



Family portraits

Purpose:

Family portraits are tools for understanding and communicating how real families organise their labour and other assets to make a living. The process of making and sharing the family portrait has the capacity to take individual and family perspectives to the level of policy change.

A family portrait is a document of words, diagrams and photographs that provides a great deal of detail on specific activities carried out by individual family members on a seasonal and historical basis, and highlights the major constraints they face in their struggle to provide for themselves. It is a research tool, but one which presents an immediate human dimension to many of the issues surrounding sustainable development.

Activities:

- **Develop a field guide** – to structure and give context to the portrait, and to provide direction for field activities.

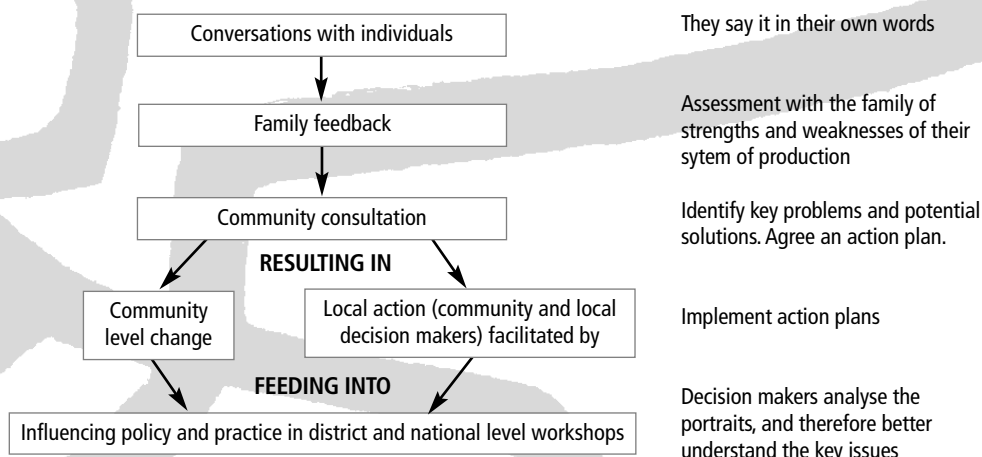
- **Select a family** – willing to devote time and effort to the development of their portrait.
- **Work with the family to create the portrait** – stay with the family over four to five days, engaging in informal conversations, observation and more visual participatory exercises. Analyse information, write up in the local language and prepare further lines of enquiry with the family. Follow up until the field research team and the family are satisfied that the portrait is relatively complete and accurate.
- **Hand back the portrait** – transcribe the portrait with photographs and present it to the family, allowing plenty of time for discussion.
- **Community consultation and policy influence** – use the portrait to facilitate reflection with the wider community and other decision makers. The portrait can be used as evidence to inform community-level action planning or to make sure that external interventions are informed by people's realities (see diagram).

Keep in Mind

- ★ Let the family dictate the breadth and depth of the enquiry – you can't force them to take you into their confidence.
- ★ Have a realistic time frame so that the portrait can feed into a broader programme of development, for example project design, community consultation about a specific issue, local action, or monitoring and evaluation.
- ★ Get the wider community involved – they will be curious.
- ★ Keep an open mind, let the process of the family portraits lead you within your broad objectives.

Further information

Find full tool and other related tools and resources at: www.policy-powertools.org or contact: Katherine Cochrane of SOS-Sahel katherinec@sahel.org.uk



The family portrait process – from individual perspective to policy change