

Community Based Monitoring System

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Tool summary

Informed public investment is a key to reducing poverty and addressing inequalities in society. It requires timely and accurate data to measure progress and plans for investment. Accurate data is also necessary for scientific analysis and policy application. The Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS) is an organized way of collecting, analyzing, and verifying information at the local/community level to be used by local governments, national government agencies, non-governmental and civil society organizations for planning, budgeting, and implementing local development programs. CBMS also serves to monitor and evaluate the performance of government agencies. Piloted in the Philippines in 1994, with the support of International Development Research Centre (IDRC), CBMS is now being implemented in 14 countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

What is it?

In most countries of the developing world, the lack of accurate local information about the socio-economic conditions of the poor hinders development planning and programs, and constrains efforts to monitor change. It also impedes efforts to measure progress toward achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). CBMS started as a monitoring system in the early 1990s to provide information on the impact of macroeconomic policies and structural adjustment programmes on households and individuals. It was expected that these policies and programs would affect households differently and that safety nets need to be put in place to assist the vulnerable groups. But the data from national statistical organizations was not adequately disaggregated to be able to capture the micro impacts of macro economic policies. Therefore, a local monitoring system that could complement the national system was deemed necessary.

Moreover, in many developing countries, the demand for local level information has seen a dramatic increase with the increasing trend towards decentralization as a means of bringing governments closer to the people. However, the shift to a decentralized government structure has not been accompanied by a corresponding shift in the management system for statistical data which has continued to focus on meeting the information needs of central governments. CBMS was conceived to fill this void and has been designed to provide information that would be primarily useful to local governments and then to national governments and other stakeholders. It is intended to improve local



governance and promote transparency and accountability by providing information that can facilitate evidence-based decision making.

CBMS is useful in achieving five objectives. They are:

- diagnosing the extent of poverty at the local level;
- formulating appropriate plans and programs to address problems;
- providing the basis for rational allocation of resources;
- identifying eligible beneficiaries for targeted programs; and
- monitoring and assess the impact of programs and projects.

Compared to other monitoring systems, the specialty of CBMS is that it is based on a partnership between local communities, local governments, and trained local researchers in an institutionalized system of regular data collection, validation, and analysis for local program development. Furthermore, it not only builds the capacity of local governments to use poverty statistics in formulating development plans and poverty-reduction programs but also of local communities in generating and using information. CBMS is a unique monitoring system since it:

- is a census of households and not a sample survey;
- Is rooted in local government and promotes community participation;
- uses local personnel and community volunteers as monitors;
- has a core set of simple, well-established indicators; and
- establishes databank at all geopolitical levels.

CBMS data can be disaggregated by region, gender, socio-economic group, age, ethnicity and other variables. Since the monitoring exercises are conducted regularly and the results are processed rapidly, the data is very useful for ongoing local level planning. There is a greater buy-in on the part of all stakeholders, as the results are accessible to anyone who wishes to see them,

IDRC has supported researchers for more than a decade in 15 countries of Asia and Africa who have developed, tested, and implemented CBMS. These experiences have been synthesized in, “Fighting Poverty with Facts”, a publication of IDRC. According to the authors and other proponents of CBMS, only when local authorities and communities work together and are guided by sound data and evidence-based analysis, they would be able to make the best policy choices for empowering and uplifting the poor. Looking at it from this perspective, CBMS holds tremendous potential for amplifying community voice in decision-making and ensuring effective public spending and greater public accountability.



How is it done?

CBMS is grounded in the principle that poverty can best be understood through the lives and experiences of the poor people themselves. It tracks poverty and development at the household level at regular intervals through a set of basic indicators. The data is collected and analyzed by trained community members in partnership with local government officials to be used by the local development planners. The method lends itself for rapid and frequent application, and is not resource intensive. The steps usually involved in implementing a CBMS are:

1. Advocacy and organization

Data requirements and existing monitoring systems must be evaluated to identify gaps and to develop a work plan that elicits the commitment of all parties and the involvement of key human resources at all levels as well as the financial and physical resources for training, data collection, processing, validation, database management, and dissemination. The commitment of the local government to use the data is critical.

2. Collecting and editing the data

The data is collected through a household survey and/or focus group discussions which involves designing questionnaires, identifying and training of community members as enumerators/field supervisors, and informing and preparing the community.

3. Encoding the data

The data collected through household survey and other means is verified and consolidated by trained community. The encoding system can be either manual or computerized, depending on resources and capabilities. Computerized encoding is advantageous as it facilitates faster analysis of the data and mapping.

4. Processing of data

Processing is a critical step since the survey findings form the basis for local planning and program implementation. Data aggregated at the village-level are then submitted to higher geopolitical levels for consolidation.

5. Validation and consultation

The results of the census are presented in a community forum for cross validation by the community members. The forum serves to: discuss and assess



several of dimensions of poverty prevailing in the community; diagnose and assess the causes of poverty; prioritize the community needs; and identify appropriate interventions for poverty reduction.

Benefits

Evidence from experiences in various countries show that real benefits accrue to communities and their governments rather rapidly. From the provision of crucial services such as schools, health, water and sanitation facilities, to employment programs.

- CBMS is an essential compliment to national level poverty monitoring systems.
- Experience has shown that CBMS is feasible, easy to sustain, cost effective and can be jointly implemented by community members and local government with capacity building support.
- Given its explicit focus on community, CBMS endeavors to empower the community by enhancing its capacity to participate in diagnosing the problems and offering solutions.
- CBMS provides accurate disaggregated data that enables local government planners make targeted investments both effectively and efficiently, and monitor progress while also addressing issues of gender and social equity in terms of resource allocation.
- CBMS enables community to have a say in the decision making process and offers them a simple tool to hold government accountable, promote public transparency
- It helps to monitor the impact of projects and programs thus contributing to poverty reduction.

Challenges and lessons

- With all due credit to the benefits of CBMS, it shouldn't be considered as a panacea for the challenges posed by lack of statistical data for planning purposes. It should be viewed as a complement and not a substitute to national-level sample surveys.
- The research has shown that CBMS is not a turnkey solution. It requires adaptation to specific on-the-ground conditions and the political, economic, and social environment.
- Decentralization, political will and commitment and community participation are critical enabling conditions for CBMS.
- Partnerships between researchers/specialists, government officials, and communities is essential for selecting indicators, development of survey tools, analysis of data and training of communities and local government officials



- Enlisting community support and orienting them at the very outset is a critical determinant of CBMS's success.
- Adequate training should not be underestimated.
- Timely collection and processing of data, cross-validating the data with the community and wider dissemination of the survey findings are all crucial prerequisites for effective implementation of CBMS.

Key resources

Reyes, C and Due, E. *in focus: FIGHTING POVERTY WITH FACTS Community-Based Monitoring Systems*. IDRC (2009)
www.idrc.ca/in_focus_poverty.

☞ International Development Research Centre is a Canadian Crown Corporation that works in close collaboration with researchers from the developing world in their search for the means to build healthier, more equitable and more prosperous societies CBMS was pioneered and piloted by IDRC. This IDRC publication and corresponding website is the single most exhaustive resource on CBMS and has assembled a variety of resources on CBMS including slide presentations, videos, short stories, case studies, research reports, books, etc. The site presents an overview of CBMS, results of IDRC-supported research, and the important lessons that have been learned in more than 15 countries across Asia and Africa.

The Poverty & Economic Policy (PEP) Research Network, Canada
<http://www.pep-net.org/programs/cbms/about-cbms/>

☞ The Poverty and Economic Policy (PEP) Research Network is an international network of researchers in developing countries who have the expertise, resources and reputation to participate in and contribute to national and international debates on economic policies related to poverty and brings together and provides scientific and financial support to teams of developing country researchers working to reduce poverty. The PEP Research Network is one of the main promoters of BMS and their website offers useful information.

Philippines Institute of Development Studies (PIDS)
http://econdb.pids.gov.ph/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=25&Itemid=40

☞ PIDS was established to respond to the critical and growing need for research for planning and policy formulation in Philippines. In general, PIDS research is envisioned to help government planners and policy-makers in the executive and legislative branches of government. PIDS has been promoting the use of CBMS and their website contains useful information on CBMS and the CBMS data base and indicators for Philippines.



Case studies

The Philippines: From cradle to national implementation

Beginning in the province of Palawan, CBMS has spread to 52 of the country's 81 provinces with the goal of 100% coverage by 2010. Local governments use CBMS data to prepare annual investment plan, prioritize projects for poverty reduction, evaluate the impacts of their projects, and to prepare for impending social crises. The researchers note that CBMS has also increased the transparency and accountability local governments. CBMS results have led to the establishment of Task Force Clean and Green and a health patrol to address health and nutrition problems. A health centre was constructed; a supplemental feeding program for children was introduced; toilets were distributed to households to improve the sanitation problem.

Source: http://www.idrc.ca/openebooks/435-2/#page_25

Vietnam: Focusing on basic needs in communes

Standing in the yard of her modest home on the edge of rice fields in Dai-Yen commune in Chuong-My district of Ha Tay province, a villager displays her poverty certificate. It attests that she is poor or rather, that she is poorer than her neighbours in this farming community of close to 5 000 people on the outskirts of Hanoi. The card entitles this widowed mother of two to free health care, preferential loans, and other services. It is a valuable entitlement. Her right to the certificate was identified by other commune members. And all this was possible, thanks to CBMS. Vietnam is one of the countries where CBMs was piloted. Among the plans and programs developed using CBMS, are vocational training in such areas as traditional crafts to generate employment, assistance to improve inadequate housing, and the provision of agricultural inputs to boost food production. The data is also helping Vietnam monitor progress toward the MDGs.

Source: http://www.idrc.ca/openebooks/435-2/#page_25

Burkina Faso: Empowering the poor

CBMS was piloted in Burkina Faso in 1997. According to CBMS team leader Prosper Somda of CEDRES, CBMS is the only data collection tool that communities can use to develop evidence-based plans. The resulting detailed picture of poverty held up to the communities spurred some to action. In Lilbouré, for instance, the results galvanized the community into building retaining



structures to capture rainwater for agriculture. As well, school enrolment more than doubled. In late April 2008 the mayor of Yako, reported that the CBMS results had enabled him to negotiate funding for priority development projects. "Whoever has information is wealthy," he says. "I needed reliable data. I was working in the dark which made it difficult to obtain financing. The CBMS results are already being used to improve people's welfare." One of the major challenges faced in Burkina Faso was communicating the CBMS results back to the community whose illiteracy level was rather high. The solution: translate the data into easy-to-interpret drawings posted at village assembly offices and into the local languages.

Source: http://www.idrc.ca/openebooks/435-2/#page_25