

Voices of the Poor: Study Purpose and Design

Study Purpose

The poor are the true poverty experts. Hence a policy document on poverty strategies for the 21st century must be based on the experiences, priorities, reflections and recommendations of poor people, women and men.

The purpose of Voices of the Poor, also known as Consultations with the Poor, was to enable a wide range of poor people in diverse countries and conditions to share their views in such a way that they can inform and contribute to the concepts and content of the [World Development Report 2000/01 \(WDR\)](#) on the theme of poverty and development. The study was led by the Bank's Poverty Group, under the leadership of Deepa Narayan, Senior Adviser.

Voices of the Poor gathers the voices of 60,000 poor men and women from 60 countries. The study consists of two parts: a review of participatory poverty studies conducted in the 1990's covering 40,000 poor people in 50 countries around the world; and a series of new studies undertaken in 1999 in 23 countries engaging over 20,000 poor men and women. In these studies, the poor discuss and analyze four topics:

- perceptions of a good life and a bad life;
- their most pressing problems and priorities;
- the quality of their interactions with key public, market and civil society institutions in their lives; and
- changes in gender and social relations.

Study Design

1. A Review and Synthesis of Existing Participatory Studies

An extensive search was conducted in 1999 of existing participatory studies conducted by the World Bank, other donors, NGOs, and research institutes. Over 130 studies were then reviewed and analyzed, and the identification of patterns and systematic content analysis was aided by the social science software QSR*NUDIST.

2. New Comparative Studies in 23 Countries

In 1999, fieldwork was carried out in 23 countries in partnership with local research institutes, universities and NGOs. This comparative study used participatory and qualitative methods to examine issues of poverty and illbeing.

The study was undertaken to inform poverty strategies at the global, national and local levels. To ensure such follow-up, the study was carried out in countries where there was a strong demand for it. Demand was assessed by a willingness to share the management responsibilities and costs for undertaking the study. Most studies were linked to World Bank policy, sector or project work. In six countries, the studies were linked to the ongoing work of other partners: Bangladesh (Proshika), Bolivia (Consultura Sur with NUR University), Somaliland (Actionaid), Jamaica (DFID), Egypt (Social Fund for Development), and India (Praxis).

The methodology was piloted in India, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Bolivia in late 1998. The [Methodology Guide](#) (256kb PDF) provides information about the research agenda and participatory methods used by the field teams. Most of the study teams received field-based training from participation specialists on the methodology and report preparation. Researchers with more experience in the methods received briefer orientations.

More than 260 communities were visited by the teams, and in most countries this included a mix of poor urban settlements and rural villages. The communities were purposively selected to reach the most important poverty groups in the country. Within each community, discussion groups were held with poor men and women separately and sometimes together. Researchers also conducted open-ended interviews to gather mini-profiles of men and women who had remained poor their whole lives, had slid into poverty, or had become better off.

The project team, including the lead in-country researchers, met for a workshop in New Delhi, India in June 1999 to present and discuss first drafts of the national reports and begin preparations on the global report. A final Global Synthesis Workshop was held in Washington, DC in September 1999 to discuss the draft [Global Synthesis](#) (127kb PDF); and there were also regional and country-specific workshops and a one-day meeting with the WDR team. At the country level, local researchers have been disseminating their reports and holding workshops with government, civil society groups, and think tanks.