Annex II

Participatory methods of data collection[1]

After having addressed the key components of the bottom-up, participatory approach, we will focus now on gathering of information through the various participatory methods of data collection.

Participatory data collection, or research, is generally associated with qualitative methods of information gathering. Qualitative methods in comparison to quantitative ones tend to be more concerned with words than numbers. *Qualitative methods are therefore based on data collection and analysis which focus on interpreting the meaning of social phenomena based on the views of the participants of a particular social reality.* (See table 2).

Participatory approaches contain a variety of data collection methods: (a) participatory listening and observation; (b) visual tools such as maps, daily activity diagrams, institutional diagrams and Venn diagrams, flow diagrams and livelihood analysis; (c) semi-structured interviews; and (d) focus group discussions. Among the participatory methods of evaluation, semi-structured interviews and focus groups are the most often used instruments for gathering the views of participants on certain topics and issues. Participatory listening and observation and various visual tools would normally be undertaken at the initial stages of the evaluation process as they often provide the basis for the design of in-depth questionnaires for semi-structured interviews and the conduct of focus groups.

While quantitative questionnaires are structured in the variety of answers that a respondent chooses from, qualitative surveys and focus groups allow for more nuanced, semi-structured and open-ended responses. The objective of qualitative designs is to capture values, attitudes and preferences of participants to permeate the 'how' and the 'why' underlying a phenomenon. Since data resulting from qualitative research approaches does not lend itself to numerical coding, evaluation of qualitative findings is more complex compared to quantitative research results. Tables, rows of data, or correlations are therefore not generated by qualitative research. Information has to be grouped under topical headings and generalized in its diversity. More details on how collected data is analyzed are described in sub-section 3.3.

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[1] Excerpts from the *"Framework for Monitoring, Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing" by Robert Venne, Division for Social Policy and Development, UN DESA.* Full text is available at http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/ageing/documents/MIPAA_frmwrk.pdft

Table 1

Participatory monitoring, review and appraisal differs from conventional monitoring, review and appraisal approaches in several important ways[2]:

	Conventional	*Participatory*
Who plans and manages the process:	Senior managers, or outside experts	Local people, project staff, managers, and other stakeholders, often helped by a facilitator
Role of 'primary stakeholders' (the intended beneficiaries):	Provide information only	Design and adapt the methodology, collect and analyze data, share findings and link them to action
How success is measured:	Externally-defined, mainly quantitative indicators	Internally-defined indicators, including more qualitative judgments
Approach:	Predetermined	Adaptive

To capture the full extent of a specific social reality, many research designs are based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Data collated by quantitative research methods is rarely sufficient to provide a full explanation of an observable social issue. Based on their experience, researchers have realized the importance of integrating quantitative analysis with qualitative methods while trying to provide policy makers with a comprehensive portrait of the socio-economic situation of various social groups. Such an integrative approach would also be of use in reviewing and appraising the implementation of MIPAA. While section 4 will address quantitative approaches to data collection, such as censuses and sample surveys, we will describe below the methods of qualitative participatory research.

a) Participatory listening and observation

Listening and observation skills are the basis for attaining a comprehensive understanding of the situation of older persons in a particular community and to viewing social reality through the eyes of older persons. These skills are of great use for any participatory research design and should be applied for the duration of any project. Participatory listening and observation assumes that "the participant observer/ethnographer immerses him- or herself in a group for an extended period of time, observing behaviour, listening to what is said in conversations both between others and with the fieldworkers,

[2] Guijt, Irene; Gaventa, John (1998), Participatory monitoring, review and appraisal: learning from change, *IDS Policy briefing, Issue 12,* http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/bookshop/briefs/brief12.html

and asking questions".[3] It is therefore "a major research strategy which aims to gain a close and intimate familiarity with a given area of study through intensive involvement with people in their natural environment."[4]

A bottom-up, participatory research project in a particular community may be started by familiarizing oneself with the environment. This is usually done in a *guided walk* – or *transect walk* – that often involves an individual or a group of people who would guide the researcher(s) through a community to observe and talk about things of local importance. The organizational set-up of a community, the quality of housing and the availability of social services for older persons can be studied on such a walk. As a result, maps could be drawn reflecting the crucial local institutions that are relevant to older persons.

With regard to *participatory listening* it is important for the listener to ensure that his/her appearance and manner are conducive to the research environment and are acceptable to the older persons themselves. Every person should be encouraged to speak, and interest in what is said should be demonstrated at all times. Non-verbal communication such as body language should be given due attention as well. The researcher(s) should seek clarification if needed to understand correctly what an individual tries to express. Expressive or verbal judgments of what older persons have said should be avoided.

Participatory observation complements the listening component. People or events should be observed at different times of the day and at different days of the week to ensure that a balanced impression has been gained. Observations and conversations should be written down in field notes as soon as possible since human memory can be deceptive. Particular attention should be given to power relationships among older persons, what roles various individuals play in the community, what activities and tasks are performed at what frequency, and what issues engender excitement, irritation, agreement or disagreement among older persons.

Participatory observation and listening form the basis from which further and more complex inquiries depart. What has been observed and heard is often the starting point for semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions during which observations can be checked and clarified in interview questions to determine whether the researcher has accurately interpreted what he/she has seen and heard.

b) Visual tools

"Visual tools – such as maps, diagrams, seasonal calendars and daily activity charts – are important elements of participatory research. They enable older people to explore complex relationships and link issues in ways not possible through verbal methods alone, generating a deeper analysis of local issues."[5]

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[3] Bryman, *Social Research Methods,* p.292
[4] *A Dictionary of Sociology,* p.482
[5] *Participatory research with older people: a sourcebook,* p.53

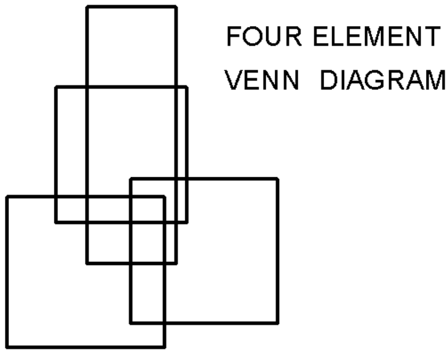
A common participatory approach in visualizing is it to draw figures, maps and diagrams and/or to use tools such as stones, sticks or other objects to demonstrate the layout of a particular community. One of the advantages of using visual tools is that illiterate members of a community would also have the opportunity to participate in the evaluation exercises, so that a balanced representation of older persons within the community could be ensured. That means that older persons from various socio-economic strata and from different geographic areas of the community should have the opportunity to participate. Age and sex distribution should be accurately represented as well.

Maps can be informative tools showing characteristics of a location, where evaluation of MIPAA is being undertaken. HelpAge International distinguishes between *resource maps* and *mobility maps*. The former show where (older) people live as well as the general infrastructure of a community, while the latter outline movements within a community. In addition to these two methods, *body maps* could be an important source of information, about the health status of older persons, which could be depicted on a large map of the human body. However, body mapping should be approached with utmost sensitivity. Although there would be a general introduction to the mapping exercise by the researcher(s), the mapping itself should be conducted by people living in the location of evaluation and the evaluation team shall not interfere during the mapping activity. Since different groups of older persons would be asked to participate in the mapping exercise, it might be expected that different maps would highlight the different perceptions within a community. The mapping exercise should also include an inquiry about historical changes of a community that could be reflected in mapping as well.

To understand how members of a community spend their time, *daily activity diagrams* are helpful. Daily work patterns and other activities of older persons could be recorded with the assistance of such a method by using little stones that would symbolize time spent on particular activities. Of special interest would be gender differences with regard to time use as well as how much older persons contribute to household and community activities. In addition, changes of time use can be demonstrated by inviting older persons to reflect on their whole lives and how much their daily activities have varied over the course of time discerning trend lines and creating historical profiles. Caution is in order when asking participants about their (extended) past, since human memory can be very deceptive.

Similarly, *institutional diagrams* would illustrate key institutions and individuals within the community. By drawing rectangles of different sizes, older persons would demonstrate the influence and power that certain local institutions and individuals possess. Connections between institutional and individual power are of interest to the researcher(s) as well: Venn diagrams are used to explain changes in relationships between institutions, groups and individuals (see fig.1). With regard to Venn diagrams, the same procedure of using rectangles of varying sizes should be utilized. The rectangles would represent different institutions (with the larger rectangles representing institutions that play a more important role in the community). The distances among the rectangles would represent the level of contact among various institutions. Overlapping of rectangles would symbolize the extent to which the various parts of different institutions collaborate on particular issues. An example for two overlapping institutions could be the local police force and the local government. Since questions regarding power within a community are often sensitive, it may be prudent to engage in such exercises after a period of trust-building has passed.

Fig.1

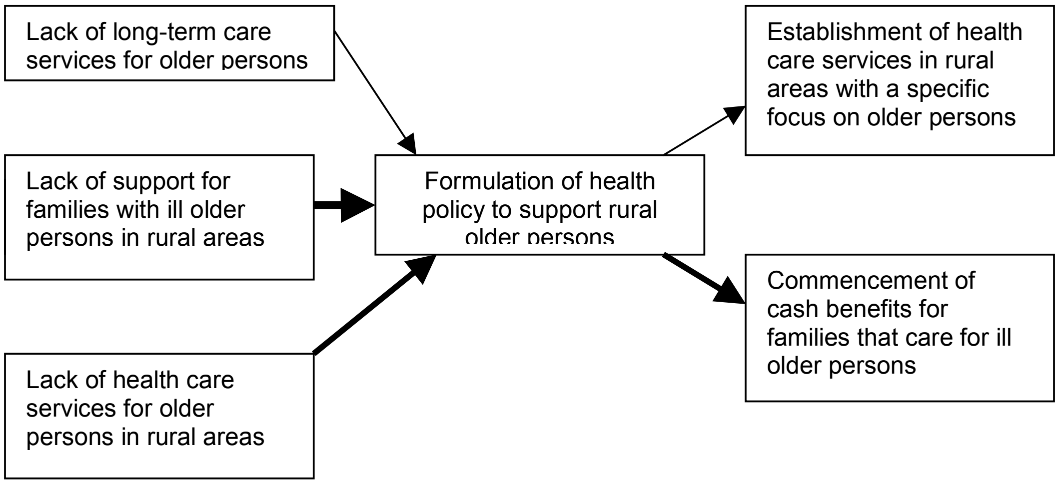


(Source: http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR2-3/schooley.html)

"*Flow diagrams* show causes, effects, and relationships. For example, a flow diagram could show the relationship between old age, livelihood and security. They can also show the impacts of an event, policy or programme on people's lives, for example the impact of new health policy on older persons' wellbeing."[6] Events (problems, issues), their causes and effects can be visualized by lines of varying thickness expressing their significance (see fig.2). They would also be used to identify the extent which issues are interrelated. The opinions of participants on effectiveness of policies can be measured by flow diagrams. Similarly, effectiveness of policies affecting the lives of older persons can be ranked and scored on a matrix to establish which policies are viewed as successful or failing in delivering what was promised to older persons. In that sense, flow diagrams and ranking and scoring matrices would be promising tools for monitoring of existing or future policies and programmes specifically geared towards older persons.

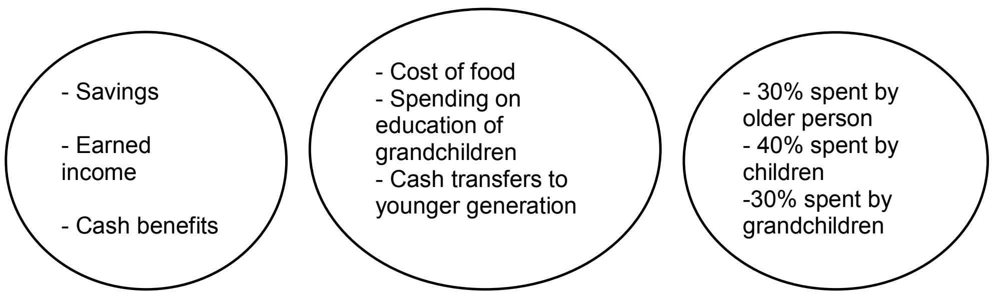
[6] *Participatory research with older people: a sourcebook,* p.57

Fig.2



Livelihood analysis aims at learning about people's income (cash and in kind) and expenditure (see fig.3). It can also be seen as a participatory, economic household analysis, since older persons would be asked to list how many household members reside where they live. Participants would draw three circles and divide the first one according to sources of income, the second one according to on what kind of expenditure the resources are spent and the third one according to which household member spends how much of the available resources.

Fig.3



The final maps, daily activity diagrams, institutional diagrams and Venn diagrams, flow diagrams and outcome of the livelihood analysis that have been created by various groups and individuals should be copied or photographed by the evaluation team. The results will be valuable in influencing the design of semi-structured interviews and in conducting focus group discussions since a rather diverse body of base information has been gathered by visual tools. More focused in-depth data collection can follow once the listener has attained a more nuanced understanding of a particular community and its older persons.

c) Semi-structured interviews

"*Semi-structured interviews* – conversations based on a set of guideline questions – are a key technique in participatory research, and a powerful way of learning about the views of older people."[7] Although all guideline questions will be asked during an interview – albeit with the possibility of varying order – new questions may arise during each interview. Therefore, the interview process is *flexible* compared to the rigidly structured interviews that we will turn to in the next section. This kind of flexibility will allow the interviewee to describe events, observations and issues in very personal terms and he/she will thus be less restricted to respond to questions in his/her own words. The set of questions however, will ensure comparability of data when the interviews are analyzed.

The guideline questions of the interview should be organized according to topical areas of inquiry that should succeed each other in a logical fashion. The language used should be comprehensible and jargon free. It is obvious that the interviewer has to be able to speak the language of the community in which he/she will conduct semi-structured interviews. An ability to (a) ask short, simple and easy questions, to (b) listen attentively, to (c) steer the interview sensitively in the desired direction and to (d) remember what was said earlier and interpret correctly respondent's statements during the interview are of paramount importance for the interviewer. Questions that would lead the respondent in a particular direction (Do you agree that….?) should be avoided. At the outset of an interview, it is important to select appropriate participants, to explain why the researcher(s) conduct this interview, to record the interviewee's name, age, gender and, importantly, whether the individual belongs to certain community institutions, how large the residential household is and how the interviewee locates him/herself within the community. Being outfitted with good quality recording equipment and making sure that the interview location is quiet and private are practical issues that are important for successful interviewing.

Nine types of questions in qualitative interviewing could be identified: introducing (please tell me about …!), follow-up (what do you mean by that?), probing (could you say some more about that?), specifying (what did you do then?), direct (are you happy with…?), indirect (what do most people here think about…?), structuring (I would like to move on to a different topic!), and interpreting (do you mean that…?) questions as well as silence (pause to signal to respondent to reflect or amplify answer).[8] These questions suggest that the interviewer(s) should be engaged without being invasive. Besides getting answers to the guideline questions, another objective of the semi-structured interview is to get a better picture of the values, beliefs, behaviour, formal and informal roles, relationships, emotions, stories, encounters, and places and locals of the interviewee.[9]

Notes should be taken during an interview on the non-verbal language of the interviewee as well as on certain specificities (the way responses were phrased) that were notable about the interview. Usually, it is not necessary to transcribe the whole interview

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[7] *Participatory research with older people: a sourcebook,* p.51
[8] Kvale, *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*
[9] see Bryman, *Social Research Methods,* p.328

from recording. To save time and energy, it is often sufficient to transcribe the crucial parts that have been the most illuminating for the evaluation.

To ensure the validity of data, representativity is a major goal in evaluation designs. *Representativity* is achieved by making certain that a sample exhibits the same key characteristics as the general population, i.e. gender distribution among older persons and age representativity. In addition, quality of life and the general situation of older persons in *various* communities have to be evaluated to control for differences that would be expected e.g. in rural areas compared to urban centres or variations in regions of a country.

Probability sampling of potential interviewees entails either (a) random samples of older persons of a particular community or (b) stratified random samples in which a population of older persons is already divided into subgroups, or strata, e.g. older persons in need of care, or ill older persons, etc. In addition, there is *snowball sampling*, in which the researcher is introduced by one interviewee to the next and *theoretical sampling* which starts with a particular hypothesis to be tested in the interview survey; as soon as the researcher realizes repetitions in the answers of interviewees, 'theoretical saturation' is reached and no new interviews are necessary. Both, snowball and theoretical sampling cannot claim statistical representativity and thus have their limitations. We will address the issue of representativity and sampling in greater detail in section 4.

d) Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions are "a research strategy which involves intensive discussion and interviewing of small groups of people, on a given 'focus' or issue, usually on a number of occasions over a period of time."[10] The difference between individual semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions is that the latter gives an opportunity to follow the group dynamic that evolves during the discussion. How interviewees react to each other's responses and make up their opinion, often as a reaction to what other participants have expressed is of core interest during a focus group discussion. Since participants may argue about certain aspects of an issue that is being discussed during a focus group, the reactions expressed and opinions voiced may be more realistic compared to an individual interview. In addition, views of participants can be challenged by others more profoundly than in a semi-structured interview. Thus, focus group discussions ideally complement semi-structured individual interviews.

The moderator who facilitates the focus group should try to be not too intrusive and should rely on a rather unstructured setting for the discussions to extract the opinions, views and perspectives of the participants. He/she should have a rather small number of guiding questions to stir the discussion and should intervene minimally. Only when the discussion veers clearly off track or when there are unproductive silences, should the moderator get involved. The moderator should record the discussions on audio equipment and make notes on the non-verbal behaviour of the participants. Naturally, the main interest would be on the range of opinions expressed, who are the opinion leaders and *how*

[10] *A Dictionary of Sociology,* p.233

the participants express their views during a focus group discussion. As with semi-structured interviewing, it is not necessary to transcribe the entire discussion; the focus should be on the most important parts of a focus group to document what was said.

Evaluation of living conditions of older persons, for methodological reasons, should be based on numerous focus group discussions.[11] There is no clear guide on how many discussions on a particular topic are sufficient, but in case of measuring the quality of life of older persons, it seems that a more limited number of discussions would be in order since only older persons would participate compared to a sample reflecting the entire society. If a starting hypothesis exists (i.e. income of older persons decreased due to pension scheme reforms), 'theoretical saturation' could be applied here as well: if the evaluation team hears repeatedly similar or identical responses and discussions of focus groups, it will conclude, there is no further need to continue with more discussions.

The size of each focus group should range between six to ten participants to allow every speaker enough time to express him/herself. The participants shall be selected randomly on a variety of characteristics: older age (60 and above) being the most obvious, but also based on differences of educational attainment, income and occupation, marital status and sex. Since participatory research on views of older persons will be organized within a community or locale, it is evident that many of the participants in focus group discussions will know each other in advance.

It is recommended to start a focus group by thanking the participants for taking part in the discussion, by explaining the evaluation purpose and design, and the reasons for recording the session. In addition, anonymity during evaluation should be assured and certain conventions (e.g. only one speaker at a time) of focus group discussions should be outlined. Forms could be filled out that would provide the evaluation team with general socio-economic (educational attainment, occupation) and demographic (age, sex) data of the participants. Thereafter, participants would introduce themselves to the group and attach name tags. A free flow of discussion topics should be facilitated by the moderator using a set of guided questions. Every participant should have the opportunity to express uninterrupted his/her respective opinion and more quiet participants should be encouraged to speak as well. Similarly to the semi-structured interviews, the language used by the moderator should be clear and jargon-free. In addition, the guided questions should be relevant to the group assembled. Thoughtful questions would engender a lively debate and avoid replies such as 'yes' or 'no' from the participants. A successful focus group discussion would allow the moderator to see the debated issues through the eyes of the participants and to glean a much deeper understanding of issues concerning the lives of older persons.

[11] Bryman, for instance, evaluates seven different research designs based on focus groups and notes a variation of eight to fifty-two focus group discussions held (see *Social Research Methods,* p.350.)

Analysis of qualitative data

Since the results of participatory research are rather unstructured in nature, analysis of qualitative data is not a simple or straight-forward process. The recorded outcomes of methods of participatory evaluation as outlined above have to be categorized to generate meaning.

The process of coding, which categorizes data according to topical considerations, is commonly used to make sense of qualitative research findings. Coding breaks for instance an interview transcript or field notes down into its components, which are organized according to topics of inquiry that allows the evaluation team to "examine, compare, conceptualize and categorize data"[12]. In regard to analyzing qualitative data on older persons, categories could, for instance, be health issues, care provided by relatives or institutions, income security in old age, or the household situation in which older persons live. It is helpful to begin the coding process as early as possible, i.e. after interviews and focus group discussions have been transcribed. Early coding would permit the research team to categorize data and to perceive the social reality of older persons through those categories. Coding would allow patterns to emerge from the field notes and other collected material. Established codes should be reviewed to ensure that changes in coding could be made in case it seems prudent to do so. Coding it therefore a highly flexible approach to making sense of collected qualitative data.

Various codified categories could be connected. The evaluation team should explore possible linkages and how categories could be related to each other. Coding, however, does not substitute for analysis. Since it is only a mechanism to categorize data, the findings still have to be interpreted.

Content analysis is the coding of documents and transcripts, to obtain counts of words and/or phrases for purposes of statistical analysis. The evaluation team creates a dictionary, which clusters words and phrases into conceptual categories for purposes of counting. Based upon this, the recurrence of often used words and phrases can be utilized and would inform the team of important topics that are mentioned repeatedly by older persons during interviews and focus group discussions.

Narrative analysis is another method to analyze qualitative research data. It attempts to analyze a chronologically told story, with a focus on how elements of the story are sequenced and why some elements are evaluated differently from others. Narrative analysis is seen as an alternative to semi-structured interviews, allowing for the uninterrupted flow of information. Some proponents of narrative analysis see it as a truly participatory and empowering research methodology insofar as it gives respondents the venue to articulate their own viewpoints without any structure restricting their expressions on a particular subject.

Four models of narrative analysis can be distinguished: *thematic analysis* (emphasis on *what* is said compared to *how* it is said), *structural analysis* (emphasis on the way a story is

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[12] Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques,* p.61

told), *interactional analysis* (emphasis on the dialogue) and *performative analysis* (emphasis on performance such as gestures used).[13] Notes and transcription of semi-structured interviews are analyzed to interpret the findings of a story told concerning a particular event.

Problems with narrative analysis are that the memory can deceive the narrator regarding the accuracy of a story told. Some researchers call for the introduction of questions at the end of a story to clarify any outstanding issues. Another criticism of narrative analysis is that stories told are treated uncritically and are only recorded without any analysis.

Qualitative data analysis is not controlled by the same strict rules as quantitative analysis. The nature of qualitative data contributes to the evolving nature of analysis and to a less structured approach. Coding, content analysis and narrative analysis seem to be rather tentative approaches to interpret collected data and to invoke meaning of the material assembled. Nevertheless, qualitative evaluation should be able to portray a social reality in greater complexity compared to quantitative methods. Participatory research is capable of generating more nuances concerning the lives of older persons. Such an approach should however be flanked by quantitative methods that would complement the qualitative data. Quantitative methods of data collection will be the focus of the next section of this paper.

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[13] see Riessman, 'Narrative Analysis' in *The Sage Encyclopedia of Social Science Methods*