

Why Don't "The Poor" Have a Louder Voice in Democracy?

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Poverty in Democracies

COUNTRY (Polity score \geq 6)	% in Absolute Poverty (national poverty lines: World Bank)
Madagascar	71%
Mozambique	70%
Guatemala	56%
Honduras	53%
Kenya	52%
Bangladesh	50%
Philippines	37%
India	29%

Why are the Politics of Poverty not more emphatic, potent and visible?

- Poor participate less (“sacks of potatoes”)
- Vertical patron-client relations
- Divided by religion, caste, ethnicity, region

May all be true, but there is also a more basic problem...

Grassroots Poverty Research: Last Five Years

Why have some households escaped from poverty, while other households in the same communities have simultaneously fallen into poverty?

Investigations in rural communities of

INDIA

KENYA

PERU

UGANDA

NORTH CAROLINA

Poverty Dynamics tracked for > 25,000 households

The Good News

	Escaped Poverty
Rajasthan (35 villages)	11%
Gujarat (36 villages)	9%
Andhra (36 villages)	14%
W. Kenya (20 villages)	18%
Uganda (36 villages)	24%
Peru (20 communities)	17%
North Carolina (13 communities)	23%

The Entire News

	Escaped Poverty	Became Poor	<i>Change in Poverty</i>
Rajasthan (35 villages)	11%	8%	3%
Gujarat (36 villages)	9%	6%	3%
Andhra (36 villages)	14%	12%	2%
W. Kenya (20 villages)	18%	19%	-1%
Uganda (36 villages)	24%	15%	9%
Peru (20 communities)	17%	8%	9%
North Carolina (13 communities)	23%	12%	11%

“The Poor”: changeable, dynamic, unstable

Country (sample size: hh.)	Period	Study	% Poor (start year)	<u>Escaped Poverty</u> %	<u>Fell into Poverty</u> %	Flux %
<u>Uganda</u> (1300)	1992-2000	Deininger -Okidi (2003)	54	29	12	76
<u>India</u> (3139 rural)	1970-1982	Bhide - Mehta (2004)	48	23	13	75

...more evidence...

Country (sample size: hh.)	Period	Study	% Poor (start year)	<u>Escaped Poverty</u> %	<u>Fell into Poverty</u> %	Flux %
<u>S. Africa</u> (1171)	1993- 1998	Carter- May (2001)	27	10	25	130
<u>B'desh</u> (379)	1987- 2000	B. Sen (2003)	57	26	18	77
<u>Kenya</u> (1706)	1978- 2003	Krishna et al. (2004)	33	18	19	112

- “The Poor”: merely a figure of speech?
- Not a valid category for analysis or action
- Better seen in terms of flows rather than as a stock

Because Ins and Outs reconstitute “the poor” regularly...

Different subgroups are better for political analysis

- **Persistent Poor** 2% - 31% in different studies
- **Newly Poor** 8% - 25%
- **Escaped Poverty** 6% - 29%
- **Never Poor**

National statistics do not collect these data

(Grassroots studies reviewed in: Baulch and Hoddinott 2000;
CPRC 2004)

DIFFERENT SUBGROUPS

- **Distinct trajectories vis-à-vis poverty**
- **Asymmetric circumstances: different reasons are associated, respectively, with escape and descent**

Leading to

- **Different needs and interests**
- **Different demands upon the state**

REASONS FOR DESCENT

Falling into poverty is slow and cumulative. Multiple reasons.

HEALTH is the primary reason in every region studied

59% in Rajasthan; 73% in W. Kenya; 88% in Gujarat; 77% in Uganda; 75% in Andhra; 67% in Peru

OTHER PROXIMATE REASONS: Social expenses, debt, land-related

(Not significant in any region: Laziness, Alcoholism)

REASONS FOR ESCAPE

Escape also occurs over a period of time. People work upon strategies that take them upward, out of poverty.

➤ **Diversification of Income Sources: Agriculture and Informal Sector Wages**

70% Rajasthan, 73% W. Kenya, 51% Andhra, 69% Peru, 35% Gujarat,

OTHER REASONS (less frequent)

➤ Jobs – in Government

➤ Jobs – in Private Sector

Hypothesis: Because different reasons affect their lives and their strategies, different subgroups of poor people have substantially different demands from the state

An Empirical Test

- 1,032 randomly selected households in 36 communities of Andhra Pradesh, India
- Poverty status assessed for 1997 and 2004
- Classified within four separate subgroups
- Asked to rank their major demands from the state

Major demands by subgroups

(% within each subgroup)

	Health Service	Housing	Irrigation	High School	Wage Labor
Persistent Poor	8	9	9	3	46
Newly Poor	34	24	9	6	8
Escaped Poverty	7	3	28	25	5

Poverty: A Dynamic View

- ✓ **Escape and Descent are constant and parallel: “The Poor” is an inadequate category**
- ✓ **Reasons for Escape differ from Reasons for Descent**
- ✓ **Consequences for Economic Policy: Separate policies are required: (1) to promote escapes, and (2) to prevent descents**
- ✓ **Consequence for Political Analysis: Subgroups better than “The Poor”**

More Implications

- * **Neglect in policy of poverty creation**
(an artifact of how poverty is conventionally measured)
- * **New methodologies are required**
(to appreciate flows)
- * **Re-conceptualizing the politics of the poor**
(democracy, participation, a “culture of poverty,” the development state)

HOW CAN POOR PEOPLE'S VOICES BECOME LOUDER?

- **Political Efficacy and Participation**

- Education
- Information

- **Economic Strength**

- Reducing Vulnerability (Health)
- Upward Mobility (“a capacity to aspire”)

- **Organization Building**

- Strengthening civil society generally
- Building Cross-Cutting Coalitions (what and how?)

POLITICAL EFFICACY AND PARTICIPATION

- New set of studies: recent survey data from Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and India
- Conventional wisdom is wrong: Wealth does not matter significantly
- EDUCATION and Information matter critically
- More educated people make more active and committed democrats

HEALTH

- **Increasing out-of-pocket costs and “catastrophic” health expenses (Xu et al. 2003; Sen, Iyer and George 2002).**
- **“Medical poverty trap” (Whitehead, Dahlgren and Evans 2001)**
- **Average long-term income loss of 17 percent (Yao 2005)**
- **More than half of all personal bankruptcies in America (Himmelstein et al. 2005)**
- **Poor people pay more (Fabricant et al. 1999, Farmer 1999)**
- **Macro Evidence (EQUITAP 2005; Milly 1999; Scruggs and Allan 2006)**

LOW MOBILITY: One Example

Highest levels reached in 71 Rajasthan villages
(last 10 years)

Accountant	(2)	Lineman	(7)
Advocate	(4)	Panchayat Secy.	(4)
Computer Operator	(4)	Patwari	(11)
Constable	(8)	Peon	(6)
Clerk Typist	(10)	Sub-Inspector	(4)
Doctor	(1)	Schoolteacher	(50)
Driver	(4)	Soldier (<i>Jawan</i>)	(32)
Civil Engineer	(2)	Software Engineer	(1)

A LOW ASPIRATION FRONTIER

- **Very similar results from rural Uganda, Peru, Kenya**
- **Resulting in low current aspirations (new study in Karnataka and Rajasthan)**
- **Only 4 - 7% of rural Indians share the aspiration profile of newly recruited software engineers (Krishna and Brihmadേശam 2006)**

Organizing Across Subgroups

No clear idea...

- Example of social democrat movements in Western Europe?
- Recognizing and reviving indigenous institutions?
- Collective action and rights-based activism?



Updates and papers:

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