Beneficiary Assessment for Monitoring:
The Zambia Social Recovery Project

Zambia’s Social Recovery Fund promotes community-driven infrastructure rehabilitation through microprojects aimed at cushioning vulnerable groups against the negative effects of adjustment. The fund was formed in 1991 as part of the Social Recovery Project, which was designed to build the capacity of local communities and governments to plan, implement, and manage community investments.

Since 1992, the fund has used beneficiary assessments to ensure that funded microprojects target the poor (by allowing the poor to set priorities for the fund’s support) and improve overall project performance. Originally a monitoring exercise, beneficiary assessments have become a valuable tool for fostering community participation and building in-country capacity in social assessment methodologies (see Box 1).

Four Beneficiary Assessments

To date there have been four beneficiary assessments in Zambia, each with its own objectives. The 1992 assessment studied the socioeconomic profile of microproject beneficiaries, assessed coping strategies during structural adjustment and drought, gauged communities potential for sharing costs and their perceptions of intermediary institutions, and evaluated Social Recovery Fund procedures.

Box 1. Building Capacity for Participatory Development

The most important long-term policy impact of the beneficiary assessments has been the creation of in-country capacity to carry out participatory research on policy issues. The assessments have inspired a number of spinoffs, including the 1993 Participatory Poverty Assessment and annual follow-up monitoring. A cost recovery exercise undertaken by the Participatory Assessment Group in 1994 also had considerable policy influence, particularly in terms of ongoing decentralization in the health sector. Moreover, the Participatory Assessment Group, an NGO whose work has been integrated into the national poverty monitoring system, is a powerful example of institutionalization carried through beyond the original project.

The second beneficiary assessment, in 1993, explored community participation and ownership; assessed project implementation, supervision, maintenance, sustainability, and impacts; and made thematic assessments of planned and ongoing health, education, nutrition, AIDS, and gender operations as part of the Southern Africa Department’s client consultation initiative.

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The third assessment, in 1994, assessed the effects of microprojects, reviewed the institutional arrangements of intermediaries, and compared community priorities with funded microprojects. The fourth assessment, in 1996/97, evaluated the performance of the Social Recovery Fund, reviewed community implementation issues, and assessed the sustainability of microproject benefits.

Learning from Experience

Beneficiary assessment methodologies have evolved over time. The first two assessments used traditional qualitative research approaches, including semi-structured interviewing, focus group discussions, and direct observation. Then in late 1993 the beneficiary assessment team undertook the Participatory Poverty Assessment for Zambia. As a result, with training and experience—Zambia’s poverty assessment was considered best practice—the methodologies for the third and fourth assessments included highly participatory research methods and rural appraisal techniques. Tools such as ranking, scoring, and institutional diagramming were used to access local knowledge and to better understand how communities (and particularly women) felt about microproject implementation issues. Participatory rural appraisal methods have been particularly useful in identifying and planning microprojects.

The first beneficiary assessment was based on a sample of 60 projects and 1,620 respondents. The second was carried out in 24 field sites with 1,121 respondents; the third in 21 sites. The latest assessment took place in 12 communities. Costs have ranged from more than US$50,000 for the first assessment to US$30,000 for subsequent ones (not including World Bank staff time).

With experience, the assessments have become more focused, more concise, and less costly. Because each assessment draws on the results and shortcomings of those that came before it, quality has improved significantly and findings have become progressively more relevant to management decisions. This approach requires the Social Recovery Fund, World Bank staff, and the team carrying out the assessments to be willing to learn and to adopt new approaches (see Boxes 2 and 3).

The first three assessments were carried out by a team from the University of Zambia’s Rural Development Studies Bureau. In 1995, the Bureau was eliminated when the university was restructured. Given increasing demand for its services, the team decided to form a nongovernmental organization (NGO) called the Participatory Assessment Group; the group receives funding from the Swedish International Development Authority under the second Social Recovery Project (effective since 1995). Relying on participatory approaches, the group undertakes beneficiary assessments, pre-project planning exercises, poverty assessments, and rural appraisal training for the Social Recovery Fund, the World Bank, government ministries, donors, and other NGOs.

Box 2. Adapting Procurement in Response to Changing Needs

Community-implemented microprojects involve an enormous number of small procurement contracts. The Bank’s procurement procedures tend to discourage community participation. The beneficiary assessments underscored the complexity of these procedures and, as a result, contributed to revisions in procurement guidelines and the piloting of new disbursement practices.

Winning over Skeptics

In 1991, when the Social Recovery Project began, staff of the Social Recovery Fund were not convinced that the qualitative approach utilized in beneficiary assessments would add value to the project. Just three years later, at a workshop in Lusaka, the local project coordinator described the assessments as the single most important tool for project improvement.
### Box 3. How Did Beneficiary Assessments Affect the Social Recovery Project?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beneficiary assessment finding</th>
<th>Manager’s recommendation</th>
<th>Action taken</th>
<th>Impact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Mandatory community contributions to the project increase participation and sense of ownership.</td>
<td>• Keep community contributions mandatory.</td>
<td>• Contributions (in cash and in kind) required as conditions for continued support.</td>
<td>• Communities continue to contribute, improving the likelihood of sustainability.</td>
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<td>• Some community-based project committees mismanage project funds; others are not held accountable by the community.</td>
<td>• Develop basic accounting training, monitor performance more closely, and take action if funds are misused.</td>
<td>• Criminal proceedings clause for fiscal misconduct added to project forms; bookkeeping module being developed for committee training manual; procedures for ensuring fiscal accountability being reviewed.</td>
<td>• Increased subproject accountability.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Communities demand closer supervision by implementing agency.</td>
<td>• Monitor projects more closely and more frequently.</td>
<td>• Regional offices established in each province; project launch workshops initiated.</td>
<td>• Increased external supervision of microprojects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Project implementing agency bypasses local governments; some NGOs and church groups perceived as nonparticipatory.</td>
<td>• Involve district and provincial line departments more closely throughout the project cycle; monitor implementing agencies.</td>
<td>• District councils and provincial planning units to monitor project once each quarter; district development coordinating committees to plan the monitoring of local projects; district workshops organized; implementing agencies monitored.</td>
<td>• Underway.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Questions on transport costs on application form unclear; application form complicated, notification and processing too slow.</td>
<td>• Clarify and simplify application forms and speed up processing.</td>
<td>• Forms redesigned; regional officers handle applications and expedite approvals.</td>
<td>• Forms easier to fill out; responses quicker and disbursements made ahead of schedule.</td>
</tr>
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<td>• Women make up less than 20 percent of project committees; committees open to domination.</td>
<td>• Improve monitoring and augment participation of women.</td>
<td>• Two committee positions reserved for women; monitoring increased.</td>
<td>• Underway.</td>
</tr>
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Box 4. Extending the Reach of Beneficiary Assessments

Listening to communities, flexibility, and a willingness to modify project implementation contributed to the early completion of the first Social Recovery Project, which finished 18 months ahead of schedule. Beneficiary assessments were an important part of this success. In turn, factors that contributed to the successful assessments included committed management support from the Social Recovery Fund and the World Bank, the credibility given to participation and social assessment by the project’s task manager, and long-term (since 1991) technical support by a Bank consultant. Moreover, the assessments findings were enhanced by quantitative analysis, making their recommendations all the more powerful. Zambia is now institutionalizing this approach under the second Social Recovery Project through a unified system of welfare monitoring that uses both participatory and household survey techniques. The Participatory Assessment Group is playing a prominent role in these efforts.

Findings from the assessments have enabled project staff to improve implementation, increase the sense of community responsibility and ownership over microprojects, strengthen supervision and monitoring, foster better communication with communities, and speed up disbursements (see Box 4). By highlighting the importance of participation in the work of intermediary institutions involved in the project cycle, the assessments have led Social Recovery Fund managers to increase coordination with local government staff, set up regional offices in the nine provincial capitals, hire non-community technical supervisors on projects, and more carefully scrutinize intermediary implementing agencies. Information flows have improved through project launch workshops, monitoring visits used to inform the community of progress, and appraisal visits used to verify community participation. The third beneficiary assessment endorsed these developments.

In the second Social Recovery Project, in addition to carrying out beneficiary assessments for the Social Recovery Fund, the Participatory Assessment Group is helping to improve pre-project needs identification, facilitating action at the community level, and providing training at the district level. The group is also contributing to better targeting of microprojects by developing practical indicators for identifying vulnerable communities and by carrying out community-level appraisals.

The value of the continuous feedback design of the assessments has been shown in a review of follow-up actions taken by the Social Recovery Fund in response to earlier findings. More broadly, the assessments have made important contributions to operations outside the Social Recovery Project, particularly in social sectors. The experience accumulated during the beneficiary assessments was crucial to Zambia’s Participatory Poverty Assessment. Moreover, the assessments’ findings have reinforced the need for World Bank financing of critical inputs in education, and of support for broad-based health reforms designed to empower communities to manage their own health systems.