

2

Participatory assessment and the twenty points of progress program: the experience from Mexico

Gary M. Woller and James B. Mayfield

• Introduction

This paper describes the field-test of the Twenty Points of Progress Program (20PPP) presently being implemented by an NGO called choiceHumanitarian in Guanajuato, Mexico. The 20PPP is a participatory methodology for systematically measuring and assessing the impact of village development programs. The 20PPP differs in a number of important ways from other methods of monitoring village development.

- It is participatory in nature, encouraging village communities to assess their own level of development and quality of life.
- Through an explicit commitment to community action planning, it encourages village communities to develop and implement strategies (action plans) to improve the quality of life in their communities and to measure the extent to which they are successful.
- It encourages network development and information sharing among rural communities and with outside government and non-government organisations.

• Developing the 20PPP

While billions of dollars have been allocated for village development by many different organisations over the past fifty years, there is no widely accepted methodology for measuring whether progress is in fact being made. Most methodologies aiming to measure village progress have failed either because they were too complicated for the villagers to understand and appreciate, so expensive that

few government or non-government organisations were willing to fund them, or so time-consuming that villagers lost interest in participating. For all of the same reasons, most methodologies also have had little impact either on programme performance or village development.

One of us (JM) developed the 20PPP at the request of UNICEF. The purpose was to devise a village monitoring system that was short, simple, and inexpensive. After field-testing over 100 development indicators in nearly 50 villages in Bolivia, Mexico, Kenya, India, and Egypt, it was found that about 95 percent of villagers' concerns fell into five broad categories (Table 1):

- education and literacy;
- availability of health services;
- income generation and the alleviation of poverty;
- community environment and infrastructure; and,
- community unity and cultural enhancement.

Once these five categories were identified, and after reviewing the aggregate data on the different dimensions of each, it became fairly easy to select the most widely mentioned indicators in each category to make a total of twenty indicators. The 20PPP entails measuring village progress according to these twenty indicators. However, rather than relying on outsiders or 'experts' to carry out the evaluation, the 20PPP asks rural villagers to rate their village on each of the twenty indicators.

Table 1. The twenty points of progress survey

Indicator	How the Indicator is Defined
1. Attendance in village schools	The number of children 5-15 years of age who regularly attend school.
2. Adult literacy	The number of adults age 18 and over who possess basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills.
3. Diversification of the school curriculum and the % of children completing school	The number of children who actually graduate from the village school as one indication of the quality of teachers and relevancy of the curriculum.
4. Parent-teacher collaboration	The number of parents who meet on a regular basis with teachers to discuss student attendance and progress, curriculum, educational costs, etc.
5. Vaccination of children	The number of children immunised for the most common diseases in the village.
6. Health awareness of parents	The number of parents who understand and use oral rehydration techniques when their children have diarrhoea, who are aware of indicators of malnutrition, and who seek to provide their children with a nutritious diet.
7. Availability and use of family latrines	The number of families who have and use a properly constructed latrine.
8. Establishment of a sustainable system of village health care	The number of families willing to pay some fee for services or contribute to a village health fund to support village health workers.
9. Food security/family vegetable gardens	The number of families who have adequate food security (enough surplus to live through short-term food shortages) measured by number of families who have vegetable gardens and awareness of organic farming.
10. Existence of savings and loan-giving groups	The number of families who belong to and actively participate in savings and loan-giving groups.
11. Existence of non-farming sources of income	The number of families who participate in supplemental income-generating activities outside of their own farming.
12. Family income status	The number of families living close to the subsistence level of income (i.e., 70-80 percent of their income spent just on food or malnutrition among the children is common).
13. Quality of houses	The number of families who have permanent, quality homes.
14. Quality of sanitation	The number of families participating in some type of sanitation program to reduce the flies and mosquitoes, remove stagnant pools, remove human and animal waste from areas close to people's homes, and establish some type of garbage collection system.
15. Existence of a functioning environmental committee	The number of families aware of environmental problems (i.e., soil erosion, deforestation, and water and sewage pollution) and participating in a program to reduce them.
16. Village infrastructure (potable water systems, roads, marketing facility)	The number of families who have access to potable water, good access roads to nearby towns, and a good transportation system for marketing and travel.
17. Quality of local leadership measured by extent of local resource mobilisation.	The number of families who have donated money, labour, or materials to complete a number of village-level projects.
18. Community cultural activities	The number of families willing to organise and participate in cultural activities, such as dance and singing groups, traditional cultural and religious festivals, the preservation of traditional arts and crafts, etc.
19. Youth programs and activities (youth ages 15-25)	The number of families willing to support the youth in sports, cultural and social activities, employment training, and income-generating project development.
20. Level of community participation in the Twenty Points Program and a broader inter-village networking program	The number of families in the village who are aware of the Twenty Points Program and have participated in meetings to determine how their village might work with other nearby villages to improve the quality of life in all the villages in their area.

Scoring system: 1=few; 2=some; 3=roughly half; 4=most but not all; 5=all or nearly

The evaluation results are then shared with the entire village to be used as a basis for community-consciousness raising, action planning, and resource mobilisation. Finally, the survey is to be repeated at least once a year over several years, and the scores of each indicator and the overall village score are to be tracked over this time to measure village progress, as perceived by the villagers themselves.

In order to keep the measurement instrument as simple and short as possible (no more than 40 to 60 minutes), a survey was developed in which each indicator was operationalised on an ordinal five point scale. Participants were asked to indicate how many villagers engage in different activities corresponding with the twenty indicators. A score of 1 means that only a few members of the community engage in the activity; a score of 2 means some, but less than half, of villagers; a score of 3 means roughly half of villagers; a score of 4 means most, but not all, villagers; and a score of 5 means all or nearly all villagers.

An initial field-test of the 20PPP in Egypt, found that two pairs of field-testers appeared to be much more successful in administering the survey than were the other field-testers. It was later learned that both pairs had received formal training in participatory methods, and in each case they had spent significant time explaining the importance and process of participation to the villagers before they introduced the 20PPP survey. As a result of this finding, choiceHumanitarian decided to develop and field-test a more participatory method for administering the 20PPP.

For the field-test site, choiceHumanitarian selected Guanajuato, Mexico, where it operates a village development program in a cluster of rural villages near the city of Irapuato. This site was chosen for two reasons. First, choiceHumanitarian employs a full-time Rural Development Facilitator in Mexico who is well-known, trusted, and widely respected in these villages. Because the 20PPP would be carried out by North Americans, it was essential that there be a contact in each village who could legitimise the exercise and help the outsiders gain rapid acceptance. Second, a PRA exercise had already been planned for

these villages, and it was decided to piggyback the 20PPP on this exercise.

Implementation of the 20PPP in Mexico

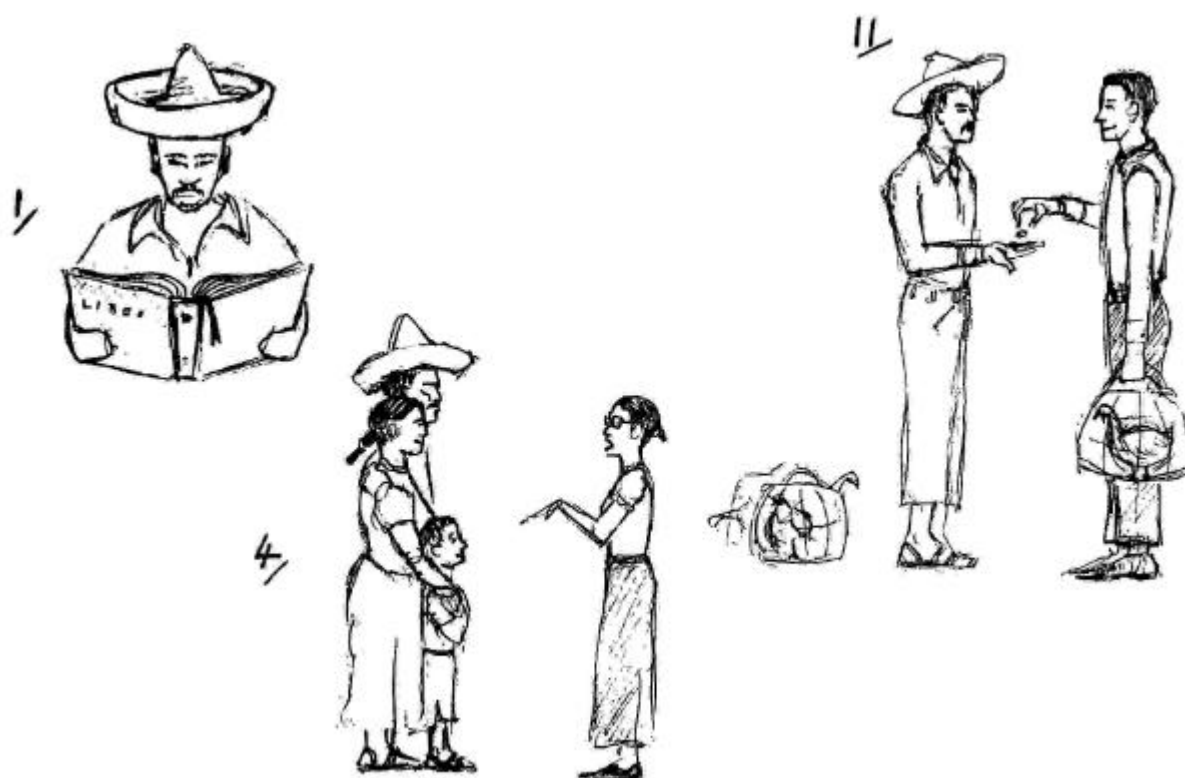
The implementation team consisted of one of us (GW) and six graduate students from Brigham Young University. None of the students had experience in development fieldwork, but each had previously lived in Latin America and spoke Spanish well. Before leaving for Mexico, the students attended an intensive two-day training workshop conducted on the 20PPP and participatory evaluation methods. Once in Mexico, the students were divided into three teams of two (one male and one female), and each team was assigned to live and work in two villages for one week each. The students worked with little direct supervision.

The first night in each village, the student teams facilitated a village-wide meeting, in which the students introduced themselves, explained the purpose for the visit, and fielded questions¹. After completing this stage of the meeting, the students facilitated the drawing of village maps and arranged a transect walk for the following day. Over the next week, the students administered the 20PPP survey to the following individuals and groups:

- formal village leaders;
- informal village leaders as identified by the Rural Development Facilitator;
- women and women's groups;
- men;
- persons living on the periphery of the villages;
- persons from different socio-economic classes as identified by village members; and,
- randomly visited households.

¹ Before the students arrived in the village, the Rural Development Facilitator arranged the meeting with village leaders. On arriving in the village, the student teams visited residents to invite them to attend the meeting.

Figure 1. Examples of drawings illustrating indicators as shown to villagers: indicator 1 - adult literacy; indicator 4 - parent/teacher collaboration; and indicator 11 - non-farming sources of income



Given time constraints, it was not possible to survey all village members in each village². Thus the selection of persons to interview was driven by the desire to provide a reasonably representative cross-section of all village members. In most cases, the students worked with focus groups (usually of 4 to 6 people), although they also conducted household interviews. Most focus groups were of a single gender. The focus groups were either arranged ahead of time by inviting persons to attend, or they were conducted on an informal basis with small groups that had congregated at different locations in the villages at different times during the day. The students also attended the weekly meeting of the women's savings group that existed in each village, at which they administered the survey to the women in attendance divided into small groups. To conduct household surveys, the students either arranged the interviews ahead of time, or they dropped by houses unannounced. The student facilitators began the survey by explaining to

² A couple of villages, however, were small enough that students were able to survey most village members.

each participant the methods and purpose of the 20PPP. Only when they were certain that this was understood did they begin the survey.

For each question in the survey, the students displayed a small drawing³ that represented the relevant indicator and depicted typical village life and dress (see Figure 1). While holding the drawing up for all to see, the students explained its meaning; then on placing the drawing on the ground or table, they asked the person or group to rate the village according to that indicator. To rate the village, the participants were asked to place on the card the number of rocks or beans (from a nearby pile) corresponding to their answer. Thus, if the answer to the question 'What is the percentage of children between the ages of 5 and 15 regularly attending village schools?'

³ These drawings were done by an art student from Brigham Young University. He was requested to make very simple drawings that depicted each of the 20 indicators. Being Mexican, he based his drawings on his familiarity with rural life in Mexico, thus depicting 'typical' rural village dress, architecture, culture etc.

was 'Most, but not everybody,' the participants would place four rocks or beans on the drawing. The students then recorded each response on a separate sheet of paper.

The villagers frequently asked for help in deciding what score to assign, in which case the students reminded them that it was the villagers' knowledge that mattered. When working with groups, the students encouraged group members to discuss their answers and then place the beans or rocks on the card only after the group had reached a consensus. If the students observed that certain individuals were either unwilling to voice an opinion or their views were disregarded by other group members, they encouraged the group to consider all points of view before reaching their decision. In some cases, villagers gave

hasty and unreflective answers, but in most cases, the villagers placed the beans or rocks on the card only after some reflection or discussion among group members. The survey typically took less than one hour to complete.

At the end of the week in each village, the students held a final village meeting, in which they shared the results of the 20PPP and the PRA exercise. To present the results of the 20PPP, the students arranged the drawings of the twenty indicators according to their score, taped them onto large sheets of flipchart paper, wrote a short description of each indicator and the average village score next to the drawing, and then hung the papers on the walls at the meeting site (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Children observing the presentation of the 20PPP at the final village meeting (Photo: Gary Woller)



The students then briefly reviewed the village scores for each of the indicators and invited comments from those in attendance. After reviewing the results of the survey, the students discussed with the villagers those indicators in which the village gave itself the lowest scores. The students then encouraged the villagers to prioritise from among these indicators those that they would most like to resolve. Once these issues were identified, the students and the Rural Development Facilitator spent the remainder of the meeting facilitating the creation of village action plan to address the prioritised issues. At the conclusion of this meeting, the students formally presented the survey results to the delegado (mayor) of each village and secured a commitment from him that he would make the results of the 20PPP publicly available.

• **Outcomes and lessons learned**

Like many development programs, the 20PPP is long-term in nature. Raising villagers' consciousness, creating a desire to improve village scores on the 20PPP, establishing cause-effect linkages surrounding crucial issues, and mobilising communities' energy to address the many problems they face is a continual process. Thus it is not unexpected that repeated administration of the 20PPP may be necessary before it begins to yield progress in these areas and to produce higher survey scores. Nonetheless, from the field-test in Mexico and from subsequent field tests in Bolivia, Egypt, Kenya, and India, we have observed that the 20PPP can be an effective tool in raising community consciousness and in encouraging community action planning, resource mobilisation, and networking with external entities, as the following examples demonstrate.

In Mexico one village formulated an action plan to reconnect its potable water system (item 16 in the survey) and deal with saboteurs (someone in the village had been sabotaging the water system for fear of running out of water). In another village, the members formulated an action plan to build a new kindergarten (item 1 in the survey). Finally, in another village, the members committed to a plan to begin building, and to teach each other to build, family latrines (item 7 in the survey). In all three cases, the action plans were a direct

outcome of the 20PPP. A follow-up evaluation is now being planned for Mexico with the intent to extend the program to other villages in the area.

Similar outcomes were observed in field-tests in other countries. In a village in Egypt that participated in the 20PPP, village leaders contacted the local director of health to ask that their children be vaccinated (item 5 in the survey). The director agreed to organise a medical team to vaccinate all of the village children after the village leaders offered to pay for the gas of the medical vehicle and to provide the health team with a full-course meal as payment. On seeing how their village scores on the 20PPP compared with another village in their area, one group of villagers in Egypt decided to visit the other village to see how it had been able to improve its scores during the previous year. In a village in India, villagers organised a health committee as a direct result of the 20PPP decision-making process, which then proceeded to raise the needed money to send a local midwife for a six-week training program in modern medicine at a nearby hospital (item 8 in the survey).

Regarding the implementation of the 20PPP, we learned the following from the field-test in Mexico:

- Both men and women are able to discuss and prioritise the twenty indicators with little difficulty.
- Most participants have little difficulty intuitively understanding the five-point scale used in the survey. In fact, in many cases, it becomes unnecessary part way through the survey to continue to prompt the participants on the scoring procedure. What we lost in preciseness using this scoring system we gained in understanding and ease of administration.
- The use of drawings to explain the indicator and beans or rocks to indicate responses is a highly effective method of eliciting active villager participation in the survey. This method enables the villagers to see what they have answered on each question and to reflect on their responses. Moreover, this method is effective in involving children in the survey, which helps in administering the survey in households where children are present.

- Focus groups need to be kept small (six or less) and, if possible, of a single gender. In large groups, participants tend to lose interest more quickly, allowing dominant personalities to take over. Also, in mixed gender groups, women tend to defer to the men.
- It is possible to implement the 20PPP even with relatively little training or field experience. (In a subsequent field-test in Bolivia, villagers were trained in the administration of the 20PPP, and they helped implement it in their villages).
- The presence of a Rural Development Facilitator or an in-country staff member who is well known and trusted by the villagers is crucial to the action planning stage of the 20PPP. The Rural Development Facilitator either did not attend or did not take an active role in the action planning stage in three of the Mexican villages. In each of these villages, the student teams were unable to get the villagers to commit to a plan of action. However, the Rural Development Facilitator took an active role in the action planning stage in the other villages. In these villages the villagers committed to an action plan to address crucial issues identified in the 20PPP.
- The administration of the 20PPP is not demanding of villagers' time. In Mexico, it involved two village meetings (on the first and last night) and one hour or less of a villager's time to respond to the survey. Working primarily with focus groups and women's organisations permitted the student teams to survey a relatively large sample of villagers in a short period of time.
- The action planning stage of the 20PPP, particularly in combination with the results of the PRA exercise, is effective in establishing the cause-effect linkages surrounding the important issues identified.

Conclusion

While the 20PPP uses only twenty indicators, field-tests have shown that villagers can and often do raise additional issues (such as gender-related issues) and add their own indicators to the original twenty. This flexibility allows each community to develop additional (or delete other) measures of progress if they desire. The potential advantages of an approach to measure village progress and mobilise community action that is short, simple, inexpensive, and flexible are apparent to many organisations working in the developing world. Already, several NGOs in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, in addition to several international NGOs, have expressed an interest in incorporating the 20PPP into their development programs.

- **Gary M. Woller**, George W. Romney Institute of Public Management, Brigham Young University 767 Tanner Building, PO Box 23158, Provo, Utah 84602 3158, USA. Email: gary_woller@byu.edu and **James B. Mayfield**, University of Utah, Chairman of the Board, choiceHumanitarian, 1937 South 300 West, Suite 110, Salt Lake City, Utah 84115, USA. Tel: +1 801 474 1937; Fax: +1 801 474 1919; Email: info@choice.humanitarian.org

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank the David M. Kennedy Center of International Studies at Brigham Young University for its generous financial support in carrying out the field research for the Twenty Points of Progress Programme.