

“Recent Trends in Ill-Being in Bangladesh and Implications for M&E of the *National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction*.”

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Poverty measurement in Bangladesh is in disarray with multiple measures using different methods. Local capacity to undertake poverty measurement is strictly limited and the national database is little used so its strengths and weaknesses are not well understood. Even basic poverty and inequality calculations are largely dependant on foreign consultants, but analysis of their works reveals many problems, not least changes to methods and questionable implementation of them (and the largely ignored implications for poverty and inequality calculations of changes in H(I)ES survey design and data release).

Orthodox (money-metric) poverty measurements using household income and expenditure surveys are only infrequently undertaken, and the results are not very convincing. There are several things that could be done to improve this including reworking recent Household (Income) and Expenditure Surveys, calculating poverty relevant Consumer Price Indexes from the price data collected by BBS to produce the national CPIs, and producing orthodox poverty calculations in a transparent manner. Poverty measures can be triangulated with other indicators of well-being (such as nutritional status and health) both to gain deeper and more confident understanding of patterns and trends in poverty.

While there is broad agreement about trends over the 1980s and 1990s among different indicators of ill-being there are no measures of poverty since 2000/1 (leaving aside the PMS as unreliable). Two measures that can be used to produce quite up-to-date indicators of trends in ill-being are the real wages of agricultural labourers and the nutritional status of children. In both cases there are data but timely and ready access has not been possible due to delays and restrictions. Piecing together some of these data suggests that circumstances did indeed improve in the 1980s and 1990s but there are worrying signs of a slackening of, if not a reversal in, these trends in the last three years, which may in part be related to the slow rate of growth of agriculture itself due to overhang of foodgrain stocks because of over-import following the 1998 floods. More work along these lines, exploiting fully the range of data available, openly and widely discussed, and contributing to improving the national database on poverty and MDG relevant is desirable.

M&E of the PRS and MDGs requires changes to the ways in which these things have been done (or not done) in the past; more should be done locally, by a wider range of people and institutions. There are successful examples of broader, evidence based, policy discourses in Bangladesh, perhaps most evidently from the Campaign for Popular Education consortium. Facilitating the emergence of such work in other sectors is challenging since CAMPE (and Education Watch) seems to have arisen indigenously (although latter donor supported), and other similar initiatives do not appear to be as successful.

The consultants for the ADB funded TA “Strengthening Capacities for Poverty Monitoring and Evaluation” have framed their suggestions in the light of these insights. In particular they suggest:

- 1). a greater use of (and more) “in-house” and “on-the-job” capacity building sustained over longer periods in preference to shorter term, off-site and overseas training; and
- 2) the institution of a local fund supported by donors and GoB and administered by an independent advisory committee to support research (including primary data production) on poverty and MDGs to which GoB institutions, CSO and independent researchers may apply ad hoc or in respond to calls to meet identified needs.

I would welcome discussion of these ideas, including by email to the address given above.