Applying a local poverty monitoring system: the case of the five wards under Muhammadpur Union*

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*P*overty is a condition of deprivation resulting from various factors. It is such a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that it is difficult to pinpoint and single out its main cause and determine one single indicator to monitor poverty especially in rural areas.

In Bangladesh, 44 percent of the people in rural areas live below the poverty line while 20 percent are hard-core poor. While the main causes of poverty identified in Bangladesh are lack of employment opportunity, lack of ownership in productive assets, vulnerability due to lack of capacity to cope with the adverse effect of natural calamities, and overburden of populations, the reality is that causes of poverty differ from one region to another and lack of understanding of these causes in a particular place makes it difficult to take realistic steps in reducing poverty.

Of course, it has to be acknowledged that Bangladesh has done remarkably well in reducing human poverty in terms of improving adult literacy rates; closing the gender gap in education especially enrollment rate; increasing life expectancy; reducing maternal and infant mortality rates; and intensifying the coverage of the Expanded Programme of Immunization (EPI), among others. However, its achievement in reducing income poverty has been modest.

To illustrate, the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) is being conducted every four years in Bangladesh to monitor the poverty situation in the rural and urban areas. Its findings help to assess the progress of the poverty situation in the country and determine policy interventions at the macro level. Disaggregated data at the divisional level are incorporated in this initiative. Experience, however, shows that even within a district, the poverty situation differs from one village to another and the service delivery agencies, especially the local government authority, face difficulties in taking proper steps due to lack of reliable data at the grassroots level. This has thus inhibited the progress made in addressing the income poverty situation.

In this regard, a user-friendly poverty monitoring system called Local Level Poverty Monitoring System (LLPMS) was developed at the Union level with the involvement of the local people. With support from the Micro Impacts

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of Macroeconomic Adjustment Policies (MIMAP)-Bangladesh project, the system was piloted in four villages of a Ward in 2002 to 2003. After the successful completion of the LLPMS, the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) implemented the system in the Muhammadpur (west) Union of Daudkandi Upazila, Comilla covering all villages. This article documents the processes and results of the survey.

Methodology

As its name suggests, the LLPMS involved locally trained people under the supervision of the functionaries of the local government to generate community- and household-level information. Two sets of questionnaire/checklist were designed to generate information using the participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and household survey. Tabulation of some core indicators was also done by the local people after which a Ward Information Book (WIB), which contains basic information of each household and aggregate information of some basic indicators, was prepared.

Functionaries of the local government and elite people of the Wards were then invited to a training workshop to analyze the information and identify the problems in various fields. They were also encouraged to prioritize the problems with the goal of preparing a pragmatic plan. Ward meetings were likewise organized in each Ward to disseminate the findings of the survey as well as the plan. The solicitation of support and commitment of various nation-building departments in financing some of the action program activities/services based on the plan was part of the meetings.

Findings/Survey results

Household and population characteristics

The total number of households in the five wards is 1,956 and the total number of population is 10,972, giving an average household size of six. The sex ratio (number of male against per hundred females), meanwhile, is 108. Said figures are higher than the national average. Male heads of households constitute more than 98 percent of household heads while female heads are only 1.6 percent.

Two-fifths of the population belong to the age group of up to 14 years old, suggesting a stable supply of school-going aged children and working people in the coming years.

In terms of religion, 87 percent of the households are found to be Muslim while the rest belong to the Hindu religion.

Education

The adult literacy rate in the five Wards is recorded at around 53 percent while the literacy rate for the population aged 7 years old and above is 49 percent. Females are lagging behind the males in both cases. Although the literacy rate of this area is lower than the national average, it is still higher than the average of other rural areas in Bangladesh.

The net enrollment rates at the primary and secondary levels are 83 and 37 percent, respectively, while the dropout rate stands at 2 and 9 percent at the primary and secondary levels, respectively. In terms of gender disaggregation, the enrollment rate of girls is higher and the dropout rate is lower than those of the boys. It is to be noted that there are five primary schools in the five Wards but no secondary school available. At present, an initiative has already been taken to establish a secondary level school in the Union to address its absence in the area.

Field observation suggests that poor parents deemed it more practical to involve their children in work than to send them to school. Meanwhile, the government initiative for increasing female education has a positive impact on increasing the enrollment rate of females at the secondary level. It is to be noted that primary education is free for all while secondary education is free for females in Bangladesh. Moreover, girls at the secondary level are given stipends. Because there is little opportunity for girls to be involved in paid labor, parents prefer to send their girls to school and have their sons work.

Health and family planning

The infant and maternal mortality rate in the study site are 14 and 3 per thousand live births, respectively. These are lower than the national average, implying that the people from these Wards enjoy better maternal and child care facilities than at the national level. Still, the delivery practices for newborn babies remain to be a problem, with only 26 percent of newborn babies being born under the supervision of doctors or trained birth attendants.

The average contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR), meanwhile, is 49 percent which is lower than the national average. Health workers note that religious belief against the use of contraceptive is one of the reasons for the poor performance in attaining a satisfactory CPR rate.

In terms of sanitation facilities, more than two thirds of households use ring slabs or sanitary latrines. Access to safe drinking water is only 15 percent as people use tubewell water for drinking which contains arsenic contamination. This certainly represents a health hazard for the people in this area.

The government has provided some arsenic-free tubewells in different areas through the *Union Parishad*. These tubewells, however, are often out of order, thereby leaving very few arsenic-free tubewells that are usable.

If one excludes the item in the provision of safe drinking water, one would note that other areas of the health sector in the study site are satisfactory. There is a Union Health Center and Upazila Health Complex at a close distance, for instance, along with a private diagnostic center at the local market for getting health services. People generally consult with the village doctor or pharmacist in case of the usual illnesses but they usually go to the Upazila Health Center for complicated health conditions.

Asset ownership
Nearly two thirds of the household heads of this area depend on nonfarm activities for their livelihood. People, however, still believe that cultivable land is the most productive asset in an agrarian society like Bangladesh. Pond and bovine animals are also considered as productive assets.

The average owned land and operated land per holding are 0.85 and 0.76 acres, respectively. Both are lower than the national average. Although 64 percent of households have ownership of ponds, the average size, however, is very small, i.e., 0.09 acres. Moreover, most of the ponds are owned jointly. Seventy percent of households are involved in poultry raising and only 25 households in livestock rearing. These figures suggest that ownership of land and bovine animal is less than the national average.

The reason for the low figures is that the area is situated near the capital city; thus, the population density is high compared to other rural areas in Bangladesh. There is also scarcity of homestead area, lack of grazing lands, and frequency of floods.

Living conditions
The survey showed that most of the houses (98.6%) are made of corrugated iron sheet or *pucca* so it is difficult to identify the poor and nonpoor by simply observing housing conditions.

Micro finance by government and non-government organizations in Bangladesh is a popular strategy for fighting against poverty. Some NGOs including the *Grameen Bank* are providing housing loans. As such, there is an opportunity to build good houses in the rural areas. Inflow of remittance was also found to be a reason for the good housing condition in these Wards as remittance earners give emphasis on building good houses as a symbol of social prestige.

More than fifty-three households have electricity facility although people are dissatisfied with the frequent load breakdown. A very significant development is having 5 percent of the households in these areas with mobile phones being used either personally or commercially. Recently, mobile phone has brought a revolution in the communication sector in the rural areas of Bangladesh. *Grameen Phone*, a sister concern of *Grameen Bank*, is the main initiator for introducing mobile phones at the grassroots level. People said that this facility has been able to make life easier and anxiety-free.

Employment
Labor force participation rate is recorded at 68 percent. Unemployment rate is very high while the underemployment rate is a little higher than the national average. Considering gender variation, it is observed that the unemployment and underemployment rates are very minimal for the male while the rates are much higher for females than the national average. The problem may lie with the definition of underemployment and unemployment rate. Household work was not considered as an economic activity and not included in the number of work hours considered in their definition. And since women are the ones mostly involved in housework, more of them were thus counted among the unemployed.

Income Poverty
When people fail to meet their minimum basic needs due to lack of purchasing power resulting from the inability to earn sufficient income, it is called income poverty. In measuring income poverty, three methods are used, i.e., Cost of Basic Need, Self Perception, and Villagers Perception Method.

The first method considers the ability to purchase a fixed bundle of food and nonfood items to meet the minimum consumption requirement as the poverty line. Under the second method, the household heads categorize themselves into four categories, i.e., occasional deficit, chronic deficit, breakeven and surplus on the basis of their ability to meet food requirement.

The author presenting the results of the Local Level Poverty Monitoring System (LLPMS) in five wards under Muhammdpar Union during the Fourth PEP General Meeting held on June 2005 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

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The households who identify themselves as chronic deficit and occasional deficit are considered as poor and the households who identified themselves as breakeven or surplus are considered as nonpoor. And for the third method, the villagers have their own perception in classifying people as poor and nonpoor. During the rapid appraisal, all households were categorized as poor, very poor and nonpoor after the identification of each household in the village on the basis of the criteria set by them.

The incidence of poverty under the CBN method is recorded at 52.2 percent, which is higher than the national average. The incidence of poverty, if only food intake is considered, is lower, however. Thirty-two percent of the families face problems in meeting their food requirements occasionally or constantly. The area is situated on the riverside of the *Meghna* and almost every year, the cultivated lands are inundated by floodwaters for nearly two months. As a result, cropping intensity is lower than other areas of the Comilla District. Moreover, a sizeable portion of the households are agricultural laborers. For this reason, the incidence of poverty remains higher than the national level poverty.

Average monthly income per household is found to be Tk. 4,947 (around $85). This is is lower than the national level but higher than other rural areas in Bangladesh. Comparing the data with the incidence of poverty, one observes that although per household income is higher than other rural areas in Bangladesh, its incidence of poverty recorded is higher, suggesting a greater inequality between the rich and poor in the study area than in other rural areas in Bangladesh.

Selected poverty profile
The results showed that nearly one half of the male-headed households and around three-fifths of the female-headed households are poor.

It is also found that among the poor, 63 percent of household heads are illiterate while among the non-poor household heads, 38 percent are illiterate. The incidence of poverty declines as educational qualifications increase.

Among the poor, 72 percent of households are landless and poverty declines as the size of land holding increases. It is interesting to note, however, that nearly half of the total nonpoor are landless. Thus, land ownership is not the only factor that classifies people as either poor or nonpoor. There are lots of opportunities in nonfarm activities for the landless in rural areas.

In the meantime, more than 55 percent of the household heads among the poor and 43 percent of household heads among the nonpoor belong to the age group of up to 40 years old. The mean age of the poor and nonpoor household heads is registered at 43 and 47 years old, respectively.

Regarding the type of business or profession, household heads who are service holders and businessmen are in a better position than household heads involved in other professions. Nearly three-fourths of the service holders and three-fifths of businessmen are nonpoor.

Utilization of the system: Perception of different stakeholders
During the workshop where the results of the LLPMS survey were presented to various stakeholders, the following feedbacks were gathered:
⇨ The local government authority has prioritized some problems in the fields of education, health, infrastructure development, building of economic institutions, agriculture development and gender development at the grassroots level. In the absence of additional funds for implementing the plan, emphasis has been given to the proper utilization of existing resources.
⇨ According to an admission of the former Chairman of the Union Parishad, they usually give emphasis on the localities of their supporters to make them happy. But during the planning workshop, he also identified some areas that were not getting due priority in gaining resources as the inhabitants belong to the opponent party.
⇨ The officials of nation-building departments committed to provide arsenic-free tubewells in a Ward meeting to Ward number 05 on a priority basis as the problem is more severe in this Ward than in other Wards.
⇨ One of the policy planners underscored the necessity of the LLPMS, saying that the system will ensure the accountability and transparency of local government. Preparing a database at the *Upazila* level covering all unions would also be helpful to have a wider replication.
⇨ People said that the information generated through LLPMS is new to them. They tried to organize themselves to strengthen their social capital and to take necessary action for combating poverty.
⇨ During the planning workshop, officials of nation-building departments stressed the importance of giving a special amount to the *Union Parishad* for implementing their plan on an experimental basis in order to help

develop a model for replication all over the country.

⇨ Some teachers also appreciated the effort of poverty monitoring. They also showed their interest to get involved in the process and even mentioned that students can be mobilized for data generation if they are involved in the process.

⇨ Functionaries of neighboring *Union Parishad* showed their interest in the LLPMS and requested to expand the program to the neighboring Union Parishad of Muhammadpur Union.

⇨ The representative of the National Statistics Department (NSD) said that if the process could be done properly, it would be helpful to complement the national initiative. The NSD also showed its interest to get involved in the process.

Lessons learned from LLPMS

Among the lessons learned from the implementation of LLPMS include:

⇨ The functionaries of Union Parishad are in a position to coordinate the efforts. Expertise support for collecting and tabulating data from the local people is essential for carrying out the activities of poverty monitoring. Training should be an integral part of the LLPMS.

⇨ Respective nation-building departments can be involved in providing specialized services related to data collection and tabulation to ensure the system's sustainability. During the initial workshop, the national level agency showed interest to be involved in the process.

⇨ The participation of people of all categories should be ensured by the functionaries of local governments to facilitate the wider use of data generated through the LLPMS. Some of the leaders of village organizations said that they would be able to undertake some projects for the development of the areas from the profits of mutual undertakings.

⇨ Presenting indicators of the surveyed area by comparing them with national indicators using the NRDB software is helpful to sensitize the policy planner.

⇨ Information dissemination by the functionaries of the local government has a big impact on mobilizing the people. The functionaries of the Union Parishad are able to prepare the plan based on the collected information if they are trained.

⇨ The indicators should be very simple and short if local people are to be involved in the poverty monitoring system.

⇨ Preparation of the Information Book incorporating some essential information of each household is helpful to ensure the quality of data. During the training workshop and Ward meeting, the Information Book was kept open to check the information of the encouraged villagers. Because of this, the investigators become very serious in data collection, thereby increasing the reliability of the information.

Future plans

Two things are essential for sustaining the activity: One is the conduct of training and the other is the management of funds for the field investigators. The functionaries of the Union Parishad said that voluntary involvement of people is possible but cost-sharing may be needed to be able to ensure the continuity of the process. They also agreed that soon after public examination, students remain idle for three to four months. During that period, they may thus be tapped for data collection at a very minimum cost. There is a plan to allocate a portion of funds to the local government directly by the central government. In this regard, a system could be developed to allocate a portion of funds for poverty monitoring. The issue of involving students during the period of their free time may be experimented by giving a portion of the funds from the CBMS to another Union Parishad.

Conclusion

Poverty monitoring at the local level that involves local people and local government proved to be possible in Bangladesh through the LLPMS project. Different stakeholders of the project have given positive feedback on the outcome of the project. As a philosophy to develop a sense of ownership of the people on data generated, the dissemination of information and assurance of the data's use for planning purpose should be effectively encouraged and strengthened.

Local people also proved their capacity to do data collection and partial tabulation of some core indicators if they are properly trained. Initiatives from the local government to continue the process, cooperation from the educated young local people and expertise support for data collection and tabulation of some indicators will thus ensure the system's sustainability. ✳

Fourth PEP General Meeting highlights 2004 Asian tsunami

The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) played host to the 4th Poverty and Economic Policy (PEP) General Meeting held on June 13-17, 2005 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The meeting brought together the three subnetworks under the PEP, namely: (a) the Modeling and Policy Impact Assessment (MPIA), (b) the Poverty Monitoring and Measurement Analysis (PMMA), and (c) the Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS).

Two Sri Lankan national government officials, namely, Hon. Dr. Sarath Amunugama, Minister of Finance, and Hon. Prof. Wisma Warnapala, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, graced the occasion as special guests and speakers. In his speech, Hon. Prof. Warnapala said that the conference came at an opportune moment given the recent Indian Ocean tsunami that put 3 million Asians into poverty where recovery may take many years to happen. Hon. Dr. Amunugama, for his part, underlined the importance of policy research for developing nations, particu-

larly in the study of poverty which affects millions of lives.

More than 150 development researchers and stakeholders from all over the globe attended the event to discuss recent issues, methodologies and findings on multidimensional poverty analysis and policy-impact assessment. Among the highlights of the event is the forum on the impact of the December 2004 Tsunami.

Meanwhile, a joint session of the CBMS and MPIA Networks was likewise conducted where invited resource person, Mr. Guntur Sugiyarto of the Asian Development Bank, presented how CBMS data can be used in computable general equilibrium (CGE) modeling.

With financial support from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC-Canada), the conference was organized by the Angelo King Institute for Economic and Business Studies of the De La Salle University in cooperation with the Laval University of Canada and the IPS-Sri Lanka.

Full copies of the conference program, papers, presentations and directory of participants are available online at the CBMS section of the PEP website at www.pep-net.org. ✳

Special guests from the Sri Lankan government, Minister of Finance Hon. Dr. Sarath Amunugama (left), and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Hon. Prof. Wisma Warnapala (right) together with IPS Executive Director, Saman Kelegama, light the traditional oil signaling the start of the Fourth PEP General Meeting.

CBMS Network visits Sri Lankan local sites

As part of the regular general assembly of the CBMS Network, its members visited local sites of the host in Sri Lanka. For the June 2005 meeting, the visit took place in the Colombo Municipal Council in the New Town Hall of Colombo and in the community of Badovita.

On hand to welcome the group in the Colombo Municipal council were Mr. Shantha Jayasundara, Deputy Commissioner of the Colombo Municipal Council, and Mr. Kesara Lal Gunasekera, opposition leader of the Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia Municipal Council. Both of them highlighted the importance of the CBMS in the community as well as for the ur-

ban council. Also present were Dr. Markus Mayer and Prof. S.T. Hettige, CBMS-Sri Lanka Co-Directors, who warmly welcomed the participants.

Two presentations were given. The first one was by Kumudini Samarasinghe, Engineer from the Colombo Municipal Coun-

Third National Conference on CBMS features new development challenges

The PEP-CBMS Network Coordinating Team of the Angelo King Institute for Economic and Business Studies (AKI) organized the 3rd National Conference on Community-Based Monitoring System on September 28-30, 2005 at the Angelo King International Center, Manila. Aptly titled "The Evolving Roles of CBMS in the Philippines Amidst New Challenges", it was indeed a challenge for the CBMS in the Philippines to look into possibilities of assuming new roles for the CBMS for the localization of the Millennium Development Goals, legislation, scaling-up, gender responsive budgeting, and other new initiatives in view of recent developments.

The conference, which was organized to share recent developments in the implementation and use of the CBMS for planning, program design and impact monitoring, among others, was attended by more than 150 participants composed of policymakers, program implementers and other CBMS practitioners at the local and national levels.

One of the highlights of the conference was the launching of the CBMS Development Grant Program which intends to provide funds to local government units and nongovernment organizations for the implementation of programs to address development needs identified through CBMS in particular communities.

Among the principal guest speakers were Secretary Angelo Reyes of the Department of Interior and Local Government, and Secretary Datu Zamzamin Ampatuan of the National Anti-Poverty Commission.

Local chief executives who were present to present the CBMS results in their localities and the actual and potential uses of CBMS data were: Governor Adolph Edward Plaza of Agusan del Sur; Governor Carmencita Reyes of Marinduque; Vice-Governor Mimiette Bagulaya of Leyte; Mayor Emmanuel Dairo of Veruela, Agusan del Sur; Mayor George Erroba of San Julian, Eastern Samar; Mayor Hilario Caadan of Tolosa, Leyte; Mayor Arnelito Garing of Cabugcayan, Biliran; and Mayor Wenceslao "Peewee" Trinidad of Pasay City.

Other presentors include officials and planners from CBMS sites such as Agusan del Sur, Bulacan, Camarines Norte, Marinduque, Palawan, Muñoz City, Mandaue City, and Pasay City. Partners from donor agencies and nongovernment organizations also shared current and future uses of the CBMS data in their project areas.

During the last day of the conference, participants signed a resolution acknowledging the importance of CBMS as a tool in addressing the problem of poverty. Part of the resolution encourages legislators to prioritize projects using their countrywide development funds in the localities that have demonstrated solid data using CBMS or related information systems to ensure objective decision-making. This would in turn avoid bias and partisanship.

Full copies of the conference program, papers, presentations and directory of participants are available online at the CBMS section of the PEP website at www.pep-net.org. ✳

Secretary Angelo Reyes (left) of DILG and Secretary Datu Zamzamin Ampatuan of NAPC highlight the importance of a community-based monitoring system (CBMS) for policymaking and program implementation at the national level.

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cil, wherein he highlighted the importance of CBMS in evaluating the different project interventions in the Colombo Municipal Council. He stressed the importance of understanding the characteristics of the settlements as well as the development of an impact monitoring system in the Colombo Municipality.

The second presentation was delivered by Ms. Malani Gamlath, Secretary of the Community Development Society of Badovita, the site of the CBMS visit. She explained how the support of the CBMS project has changed the way of development in their community. She also noted how useful their training in data collection had been and how they now keep all the required data of the community in a booklet. They have also done data mapping which enables them to easily identify the households affected by each of the problems. This has facilitated the formulation of intervention of project, especially in the three major areas they have identified, namely, education, health and employment. Hopefully, she said, they could get support from the government and other NGOs. She also mentioned that they are hoping to carry out the survey at least once in two years

After the visit to the Colombo Municipal Council, the group proceeded to the community of Badovita, which consists of approximately of 5,800 households.

Once in the field, the CBMS group was divided into subgroups of 4-5, with one translator from the Social Policy Analysis and Research Centre (SPARC), and one community development member of the community development society in each group. Each subgroup visited one household in Location Two (one section of Badovita community), which consists of approximately 380 households. The group interacted with household members. Afterwards, the group went around the village and interacted with the community members to know more about the actual way of living in an urban poverty pocket of Sri Lanka like Badovita.

Joining the members of the CBMS Network were representatives from the SPARC, the University of Colombo, the Colombo Municipal Council and the community. The field visit was coordinated by Nishara Fernando of the SPARC, under the supervision of Dr. Mayer and Professor S. Hettige. ✳

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