

Missing Data for Human Development and Poverty Research

The objective of human development is to expand the freedoms that people value and have reason to value, enabling people to live more fulfilled lives, and to flourish. Data on people's freedoms is needed to guide and evaluate development actions. More such data already exists than in any previous generation. Still, one of the critical bottlenecks is a dearth of high-quality internationally comparable indicators of key freedoms, for which sufficient cross-country coverage is available. The purpose of this research is to identify and advocate a small set of indicators on 'missing' dimensions of human development that often matter to poor people - perhaps related to work, safety, freedom, respect, and meaning. The indicators will be chosen both for their value and also their technical properties in terms of comparability, accuracy, robustness, and statistical independence, and feasible incorporation in existing surveys.

Background: This topic was proposed by a research workshop in May 2006, which observed that research is deeply affected by the lack of internationally comparable data on key capabilities or dimensions of deprivation, and agreed that it could be useful to initiate a limited but energetic call for better deeper data, based on the highest quality empirical and conceptual research.

Rationale: The Millennium Development Goals Campaign has clearly identified and advocated international data collection and reporting on particular indicators, many of which have not been collected by countries until this time. Such data considerably enrich the potential analyses of human development, and this advance is rightly celebrated.

At the same time, the MDG indicators, as critical as they are, do not encompass all fundamental dimensions of human development nor, for that matter, of human security or human rights. It is not feasible nor necessary to measure all of these dimensions at all, much less exhaustively. The ultimate objective, after all, is not to measure human development but to *advance* human flourishing. Yet the data are a critical part of such action.

29-30 May 2007:

The purpose of the planned research workshop is to consider proposals for a short list of indicators. In many cases, initiatives are already under way to include certain indicators widely in household surveys and as MDG targets, and these initiatives will be included and their proposals reviewed. The dimensions to be discussed include:

- **work**; including both formal and informal employment, with some attention as to the quality of employment.
- **agency** or empowerment; the ability to advance goals one values and has reason to value (as opposed to acting on the basis of oppression or coercion)
- **physical security**; safety from violence, including lethal and non-lethal violence
- **social relationships**; of dignity & respect or of exclusion & humiliation (these are not polar opposites as they often occur in distinct relationships)
- **meaningfulness and significance**; an assessment of meaning or value

Given that numerous initiatives are already underway to expand data sets, it could be helpful to contribute to that effort, and thus to invest in sound data for future multidimensional poverty research on dimensions that seem intrinsically important to poor people. Access to

directly comparable data from household surveys will enable the study of important interconnections between dimensions of poverty, and the identification of bottlenecks.