

Chapter 7

What Has Worked: Perceptions of the Poor

Changes have occurred over time, some of which have impacted positively on the lives of poor, drawing them out of poverty. There have also been changes that have impacted negatively, keeping people in poverty and or drawing them deeper into it.

Time line studies in PPAs bring out the general direction of changes quite clearly, while at the same time highlighting what has worked better, what has not, and the problems which continue to exist even in areas where the directional change has been considered by the participants to be positive overall.

The overall direction of change suggested by PPAs while positive on some fronts presents a mixed picture on others. For example, in some locations the gap between the richest and poorest categories has widened over a decade. At the same time, there is a swelling up of middle categories in others. Overall, positive, mixed and negative changes co-exist in a number of spheres important to the poor.

Positive, Mixed, and Negative Changes as Perceived by the Poor

- **Education:** Relatively more children going to school and higher literacy, facilitated by incentives.
- **Livelihood options:** Wider range of options available, especially in the nonfarm sector
- **Agriculture:** changes in cropping pattern in favor of high value crops

A Snapshot: Historical Transect through Two Decades in a Semi-tribal Village

Objects of change	Two decades back	Now
Size of village *	Between 50 - 60 households	103 households
Forest produce	Forest products were available in plenty, besides a wide variety of tubers, fruits and MFPs. The village was situated in the heart of a thick forest.	Forests have reduced to almost 60%, and have receded an extra 1.5 km from the village
Dietary habits	Old varieties of cereals like <i>kodo</i> and <i>kutki</i> used to be staple food; roasted mahua was another popular item	Mainly rice; <i>kodo</i> , <i>kutki</i> , etc. consumed only in times of crises
Dress	Both women and men used to wear only a small loincloth, besides brass ornaments	Some women and men have started wearing <i>saris</i> and <i>Dhotis</i>
Agriculture	Practiced only by a handful of people	Main occupation of a majority of people
Institutional services	Nonexistence of even basic services like schools, health care, <i>anganwadi</i> , <i>panchayats</i> .	All the important basic services have a "presence" in the village
Drinking water	No hand pumps. Only sources of water were wells and a stream	Seven hand pumps have been installed, which yield water with high iron content. People drink water only from the wells
Livelihood base	Primarily dependent on forest produce. Nobody used to go out of village in search of livelihoods. Agriculture practiced on a small scale.	Several people have started migrating. Agriculture has become the main occupation.
House type	Thatched hutments	Some houses are made of bricks; use of rounded clay tiles.

- **Irrigation:** Improved irrigation facility in some areas, helping to increase cropping intensity and yields.
- **Migration:** Greater migration to more prosperous agriculture belts, nearby towns and far away. But migration is not beneficial evenly to all poor people. It also has devastating effect on the poor villagers.
- **Wages and return:** The wage rate of men as well as women has gradually increased over time in a number of areas. However, there is gender disparity in wage payment in most districts.
- **Type of houses and dwellings:** Now many poor people have small dwellings and cement and brick houses.
- **Assets:** Better household assets. The poor purchase cycles, watches, cots, fans, steel utensils, livestock and even land.
- **Food Security:** The food security is improving for many poor. Earlier, the very poor people had food problems throughout the year. Due to work availability, the food problem reduced to 6 months in a year. The food consumption pattern is also more diversified. But the food quantity and quality consumed is still far from healthy.
- **Health Problems and treatment:** Health problems have shown increasing trend in a few villages. There is wider access to modern health facilities, delivery and vaccination services.
- **Sanitation:** Greater number of toilets in some places supported by programs.
- **Village infrastructure:** The condition of the village roads is improving.
- **Smaller family sizes:** The number of children per couple is decreasing everywhere.
- **Age at marriage of girls:** The age at marriage of girls is increasing everywhere.
- **Social Networking:** Social networking of the poor people has improved to some extent as also their interaction with the panchayat, Block and other offices.
- **Status of poor in the society:** The social status of the poor has marginally improved in many areas, partly because of the political mileage they bear and partly because their awareness. Their economic situation has improved marginally.
- **Status of women in the family:** Women's respect in the family is also increasing in some pockets. This is mainly due to their

increasing empowerment through enhanced awareness and participation.

- **Self-help Groups:** Number of women in SHGs is increasing in many areas. This is helping women in terms of both social and economic empowerment.
- **Forest and Common Property Resources:** Many participants reported that the forest cover and availability of NTFP has been declining. Many poor people have to cover longer distances to collect wood, fuelwood, and other forest produce.
- **Water table:** The water table is reportedly going down everywhere.
- **Water reservoirs:** Rivers and ponds are drying up due to siltation and exploitation. The water sources are also more polluted.
- **Quality of land:** The quality of land was quite good in several places but productivity is declining due to several factors. Only in some places the reverse trend is reflected due to high investment in land and labor by people.
- **Availability of raw material:** With the degradation of forests, the availability of raw material which supports a large number of traditional industries and poor households is also going down.
- **Cost of rice as food:** The price of rice and other staple foods is increasing.
- **Ruinous Social practices:** Since the poor try to emulate the practices of the rich, practices such as dowry, and other customs requiring large expenditure have begun to raise their head. Along with these, the violence inflicted on women has also increased among social groups where they enjoyed comparatively greater equality.

Strengths of the Poor

The experience of PPAs clearly brings out the fact that the poor are well aware of their problems, their needs, and priorities. They understand reasons for their plight and they also have solutions for this. They can be motivated to suggest, and given a chance, they articulate very well. This is a very positive finding for any poverty reduction strategy or approach.

Another positive aspect of the poor is that they are hardworking, courageous and resilient. They work for long hours - from morning to late evening, to make the two ends meet. They migrate from their open lands to dirty congested slums, they accept sheer hard work in brick kilns or factories, they push heavy carts and carry heavy loads on their heads on

railway platforms or godowns and they suffer the extreme cold or extreme heat to feed their children. Indeed, their capacity to work hard and ability to adjust to hostile environs is tremendous!

In spite of being poor, they do not normally resort to devious means of earning their income. They accept their fate without grumbling. They smile, they dance and they sing in spite of their problems. They celebrate festivals and come together to enjoy social occasions.

These qualities will help them rise when the chance is given to them. The poor have a great potential which needs to be harnessed.

PPAs offer a number of insights on the design and implementation of strategies, programs, and services for the poor.

Perceptions of the Poor on Policies and Programs

PPAs provided an opportunity to assess the views of the poor, albeit in the region studied, on the role, impact, and priorities in respect of public policy for poverty reduction.

The views are presented per the framework used in the previous chapter in classifying public interventions viz.:

- Pro poor Growth and livelihoods
- Targeting
- Enabling environment through appropriate physical infrastructure investments
- Appropriate social infrastructure investments
- Governance and institutional framework.
- Social Security

Pro-poor Growth and Livelihoods

The issue of pro poor growth is complex and encompasses multiple dimensions including supply side dynamics for livelihood provision, enabling environment, requisite skill base, power equations and demand side including mobility, opportunity, etc.

Below we discuss this aspect against the provision of public policy for livelihoods, considering that livelihoods constitute an interface of availability and capability. Livelihoods as discussed in the previous chapter take the form of self-employment and wage employment programs.

Self-employment programs

Self-employment programs are a viable economic option to stem jobless growth. However, the poor generally seem to prefer remunerative wage employment, which can provide regular income without much risk.

Where the poor had managed to access assets there was no sustained increase in income because the asset had either been sold off or wasted (e.g. death of milch animals), or the poor family had become indebted to the bank without improving its status. In many cases they had to financially grease the process which was also a burden. Further even where there was access the poor did not consider self-employment programs as very useful because such programs could not be run successfully in the absence of local demand and access to outside markets.

Further, there were innumerable instances of self-employment programs being availed of by the nonpoor (as per the wealth assessments) and targeting in the context of local power equations was misdirected.

In the context of traditional occupations, there are many trades dying out in terms of demand. Skill development of the poor in emerging areas of growth is a major need. Training the poor in segments which are the drivers of growth is essential for inclusive and participative development.

PPAs corroborate the fact that:

- Self-employment programs are viable when implemented in the form of sound projects rather than as a program with blanket norms.
- It is important to involve the local poor in the design of self-employment projects.
- Efforts will also have to be undertaken toward training and capacity development of the poor.

Wage employment programs

Wage employment programs were generally preferred in many of the locations as they provided stable income and were flexible to cycles of alternate employment in some cases. Such programs have also had some impact in terms of creating assets like roads, community halls, Panchayat Ghar, pipelines, etc. in villages. These assets were sometimes accessible to the poor also.

Wage Employment Preferred to Self-employment

There have been some impediments toward realizing the potential of these programs on the generation of employment. A major problem is that the system of contractors has led to employment of select groups of people.

Across various PPA locations the poor felt that there was a decline in the availability of daily wage labor and lessening of negotiating power over wages. Diminishing options in other occupations, including agriculture, is shifting a sizeable population toward casual labor. The poor who were on their own often traveled long distances to work, at times even 20 km, for daily wage labor. Some were lucky to secure work in nearby houses for repairing, domestic help, washing clothes, and pounding rice and take up other odd jobs while the men traveled to far off villages. Children are left to fend for themselves and sometimes eat tobacco leaves, charcoal, etc. and fall sick.

Contracting and Employment in Public Works

For every construction contract by a contractor, the same labor is employed most of the time. Therefore, the contractors are in touch with this guild of labor and employ them as and when a new construction contract is finalized. A mechanism adopted by contractors is to employ people they trust and who will not raise their voice if payments are delayed or are less than the entitlement. These workers stay along the side of the roads. Their housing condition is very poor with no basic amenities like toilets, electricity, and clean drinking water. Houses are covered with plastic bags and walls made up of wooden planks. During rains, the condition deteriorates due to leakage in the roof and children fall sick quite frequently. The roof is blown away at times due to strong winds and the workers have to sleep on gunny bags. Sometimes It takes around 4–5 hrs to collect fuelwood which lasts 3 days or so. Education of migrant children is a distant dream.

Wage employment programs have now been scaled up and can form the potential basis for employment security of the able-bodied poor, while building critical productive assets. The programs can also be used for protecting the massive environmental degradation of the environment through proper planning of these programs. However,

- Contractors and intermediaries, through whom such programs are implemented, create a new class of power equations that act as a barrier for the deserving poor to access such opportunities.

Hence to have the desired impact, programs need to be well designed, i.e. they have to take into account the local characteristics as well as the macro-context. Lack of participatory planning and proper information imply that wage employment programs do not have the expected impact on employment and the creation of community assets.

- In many cases, programs are designed, and guidelines for implementation prepared at a centralized level, without taking into account the local variations in context which make the fulfillment of the guidelines difficult, if not impossible.

In employment programs, for instance, a 55 per cent unskilled labor content is deemed necessary. This was feasible in certain types of works in some areas, but not in others, providing an incentive to fudge muster rolls. Another problem is the lack of coordination between schemes with similar objectives, leading to poorer accountability and suboptimal performance.

Government Interventions in Livelihood Generation

Harsh's village got destroyed in an earthquake and he along with his family shifted to the present forest village. His family initially cleared patches of forest for agriculture and depended on it for subsistence. In 1988, he got a loan under the integrated tribal development project (ITDP) with which he bought two buffaloes. In 1994, he got a loan under the Prime Minister's Rozgar Yojana. Out of the total amount, he invested Rs70,000 to buy 10 buffaloes. Today, he is able to supply an average of 35 liters of milk per day at Rs16 per liter (income of about \$13 a day). The family's well-being has improved as a result of Harsh's initiative and government support, and his family is well above the poverty line. The only word of caution is that such programs help when well directed and in keeping with the requirements of the area.

Targeting

Identification of beneficiaries

A number of programs in the rural and urban areas are targeted at the BPL households. Programs of this nature include TPDS, the self-employment programs, and the National Social Assistance Programs. In some states, entitlements to the public health care system are also differentiated on the basis of the BPL status of the household. But as was noted at several

locations the BPL lists are faulty (including the nonpoor), and more problematically, exclude the poor and the needy.

- There is a strong need for revising the BPL list, using objectively verifiable and simple indicators for updating the same.
- These need community validation.

Approaches like well-being assessment can be effectively used to this effect. The responsibility for identifying the poor can be vested in a committee of people, including, for instance, development practitioners, panchayat leaders, teachers, representatives of community-based organizations, senior citizens of a community, etc. The approach should be to purposely seek the poor.

At the same time, there are inherent problems in categorizing a household as poor or nonpoor. This is both due to the need for an objective system of identification, and the problems of identifying characteristics of poverty which may vary between contexts. As a result, there is a compelling need to evaluate alternative ways of reaching the poor i.e. through geographic targeting, self-targeting, and universal targeting after a careful evaluation of costs and benefits associated with each approach.

Transparency in selection

As long as a program targets a subset of BPL households, there should be complete transparency in identifying such households.

- Display the composition of BPL lists, names of beneficiaries of different schemes and the criteria used for the selections at a public place.
- Effective processes need to be institutionalized to enable eligible poor excluded from the list to appeal for their inclusion.
- Reasons for inclusion/ noninclusion of certain applicants must be communicated to the community quickly and transparently.

Targeting has not worked according to the poor and secondary stakeholders because of:

- Local power dynamics
- The award of cash transfers that can be availed of by various sections, not necessarily the poor.

Issues in Targeting

Anomalies in the selection of BPL households were common as relatively well-off families were enjoying the benefits meant for the poor.

People in several locations have commented negatively on the process, time, and money involved in applying for a ration card.

Poor across the various locations indicated that when large amounts of subsidy were provided, only part of the amount was received by them. For instance, a budget of Rs25,000 was sanctioned for the construction of a house, not more Rs7,000–8,000 has been spent on each of the houses.

Grievances pertaining to compensation and relief were expressed during PPA interactions. For example, though a compensation of Rs10,000 was announced only a few persons received the full amount. While others got less, many did not get any compensation.

Midday Meal – Instead of the stipulated 3 kgs of rice per head, children in surveyed sites get 2 kilograms

Going rates for winning the bid for lease rights over fishponds presently range between Rs6–12 lakh. Tenders are entered by intermediaries on behalf of pseudo societies. Upon favorable settlement of their bid, the key fishing groups are paid a lump-sum amount (about Rs40,000–50,000) to keep their mouth shut and to withdraw from fishing. Thereafter, the intermediaries assume total control of the fisheries.

- Even where the poor are directly targeted like wage employment programs, contractors may not necessarily transfer the benefits and the appropriate wages to the poor.

Targeting has Many Pitfalls

Rural housing

A major problem with the scheme per secondary stakeholders is that it provides an expensive asset of Rs25,000–30,000 free to the beneficiary, and generates a lot of ill will as the funds are given only to some households. As a result, lobbying under the scheme was almost a rule. Poor households gave Rs1,000 to Rs5,000 for each of the houses. Leakages were very common. The nonpoor frequently used such houses as an extra house, or a storage shed or to keep animals. The poorest of the poor were frequently left out of the benefits of housing schemes as they could not contribute anything.

Largesse through single person subsidy not preferred and may not yield the desired outcomes

Where benefits were provided, there is a time gap of six months between the installments. Many beneficiaries complained of not receiving the final installment. The people felt that there was no supervision on the utilization of the rural housing scheme funds at the beneficiary level, and on whether the houses were being constructed at all or not. The beneficiaries often had to sell off portions of their land to finance the completion of the house. This happened when the committed amount was not paid to the beneficiary.

The poor feel that politicization of the panchayat is an important factor that has resulted in many deserving people not having been covered under various public schemes. Lists of beneficiaries under various schemes need approval of local politicians. As the people said, those who do not support the nominated representative are not given benefits under any scheme. Flying the flag of the ruling party was one coping strategy adopted by many villagers.

An Experience of Receiving Housing Support

With a wife and four children to support, he had requested the sarpanch of his village in 2002 for housing support under the Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) scheme. The Gram sabha accepted his request and he deposited Rs150 with the sarpanch along with a form. The application got passed in early 2003. Three months later, he got 6,000 bricks from the Gram Sabha to build a house which, according to the sarpanch, cost about Rs6,000. At that time, neither any money was given to him for undertaking construction work, nor did he have much savings. He started building the house with mud and other cheap materials as he did not have money to purchase cement and sand. He had to hire a mason and pay him at the rate of Rs110 per day. His total expenses amounted to Rs3,500/-. For this, he had to take a loan from the local moneylender, as the next installment of financial support was yet to be released. He also had to borrow food grains from neighbors for sustaining his family. He received Rs2,050/- from the panchayat three months later, which enabled him to clear his debts. He received another installment of Rs2,000/- shortly afterwards, which he used for purchasing mud tiles to build a roof for his house. Thus, his total receipts from the panchayat amounted to about Rs10,000/- less, including bricks. However, the sarpanch calculated his total receipts to be of the tune of Rs14,000/-. On asking for records of transactions, there was no response. He has been waiting for the last 2 years for the remaining of Rs20,000/- sanctioned under IAY, to give finishing touches to the house and for constructing a latrine. The authorities have ignored, in the meanwhile, his pleas.

Enabling Environment through Appropriate Physical Infrastructure Investments

Connectivity

Poor Connectivity is a major factor leading to exclusion from basic services. The poor experience difficulty in accessing services such as health care centers, hospitals, schools and even markets of vegetable and crop produce. The long distances compel villagers to spend more on transport or invest time in walking to distant places. Therefore good quality roads not only remove constraints in accessing basic services but also open up opportunities for wage employment, and promote self-employment by improving outreach to far off markets. Lack of maintenance of roads has however been a major problem as stretches of roads in many locations have been destroyed. Seasonal exclusion is also prevalent as roads get washed away during the rainy season.

Energy

In the matter of electricity the farthest villages are often neglected the most. Even though most villages are electrified, there are pockets or sections that have not received electricity. In these villages, people have to take up electricity connections privately which costs about Rs2,000–2,400/- and only those who can afford it are able to pull the wires to their houses, while the poorest have no option but to stay in the dark.

Electricity is an irregular facility in many villages. This affects adversely certain basic occupations and services that are powered by electricity, and agriculture and services.

Urban infrastructure

Life in urban areas is characterized by greater incidence of ill-health of children due to lack of safe drinking water sources, less work done by men due to illness and, diminishing community feeling as people are struggling to manage home and hearth. As noted by PPAs, breakdown in social norms is clearly visible in terms of children not caring for old parents any more. Income poverty in some communities manifests in terms of children taking up least preferred work like rag-picking.

Eviction and nontenure slums have created major problems for the poor in terms of economic and social stability. Local lords have exploited the poor tremendously in such situations. Eviction has been stated to be an important criterion contributing toward ill-being. According to women in

the slums, eviction has been ranked first in problem prioritization in urban areas along with sanitation .

Appropriate Social Infrastructure Investments

Water supply and sanitation

Availability of safe drinking water was accorded a very high priority by many communities. Concerns on availability and quality were widespread. Need for proper sanitation facilities were also indicated as a pressing priority in both urban and rural locations.

Education

“Cost of education” was a primary issue among the poor. They perceive the opportunity cost of education to be very high compared to the returns. The poor preferred to keep children home for (a) animal grazing, (b) hired wage work, or (c) for taking care of young siblings.

The Crisis of Water Delivery

A large number of PPA sites suffer from acute scarcity of drinking water. A sample study of hand pumps carried out in a few of the PPA villages indicates that only 38% of all hand pumps are in working condition. The problem is particularly acute in some of the tribal districts, where the problem has been stated as critical in almost every second PPA site. Besides, many villages in the eastern plateau region spoke of poor quality of drinking water, whereby consumption of water from some of the local hand pumps is believed to leave a lasting black mark in the teeth. Scarcity or alternately the quality of drinking water has emerged as a burning issue in many of the sites in most of the states. Many of the health complaints across sites stemmed from lack of potable drinking water.

As indicated in Chapter 4, *“There is a shortage of infrastructure that acts as a barrier to pursuing sustained education. While primary schools are accessible for most villages, the secondary school facilities are more spread out and technical schools and polytechnics scarcer still. There is shortage of teachers in most of the schools. In many cases, teachers “manage children” rather than teach them. They expect parents to teach, which is not possible in the case of the poor children whose parents are not literates. Children of poor families therefore usually perform badly. They are consequently, treated*

badly by teachers, with the result that they drop out gradually. In some cases children from certain social groups are asked to sit away or are asked to do manual work, which again encourages them to drop out.

The availability of drinking water facilities and toilets was not found in all the schools. A separate toilet for girls was available in less than a quarter of the schools. For those girls who have dropped out of school and want to continue studies after some gap, there is no facility to mainstream them. The system lacks flexible options.

The reasons that emerged from the participatory assessments for the poorest not attending school included: (1). Migration, (2) Education not useful for income earning (3) Expensive facilitative measures like uniforms, travel, etc. (4) Children an economic asset (Child labor) (5) Discrimination (6) Taking care of siblings, and (7) School far away.”

Health care

The system of health care, both public and private, is beset with problems. Some of the most common complaints about public health care relate to inadequate personnel, equipment and medicines. Private health care is costly, virtually leaving the poor out of a health care net. The rate of hospitalization among the poor is low. Moreover, health care expenditures are among the major causes of indebtedness of poor households

On the other hand, the private health system is largely unregulated. In addition, the existing public and private systems do not build upon their mutual existing strengths. Some steps have however been taken to ensure access to secondary and tertiary health care through referral systems, which can tap the private sector expertise.

Anganwadis

The supplementary nutrition program being implemented has two components: for pregnant women and preschool children; and midday meals for primary school children. The program for pregnant women and preschool children is implemented through a network of anganwadis managed by trained women who work for a small stipend.

The institution of anganwadi found great favor with the poor as it enabled women to leave their preschool children to care. They however felt that the capacity of these institutions must be increased.

Swashtha Swahayikas (Para-health workers)

The swashtha swahayikas is an innovative experiment in providing health services through local para-health workers. The para health workers promote awareness on quality health and sanitation. They play the role of promotional agents for government health schemes or during special drives against any disease. Most of these swahayikas have been selected from SHGs in the blocks and they act as the agents of health care on behalf of the government machinery. They have been given basic training for raising awareness about the common diseases in the villages and the details of the medicines that they can administer. The Block Health Officers also give the swashtha swahayikas some common medicines like paracetamol, oral rehydration therapy packets, family planning kits, etc. to be used by them in their areas. Bicycles have been provided to increase their mobility in the locality concerned. This scheme has been running for the past 2 years. The local nongovernmental organizations supply the medicines that are distributed by the para-health workers. The swashtha swahayikas maintain detailed records of their daily activity in a set format in notebooks provided to them. The swashtha swahayikas are the grassroots channels through whom the government delivers the various health and sanitation programs to the villagers. Programs such as pulse-polio have been popularized by the swashtha swahayikas. Such a cadre of para-health workers can form a dependable backbone in poverty – stricken localities for promoting primary health care and sanitation.

Governance and institutional framework.

PPAs bring out both the positive and negative role of governments in fostering participation through local administration. For instance, in some cases, development bureaucracies are seen as too over bearing, and they do not allow panchayats to function independently. On the other hand, devolution has been an important route through which the poor can access public goods and services and public expenditure to yield the best possible pro-poor outcomes.

Local self-governance is now the route through which many of the initiatives meant to improve the lives of the poor are planned and implemented. However, the experience of participatory local governance varies across states.

Mainstreaming the poor into local decision-making and strengthening the capacity of panchayats to undertake local planning are important components of the decentralization agenda. The Grambashider Dara Gram Parichalona (GDGP) in West Bengal is an attempt to build participatory

plans through the involvement of the Gram Sansads. The involvement of the poor agricultural laborers in local decision-making and planning is central to the GDGP, which recognizes the fact that planning priorities and project selection tend more easily to take on board the interests of the well-to-do.

Better Governance and Awareness

Some of the instances of movements out of poverty and improvements in quality of life identified during PPAs were attributed to better governance through alternate systems and accessibility through better information. The systems that work include: (i) Engaging community based organizations and SHGs with management of key services like PDS. Entrusting panchayats and community-based organizations like SHGs with the responsibility of managing PDS was lauded by many communities. Their management of PDS resulted in improved performance of the scheme; (ii) establishment of village secretariats, helping in a better flow of information for the poor, and expediting local development schemes; and (iii) holding review meetings in remote villages by senior officers, making it easier for the poor to register their grievances and to hold service providers accountable.

Case Study: Holistic Approach to Poverty Reduction through Community Action

Kerala has successfully aimed at a holistic approach to poverty reduction through its Kudumbashree program which aims at reaching out to needy families through women and reaching out to the community through families. It has helped create thousands of Neighborhood Groups and middle level Area Development Societies and hundreds of apex level Community Development societies. It covers several lakh women from poor families.

The Mission relies upon community structures to carry out the task of poverty reduction through concerted community action under the leadership of Local Governments, by facilitating organization of the poor for combining self-help with demand led convergence of available services and resources including education, and skill development. It aims at tackling the multiple dimensions and manifestations of poverty in an integrated manner. Where local institutions are not so well developed or have a political flavor, nongovernmental agencies could be used for the mobilization process.

Participatory Planning and Action

The Grambasher Dara Gram Parichalona (GDGP) is an attempt to build participatory plans through the involvement of the Gram Sansads in West Bengal. Official booklets on GDGP in Bengali on decentralized planning process state that laborers are an integral part of the productive force and are the real force behind social change. To organize laborers is a major thrust of this decentralized planning movement. Data collection during the planning process is undertaken not by going from door – to – door but by sitting with groups of laborers, through meetings in hamlets. This helps to raise awareness of the deprived groups and also ensures that the processes are not controlled by a handful of powerful people. Based on the data collected a Gram (village) Register is prepared, which is a record of the socio-economic information of every family in the village. Reports on problems identified and project formulation are also prepared and placed before the local gram sansad (village assembly) and finalized for further action.

Some issues faced in GDGP are as follows:

- One major issue is of problem prioritization – whose development? Should it be development of household or of an area or locality? The well-off want to prioritize social assets and infrastructure in the locality while the vulnerable groups would like to have personal and household benefits.
- The other major issue is meeting diverse and large local demand: There is acute shortage of development funds and it is difficult to compress local demand. Most demand is for infrastructure, especially in agriculture. Those who are landless have a different focus.

Social security

Lack of social security and problems in old age

PPA interactions brought out several instances of exclusion of extremely poor households from the various social security schemes as the schemes are few and are monopolized by the powerful and the influential. Instances of denial of social security schemes to the deserving came to the fore in both urban and rural locations.

Case Study of an Elderly Person in Distress

Prem, aged 60, has to beg for food to make a living. He belongs to the Ghasia community and lives in Sarguja along with his wife. Although he has four children, all of them live separately. To survive, Prem collects used blouses, saris and other clothes from the better-off families in the village and sells them. He earns Rs8–12 a day. However, he is unable to sell anything on most days of a month, which compels him to beg to survive. He does not have a house to live, which aggravates his situation. He sleeps in front of any house of Ghasia community members. At an age when he aspired to have an easy life, Prem has no other option but to beg for survival.

Conclusion

It is indeed heartening to note that several new policies and programs have been initiated in the last few years that have tremendous potential to address the problem of poverty. Implementation of some of the programs (as in health care and employment guarantee) began only in 2005/06 and their impact is not captured in the assessments. Over years, there has been some movement out of poverty and average living conditions have improved. However, on the other hand poverty persists, and continues to be a significant phenomenon.

Macro Policies Need to Address the Priorities of the Poor

The poor do not talk about the macro-policies but it is clear that the macro environment provides the broad enabling framework in which poverty and deprivation can also be addressed. The issue of livelihood of the poor and of human development needs to be addressed not only at the micro level, but at the macro level by focusing on the development path of the state. From the point of view of secondary stakeholders, the major components that macro-strategy should address are: (a) broad-based agricultural growth and increased productivity; (b) environmental protection and regeneration, including development of common land resources, sustainable water management, regeneration of forests, etc.; and (c) development of the nonfarm sector, not in an isolated and scattered way, but by facilitating diversification of the economy. The macro policy needs to be supplemented by supportive sectoral policies, such as forest policy (linking forests with tribals), labor policy, water policy, land policy, agricultural policy, industrial policy, informal sector policy, etc.