

Using the Social Assessment Tool to Assess Impact at the Household Level



The main objective of the social assessment tool (SAT) is to measure the achievement of programme objectives, strengthen the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanism, and demonstrate programme effects to policymakers and the public at large. This tool assesses the changes (or the absence of change) in the households of the persons who participate in community organisation (CO). Also, it seeks to uncover the causal relationships or variables that underpin or constrain such changes. It is a survey administered on a sample of programme-involved households. Baseline readings are taken at the start, followed by subsequent measurements from the same households 1 or 2 years later. This is an effective instrument to assess change in the status of poor households. It has been adopted by poverty alleviation fund (PAF) for internal evaluation of outcomes of the programme, in terms of changes in poverty ranking, in income in real terms, and in access to public facilities.

Methodology

Community members rank themselves on the basis of socioeconomic status. The surveys also help the community and the project to assemble basic demographic data (caste, ethnicity and gender). This assessment tool covers parameters such as ownership of assets (e.g., land, house and livestock) sources of income and access to basic public services (e.g., drinking water, roads, schools and health services). Based on these well-being rankings, community members describe their current quality of life by choosing from among different predefined values (for selected indicators.) For example, for identifying the period with secure food sufficiency, households choose from one of four categories: less than 3 months, 3–6 months, 6–12 months and more than 12 months.

The survey is conducted and managed by the communities themselves with the help of PAF partner organisations (POs). Changes in household income, including monetary as well as non-monetary dimensions, are measured. The second survey coincides with and complements the midterm evaluation of the programme. During the analysis, current poverty ranking values and household conditions are compared with those from the previous survey. Please refer to box on page 3 for more details of the assessment.

Established in 2003, the Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF) is an autonomous institution that has implemented several income-generating (IG) as well as small infrastructure (INFRA) activities through a community demand-driven approach in Nepal. The fund seeks to help poor women (from Dalit, Janajati and other vulnerable groups) gain access to resources for productive self-employment and encourage them to undertake income-generating activities. PAF also aims to address spatial exclusion through focusing on the most deprived districts and reaching out to other poverty-stricken areas. PAF has been working with community organisations for several years. By 2011, it has engaged 17,000 community organisations in implementing programme activities, to the benefit of more than 300,000 households.



Social assessment of COs

By using the social assessment form (well-being rankings of CO members), both quantitative and qualitative information are collected at different intervals and later compared and analysed. Changes in wealth and livelihood of the targeted community members are compared with the indicators of PAF projects and accomplished activities.

This methodology enables integration of various types of data and is designed to compare and analyse the impact of PAF projects on the socioeconomic conditions of poor households. The social assessment of the CO members provides household-level data as well as comparative data on CO members. Data for the assessment carried out under the PAF was collected in two rounds of social assessment. The second survey was carried out for 175 COs, representing 4,880 households from 11 districts (Dalit 32.1%, Janjatis 25%, Brahmin/Chhetri 23.1% and others 19.8%). The baseline social assessment of the households was carried out in 2008 and the second survey of the same households was conducted in early 2010. The indicators well-being of CO member households for 2008 are compared with the post-intervention data from 2010.

The comparison with earlier data indicated a marked increase by at least 15% of household income in more than 68% of the total households surveyed. Moreover, the income growth rates of Dalit and Janjatis were higher than the average, showing that the project is reaching those most in need. Among other indicators, PAF also uses the level of food sufficiency of the targeted population. Results show that the percentage of households with food insufficiency of 3 months or less dropped from 66.9% to 24.1%, with a reduction of 63.3% among the CO member households.

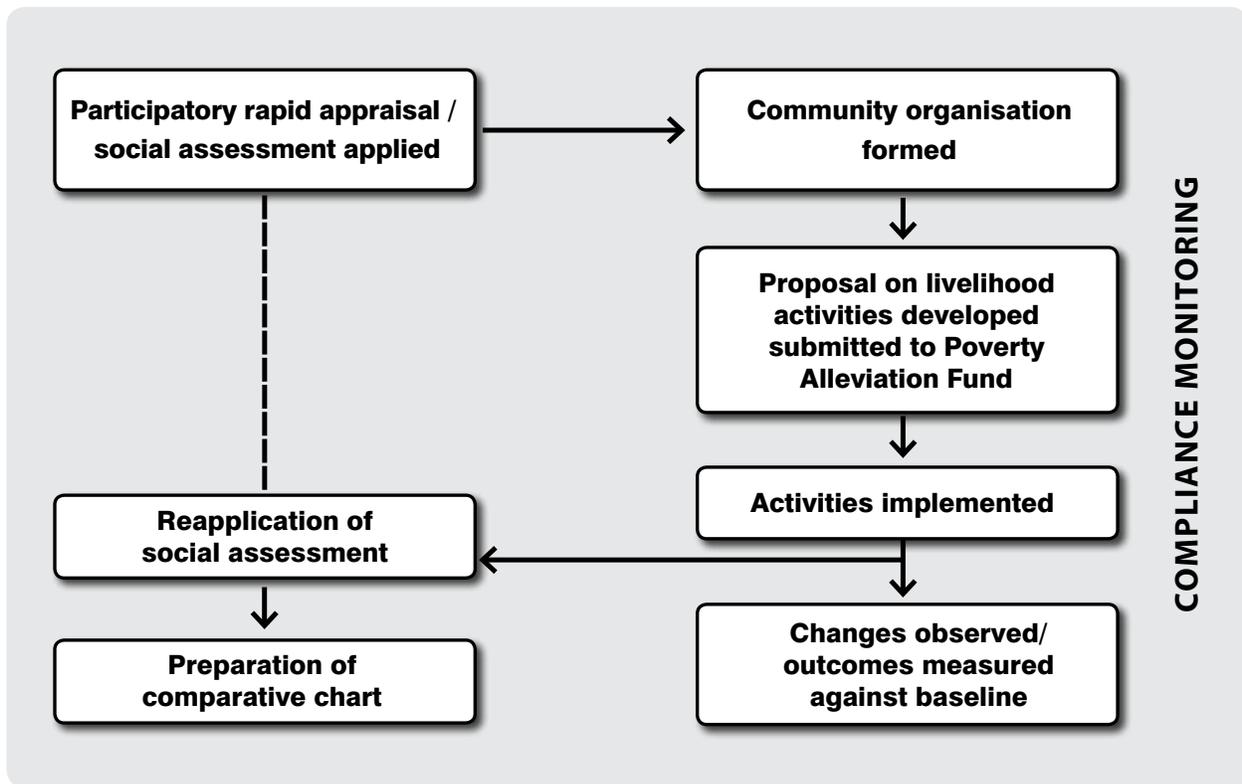


Figure 1. The social assessment process flow chart:
assessment of changes made at the household level

Lessons learned

The SAT provided an efficient and effective way to evaluate the programme interventions. An assessment of significant changes—both in terms of household annual income as well as level of food sufficiency—could be undertaken among the studied households. Lessons included:

- Community involvement is mobilised through the assessment of well-being changes at the household level.
- It is a very simple and effective tool that helps specify the outcomes of project interventions at the household level.
- It is versatile. It can be used as part of the results-based management system and also to strengthen M&E.
- It is easy to apply. This tool can be used by any literate person. With the help of literate members from the community, illiterate members can also fillout the forms.
- This tool provides a real-life picture of the changes brought about by various projects interventions at the household level.

Challenges

- It is time-consuming and labour-intensive. It takes one full day for data collection and another day for data entry and analysis of results (covering 20 households).
- It can be done once or twice a year, depending on available resources and programme needs.
- It cannot be applied to all COs as some have not yet reached a sufficiently mature stage in the implementation of activities to register significant changes in outcomes.
- It cannot be used as a comprehensive/extensive M&E system, but it can supplement existing data-heavy M&E systems.

References

PAF: A Brief Report on Social Re-Assessment 2010/11.

PAF Implementation Guideline

PAF website: www.pafnepal.org.np

Acronyms and abbreviations

CO	community organisations
IG	income generation
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
PAF	Poverty Alleviation Fund
POs	partner organisations
SAT	social assessment tool

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