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Poverty Reduction, Decentralization and Community-Based Monitoring System

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Introduction

The period of high economic growth in Asia has brought about a significant decline in poverty. Poverty incidence has declined drastically over the last decade. Using the $1 a day threshold, the World Bank has estimated that poverty incidence in East Asia has been halved from 29.4% in 1990 to 14.5 % in 2000. In South Asia, the poverty incidence declined from 41.5% to 31.9% over the same period. Nevertheless, the number of poor in the region still reaches 694 million, and poverty remains to be one of the biggest challenges confronted by the countries in the region.

With the poverty problem looming across Asia, it is not surprising that poverty reduction has become the main goal of many countries. At the Millenium Summit in September 2000, 147 heads of State and Government adopted the Millenium Declaration and affirmed their commitment towards sustaining development and eliminating poverty. This led to the formulation of a concise set of goals, numerical targets, and quantifiable indicators, or the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs). With the MDGs, the countries can focus its efforts on achieving significant, measurable improvements in people's lives. Even multilateral development banks have supported the adoption of the MDGs. They have agreed to relate their long-term strategic frameworks to the MDGs and have committed to reflect the MDGs in their country strategies and programs.

The eight Millenium Development Goals are the following: (1) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; (2) achieve universal primary education; (3) promote gender equality and empower women; (4) reduce child mortality; (5) improve maternal health; (6) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; (7) ensure environmental sustainability; and (8) develop a global partnership for development. The first seven goals relate to the different dimensions of poverty. There are a total of 48 targets.

While the world community has been focusing its efforts in reducing the different dimensions of poverty, the governance structure of government in many countries has

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also been evolving. Decentralization has gained popularity within the last two decades. It was seen as an alternative to provide public services in a more cost-effective way.

Decentralization brought with it greater demand for local level data. This paper examines the role of community-based monitoring systems in addressing this demand for more disaggregated data on the different dimensions of poverty. In particular, it looks at the initiatives carried out in the Philippines, Nepal and Vietnam in developing local level poverty monitoring systems.

Decentralization

Decentralization is defined as the transfer of responsibility for planning, management and resource raising and allocation from the central government and its agencies to the lower levels of government. Decentralization is being pursued in many countries to improve delivery of services. Local government units are now involved in identifying problems in their localities, formulating plans and programs to address these problems, implementing the corresponding programs and projects, and monitoring and evaluating the impact of these interventions. The local units are now more accountable to their constituents.

Advocates of decentralization argue that bringing the government closer to the people will make it more responsive and hence more likely to develop policies and programs which meet the needs of the people. This can be done by strengthening local governments by giving them autonomy and building their capability and capacity to meet the challenge of improving the lives of their constituents, which is conducive to poverty reduction.

Several countries in Asia have long advocated and practiced decentralized system of governance for effective participation of the people in the governance process, equitable distribution of resources, organized presence of the government at all levels, and empowerment of disadvantaged communities. The examples below serve to illustrate the diversity of types, degrees and approaches to decentralization.

In Nepal, two Acts have been enacted on decentralization following the new 1990 Constitution: The Village Development Committee (VDC), Municipality and District Development Committee (DDC) Act 1991 and the Local Self-Governance Act 1999. The former was only the continuation of the earlier system with a different classification while the latter was designed on the basis of the report of the High Level Decentralization Coordination Committee 1997. The Local Self-Governance Act 1999 includes provisions for broad based organizational structure and devolution of authorities. It enabled elected local bodies to establish sectoral units within DDCs, collaborate with the private sector on joint ventures, levy local taxes and exercise judicial authority.

The passage of the Local Government Code (LGC) in 1991 represented a major step in decentralization in the Philippines. Before the LGC, the LGUs' main functions were levying and collecting of local taxes, regulation of business activities, and

administration of garbage collection, public cemeteries, public markets and slaughterhouses. The LGC paved the way for increased local autonomy, expenditure responsibility and revenue authority. In particular, the principal responsibility for the delivery of basic social services and the operation of the facilities were devolved to LGUs. The devolved areas are: agricultural extension and research; social forestry; environmental management and pollution control; primary health and hospital care; social welfare services; repair and maintenance of infrastructure; water supply and communal irrigation; and land use planning. Consequently, personnel of National Government Agencies who were doing these tasks before the passage of the LGC were devolved to the LGUs.

In addition, the LGUs were given taxing authority to be able to generate resources to complement the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) that they get from the national government. A new scheme has been devised to determine the share of LGUs from the revenues collected by the national government and this is based primarily on population and land size.

In Vietnam, the Law on the Organization of the People's Council and People's Committee provides for decentralization in the social sectors, particularly in education, health, and social welfare. The transfer of power to the local levels unburdens the central government and allows it to concentrate on issues of national importance. This is to be done through the distribution of powers to different local government levels, including taking over some of the responsibilities of the central government or coordinating the latter's activities. This will enable local authorities to immediately attend to the needs of the communities because they do not have to wait for instructions from above.

Vietnam brings the process a step further by giving local authorities, instead of the central administration, the power to issue decentralization measures. Such measures empower not just the local governments but also the social organizations, mass organizations, the various sectors, and non-governmental organizations. In effect, decentralization in Vietnam combines the principles of management by sector and management by locality or territory. The executive organs, particularly the ministries, deliver the national services, while the local authorities deliver the services in their respective territories "without any discrimination as to central and local economic activities".

The constitution of Pakistan does not stipulate for the creation of local governments. They existed through ordinances and under the supervision of their respective provincial governments. Pakistan is undergoing decentralization through devolution. The plan requires the establishment of a three-tier local government system in every district of Pakistan. The design is based on five fundamentals: devolution of political power, decentralization of administrative authority, deconcentration of management functions, diffusion of the power-authority nexus, and distribution of resources to the district levels. The issue of providing provinces with greater autonomy is in line with the rationale that they are in a much better position to deal with, decide and

design a local government plan that will be more responsive to the specific needs of each province.

In order to reduce red tape and make government more responsive to the needs of the people, decisive steps will be taken for devolution of authority at the federal and provincial levels and ensuring an effective role for local bodies. In the first phase, health, primary education, secondary education, local roads, irrigation and police would be decentralized. These services would be managed at the district or regional level with provincial or central government exercising supervisory role.

In the Sri Lankan context, devolution means transferring political and administrative decision-making authority from central government to elected bodies at lower levels. The instruments of devolution are The Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution (1987) and The Provincial Councils Act No 42 of 1987.

There are three formal levels of state administration in Sri Lanka i.e. the Centre – with the President, Prime Minister and Cabinet of Minister; Province – Provincial Councils; Divisions – Divisional Secretary, Produce Sabhas, Urban Councils and Municipal Councils. The Government has decided that administration should be centralized to divisional level. The objective of this proposal is to ensure that delivery of services to the people is undertaken at the level closest to their place of living. This is to ensure that all operational activities presently performed by line ministries of the central government, provincial councils and the district administration, which directly affect the people are carried out at the divisional level. The functions of line ministries, departments and provincial councils in respect of these activities will be confined mainly to planning and policy-making.

The major components of the decentralized planning and coordination are found at four levels, namely, Provincial Development Policy, Strategy and Programme, District Development Programme, Divisional Development Plan, and Village Development Plan. The latter focuses mainly on projects and activities at the village level to be identified through direct consultation between the village level organization and the community. They will be drafted with an assigned order of priority assigned to meet the felt development needs of the village. In terms of coordination of decision-making at the four levels, three bodies have been set up, i.e. Provincial Planning Councils, District Coordinating Committees, and Divisional Planning Councils.

In terms of project planning and implementation, the level of decentralization has gradually shifted down to the divisional level, with strong participation of the divisional secretariats. It has become the meeting point where national development efforts, provincial development strategies and peoples needs, as represented by village groups and elected members, are brought together, appraised, reviewed and approved. It is also at this level that projects are monitored and implemented and their impact evaluated.

In Bangladesh, local bodies are controlled by the central government in all aspects. Through legislation, the government determines the structure, composition, functions, and responsibilities of the local bodies. In addition, the government formulates

detailed rules relating to the powers of the elected members, assessment of the taxes and the many important matters. Regulations made by the local bodies are subject to government approval. Financially the government prescribes in detail the sources of income, the powers of taxation, maintenance of accounts, the rules to be followed and other related matters. Administratively, the local bodies do not appoint their own staff. Administrative control is also carried out through review of resolutions (the local bodies have to submit a copy of the proceedings of their meetings and the resolutions passed) and periodic inspections.

Since 1991, there has only been local government at the Union level and that is the *Union Parishads* (the lowest unit of local government). It is a level of local government, which has existed for a long time and where the locally elected persons are well-known to them.

Challenges of Decentralization

Decentralization brings decision-making closer to the people and yields programs and services that better address local needs. The latter requires sufficient and technical capacity on the part of local government units, as well as supporting institutional arrangements.

Local government units face greater challenges with the increased powers given to them. They now have to do their own planning and implementation of projects and programs to address the needs of their constituents. They need to be able to determine what are the problems in their localities, what interventions are needed, who should be the target beneficiaries for these programs and what are the impacts of these programs. To be able to carry out these functions well, it is necessary to have the relevant information. Institutionalizing a monitoring system at the local is one of the more important challenges faced by local government units.

In the case of the Philippines, there are structures mandated by the local government code to assist the LGU to carry out its functions, but these are not enough. For instance, a planning unit is mandated to be operational in every province, city and municipality. These planning units are tasked to prepare annual development plans. But there are no clear guidelines on how the planning unit is supposed to carry out its functions. Thus, we find large variations in the tasks performed by the planning units as well as the quality of plans (if there are) prepared by them. One of the more serious gaps is the lack of data that can be used in preparing the plans.

The types of programs that are implemented by local governments are dependent on the identified needs of the local populace. In the absence of data on the different dimensions of well-being, it is not uncommon to find that the programs implemented by local government units correspond to the priorities of the local chief executives. Thus, we find local government units (especially those headed by engineers) to prioritize infrastructure projects. We also find examples of localities which prioritize health

concerns or education. The lack of data covering the different dimensions of poverty will make it easy to overlook the other dimensions.

Poverty Monitoring Systems

With decentralization, the types of data being demanded by the various stakeholders such as policymakers, program implementers and civil society are also changing. Data that has been disaggregated to correspond to the different levels of government are needed by the local governments to assess the situation. Moreover, longitudinal data are necessary to track changes over time. Furthermore, household level data are needed to identify eligible beneficiaries to the different programs.

Existing poverty monitoring systems in many countries rely on national surveys and censuses conducted by the national statistical offices. When conducted regularly, these surveys and censuses provide data on the different dimensions of poverty every 3 or 5 years. Many of these surveys can generate national and regional level estimates. However, they cannot provide data disaggregated enough to meet the needs of local government units.

There are efforts by the various national statistical systems is trying to address the demand for micro-level poverty statistics. Small area estimation facilitates the generation of estimates for areas smaller than the sampling domain. MIMAP-Philippines has conducted a research on this in 1996. The research demonstrated the use of various estimation methodologies in generating estimates of poverty incidence at the municipal level. Some of the estimates, though, had high coefficients of variation. Nevertheless, the MIMAP work has helped in generating awareness of these techniques in generating more disaggregated poverty estimates. This type of research requires linking census and survey data. Thus, the extent of overlap between the two sources determines to a large extent how good the resulting estimates are.

Poverty mapping is now being carried out in several countries to facilitate geographic targeting. Poverty mapping allows for the identification of small areas where poverty is prevalent. Through the use of regression, poverty indicators are mapped for smaller areas. This method requires the combined use of data from censuses, surveys and/or administrative records. One problem with poverty mapping is the difficulty in updating the poverty maps. Since censuses are conducted every 5 or 10 years, this implies that updating can only be done at the same frequency.

Some countries have redesigned their surveys to generate more disaggregated data. Sample size of surveys can be increased but at greater costs. The Philippines, for instance, started generating provincial estimates in 2001. However, they find that more than half of the estimates have coefficients of variation greater than 20%.

Meanwhile, some countries have started to focus on other poverty monitoring systems that can provide local level data. The Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS) is one such alternative.

CBMS in the Philippines

MIMAP-CBMS started in the Philippines by the Micro Impacts of Macroeconomic Adjustment Policies (MIMAP) -Philippines Project in response to the need to monitor the impact of macroeconomic policies and shocks on the population. It was found that national surveys and censuses conducted by the statistical system could provide statistics relating to the different dimensions of poverty. However, there are gaps in the system in terms of the level of disaggregation and frequency. While there is the Family Income and Expenditure Survey conducted by the National Statistics Office as the source for the income-based measures of poverty, it could only provide national and regional data until 2001. Moreover, the data are collected every three years so that the official estimate of the impact of the 1997-1998 Asian Financial crisis on poverty in the Philippines came out in late 2001, four years after the onset of the crisis.

The gaps are greater for some of the non-income based measures of poverty. Some of these statistics are collected infrequently. For instance, the latest data on functional literacy rate is 1994. Moreover, most estimates are available at the national and regional levels only.

To meet the demands for local level data by LGUs, MIMAP Philippines pilot tested the community-based monitoring system. Florentino et al (1992) proposed a monitoring system to monitor the impact of macroeconomic adjustment policies on the welfare conditions of the population, particularly the poor and vulnerable segments of the population. Reyes and Alba (1994) modified the proposed MIMAP monitoring system and specified the indicator system, identified the key players at each geopolitical level and outlined the flow of information. Reyes and Ilarde (1996) further developed the details of the monitoring system. The design was further refined to incorporate the results of the pilot testing in Bulacan in 1995- 1996 and this is presented in Reyes (1998).

The MIMAP Community-Based Monitoring System (MIMAP-CBMS) is an organized way of collecting information at the local level for use of local government units, national government agencies, non-government organizations and civil society. A brief description of CBMS is given below.

The CBMS has several features: (1) it is LGU-based; (2) taps existing LGU personnel as monitors; and (3) has a core set of indicators. Being LGU-Based, the CBMS adopts the concept of mobilizing and developing the capability of communities for data generation and utilization. It also reports the data collected to the higher geopolitical level for immediate intervention and ultimately reaches macroeconomic planners in order to influence adjustment programs. It utilizes the information generated by other monitoring

systems already in place as a support. It also creates and maintains databank at each geopolitical level.

The CBMS taps local personnel to do the data collection, processing and analysis of the data. The key players at each geopolitical level include:

Provincial Level: Provincial Planning and Development Office
Municipal Level: Municipal Planning and Development Office
Barangay Level: Barangay Development Council
                        Community leaders and volunteers
                        Health workers, nutrition scholars
                        Teachers and students in some barangays

The CBMS adopts a core set of indicators covering the different dimensions of poverty . These indicators have been chosen based on the *multi-dimensional* aspects of poverty and have been confined largely to *output* and *impact* indicators. Table 1 shows the 14 core indicators. These indicators are recommended to be collected annually or at most every 2 years.

The system is flexible and can accommodate community-specific indicators to reflect the other concerns of the community. For instance, indicators related to environmental concerns are included in the CBMS system in Palawan. On the other hand, Camarines Norte has included indicators related to natural calamities in its indicator system.

Table 1. List of Core CBMS Indicators

BASIC NEEDS	CORE INDICATORS
A. Health	1 Proportion of child's deaths
B. Nutrition	2 Malnutrition prevalence
C. Shelter	3 Proportion of households living in non-makeshift housing 4 Proportion of households who are not squatters
D. Water and Sanitation	5 Proportion of households with access to safe water supply 6 Proportion of households with access to sanitary toilet facilities
E. Education and Literacy	7 Literacy rate 8 Elementary participation rate 9 Secondary participation rate
F. Income	10 Proportion of households with income above the poverty threshold 11 Proportion of households with income above the food threshold 12 Proportion of households who experienced food shortage

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G. Employment	13 Employment rate
H. Peace and Order	14 Proportion of persons who were victims of crime

The implementation of CBMS requires the conduct of the following activities:

1. Orientation
2. Data Collection
3. Data Processing
4. Community validation
5. Analysis
6. Preparation of socio-economic profile and plan
7. Dissemination (databanks)

Orientation

The community is briefed on the objectives and uses of the CBMS. The responsibilities of the various stakeholders are discussed. This is led by either the provincial or city/municipal CBMS focal persons, usually from the Planning and Development Office.

Data collection

Data is collected using two survey instruments – a household questionnaire and a community questionnaire. Barangay health workers (BHWs), Barangay environment, agriculture and nutrition scholars (BEANS), together with Mother Leaders and Barangay officials are the primary data collectors. Recommended frequency of data collection is annually. If this is not possible, then every two years is suggested.

Data Processing

Data are tallied and consolidated manually at the village level by some of the data collectors. When possible, computerized processing is done even at the village level.

Barangay or village aggregates are then submitted to the municipality or city for consolidation and encoding in the computer. At this level, household level data may also be encoded. The municipal aggregates are then submitted to the province for consolidation.

Community validation

The processed data are presented to the community for validation. The focal person in the barangay presents the poverty situation in the village and representatives of the community check on the accuracy of the data. In this community forum, the reasons for the findings are discussed and possible solutions are presented.

Analysis

The Barangay council, the municipal/city planning unit and the provincial planning unit analyze the data. The extent of poverty and its different dimensions are assessed, the causes of poverty are diagnosed, and appropriate interventions are identified.

Preparation of socio-economic profiles and plans

The CBMS data and the analysis of it are used as inputs in the preparation of the annual development plans. In particular, the CBMS data can be used to:

❖ To provide inputs to development plans and socio-economic profiles.
❖ To provide the basis for resource allocation.
❖ To help identify target beneficiaries for program and projects.
❖ To provide inputs for program design, implementation and monitoring.

Dissemination (databanks)

While local government units are the primary users of the CBMS data, it is envisioned that this will also service the data needs of national government agencies, NGOs, academe, researchers and other users. This has been happening in Palawan.

To service these needs, databanks are established at each geopolitical level. A software is available that can be distributed to local partners for free to generate tables and maps from the CBMS data. Samples of these maps are shown below. It has been found that the local policymakers and the communities' understanding of the poverty situation in their localities was greatly facilitated by the use of maps.

Samples maps of CBMS results are shown below. Figure 1 shows the proportion of households with access to sanitary toilet facilities in the different municipalities in Palawan. The red-shaded areas (bright red and pink) are municipalities with access lower than the provincial average while the green-shaded areas are municipalities with access higher than the provincial estimate. Figure 2 shows the access to sanitary toilet facilities in the different *barangays* (villages) in the municipality of Brooke's Point. Figure 3 reveals the situation in the *puroks* in the *barangay* of Oring-oring. It also shows the households who have access to this amenity (green dots) and those who do not have access (red dots).
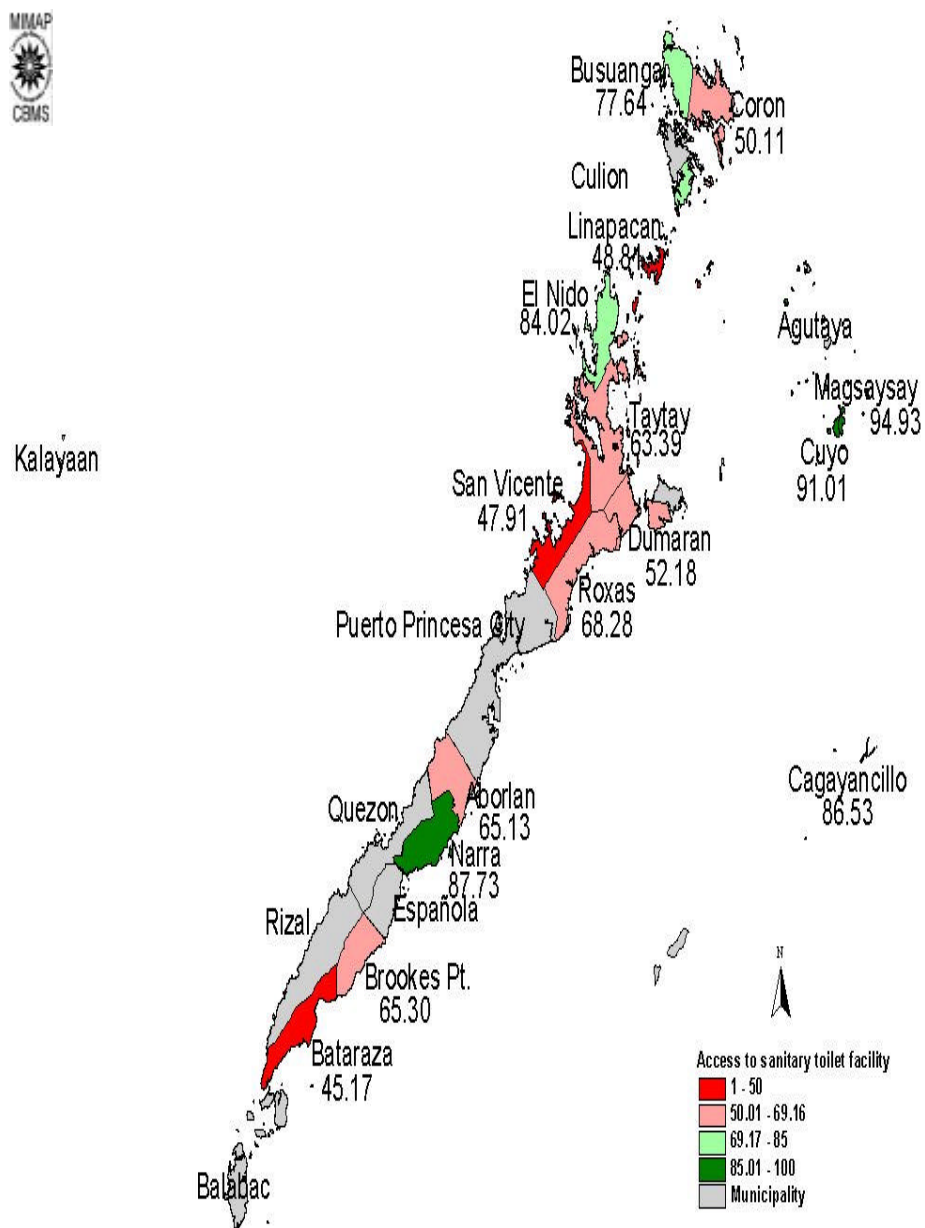
Figure 1. Proportion of households with access to sanitary toilet facility, by municipality, Province of Palawan, 2002
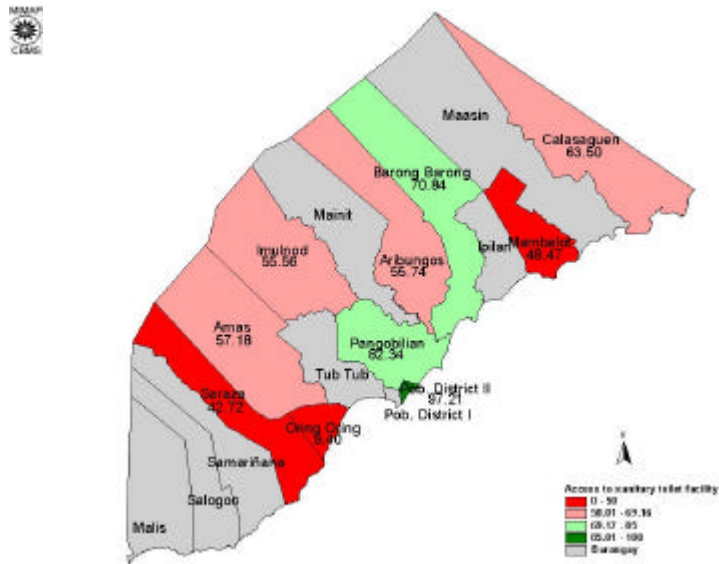
Figure 2. Proportion of households with access to sanitary toilet facility, by barangay, Municipality of Brooke's Point, Province of Palawan, 2002
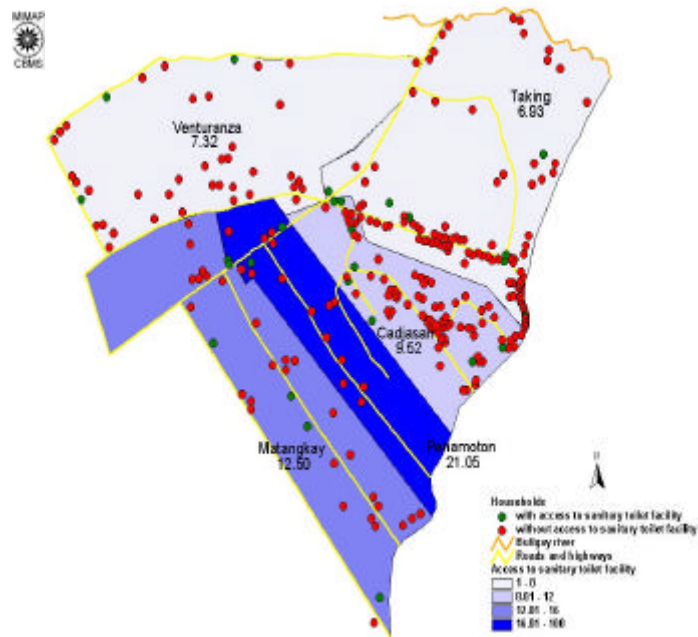
Figure 3. Proportion of households with access to sanitary toilet facility, by purok and household, Barangay Oring-Oring, Municipality of Brooke's Point, Province of Palawan, 2002

CBMS Experience in the Philippines

The CBMS experience in the Philippines has been very positive. Implemented province-wide in Palawan, it has been shown that it can provide the needed information to support planning and project implementation at the local levels. It is now being implemented also in Camarines Norte. Region IVB, through the NEDA Regional Office, consisting of the provinces of Mindoro Oriental, Mindoro Occidental, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan, has expressed interest in doing it region-wide.

At the national level, the CBMS work has led to the issuance by the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) of a memorandum circular advocating for the institutionalization of a community-based monitoring system and the adoption of the core indicators recommended by MIMAP-CBMS. Just before this issuance, the DILG issued a circular in December 2001 requiring all provinces and municipalities to identify a Local Poverty Reduction Action Officer (LPRAO). The LPRAOs are mandated to prepare poverty action plans. Consequently, they would need data in the different dimensions of poverty to be able to diagnose the poverty situation in their localities.

CBMS in Nepal

In Nepal, two Acts have been enacted on decentralization following the 1990 new Constitution: The Village Development Committee (VDC), Municipality and District Development Committee (DDC) Acts 1991 and the Local Self-Governance Act (LSGA) 1999. The former was only the continuation of the earlier system with a different classification while the latter was designed on the basis of the report of the High Level Decentralization Coordination Committee 1997. Under the LGSA, the DDC has influence and control over all government development initiatives in the district. The district level activities are allocated to the VDCs through the DDC. It works also as a link institution between the line agencies representing government ministries and the local bodies. In essence, VDC is the lowest political unit of which all local level initiatives and development interventions are conceived, designed and implemented. It is, therefore, necessary that planning and implementation of the programmes are done at the lowest political unit i.e. VDC. This is not the case, however. Plans are prepared only at national level collecting the demands from districts on ad-hoc basis. In such plans, needs of local people are not reflected. It is, therefore, imperative that plans should be formulated at the VDC level, going up to DDC and then at the national level.

The information base at the local level is virtually non-existent, however. The only household survey being conducted by national government is the Nepal Living Standards Survey. LSS are integrated surveys that provide statistics relating to all aspects of income-related poverty, human development and social inconsistencies. It is conducted every five years or so with the initial survey conducted last 1995/96 with the next one scheduled on 2002/2003. Moreover, it does not provide district level statistics. Therefore, it is necessary to gather up-to-date information on the welfare status of the people at the district level.

In addressing this problem, the MIMAP Project in Nepal started to implement information gathering at the local level. Data is collected through focus group discussion at the ward level with key participants such as the ward chairperson, ward members, schoolteachers and local elite of the wards. The wards comprise 100 households or so and the discussants number about 15 to 20.

Sixty-two (62) indicators have been carefully chosen to be generated through discussions. These indicators are simple to collect, easy to interpret and have little or no room for subjective judgment. After the information have been collected, processed and interpreted, they serve as inputs to the planning preparation at the VDC level. This step was noted to be necessary since planning, programming and budgeting exercises are done at this level. During planning preparation 40 participants are invited. The plan is prepared by identifying the basic need and long-term development vision of the VDC. Programs and activities were discussed and finalized for the fulfillment of those needs. Efforts have also been made to assess the achievements from different sectors when the proposed programmes are implemented.

At present, the CBMS is being operationalized in five districts in Nepal.

CBMS in VIETNAM

Local government in Vietnam consists of three tiers: province and central city, district and township, and commune. Each administrative level has a people's council and a people's committee. Law on the Organization of the People's Council and People's Committee provides for decentralization in the social sectors, particularly in education, health, and social welfare. The People's Council represents the local authority of the state and is the top supervisory bodies at each level and oversee people's committees that act as executive bodies and carry out local administrative duties.

Vietnam brings the process a step further by giving local authorities, instead of the central administration, the power to issue decentralization measures. Such measures empower not just the local governments but also the social organizations, mass organizations, the various sectors, and non-governmental organizations. In effect, decentralization in Vietnam combines the principles of management by sector and management by locality or territory. The executive organs, particularly the ministries, deliver the national services, while the local authorities deliver the services in their respective territories "without any discrimination as to central and local economic activities".

Another notable move by the government in the area of decentralization is the issuance of a recent decree, *grassroots democratization decree*, which stipulates actions which local leadership must take in order to promote grassroots democracy. The Decree differentiates four levels of participation of citizen: sharing information, providing comments, participating in decision-making and monitoring.

Given that local authorities have the power to deliver services within their locality, it is necessary that timely information on the welfare status of the people at the village level be known. The information generated will be valuable inputs in planning, decision-making and policy-making especially in the poverty alleviation efforts of both the local and national administration.

The two main sources of information on poverty in Vietnam are the General Statistics Office (GSO) and the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). The former estimates poverty, using international poverty line, through a nationally representative survey. Results provide inputs for macroeconomic policymaking. Meanwhile, MOLISA is the government agency responsible for coordination of poverty alleviation and is responsible for poverty reduction through its role in implementing the targeted programs for poverty reduction.

In line with this, the MOLISA, with the assistance of the provinces, supervises the conduct of a household survey by community leaders to collect income data. While preparing for the survey, communes preliminarily classify households by the living standard, primarily based on individual observation of the commune's and village's leaders. All households, which have low income or are considered to have lower average level of living standard, will be on the list of survey. Main conclusion drawn from the questionnaires is the average income per capita in a month. This is the main indicator, which is used by MOLISA as the poverty line.

After completing the survey, a meeting is held with households in villages to get their opinion to identify which household must be considered as poor. Participants from this meeting will discuss and give comment on each household with income below the poverty line. Other characteristics of the household such as asset, income and living standard are also considered in assessment. The outcome of this meeting is a final list of poor households in this village. The commune will gather these lists of all villages in commune and report them to the district. The list goes up to the province wherein MOLISA has supervision missions to the provinces to check lists, and try to reduce them.

The two surveys address the need for information of national and local administration for their planning and program implementation, especially in the area of poverty. However, it has been observed that income alone is not sufficient to capture the multidimensional aspects of poverty. Likewise, the data collected at the local level is difficult to consolidate at the national level because data were collected in different periods. This hinders the use of the collected information in policy making. In addition, the identification of poor households by MOLISA survey has room for subjectivity.

What is needed is a system of gathering information on all households in a village to determine who are really the poor. Likewise a set of indicators is needed to determine the welfare conditions of the people with respect to poverty's causal links with many other forms of deprivation, including access to health care and basic facilities, educational services and employment opportunities among many others.

In response to this, MIMAP Project in Vietnam initially implemented CBMS in selected areas of the country. The local people themselves collect information from the households. Aside from income, other relevant information relating to aspects of poverty is also collected. The information collected is very helpful to the work of local officers and non-governmental organizations, particularly in assessing the poverty situation. Data is available at the village and commune levels, and can be used immediately by local people in development planning and poverty monitoring.

According to the assessment of the Managing Office of HEPRJC (Hunger Eradication, Poverty Reduction and Job Creation) - the main user of the survey results - CBMS has provided relatively valuable basic information on surveyed communes and households, and on impacts of poverty reduction policies on poor households and communes in various regions. This is crucial information, which provides baseline data for assessment of implementation and impacts of poverty reduction policies in the future.

Other initiatives in Asia and Africa

CBMS has also been pilot tested in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. In the pilot test phase in Bangladesh, only one ward with 4 villages (out of the total of nine wards in a Union Parishad) was covered. A ward may be composed of one or more than one village with 3000-4000 populations. In the next phase, all villages under the Union Parishad will be covered. The main objective of the activities was to strengthen the capacity of the local government institution at the *Union* level (*Union Parishad*s) to regularly collect, classify and incorporate poverty and socio-economic data in preparing and implementing local development plans/programs.

Meanwhile, implementation of CBMS in Pakistan and Cambodia has just begun. The former hopes to provide information on some 20 core indicators that will provide policy makers with regular information on the inputs and the impact of these inputs on marginalized communities. In the case of Cambodia, CBMS will nicely complement decentralization efforts in a concrete way and contribute to successful functioning of the new decentralized state apparatus

Meanwhile, in Africa, CBMS work is going on in Burkina Faso and Senegal. Work is soon to commence in Ghana and Benin.

Concluding Remarks

Dr. Virola of the Philippine National Statistical Coordination Board stated that "statistical offices must bear in mind that if they do not produce the poverty statistics needed by the public, somebody else will do it." The statistical system has to respond to this demand and sometimes may need to go beyond the traditional approaches. As evidence-based policymaking further spreads, so will the demand for more data that are disaggregated, comparable over time, and adequate for panel data analysis.

Data being produced outside the statistical offices are already happening in the Philippines, Vietnam, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Community-based

monitoring systems are being institutionalized or pilot-tested in these countries to generate village-based indicators on the different dimensions of poverty. These initiatives are linked to the poverty reduction efforts of the government. The data have been used by local government units for diagnosing the nature and extent of poverty in their localities, identifying appropriate interventions, identifying eligible beneficiaries to poverty reduction programs, and assessing the impact of some of these programs.

The scenario that we hope to see soon is for the national statistical systems to acknowledge the role that community-based monitoring systems and other local monitoring systems have in providing a comprehensive picture of the poverty situation in the country. As we all know, there are very few, if any, national surveys that collect information on the different dimensions of poverty. There is a survey on income and expenditure, another survey on health, another on education, another on employment, another on nutrition, etc. The samples are different and the reference periods are also different. Thus, we do not have a comprehensive picture of the poverty status of the population at any point in time. The CBMS can do this through a set of core indicators relating to the different dimensions of poverty.

Since the national statistical offices cannot provide all the information needed by local policymakers due to resource constraints, they can assume a coordinative and oversight role. Statisticians from the national statistical agencies can share their expertise with the other stakeholders who are trying to address the data gaps. In addition to providing assistance in improving the survey instrument, the statisticians from the national statistical offices can also be involved in training the community volunteers in collecting and processing the data. This will help substantially in improving the quality of the data from local systems. At present, there is a large unmet demand coming from the local government units for capacity building, particularly on how to implement CBMS and how to prepare poverty reduction action plans.

Thailand is also taking steps to improve poverty statistics. One of the activities is to improve the NSO coordination role among other statistical units to reduce repetition of statistical works and improve the quality of statistics produced. Thailand NSO has identified the BMN (Basic Minimum Needs), a community-based monitoring system, and SEB (Socio-Economic Baseline Data) as two data collection initiatives that will be covered. The Thai cabinet has already resolved that the NSO is entitled to organize the statistical data system to be used in local administrative area development. After restructuring the system, the NSO plans to improve the quality of such data by training the personnel involved as well as launching a systematic quality control exercise.

Many countries now recognize the emerging demands for data brought about by the changing structures and policies in Asia. Data collection initiatives outside the official statistical system are gaining ground. I think it will not be long that community-based monitoring systems will be part of the national poverty monitoring system. In the near future, I think we will see NSOs not just conducting surveys but even coordinating the collection of all poverty related data, even micro-level data, thereby facilitating poverty measurement, monitoring and analysis at all levels of government.

   While poverty reduction remains to be a national concern, decentralization has shifted greater responsibility to the local government units to carry out the policies and programs. A community-based monitoring system increases the capacity of local government units to meet the challenge of improving the lives of their constituents. The CBMS will enable the local government to formulate policies and programs more responsive to the needs of the people. This will facilitate faster and sustained reduction in poverty, and help us to attain the Millenium Development Goal of halving extreme poverty incidence by 2015.

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