

Third International Food Data Conference

Everywhere we look we find food composition data: nutrition facts on food labels; fats, vitamins and minerals highlighted on television commercials; and newspaper and magazine articles about fantastic nutrients in our foods. Although this information is prepared for consumers, there is very serious science behind it. The scientists responsible for the information met at FAO headquarters in Rome, Italy for the Third International Food Data Conference, held from 5 to 7 July 1999. Back to Basics was the conference's theme. Approximately 250 scientists from more than 54 countries attended the conference. Their aims were to discuss basic technical and scientific issues in analysing foods and in preparing the information for multiple purposes and users. Researchers, clinicians, health and agriculture policy-makers, food industry personnel and consumers are among the users of the data.

The conference was organized by FAO in cooperation with the European Cooperation and Research Action on Food Consumption and Composition Data (COST Action 99/ EUROFOODS), the United Nations University (UNU), the International Union of Nutritional Sciences (IUNS) and the Italian National Institute of Nutrition, Rome. FAO will publish a brief report on the conference, and its conclusions and recommendations, in English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Chinese. More information about food composition can be found on the FAO Internet site: www.fao.org/infoods.

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BOOKS LIVRES LIBROS

Can the poor influence policy? Participatory poverty assessment in the developing world

C.M. Robb. 1998. Directions in Development – The World Bank. 128 pp.

In the wake of the 1990 World Development Report on Poverty, poverty studies have become of critical importance to the World Bank as poverty reduction was declared as its core purpose. Since the mid-1990s, it has made increasing use of participatory techniques in its poverty assessment work at the country level. This publication reviews the work accomplished and synthesizes the lessons learned in three main topics: the understanding of poverty, the influence of participatory poverty assessments (PPAs) on policy, and the capacity building of institutions that should play a role in poverty alleviation. The author then summarizes emerging good practice and discusses the complementarity of PPAs with traditional socio-economic surveys.

If most of the findings of these assessments come as no surprise to readers familiar with community development and participatory approaches, the fact that these findings are being given appropriate attention by professionals from a predominantly macroeconomic and financial background is, in itself, a major breakthrough. This publication will therefore contribute to strengthening the legitimacy of participatory approaches. The lessons learned in conducting such exercises are consistent with those emerging from similar processes around the world. Not surprisingly, the findings also confirm the importance of household food security and nutrition issues in poverty alleviation. The style reads easily and the conclusions are presented in a professional and user-friendly way.

This book should constitute a useful reference to development institutions working in Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Benin, Brazil, Burundi, Cameroon, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Georgia, Ghana, Guatemala, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali, Mexico, Mozambique, the Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Republic of Moldova, Rwanda, South Africa, Swaziland, Togo, Uganda, Ukraine, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. It is indeed essential to ensure synergy of activities in this area and the policy dialogue initiated by the World Bank in these countries (which has itself in most cases built upon previous work by other organizations) should be used as a basis for further activities at the country level.

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