

**BRIDGING THE QUALITATIVE-QUANTITATIVE METHODS OF
POVERTY ANALYSIS**

**PAPER WRITTEN FOR WORKSHOP ON SAGA QUALITATIVE-QUANTITATIVE
METHODS FOR POVERTY ANALYSIS**

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1. Introduction

Poverty is primarily a social problem. As such it requires meticulous definition, identification of constituent parameters and verifiable and measurable indicators. The constituent parameters should essentially single out the major causal factors. Knowledge of the latter, in effect, serves as good basis for identification of perceived solutions and methodologies to guide implementation of the proposed remedial strategies.

2. Definition

Social scientists have looked at poverty from three broad definitional approaches, viz. absolute, relative and subjective poverty.

2.1. Absolute poverty

This refers to subsistence poverty, based on assessment of minimum subsistence requirements, involving a judgement on basic human needs and measured in terms of resources required to maintain health and physical efficiency. The resources in question include quality and quantity of food, clothing and shelter, all perceived as necessary for a healthy life. These basic life necessities are then priced and the total figure or price constitutes the poverty line. Those with incomes below the poverty line are the poor. Poverty begins below and ends above the poverty line in question.

Operationalization and measurement of absolute poverty has been based on a number of indicators such as “ Level of living Index, ” focusing on such basic needs as:

Nutrition: Indicated mainly by caloric and protein intake

Shelter: Reflected by the quality of dwelling and absence or presence as well as the degree of overcrowding.

Health: As reflected, for example, by the health status of the population, which includes the overall physical, mental and the social wellbeing of the individuals in the population as well as other trends indicated by infant mortality rates, access to and quality of available medical facilities.

The basic human needs have also been broadened beyond physical survival to include “basic social and cultural needs” such as the need for education, security, leisure and recreation:

Education: As indicated by the proportion of the population enrolled in schools.

Security: The numbers of violent deaths, relative to the population size and also cases and types of theft, mugging, rape, etc., have been taken to reflect the socio-cultural and security status of the resident populations.

Leisure: The amount of leisure time, relative to work time has been considered as a good indicator of life consolations away from propensities towards socio-economic inadequacies.

Critique: The concept of absolute poverty has been widely criticized especially against its assumption of universal applicability. It assumes, for example, that there are minimum basic needs uniformly applicable to all social and economic categories in all societies.

It is, however, recognized that there are variations of diets, shelter, security, leisure and recreation, depending on the diversity of cultures and modes of production, as well as the degree of socio-cultural change towards modernity and globalization. African pastoral societies, for example, look at their basic necessities through adequacies in livestock

members, unlike the urban dwellers among whom TVs, videos, radios, good housing, leisure, security, education, etc, would count as basics. The concept of adequate provisioning is also increasingly changing according to needs of specific population categories, e.g. youth, women, aged. The changing needs patterns also vary from one society and culture to another.

2.2 Relative Poverty

This refers to the use of relative standards in both time and place in the assessment of poverty, viewed as an improvement over the concept of absolute standards. In application, relative poverty is based on judgements of members of particular societies, regarding what they see as reasonably acceptable standards of living and styles of livelihoods.

The notion of relative poverty is thus elastic and receptive to conventional and rapid changes. Thus, In some cases, people might be viewed as relatively poor because they lack running water, washing machines, modern medical facilities, higher educational institutions such as universities, tourist and holiday facilities, and cars for personal use. Yet these are luxuries to some population sectors.

Critique: Acceptable standards are in themselves problematic between inter-societal, ethnic, religious and other social groups. Relatively acceptable standards of life style to slum dwellers are not acceptable to higher residential class area residents. To engage in meaningful comparison of relative poverty, there may be need to differentiate between local, national and international levels of poverty measurement.

2.3 Subjective poverty

Closely related to relative poverty, subjective poverty has to do with whether or not individuals or groups actually feel poor. This is because those defined as poor by the standards of the day will probably have low self-esteem, hence see themselves as poor.

Critique: A moderately-well-to-do person who might have done much better before, but currently experiencing cash-flow problems, may subjectively feel poor. However, he or she may be way ahead of other members of society, who may not see him as poor.

Groups or societies, seen as relatively poor by majority standards may also not see themselves as poor. They may either be having different assessment standards or lower estimates of acceptable living standards. This is often a problem with rural populations, who might just be content with provision of a few key services such as running water.

3 The Poverty Debate

Poverty debate and analysis is understood to incorporate various dimensions. According to OECD (2001: 10), for example, poverty is multidimensional, in that it encompasses deprivations that relate to human capabilities, including consumption and food security, health, education, rights, voice, security, dignity and decent work. As such, any poverty reduction efforts should incorporate environmental sustainability and reduced gender inequality, both viewed as integral in any meaningful treatment of poverty. In making proposals for poverty reduction, OECD lays emphasis on sound government policies coherently applied to development, focusing on the key policy areas with strong poverty reduction impacts. The areas in question include debt relief, trade, investment, agriculture, environment, migration, health research, security and arms sales (ibid.: 10). In the case of Kenya, poverty incidence is said to have increased from 44.8% in 1992 to 45.0% (1994) and to 52.3 in 1997 (Republic of Kenya, 2003). The poor, in this case, experience difficulties in accessing such human capabilities as education and health, which constitute critical aspects of human security, freedoms and overall empowerment.

Substantivists among cultural anthropologists and other poverty analysts support the presentation of the relationship between poverty and human security (see Global Human Development Report, 1994), as resulting in social relations that require protection of the affected human beings from abused freedoms. In this case, human security becomes a crucial component in explaining and analyzing different aspects of vulnerabilities and dimensions of poverty in time and space. Thus people without socio-economic and politico-civil freedoms cannot access the requisite opportunities and choices for enabling them to escape the poverty trap (UNDP, 2000).

In its differential impact dimensions, as will be clarified in this paper, poverty limits access to the different freedoms in different ways and with different impacts. This way, poverty translates into and is also essentially one of the key outcomes of structural violence, a constraint to human potential, caused by social dynamics in societal structures (Galtung, 1999). Structural violence as part of human insecurity exists in circumstances where human beings are unable to realize their full potential, resulting in unequal access to resources, political power, education and health care. Other notable outcomes include the resultant minimal access to legal representation, which in itself is a standing form of structural violence, embedded in the attendant social structures and often causing direct violence, conflict and ultimately, poverty. With marginal opportunities for peace in such situations, the affected societies lack potential for self-realization and development (Mwagiru 2001).

Using a gender mainstreaming perspective (the process of ensuring that gender is taken into account in all legislation, policies, processes, practices, and programmes in all areas and at all levels), the African Women's Development and Communications network (FEMNET, 2003), advocates incorporation of gender perspectives in poverty analysis. In their view, poverty is multidimensional, encompassing low incomes and consumption, low achievement in education, poor health and nutrition, low asset acquisition and ownership, as well as other forms of human development. FEMNET takes issue with the traditional conceptualization of poverty in that it tends to concentrate on income poverty as a measure, ignoring other dimensions with immense gender disparities. Here, attention

is drawn to the fact that women in Kenya, constitute a slightly higher proportion of the total population (50.1%) in comparison to men (49.9%) and that the national poverty rate estimated at 52.3% in 1997, increased to 56.8 by 2000. Yet despite the numerous policies, poverty remains widespread in Kenya, afflicting disproportionately more women than men, hence the Welfare Monitoring Survey (1997) noted that prevalence of poverty among the female-headed households was relatively higher than in male-headed households, while still slightly more severe for the female-headed households where husbands were away.

4 Conceptualizing Poverty and Human Security

Proactively pursuant to strategies meant to augment poverty reduction efforts, a United Nations Trust Fund was established in 1999, with the overall task of translating the concept of human security into concrete activity structures. The UN's conceptualization of human security focused on efforts aimed at safeguarding human societies against threats to human life, livelihoods and dignity. The most common threats include violent conflicts, environmental degradation, refugee phenomena, use and trade in illicit drugs, diseases such as HIV/AIDS, among other characteristics of population disempowerment. It is these same factors that are considered central to poverty causation. Human security here was understood to encompass the absence or reduction of dangerous situations that make human life difficult and sometimes impossible (Sadako, 2003). In agreement, the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan during the 2000 Millennium Summit in New York referred to a world that embodies the twin ideals of "freedom from fear", and "freedom from want". Implied here is the need to match freedom from physical and psychological insecurity with freedom from insecurity of livelihoods, hence poverty.

Civil society organizations play a crucial role in eradication and prevention of violent conflicts and poverty, leading to increased human security, strengthening of people's aspirations, and helping to take one notch higher, the concept of human security by removing the security debate from its traditional focus on "state security" to encompass

issues of well being, livelihoods and overall improvement in people's lives (Sen, 2002; Mark and Dewit, 2002). The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2003) looks at poverty and human security using a "protection-empowerment" model, thus providing a useful framework for understanding not only conflict prevention and transformation, but also the need for institutions, norms and processes for shielding people from pervasive and critical threats and vulnerabilities. States are thus challenged to develop "top-down" structures and systems that guarantee the rule of law, accountable and transparent institutions, and protective infrastructures. In initiating and facilitating "bottom-up" systems that give citizens an opportunity to participate in defining their priorities and setting up initiatives to better their lot, states make a key contribution to poverty reduction efforts. We now know that participatory processes for local level development work best in situations where the actors are protected against threats to their lives and resources.

Protected and empowered people make better choices to shape their destinies. The state, jointly with civil society actors and the private sector therefore have an important role, to facilitate realization of these ideals. Without protection and empowerment, poverty can hardly be alleviated. Improved people's well being thus calls for an all-rounded approach, to guarantee people the freedom they need as the basic ingredient to their participation in own development (UNDP, 2002). For Kenya in the last four decades, most population members have experienced isolation from the non-protective and dis-empowering state (Third Kenya Human Development Report, forthcoming) due to conflicts over resources and increased poverty.

Poverty has been seen as a cause of conflicts and insecurity. External factors such as globalization and structural adjustments have played a significant role, contributing further to more complexities in manifestation of poverty. In order to reverse the subsequent trends of poverty and human insecurity, there is need to embrace a protection-empowerment approach in which strengthened institutions and development structures adopt a rights-based approach, with popular participation and improving the welfare of the poor and vulnerable clearly constituting key policy and development emphasis.

This latter position tallies well with the Human Development Report definition of poverty as denial of opportunities and choices most basic to human development, which include choice to lead a long, healthy and creative life and enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity and self-respect (2001: xv). The poverty of choices and opportunities, which focuses on empowerment and actions to enhance opportunities is referred to as human poverty and captures poverty beyond income and expenditure, as distinguished from poverty of income. Similar parameters in assessing poverty, according to the Ministry of Finance and Planning (2002:11) are used in presenting poverty as existing where the basic material needs of an individual or a household are not adequately met, and a poverty line used to distinguish between the poor and non-poor, as the proportion of the population lying below the poverty line is categorised as poor, and the poverty is either absolute or relative.

5 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is good for social science research/data gathering. Qualitative techniques act as complementary or even alternatives to conventional quantitative approaches. Qualitative research enables researcher to gain empathic understanding of social phenomena; facilitates recognition of subjective aspects of human behaviour and experiences, and to develop insights into group's lifestyles and experiences that are meaningful, reasonable and normal to those concerned (e.g. hospital inmates when you get close to them through qualitative approaches). Below is a presentation of selected key qualitative approaches.

5.1 Key informant Interviews

Key informants are knowledgeable and other persons strategically positioned to provide specific types of information on particular situations, depending on their statuses in society or organizational hierarchies, with respect to the purpose of the assessment. They could be experts, with required knowledge on particular issues and situations. The key informants can be carefully identified in the project areas, ensuring gender equity, and in consultation with area representatives. At the community level participant selection criteria include:

- Length of stay in the community
- Prestige and respect commanded within the community, often taking into account socio-metric networks enjoyed by the individual
- Knowledge and willingness to discuss poverty issues with the assessing team

After the selection, issues of poverty to be presented for analysis and discussion include:

- Definition of poverty and its causes;
- Identification of key behavioural characteristics of the poor;
- Impact of poverty;
- Access to resources and trends in the quality of services;
- Explanation of mechanisms used by target communities in coping with poverty challenges.

5.2 In-depth Interviews

These are usually undertaken where analysts/researchers have previously studied the situation: for alertness and sensitivity to inconsistencies; for notes on omissions and problems for clarification. They facilitate collection of in-depth data not otherwise known; advancing deeply into personality structure of target

groups (through interviewer guided and discussion based experiences). Subject characteristics include involvement in particular experiences, ability to express oneself with liberty.

5.3 Participant Observation

Through attempted close attachment or membership to study areas, either as *complete participant*: wholly concealed identity, objectives unknown to subject population, interacting with them as naturally as possible; or *participant observer*: conscious systematic sharing of activities and interests, with trust, freedom, openness, not hiding or pretending; ensuring rapport, meaning and learning language and symbols. Taking detailed accurate field notes, or taping with consent of other actors.

5.4 Narrative Interviews

Analysis of personal accounts and situations through narratives or free “story telling”. Allows researchers to develop vivid insights into segments of target group’s lives. Involves life stories with more narrative and less interviewing; little interviewing through “question-answer interviews”. Facilitator/interviewer passive, but stimulating, friendly, permissive, not authoritarian.

5.5 Case Study Analysis

This involves selection of a typical case (poverty-stricken in this case) within the study area and using any of the above suitable methods to make a comprehensive analysis of the poverty situation in question. Can be good for prelude to main research, post-research analysis and explanations, supplementary information.

Helps gain more insight into structure and process, formulate suitable hypotheses, operationalize research variables, develop suitable research designs, provide more detail and explanation and beefing up of quantitative findings, and help ascertain feasibility of planned studies. Good for description, evaluation of causality, especially where complex researches are not ideal for survey or experimental study designs. Units of analysis/study: whole units e.g. community; single unit e.g. family or household;

5.6 Triangulation

As a methodology, this involves application of as many of the above methods as are suitable for the tasks in question.

6 Participatory Poverty Assessment Methodologies

Participatory methodologies involve active exchange of ideas as well as role taking and play based on equitable and institutional partnerships between the researchers and representatives of the target groups. Participation begins with: initial identification of the problem, diagnosis of the problem and design, actual research/analysis, report preparation and dissemination of findings. Where the target populations are rural communities, for example, their consultatively selected representatives work together with the researchers to formulate the training and data gathering methodologies, leaving none of the tasks exclusively in the hands of the “experts”. As such, there are no experts. Participatory approaches simply imply equitable incorporation of the target group representatives in the delivery process, without undue dominance on the part of the facilitators. Participatory analysis or research promotes collaborative action between communities and other target groups with governments, donors and resource persons. Promotes ownership for intervention, promotes collaboration and co-operation between researchers, practitioners and lay people. Common participatory approaches to poverty assessment, among others, include:

6.1 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Begin with selection of social groups, with specific social category delineation. Participants' composition guided by homogeneity; cohesiveness; knowledge of the issues involved. Examples: groups of women only; men only; youth – girls only; youth - boys only; female elders; male elders; etc. It is important to separate the groups in order to pertinently capture and reflect the views and experiences of particular social categories such as sexes and age-groups, etc. as will be found in given poverty set-ups. Ideal group size is 10 but can vary between 5-12. Discussion topics include identification of major problems in the area e.g. poverty in terms of definition and coping strategies; proposed solutions. Discussion is moderator-facilitated/generated through pertinent/topical issue raising for debate, keeping discussion interesting, encouraging non-talkers and controlling dominant individuals. FGDs are good pre-research method; for identification of main study indicators; post-research explanation of trends and variances, reasons and causes through participants' mutual stimulation and exchange of views; can act as change agents - changing group members' opinions, thro' direction, intensity and content of the discussion; good source of valuable information: attitude changes; dominant values, beliefs norms, etc.

6.2 Time lines

These are lists of key events in the history of the communities or target groups, that facilitate identification of the past trends and problems facing the group, focusing more on those related to poverty. Key among these would include droughts, famines, unpredictable commodity price fluctuations and inflation.

Useful time lines for the last 30 years or so in the history of the areas in question could be reconstructed with facilitation of key informants and talented community members.

6.3 Trend Analysis

These differ from the time lines in the sense that they address the key changes that have taken place in the area in question, in relation, for example, to affordability of essential goods and services. Participating group members should also be asked to provide underlying reasons for such variations. This helps in identification of goods and services important to them and how the changes relate to poverty onset, experiences and outcomes.

6.4 Gender Analysis

This approach can take the form of visuals depicting household properties and roles performed by women and men such as cultivation; baby care; herding; shoe repairs; laundry; carpentry; tailoring; ploughing; house construction. More telling perhaps would be ownership visuals depicting: farming tools (pangas, jembes, shovels; axes); houses; ornaments; cattle; land; radio; children; money; utensils; cattle; money. The reasons given for different associations and categorization of ownership, use and roles are important for inferences regarding gender differentials in terms of poverty and its impacts.

6.5 Social Mapping

Represents a geographical representation of the locally available community resources and services. The villages or represented community members are in small groups instructed to draw the social maps of their areas. Small coloured

manila paper markers are then used to show households and key resources, located in different places. Various features to be included could include roads; swamps; valleys; rivers; wells boreholes; mountains; schools; churches; health facilities, etc. The combined visual impacts and analysis tells a lot about poverty presence or absence.

6.6 Seasonal calendar

This consists of community or village based seasonal calendars, drawn by the community representatives, indicating seasonal variations on an annual/12 month calendar, with specific reference to poverty or other strongly notable community livelihood features. The seasonal calendars can be used to indicate visual appearances of when the highest and lowest supplies regarding rainfall, certain or all food commodities, incomes, diseases, and other acute problems, are/were recorded, followed by poverty related analysis based on the information extracted from the exercise.

6.7 Wealth ranking

This is often based on social mapping, following which households are identified alongside various socio-economic groups. The households or individuals owning them are thus ranked according to community perceptions of wealth and the lack of it, to identify the rich, poor and the very poor individuals and households.

7 Overall assessment

Over and above the above participatory approaches, the people in groups could be drawn into general and specific discussions of poverty, by definition and who within their areas is or are regarded as poor and why, i.e. causes of poverty; who is affected most and why; as well as the overall gender disparities. The participants can also make useful suggestions regarding recommendations for viable poverty reduction interventions that are responsive to specified local resource utilization. A combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches would certainly optimise the quality and value of the analysis.

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