

From: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

http://www.fao.org/docrep/t1660e/t1660e01.htm#P53_8786

1.3 What is social analysis?

The word 'social' is not easy to define. Most people know roughly what the word means but when asked to define it they are likely to give a variety of different answers. It is necessary to look briefly at this problem here, in order to be clear as to what is - and is not - included in the term 'social' in these Guidelines.

Holistic and residual approach

There are two main ways of defining 'social' which are commonly used. One is what might be called the 'holistic' approach, which defines 'social' as anything relating to people or society. This is a very broad definition, which could include most aspects of rural development, in so far as rural development implies the development of rural people or rural societies. The other is most appropriately known as the 'residual' approach since it defines 'social' as anything which is not 'economic'. The main problem with this approach is that there is no one definition of the word 'economic'. Sometimes, 'economic' is defined very narrowly to refer only to 'financial' or, at most, 'directly productive' issues or activities, in which case the residual 'social' issues or activities are relatively broad in scope. However, there is probably an increasing tendency among economists to define 'economic' in much broader terms, even to the point of including most issues or activities related to rural development, on the grounds that they are all directly or indirectly related, in which case there is little if anything left under the heading of 'social'.

It is obvious that neither of the above approaches is very useful in determining what should and should not be included in a publication or training course on social analysis. For practical purposes, it is more useful to define in more specific terms the types of issues or activities which are most likely to be regarded as 'social' in nature, while recognising that some of these might also be included under the term 'economic'.

Social issues and activities

The most obvious of these 'social' issues and activities are those related to:

- **the 'social' characteristics** of an area or society, including the demographic structure (eg. size and density of population, age and sex structure, household structure and composition), ethnic characteristics, social structure (eg. leadership structures; class, caste or other social divisions), religious and cultural beliefs and practices, and general attitudes;
- **the general quality of life** in an area or society, which comprises a number of different factors, including some (eg. income) which are 'economic' in nature but have wider implications in the sense that they influence other aspects of life (eg. income affects health, nutrition, access to various goods and services, leisure activities and the ability to choose between alternative lifestyles, all of which are important components of the quality of life);

- **social services** (eg. health, education, water and sanitation, welfare benefits), which contribute to the general quality of life but warrant attention in their own right because they raise particular planning issues; and
- **social justice**, which includes issues related to equity, human rights and participation in decision-making, all of which are again part of the overall quality of life but also warrant separate attention because they raise special planning issues.

Therefore, for the purposes of these Guidelines, the term 'social analysis' will be used to refer to the analysis of issues or activities related to any or all of the above.

1.4 The need for an integrated approach to planning

Although these Guidelines focus on particular aspects or dimensions of planning - notably the **social** aspects of **rural** development planning at **district** (or equivalent) level, it is important at the outset to remember that most planning issues and problems are interrelated and so, in practice, an integrated approach is essential. More specifically, it should be noted that:

- The social and economic aspects of rural development are closely related; this has already been suggested in section 1.3 and the nature of the relationship will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.
- There are important linkages between rural and urban areas, in the form of movements of people, goods, money, expertise and so on; these include linkages between rural areas and small towns within a predominantly rural district and linkages between predominantly rural areas and larger towns in other parts of the country.
- Planning at district level will only be effective if it is linked vertically to planning and policy-making at national level and to conditions, needs and aspirations at the local level.

It is therefore important to recognize that these Guidelines relate to only part of the planning process and thus must be used in some sort of broader planning context. The implications of this are discussed in Chapter 2 and in appropriate places in Parts II and III.

SUMMARY

- This publication has been produced as part of FAO's ongoing training programme in support of decentralized planning, the aim of which is to strengthen local planning capacity in rural areas by developing and disseminating information on appropriate planning approaches and methods. It complements an earlier publication entitled **Rural Area Development Planning: Principles, Approaches and Tools of Economic Analysis**.
- Its main aim is to provide guidelines on the social aspects of planning for practitioners and, in particular, trainers involved in agricultural and rural development planning at the district (or equivalent) level.

· The term 'social analysis' is used here to mean the analysis of issues or activities related to any or all of the following: (i) the social characteristics of an area; (ii) the general quality of life; (iii) social services; and (iv) social justice.

· Although these Guidelines focus on the **social** aspects of **rural** development planning at **district** level, it is important that they be used as part of a broader planning approach, which recognises the linkages between social and economic issues, between rural and urban areas, and between national, district and local planning.