chapter therefore includes more discussion of local-level work than the other chapters of the report.

Practice and lessons from the 'South'

I am telling you that I have a headache and you keep telling me that I have a footache and you want to force me to take medicine for that.

(Participant from Chad, at a World Bank planning meeting, quoted in Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, 2000)

This subsection looks at practice in the UK which has been inspired by participatory approaches developed in the 'South'. It includes work by government, academic institutions and non-governmental organisations. Then it examines briefly some lessons drawn from this experience.

Government: the Department for International Development (DfID)

The Department for International Development (DfID) has over the last decade worked hard at mainstreaming a participatory approach into its work on poverty issues and social development. However, there had been little sign until recently that DfID had persuaded other government departments of the case for transferring this approach to research within the UK.

Now, however, there have been some exchanges, facilitated by Oxfam and others. And a consultancy called Social Development Direct (SDD), which carries out research for DfID, has been commissioned to conduct the evaluation of the neighbourhood wardens scheme in England for the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU). Its scoping study proposed to use 'community driven participatory methodologies' to examine case study areas (Neighbourhood Wardens Evaluation Team, 2001).

Academic institutions

Academic institutions using participatory approaches include:

- PEANuT (Participatory Evaluation and Appraisal in Newcastle upon Tyne), at Northumbria University, which uses participatory appraisal (PA) methods in local studies (Fuller *et al.*, 2003)
- the Chronic Poverty Research Centre, based at Manchester University, which is developing an online research 'toolbox' incorporating participatory research (see 'Contacts and resources' at the end of this report).

Other academic teams, such as the Participation Group at the Institute of Development Studies (University of Sussex), the Centre for International Training and Development at the University of Wolverhampton, and the Centre for Development Studies, University of Wales, Swansea are sometimes asked to undertake work in the UK as well, based on their experience overseas.

National non-governmental organisations

There is growing interest in 'South–North' exchange, with non-governmental organisations in particular interested in sharing lessons (Lewis, 1998). Part of this is made up of:

... organisations and individuals in the North and South ... working jointly on new approaches to development work, including more participatory methods.

(id21 Society and Economy, 2003)

Several groups are involved in bringing learning to the UK from the 'South' and/or development thinking. There is a network that exchanges experiences and learning about participatory methods drawn from the 'South'. A range of work is going on, not all of it related to poverty, and much at local level only.

Some of the groups using such approaches in their research in the UK include development organisations, such as the following:

- *Save the Children*, which uses participatory techniques in its research with children and young people (see, for example, Willow, 2001).
- *ActionAid-UK*, which works with an adult literacy method called 'Reflect', which links adult learning to empowerment to strengthen the voices of people in poverty. Participants develop visual materials to analyse their local environment and discuss issues arising. The Poverty Alliance in Scotland is also planning to use 'Reflect' as a core method in the work of the Scottish Poverty Watch network, which it is setting up to monitor the impact of Scotland's social justice strategy at local level (Wilson, 2003).

- *Oxfam GB*, which has had a UK Poverty Programme since the mid-1990s, and works with groups especially in Scotland, Wales and the North of England, as well as with UK-wide groups such as the UK Coalition Against Poverty. Oxfam was involved with the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, described in Chapter 6. Oxfam's work in the UK on South–North learning is more developed than that of most other similar non-governmental organisations; some examples are therefore described in more detail below.

Oxfam

Oxfam supported a participatory study of Gellideg, a community in South Wales, carried out by local workers from the Gellideg Foundation Group who were trained to do the research. This looked in particular at gender issues related to poverty (Buhaenko *et al.*, 2003). Like many reports inspired by methods from the 'South', the report of this study contains graphic visual representations of some of the main findings, as well as the written 'story'. The research was seen as part of an action process led by the local community group, which used the findings to support its bid for European Union funding.

Oxfam has also been involved in using participatory appraisal techniques to involve the local community in Salford in developing a community plan as the basis for a bid for area regeneration money, and

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in subsequent work related to that. With Development in Focus, it supported Sustain (formerly the National Food Alliance) in a 'community mapping' project, to enable communities to analyse their own local food economies, to be able to identify possible improvements or threats and respond to them effectively (Sustain, 2002). And it has supported Glasgow East End Health Action in carrying out participatory investigation into health issues in its local community.

Community organisations and local networks

Community organisations and local networks using these approaches include the *Walsall Participatory Appraisal (PA) Network* and the *Hull and East Yorkshire PA Network*. Participatory techniques in the UK are probably used more in training and consultation than in research, according to the Standing Conference on Community Development (personal communication, 2003). But they can be, and are, used in research with poor communities as well.

An example of participatory research with a local community

A good example of participatory research with a local community is a report by Holdsworth (1998). A grassroots worker, doing her first paid job in the community sector in Hull, worked with local residents trained in PA to do the research around issues identified by the community in a poor area where she herself lives. The research was guided by a steering group of

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community members. It identified suggestions for ways forward to meet community needs identified in the research by local people. These ideas were then developed, with help, into a bid for regeneration funding to employ community development workers:

All 14 out of 15 recommendations have been acted on since the report. But the best thing about the project, so I am told by some, is that it added something to our community – rather than extracting information and enthusiasm and skills, which has happened [elsewhere].

(Gina Holdsworth, personal communication, June 2003)

Lessons of bringing practice from the 'South'

Some people involved in participatory approaches to research in the UK inspired by practice in the 'South' have written about their experiences, drawing out learning for others who may want to take similar initiatives.

The main lessons drawn out from a community assessment in Berkshire, again supported by Oxfam (David and Craig, 1997), include the need for methods developed in the 'South' to be adapted for a new setting in the UK. But:

... the essence of good participatory appraisal – listening, self-critical awareness, encouraging people to take control – will never be inappropriate.

(David and Craig, 1997)

Another study reflects on using participatory learning and action tools to engage residents of an area in Bristol, which had

been chosen for regeneration in 'sustainability assessment' as part of a European Union research project. The approach was seen as 'highly innovative' in a European context. It was used because:

... conventional methods are failing. Residents are fed up with coming to meetings where they sit in rows, listen passively to tedious explanations, their participation being reduced to questions at the end. They are also tired of box-ticking questionnaires.

(Robbins, Symes and Mowat, 2002)

Some tools often used in participatory learning and action in the 'South' were not used, as they seemed inappropriate in this context. But, as in the previous example, these authors also say that the central features of this approach are not so much the tools but 'appropriate behaviour and attitudes, and sharing'.

One edition of *PLA Notes*, the newsletter for people in the UK using participatory approaches from the 'South', focused on 'participatory processes in the North' (Flower *et al.*, 2000). The articles are about other countries as well as the UK; and they are about participatory methods in general, not just as applied to research. But they do focus on poverty. They identify growing experience with using participatory processes in the 'North' – but, so far, only limited practical information, skills and assessment. The authors identify various challenges as participatory approaches become more widely accepted, including moving 'from the margins to the mainstream':

The challenge is how to develop processes that work at the local level that also feed into and engage in processes on a larger scale.

(Flower *et al.*, 2000)

Other participatory practice in research and evaluation on poverty issues

Of course, by no means all participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty in the UK is primarily inspired by practice from the 'South'. In any case, in practice it is not possible to separate approaches in such a clear way, as there is a lot of cross-fertilisation of ideas. This subsection again looks at government, academic institutions and non-governmental organisations at national and local level, to explore what other participatory research and evaluation on poverty issues are being carried out in the UK.

Government

The government at Westminster recently produced a toolkit about public involvement known as *Viewfinder* (Cabinet Office, 2002; also see Policy Hub web site: <http://www.policyhub.gov.uk>). This was intended to complement existing guidance on written consultations for government departments with ideas about involving the public in other ways. It does include some ideas about engaging 'diverse' groups and those who have 'fallen outside of mainstream involvement activities'; and one Appendix includes some ideas brought up at a workshop about 'inclusive consultation' attended by grassroots members of the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, among others (see Chapter 6). But it is not really geared to the needs of people living in poverty. It is also focused more on consultation, in which the initiative remains with government departments, although it also discusses more open-ended 'participation' exercises. (Research is not defined as being part of public

involvement, although it is mentioned as part of citizen–government interaction.) The toolkit comes across as being more technical than value-led. However, it is clearly written and open in its aims. Although it does not seem to be very well-known across government departments, it is a sign of an increasing emphasis on engagement with people affected by government policies, which may give some opportunities in the longer term for progress in advancing the involvement of people in poverty.

The Department of Health is increasingly supporting user involvement initiatives in health, and the Social Care Institute for Excellence is currently commissioning literature reviews on user involvement in social care. By contrast, UK government departments have not yet undertaken or commissioned much participatory research on poverty or related issues. However, a participatory element is being planned in the review of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit's *community participation programmes*, being carried out for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister by the University of the West of England (M.E. Taylor, personal communication, 2003).

In fact, evaluations of various government policies, including Sure Start, the Children's Fund and neighbourhood renewal, now have to involve local people. However, one problem with government commissioning is that the remit is often so tight, and the timetable so restricted, that opportunities for the creative use of participatory methods may in practice be very limited. The department involved may even specify the questions, leaving no opening for the researchers, let alone participants, to influence the agenda. (This can happen in any evaluation, of course; see Stake, 1986.) Yet, even if the broad agenda is

'Residents' consultancy'

A recent review of 'residents' consultancy', carried out for the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit and the Department for Education and Skills (see Chapter 3), drew on experience in the UK *and* overseas. It was intended to provide a framework for evaluating six pilot schemes for regeneration and service delivery in deprived areas. It found two main strands of 'residents' consultancy' – learning and skills transfer, and community consultation. But, when residents were trained by research *companies* to do consultation/survey work, they did not necessarily end up having much influence over the process:

Most of the employment appears to be in carrying out interviews, rather than in structuring the research process or in analysing the results. (Taylor *et al.*, 2002, quote from Research Brief No. RB382)

Resident-run companies might have provided a different model. But the authors note that there is none among the six pilot schemes. They found that participatory approaches to research overseas contributed a 'helpful framework', from which they thought the UK could learn a lot:

Within this approach, residents tend to be involved, not as 'consultants' undertaking a piece of research, but as participants in a facilitated process which engages and empowers the whole community and aims to influence the policy-making and service-delivery process. (Taylor *et al.*, 2002, quote from Research Brief No. RB382)

set by the government wishing to evaluate a pre-determined policy, it could be argued that there should be more effort to include participatory elements in the later stages of the research; and that evaluations of local projects are particularly appropriate for influence and input from those involved in such projects (see earlier in this report). Some evaluations of government interventions are being developed in a participatory way involving users.¹

The devolved bodies, especially the *Scottish Parliament and Executive*, have been sympathetic to exploring more participatory ways of working. A recent paper focuses on exchanges between community members, professionals and academics during joint training (Barr, 2003). The author says that there is an emphasis within the Scottish Executive's Social Inclusion Programme on *joint training in regeneration*, as a basis 'for each group to contribute to the learning of the others, drawing from their particular expertise and experience'; and that this sets up 'learning dynamics that result as much from the engagement between them as it does from the formal content of the planned curriculum'. Although this exercise was not about research as such, it was a joint learning experience, and so is similar to the two examples of participatory inquiry described earlier in this report (Chapter 6).

In mid-2002, a *Scottish Community Action Research Fund* was introduced by the Scottish Executive, to be administered by Communities Scotland, to support community-led research. This provides (small) funds to enable local people to gather information about their environment, to identify gaps in services or areas of concern. It is intended to help 'close the gap' between disadvantaged and other areas.

For the second stage of funding, the research 'must involve members of the community that is being researched' (see Scottish Community Development Centre web site: <http://scdc.org.uk>). The Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) supports communities wishing to develop proposals, in part by supplying 'research mentors' and managing the process. An *Action Research Network* is also being set up by the Scottish Civic Forum and the Centre for Human Ecology. As Church Action on Poverty (CAP) says:

... with the advent of the new Parliament, the people of Scotland have been invited to do things differently.

(Galloway, 2002)

Academic institutions²

The Health and Social Policy Research Centre at the *University of Brighton* has been developing participatory approaches to its research on poverty for some time, particularly through evaluations of government regeneration programmes. More recently, it has set up a new Community University Partnership Programme; one of its aims is to extend the parameters of participatory research on poverty (<http://www.brighton.ac.uk/cupp>).

The Department of Social Research at the *University of Birmingham* tries to develop long-term relationships to involve people being researched throughout the research process. Its focus is 'the experiences and perspectives of poor and socially excluded citizens and those whose quality of life is substantially affected by the nature of welfare services and policies' (<http://www.socialresearch.bham.ac.uk/approach.htm>).

The *Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion* (CASE) at the London School of Economics is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council as a centre of research on social exclusion. Because of this key role, some of its work that could be seen as more participatory in approach is profiled below.

The Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE)

CASE has active links with the Tenants' Resource Centre at Trafford Hall, which provides training to tenant activists from deprived areas. Recently, it used these links to conduct an experiment with methods that it described as being drawn from 'participatory action research'. Tenant activists were asked to give their views on the definition of social exclusion drawn up by CASE academics (Richardson and Le Grand, 2002). This was described as contributing 'insider expertise', to add to the 'outsider expertise' of the academics. The tenants largely agreed with the definition. But they put more emphasis on access to quality public services as part of social inclusion (see Sefton, 2002), and said there should be more focus on areas. They thought some people exclude themselves. And they highlighted principles of social justice and solidarity as reasons for tackling social exclusion.

CASE also organised several events with residents of low-income neighbourhoods, practitioners and academics, to find out

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their views about the national strategy for neighbourhood renewal in England (Richardson and Hills, 2000). They found much wariness, and some cynicism, about the government's commitment to community involvement. CASE's monitoring of the impact of government policies and other changes on low-income neighbourhoods includes regular interviews with families living in some of these areas, to find out their experiences and views in depth (Bowman, 2001; Mumford, 2001; see also Power and Mumford, 2003). CASE's housing research arm has always been careful to check findings from research studies with those who took part in them.

People living in poverty are not necessarily involved throughout these processes as full partners in the research or inquiry, including its design or any follow-up action. For example, in the discussion of the definition of social exclusion, the tenant activists were not asked whether they thought 'social exclusion' was a useful term to begin with (Lister, forthcoming, 2004); and the report of this exercise was not cited in the recent CASE publication on social exclusion (Hills *et al.*, 2002). But the fact that a major centre of academic expertise on poverty and social exclusion is developing its work further in the direction of a more participatory approach should be welcomed.

Participatory research on the poverty of *children and young people* has to date largely been left to the bigger children's charities, all of which now use participatory approaches extensively in their work. Similar developments have taken place in the international development field (Johnson *et al.*, 1998). But a recent academic study took seriously the perspective of children living in poverty, and their agency in coping with and 'managing' it (Ridge, 2002a). It also emphasised the impact of poverty and social exclusion on childhood, not just on the children's experience as adults later on. The author calls the research 'child-centred', rather than participatory; the study:

... set out to develop an understanding of poverty in childhood that was drawn from the perspectives of poor children themselves, and provides an account of their lives that is grounded in their own realities and meanings.

(Ridge, 2002b)

And she describes the research agenda of the study shifting in focus as it progressed, in response to the children's own views and priorities.

National non-governmental organisations

The *Poverty Alliance* in Scotland is a leading member of the UK Coalition Against Poverty. The Poverty Alliance is developing a network called Scottish Poverty Watch, which will involve local people from a mix of areas in researching the impact of the Scottish Executive's social justice strategy on individuals and on communities. The report on the development phase of this work usefully sets out principles and issues to be considered when

developing a participatory research project of this kind (Wilson, 2003). The Poverty Alliance has also been a key supporter of community needs assessments – participatory research by local people into the needs of their communities (Long and Tennant, 1998).

ATD Fourth World International is an organisation that works at national level in the UK, as well as elsewhere, with people living in long-term poverty. Its work has been described above, in the case study Pooling Knowledge on Poverty (Chapter 6). Although much of its work in the UK could be described as capacity building and policy influencing, it has always prioritised research, and in particular support for people living in poverty in developing their own knowledge base. Because of this focus, which is unusual among non-governmental organisations in the UK, its work is profiled below.

The work of ATD Fourth World

One research method used by ATD Fourth World is the 'family monograph', a long-term account of the life of a family living in extreme poverty, worked on by family members together with an ATD volunteer, and checked by the family before publication (see Fourth World Movement, 1995). Other methods include the 'People's Universities' – called 'Fourth World evenings' or 'policy forums' in the UK – in which people living in long-term poverty meet regularly to discuss issues relevant to them with ATD volunteers, friends and others.

(continued)

It was this kind of exchange that led to the Pooling Knowledge on Poverty experiment. ATD Fourth World was also involved in a project in Belgium to develop indicators of poverty and social exclusion in a participatory way.³ While much of this work has been done outside the UK, ATD Fourth World's approach is now becoming increasingly well-known here too.

Church Action on Poverty (CAP) has used participatory approaches in its research, including an inquiry into debt in North East England; the issues arising were discussed at 'national policy forums' with people with direct experience of poverty (Matthews, 2002), and fed into the national Debt on Our Doorstep campaign.

A project initiated by CAP Scotland is profiled briefly below, as this type of work to develop indicators of poverty and social exclusion with people living in poverty is still rare in the UK.

A project initiated by CAP Scotland

The CAP Scotland project on developing indicators of poverty and social exclusion was initiated because:

... in the struggle to bring about a Scotland where truly everyone matters ... there is an important place for the voice of experience as well as the voice of theory and analysis; and perhaps the voice of experience can do some of its own analysis.

(Galloway, 2002)

(continued)

Significantly, the final report suggests that:

... perhaps the starkest statements of exclusion came in the consistent experience of people living in poverty that being poor results in being disregarded and treated with disrespect ... A Scotland where everyone matters is really about who we value, and how that shows up.
(Galloway, 2002)

The project involved two groups in Glasgow exploring what they thought it meant to live in poverty. The meetings each followed a set process, using an image or picture to start the discussion, as well as people's own experience (Galloway, 2002).

In the groups' statement to a meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty, they asked whether and how the government would involve people living in poverty in setting poverty indicators and targets. The Secretary of State used the opportunity to announce a national consultation on the measurement of child poverty. As part of this exercise, the Department for Work and Pensions did in fact arrange consultation meetings with people with direct experience of poverty, including children.

The Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network (NIAPN) uses a participatory approach in its work with its member organisations, such as its pack on poverty and powerlessness in Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network, 2002). NIAPN calls for people living in poverty to be involved in shaping anti-poverty policies.

Community organisations and local networks

This report concentrates largely on national-level research. But there are many examples of local community research using participatory methods to a varying extent, including the following:

- *Dundee Anti-Poverty Forum*, which wanted 'to develop a method by which poor people can gain a voice in the evaluation of anti-poverty strategy', and produced a report on poverty as experienced by local people (Dundee Anti-Poverty Forum with Spicker, 2002).
- A study of *Kingsmead Estate in Hackney*, which gives 'a central place ... to the voice of the tenants in describing their experience of poverty' (Green, 1997), and describes its recommendations as having been extensively informed by tenants' own views.
- Research in Wansbeck, Northumberland: *Our PART project* did two pieces of 'participative action research', training local people to be researchers, with parents and young travelling people, and now plans other similar exercises, to feed into local neighbourhood renewal work (Schwartzberg, 2003).

The national *Community Development Foundation* uses research as part of its role of supporting local community development. The role of the *Association of Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector (ARVAC)* – also a national body – is specifically to support 'community research' locally and raise its profile nationally. It has produced a guide for individuals and

groups wanting to do community research projects (ARVAC, 2003). With the Housing Corporation, it is now working with CLES Consulting to review good practice in the commissioning, design, delivery and evaluation of research, which will highlight 'user-led and action-based' approaches.

European Union level

Activity within the UK on poverty and social exclusion issues now takes place increasingly in the context of European Union (EU) policies and networks. Within the EU, the *European Anti-Poverty Network*, with member organisations in all the member states, is committed to participatory ways of working. It does not specialise in research, being more involved in policy debates and decision making. But some of its member organisations were involved with the project to develop indicators of poverty and social exclusion in a participatory way, mentioned above and described in Chapter 8. And it has been influential in shaping the commitment to 'mobilisation of all the actors', including the participation of people in poverty and their organisations, embodied in the National Action Plans for social inclusion, which all member states now have to produce and act on. This is similar to the 'multi-stakeholder' approach of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers in some countries in the 'South', in which the involvement and ownership of citizens as well as governments are required. It is likely to provide increased opportunities for more systematic input by people in poverty and their organisations in the poverty debate.⁴

Conclusion

So far, we have looked at the arguments for participatory approaches to research and inquiry into poverty; set out some of the basics and the building blocks to make these approaches work; explored the various influences on how the debate has developed;

examined particular examples of participatory practice; and given an overview of the development of these approaches in the UK. We now turn to explore in more depth some of the issues involved in putting participatory approaches to research and inquiry into poverty into practice.

8 Promise and possibilities, problems and pitfalls¹

... participation can be used to evoke ... almost anything that involves people. As such, it can easily be reframed to meet almost any demand made of it. Unpacking these meanings and exploring the diversity of practices that come to be labelled as 'participatory' is therefore vital, in order to make sense of these claims.

(Cornwall, 2000)

This chapter tries to do some of this necessary 'unpacking'. It looks at issues about the *who, how and what* of participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty. It is based on the 'basics and building blocks' of participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty (see Chapter 3), but explores these in more detail, with the help of reports by some authors who have been involved in putting participatory approaches into practice for many years. It therefore goes beyond the case for participatory approaches in principle, to explore what this means in practice.

Issues about the 'who'

The first issue is about *who takes part* in participatory research and inquiry into poverty. The ideal could be seen as researcher(s) being invited in by an organised group of people living in poverty, which already had its own research agenda. (This is the model for emancipatory research by and for disabled people – see Chapter 5). But, as noted earlier, there is currently no national-level organisation that would claim to be representative of people living in poverty in the UK. An organisation such as ATD Fourth World is working with people prepared to identify themselves as

members of a movement of people living in long-term poverty. But there are few like it. The obstacles to getting together under the 'poverty' label, at local or national level, have been described earlier. This should not mean that research on poverty using participatory approaches cannot take place at all if this condition is not fulfilled.

The authors of *Poverty First Hand* (see Chapter 6) raise this issue:

... we found we had to deal with a paradox which might make it very difficult for people with experience of poverty ever to offer their ideas and views about poverty. How do you know who to include? How do you avoid pre-empting people's own conceptualisation of poverty in who is included?

(Beresford *et al.*, 1999)

Their solution was to rely on people's self-definition. But they acknowledge that this may have excluded some people, and included others not currently living in poverty.

Some researchers have discussed the *problem of the label 'poverty' itself*:

Some marginalised social groups, including 'the poor', may prefer not to identify themselves in such terms, let alone mobilise in the name of their alleged 'poverty'.

(Dean, 1996)

This is sometimes called the problem of the 'p word' (Lister and Beresford, 2000). One researcher has written openly about the dilemmas she faced in a situation in which the people who had actively participated in her research were not happy with the idea of their

area being portrayed as a poor one in the reporting of the results (Corden, 1996).

Some people would therefore argue that poverty research that involves people living in poverty themselves should not necessarily use the term 'poverty' at all. In the Oxfam-supported study in Gellideg cited above (see Chapter 7), people were not asked about their poverty, but about what it took to be 'ok' or 'not ok' in their community. This mirrors the common practice in many participatory research exercises in the 'South' of avoiding 'poverty' and using words such as 'ill-being' instead. Some people decide to persist with using the word 'poverty', however, despite its disadvantages, because it describes a situation that exists and that should be seen as unacceptable:

In the end, however, we cannot get around the reality that poverty exists and millions of people in the UK live in poverty. Avoiding the word may be too much like avoiding the problem.

(Dundee Anti-Poverty Forum with Spicker, 2002)

There may be a range of views among people in poverty themselves. If people with direct experience of poverty are already actively involved in debates and action to tackle poverty, they may be more prepared to use the 'p word':

When people experiencing poverty are included in the policy making from the very beginning, it's not poverty that is shameful – it's the existence of poverty that is shameful.

(Participant in People's Parliament, Voices for Change Scotland, 2000, cited in Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, 2000)

And the authors of *Poverty First Hand* conclude:

The reluctance of some people to be identified with poverty is not an argument for excluding people with experience of poverty ... Instead it may have broader implications for how existing debates and campaigns organise and address the issues associated with poverty if they are to become more inclusive.

(Beresford *et al.*, 1999)

A different issue is about *who participates, even among a group defined as living in a poor area, or in poverty*. The use of the phrase 'community' in particular can often evoke the image of consensus, and of a warm, friendly and egalitarian environment. However, there are differences of power in local communities, including those living in poor areas; and these myths of 'community' can deepen the exclusion of people with less power, often women (Cornwall, 2000). An inclusive approach, aware of which voices may be being 'silenced', is essential. It is important to:

- be transparent about the process used
- take account of different levels of power and ensure it is not just the more powerful who are included
- seek out the 'hidden' groups (Norton with others, 2001).

There has been some discussion about *how active a role people living in poverty want to play*. The first issue is that participation has costs. If it requires written consent to the research, it may be seen as unwelcome identification of individuals. It takes up time, which may be at a premium for people living in poverty. This in

turn has opportunity costs, which affect the rest of people's lives. Some people may decide that it is not worth their while taking part in participation exercises which they see as 'phoney' (Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, 2000). If people do decide to speak out, this may also have consequences which cannot necessarily be controlled by those initiating the research exercise:

It is time that more respect was paid to the time, energy and opportunities that participation may cost poor people and with it a clearer sense of the limits of different forms of participation.
(Cornwall, 2000)

Participation is a right. It should not be seen as either cost-free or compulsory.

It is also crucial not to rely on the same people all the time. This can mean that they acquire a position and some status, almost as a 'professional poor person' – though this does not usually mean that they receive a professional salary, or escape from poverty, as a result. They can be 'creamed off' and become cut off from other people living in poverty or their local community. The grassroots members of the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power felt a great responsibility towards the people living in poverty in the areas they came from for whom, in some sense, they were speaking (Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, 2000).

Some people would say that not everyone will be able to participate throughout – and indeed may not want to. Cornwall (2000) argues for moving from the idea of 'full' participation to 'optimum' participation – 'what makes sense for different contexts and purposes'.

Participation of the largest possible number at all stages may be the abstract ideal. But she argues that it can be impossible in practice – or so cumbersome that people lose interest. What is important is *clarity about aims*, rather than allowing limitations of time and money to dictate choices about participation, as so often happens.

Others would say that involvement in the final stage of the research may be more difficult, and that in any case it is usually the researcher who ultimately has the power to produce the final 'story' in reality. But this may be the critical stage in terms of determining the key messages. It is possible to be more creative – arranging a meeting of participants, for example, rather than sending them a 50-page report. (It is also worth asking whether a 50-page report is always the best way to get certain messages across!) The two case studies of joint inquiry in Chapter 6 (see Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power and the ATD Fourth World project) also describe experiments with various ways to promote the wider involvement of all participants in producing a written report.

This issue of 'how much participation' is part of a bigger question. Researchers have been concerned about raising *unrealistically high expectations* through participatory research. They may themselves be seen by participants as powerful, with access to funding and other influence. Guidelines often stress the need to be clear about whether anything of immediate practical benefit to participants will come out of the research or not. But there is a wider issue, in that research may be done for a variety of motives, and especially with a view to increasing *knowledge* – whereas participation

may often be entered into with a hope of future *action*. Thus, the starting points of researcher and researched may be very different. Some research is organised around assessing local community needs and helping to make a case for resources to meet them; but this may be more difficult with national-level poverty research.

In the UK, there has also been concern about the impact of the *low expectations* of people living in poverty – sometimes known as the ‘mustn’t grumble’ syndrome – on research findings. This has been used as one argument, for example, for researchers introducing their own views about what goods everyone should have access to – or involving the general public, rather than only people living in poverty, in these judgements (see below). Low expectations can be a problem. One answer is to see participatory approaches to research as part of a more substantive and sustained process of working together with people in poverty to ensure that they are aware of their rights and *do* increase their demands.

Some people raise questions about the (*lack of*) *capacity of people in poverty* to take part in research or debates about poverty – and therefore may not try to involve them. ATD Fourth World (1996) emphasises that, as many people living in poverty have been taught to believe their opinions don’t count, they may need to go through a long process before feeling confident in articulating their views. So it would argue for realistic provision for support and ‘accompaniment’ for them (see Chapter 3), and for recognition of the need to go at their pace. The authors of *Poverty First Hand* also emphasise the importance of experience:

To begin with, people seem to feel more confident and comfortable talking about what they are most familiar with. As they begin to take part in discussions and become more involved, they gain in confidence and skills and they feel increasingly able to explore broader issues.
(Beresford *et al.*, 1999)

Some writers have focused recently on the concept of ‘information poverty’ (McGee with Norton, 2000). They argue that, in order for people in poverty to be able to take part in participatory processes that are directed at informing policy making, they need information about both existing government policies and their own rights.

What about the *involvement of people who are not poor* in poverty research? In the UK, a trend in recent research has focused on asking a sample of the whole population their views, to get a consensus on defining poverty (‘Breadline Britain’ study, updated in Gordon *et al.*, 2000).² The right to have an input into decisions about appropriate indicators of poverty is seen as belonging to the general population, not just to those living in poverty. Within this tradition, professional judgements have traditionally been prominent – though this has been changing more recently (Bennett and Roche, 2000).

As some people have argued, depending on what is being researched, those who are currently experiencing poverty are not the only people who can talk about it from their own experience, and research to discover minimum acceptable standards of income or necessities for everyone needs to draw on the views of the whole population (Veit-Wilson, 2002). But it could be argued in relation to the latter point that there may still be a complementary role for

people speaking from their experience of poverty to explore what 'adequacy' means from their perspective. They may have specific insights which can be drawn on in this area, to add to findings about the views of the whole population on what is acceptable to all.

Another author argues, however, that focusing *solely* on asking 'the poor' for their experiences and views may miss something out. What it may fail to include are alliances between people living in poverty and others, which may be significant in terms of the success or otherwise of their own efforts to tackle poverty (Cornwall, 2000). And the authors of *Poverty First Hand* are clear about their conclusion:

We believe that people with experience of poverty have a particular contribution to make to poverty discussions and anti-poverty action ... At the same time, we are not saying that only poor people have something to say about poverty, or that they alone have a right to talk or write about it ... Instead we want to stress the importance of an inclusive approach to poverty, which recognises the validity of all voices seeking to challenge poverty.

(Beresford *et al.*, 1999, authors' original emphasis)

Issues about the 'how'

These issues about implementing participatory practice in research and inquiry into poverty need to be distinguished from just doing it badly. *Practical pitfalls* may include those already identified, such as encouraging individuals to identify what they want through the research, but in a context where it is impossible for them

to obtain it; and privileging some people's participation over others, rather than being inclusive. They can also include the problem of insufficiently skilled practitioners using participatory methods badly (Rowlands, 2003). Other pitfalls include insufficient time, issues about how 'representative' people are, and lack of follow-up or feedback to participants about findings or outcomes (Institute of Development Studies, 2001b). The solutions to some perceived problems depend on using participatory methods sensitively – such as not engaging in discussion of certain issues in some group contexts. But this section focuses more on issues of principle.

One of the most important issues is whether participatory forms of research involve people in poverty only as *suppliers of information*,³ or *whether they have more control* in the various stages of the research process. The latter is likely to happen less frequently, but is at the core of the principles of participatory forms of research. The founder of ATD Fourth World said in 1980 that, for academics involved in research on poverty, the 'search for the means to pursue the gathering of information' was much more common than 'having to go through the stages of a more lasting collaboration'. He himself was uncompromising in his views:

... to disturb the very poor in their thinking processes by using them as informers, instead of encouraging them to develop their own reflection in a truly autonomous fashion, is to reduce them to a form of slavery.

(Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World, addressing UNESCO meeting, December 1980)

And one organisation of tribespeople in south India has laid down conditions for researchers wanting to do research with them. The research must be of potential benefit to the tribespeople; and the researchers must also agree to allow them to approve the final output (Stan Thekaekera, Accord, personal communication, 2003).

Both these examples come from *organisations* of people living in poverty. Some researchers see accountability to *individuals* participating in the research as different from accountability to organisations that are meant to represent their interests; it is not part of the role of researchers to be mouthpieces for organisations. The degree of accountability will depend on the role organisations have played in the research as a whole – participating fully, facilitating access or not being directly involved at all.

Various research projects that employed people from the researched group as researchers are cited in this report. This can certainly provide a positive and empowering experience. But previous chapters have queried whether this is a necessary part of a participatory process. And discussions about research ethics have recently included concern about the possible impact on the research ‘subjects’ of being on the receiving end of interventions by insufficiently trained participants, however locally rooted and committed they may be.

In terms of defining its participatory nature, therefore, involving people in *making sense* of the information – not necessarily in carrying out research interviews or group discussions themselves – can be seen as a key part of the process (International Institute of Environment and Development, 1999). But, while it may be

crucial to participation, analysis of information is often the very stage at which the researchers come back in without involving participants. This is often argued for in order to ensure objective results. Supporters of user-controlled research, however, would argue that what is often seen as ‘bias’ in traditional research can instead be seen as ‘insider expertise’ (Evans and Fisher, 1999b); this recalls the ‘insider expertise’ called on by the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (see Chapter 7).

Some perceived problems with the ‘how’ of participatory research resemble issues in *qualitative research* (and sometimes, in discussion, the two may be confused):

- findings may be considered as ‘subjective’ and therefore less valid
- they are also seen as difficult and expensive to collect, record and retrieve
- they are difficult to add up and compare, either across areas or over time (adapted from Bennett and Roche, 2000).

More broadly, there is some tension between a focus on simple quantitative poverty measures, set at a national or even global level and often used in government targets, and the complex nature of the lived experience of poverty revealed in participatory forms of research and inquiry (Maxwell, 1999).

Supporters of participatory approaches to research are often wary of standardisation, and emphasise the local and specific nature of the knowledge obtained. One American author asserts:

From input to influence

... the purpose of participatory research is to solve immediate problems of a specific neighbourhood or community – and not to extrapolate knowledge learned to other communities, although such research outcomes may have broader implications.

(Bryant, 2003)

This issue was raised starkly in the World Bank ‘Voices of the Poor’ case study (Chapter 6). One possibility is to try to carry out the synthesis of the information as close to the original data collection point as possible – keeping in touch with ‘insider knowledge’ in the process. However, people are also now more prepared to say that, even in the most fully participatory research exercises, ‘making sense of a complex reality always requires combining and structuring information’ (Laderchi, 2001).

There has been debate about whether participatory research is always qualitative, or whether it can also be *quantitative*. Some people argue that it is the data that are quantitative or qualitative; it is just that some research methods may be better suited to producing qualitative or quantitative data. Some argue that measurement is not the same as understanding meanings and/or causes, and that aspects of poverty that may be emphasised by people living in poverty themselves are often less easy to measure.

But others argue that participatory approaches to research can and do produce numbers. They point out that many participatory tools – especially those used traditionally in participatory research in the ‘South’ – are ways of analysing reality that do result in numbers, often via comparison, by counting, measuring, estimating, valuing, ranking and scoring:

The evidence invites those in the quantitative mainstream to take these participatory approaches and methods seriously.

(Chambers, 2002a)

In other words, data produced by ‘participatory’ methods often *can* be quantified. This may mean expanding our traditional ideas about what constitutes ‘quantitative research’. In fact, ‘pooled people’s knowledge’ may be a more accurate description of this form of research, rather than thinking of more traditional quantitative methods, such as censuses. Outsiders’ skills may still be needed when bringing information together, however; so – as discussed above – there may in practice be a trade-off between standardisation of the information and empowerment (Chambers, 2002a).

Most people in the field would agree that the findings from participatory research should always be ‘*triangulated*’ with information obtained by other methods – meaning that findings should be cross-checked, so as to be able to understand trends from various different perspectives. (Many would argue that data gathered by participatory research methods are already ‘triangulated’ in one sense, in that they usually combine information obtained by several different methods from varied groups.)

There is also scope for *combining methods*. For example, a research exercise using a participatory approach can inform the questions in a household survey and shed light on the survey findings; the survey is then used to influence the questions, and the site, for the next participatory research exercise – and so on (McGee with Norton, 2000, citing Robb, 1999). Or the people who measure by numbers can

come together with the people who measure by experience, to build a framework to guide quantitative researchers. Moreover, the idea of involving people with direct experience of poverty at the stage of interpreting evidence can be applied to quantitative as well as to qualitative types of research.

In a European example, which draws on a similar experiment initiated by ATD Fourth World and others in Belgium (see Chapter 6), research was carried out by member groups of the European Anti-Poverty Network to identify indicators of poverty and social exclusion. This involved people living in poverty as one group of participants in a process of joint inquiry with other groups. Participatory forms of research were thus used to find out what indicators people in poverty think are key; these can then be used in quantitative research in future, to assess progress in tackling poverty (Horemans, 2001–02; European Anti Poverty Network, 2003). This approach to investigating indicators was discussed at a ‘round table’ on poverty and social exclusion in October 2003, organised by the European Union.

The final ‘how’ of participatory research on poverty is *how to assess its quality*:

While the scientific tradition sets out clear criteria for judging the quality of research, based on notions of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity, there is no such broad agreement as yet on the criteria for assessing the quality of participatory research.

(Roche, 1999)

Some UK academics committed to trying to work in more community-oriented ways are struggling with the demands of traditional research practices and standards. For example,

CASE is trying to integrate the perspectives of the tenant activists involved in some of its projects into its measurement of outcomes from those projects (Richardson, 2003).

However, some progress is being made, particularly in the development field:

New indicators are being developed to assess the quality and impact of participatory processes.

These seek to capture:

- *the level and nature of participation in the process;*
- *the impact on the participants, and on their capacity to become involved and influence policy processes in the future;*
- *the ultimate impact of participation on policy and change.*

(Institute of Development Studies, 2001b)

Issues about the ‘what’

Is the aim of participatory practice in research just to *allow the ‘voice’ of people with direct experience of poverty to be heard*? There are some models in existence for enabling individuals to tell their stories, with or without comment from someone else (see, for example, Parker, 1983; Holman with others, 1998). Researchers involved in participatory processes often claim that they are not really intervening – for example, they may say that they are making a ‘conscious effort not to put our slant on the key findings’ (Dundee Anti-Poverty Forum with Spicker, 2002).

In the past, those involved in this kind of research in the ‘South’ tried hard to ensure that they were not seen as powerful outsiders with unique skills, but that the knowledge and

experience of local people were fully valued. They believed that they should see themselves as 'not lecturers but listeners and learners' (Chambers, 1998); 'experts should be on tap, but not on top' (Pratt and Loizos, 1992). So researchers arriving in villages began by working alongside villagers in daily production tasks, thereby showing up their own lack of skills and local knowledge:

Thus the equation educated expert: villager = knowledgeable person: ignorant person is erased, and in its place is the suggestion that all knowledge is limited and provisional, more relevant to some contexts than others, and subject to revision.

(Pratt and Loizos, 1992)

But many people involved in participatory forms of research would now probably query the practicality and desirability of such approaches and instead argue that:

... any process of enquiry is heavily filtered according to context, and by the objectives of the stakeholders who participate in that process.

(Brock, 1999, emphasis added to the original; also see McGee and Brock, 2001)

Such research, in other words, is *not* just holding a mirror up to reflect the reality of the lived experience of poverty. This is not in any way to downgrade the importance of alternative sources of knowledge and expertise from those of traditional academic research; a major point of participatory approaches is to respect and value these. But, from this perspective, the researcher is inevitably intervening and cannot duck the responsibilities of that position, or the imbalances in power (Lister and Beresford, 2000). Research is an activity like any other in

which participants have different stakes; there is no neutral transmission of 'voice', but participation in a process in which everyone involved has different interests. This does not mean that these personal interests should be deliberately pursued to the exclusion of others. But it does mean being realistic about the differences in power between different participants, and what that means for the research process.

In disability research, it has been argued by some people that researchers *do* have a clear (and useful) role, in terms of having time, resources and certain skills (Priestley, 1997). On the other hand, members of the disabled people's movement have also argued against the idea that outside researchers 'know best' (Lister and Beresford, 2000).⁴ One author identifies four roles needed in participatory forms of research: 'animator', community organiser, popular educator and participatory researcher. He believes that an academic can act as initiator, consultant or collaborator; which role among these is adopted will depend above all on the degree of organisation of the 'community' being researched (Stoeker, 1998).⁵ This echoes conclusions reached elsewhere in this report.

It could also be argued that spending too much time *debating the role of the researcher is the wrong focus*: people in poverty are likely to be more interested in challenging – and changing – their own situation:

The ideal type of participatory research requires that the 'community' take the lead – defines the research problem, develops the approach, invites the 'researcher', gathers and analyses the data, disseminates the information and, if it is desired,

continues with the process of the research afterwards. Most real projects are collaborative action research – a combination between our knowledge and other people’s knowledges. In this we try to take away the hierarchies of the collaboration to create a more equal and two-way dynamic between the ‘researcher’ and the ‘researched’.

(John Gaventa, Citizenship Development Research Centre Director, Institute of Development Studies, at ‘Researching Citizenship Methodologies’ workshop, cited in Development Research Centre’s [DRC’s] draft annual report, 2003)

Much participatory practice in research into poverty is carried out at local level. It can make a crucial contribution to local debates and can also feed into national discussions. But several organisations are struggling with how to stimulate participatory approaches in mainstream national level research and inquiry into poverty (whether promoted by government or not), and how to ensure that key messages from local work influence national policy and practice as well. This is something which so-called ‘second generation participatory poverty assessments’ have started to do in the ‘South’ in recent years (Cornwall, 2000).

What about the form that participatory approaches to research and inquiry take? Some work is now being done to experiment with more ‘deliberative’ methods of inquiry and policy debate, which depart even further from the idea of just listening and transmitting ‘voices’, and move instead towards prioritising dialogue and debate. For example, ‘citizens’ juries’ are one experiment, in which people with different areas of knowledge come to a judgement about an issue:

These processes offer a valuable corrective to the tendency found in some participatory processes of simply gathering people’s views, rather than providing opportunities for exploration, analysis and debate.

(Cornwall and Gaventa, 2001)

Two of the case studies described in Chapter 6 – the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, and the Pooling Knowledge on Poverty experiment – could be seen as more like this sort of exchange. Other examples include the ‘think tank’ model used to examine policy issues by academics involved in CASE and Trafford Hall (see Chapter 7), which includes people with direct experience of the issues taking part in a deliberative process with other stakeholders; and ‘community select committees’, with people from a specific local community invited to consider and debate evidence on an issue (Collard *et al.*, 2003).

These experiments may or may not include people with direct experience of poverty; and they may be more or less participatory in nature. They also move beyond traditional understandings of participatory approaches to research and inquiry into poverty, into the realm of citizen participation in decision-making and policy debates. But the discoveries made in the process of conducting them are often similar to those made in participatory research and inquiry. For example, in the report of an interview with Patricia Hewitt MP, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (in *The Guardian* of 29 September 2003), conducted by Jackie Ashley, a comment by a moderator of a citizens’ jury is reported. She said that people who set up exercises such as citizens’ juries often start by thinking that the result will be to increase public

From input to influence

confidence in the experts – but that what the experience often does in practice is to increase the experts' confidence in the public.

Having considered some of the more complex issues involved in the who, how and

what of participatory forms of research and inquiry into poverty, the final chapter suggests ways forward to further develop their positive potential.

9 Conclusions and recommendations

For once, they have not written about us without us.

(Participant at launch of Pooling Knowledge on Poverty study, at the Sorbonne, Paris, 1999)

This chapter summarises the case that has been made in this report for engaging in participatory forms of research and inquiry into poverty, and situates this in the context of broader debates about the right of people in poverty to participation more generally. It concludes with recommendations for the next steps forward to further explore the potential of such research in the future.

One author writing about participatory approaches to research argues that ‘doing the research is not a goal in itself but only a means’ towards the real goals of learning something, developing relationships and acting more effectively (Stoecker, 1998). The case for participatory forms of research and inquiry into poverty rests on:

- the opportunity of getting more and better information
- the rights of people in poverty to put forward their own realities; and
- the opportunities it can give them to influence policy and practice (McGee with Norton, 2000).

This report has focused largely on the first two of these arguments and less on the third. Participatory forms of research and inquiry are unlikely in and of themselves to achieve social change, or to remove major conflicts of interest or inequalities. But they *can* be used by existing organisations to strengthen their own voice, understanding and influence. And they *can* be part of the groundwork to help create

partnerships and relationships for bringing about changes in policy and practice. In the UK, the traditional split between the ‘poverty lobby’, focusing on income and rights, and the community action movement, focusing on empowerment and community development, may have held back such initiatives in the past; but some writers suggest that there may now be more of a coming together of these approaches (Henderson and Salmon, 2001).

Research and information gathering can be the first steps in policy influencing – but only if this also includes opportunities to build networks and partnerships to achieve it. In fact, engaging other people and institutions in a commitment to poverty reduction may be how these processes have the greatest potential (Brock *et al.*, 2001). Organisations can also draw on an express public commitment to ‘listen to the poor’ in order to call for action. This goes beyond the subject of this report, to the role of participatory approaches to research and inquiry into poverty in broader debates about the participation of people living in poverty in policy and decision-making processes.

Next steps for social research funders

- Participatory forms of research and inquiry into poverty tend to be at a disadvantage because of their greater costs, longer timescale, and sometimes their lower credibility. The authors of *Poverty First Hand* (Beresford *et al.*, 1999) said: ‘Funding authorities and trusts should take account of the additional funding needs, if they wish to support more participatory research and anti-poverty initiatives which fully involve people with experience of poverty’. The Sustainable

Development Research Network (Eames with Adebowale, 2002) recommended that funders should open up funding streams for participatory research methods, and tackle the cultural and institutional barriers to such research. Funders could consider discussing the realistic requirements of participatory research initiatives, especially in terms of resources and time, and incorporating commitments and guidance covering additional support needs for such initiatives in their guidelines to applicants.

- Those funders already committed to exploring the potential of participatory approaches to research on poverty could play their part in developing their own practice, and also in promoting participatory approaches in exchanges with others. In particular, the Economic and Social Research Council could be approached, both to look again at its definition of research 'users' and to consider funding more experiments in participatory forms of research.
- Networking and sharing experiences are valuable tools for learning. Social research funders who have funded participatory research and inquiry into poverty and related issues could bring together people who have taken part in such initiatives, to exchange lessons and propose practical ways forward.

Next steps for social researchers

- There is nothing like the practical experience of engaging in participatory forms of research and inquiry to change people's minds about its value. So more opportunities should be provided for people to experiment with using

participatory methods. It is also important for practitioners to work with institutions such as universities, networks of social scientists, etc. to embed participatory processes as part of the established body of social research knowledge.

- There seems currently to be no national network to stimulate development and discussion between people working in participatory ways on poverty research and inquiry; a forum to promote regular exchanges could be developed.
- Exchanges between those working on development issues and/or in the 'South' and people working in the UK using participatory approaches from other traditions would also be very valuable. The same is true of exchanges about the connections (and the differences) between work on poverty, disability and user involvement/control, and between community development and participatory approaches to research. These could be arranged by academic institutions, non-governmental organisations and/or social research funders.
- Social researchers should continue to advance the discussion of research ethics, in order to promote the influence and involvement of the research 'subject' at all stages of the research process, including agreement on outputs.

Next steps for government

- If government is to facilitate participatory approaches in research and evaluation, it will need to become more flexible and open-

ended about its agenda, and the questions to be asked of those people affected by government policies.

- If the next steps in the development of participatory forms of research and inquiry into poverty are to move on from the one-off production of valuable insights to becoming an integral part of policy formation, it is crucial that policy makers identify with, and 'own', such approaches – and that the supporters of participatory approaches are also aware of policy makers' own 'voices' and needs. Already, people with direct experience of poverty are involved in exchanges about policy on neighbourhood renewal issues and the National Action Plan on social inclusion in the UK. The National Action Plan is a particularly useful example, in that member states in the EU have to 'own' what is done in their name, including efforts to encourage and support participation by people in poverty in developing and monitoring the Plan.
- These spaces for sustained debates and regular encounters need to be increased and better linked in with mechanisms for national decision making. Participatory forms of research could then become an integral part of these processes. In addition, this should increase policy makers' personal engagement with people in poverty, which is important. Brock (1999) also argues that, if we understand powerlessness in the face of officialdom as a key dimension of 'poverty', empowerment derived from participating in initiatives that make governments more accountable to people in poverty and their organisations is in and of itself a direct way of reducing poverty.

Conclusion

At various stages in this report, it has been argued that it is much more likely that people with direct experience of poverty will be able to shape the research agenda, have more control over the research process and influence what is done with research once it is completed if they are involved in organisations in which they can come together to support one another, debate issues of common concern and pursue their rights. In order to fulfil their potential, therefore, the recommendations above need to be complemented by a more general commitment, by government and others, to increasing the capacity of people with direct experience of poverty and their organisations to engage fully in research and inquiry into poverty, as well as in policy debates and decision-making processes. It is usually much more difficult for organisations to attract funding to support people with experience of poverty to participate in research and policy discussions than it is to get resources for direct service provision. Yet, while this is not the focus of this report, such funding is a key element in ensuring that the recommendations above result in participatory approaches becoming integral to research and inquiry into poverty in the UK:

Society needs to have trust in people experiencing poverty. They have skills, and abilities, and gifts, and a way of creating policies – if they are listened to.

(Member of Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, 2000, cited in Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power, 2000)

Notes

Chapter 1

- 1 The phrase 'authority, control and influence' is used in connection with 'Poverty Reduction Strategies' in the 'South' of the globe by Rosemary McGee (McGee, 2000), though it has also been used by others in different contexts.

Chapter 3

- 1 The authors justify the use of this method to 'help equalise the research relationship and to counter the individualisation of analysis'. Different methods are appropriate in different situations, however, and in some circumstances – to explore particular issues, or to work with certain groups, for example – individual interviews or other methods may be seen as preferable.
- 2 This is one of various 'ladders of participation', the best-known being the one created by Arnstein (1971). Another suggestion is made by Farrington and Bebbington (1993), cited in Cornwall (2000). This distinguishes between depth and breadth of participation. Deep processes engage participants in every stage of the process. But they can remain narrow if only a few people are involved. A wide range of people may be involved in terms of numbers, but their participation can remain shallow. (Both of these were developed to apply to participation in general, not specifically participation in research.)

Chapter 4

- 1 Adapted from Brock *et al.* (2001), and with thanks to Gina Hocking, Oxfam GB. Seeing

poverty as the denial of human rights raises issues about injustice, inequalities and exclusion.

- 2 This is related to the philosophical concept of 'adaptive preferences' – meaning that, in restricted circumstances, people may eventually restrict their own desires to fit in with the situation they are in.
- 3 For example, in a project involving women, they may start to define their objectives in terms of obtaining more control over decision making, rather than merely achieving a specific practical outcome (Roche, 1999).

Chapter 5

- 1 However, the disabled people's movement was keen, at least initially, not to construct its own issues primarily around the theme of 'poverty', as this was seen as one way in which disabled people themselves were excluded from leading the discussion (Beresford, personal communication, 2003).

Chapter 6

- 1 The way in which the researchers tackled the project, and issues that arose, are also described in Lister and Beresford (2000).
- 2 This was to act as a trigger for the discussion of media images of poverty (Lister and Beresford, 2000).
- 3 Qualitative and participatory methods are bracketed together here; see Chapter 8 for a discussion of the assumptions behind this link.

- 4 This can of course apply to non-governmental organisations as well as to more powerful institutions such as the World Bank.
- 5 One of the authors of this report, Fran Bennett, acted as secretary /policy adviser to the Commission, as part of her job as policy adviser on UK and European Union poverty issues for Oxfam GB.
- 6 A staff member 'held the fort' by chairing to enable structured discussion to take place at meetings.
- 7 Moraene Roberts, as an activist with ATD Fourth World, has gathered the detailed information about this project, although she did not personally take part in it, as it was carried out in France and Belgium. All quotes are from ATD Fourth World (1999b), unless otherwise specified.

Chapter 7

- 1 For example, the Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University is helping stakeholders in a Sure Start project, including users, to develop a local evaluation framework/toolkit.
- 2 There is not sufficient space in this report to list all the academic departments and teams using action research and/or participatory methods in their work, in poor areas or with people living in poverty. But they include the Scottish Centre for Social Justice, and the Scottish Poverty Information Unit at Glasgow Caledonian University, as well as other academic teams at the University of the West of England and in the Sociology Department at Warwick University, as well as those mentioned here (which are those better known to the authors).

- 3 This has been expanded and taken forward by others under the umbrella of the European Anti-Poverty Network: see later in this chapter.
- 4 Fears are now being raised about whether the proposed absorption of the National Action Plan process within the more general social protection agenda may threaten the achievement of such goals.

Chapter 8

- 1 Borrowed from Barnes and Mercer (1997).
- 2 The Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University has also developed this method in more tailored ways, by bringing together people from specific groups (such as lone parents with young children) to explore minimum essential living standards for such groups.
- 3 There has also been concern at a country, rather than just individual or community, level about this. Data on poverty may be obtained from countries in the 'South' by northern and international research institutions, and then kept for these institutions' own purposes, rather than being given back to those countries (Hulme, 2003).
- 4 Citing these sources, Lister and Beresford (2000) admit that they themselves have different views on this.
- 5 Note that this discussion is specific in that it is about an academic as the researcher involved.

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Contacts and resources

ActionAid UK: more information about 'Reflect' is available from International Education Unit, ActionAid, Hamlyn House, London N19 5PG; <http://www.actionaid.org/policyandresearch/education/reflect.shtml>

All Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty, c/o Ernie Ross, MP, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA (facilitates exchanges between people with direct experience of poverty and MPs and ministers at Westminster); clerked by UK Coalition Against Poverty (see below)

ARVAC (The Association of Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector), 2D Aberdeen Studios, London N5 2EA; tel.: 020 7704 2315; <http://www.arvac.org.uk>

ATD Fourth World, 48 Addington Square, London SE5 7LB; tel.: 020 7703 3231; email: atd@atd-uk.org; website: <http://www.atd-quartmonde.org/accueil-uk.html>

ATD Fourth World (ATD Quart Monde), Avenue du Général Leclerc, 95480 Pierrelaye, France

Church Action on Poverty, Central Buildings, Oldham Street, Manchester M1 1JT; tel.: 0161 236 9321; website: <http://www.church-poverty.org.uk>

Church Action on Poverty Scotland, The Renfield Centre, 260 Bath Street, Glasgow G2 4JP; tel.: 0141 333 1890

Community Development Foundation, 60 Highbury Grove, London N5 2AG; tel.: 020 7226 5375; website: <http://www.cdf.org.uk>

CPRC (Chronic Poverty Research Centre), at the University of Manchester, has an online research 'toolbox' incorporating participatory research methods: <http://idpm.man.ac.uk/cprc/CPToolbox/Toolboxhome.htm>

European Anti-Poverty Network, Rue du Congrès, 37-41 (6th floor), B-1000 Brussels, Belgium; tel.: (00) 32 2 230 4455; website: <http://www.eapn.org>

Institute for Community Research: <http://www.incommunityresearch.org/research/research.htm>

Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex: participation group website: <http://ids.ac.uk/ids/particip/index.html>. The participation group has just developed an E-Bulletin called MZIZI

Jigso is a partnership of agencies in rural Wales supporting community participation. Contact Megan Evans, c/o Wales Council for Voluntary Action, Baltic House, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff Bay, CF10 5FH; tel: 02920 431729

New Economics Foundation, Cinnamon House, 6-8 Cole Street, London SE1 4YH; tel.: 020 7407 7447; <http://www.neweconomics.org>

Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network, 61 Duncairn Gardens, Belfast BT15 2GB; tel.: 028 9087 5010; email: niapn@nicva.org.uk

Overseas Development Institute: http://www.odi.org.uk/pppg/activities/concepts_analysis/

Oxfam GB, 274 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 7DZ; tel.: 01865 311311; website for UK Poverty Programme: <http://www.oxfamgb.org/ukpp>

PEANuT: Division of Geography, Lipman Building, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne; tel.: 0191 2273951; <http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/peanut>

Poverty Alliance, 2nd Floor, 162 Buchanan Street, Glasgow G1 2LL; tel.: 0141 353 0440)

Research for Real: Dr Cathy Sharp (info@research-for-real.fsnet.co.uk)

SCARF: information from <http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk>

SCDC (The Scottish Community Development Centre), Suite 329, Baltic Chambers, 50 Wellington Street, Glasgow G2 6HJ; tel.: 0141 248 1924; website: <http://www.scdc.org.uk>

Scottish Poverty Information Unit, Glasgow Caledonian University, Park Campus, Glasgow G3 1LP; <http://www.gcal.ac.uk>. The SPIU has produced a 'Community profile resource pack', as a guide for those wishing to research their own communities.

Social Development Direct, 4th Floor, 2 Caxton Street, London SW1H 0QH; tel.: 020 7654 5323; <http://www.sddirect.org.uk>

SOLAR (Social and Organisational Learning as Action Research), at University of the West of England, Bristol: <http://www.uwe.ac.uk/solar>

Standing Conference on Community Development (email: info@sccd.solis.co.uk)

UK Coalition Against Poverty, St Thomas Centre, Ardwick Green North, Manchester M12 6FZ; tel.: 0161 272 9111; email: eileen.devaney@ukcap.org

World Bank: for information about its views on participatory work on poverty: <http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/empowerment/>

Note: Website references correct at the time of writing

