

**Q-Squared in Practice:
A Conference on Experiences of Combining Qualitative and Quantitative
Methods in Poverty Appraisal**

**Centre for International Studies, University of Toronto
May 15-16, 2004**

'P³ > Q²' IN NORTHERN ORISSA; an example of integrating 'Combined Methods' (Q²) through a 'Platform for Probing Poverties' (P³)

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SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION

Summary

Extensive experience of poverty-focussed research in Orissa indicates that the main challenges when combining quantitative and qualitative methods are:

- Achieving integration of quantitative and qualitative methods in the face of poverty's essential multidimensionality and varying, specific manifestations;
- Inclusion, within that integrating framework, of the cultural and political contexts in which poverty reduction programmes must work.

These overall conclusions are based on a case study of the implementation, monitoring and impact, by both a Government of India agency and by agencies of the state government, of well-supported poverty reduction actions in three northern districts of Orissa. The results show that an institutional platform able to probe significant cases of exclusion and of delivery failure in a responsive manner and working with the trust of policy-makers and of the communities is essential. Thus the sequencing and variety of quantitative and qualitative assessments is less a question than is the presence of social development research capacity within the available range of contracting research units. This capacity is partly dependent on the supply of such research by government research institutes, NGO units, and by the staff and institutes of higher education. They are all accustomed to running large-scale surveys but are only rarely exposed to the responsive, iterative and 'probing' investigations needed to tackle the way in which institutional, environmental, economic and social factors combine to create and maintain structures of poverty. The overall investigative capacity also depends on the character of demand from the policy-making side. This can be both partial and uneven so that interpretation of the inputs and frames of policy-makers further complicates the integration of results. It follows that a carefully constructed institutional 'platform' is needed to carry out the translation of complex results into policy relevant narratives and recommendations. Rapid surveys, whether QUAL or QUAN or COMBINED, do not identify the interlinking and multi-dimensional actors that create and maintain poverty. The major

challenge for 'Q² in Practice' is the institutional character of the assessment unit rather than any particular combination of methods.

Coats of Many Colours

As most of the participants in the earlier, innovating Cornell Workshop realised, mixing QUAL and QUAN to create 'Q2' was nothing new; combined methods are essential to any social science approach. In the eastern India assessments reported here we started by thinking that the main methodological problem would be the balancing of multi-disciplinary enquiries (eg agriculture or/and economics or/and social anthropology) and the sequencing of a range of agreed 'poverty-problem-driven' methods. The case-study shows how a range of methods with varying qualitative and quantitative dimensions were developed, in sequence, to contextualise the dynamics of poverty first on the Chottanagpur Plateau of eastern India and then in depth in northern Orissa. The eventual aim was to move from this geographically focussed and detailed analysis to generalise the findings to situations of chronic social exclusion and livelihood insecurity elsewhere. We assumed, based on formal prior agreements, that there was widespread, even if broad, agreement for the aims at project and programme levels and that the main challenge would be to get the right surveys in the right sequence. In fact, deep-seated anxieties about both information and types of knowledge began to surface with increasing rapidity as different poverties were revealed. Some methods we chose simply papered over these anxieties and the different agendas that fuelled them. There were also a number of significant topics that the impact monitors proposed to highlight that were received only with 'silence' or 'no comment'.

Increasingly, the assessment process was contested. This has clear parallels in the Combined Methods experience carried out at national levels and with World Bank and other 'blue chip' backing. The main driving force behind the 'Q2' discussion was not methodology operating in some effectively neutral zone of social science but the energy of the donors' institutional knitting needles. Contrasted 'finance and economics' and 'civil society' approaches to poverty reduction challenges were woven into colourful, and hopefully credible, garments of 'income and expenditure numbers' linked and stitched with 'participating voices'. The hope in 'combining methods' was that an enriched text could be created that combined the analysis of aggregated economic data and qualitative accounts of institutional constraints and conflicts over power. The World Development Report (WDR) for 2000/2001 'Attacking Poverty' showed exactly the way a multicoloured donor garment could be stitched together suggesting each of independence, a range of stakeholder views, and yet technical authority. The eventual text of the WDR papered over many disagreements within the World Bank as the drafting team moved from one draft to another and back to previous stages and, towards the end of this process, Ravi Kanbur resigned (Wade 2001). Some saw it as an outcome of the disagreements; others were surprised that the technical issues concerned were serious enough to warrant resignation.

THE ORISSA EXAMPLE AND ITS CONTEXT

Participatory Rural Development Origins

The developments in Orissa reveal a similar mixture of 'combined method' technical issues – including judgements about the effectiveness of targeting surveys and/or participatory data collection – together with far more fundamental institutional disagreements over the importance of 'universal' and 'contextual' knowledge.

The attempt to create and support an institutional platform for multi-dimensional poverty research was first raised in the context of a three state, Government of India initiative in eastern India designed to bring improved livelihoods to poor men and women of the Chottanagpur Plateau. This was a DFID funded programme for Rainfed Farming improvements in eastern India. It operated as a programme with built in diversity, rather than as a single unified project, because each of the three states that were participating - Jharkand, West Bengal and Orissa – had their own state coordinators, with differing technical and social priorities or interpretations, very different political and governmental contexts, and somewhat different impact monitoring arrangements. The executive agency was a Government of India cooperative unit supplying farm inputs. It had three years previous experience of operating rural development services within a 'participatory' framework involving mainly tribal men and women as the key stakeholders. It had recruited additional contract staff with prior experience of grass-roots community development. Staff from either community development or agronomics backgrounds were all similarly employed as 'community organisers' (C.O.s) responsible for a cluster of resource-poor villages. Field Specialists advised and coordinated the work of the C.O.s. The cadre of Field Specialists was responsible for a very wide range of rural development sub-disciplines including all farm, many off-farm and gender and community development interventions. But information on the likely impact on poverty and livelihoods from this innovative programme was lacking.

Participation as Problem and Opportunity

It was determined early on that much core data for impact assessment would be numerical and based on the analysis of programme activities and outputs. On the other hand, the programme also had a heavy emphasis on participatory operations and so this aspect of impact would need to be assessed through 'participatory' methodologies. There had indeed been very significant donor support for PRA from the beginning. It was given a high profile in the range of programme aims, considerable consultancy support, and received training visits from distinguished 'participatory experts' – for example, from Robert Chambers and others.

The eastern India programme thought of itself as 'participatory' in its reputation just like its "daughter" initiative 'the Western India Rainfed Farming Project'⁴. Mosse (2000:31) argues of the western project that by 1995 (the western project's third year) demonstration of its participatory approach had become *the* key project purpose. Participation had become a way of talking about rather than doing things. It is, argues Mosse, 'not a provable approach or methodology' (ibid:32). He argues that the project had, through ritualised expression in internal meetings and with the donor, constantly repeated the core model so that it confirmed its own presuppositions. Yet in its detailed practice it emphasised strong control over the implementation of project activities and patronage between it and client rural groups. The result was a largely invisible internal contradiction. This contradiction was actively managed by the project through ritualised repetition and re-articulation. But it was further 'managed' by the commissioning of a set of largely 'participatory impact assessments' (made by teams indistinguishable from the project/consultant teams). These demonstrated that the project was perceived by villagers as having significant positive impacts in areas of livelihood support.

Mosse's own interest in 'participation' centred on the potential for the project and its groups to demonstrate 'local autonomy, sustainability and project withdrawal'. These aims and targets were unrealistic in the east since villagers are actively searching for patrons to show an interest, whether they are project, political or commercial patrons.

Polly Hill (19xx) records, for residents of rainfed farming areas in Karnataka, that their only way out of poverty is through making outside connections and gaining patrons; the eastern (and possibly the western?) rainfed farming improvement area residents would share this evaluation of their chances.

The justification of 'participatory' exercises – PRAs, PLAs, PPAs etc – is that they should lead to organisational learning in two ways. First there is the capture, in a timely way, of 'the voices of the poor'. Second, it is expected from role reversals of participating officials, facilitators and *animateurs* who learn to put themselves in the shoes of the poor by lowering their public status in the exercises, walking through the village and sitting on mats at the same level in village meetings etc. The expectation is that this style of equitable and mutually engaged work can be institutionalised both in the field and within supporting management support and supervision systems. But, somehow, these exercises were disappointing both in their ability to reveal underlying agendas and dynamics or to lead to open-ended process learning.

In other words, when the poverty-focussed programme thought of itself as 'participatory' it led contradictions and tensions in evaluation to surface rapidly. These tensions were managed by simply allowing QUAL and QUAN methods to run in parallel, without resolving them. Yet there was increasingly recognition that the lack of integration would make it difficult to measure achievements and thus secure further funding.

The Range of Methods and Bases for Integration

DFID then agreed to support the training and institutionalisation of an impact assessment 'platform' or 'unit' at headquarters with a tie-in to programme management. The team that was recruited worked within the programme context for two years, but **not** as part of the programme management structure, and within that period collected a variety of information, including a purpose built and explicitly integrated and in-depth 'Q²' panel survey of 60 households and their changing livelihood activities over the three agricultural seasons of a complete year in northern Orissa. We took advantage of the dominance of the non-cash economy in these areas. The importance of in-kind agricultural wage payments (in the form of traditional measures of paddy) opened up a specific research opportunity to develop integrated income/expenditure data based on paddy and days of food security as the *enumeraire*. This meant we could record both the income sources of livelihood activities and expenditures in the same framework. The year chosen was, however, one in which agricultural yields may have been lower than usual because of high winds and storms on the edge of the major cyclone that hit the Orissa coast in 1999. There was extensive support for the collection of a further one or two years' data in Orissa and West Bengal; but changing aid priorities and the pressures to reorganise DFID meant that the extension was not funded under the GOI agency led rainfed farming programme.

A great deal of other QUAL and QUAN impact assessment activity continued within the programme but the streams did not integrate. Various kinds of technical agricultural, economic appraisal and social and community assessments had been attempted. None of the surveys were entirely satisfactory in identifying the many constraints on key programme activities. For example, micro-credit use through groups and the design and the creation of 'collective' and innovative natural resources assets were continually problematic in the sense that there were moments of apparent success followed by reversals and uncertainty about how to proceed. Multidisciplinary enquiry into these usually under-performing components required a new way of thinking about research and evaluation.

The investigations from 'the platform' that were successfully completed were:

- Village profiles in each of Orissa, West Bengal and Jharkand using the programme staff as key informants (Ashley and Jones 1995);
- Surveys of programme interventions, and the economic enterprises created through, them in all three states (Glebe 1998);
- Rolling PRAs of one week duration in each of 13 villages of northern Orissa with populations between 100 to 200 households (S Khan and M.J. Rew 1999);
- Pilot and more intensive sample surveys in Jharkand of more than 100 households using programme and non-programme samples and a questionnaire covering incomes and expenditure data and 'network and social capital' data (S Kumar, in progress).

In addition to these general and household surveys, the team in Orissa concentrated on three Q² tasks:

- Assets surveys for selected programme and non-programme hamlets and villages (ISED and A.W. Rew 2000 and 2001);
- A framework in which we looked at households and their food security sources by season and then extracted both numerical analysis from the changing seasonal data plus qualitative analysis of topics and situations (M.J. Rew and R. Satpathy 1999 to 2002).
- Open ended case studies, especially of women's livelihoods as labourers and off-farm entrepreneurs (M.J. Rew and N. Satpathy 2001)

After the initial 2 year period, Q² researches continued in the northern Orissa districts because alternative funding was finally found. The Institute of Socio-Economic Development (ISED), a Bhubaneswar-based research oriented NGO, employed and managed the impact assessment team under funding from a DFID international initiative to strengthen Social Development Research Capacity, including in eastern India. The funding included a major element of experiential training, skill development, and team building and research training supported by international consultancy. The team has been able to continue the last three investigations and to maintain the seasonal panel surveys over three years across a range of village types and with only intermittent supervision. The analysis in this paper is based mainly on the results from these last three field exercises. Results from the investigations of local government have appeared in N and R Satpathy (2003), SA Khan and N R Das Patnaik (2003), and A.W. Rew and S A Khan (2004).

Together, the investigations and the opportunity to assess the dynamics of change (and non-change) have taken the team much further than did the many initial weeks of PRA investigation or the questionnaire surveys. The research team has now moved on to probe poverties further in the context of PRI action and resources. Current priority investigations include investigations with and through the Zilla Parishad and in liaison with District level officers as well as with a sample of Gram Panchayats and Panchayat Samiti. A range of 'probing' investigations has also been carried out into:

- Communication channels, coping strategies and self-organising networks of enterprise and social support (A.W.Rew 2003a);
- Local government dynamics and the training and mobilisation needs of gram panchayats (R and N Satpathy 2003);
- High school students' perceptions of employment opportunities and occupational prestige (N Satpathy, S Shetty and A.W.Rew 2002)

- The institutional map of district and local government (N R Das Pattnaik 2003).

The team is now based within a network of social development researchers in Orissa and West Bengal – *Jibika Vikas Samaj Gabesna*. (Results of the first conference at which it emerged are available at www.anthrobase.com.) The research team members in Keonjhar provide the secretariat for the network, which is also registered as a Keonjhar based NGO.

COMMUNITY DECISION-MAKING

Tea-Stall and Graveyard Talk

The full results centred on the three years of integrated QUAL-QUAN panel surveys are being processed. It is already clear that longer-term studies lead to very different conclusions than rapid snap-shot surveys and consultations. Findings on ‘meeting places for consultation and decision-making’ provide a case in point. What you say depends on where you say it.

Each village has its assemblies. There may be an assembly at village level to organise a festival; or at hamlet level to deal with a natural resource management problem. But these are occasional, and decisions can often be contested or weakly enforced. Stronger enforcement is attached to *jati* decisions - these are the local corporate caste groups that regulate marriage and monitor social status and form inter-village alliances with similar groups in nearby villages. Both caste and tribal groups have *jati* associations. Each *jati* alliance has a regulatory council that meets, usually no more than annually, in rotation around the member villages. *Adda*, on the other hand, are everyday informal meetings at which friends – often from the same hamlet or ritual membership - generally gather to share news and form views.

Social and public gatherings tie up with meeting places in an interesting way. We are mainly interested in 7 villages. The results show that the village with the local government office – the *panchayat* office – also has a range of other facilities based at a junction of dirt roads – including a tea stall. This is an important meeting place in the local district in part because the village is locally dominant with a Brahmin group to whom other groups have service relations. It also has a locally prominent Shiva temple, is very productive in local agricultural terms and holds a locally renowned and profitable festival each year. There is a much smaller village centre in another sampled village – with just a junction, a *paan*-shop and a cycle-shop.

The rainfed farming programme is quite active compared to other government departments and visits the villages reasonably regularly. When it holds PRAs and other consultations it moves beyond the villages with ‘centres’ to other villages even further ‘from the end of the tarmac’. In these cases, it usually holds meetings at a central place which is either ‘obvious’ from the geography or is suggested as appropriate by the villagers they have met. So each of the four villages has a meeting point for dealing with officials and with programme staff. In one case the meeting point is the veranda of a lineage head (thought of as a ‘bigger farmer’); in the fourth case it is the tribal graveyard – a set of stones under an old spreading tamarind tree. Sometimes the programme or government will go to the homes of current and ex Local Government representatives. There are 9 of these venues for official and other interactions.

In addition to the meeting places used for village or official gatherings there are a whole set of natural features, junctions, homes, public buildings, tea stalls, paan

shops, and clubs etc at which friends gather regularly to settle village, hamlet, tribal, labour availability and food security matters. These are the *adda*. While we were carrying out fieldwork in eastern Orissa, Amartya Sen visited Kolkata. The newspapers in west Bengal and Orissa were full of his visit – ‘Nobel prize economist returns to his old haunts’ etc. – they gave front page coverage to his visit to the *adda* of his student days; this was a stall in the city where he had met his friends for tea and gossip.

Adda, although a Bengali word, is frequently used in northern Orissa villages to refer to the small meeting areas in which men and women congregate to talk through village and hamlet affairs⁵. They are very important gravitation points in village social structure. Controversial issues will first be aired here with people with whom you feel comfortable, an opinion is formed and then this is negotiated or modified after discussion in other more public meeting places in the village. The friends and kin who congregate at the *adda* form the real units of ‘social capital’ in the village. The tea stall in the dominant village in the four sampled villages is one such *adda* – for the ‘posh’ people of the area and where no doubt Professor Sen would be very welcome if he wanted to change his *adda* to one in Orissa.

To locate and understand the scope of the *adda* in rural northern Orissa you need to be very patient and observe behaviour more than ask questions or invite public discussion. It is easy enough after a few days to ask for the tea stalls and then to guess that people will meet there. But how, without observing over time, do you guess that the graveyard, or that tree, or that stream are key meeting points for many stakeholders when discussing the important news and the distributional outcomes of government and business developments?

The gatherings provide sounding boards for villagers’ thinking on official encounters and on schemes that will have implications for their poverty not other peoples’ poverties. Villagers need first to discuss, among themselves, their anxieties and tactics over these encounters with other groups and with outsiders. Without prior and patient discussions, effective consent and buy-in to an agency’s agenda will not happen.

The rural development programme placed far too much faith in the ‘face-maintaining’ views of the larger assemblies called at major meeting points. Consent was often lacking because of impatience. A PRA was trusted to deliver ‘participation’ without caring what the details of participation in that context could mean. Authority was also lacking because the PRA required a canvassing of solutions without any realistic prospect of tasking a line department to take action or to ensure coordination with another department. It became clear that the programme was ultimately able to dispense only unusually large ‘mercy’ payments and benefits; and these to people who joined it in ways that were not always clear. The programme could present ideals and prescriptions. Real power lay elsewhere, often with the Block officers and the Collectorate.

Our experience in northern Orissa made us very doubtful indeed about accelerated PPAs and PRAs in order to cover large samples quickly. For example, we are somewhat incredulous that CARE should consider they can succeed with the ‘participatory development’ of water supplies in a village in one week using a team of 12 people (Manikutty 1997). How do they achieve consent and buy-in?

LIVELIHOOD CHOICES AND RISKS

'More Trees Please'

One of the more striking examples of apparent immediate buy-in and then growing resistance concerned agro-forestry. Our studies convinced us to side-step the rituals of 'participatory' methods as far as possible because we found the results so unreliable when translated into 'ground realities'. Views are contested, of course, and the participatory methods recognise this. PRA and PPA try to generalise quickly in the interests of timeliness rather than totally accurate results. So some inaccuracy would be expected and tolerable. Our problem was not that participatory methods were not 100% accurate; rather it was that they were often downright misleading.

'Participatory tree planting' was highly ambiguous and even nugatory. There are parallels with the WIRFP experience. Mosse (2001) notes, for example, that villagers in the western project expressed a strong preference for eucalyptus as housing timber when they had no experience of the species. In this case, needs were shaped by perceptions of what the agency was able to deliver; villagers wanted known benefits in the short term that might be jeopardised by more complex expressions of preference.

In the eastern case there was also a demand through the PRAs for trees. In the east there was far less ventriloquism of a government department and the availability of its supplies. A more complex set of social and political ambiguities and mistakes are revealed. Initial 'participatory planning' with programme groups and group members identified major seasonal shortfalls in income and the need for natural resource development. There was unused upland and apparent scope for agricultural diversification through a tree crop, specifically cashew. Facilitators of the PRAs that established the scope for villages to plant cashew through the project were easily misled.

First, things are not what they seem when short and long-term considerations and social relations are considered. Second what one might do in theory is another matter when it comes to the point. Third, there is the incomplete representation of responsibilities. By offering to organise information and the planning process the programme states it is taking charge of the activity it itself identifies— but is then often unable to sort out the responsibilities of government departments, including forestry or horticulture or to maintain the same degree of follow-up on the local process.

The fuller story of cashew planting is that behind the poor's voiced demand for tree crops was a set of claims on land and the uncertainties about trade-offs between short-term and long-term benefits. In one case – well known to the community organisers but then ignored as the PRAs got underway in other villages – cashew planting by the programme was used to establish stronger claims over common land of uncertain status. The land lay between two villages, both of whom claimed it as "their's"; and there were also claims by a line ministry. By planting trees in the name of a programme group and an adopted village, one side to the dispute had engineered an advantage. In another case, tree planting revealed irreconcilable underlying conflicts between neighbouring hamlets that were not previously known to the programme staff and were not mentioned in the PRA.

In other cases, programme staff began to find that there was considerable damage to young cashew saplings and, in some cases, the active uprooting of young plants by farmers ploughing their only recently planted fields. In trying to explain the high level

of activity in cashew planting coupled with early re-ploughing of the newly planted fields, a complex picture emerged. It was not simple lack of maintenance or a clear change of heart after planting. The causes lay in complex and not always explicit calculations of short and long term benefit and in relationships to powerful external agents. People ask for tree planting because they want immediate labour payments for the casual employment that comes with planting and nursery operations; but also because they want to maintain 'face' with the community organiser (CO). The CO uses the PRA and other discussions to indicate that villagers can make choices about their type and level of participation in the programme activities. The villagers recognise in the person of the CO a system of discretionary and 'mercy' payments. Today on offer it is immediate payment for cashew planting, plus a vision of longer-term benefits from the cashew yield, for which they do not, or will not, quite see the implications.

In part, the uncertainty of longer-term calculations comes from the great ambiguity of land rights following tree planting. There is a history of reclaiming forest estate land in the area by the Forest Department. What would not be revealed in a PRA is that a high percentage of villagers' cropping land had been encroached from the forest. So villagers were somewhat anxious that cashew planting could lead to the greater visibility of the encroachments and to a forcible repossession of village cropping land at a time when the demand for cropping land was increasing from household division. These anxieties did not (and could not?) surface in the PRAs. Moreover, the villagers are somewhat aware that although the programme talks knowledgeably about tree planting operations, programme organisers are not able to task the forest department to support or even tolerate what is classified as a horticultural planting rather than a forest replanting exercise.

Leaving aside for the moment these important tenure and government action uncertainties, results from the integrated surveys show that the villagers do not subscribe to a model by which they become cash-cropping cashew farmers rather than subsistence rice cultivators. They need paddy to eat in their households and to pay for village labour inputs. Moreover, there is a clear prestige attached to being even an average-yield paddy cultivator in a livelihood arena in which very few indeed are self-sufficient in paddy. So the villagers cannot even apprehend, let alone fully comprehend and accept, the scenario in which they gain high incomes from cash-cropping – they were told they could earn Rs5000 from selling cashew nuts and should then use the money to buy food from traders.

Finally, neither QUAN nor populist consultation methods can analyse the changes in the farming system needed to plant cashew saplings successfully. The local practice is to turn village livestock loose to graze after the paddy harvest. The CO for the project had thought through the changes in grazing practice that would be needed and suggested to villagers at the time of the PRA, and after, that they could institute controlled grazing to protect the immature cashew plants. But not all villagers have cashew benefits; whereas all would be required to constrain their livestock. These inequities are hard to manage as many have reason to ignore the new livestock management rule. Tensions then result as some resent the rule's infringement and others resent the need for the rule at all. The inequities might be managed if the C.O. continues in post. But he might leave the village; or the results of inequity become too hard to manage. As a result, most villagers recognise that the controlled grazing measure is precarious.

At the end of the PRA process, although there were many uncertainties to which it had contributed there was one definite product. The PRAs had helped create or confirm 'farmers' as the target of the programme. Increasingly, the programme

placed emphasis on farm and off-farm agricultural solutions, making large expenditures on soil and water conservation and tree planting. Our quantitative household surveys, on the other hand, show that paddy cultivation is a significant but not dominant part of most livelihood portfolios. Income from other crops is insignificant. It is district based non-farm labour that provides the major alternative to income from paddy and allows the vast majority of households to survive. The programme provided 'agricultural' solutions in part because its core business was agricultural supply. But the PRA methods helped the programme to build up a picture of the villagers as 'farmers' – who of course would want agricultural solutions. This was only partly true; the villagers were 'rural folk' with diverse livelihoods.

In summary, the key factors leading to unevenness in the introduction of cashew were the usual suspects of conflicting short-term and long-term benefits, maintaining 'face' with the programme *animateurs*, and high ambiguity concerning land. The programme's 'mistakes' arose because neither PRA nor household survey data are able to identify the underlying agendas, neither on their own, nor in sequence. What is needed is long-term, **integrated** quantitative and qualitative research on social and institutional relations. The research design should assess how longer-term choices evolve, especially the extent to which the diversification and cash-cropping models are accepted into the local society. Appleton and Booth (2001) argue that the integration of combined methods is rare. This illustration in upland Orissa raises the question: is it even worth trying to integrate the results of large scale attitudinal and household surveys given the underlying complexities of social and political relations, and without the ability to follow up with 'probing', responsive investigations?

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Hobley (2001), in a synthesis of the Policy, Institutions and Processes (PIP) component of DFID's Sustainable Livelihoods work, has noted its major understatement of social development dimensions. Social factors are certainly mentioned – but there is little real account taken of them in the development of the framework, except as detail. Ellis (2000) argues that 'social capital' is important as an asset; and that 'access through institutions' is important in mediating the conversion of livelihood assets into livelihood activities. It is nonetheless remarkable in Ellis' otherwise excellent synthesising book that social relations and processes receive little systematic attention. The only social factor that receives detailed treatment is gender. Methods to assess social capital are reviewed only briefly.

This gap between intention and accomplishment in both cases follows from the use of social factors as residual complications that 'mediate' individual or household decision-making. It is as if people are capable of taking decisions somehow 'outside' of social and power relations and that (rather poorly defined) social factors come in 'after' the decision has been taken in outline economic terms. In comparison, in our survey reports for the eastern India programme, livelihood activities were analysed as the product of social constructions based on experiences of rank, authority, power, gender, kinship, cultural practice and social status that have economic implications and natural resource and physical contexts, but are not determined by them. The job of 'livelihoods' analysis is to link the separate social, NR and economic variables and not to assume one set can only be 'intervening'.

There are significant cost implications if Ellis's approach is accepted. Ellis argues that 'concentrated methods', for example PRAs and participatory wealth ranking, can provide sufficient data to establish a 'one spread-sheet page' of livelihood 'Assets'⁶. 'Activities' can then be assessed by means of questionnaire household sample

surveys. In fact, the results of a Tanzania household sample survey carried out specifically for his review did not justify elaborate analysis, although useful counter-intuitive lessons were learned. One possible, but not explicitly mentioned, implication of this particular outcome could be that rough and ready methods to establish 'assets' may suffice; household or other intensive surveys could be dispensed with and one page summaries based on participatory appraisals substituted.

The Ellis (2000) methodological framework is as follows:

Livelihood 'domain'	Assets (5 or more)	Mediating social factors (9 factors)	Diverse Activities
Method proposed	PRAs, wealth ranking exercises etc	To be determined in each context	Household questionnaire sample surveys

This approach would have been very misleading in our sample area. Livelihoods are *jibika*, ways of life and social status as well as micro-economic activity. For example, some livelihood choices are more 'dubious' than others in terms of long-term citizenship in the local agrarian society. Specific household activities reflect socially constructed priorities about work, consumption, religious and cultural responses, and invite statements of social identity from surrounding groups⁷.

The methodological and research framework we adopted in the eastern India research are presented in the next table. The shaded cells represent the main line of data collection and analysis. It will be seen that even extended 'PRAs' were not thought to be especially useful. Control over measurement error was rated more highly than reduced sampling error since our survey method allowed for many cross checks and our purposive samples were carefully selected after much piloting.

Stage of Piloting and Analysis of Context	Intensive Surveys Stage	Survey Analysis Stage
Key informant and institutional interviews to establish all contexts: ▼	The preferred method is: Repeat interviews using standard schedules for quantitative data; plus rapport building and open ended but theoretically focussed discussions for qualitative data. ►	Refine information on contexts and 'capital assets'
Social history of community co-operation, disputes, and dispute resolution ▼		Create ▲ quantitative database of livelihood activities
NR and Physical contexts ▼		Situational analysis of case-studies ▼
Financial and HR contexts ▼		Analysis of institutional stakeholders' policy and operational agendas/roles
Admin and Govt contexts ►		

AN INSTITUTIONAL PLATFORM

The Institutional Challenge when 'Combining Methods'

The account so far is of how, and why, we evolved a particular Q² methodology. The methodology was based less on specific QUAL or QUAN 'tools', or some

combination of them, than on the investigative abilities and cultural aptitudes of local graduates and their employment and training to carry out repeat Q² household interviews. They were also expected to remain in the local area after the project ended, using their newly acquired research skills. The institutional location and capacity of this team was critical. To avoid assumptions that the location must be in government, within the programme where we began the work, in academia, in private sector consultancy, or outside any of these, we chose to think of it as a 'platform' (rather than firm, institute etc) from which Q² integration could be attempted. We were also convinced from our studies that it is 'poverties' in their multi-dimensional social, political and economic contexts that must be assessed, not an undifferentiated 'poverty' found at highly aggregated levels, unless that is we mean **only** income insufficiency, and perhaps not even then. The assessment of poverties depends on being able to probe into the multi-dimensionality that holds the poverties in place. We found that certain poverties were highly embedded in multiple, reinforcing strands of vulnerability: these strands included interlocking issues of social rank, political position, major constraints of productivity, lack of access to markets and inputs, local citizenship, ill-health, poor education and so on. Hence we came to think of 'probing' into the specific circumstances of poverty for any given management or policy problem, using QUAL and QUAN data usually derived from our repeat interview panel surveys and from the other team sources listed on page 5 of this paper. One measure of the acceptance of the quality of the work and its relevance is that 'PRI and poverties' assessments are now beginning to develop in cooperation with district and local government administration and in liaison with state planning and development coordination officials (see, for example, Satpathy & Satpathy 2003 and Khan and Das Patnaik 2003)

The academic institutes and private sector consultancies that were approached as potential 'platforms' were either not interested or were unable to operate in this way and could only offer minimally-piloted large-scale questionnaire surveys, sometimes with an unconvincing bolt-on of 'participant observation' or 'PRA'. Some NGOs were interested in principle but did not have the required capacity. The eastern India rainfed farming programme was judged to have completed its work and so could not afford an impact assessment unit. It was fortunate that DFID's Social Development Research Capacity Strengthening project had a presence in the region and so could offer technical advice and financial seed-money to continue the 'platform' for the 'poverties probes'. The funding allowed what had started as a field research team employed by two UK universities that were working in partnership with an operational poverty-focussed programme to continue its research and form the core of a network of social researchers with its own independent Q² work-plan.

The difficulties faced by the team came mainly from failing to realise that combined methods in the field would not necessarily answer the more institutional and governmental questions of how the information would be integrated or rejected at programme levels. Combining methods in the field is very likely to miss the need to combine methods in terms of the ideologies and norms about translation, integration and the control of monitors', organisers' and communities' behaviours that governed institutional offices. Booth, Leach and Tierney (1999) recognise this in other instances and ask for an approach that is more institutionally self-aware and positions people's own efforts in the context of the side-effects of government power.

All the signs of participatory management were there in the rainfed farming programme; and so too was a very professional approach to technical and economic evaluation. In short, it was not an organisation that was either sloppy, or run on 'do-as-I-say' principles. There were programmes of technical training in monitoring and evaluation; and managers and more junior technical and community organiser staff

all sat at the same level on mats on the floor. Managers invited discussion, spoke in a consensual way and asked that the programme 'be participatory'. So it is worth setting out the difficulties and experience they encountered with combined assessments in some detail.

First, the 'mangle of practice' (Pickering 1995) in a large field operation worked to dilute many of management's everyday concern with 'making it participatory'. This 'mangle' did not just lessen awareness of QUAL aspects; management was often not overly impressed, either, with QUAN evaluations based on large-scale datasets that made heavy demands on field staff's time in collection and processing. 'Practice' meant operational adjustments often based on *ad hoc* decisions in order to respond to emergencies, delays, miscalculations, and so on.

Second, much contradiction remained 'off-site', so to speak, because it reflected the contrasted generic or universal explanations of the donor and management, and state and national governments. Although field staff and consultancy teams tried to fit together some site-specific accounts of impact 'in the middle', these were always seen to lack authority because neither from the donor, nor from government, nor large enough in their coverage, and so on. Community organisers who had discovered local strategies and thought they could be disseminated or improved, were swamped by universal certainties imported from the latest policy line in DFID, or from the World Banks' economic analysis, or pronouncements from the 'participation' gurus, 'micro-credit' gurus and so on. External advice often arrived un-integrated and in quantity (except perhaps at the time of the annual missions, although even here the strain of integration meant that written recommendations were often very late in arriving in the programme.) The volume of competing new tools and external perspectives on offer usually led senior decision-makers to rely on their own instinctive and 'agriculturalist' views about effect and effectiveness; although they would allow the latest recommended new techniques to be 'tried out' by one unit or another in one or two villages or areas.

Third, there was the gap in knowledge between external and field staff about key programme concepts. For example, the virtue of 'more participation' and 'individual rights and equality' was 'self-evident' to almost all consultant and donor social scientists. But field staff found it difficult to translate 'participation', for example, into Oriya (or Bengali or Hindi). The words that *were* used could not capture that sense of the potential for greater self-actualisation through (citizen) involvement at the core of the English language concept. As a result, when donor staff and consultants or management asked field staff questions about the programme's performance in terms of these key concepts, the result was often an awkward silence. In the set public performances of the programme – workshops and so on - field staff learnt to recite these concepts and the aims like *mantras*; but in the field, and in one-to-one discussions, they had great difficulty in interpreting their own social structures back to the questioners.

The Assessment of 'Credit Problems' as an Example

The mix of these three limits on institutional learning can best be seen in the way 'credit activity' was diagnosed and its problems researched. Grants to 'self-help groups' (SHGs) and help in linking them to rural banks were key programme components. In the initial PRAs the responses about credit were quite uniform. "We are suffering from debt exploitation... Money-lenders are charging us high rates.... There is the humiliation of the negotiations with the money-lender even if the interest is satisfactory." The programme was pleased to hear these reports since an

additional credit line for community groups was a high priority for disbursement and 'savings and credit through SHGs' appeared to give substance to what could be meant by 'participation'.

Villagers in programme villages were asked to form SHGs and undertake savings and credit activities. If they saved regularly, the programme would place many income generating programme inputs through the groups. In time, some groups – with, for example, soil and water conservation and/or tree planting activities that entailed payments to village labour - accumulated large group 'savings'. A great deal of attention was then paid to helping the groups to use their funds on behalf of 'group and village development'.

The programme was perplexed when it became clear that groups were not using funds but just letting them accumulate. There was surprise that, in the face of the chronic poverty of many households, few people took food or other loans from the groups when money was readily available. One explanation offered was that the groups may have been 'insufficiently exposed' to debt and credit. There were a number of consultancies to consider 'the group credit problem' but perplexity continued. The exigencies of practice meant that 'the credit problem' always resurfaced with great urgency attached to it so that 'a consultancy' was the usual response rather than detailed monitoring investigations or impact assessments carried out by programme staff.

Another reason for the lack of resolution stemmed from an inability to choose between competing generic explanations. Those possible solutions that held most sway (hence as explanations for the problem) were as follows:

- Step up the parallel search for new medium-sized enterprises for the groups to invest in because 'economic growth will reduce poverty';
- Give 'our' approach more time to work since SHGs are 'by definition participatory' and other experience (usually from Bangladesh or Bangalore etc) confirms "for certain" that SHG savings and credit "work well";
- Simply maintain the SHG system and the unused group funds as they were, in order to demonstrate that this was a high profile, high spending agency, able to patronise whole villages and make significant financial impacts there.

Third, the community organisers could not clear their minds sufficiently of 'modern' ideas to understand what they did see in the villages when they visited. Although they knew the economy and social relations functioned differently than their 'modern' understandings predicted, they did not have sufficient confidence to present their findings about subsistence, hierarchy, and group solidarity into the prevailing discourse using ideas of 'debt exploitation', 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'feudal social relations'. Clashes between different codes for governing 'the conduct of conduct' were evident and could not be resolved (cf. Rose 1999: xxi)

It was left to 'the Q² platform' to present a different view of 'the credit problem' based on detailed research. In view of the programme's perplexity about low credit utilisation we expected to find little borrowing activity in our household surveys. Instead, we discovered an almost continuous demand for food and other credit. Loans of paddy were frequent and managed by women. Day-to-day food consumption was the main responsibility of women and if their granaries were short of grain they turned to their *adda* group members and within the hamlet through networks of trust. New brides were the most vulnerable because they lacked established social ties within the set of in-marrying wives and could face difficulty when negotiating loans. Social relations also channel loans and borrowings in other

ways. One reason offered for reluctance to accept loans, even if in-kind in the form of grain, from the group fund was that it would signal hunger to other group members and their families. Food scarcity was easier to confess when it was to fellow *adda* members. Another reason for not making loans from the group fund was 'social strength' – members, especially women members, wanted the fund to accumulate to advertise their assets and against some future major calamity. There was also a sense that access entitlements should be held static so that latecomers could not enter the SHG and acquire access to the funds when they joined the hamlet or village. In summary, we found a low demand for publicly-visible cash loans and a high demand for inter-household loans in-kind much borrowing and many local coping strategies reliant on the quality of social relations. Field staff members were aware of these dynamics in a diffuse and anecdotal way but were silent when reprimanded about 'their' SHGs failure to revolve group funds. The programme largely disregarded these results. They were seen as not 'generalisable' and/or likely to reduce further aid disbursements. Further consultancies and experiments continued on their way.

CONCLUSIONS

If natural scientists want to apply science they recognise they must first construct or find, and then maintain, a laboratory for the purpose. The argument in this paper is similar. If we want to see 'Q' squared in practice then there must be special purpose 'laboratories' or institutional platforms that will encourage experimentation in methods and theorise after probing the detailed dynamics of the phenomena under investigation.

In a natural science laboratory there will also be an incentive system to encourage good science including, most importantly, mechanisms of peer review concerning research design and the evaluation of results. This framework of incentives barely exists in the cases of poverty-relevant investigation we have been considering. Universities and government research institutes have their own systems of review but, in eastern India, these mostly concern the submission of papers to journals and applications for research grants. In the various 'policy analysis units' we have encountered the main incentives come from patronage and through 'the praise culture' (Phillips 2000). Martin Rew (2003) for example, reports the surprisingly long expressions of praise and encomium at technical meetings called to settle operational or policy priorities. Moreover, just as individual field staff fell silent at difficult moments in the link between development concepts and their experience so, too, agencies do not always want to face issues of impact on the range of poverties they encounter and maintain their own silence or displace the problems onto high praise for what has been modest and contested achievement.

The integration of Q^2 in practice requires social researchers and policy-makers to agree to a research design that will allow a range of poverties, subject to a multi-dimensional set of forces to be probed, and reported. Although there have been some advances in achieving this end, donors have not (with the exception of Canada, the Netherlands and DFID for a short period) been exceptionally courageous or ambitious in supporting these major needs in social development research capacity building (see Alan Rew 2003b).

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⁴ The eastern project was started three years before the western project and pioneered, under the leadership of Professor Bob Willey, University of East Anglia, a no-subsidy participatory agricultural technology development working with individual self-selected farmers. A CDS Swansea team visited this eastern project when designing a participatory rainfed farming project in the west of India. The western project had a wider range of planned inputs and worked with 'project groups' not individual households and was able to build on the eastern experience. The background to the eastern project is described in A W Rew and M J Rew (2003).

⁵ In Oriya these 'gossiping circles' are sometimes known as *katthia* or *matha*.

⁶ How 'social capital' is established as an asset in this way is not explained.

⁷ See Ruud (2000) for an excellent analysis of the consumption and cultural ideas and behaviour of *chotalok* in relation to Operation Barga in Midnapur; and their reactions to tribal consumption and sexual behaviour as part of a 'cultural reform' movement.