Guidance on Conducting a Participatory Impact Assessment (PIA)

BACKGROUND

Participatory approaches are a way of undertaking activities which are meaningful to different stakeholders. The fundamental principle of participatory approaches is that the people affected by a policy or project play an active role in all stages of its design, implementation and evaluation. This can help ensure that our work is grounded in peoples' realities and contexts, for example through local understandings and values of livelihoods and environmental use.

The aim is to shift power away from conservation professionals to local stakeholders, who are commonly women and men from the local communities that live and interact with biodiversity in the areas that we work. This is achieved by enabling local people to articulate their views and share their knowledge through describing and analysing their own situation, setting the direction for change, planning priorities, and deciding whether the intervention has made progress. In this way local communities become partners, through relationships built on trust and respect. When using participatory approaches, the process of engagement is often as important as the outcome of the activity/exercise itself.

An impact assessment is a study conducted at the end of an intervention to determine the extent to which anticipated impacts/outcomes were produced. An impact assessment is different from evaluation which is a periodic process of reflection on what changes are taking place, why and how they are happening, discovering unintended results, and determining how/if the project should adapt to meet its desired impact.

Social impacts refer to the impacts of a policy, programme or intervention that directly affects people. In conservation, this commonly focuses on how conservation projects and activities impact peoples' resource-use, their livelihoods, and diverse local conceptions of human wellbeing. Social impacts can be positive and negative, intended and unintended. They are a key mechanism through which we are accountable to donors, partners, and the local and community stakeholders with whom we work.

Social monitoring is a key way of identifying and understanding the social impacts of projects, and learning from this can maximise positive impacts and minimise negative impacts. Participatory approaches can be highly effective in engaging with less powerful and influential members of communities to ensure that their perspectives are recognised, for example through engaging separately with women and men, people from different ethnic groups, and users of different resources.

PARTICIPATORY IMPACT ASSESSMENT (PIA) APPROACH

PIA is a flexible approach which can be adapted to different local contexts. It often incorporates ranking and scoring exercises (e.g. participants using beans or shells to vote on the relative importance of changes). It is typically done at the end of a project, or soon after, in order to measure the immediate, real or perceived impacts that a project or programme has had on local stakeholders and beneficiaries through identifying changes in peoples lives, and considering how much these changes can be attributed to the project in question.

PIA does this through trying to answer three key questions:

- **What changes have there been in the community since the start of the project?**

- **Which of these changes are attributable to the project?**

- **What difference have these changes made to people's lives?**

Human wellbeing is commonly used as a measure of social impact, and the PIA approach has been adapted by FFI to evaluate the impacts of conservation activities on it.

In the conservation and development sectors, income was long used as an indicator for quality of life. Recent decades have seen a shift towards human wellbeing as a broader way of considering the quality of human life, recognising that measuring income alone does not determine peoples' wellbeing. The **three-dimensional framework for human wellbeing** is a way of understanding and measuring this in a holistic way.

> *'Wellbeing is a state of being with others, which arises where human needs are met, where one can act meaningfully to pursue one's goals, and where one can enjoy a satisfactory quality of life' - McGregor, 2008*

This framework divides human wellbeing into three different dimensions:
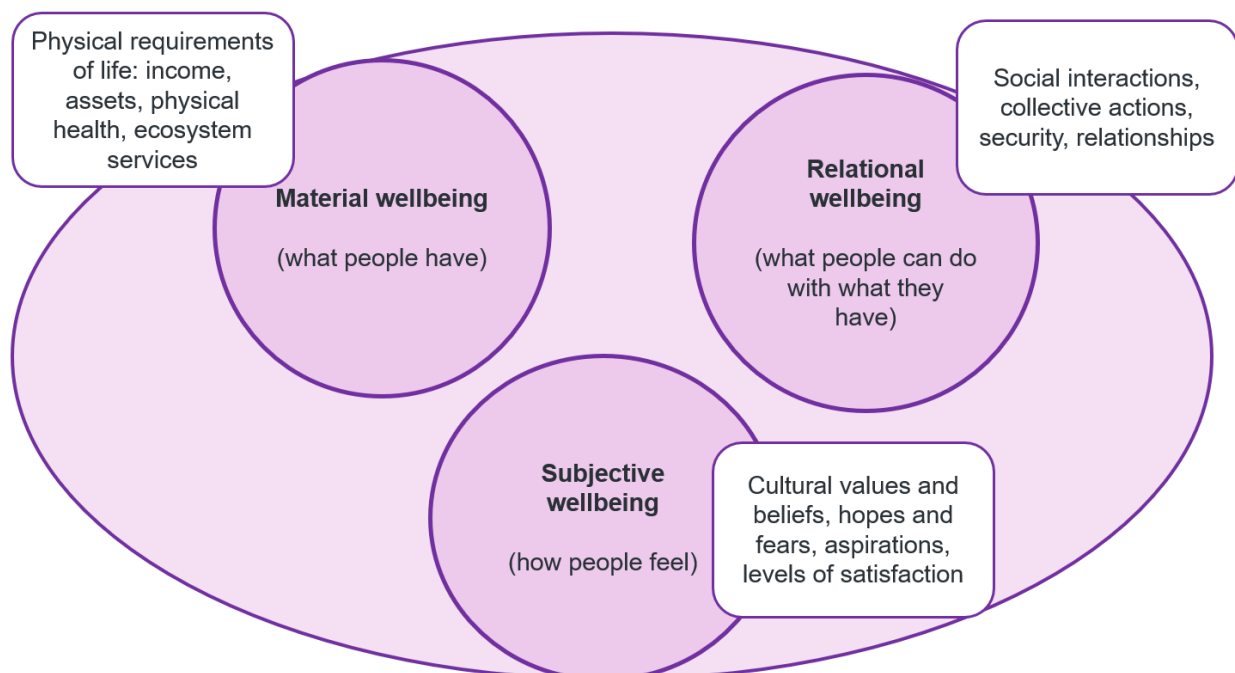
- Adapted from Franks, Small & Booker, 2019

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDANCE FOR CONDUCTING A PIA

This guideline is intended to provide a basic framework that can help guide the PIA and ensure that the facilitators stay on track. This framework involves a series of group discussions with community members. Discussions include ranking and scoring activities to identify changes, impacts, and contributing factors, stimulating discussion with and between participants.

Example statements have been included, but these should be adapted to what is appropriate for the individual site and project context. As you do more discussions you will find out what parts of the guidance are useful and which parts you might do differently.

This framework is one way to do a PIA, with further examples available in this [PIA design guide](#)[1].

Reminders

- Remember that each community you work in is unique. The interests and values of different people can be diverse, both within and between communities, especially across 'social characteristics such as sex and age. It is important that everyone has a voice.
- It is important to identify and consider which groups are the most vulnerable and marginalised. This could be women, but it could also be other people too, and there may be multiple vulnerable groups. It is very important to hear these voices and understand what changes they have or have not experienced. This can help to understand different levels of support or opposition to a project or conservation intervention.

Sampling and disaggregation of groups

- The sampling method (how you choose participants) can be random (using mathematical calculations), purposive (using the judgement of project staff or community representatives), or convenience (doing what is easily-accessible)[2].
- It is important to decide whether you will select participants who we have worked with directly ('beneficiaries') or broader 'project-affected peoples' who may have been impacted positively or negatively.
- Sample size (the number of people who participate) should be set according to the PIA aim, the number of communities/households, practical considerations, budget, and time.
- When organising group discussions, it is generally advised to hold separate ones with women and men as gender dynamics in mixed groups can often lead to women's voices and perspectives being excluded.
- Depending on the local cultural context and resourcing available, it could be important to disaggregate groups in other or additional ways, for example by holding separate group discussions with youth, or with specific ethnic groups.

Aim of the discussion

- To understand what changes (positive and negative, intended or unintended) men and women have experienced (for example in relation to resource use and management) and which they identify as most important to them.
- To understand what factors have contributed to these changes, and which have been the most important. These factors could be both related or unrelated to the project.
- This information will help the project team, and local stakeholders, to reflect on the progress and future direction of our work.

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[1] Available in [English](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#).
[2] See [Page 41 of this guide](#) for further details about sampling methods

Facilitating the discussion

The discussion is as important as the output (i.e. the ranking or scoring) – it is important to take note of the detail of the discussions and to probe for further information and clarification. Try and facilitate the discussion so it flows freely and feels more like a discussion than strict questions and answers.

- If some people are quiet it does not mean they have nothing to say. Try and encourage everyone to speak, especially if a few individuals are dominating the conversation. But it is also important not to force or pressure people into speaking if they don't want to.
- It is important that people are free to talk about what is important to them (within the remit of the aims of the discussion) so try not to steer the discussion too much based on the knowledge and assumptions you already have about the project.
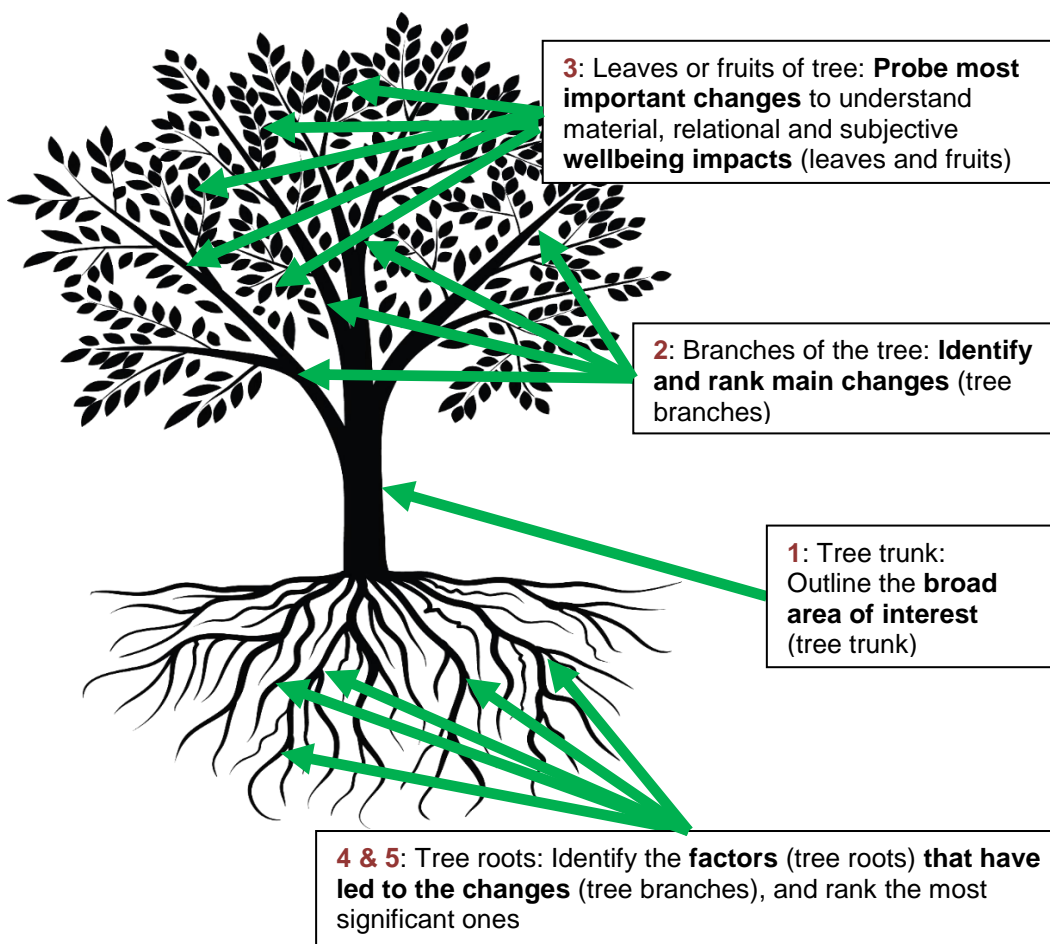
Suggested team roles:
- main facilitator (the person organising the participants and asking the questions)
- note-taker (to take notes but also to ask questions for clarification)
- helper/observer (to help organise the changes/impacts and factors into groups/categories, to observe the dynamics in the group, to support the facilitator in making sure that everyone in the group has a chance to share their views).

After each discussion it is good practice for the team to take some time to review how the exercise went and to highlight major findings including key themes emerging and any differences or consensus in opinion within or between groups. During the first few discussions it will also be useful to discuss how the activity went – what do you think worked well in facilitation and note-taking, and what do you think could work better for next time?

Overview of the process

The different steps of the process and information we are collecting can be seen as different parts of a tree. The numbers in the diagram below correspond to the steps in the process.

3: Leaves or fruits of tree: **Probe most important changes** to understand material, relational and subjective **wellbeing impacts** (leaves and fruits)

2: Branches of the tree: **Identify and rank main changes** (tree branches)

1: Tree trunk: Outline the **broad area of interest** (tree trunk)

4 & 5: Tree roots: Identify the **factors** (tree roots) **that have led to the changes** (tree branches), and rank the most significant ones

1. **Introductions and posing broad area of interest (tree trunk)**

   1.1. Introduce yourselves and explain the purpose of the meeting.

   Example statement: We are xxx and we are conducting group discussions here on behalf of FFI (and xxx). We are interested in hearing about your livelihoods and the wellbeing of you and your households, and the community more widely. The information you share will be useful in informing our project and monitoring its impact. You are here voluntarily and the discussion will take approximately 2 hours. We will take notes of the discussion but we are not recording your identity and we won't attribute anything to you individually. Are you happy to continue?

   1.2. Then give a broad statement expressing the aim of the PIA. The intention of the approach is to keep this open (i.e. speaking about changes broadly), but sometimes this can be challenging to relate to the specific conservation issue or project in question. In these cases it can be useful to be more specific, e.g. understanding the main changes in [insert specific natural resource-use and management], and how that relates to their wellbeing.

   Example statement: We are interested in hearing about the changes you have experienced and seen in this community relating to the use and management of [insert specific] natural resources, and how those changes have affected the wellbeing of you and your households.

   Emphasise that we are interested in both positive *and* negative changes. Explain that notes will be taken but any statement will not be attributed to them and encourage people to speak openly.

2. **Identify and rank the main changes (positive and negative, intended and unintended) [insert specific natural resource use/conservation issue] (tree branches)**

   2.1. Start with a broad, open-ended question to start a discussion about changes related to [insert specific natural resource use/conservation issue]

   Example statement: Please tell me what have been the main changes in or related to [insert specific natural resource use/conservation issue], since xxxx? (the xxxx to be agreed for each site according to how long we have worked there – our interest is changes since just before or at the start of the project and now). It is important that all participants are clear on the time period of interest. Sometimes it is useful to set local measures of time periods, for example by relating to major events people are familiar with such as an election, a powerful storm etc.

   2.2. Write each change on a piece of card.

   If people mention changes unrelated to the natural resource in question make a note of them. These changes may be more relevant to wellbeing so we need to be aware of them.

   Probing questions:
   - Have there been any changes in relation to how people collect, use and sell [insert specific product/resource]
   - Has *participation* **of local people** in conservation activities (e.g. monitoring, patrolling, etc.) changed over this time? Which people? In what way is it specifically different than before?

2.3. Once people have listed different changes, ask them to identify and rank the most significant ones. Some of them may be very closely related and can be grouped together.

Clarifying questions are useful at this stage to understand more about changes

For example: For 'harvest/catch' does this mean more or less harvest/catch, or better or poorer quality of harvest/catch, or easier or harder harvest. For 'price' does this mean increase in price or decrease? Etc.

Make sure that there is a card for each of the specific changes mentioned).
Instructions for ranking:

2.3.1. (Taking two cards at random, ask) Of these two changes, which is the most important or significant for you? Which had the greatest impact on your life/lives?

2.3.2. Why is this one the most important?

2.3.3. (Ask people individually) Do you agree?

2.3.4. (Taking another card, ask) Where would you place this change in relation to the first two changes? Is it more important or significant for you? Why?

2.3.5. (Go through each change in turn, so you end up with the cards in the ranking from most important to second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth most important)

2.3.6. Do you (all) agree with this ranking?

3. Probe most important changes (tree branches) further to understand impacts on wellbeing (tree leaves and fruit)

3.1. Once the participants have ranked different changes, take the most important ones (the team of facilitators should agree in advance how many this will be, but it should be a manageable number, e.g. five).

3.2. Now ask open-ended and probing questions to try and understand more about the meaning behind people's initial replies, and what impacts these have had on their wellbeing. Remember the six helpers that can help: **who, what, why, when, where, how.**

Example: if people have identified 'improved access to the market' as a change, how does this affect them day-to-day in their quality of life?

Even if the meaning is obvious to you, it is important that we hear the perspectives of the participants, and try to understand the changes in relation to the **three dimensions of wellbeing**.

Material – this considers how changes could have impacted areas like income, availability of food, access to services and infrastructure (e.g. health and education), quality of housing, and materials for livelihoods (e.g. fishing gears and farming equipment).

Example: If people say a change is over harvesting of a product what changes does this have on their income or availability of food?

Relational – this considers how changes could have impacted the relationships that people have in their day-to-day lives, for example with fellow community members, ability to participate in committees, influence over decision-making, increased or decreased conflict, or relationship with government staff.

Example: If people say a change is more illegal harvesting of a product, has this changed relations in the community (generally or between specific groups/actors)? Has it led to conflict?

Subjective – this considers what people personally feel about changes, for example whether they have affected their level of happiness with their day-to-day lives or their satisfaction doing their job or income-generating activity.

Example: If people say there is more over harvesting of a specific product, how does it make them feel? Are they angry or do they feel unconcerned about it? Does illegal harvesting of a product affect how they feel about their own livelihood?

NOTE: If it is useful for you, you can use the table below as a reminder for the facilitators to ask questions to try and understand the three different dimensions of wellbeing. It is often easier to ask questions or hear responses about material wellbeing, but relational and subjective are just as important. It might be that some changes relate more to just one or two dimensions of wellbeing so you don't need to identify material, relational, and subjective wellbeing impacts for every single change. Some wellbeing impacts could also relate to different changes, for example unity in the community could be the result of different changes.

Changes	Material wellbeing *(what people have)*	Relational wellbeing *(what people can do with what they have)*	Subjective wellbeing *(how people feel)*

3.3. (Taking each change in turn now ask probing questions – using the 6 helpers **(what, who, where, when, why, how)** - to understand the changes in people's wellbeing. Remember the 3 dimensions of wellbeing). Some example questions:

- *What difference has this change made to you / your household / the community?*
- *How has this change affected you / your household / the community?*
- *How has this change affected your daily life?*
- *Who has been most affected? Why? Has it affected everyone in the same way? Why / why not?*
- *Has it made a difference to the things you have? (What, Who, Where, When, Why, How?)*
- *Has it made a difference to relations (in the community, with the authorities etc)? (What, Who, Where, When, Why, How?)*
- *Has it made a difference to how you feel? (What, Who, Where, When, Why, How?)*

4. Identify contributing factors (tree roots) to changes (tree branches)

4.1. Using probing questions, try to find out what factors (tree roots) have contributed to changes. These can be both project and non-project factors. People may have already started to identify these when speaking about the changes.

Examples: We are interested in the factors that have contributed to these changes. Tell me, what are the factors that have contributed to these changes?

- *Why is there more harvesting of [insert product] now?*
- *What made this change happen?*
- *If the FFI project did not exist, would this have happened anyway?*
- *What made this happen?*

5. Rank factors

5.1. Write each of the main factors for all changes on a card/paper. Some of the factors may be combined if they are the same thing expressed in a slightly different way.

5.2. Take 2 cards at random – ask participants which factor was more significant in contributing to the changes that the participants have identified (NOTE: this should be done for the changes as a whole rather than each change). Let them discuss amongst themselves but pay attention to the discussion and try to take notes on what people speak about. On the table / ground, place the card with the most important factor above the other card to build a ladder along the floor/table.

If the group cannot agree which is most significant you can either go with the majority or place the cards side by side.

5.3. Take a third card – ask if the factor is more or less significant or the same as the others. Ask different people individually. Ask someone to put the card where it belongs in relation to the others (e.g. lower down if less important than other factors, higher up if more important). If no one wants to, place it somewhere (it doesn't matter where) and ask if that is the correct place for it.

5.4. Continue with the remaining factors until they are ranked in order of importance.

Take careful note of the discussion. Some factors may contribute to more than one change, and some of the changes may be factors contributing to other changes. If necessary ask questions to explore this, and to tease out how far the project has contributed to the changes.

6. The end

Thank participants for their time and answer any questions they may have.

Note-taking

It is very important to take detailed notes of the activity, including the discussions people have to come to decisions about different changes and factors of importance. Effective note-taking varies from person to person, and it is important to check and review notes after each discussion to see how easily the facilitators and note-takers can understand what has been recorded, and if any parts of the discussion have not been effectively recorded.

An example template has been included below, this can be resized and adapted based on the amount of information from each step. The template can be extended across multiple pages to ensure enough space to capture details from discussions.

Annex I: Example note-taking template for group discussions

Discussion number: [insert discussion number]
Location: [insert location]
Group: [insert stakeholder group]

Step #	Step focus	Changes or factors		Detailed notes
Step 2)	Main changes	Change 1		*Additional notes on discussion*
		Change 2		*Additional notes on discussion*
		Change 3		*Additional notes on discussion*
		etc.		*Additional notes on discussion*
Step 3)	Ranked changes	List ranked changes in order		*Additional notes on discussion*
Step 4)	Wellbeing impacts	Change 1	Wellbeing impacts	*Additional notes on discussion*
		Change 2	Wellbeing impacts	*Additional notes on discussion*
		Change 3	Wellbeing impacts	*Additional notes on discussion*
		etc.	etc.	*Additional notes on discussion*
Step 5)	Contributing factors	Factor 1		*Additional notes on discussion*
		Factor 2		*Additional notes on discussion*
		Factor 3		*Additional notes on discussion*
		Factor 4		*Additional notes on discussion*
		etc.		*Additional notes on discussion*
Step 6)	Rank factor	List ranked factors in order		*Additional notes on discussion*