

REPOA

Experiences in Participatory Research and Micro-Macro Policy Linkages

Contribution for the colloquium organised by Hakikazi Catalyst at Bagamoyo, 12th-14th August 2002 - "Popularising policy and influencing change through action research advocacy and creative communication."

1. Introduction

Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA) is a research Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) with the mandate to undertake and facilitate research in the area of poverty and related issues. The vision of REPOA is to see poverty sustainably reduced in Tanzania. REPOA's objective is "to deepen the understanding of causes, extent, nature, rate of change and means of combating poverty in Tanzania". The institution provides support to researchers to undertake research in the field of poverty alleviation. REPOA is coordinating commissioned studies for the government, international and national NGO's, or other stakeholders in development. These studies range from baseline studies, development of programs to policy-oriented papers. The research by REPOA can be classified under 5 sub themes: Implications of public policies on poverty alleviation, the linkage between poverty and environment, the role of technology in poverty alleviation, the role of gender in poverty alleviation and social and cultural determinants of poverty. Apart from the research activities, REPOA is also committed to building the capacity for poverty analysis and for doing research in general.

2. Policy dialogue by REPOA

REPOA is an independent research institution. This means that REPOA itself is not involved in advocacy. REPOA tries to influence policies in three different ways. First of all, research and more specifically commissioned studies by REPOA for the government and international and national NGO's are a direct way of influencing policies. Secondly, REPOA organises capacity building workshops for government officials and social workers from civil society organisations. For example, workshops on mainstreaming poverty for district planning and community development officers and CSO members have been organised. Policies at local level might be influenced indirectly through these trainings. The closer link that REPOA wants to build with the CSO's will create a third opportunity for influencing policies and advocacy. REPOA can assist CSO's by providing objectively researched information that will back up their advocacy programs. And in the new program opportunities will arise for CSO's and grassroot communities to identify needs for research or to engage in research themselves in order to source their advocacy programs.

REPOA's approach for policy dialogue ensures a micro-macro linkage. REPOA interprets policies at macro level and brings it to micro level through workshops and newsletters. REPOA's analysis of poverty at micro level is the basis for policy recommendations at a macro level.

3. REPOA's experience in participatory research

REPOA is implementing a social development research and capacity program in which REPOA builds up its experience in participatory research. The aim of the program is to analyse the social service delivery under the decentralised government. Themes addressed are: understanding the local government service delivery systems, impact assessment of social service delivery under the decentralised government and the extent of targeting for poverty alleviation in the social service delivery. Because the grassroot communities are the beneficiaries of the social services by the local government, their view is crucial in the analysis. Therefore all research within this program is based on participatory analysis. Within this program several training courses in participatory methods have been organised for researchers and CSO members.

Furthermore, REPOA has identified the need to work more closely together with civil society organisations and grassroot communities for two main reasons. First of all, the experience and findings from the field, from CSO's and grassroot communities, can increase the relevance and the accuracy of poverty analysis and policy dialogue. This will also increase the linkage between policies at macro and policies and reality at

micro level. And the CSOs and grassroots communities could identify new niches where objective research is needed. Secondly, REPOA wants to contribute to the capacity building of CSOs and grassroots communities in research and action for poverty alleviation, through training, empowerment and information sharing. REPOA has opted to encourage a participatory methodology because this ensures empowerment of the grassroots communities. The identification of the research and advocacy need by those communities and their active involvement in the research guarantee ownership of the findings and capacity building of the grassroots communities.

Out of these considerations, REPOA has developed a new program consisting of four components.

1) Facilitate dialogue amongst CSOs and between policy makers, researchers and CSOs

The first component in the program will consist of facilitating the dialogue between the CSOs, researchers and policy makers. CSOs have been identified as facilitating the representation of the grassroots communities. The CSOs can act as intermediaries between REPOA and the grassroots communities. REPOA will take up a role as intermediary between researchers and the CSOs. And REPOA will encourage and facilitate the dialogue between policy makers and the CSOs. REPOA will act as a facilitator to safeguard its position as an independent institution. (see figure below)

The first objective of the dialogue is to provide a forum for the grassroots communities and CSOs to bring their views and recommendations to the level of policymaking and research. On the other hand, the dialogue is aimed at disseminating information to the CSOs and the grassroots communities about policies and relevant research. REPOA will also encourage dialogue between the CSOs at national, local and grassroots level. The information flow will go horizontally, between CSOs, and vertically in both directions.

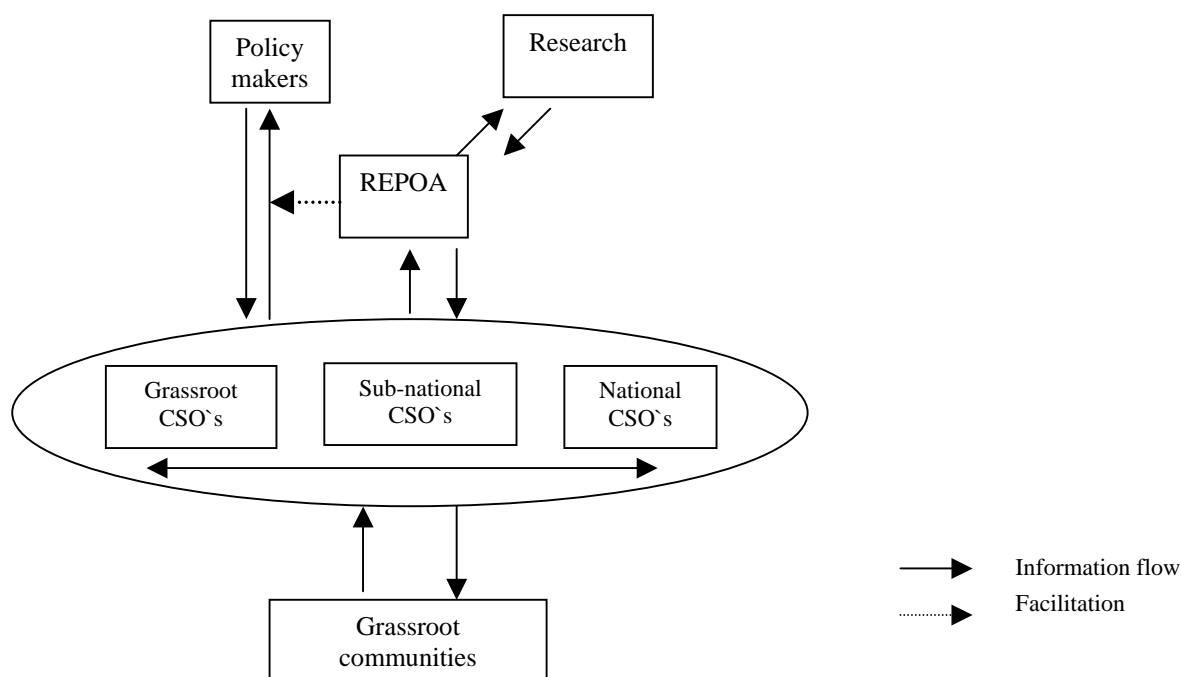
The activities organized within this first component will be a research conference, encouragement and facilitation of dialogue between CSOs and between policy makers and CSOs and distribution of information.

The annual research conference will be thematic and open to CSOs, grassroots representatives, researchers and policy makers. The objective of the research conference is to learn from participatory action research done by CSOs and to discuss the findings amongst grassroots representatives, CSOs, policy makers and researchers. The purpose is also to enhance our understanding of poverty and to inform policy makers about poverty issues, based on research from the field.

Each year, CSOs will be invited to participate in a case study scheme (see component 2) and undertake participatory action research with the support of REPOA. The results of the case studies will be the CSOs' input on the annual conference. REPOA will present research findings relevant to the theme and elaborate its efforts in national policy dialogue. The case studies will be published in a volume. REPOA will include popularised summaries of its research in the volume. The volume will be distributed to a larger number of CSOs and other interested parties.

REPOA will actively encourage dialogue amongst CSOs, at grassroots level, local level and national level and will facilitate the dialogue amongst these CSOs and between the CSOs and policy makers. Therefore REPOA will keep a database of CSOs and policy makers and will assist these actors to get in contact. REPOA will also provide logistic support for meetings and workshops (premises, addresses, invitation of facilitators) and information sharing. On a regular basis, thematic debates can be organized.

The improved accessibility and distribution of information will be accomplished by opening the library of REPOA to the public. REPOA will also start publishing information and outputs on the Internet. And if feasible, REPOA wants to introduce a system to send copies of literature on request. This would make literature available for organizations or individuals without access to the Internet. Furthermore, the newsletters and policy briefs will be distributed on a larger scale and priority to CSOs.



2) Capacity building of CSOs for participatory action research

The objective of this component is to build the capacity of CSOs in participatory action research (PAR) specifically, and to build the capacity in doing research in general. A first underlying objective is the empowerment of the grassroots communities to engage in analysis of problems or questions they are facing. A second underlying objective is to increase the quality of research from the field so it can be more useful and relevant for policy dialogue or further in-depth research.

To accomplish these objectives REPOA will initiate a thematic case study scheme for CSOs and provide technical assistance and training. Each year, CSOs will be invited to participate in the case study scheme. They will undertake participatory action research with technical, methodological and financial support of REPOA. The results of the case studies will be the CSOs input on the annual conference (component 1). The technical and methodological support will be given through short training courses, follow-up and assistance on specific issues as requested by CSOs. The financial support will be given in the form of small grants to implement the participatory action research.

Initially, technical assistance and training for CSOs will be linked to the case study scheme. Once the expertise of REPOA is built up and recognized by the CSOs, the technical assistance and training can be demand-driven. When the training courses are established and renowned, these will be organized on a regular basis. Initially, REPOA will assess the training needs of CSOs. Potential subjects of the training courses are PAR, measures and analysis of poverty, targeting, survey instruments, sampling and other methodologies for analysis, report writing, advocacy and popular communication.

The beneficiaries of the case study scheme are primarily the CSOs. They will gain input from the research for their future activities and get experience and training in undertaking research. The grassroots communities will benefit from the increased expertise in participatory action research and the capacity building aspect in this approach. Indirectly they will benefit from the results of the advocacy and policy dialogue. The information generated by the grassroots communities with facilitation of the CSOs will be of use for policy dialogue on a national level but also to identify niches for further research.

3) Community empowerment

The objective of the third component is community empowerment. REPOA will therefore facilitate information flows between national level programs and district development actors and grassroots communities. REPOA will also develop activities within this component to build the capacity for problem analysis, participatory action research, and advocacy. An underlying objective of the action is to collect data and information from the grassroots level for policy dialogue and for identifying needs for further research.

The contact between REPOA and the grassroots communities will pass through social groups or CSOs active in the districts. REPOA will identify social groups, grassroots CSOs, local CSOs or international CSOs

who can collaborate with REPOA and facilitate participatory action research with the assistance of REPOA. The CSO`s involved will facilitate the investigation and information gathering by the grassroots communities. The grassroots communities will identify what kind of information they want from different actors, where they need training and advice and where the CSO`s or other actors should help. They will decide on the way the findings will be presented to and shared with the rest of the community. The grassroots communities will agree whether they want to engage in advocacy and who they want to talk to, whether in-depth research is required, whether they want to make a report of the findings to share with other communities or stakeholders etc. The CSO`s, in collaboration with REPOA, will engage in the organization of training and meetings with government or policy makers, the publication and dissemination of the findings, the organization of in-depth research.

REPOA will coordinate and follow up the participatory action research program. Apart from coordination, the assistance of REPOA to the CSO`s and social groups will consist of building the capacity of the CSO`s and social groups in PAR, report writing, advocacy, accessing information etc. through training or by inviting resource persons for assistance. And REPOA will facilitate the dialogue on local level and with policy makers and researchers at the national level.

REPOA will also take up the role of provider of information. The information flow from national level to sub-national and to the grassroots level (about national policies, reform programs, research findings...) will be organized on request of the communities and the CSO`s or social groups. REPOA will also be proactive and organize some workshops about poverty, governance, national poverty reduction programs or other relevant issues. Grassroot community members and development actors like government workers, CSO`s and social groups, will be targeted.

The grassroots communities will be the primary beneficiaries: directly through the empowerment and capacity building element in the participatory action research method and through increased access to information. They will benefit indirectly through the advocacy and policy implications following the research. The CSO`s and other social groups will benefit from the program through improved access to information, increased experience and capacity for research, consultation and collaboration with the grassroots, and advocacy. Graduate students and Ph.D. students will get field and research experience (see component 4). Finally, REPOA will benefit from the program by the information and data from the field, which can enhance the relevance of the research and policy dialogue.

The actual implementation of this component will be worked out in detail in the initial stages of this program. REPOA is starting by assessing the demand for information and the development issues that the grassroots communities identify to be investigated or researched.

4) Attachment to Poverty & Participatory Research

REPOA will offer attachments to Poverty & Participatory Research to graduate or Ph.D. students and recently graduated researchers for a period of 1 to 3 years. The attachment can be combined with the writing of a graduate or doctoral thesis. The objective of this program is to offer the opportunity to students and recently graduated researchers to gain experience and acquire skills in poverty analysis, research methodologies, participatory action research and fieldwork.

Recently graduated researchers can hand in a proposal for research relevant to REPOA`s focus and based on extensive fieldwork and a participatory action research approach. When selected, REPOA will financially assist these researchers by issuing grants to conduct the research and cover the expenses involved. Also Graduate or Ph.D. students, whose thesis proposal has been accepted by a recognized university or college and whose research involves extensive fieldwork and a participatory action research approach, can participate in the attachment scheme. When admitted, the students can be given a grant to cover the expenses involved in the research.

REPOA will facilitate the opportunity to engage in fieldwork attached to an institution or CSO involved in participatory action research. Opportunities for research for the attached researchers and students will also arise in the community empowerment project (component 3) and the capacity building for CSO`s (component 2). REPOA will further provide training in PAR to the researchers and students. They can also count on follow-up and assistance by mentors appointed by REPOA. REPOA expects from the researchers and students to produce quality reports and research papers.

4. Points for discussion

The need for information dissemination about national policies and research on poverty alleviation to the grassroots arises within component 1 and component 3 of the new REPOA program. Therefore REPOA is looking for methods of information dissemination to grassroots communities and their representatives. In that aspect the colloquium of Hakikazi Catalyst and the publication of a user-friendly manual will be very useful to our institution.

For REPOA and for most institutions, the aim of information dissemination to the grassroots level is empowerment and creation of opportunities for these communities to work on change. Questions that arise are the following:

1. **What** information should be disseminated to grassroots level?
2. **How** should information be disseminated to grassroots level?
3. How can we **facilitate the further spread** of information amongst the grassroots communities?