



My Rights Beyond 2015: Making the Post-2015 Framework Accountable to the World's Poor

September 2013



Trócaire envisages a just and peaceful world where people's dignity is ensured and rights are respected; where basic needs are met and resources are shared equitably; where people have control over their own lives and those in power act for the common good.

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Foreword

With just two years to go until the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) expire, negotiations are under way at many levels to agree what should be their successor in 2015. Should there be new goals on gender? Disability? How can environmental sustainability be incorporated? Should consumption be included? The list of potential global goals is breath-taking; each of them has their merits and ought to be considered in the development of a new set of global goals. Imagining up a new framework to replace the MDGs is fast becoming the ultimate quest for development professionals, employing vast amounts of energy and expertise.

The failure to meet many of the MDGs by 2015 is, however, likely to have few, if any, consequences for the governments who agreed on them, or indeed for many of those busy designing the next round of goals. For those living in poverty, on the other hand, the failure to deliver on many of the goals has a significant impact on their daily lives, and indeed survival. Despite the efforts and commitment around the MDGs, nearly half of the world's population remains in abject poverty – many of them now in middle income countries. One in eight people in the world today remain chronically undernourished. This truly is a scandal in a world where there is more than enough food to feed everyone. Progress has been modest at best.

Many organisations, including Trócaire, have long argued that whilst the idea of establishing global priorities is a good one, the MDG project has been flawed from the beginning. The failure to embed the MDGs within existing human rights commitments, standards and principles represented a major weakness and opportunity missed, resulting in their limited benefit to the poorest and most marginalised people. In trying to establish quantifiable progress, the MDGs miss the point that every woman, man and child on the planet (not 50%) is inherently endowed with moral entitlements to a dignified life - an adequate standard of living, secure access to sufficient food, to an education and to a healthy environment. These moral entitlements are enshrined in international human rights law. We strongly believe that the achievement of human rights for all needs to be at the heart of the debate about a post-2015 framework.

In order to inform our thinking, and to ensure that it is grounded in the experiences of the people Trócaire works with across the world, we have undertaken a participatory research project to understand their experiences in accessing their rights. I would like to sincerely thank the people across the communities in the six countries who participated in this study for sharing their views and experiences with us. Their stories, and the insights they provided, will be central to our engagement with the post-2015 agenda.

This report is published as Trócaire celebrates its 40th anniversary. This is a time for Trócaire to reflect on international development efforts past and present, and to look to what the future holds. In March this year Trócaire invited partners from across the world, colleagues, allies and experts together to debate the systemic challenges of the poverty, equality and environmental crises evident at global, national and local levels, and the role of a post-2015 framework for development in addressing these. There was agreement that the post-2015 framework for global development and cooperation will be no panacea. It can and must, however, lay the groundwork for the shifts in approach needed, and incentivise enhanced action at national and international levels. In this context, Trócaire believes that reaffirming human rights as an anchor and a compass for national and global governance is critical if we are to create change for the poorest and most vulnerable people.

Justin Kilcullen
Executive Director

Trócaire

Executive Summary

With just two years to go until the Millennium Development Goals expire, negotiations are under way at many levels to agree what should be their successor in 2015. The list of potential global goals is breath-taking. Imagining up a new framework to replace the MDGs is fast becoming the ultimate quest for development professionals, employing vast amounts of energy and expertise.

The MDGs have been subject to widespread debate since their emergence in 2000. Stakeholders have both welcomed them and criticised them, often simultaneously, acknowledging their strengths and their contribution to poverty eradication, but also expressing unease regarding weaknesses in their content, architecture and implementation.

Many organisations, including Trócaire, have long argued that whilst the idea of establishing global priorities is a good one, the MDGs have largely failed because they were flawed from the beginning.¹ Many of the MDGs' shortcomings relate closely to the failure to put human rights at the centre. While some have argued that the MDGs were never intended to replace the human rights treaties and were focused on human rights implementation, in practice, as the MDGs became more prominent in development policy, they became detached from the principles which underpin international human rights law. A human rights approach to the framework would have acknowledged existing legal obligations to fulfil the rights to food, health and education of all people. It would have put equality, participation and accountability at the centre of implementation, and built a bridge to existing reporting and accountability mechanisms.

Who will be held accountable if certain MDG targets are unfulfilled by 2015 is unclear, and throws into question the purpose and credibility of such global compacts. For those living in poverty, on the other hand, the failure to deliver on many of the goals has a significant impact on their daily lives, and indeed survival. As attention increasingly focuses on 2015, the development and implementation of a post-2015 framework offers a significant opportunity to build a more robust global framework that can respond to today's context.

Putting the priorities, voices and experiences of people living in poverty at the centre

A key concern in formulating the next framework must be the lessons learned from the MDGs.

From Trócaire's perspective, the value of a global framework for development begins and ends with its relevance to and impact on the lives of the people it is intended to support. A critical starting point is to enable people living in poverty to have their priorities, views and experiences heard, and to take these into account in the debate.

Efforts to ensure a more consultative process in the elaboration of a new global development framework are underway. More challenging, however, is how to ensure that people directly affected by poverty are enabled to meaningfully participate. In order to contribute to efforts to this end, and to ground our own analysis and advocacy, in late 2012 Trócaire embarked on a participatory research project to explore the priorities and

experiences of people living in poverty in six countries in which we work: Koraput District in the State of Odisha, India; Umerkot District in Southern Sindh, Pakistan; Lilongwe and Dedza Districts in Malawi; Bombali District, Northern Province in Sierra Leone; Madriz District in North Central region in Nicaragua; and Gonaïves District in the Department of Artibonite in Haiti.

The purpose of the research was not to come up with a new set of universal goals. Rather, the aim of the project was to bring the diverse voices of people directly affected by poverty and injustice into the high level post-2015 process, and to allow their lived reality to challenge the dominant thinking. Through carrying out the research in a participatory rights-based approach, it also aimed to develop insights into the potential benefits of this approach for a post-2015 framework.

¹Trócaire (2005), 'More than a NumbersGame? Ensuring that the Millennium Development Goals address Structural Injustice'.

Insights from the Case Studies

Insights from the Case Studies

Insight 1

Whilst certain core basic needs are common to all, people's priorities are quite specific and context related

Key priorities across all of the case studies were the need for a stable income and nutritious food. In all the case studies apart from the one in Nicaragua, shelter featured particularly highly. The case studies highlight the mix of priorities which are common to all, and a long list of other priorities which are context specific. The main insight from this is the importance of context in shaping people's development priorities. If the priorities of the participants in this project are overlaid on the current MDGs, nearly half of the issues identified in the case studies are not currently MDGs.

This divergence raises questions about the ability of a narrow set of global goals to respond effectively and appropriately to the priorities of people living in poverty.

Insight 2

The interconnections between different priorities really matter

Whilst there was divergence across the communities relating to what their most important issues were, everyone could point to the interconnected nature of their priorities, such as between income and food, land for food and income, food for health and education, among others. The case studies also highlight important factors affecting the ability of participants to secure their priorities, such as discrimination, and their ability to shape and challenge government policy and practice. The challenges for women in securing income opportunities, including access to land and/or the means to invest in it were highlighted, and at the same time, across the case studies, women were more likely to feel unable to express their opinions at local levels or to access or influence decision-making. This interconnectedness points to the need to address the critique of the MDG framework as promoting a single issue-based approach, and the need for a framework in which interconnections between priorities are addressed in a holistic, integrated way which is tailored to specific contexts.

Insight 3

Reliance on family, friends and local community is a central coping strategy

The self-reliance of the communities in this study, in the face of extreme poverty, is reflected in the diverse range of coping strategies reported. Nearly a third of the people in the research reported having to get by on their own without assistance from anyone. Overall, family and friends remain the most important source of help, followed by Church and NGOs. Women and girls were more frequently associated with coping mechanisms such as reducing food consumed, being removed from school to work or search for food, or even forced early marriage or prostitution. Most participants across the case studies are heavily dependent upon natural resources for income generation activities, food, and, in some cases, medicine to get by.

Participants' proposals for what could best support them to achieve their priorities related primarily to the adequate provision of basic services such as health or education, social protection for the poorest, and notably, the importance of support to establish a more enabling environment, whether for agricultural production, income and employment opportunities, or other activities. This indicates that if a post-2015 framework is to support communities to become more self-reliant and resilient, it needs to build on their existing capacities and strategies, placing far greater focus on development processes as well as outcomes. This would mean stepping away from a predominantly outcome focused approach, underscoring the importance of determining goals and assessing progress from the bottom-up.

“Nearly a third of the people in the research reported having to get by on their own without assistance from anyone”

Insight 4

Services and supports may exist but barriers undermine access for the poorest groups

The level of basic service provision varied across the different case studies. In some cases, provision was inadequate or non-existent. In other cases, services existed, but many participants were not able to make use of them. The problem of accessing supports and services was highlighted across the case studies. Barriers to access consistently included costs, whether official costs or necessary bribes, as well as distance, and were noted as affecting participants' ability to access education, health and other services, as well as income opportunities. Other barriers highlighted across a number of case studies as undermining participants' access to services were illiteracy, lack of education and information. These affected people's knowledge of existing supports and services as well as their ability and/or confidence to pursue them. The focus on outcomes under the MDG framework, diverted attention from the importance of removing barriers that inhibit access to services for the most disadvantaged groups. If the post-2015 framework is to be an effective tool for enabling the poorest people to access services and supports, it needs to give due consideration to the barriers they encounter in accessing these.

Insight 5

Discrimination is a significant barrier in accessing supports, services and opportunities. Multiple intersecting forms of discrimination, including in particular gender-based discrimination, lead to disproportionate vulnerability

Participants across the case studies consistently highlighted experiences of discrimination as a significant barrier in accessing supports and services. Overall, half the participants directly identified discrimination as a major obstacle to achieving their priorities. When asked about barriers to accessing their priorities, many more referred to discrimination-related barriers. Experiences of discrimination on the basis of socio-economic status, for 'being poor', and gender-based discrimination were highlighted in every case study. Other forms of identity-based discrimination, their extent and their impacts varied according to context. Discrimination on the basis of socio-economic status was described in terms of the inability to afford official costs or requisite bribes, but also of being treated differently by service providers as a result of their perceived status.

The fact that participants across all case studies felt that they were discriminated against because they were poor is indicative of the ways in which identity-based discrimination can result in a series of deprivations, contributing further to the discrimination experienced and reinforcing people's situation. Gender-based discrimination was noted by some participants as compounding other forms of discrimination they experience. Across the case studies, the de jure or de facto unequal treatment of women in accessing supports and services, land ownership and job opportunities were cited as factors in their disproportionate vulnerability. While no questions were asked in relation to gender-based violence, violence against women was referred to, explicitly or implicitly, by a number of female and male participants across a number of case studies.

Tackling discrimination, in particular in relation to gender, is critical in eradicating poverty and has implications for policy and practice from local to global levels. Data on who has and has not benefitted from the MDGs indicates that many of the poorest people, in particular groups who experience discrimination, have benefited least.² If the cycle of poverty in which many people are trapped is to be broken, a post-2015 framework needs to find ways of addressing discrimination as it is experienced at a variety of levels.

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Insight 6

Participation in decision-making does not equal influence

Across all countries participants felt disempowered and experienced a significant lack of control over decisions that affect their lives. Experiences of participation varied across the case studies. With the exception of Sierra Leone and Malawi, more than half of participants felt they can voice their opinion on issues of concern in their community. Half of participants felt, however, that they are not confident that their solutions will be taken into consideration, and two thirds also felt they did not have sufficient information about local government decisions.

Participant views on their experiences of participation reflect much of the critique around participatory approaches³, including that participation can take place without resulting in any impact on decisions made or their implementation. While the MDGs emerged following the ascendancy of participation in development discourse and practice, the lack of attention to participation, either as a development end and priority in itself, or as critical in practical terms to effective implementation of the MDGs, is stark. If the post-2015 framework is to enable people experiencing poverty to be agents of their own development, enhancing their meaningful participation and capacity to influence decisions which affect them needs to be an objective and outcome of the framework.

Insight 7

Perceptions of accountability of those in authority influences people's hope in a different future

High levels of dissatisfaction with government performance in providing support or assistance were reported by participants in relation to their priority issues. Nearly half of the participants said they had no one to turn to when the Government is not performing well in relation to their priority issues. Most people identified traditional leaders as someone whom they could tell if they were dissatisfied with the Government's performance, but they were often noted as having limited influence over official government.

In most case studies, accountability mechanisms were referred to, however, participants struggled to identify an example of where they had successfully sought and achieved accountability from authority figures at the community or local government level. Pervasive corruption and the fact that in many cases those in authority were both the perpetrator and the accountability channel were seen as undermining the possibility of holding those in authority to account and achieving change. The case studies demonstrated the problem of ineffective accountability mechanisms. Barriers, such as lack of education, distance, costs involved, and social norms, undermine the belief and confidence of many people that accountability is possible, or their due. Without accountability, the possibility of people living in poverty to seek and achieve change is significantly impeded.

While a lot of emphasis has been put on reporting on the outcomes of the MDGs they have done little to strengthen accountability at local, national or international levels. A key consideration for the post-2015 framework needs to be how such a framework can support strengthened, effective accountability mechanisms at global, national and local levels that facilitate the active participation of people living in poverty, in the implementation of the framework, but also beyond it.

Recommendations and Added Value of a Rights-based Approach

Trócaire believes founding a post-2015 framework on human rights, underpinned by the international legal human rights framework, is the most effective means to ensure a people-centred participative approach, integrate equality and non-discrimination, and enhance accountability. The preparation of a post-2015 framework comes at a time when governance at all levels is being tested by increasingly interconnected crises in the social, environmental and economic spheres. These challenges are systemic, and a new global development framework alone cannot provide the solutions. Trócaire believes, however, that it can and must make a critical contribution. Today's

context demands a very different framework to the MDGs, one in which there is greater shared responsibility, strengthened action at national and sub-national levels, strengthened collective and individual accountability, and enhanced coherence around a people-centred agenda. A human rights-based approach provides an existing, universal normative and legal framework that can and must provide an anchor and a compass to ensure that the poorest people are placed at the centre of concern; as governance at national and global levels seeks to navigate change in a context of increasing uncertainty.

1. Goal setting needs to happen at the right levels, to support local priority setting

This study points to the importance of local specificities and contexts in shaping people's priorities, and their ability to pursue them. The new framework needs to consider carefully the purpose of goal setting at the global level. Determining the impact of the MDGs on government policy and action, whether developing country governments or donor country governments, or other actors, has been difficult. Lessons learned from the experiences of the MDGs highlight the importance of translating global goals into national policy and action if they are to be appropriate to national and local contexts, and if implementation is to be effective. This indicates strongly that a post-2015 framework will have to play a more explicit and effective role in incentivising action at national and sub-national levels by, inter-alia, combining global goal setting with the establishment of national and sub-national commitments, and their integration into national policy frameworks.

A meaningful way of framing the post-2015 framework would be to focus the goals on the progressive realisation of human rights commitments as laid out in international law. Acknowledging the existing human rights commitments and obligations to which goals relate would significantly strengthen the moral, political and legal standing and credibility of the framework. This would acknowledge the right of every person to be free from hunger, to an education or to a healthy environment, and the obligation of governments to respect, protect and promote these rights, rather than seek socio-economic outcomes for the percentage of the population deemed feasible. Recognising people living in poverty as rights-holders, with the ability to claim their rights from governments as duty-bearers, is much more profound and empowering than being considered

passive recipients who may benefit from support when and if it is available, and an important reaffirmation of the social contract underpinning democratic societies. This is important given evidence of the sense of humiliation, powerlessness and hopelessness experienced by many people living in poverty, as reflected in many participant responses in this study.

Such an approach, underpinned by legal instruments and principles, would provide clarity on the responsibilities of national governments, ensure coherence with existing obligations and establish links to existing reporting and accountability mechanisms. National governments are by no means the only actors in focus under a rights-based approach, but the primary importance of the relationship between people and their government is emphasised, and the need for implementation processes in which this is the central relationship is underscored.

Recommendations

A post-2015 framework should:

a

Have universal application, establishing international consensus on where global impetus and increased international cooperation are needed.

b

Incentivise enhanced international and national level action, establishing global goals and mandating the elaboration of national and sub-national level goals, targets and indicators.

c

Explicitly serve the fulfilment of human rights by, inter-alia, reaffirming the full set of social, economic and cultural, civil and political rights of all people everywhere, linking goals and targets (global and national) to existing human rights obligations, and integrating framework accountability mechanisms with national, regional and international human rights accountability mechanisms.

2. Address the interconnectedness of people's priorities

This research reaffirms the interconnected nature of people's priorities, and of the factors affecting their access to them. The single-issue MDGs, however, promoted programmes designed to achieve particular objectives, often without acknowledging or acting on the interconnections between different goals. A new framework needs to actively promote action to address the interconnections between priorities, and the factors that impact on their pursuit by people living in poverty. The human rights principles of 'indivisibility, inter-relatedness and interdependence' focus attention on the interconnections between realising different rights, including economic, social and cultural rights and civil and political rights. This provides a lens with which to approach a post-2015 framework, to ensure it responds effectively to the challenge of promoting joined-up action in both its content and its implementation.

Coherent approaches are also critical if a global post-2015 framework is intended to address poverty and sustainability in an integrated way. Advancing policy coherence for sustainable development in all countries should be acknowledged as a central objective of an integrated agenda. Human rights standards and principles should be established as the normative framework guiding policy development, implementation and review, to ensure vulnerabilities of people living in poverty are not exacerbated, and that their resilience is strengthened.

Recommendations

A post-2015 framework should:

a

Reaffirm the human rights principles of indivisibility, interrelatedness and interdependence, and mandate their integration in the implementation of the framework at all levels.

b

Reflect a balance within global, national and sub-national level goal sets, between socio-economic rights and outcomes, and the civil and political rights and processes that underpin their realisation for all.

c

Provide global impetus to advancing policy coherence for sustainable development, designating human rights standards and obligations as the universal norms and standards governing poverty eradication and sustainable development policies.

3. Support local strategies to build sustainable and resilient livelihoods and communities

This research indicates the variety, and the fragility, of existing strategies employed by participants, and their ability to identify the kind of supports, services or other interventions that could support them to improve their lives. This highlights the importance of a post-2015 framework incentivising action at national and sub-national levels that builds on the existing capacities of people living in poverty, enhancing their ability to contribute actively to their own development. This includes increasing the access of people living in poverty to resources, enhancing their capacity to represent issues that matter to them, and to support collective responses to problems.

Participatory approaches provide a basis for building on existing capacities, networks and assets, and engaging with the formal and informal processes and norms most relevant to people's lives.⁴ Participation of people living in poverty is critical not only in the design of policies and programmes, but also in the review of their implementation. Engaging with people to understand their experiences of supports, services and other interventions focuses attention on quality and accessibility. This is conducive to more responsive and appropriate policy making and implementation, but also supports the building of people's individual and collective capacities to shape their own lives, an intrinsic end in integral and sustainable human development⁵. A human rights-perspective lends weight to this approach, recognising people as rights-holders, critical actors in development processes and the primary agents of their own development.

Recommendations

A post-2015 framework should:

a

Be shaped by the priorities, views and experiences of people living in poverty. People living in poverty should be appropriately supported to participate in debates at various levels that are influencing the post-2015 agenda.

b

Promote, pursue and actively provide for the participation of people living in poverty in the establishment of national and sub-national level goals, targets and indicators, and in their monitoring and review at all levels.

4. Address the barriers experienced by people living in poverty in accessing services, supports and opportunities, especially discrimination

No country in the world has successfully eradicated discriminatory norms and practices and inequalities are increasing rapidly in many countries and regions. Establishing equality as a central objective under a post-2015 agenda, would provide both a normative boost to the fight against inequality and discrimination, and enhance accountability for progress at global and national levels on this critical component of a poverty eradication agenda.

Applying a human rights perspective provides a normative and legal basis with which to challenge discrimination and inequality. A human rights approach invokes obligations to achieve substantive equality with full protection under the law, and non-discrimination, with prohibition of distinctions based on impermissible grounds that have the effect or purpose of impairing the enjoyment of rights. Furthermore, the right to equality and the principle of non-discrimination ensure that the people and groups usually excluded from decision-making are purposefully and actively identified, and that they are meaningfully included in the design, implementation and review of action. This is critical if the status quo is to be effectively challenged.

This has a number of important implications for a post-2015 framework for development. Adopting a rights-based approach would mean prioritising the people whose rights are currently being denied or violated, identifying the barriers to their ability to enjoy or claim their rights, and disaggregating implementation and outcome data to provide an equality lens on progress.

The level and persistence of discrimination against women is indicative of the significant continued efforts needed to ensure women, in particular, enjoy equality of treatment in both law and practice. The impact of a post-2015 agreement on advancing gender-equality and empowering women, will be a litmus test of its success as a framework for tackling poverty.

Recommendations

A post-2015 framework should:

a

Tackle discrimination by including equality as a global goal with universal application. This should be accompanied by participatory processes and empirical work from local levels upwards to identify additional context-specific forms of discrimination and establish equality targets and indicators in national and sub-national goal sets as appropriate.

b

Equality should be mainstreamed across all goals and targets, incentivising action to tackle discrimination and advance equality under each goal area. Groups experiencing discrimination should be enabled to actively participate in identifying appropriate qualitative as well as quantitative indicators to provide disaggregated data to assess progress.

c

Commitments to tackling gender-based discrimination should be explicitly prioritised and addressed in both global and national level commitments.

5. Foster empowerment and enable people living in poverty to influence decisions which affect them

Participation without influence, and anchored in accountability, is tokenistic and inhibits transformational change. Evidence from extensive studies, including this one, with people living in poverty highlights the inherent link between people's ability to access their priorities, their ability to have their voices and views heard, and their ability to hold those in authority accountable. This highlights the misplaced distinction within the MDG framework which defines development in terms of economic and social outcomes, and the failure to factor in the civil and political processes that underpin securing them for all.

Participation in public affairs is a human right and both participation and accountability are core human rights principles. Applying a human rights-based approach to a post-2015 framework places both participation and accountability at the centre of development processes, as the fundamental hinge on which democratic society turns. A human rights-approach to enhancing participatory and accountable governance is critical furthermore, if transformational change is to be achieved. A rights-based approach interrogates whose rights are unmet or being violated and the root causes, challenging the power of those whose interests are served by the status quo.

Whilst extensive monitoring has been conducted on the MDGs, with the UN in particular spearheading efforts to improve international reporting and accountability, a consistent criticism of the MDG framework has been the inadequacy of accountability at all levels for its implementation. Who will be held accountable if certain MDG targets are unfulfilled by 2015 and how is unclear, and throws into question the purpose and credibility of such global compacts. A key consideration in relation to a post-2015 framework needs to be how such a framework can support strengthened, effective accountability mechanisms at global, national and local levels that facilitate the active participation of people living in poverty in the implementation of the framework, but also beyond it.

The international human rights framework provides an existing legal framework and architecture on which accountability mechanisms for implementation of a post-2015 framework can and should be built. While centring responsibility with national governments, international human rights law establishes responsibilities for other governmental actors and Guiding Principles exist that provide moral obligations for non-governmental actors.

Participation and accountability are processes rather than one-off events or stand alone mechanisms. This highlights the importance of strengthening both formal and informal mechanisms and channels for participation and accountability at national levels and in particular at local levels, and the importance of securing other civil and political rights such as the right to association and assembly, and the right to freedom of expression.

The challenges experienced by people living in poverty in influencing decisions that affect them and seeking accountability for violations of their rights are common to rich and poor countries⁶

and would be an appropriate global goal under a universally applicable framework for poverty eradication and sustainable development. Existing initiatives to strengthen bottom-up, community based, social and human rights accountability, in relation to performance against standards, and for fulfilment of official commitments, should be supported and scaled up.

Recommendations

A post-2015 framework should:

a

Reaffirm the human rights principles of participation and accountability in legitimate, people-centred development.

b

Establish effective accountability mechanisms for the implementation of a post-2015 framework at global, national and sub-national levels, integrating these with existing human rights accountability mechanisms at international, regional and national levels. Improve the accountability of powerful non-governmental actors.

c

Actively involve the participation of people living in poverty and marginalisation in monitoring and review of implementation at all levels.

d

Establish participatory and accountable governance as a global goal for universal application, to be translated and elaborated on at national and sub-national levels in participatory processes with people living in poverty.

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1. Introduction

In September 2000, world leaders gathered in New York to mark the new millennium and to sign the Millennium Declaration. The Declaration contained eight promises, which became known as the 'Millennium Development Goals' (MDGs). Since then, the MDGs, with their deadline of 2015, have become central goals governing development cooperation efforts across the world. With two years to the deadline, political attention is focused on the state of progress in achieving the MDGs, and on what will succeed them after 2015.

MDGs - A Mixed Blessing

The MDGs have been subject to widespread controversy since their emergence in 2000. Stakeholders, including Trócaire, have both welcomed them and criticised them, often simultaneously, acknowledging their strengths and their contribution to poverty eradication, but also expressing unease regarding weaknesses in their content, architecture and implementation.

On the positive side, there is strong evidence that the MDGs have focused attention on many important issues linked to the achievement of integral human development. They have made a critical contribution to anchoring poverty eradication as a global priority. By including goals on education, health, the empowerment of women and environmental issues, they have also furthered popular understanding of poverty as more than a lack of income. While the impact of the MDGs on government action is difficult to determine, the goals are attributed with focusing political attention at the highest level and increasing financial flows to key social sectors.

The goals have provided time-bound targets against which aid donors and recipient governments can assess their respective actions. They have also offered national and international civil society actors an important new advocacy tool with which to hold governments to account on a clear set of priorities⁷. In a survey conducted with 104 representatives from civil society organisations in 27 developing countries, 72 per cent thought that development had become a higher priority because of the MDGs, and 60 per cent believed the MDGs were beneficial to NGOs in terms of lobbying, monitoring, fundraising and project design.⁸



Source: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

⁷ Office of the High Commissioner For Human Rights and Centre for Economic and Social Rights, (2013), 'Who will be accountable? Human Rights and the Post-2015 Development Agenda'. New York and Geneva. P viii.

⁸ Pollard A, Sumner A, Polato Lopez M, de Mauroy A (2011), '100Voices: Southern perspectives on what should come after the Millennium Development Goals'. Cafod. P.9.

MDG Progress

- The world reached the poverty reduction target five years ahead of schedule. In developing regions, the proportion of people living on less than \$1.25 a day fell from 47 per cent in 1990 to 22 per cent in 2010.
- The proportion of undernourished people in developing regions decreased from 23.2 per cent in 1990–1992 to 14.9 per cent in 2010–2012. Given reinvigorated efforts, the target of halving the percentage of people suffering from hunger by 2015 appears to be within reach.
- Between 2000 and 2010, mortality rates from malaria fell by more than 25 per cent globally. An estimated 1.1 million deaths from malaria were averted over this period.

MDG Gaps

- While new HIV infections are declining, an estimated 34 million people were living with HIV at the end of 2011. The MDG target of universal access to antiretroviral therapy for all who need it by 2010 was missed.
- Globally, the maternal mortality ratio declined by 47 per cent over the last two decades, from 400 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births to 210 between 1990 and 2010, but progress is falling short of targets.
- The growth in global emissions of CO² is accelerating, and emissions today are more than 46 per cent higher than their 1990 level. Forests continue to be lost at an alarming rate. Over-exploitation of marine fish stocks is resulting in diminished yields.
- In 2012, net aid disbursements from developed to developing countries totalled \$126 billion. This represents a 4 per cent drop in real terms compared to 2011, which itself was 2 per cent below 2010 levels. In 2012, bilateral official development assistance to least developed countries fell by 13 per cent, to about \$26 billion.

Box 1: MDG Progress and Gaps⁹

Whilst the MDGs have had some clear benefits, there are a number of gaps and critiques which must be considered as attention turns to the development of a post-2015 framework.

Failure to recognise diversity

Setting one set of universal goals has arguably driven increased investment in a number of critical areas, for example the creation of the innovative Dutch MDG3 Fund for bringing about gender equality. While providing positive impetus to global donors, it is widely acknowledged that the largely top-down implementation of the MDGs has failed to adequately take into account local specificity and context. The voices of those directly experiencing poverty, their priorities, experiences and proposals were not accounted for in MDG implementation, a problem increasingly acknowledged by the UN.¹⁰ Following a decade when the development community focused on the 'right to participate'¹¹, to some extent, with the MDGs, the commitment to empower people to be the authors of their own development has been watered down.

Masking discrimination and inequality

The MDG framework is also criticised for the way top line achievements have masked chronic poverty and deepening inequalities. Greater interrogation of outcomes has shown that in many countries the situation of the poorest and most marginalised people in relation to the MDG targets has stagnated, or deteriorated, and that inequalities have increased.¹² Evidence also demonstrates that the poorest and most marginalised people are most likely to be from groups experiencing discrimination, many of whom experience a combination of forms of discrimination, with women and girls often faring worst within all groups.¹³ The MDGs can be met whilst systematically discriminating against whole groups of disadvantaged people. Ironically, if the main objective is to meet the goals quickly, such discrimination may even be expeditious.

Weak accountability

Accountability for achieving the MDGs, moreover, is weak at all levels. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights describes effective accountability as being composed of three core components: responsibility, answerability and enforceability.¹⁴ The MDG framework is vague on who is responsible for what, with the result that national governments tend to point to others and external factors for their lack of progress. Whilst there is global reporting on progress, answerability at global and national levels has been limited. Reporting on progress towards the goals has been largely voluntary and non-systematic, highlighting best practices rather than challenging compliance or assessing efforts, and with no real consequences for lack of progress.¹⁵

Downward accountability from governments to citizens for their actions under the framework has also been largely absent. Official reporting processes have provided little opportunity for independent evaluation or challenge. The ability of people affected by the MDGs and related policies, or civil society, to shape and review government action has been lacking at official levels and limited at best.¹⁶

From an enforceability standpoint, the picture has been mixed. While a number of countries gradually integrated MDG commitments in government policies and plans, or established national level targets, and in many cases donor funds were aligned towards MDG related sectors, the MDGs were never enforceable from a legal perspective.¹⁷

Failure to address policy incoherence

Accountability, where it has existed, has focused almost exclusively on progress made in aid recipient countries against MDG 1-7 targets. Accountability of donor countries for delivery on their commitments to greater policy coherence has been particularly weak. Under MDG 8 on 'Developing a Global Partnership for Development' targets and indicators relate mainly to actions to be undertaken by donor countries. These include delivering more generous ODA for countries committed to poverty reduction, furthering a fairer trading and financial system, the implementation of robust programmes of debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries, and ensuring access in poorer countries to affordable essential drugs. Throughout the early 2000s, aid levels increased throughout the OECD, though not to the levels committed to and some progress was made on debt cancellation.¹⁸ As the financial crisis hit in 2008 the political will to meet the target of 0.7 per cent GNI going to ODA has diminished as domestic priorities in donor countries has taken priority.¹⁹ Progress on establishing a fairer trade and financial system has been negligible and on the whole the MDGs are considered to have no real impact on domestic policies in donor countries.²⁰ Moreover, the failure of the MDG framework to take into account the climate crisis, and its impacts on poverty, represents a glaring omission.

⁹ Excerpts from the UN Secretary General's 2013 progress report on the MDGs, United Nations (2013), 'The Millennium Development Goals Report 2013', available at <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/report-2013/mdg-report-2013-english.pdf>. For additional and alternative analyses on gaps and progress in MDG progress see Melamed C (2012), 'After 2015: Context, politics and processes for a post-2015 global agreement on development'. Overseas Development Institute; or Green D, Hale S, Lockwood M (2012), 'How Can a Post-2015 Agreement Drive Real Change? The political economy of global commitments'. Oxfam Discussion Paper.

¹⁰ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2006), 'Participatory Governance and the Millennium Development Goals', Publication based on the Expert Group Meeting on Engaged Governance: Citizen Participation in the Implementation of the Developmental Goals including the Millennium Development Goals, New York.

¹¹ Goetz A and Jenkins R (2002), 'Voice, Accountability and Human Development: The Emergence of a New Agenda'. Background Paper for UNDP Human Development Report.

¹² Office of the High Commissioner For Human Rights and Centre for Economic and Social Rights (2013), 'Who will be accountable? Human Rights and the Post-2015 Development Agenda'. New York and Geneva. P3.

¹³ Melamed C (2012), 'After 2015: Context, politics and processes for a post-2015 global agreement on development'. Overseas Development Institute. Ps 16-17; 'The Millennium Development Goals Report 2013'. P16.

¹⁴ Office of the High Commissioner For Human Rights and Centre for Economic and Social Rights (2013), 'Who will be accountable? Human Rights and the Post-2015 Development Agenda'. New York and Geneva. P10.

¹⁵ Ibid P4.

¹⁶ Ibid P4.

¹⁷ Green D, Hale S, Lockwood M (2012), 'How Can a Post-2015 Agreement Drive Real Change? The political economy of global commitments'. Oxfam Discussion Paper. P 9; Melamed C (2012), 'After 2015: Context, politics and processes for a post-2015 global agreement on development'. Overseas Development Institute. P18.

¹⁸ Melamed C (2012), 'After 2015: Context, politics and processes for a post-2015 global agreement on development'. Overseas Development Institute. P18.

¹⁹ Office of the High Commissioner For Human Rights and Centre for Economic and Social Rights (2013), 'Who will be accountable? Human Rights and the Post-2015 Development Agenda'. New York and Geneva. P5.

²⁰ Green D, Hale S, Lockwood M (2012), 'How Can a Post-2015 Agreement Drive Real Change? The political economy of global commitments'. Oxfam Discussion Paper. P 8.

Human Rights - A Missing Link

Many of the shortcomings of the MDGs relate closely to the failure to put human rights at the centre. It may be true, as some have argued, that the MDGs were never intended to replace the human rights treaties and that they represent no more than a 'short hand' for a broader set of global commitments.²¹ In practice, however, as the MDGs have become more prominent in development policy, they have taken on a life of their own and tended to become detached from the principles which underpin international human rights law.

Without human rights at the centre, the MDG framework can easily promote solutions which fail to recognise the inherent dignity of all people and their rights to an adequate standard of living. The framework also fails to recall and reaffirm existing legal obligations to progressively pursue the fulfilment of these for all, rather than an agreed percentage, or to link these commitments to existing human rights accountability mechanisms to enhance their enforceability.

The MDG approach in some ways contradicts the basic principles of the Declaration on the Right to Development, agreed in 1986. This Declaration recognises that development is a holistic process based on the active, free and meaningful participation of all individuals, and the indivisibility and interrelatedness of economic, social and cultural rights, and civil and political rights.

The failure to hardwire human rights principles into the MDG framework, moreover, has contributed to the limited progress made on improving the lives of the poorest and most marginalised because root causes such as discrimination and governance were not prioritised. For example, the failure to address the many barriers girls may face attending or completing school – including school-related sexual violence, the burden of care at home, early pregnancy and many others – undermined the impact of the target of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education. The almost exclusive focus on tangible outcomes of social and economic development, and lack of inclusion of rights and principles relating to participation, accountability, ignored critical civil and political rights and the importance of citizen mobilisation and action to achieve their development priorities.

A post-2015 global framework for development

As attention increasingly focuses on 2015, the development and implementation of a post-2015 framework offers a significant opportunity to build a more robust global framework that can respond to today's context. Much has changed since the adoption of the Millennium Declaration. Shifts in geopolitical and financial influence have seen South-South trade, investment and cooperation challenge the influence of traditional donors. Many new donors have become increasingly influential, not all of whom necessarily adhere to human rights principles. ODA remains critical for many people, countries and areas of cooperation, while progress on the longstanding commitment to achieve 0.7 per cent of donor country GNI for ODA has come under threat in times of budgetary austerity in donor countries. Increasing evidence of environmental crises and their impacts have seen the sustainable development agenda climb the global political agenda once again.²²

Lacklustre implementation of commitments adopted at the Rio Summit on Environment and Development in 1992 sparked debate in the run up to the anniversary Summit in 2012 on the adoption of 'Sustainable Development Goals', seeking to capitalise on the perceived added value of the MDGs as a limited set of concrete global commitments to spur action. With the MDGs expiring in 2015, coherence and political expediency has led an increasing majority of stakeholders to promote the negotiation and adoption of one integrated global framework in 2015 that would have universal application and tackle poverty and sustainability issues together. This potentially presents huge challenges for reaching a global agreement, as existing inequalities mean that significant shifts in access to resources would be required if poverty is to be eradicated without further exceeding planetary boundaries.

This also potentially signals a major shift from the MDG framework approach and could have significant impact on development discourse and policy. The MDGs in their content and application focused

predominantly on actions to be taken in ODA-recipient countries. Weak implementation of MDG 8 commitments is reflective of longstanding challenges in advancing the changes needed in the policies of donor countries to achieve policy coherence for development. A framework with goals for universal domestic application could present a development agenda with a greater sharing of action and responsibility.

A key concern in formulating the next framework must be to act on the lessons learned from the MDGs. Recognition of the weaknesses of the MDG framework in failing to incorporate governance issues and human rights standards and principles has led to increasing advocacy for their inclusion in a post-2015 framework, and debate on what this might entail.²³ Trócaire believes that founding a post-2015 framework on human rights, underpinned by the international legal human rights framework, is the most effective means to ensure a people-centred participative approach, integrate equality and non-discrimination, and enhance accountability. The preparation of a post-2015 framework comes at a time when governance at all levels is being tested by increasingly interconnected challenges in the social, environmental and economic spheres. A post-2015 global framework cannot solve these challenges, but can begin to lay the foundations for the approach and actions needed. Human rights must provide a critical anchor and compass with which national and global governance must navigate the way ahead.

Contributing to a consultative, bottom up process

From Trócaire's perspective, the value of a global framework for development begins and ends with its relevance to and impact on the lives of the people it is intended to support. If the next global framework is to respond to the weaknesses of the MDGs, a critical starting point is to enable people living in poverty to have their priorities, views and experiences heard, and to take these into account.

Efforts to ensure a more consultative process this time around in the elaboration of a global development framework are underway. Civil society initiatives and campaigns are active across the continents, including the Beyond 2015 international campaign of which Trócaire is a founding member.²⁴ Beginning in 2012 the UN has spearheaded national and regional consultations, as well as leading online and offline deliberations on themes ranging from hunger, health, energy and water, to governance, inequalities and conflict, providing an official channel for civil society actors and others to provide their views, experiences and expertise for consideration at the inter-governmental level.

More challenging, however, is how to ensure that people directly affected by poverty are enabled to meaningfully participate. Efforts to respond to this challenge include the Participate initiative under the Beyond 2015 Campaign. Participate has produced a synthesis of participatory research conducted with people living in poverty across 107 countries over the past 7 years and is promoting key findings and messages from this work. 'Ground-level Panels' are being organised to provide an alternative and complement to the top-down, often elite analysis dominating official debates. In order to contribute to these efforts and to ground our own analysis and advocacy, in late 2012 Trócaire embarked on a participatory research project to explore the priorities and experiences of people living in poverty in six countries in which we work: India, Pakistan, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Nicaragua and Haiti. This report presents the findings of that research, with a view to feeding into these key global processes.

Participate is co-convened by the Institute of Development Studies and Beyond 2015. The initiative provides high quality evidence on the reality of poverty at ground level, bringing the perspectives of the poorest into the post-2015 debate. In 2013 Participate published a report drawing on the experiences and views of people living in extreme poverty and marginalisation in 107 countries. It distils messages from 84 participatory research studies published in the last seven years, 'What matters most? Evidence from 84 Participatory Studies with those living with extreme poverty and marginalisation'.

For more information see <http://www.participate2015.org/> or contact participate@ids.ac.uk.

2. Methodology

Purpose of Research

The purpose of the research is not to come up with a new set of universal goals. Rather, the aim of the project is to bring the diverse voices of people directly affected by poverty and injustice into the high level post-2015 process and to allow their lived reality to challenge the dominant thinking. Through carrying out the research in a participatory rights-based approach, a secondary aim is to develop insights into the potential benefits of this approach in a post-2015 framework.

Analytical Framework

The research project has been framed in terms of a rights based analysis (Box 2 below), which focuses on understanding how to raise levels of participation and accountability in the development process.

A human rights-based approach is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. It seeks to analyse inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress.

Under a human rights-based approach, the plans, policies and processes of development are anchored in a system of rights and corresponding obligations established by international law. This helps to promote the sustainability of development work, empowering people themselves—especially the most marginalised—to participate in policy formulation and hold accountable those who have a duty to act.

While there is no universal recipe for a human rights-based approach, United Nations agencies have agreed a number of essential attributes: i) as development policies and programmes are formulated, the main objective should be to fulfil human rights; ii) rights holders and their entitlements, and duty-bearers and their obligations are identified; iii) interventions works towards strengthening the capacities of rights-holders to make their claims, and of duty-bearers to meet their obligations.²⁵

Box 2: Definition of a Human Rights Based Approach

Research Design

The fieldwork has been carried out in the six countries by one or more of Trócaire's local Partner organisations, with support provided by staff from headquarters. The fieldwork was conducted with 40 participants in each community. Overall, 240 people were involved; 90 women and 90 men over the age of 30, and 30 younger women and 30 younger men. Participants answered questionnaires and took part in focus groups. The questionnaires were anonymous and included a mix of open and closed questions. For data collation purposes participant responses were categorised by gender and by age (younger participants were aged 18-25, older participants were aged 25+ based on recommendations from field offices and local Partner organisations).

Countries were selected to provide a diversity of geographical, cultural, social, economic and political contexts, and based on interest and capacity from Trócaire's local Partners and field staff. Participants in the research came from communities with whom local Partner organisations have a current or past relationship either in terms of support or dialogue.²⁶ While the numbers were not large enough to be statistically representative, the data collected on the priorities, views and experiences of people from a variety of very particular contexts, provides important insights into how highly vulnerable people and communities experience development supports and services.

Research Tools

The design and application of the tools sought to ensure the research would be both dialogic and experiential, generating a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. Tools were piloted to ensure applicability in local contexts and a variety of visuals and locally appropriate stories were used to convey key themes. Specific questions and prompts were included to enable information relating to differences in experience between women and men to emerge. A summary of the questionnaire and focus groups can be found in Annex 1.

Qualifiers and Limitations

The research was designed to provide a snap shot of the experiences of people living in poverty rather than a statistically representative sample to generate universal findings. The selection of countries was aimed at diversity and value was placed on capturing local nuances in recognition of the importance of context in development processes. Asking people what their priority issues were was not intended to inform us directly of the goals that should succeed the MDGs, but provides an important insight into priorities of people living in poverty generated from a bottom-up approach, and to explore people's experiences of being able to access their priorities.

Geographic and community context information was drawn from Trócaire's programmes which are based on primary and secondary literature. Further research was not carried out however to validate participant responses. People's views were purposefully prioritised as the primary data source in line with the aims and ethos of the research. Whilst this will likely have resulted in some discrepancies, including given inevitable different interpretations of questions, we can be confident of messages that emerged consistently in questionnaires and focus groups, including where these resonate with an extensive range of other participatory research studies.

Research Contribution

There is a significant amount of research critiquing the MDG framework as a poverty reduction tool, including for its failure to integrate human rights commitments and principles. There is also increasing interest among many governmental, UN and non-governmental stakeholders in ensuring the post-2015 framework responds to the voices, views and experiences of people living in poverty and marginalisation, and incorporates governance issues and rights-based approaches.²⁷ This research seeks to contribute to this debate, and to provide some insight into how a rights-based approach could be incorporated into a post-2015 framework.

The experience of the research and the findings that have emerged have contributed significantly to Trócaire's organisational advocacy on a post-2015 agenda, and are being used at local and national levels in the research countries, to support advocacy on a post-2015 framework for development, or to support existing advocacy and programme work. It is envisaged that following this report, further thematic and/or local studies will be undertaken to deepen the key themes identified.

3. Community Case Studies

Presentation of Findings

The research findings are divided into two sections. In the section that follows, a summary of key findings are presented as case studies from the different locations. Each case study presents an analysis of findings from focus group discussions and questionnaires around six key themes:

People's priorities and their experience of them

We asked participants 'What does a person need to feel well and live a good life?' 'What are the three most important things for you to have a reasonable quality of life?' 'Which, if any of these three, would you say you currently have?' 'What, if anything, is stopping you having these three important things?'

Strategies and Supports

We asked participants, 'Considering your priority issues, how do you manage/ deal with these problems on a day to day basis?' 'Do you receive any help (material or non-material support) in dealing with these problems?'

Peoples' Proposals

We asked participants 'What service or assistance do you need to be fully satisfied in relation to the three priority issues identified?'

Discrimination

We asked participants, 'Do you feel you are denied these important things because of you are a man/ woman, or because of your; religion, social origin, ethnicity, health status, or for any other such reason?' 'Do you think your life would be different if you were a man/woman? If so, how?'

Participation

We asked participants, 'How do you view your ability to participate in decision-making in relation to public services in your community?' (ability to voice opinion; having the necessary information about local government decisions; proposing solutions to leaders about community problems; confidence your solutions will be taken into consideration; participation in decision-making process).

Accountability

We asked participants, 'How satisfied are you with your Government's performance (local Government) in providing support or assistance?' (ranging from 'very dissatisfied' to 'very satisfied') 'When you are not happy with the Government's performance, is there anyone you can tell to make the Government perform better?'

Koraput District, Southern Odisha, India

Umerkot District, Southern Sindh Province, Pakistan

Bombali District, Northern Province, Sierra Leone

Lilongwe and Dedza Districts, Central Region, Malawi

Madriz District, North-Central Region, Nicaragua

Gonaïves District, Artibonite Department, Haiti

This is followed by an overview of insights emerging from across the case studies. Given the diversity of the case studies and the scale of the research, these overarching statements are presented as insights rather than 'findings'. Finally the report offers an analysis of what can be learnt from this research in light of the post-2015 global framework for development.

Guide to the Visual Data

The graphs in each chapter visually represent the data per country under each of the section headings. The visual data refers only to data collected via the questionnaires; information from the focus groups is represented in the accompanying narrative.

The graphs reflect the frequency of a given response rather than number of participants. The complexity of certain topics often generated multiple answers. For example, due to the intersecting nature of discrimination, many participants reported a variety of forms of discrimination when accessing their rights. This means that a 15 people may experience discrimination a total of 30 times. The obstacles or barriers people faced in accessing their rights was of a similar nature.

Data categories were derived in part from the qualitative tools used for data collection with further categories generated during the analysis process. This dual process allowed the data itself to generate themes, relevant to participants' personal experiences in accessing their rights, in their own specific context.



Koraput District, Southern Odisha, India

India is a federal union of 28 states and seven union territories. Ranked 136th of 187 countries in UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI), it has an estimated population of 1.258 billion people, of which only 32 per cent live in urban settings. Trócaire's work in India is located in Odisha, on the east coast of India. Despite its rich natural resources, Odisha remains one of the poorest and most unequal of India's states. The majority of communities in Odisha are tribals and 84 per cent live below the poverty line as determined by the government of India.

Scheduled castes (or Dalits) and tribes are historically disadvantaged groups recognised under the Indian Constitution. Traditionally in India, each Hindu person is born into a caste or a tribe, which determined, inter-alia, what job they can have and whom they can marry. In all Indian states, discrimination on the basis of caste is now illegal and various measures have been introduced to empower disadvantaged groups and give them easier access to opportunities. Despite this, serious challenges still exist for many people from different castes or tribes, particularly in rural areas where 69 per cent of the population live.

The ethnic composition of the population is a distinguishing feature of the State of Odisha. Odisha has one of the largest concentrations of indigenous people in India, with 22 per cent of the population composed of scheduled castes and tribes, compared to the national average of about 8 per cent. The caste system is still highly prevalent in Odisha. There are six million Dalits,

scheduled castes, making up almost 17 per cent of the total population of the state. As with the tribal community, poverty is disproportionately high among these groups.

Female literacy is lowest among tribal and Dalit women. Low levels of female participation in formal employment, poor political representation of women and persistent violence against women are prevailing trends. Dalit women experience intersecting gender and caste-based discrimination and exploitation.

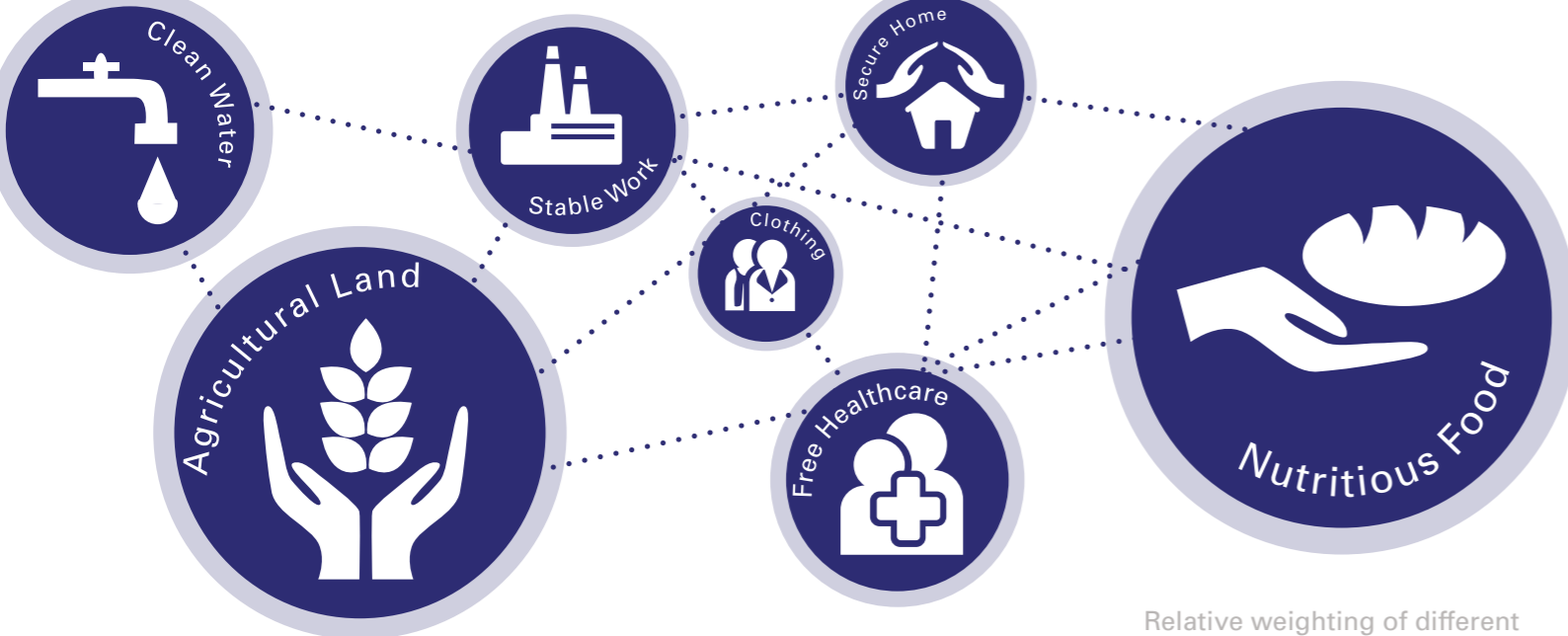
Trócaire has been active in India since the late 1990s and established an office in Odisha in 2008. The organisation currently supports programmes on Sustainable Livelihoods, Gender Equality and Governance and Human Rights. In Odisha, the research was carried out together with Trócaire Partners Pragati Koraput, SOVA, CYSD and WORD in the communities of Jantaput, Katriguda and Majurgula, in Koraput District.

Pragati Koraput works to strengthen vibrant peoples' organisations, building local community capacities on rights and entitlements in order to demand accountability from government duty-bearers. Pragati advocates for pro-poor governance and bringing women, children, tribals and other marginalised peoples, into the mainstream of the society. The organisation provides livelihood projects, including facilitating community forest management, rights of forest dwellers over forest lands and resources and a district-level initiative for scaling up the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) to enhance food and income security of small and marginal farmers. <http://www.pragatikoraput.org>

CYSD (Centre for Youth and Social Development) is an NGO working in Odisha to enable marginalised women, men and children to improve their quality of life. CYSD works to ensure transparent, gender-sensitive, accountable and democratic governance, by advocating for pro-poor and rights-based policies through its large-scale issue-based research. CYSD has also been involving people and organisations in participatory planning, building their capacities to engage in such processes. <http://www.cysd.org>

SOVA (South Orissa Voluntary Action) is an NGO working to empower communities, in particular women and children, the most disadvantaged members of society in Odisha, to better their own lives through healthcare, education, governance, livelihoods and disaster relief. Through participatory process SOVA seeks to motivate tribals to work together to fight poverty, exploitation and discrimination, strengthening Village Development Committees and supporting women's Self Help Groups to access government schemes. SOVA also works to reduce distress migration in Koraput through a consolidated network of fourteen civil-society organisations, in collaboration with the District Administration. <http://www.sovakoraput.org>

WORD (Women's Organisation for Rural Development) is a women-led grassroots development organisation striving for a just and equitable society. WORD works among marginalised tribal communities to address food security through mobilising tribal communities to access their entitlements, supporting the development of sustainable livelihoods, and raising awareness on the laws relating to land, water and forests among civil society groups.



Relative weighting of different priorities expressed

People’s priorities and their experiences of them

“We weren’t included in the list of people qualifying for government assistance and as I have a small baby I can’t get work.”

(India, female)

When asked what their priorities were for a person to live well, the issues emerging from community members in Koraput were access to sufficient nutritious food; secure, quality housing; secure land tenure, agricultural production capacity, and a livelihood or cash income. The vast majority of the research participants said that while they had some level of access to these, that this was generally inadequate. Houses, for example, were of poor quality and vulnerable to the weather. They had sufficient food at times during the year, but inadequate throughout the whole year. Work was available for short periods during the year, ranging from one to three months, but not all year round.

“My family has mud shelter with tin roof.”

(India, female)

“I have enough rice and millet for 6 months.”

(India, male)

“I get food from land two months of the year.”

(India, female)



Eating together in Odisha, India.

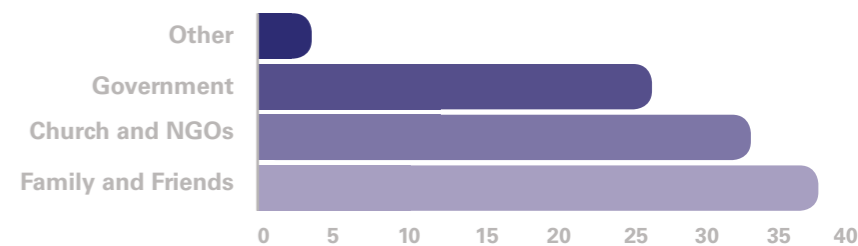
Strategies and Supports

“I survive by collection, consumption, and selling of forest produce (kanadi, kanda, mushrooms and seeds), and maintain my Kucha house by purchasing house building materials like bamboo, rope etc.”

(India, female)

When asked what strategies they pursued to secure their priorities, participants reported relying mostly on the family and friends to assist them, followed by the Church and NGOs. Community-based support, via Village Development Committees, Self-Help Groups and community-based grain banks were also noted as providing emergency relief during food shortages. The local Panchayat, the self-government at a local village or town level, was cited as important. However the Government was reported as the least likely to provide assistance.

Figure 1: Accessing Support, Koraput, India



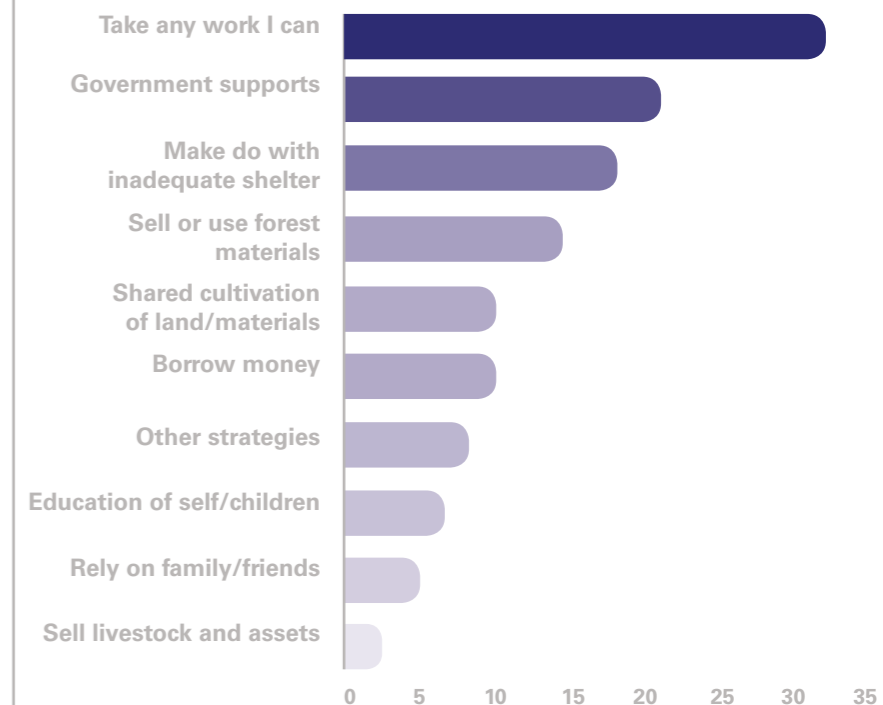
“The panchayat is not performing properly, so we don’t get labour.”

(India, female)

The existence of government supports was noted by the majority of participants, such as subsidised rice and free housing, however participants viewed services as inadequate and undermined by corruption. While more than half received some governmental assistance, one third received none at all and most said they did not know how to access them. The majority of participants said they were ‘very dissatisfied’ with government support and services in relation to at least one of their priority needs.

Self-reliance and innovation were the primary means of coping. Informal loans, of both cash and food, and daily waged-labour were noted as strategies, and responses indicated high levels of dependence on wild or natural resources including for food and firewood.

Figure 2: Coping Strategies, Koraput, India



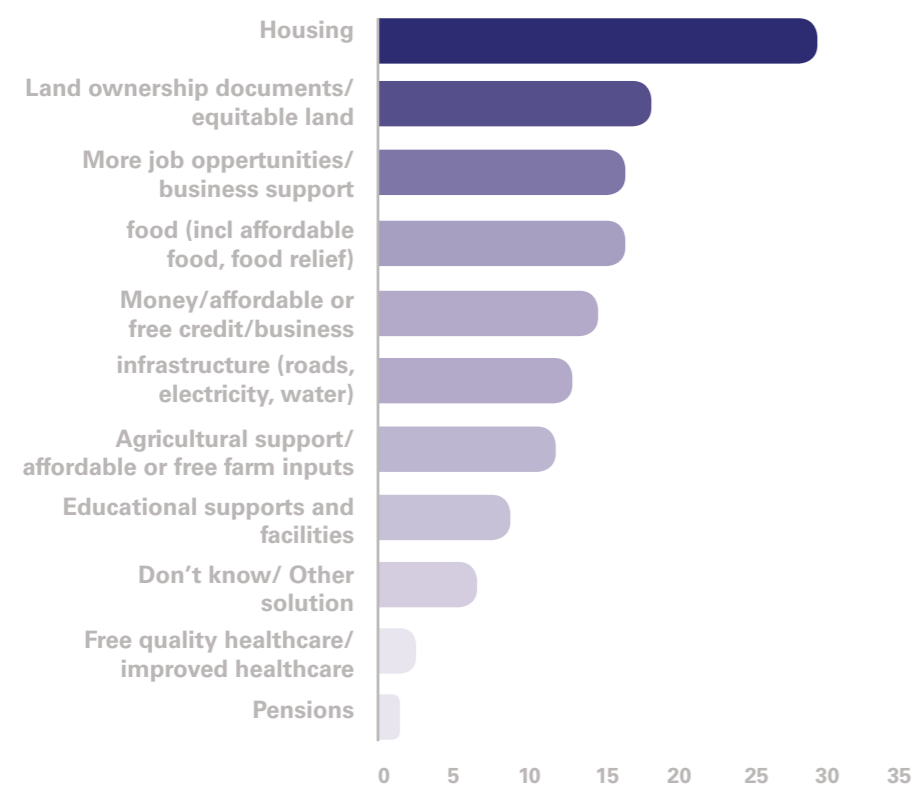
People's Proposals

Proposals from participants in the communities in Koraput regarding how they could be supported to improve their lives included improving basic services and investing in an enabling environment for secure livelihoods. Free healthcare, ration cards for food and energy, pensions for old age and greater access to quality education for both children and adults were mentioned by a number of participants as among the services that could come from the government.

In relation to livelihoods, provision of land, secure

land tenure and fulfilment of the promises made in the government's rural job scheme came out strongly in people's proposals, with some young women emphasising the need for access to land for women. Increasing access to microcredit was suggested, and a number of participants suggested a guarantee of a few months paid work per year would enable them to reinvest in family businesses and develop their capacity for agricultural production. Government support for accessing water, irrigation and new crop technologies were also put forward as proposals.

Figure 3: Proposals, Koraput, India



Discrimination

“As a female ... I can't go to the panchayat alone.”

(India, female)

“As I was young when I married I had no money or food of my own, and my in laws tortured me.”

(India, female)

“I could have gone to school to study and then would have a real job. But being born in a poor, remote, tribal family, I was deprived this.”

(India, male)

“Being a tribal, I haven't had education and so don't have information about government schemes.”

(India, male)

Figure 4: Discrimination, Koraput, India

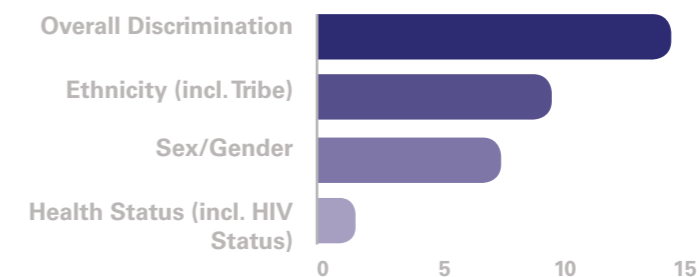
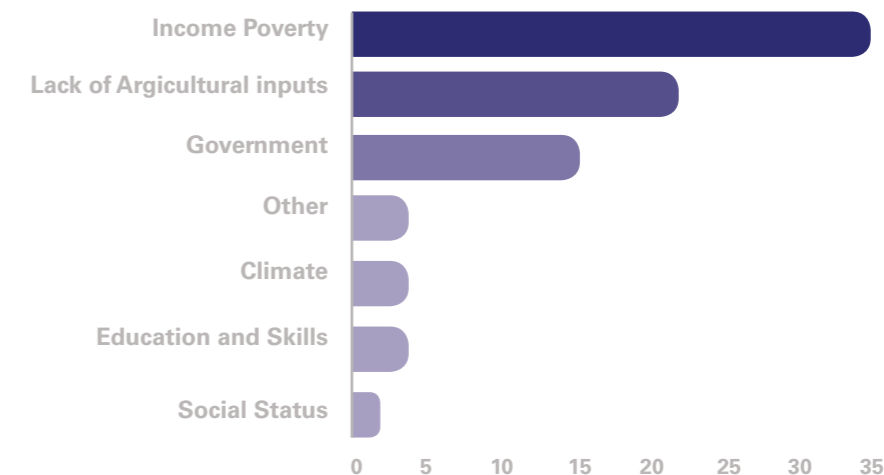


Figure 5: Obstacles to a reasonable quality of life, Koraput, India



Overall, only 14/40 participants identified discrimination as affecting their ability to secure their priorities for living well and to access and pursue opportunities and supports. This perhaps reflects the deeply rooted nature of existing inequalities and the isolation of these communities from wider society. Among those who felt they experienced discrimination, their tribal status was perceived as the main reason.

This was followed by discrimination based on gender. The impacts of discrimination against women included lack of decision-making power at household and local levels and exclusion from local government. Participants also highlighted women's unequal access to land and livelihood opportunities, often resulting in greater food and income insecurity as compared to men. Lack of freedom of movement and domestic violence

experienced by women was noted by a number of mainly female participants.

In the focus group, the impacts of identity-based discrimination were much stronger; discrimination was noted as a greater challenge in accessing education, lack of access to information and ability to access government schemes, as well as increased vulnerability to corruption.

Overlapping, mutually reinforcing forms for discrimination can make determining the basis difficult, as was evident in the different views expressed by a number of participants as to the reasons behind the discriminatory treatment they experience. The idea that they held responsibility for their situation was expressed by at least one participant.

Participation

“We ask the Sarpanch about it. Every time he asks 20/30 Rupees and says that he has sent the form to the BDO. But nothing happens.”

(India, mixed focus group)

Table 1: Participation in decision-making processes, Koraput

	Agree	Disagree	No response
If you think there is a problem in your community you can voice your opinion	30	7	3
You have all the necessary information about the decisions taken by local government	4	15	21
You can propose solutions to the leaders about community problems	25	8	7
You feel confident your solutions will be taken into consideration by the leaders	15	9	16
You feel the leaders allow you to participate in decision-making process, such as through meetings or discussions.	20	10	10
You are only told what leaders have already decided and you have no input to the decision-making	17	15	8
You are not told about decisions made in your community	14	23	3
You are not asked your opinion about decisions made in your community	12	25	3

Participants were asked whether they felt they could express their views and ideas in their community, if they were able to access decision makers and decision-making spaces, and if they felt their views were taken into account. Questionnaire responses indicated that while participation opportunities exist, quality is limited. While a majority of participants agreed that they could voice their opinions about problems in the community (30) and propose solutions (25), only four people, all of them men, agreed they had all the information necessary to make decisions. Similarly, while half of participants believed they could participate in meetings, only 15/40 agreed that their opinions in such meetings would be taken into account. However, low numbers agreed with statements that they were excluded from participating; indicating that, regardless of issues around quality, there is a general perception of participation.

“We can talk to the duty bearers or give them in writing about a particular demand/complaint. But, we have no idea what to do if the duty bearers do not respond to our complaints.”

(India, mixed focus group)

In focus groups, people referred to attending or sending issues to their local village committee and even to the local government. Participants were unable to cite positive examples of how participation had improved their situation in the past, citing typical examples of attending meetings to agree a housing priority list, and a week later it has been changed. As a result they had little confidence that their participation leads to better outcomes.

Women reported that women were invited only to discuss issues perceived as ‘women’s issues’, while meetings are often held in the evening, when women work. Other barriers listed by participants included travel costs, as affecting their ability to participate in official meetings and access government representatives. There was a sense that remote villages were of less interest.

Accountability

“We have discussed it, but we haven’t done anything about it because we fear that we will not get anything in future. All our applications for different schemes will be cancelled.”

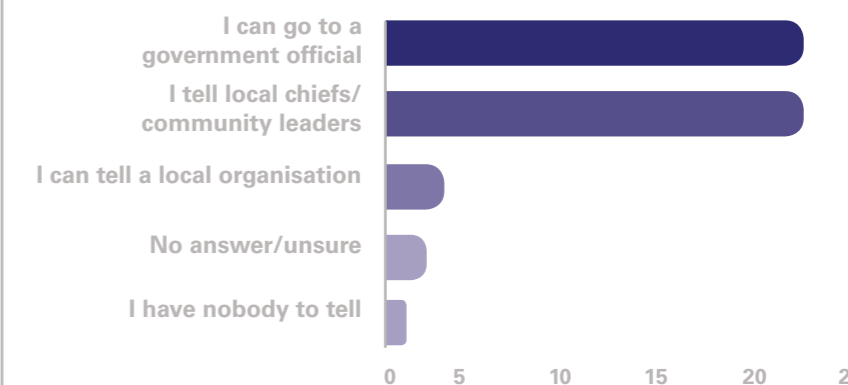
(India, male)

The majority of participants were able to indicate who they could report experiences or grievances to, with most pointing to the village leadership or local government officials. In focus groups people referred to visiting local ministers and officials with specific grievances. However, while it was clear that people had a strong sense of when rules were being broken, the concept of accountability was largely unfamiliar to them. While some saw lack of education as undermining their ability to seek accountability, those who had a greater sense of official responsibilities suggested that pervasive corruption meant that change was impossible, and that seeking it risked access to existing services.



Community members attending a meeting in Odisha.

Figure 5: Demanding Accountability, Koraput, India



Reflections

In Koraput, participants’ responses, views and experiences indicate highly vulnerable livelihoods with inadequate and insecure access to priority basic needs such as food, shelter and an income. While there are indications that supports and services are available, access appears to be a major issue with a variety of direct and indirect barriers encountered by participants. These include corruption and the continued experience of discriminatory social norms relating to caste and tribal peoples. Discrimination also affects women in particular, resulting in additional barriers and vulnerabilities. While there appears to be a general perception of participation, the lack of accountability highlighted appears to influence participants’ views on the value and impact of their participation in governance processes.

Umerkot District, Southern Sindh Province, Pakistan

Pakistan is ranked 146th of 187 countries in UNDP's HDI. It has an estimated population of almost 180 million people, of which 37 per cent live in urban settings. In Pakistan a small number of powerful families have been able to dominate local and regional politics, and extend their dominance to national levels. This political power is rooted in their control over land and the associated social and economic privilege that accompanies it.

Although outlawed through the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act of 1992, the practice of bonded labour is still prevalent in Pakistan. Bonded labour occurs when powerful feudal lords subcontract land to tenants. The tenants are forced to take loans from their landlord in order to meet their basic daily needs. Recent figures from the International Labour Organisation estimate that over 1.7 million people remain in bondage in Pakistan. Many observers consider these figures to vastly underestimate the real number which do not include the many women and children also working as bonded labourers to supplement the wages of the male head of family.

Inequality is entrenched in Pakistan. Gender-based inequality is the most pervasive form at every level resulting in disproportionate income poverty, lack of independence and decision-making power. In the Sindh province, feudal based power structures, chronic poverty and vulnerability to flooding result in particular inequality dynamics.

Trócaire has worked in Pakistan since 1973, establishing an office there in 2007, and currently supports programmes on Sustainable Livelihoods, Environmental Justice, Gender Equality, Disaster Risk Reduction and Governance and Human Rights.

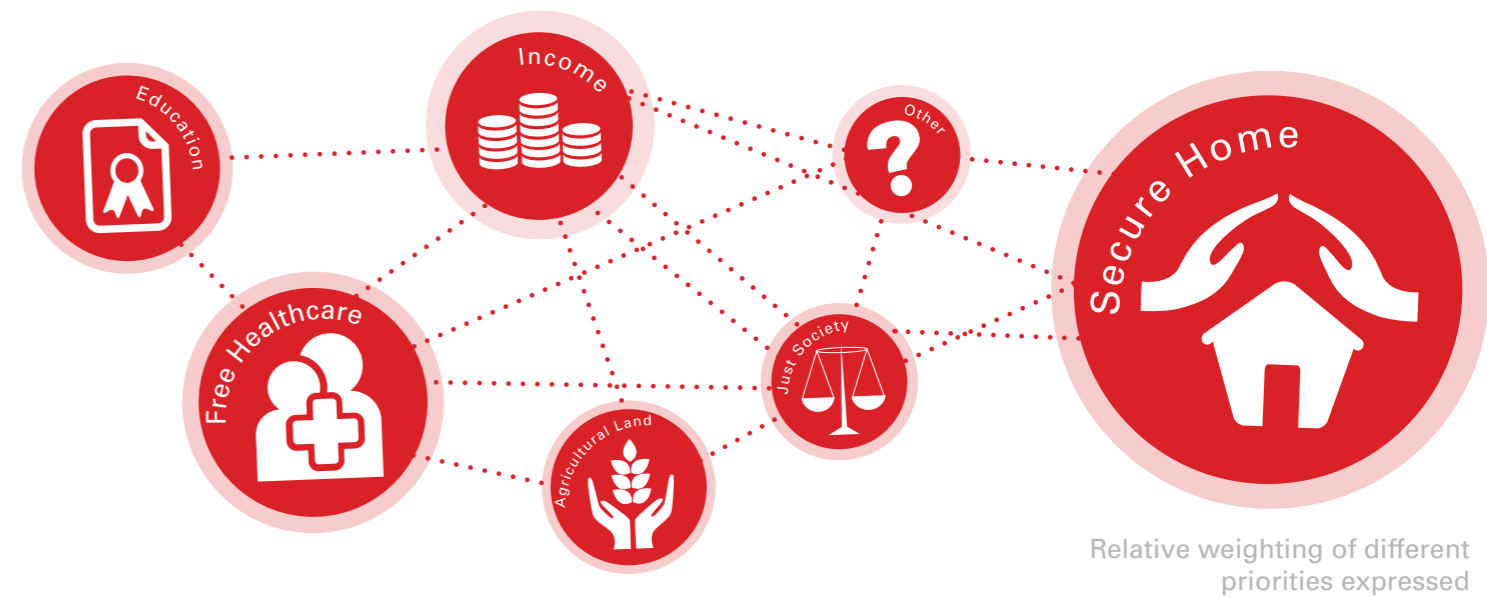
The research was carried out with Trócaire Partners, the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER) and the Green Rural Development Organisation (GRDO) in the communities of Paaru Malh Bheel, Choudhry Javed, Abdul Hakim Nohrio, and Haji Allah Rakhio in the Umerkot district, a subtropical region of the Sindh province. The communities that took part in the research were lower caste Hindus and bonded labourers. While agriculture and cattle rearing are the main sources of livelihood, traditional livelihood sources are rapidly depleting due to acute water shortages, with women in religious minority groups feeling the worst effects.

Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER) is a non-governmental organisation based in Karachi, dedicated to research, advocacy, and awareness raising in the areas of labour rights and labour legislation, social justice, and regional stability and solidarity. Their work to build up the capacity and organisation of trade unions has formed a core part of Trócaire's work on bonded labour in Pakistan. They are the foremost organisation in Pakistan in advocating for the rights of workers at local and national levels. <http://www.piler.org.pk/>

Green Rural Development Organisation (GRDO) is a human rights organisation based in Hyderabad, Southern Sindh province. The population of Southern Sindh is one of the groups most vulnerable to bonded labour in Pakistan, and GRDO's work has focused in particular on the needs of those living in conditions of bonded labour. GRDO carries out two streams of work, supporting individuals and communities to free themselves from bonded labour, and enabling those who have been freed from bonded labour to build a secure livelihood, so that they do not fall back into forced labour.

<http://greenrural.net>

People's priorities and their experiences of them



When asked what a person needs to live a good life the priorities highlighted by participants in Umerkot were having access to secure quality shelter, free quality education, land tenure, and a livelihood and/or cash income. Women broadly shared the same priorities as men, but placed a higher priority on livelihood opportunities.

The vast majority of participants said that they did not currently have access to any of their priority issues. Those who said they had some access, for example to basic shelter or use of land for food and income, emphasised that this was insecure because these were not theirs and belonged to the landlord for whom they worked. All but one participant indicated they were very dissatisfied with government support in relation to their access to their priority needs.

“Morally, we are still one community even though we cannot support one another materially.”

(Pakistan, female)

“Government stops us accessing facilities. Our elected representatives would never want our lives to improve because if our lives are improved who will serve them and be a bonded labourer?”

(Pakistan, male)

Strategies and Supports

When asked how they coped and what strategies they pursued to try to secure their priorities 33 participants said they had no coping mechanisms for at least one of their priority needs and even more, 27 out of 40, said they received no support. Of the small number who identified external sources of support, most were adult men, who said that NGOs, and in emergencies relatives,

provided support. Limited capacity to offer support within the community was indicated by a number of participants.

A significant number of participants (18/40) linked the lack of support they receive to political exclusion and a lack of intent or desire to see change on the part of those in power.



Meeting in Sindh.

Figure 7: Accessing Support, Umerkot, Pakistan

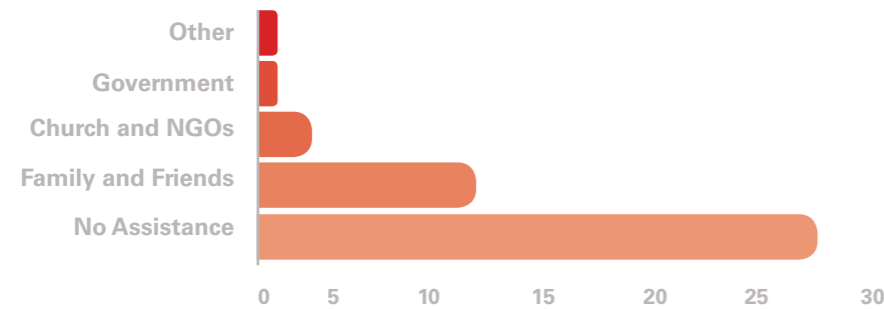
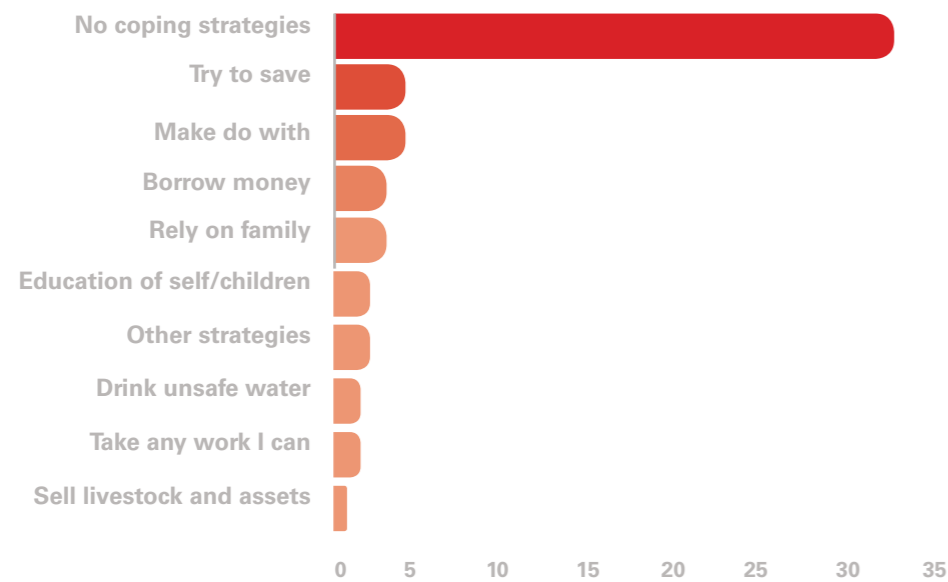


Figure 8: Coping Strategies, Umerkot, Pakistan



People's Proposals

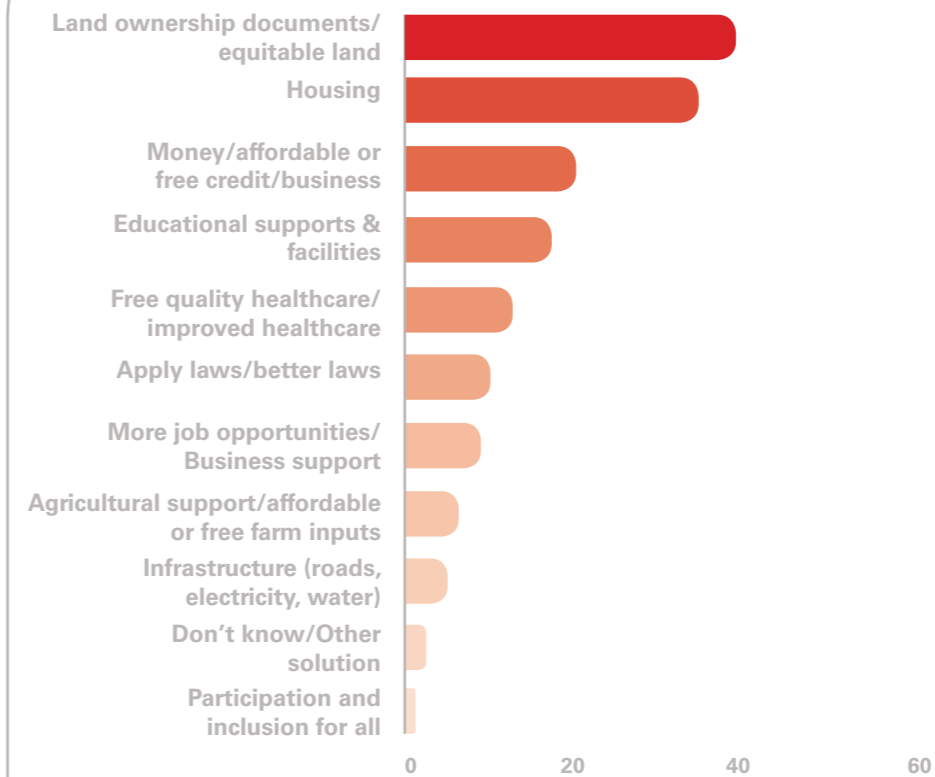
Participants were clear, however, on what they saw as necessary to improve their situation.

The most common proposals put forward were for materials and assistance to improve their homes, and documentation to prevent their eviction from the land. A number of participants proposed that the Government should actively redistribute land between landless farmers. For their children's education, many highlighted the need for a school

building and reliable teachers.

While many of the priorities and proposals from participants in Umerkot were similar to those from the communities in other countries, the emphasis placed on the need for ownership of land and shelter by participants underscores the level of constant insecurity with which these bonded labourers live.

Figure 9: Peoples' Proposals, Umerkot, Pakistan



Discrimination

“Our economic status is lower than others and so no one supports us, no one listens to our problems, even other Hindus.”

(Pakistan, female)

Figure 10: Discrimination, Umerkot, Pakistan

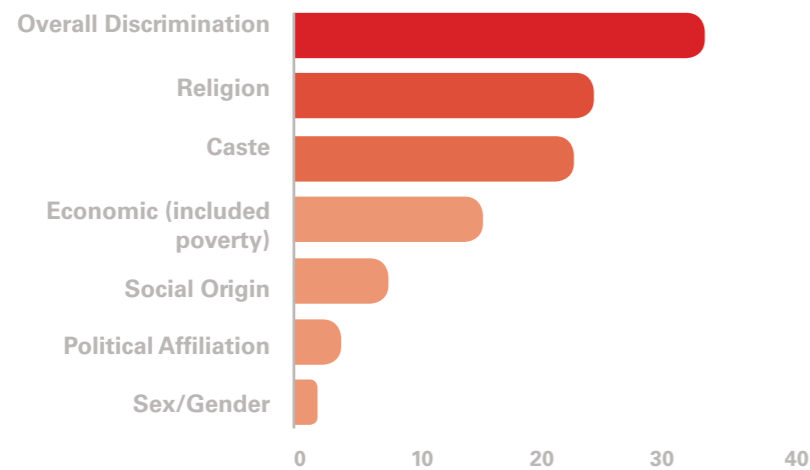
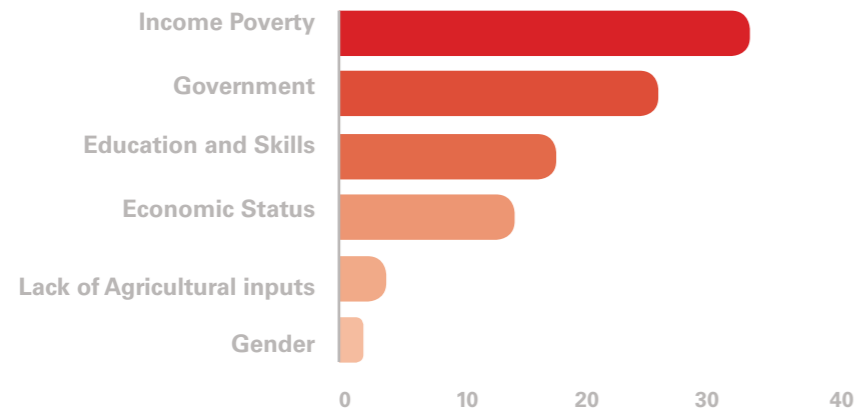


Figure 11: Obstacles to a reasonable quality of life Umerkot, Pakistan



In Umerkot, it was clear that research participants felt that discrimination was the overriding factor preventing them from improving their lives. The vast majority of participants (34/40) perceived themselves as discriminated against. Religion was the most frequently cited reason for discrimination, followed closely by caste. Caste and religion were cited together in almost half of cases indicating the extent to which these

identities are perceived as intertwined.

In focus groups, participants said the discrimination they experience sees them routinely overlooked by the Government in the provision of land, irrigation and other productive assets, and so they are forced to continue working their landlord’s land. They repeatedly referred to how their status as Hindus, lower-caste Hindus, and/or ‘low-status bonded labourers’ meant that

they were mistreated at the hands of government and service providers. Participants said they are routinely ignored by doctors in hospitals and teachers in schools.

Lack of attention and investment in the public health and education sectors was noted as affecting poor people disproportionately as they are the only ones using these services. Discrimination against Hindu children in schools was seen as a deterrent from sending children to school, with a number of parents reporting that they send them to work instead because of this. They said their religion also led to physical persecution and kidnappings with impunity, in particular of women.

Socio-economic status was also cited as a basis for the discrimination they experience by almost half of participants, in particular by women. A small

number of people said the real reason behind the discrimination they experience was poverty rather than caste or religion. They referred to upper caste Hindus who occupy reserved seats for minorities in the Parliament, and do not work as bonded labourers and therefore do not experience the discrimination that they do, indicating that both multiple forms and layers of identity-based discrimination are experienced.

When asked, the majority of participants (30/40) said they believed their life would be different if they were the opposite sex, including 19/20 women and 11/20 men. The biggest differences women saw in a man’s life were their greater level of general freedom, including freedom of movement and opportunities to earn an income. A number of women said that if they were a man, they could do more to improve their families’ fortunes.

“Our poverty and lower social status is responsible. If we were bit self-reliant people, with own resources and sources of income, everyone would have listened to us and resolved our issues whatever they might be.” (Pakistan, female)

Participation

“If I were a man, I would have played a role to reform the entire society.” (Pakistan, female)

“If government wants we can prosper and live a better life, but it seems it won’t do that, because government and its institutions have taken us for granted that we do have political voice and we won’t be able to make dent in their power.” (Pakistan, male)

“Every facility is for rich men or politicians, they spend very lavish life. While poor people are going under debts day by day.” (Pakistan, male).

“Government knows well about our situation, so why should I tell anyone? Simple answer is that it is doing nothing for poor people like us.” (Pakistan, male)

Table 2: Participation in decision-making processes, Umerkot

	Agree	Disagree	No response
If you think there is a problem in your community you can voice your opinion	26	10	4
You have all the necessary information about the decisions taken by local government	5	31	4
You can propose solutions to the leaders about community problems	25	14	11
You feel confident your solutions will be taken into consideration by the leaders	17	13	10
You feel the leaders allow you to participate in decision-making process, such as through meetings or discussions.	17	21	2
You are only told what leaders have already decided and you have no input to the decision-making	7	27	6
You are not told about decisions made in your community	5	31	4
You are not asked your opinion about decisions made in your community	8	32	0

Participants were asked whether they felt they could express their views and ideas in their community, if they were able to access decision makers and decision-making spaces, and if they felt their views were taken into account. More than half of all participants felt they could voice their opinion when there was a problem in the community (26/40), though women and in particular youth were less likely to feel this way. More than half also felt they could propose ideas to the community leaders (25/40). Fewer however, less than half (17), felt that they could influence decisions taken.

Focus group discussions indicated that it is elder males who are taking decisions at the household and community level. One woman said that while they are often spoken to by their husbands in confidence about the decision-making, they have no right or expectation of that. On the other hand a

small number of women highlighted their desire to play a more active role and contribute to change.

Critically, participants indicated that decisions in relation to health, education, land and housing issues at the community level are often made by landlords. The landlord's decision is mostly seen as final and beyond challenge. Participants said that in some cases even government officers cannot influence the decisions of the landlords, indicating their political power. In focus group discussions participants said their lack of ability to shape decisions is compounded by being forced to vote according to their landlords' preferences, due to fear of punishment or increased prices for rent or cost of seeds. While participants felt that increasing their ability to influence decision making would be beneficial, many considered it impossible because of the influence of landlords and their deliberate exclusion by the Government.

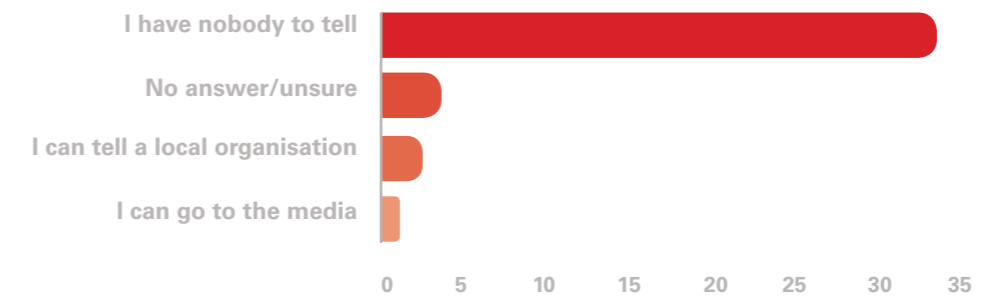
Accountability

“All government, politicians and all departments are corrupt, no expectation from them, no one monitors them, and if someone does this he would be killed.”

(Pakistan, male)

“We can get some rights if police and courts do justice, but as we know that police never help us or any other duty bearer is not willing to listen us we avoid approaching them and live our life with the circumstances.”

(Pakistan, male)

Figure 12: Demanding Accountability, Umerkot, Pakistan

The majority of participants in the communities said that there was no one for them to go to in order to convey their grievances. While participants were aware of those holding responsibilities, such as politicians and landlords, in many cases, landlords are also elected politicians meaning many people are effectively 'bonded in debt' to their duty-bearer.

Many participants appeared to have limited understanding of official accountability. While some were aware of the role of the police and the judiciary, they considered themselves excluded from this avenue for seeking justice.

Despite a strong sense of the injustices they endure, fear of the consequences – including fear

of death – prevent many from approaching the Government. Many also suggested that soliciting the Government was futile as they are well aware of their situation. The Government was viewed as unable and/or unwilling to change the situation, in which many officials and political representatives are complicit.

A small number of participants suggested that NGOs could be approached to put pressure on the Government. Reference was made to an example of NGO support that mobilised people to challenge their landlords, as a result of which there have been less attacks on bonded labourers. Media is also increasingly recognised as a way to 'shame' and threaten landlords who mistreat labourers.

Reflections

Participant responses, views and experiences in Umerkot throw light on the impacts and implications of the continuation of the bonded labour system in practice, the continued vulnerability of individuals facing multiple inequalities, and the impact on their access to a wide variety of their rights. Participants' access to their priorities was inadequate, with security of tenure seen as a major priority. External support was extremely limited and government support non-existent. Caste and socio-economic discrimination compound the situation, undermining access and quality of public services. A number of participants expressed clear views on the injustice of their situation, while others indicated a sense of resignation. There was a clear sense from the majority of participants that change is seen as impossible, or highly unlikely at best. The impacts of the economic and political power imbalances entrenched through bonded labour are seen as structural barriers to participants' ability to participate in key decisions that affect them, to seek accountability for the actions of those in authority, and thus to achieve change in their situation.

Bombali District, Northern Province, Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is ranked 177th of 187 countries in UNDP's HDI. It is a small country similar in size to Ireland and has an estimated population of 6 million people, of which around 60 per cent live in rural areas. The majority of the population in Sierra Leone live in extreme poverty. Life expectancy is very low at 48 years and most adults have only spent approximately three years in education. Sierra Leone experienced a brutal eleven-year civil war that ended in 2002 which has affected levels of human and economic development, which are behind regional averages. The rebuilding of a social contract, in particular with the country's youth, remains a challenge as 70,000 former combatants struggle to find a new life post-conflict.

The mainstays of the national economy are agriculture and mining. Sierra Leone is richly endowed with natural resources, including minerals and diamonds, and fertile land is available for agriculture for much of the year. Following significant internal displacement during the war there are challenges in relation to land access and ownership. A high and growing proportion of youth in society are unemployed and socially alienated and there are challenges in encouraging and enabling young people to engage in farming. Traditional authorities control access to land, which often results in inequitable access, in particular for women and young people. Women are subject to discrimination both in law and in practice in Sierra Leone and traditional attitudes towards and treatment of women remain largely unchallenged, resulting in abuse and exploitation at various levels. It is estimated that up to 250,000 women and girls experienced

gender-based violence as part of the conflict. Under the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it was recommended that the government issue an unequivocal apology to women for the violence they suffered during the conflict, and the impunity with which it was met. An apology was issued in 2010, but a number of other recommendations from the Commission related to violence against women have not been implemented.

Trócaire has worked in Sierra Leone for over twenty years and established an office there in 2007. At present, programmes are focused on Governance and Human Rights, Sustainable Livelihoods, and Gender Equality. In Sierra Leone the research was carried out with Trócaire's Partner, The University of Makeni (UNIMAK), in the communities of Mabanta, Masuba, Makarie and Central Makeni in district Bombali, Northern Province, Sierra Leone.

The University of Makeni (UNIMAK) is a part of the University of Sierra Leone and is independent and non-partisan. It was founded in Makeni, Bombali District, Northern Province of Sierra Leone. The university's Governance Programme's research department that supported this study was established in 2012 following a successful community based governance programme that lasted seven years. The Governance Programme offers a new dimension to UNIMAK's work and aims to facilitate the process of government decentralisation from a human rights based approach. <http://universityofmakeni.com>



People's priorities and their experiences of them

“Our parents want us to attend school in big towns when we enter secondary level but we have to stay away from them, they can only manage to pay the fees sometimes and we have to meet other school expenses such as lunch, buying pamphlets, paying lesson fees; where can we get the money?”

(Sierra Leone, mixed focus group)

When asked what a person needs to feel well and have a good life, the priorities emerging from the communities in Bombali were having a livelihood and/or cash income, having an adequate house and having access to quality education. Women were marginally more concerned with health and housing and men focused more upon education and food security. The views of younger participants were similar to the adults, but they placed a higher priority on access to education.

Financial security was a major priority as it was viewed as the main enabler to accessing other priorities; almost all participants touched on the importance of financial security, whether via crop production, having a business, and/or a waged income.

Almost half of participants the majority of whom were women felt they did not currently have sufficient access to any of their priorities.

“Lack of adequate income prevents me getting sufficient food for my family.”

(Sierra Leone, male)

“Sometimes lack of money can stop me from attending school and gaining access to health services.”

(Sierra Leone, female)



Selling food in the Northern Province.

Strategies and Supports

When asked what strategies they pursued to secure their priorities, what support they receive and how they coped during times of difficulty more than half of participants (21/40) said they received support from family members such as cash, food and accommodation. More than half (22/40) were willing to take any kind of work including farmwork, housework, labouring and trading to meet their food and health needs, and to generate an income to pay for education and

other services. Selling accumulated assets was the next most popular strategy, contributing to the vulnerability felt in times of need.

A small number were receiving support from the Church or NGOs (6/40), or from the Government (10) for at least one of their priority needs. The few participants who were receiving support were almost exclusively men. Participants were very dissatisfied with government performance in relation to at least one of their priorities.

Figure 13: Accessing Support, Bombali, Sierra Leone

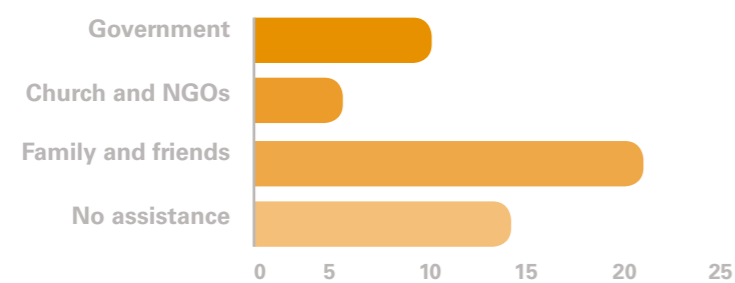
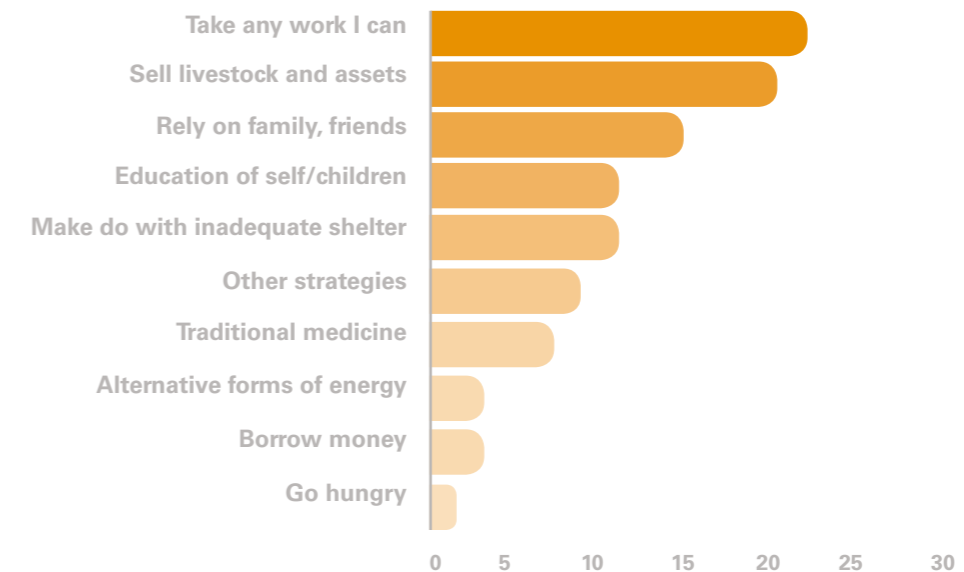


Figure 14: Coping Strategies, Bombali, Sierra Leone



People’s Proposals

“We would like to meet with our councillor, ward committee members and the education committee to have them know our concerns and make improvement in terms of education for young people in the country.”

(Youth focus group)

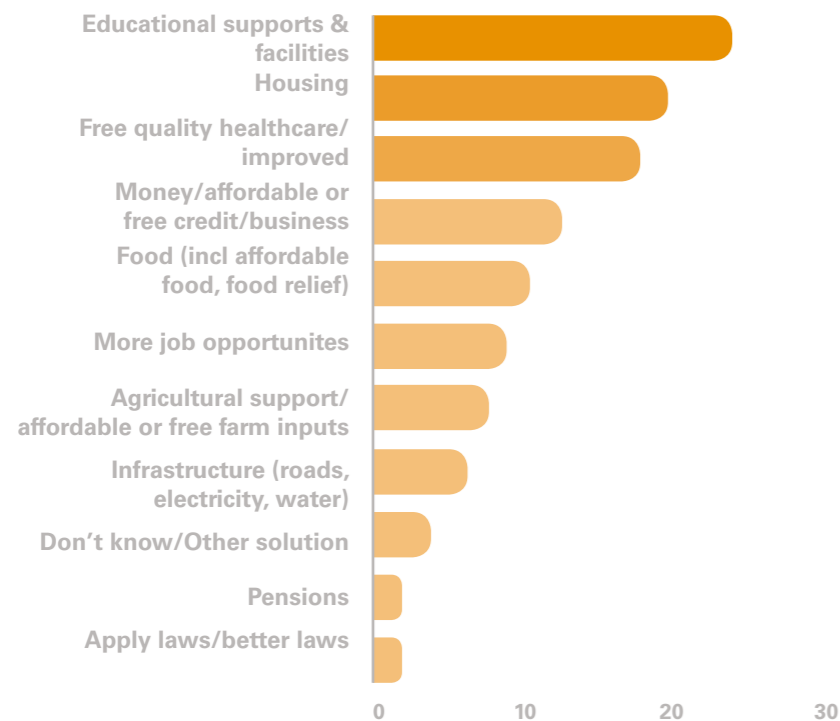
Participants had clear ideas on what was needed to improve their access to what they need to live well. Improving income and employment opportunities was a clear priority. People proposed investment in local employment opportunities, affordable micro-credit facilities and improved management of land distribution.

All participants (40) identified the need for public

services which are currently absent or ineffective. In particular educational supports and facilities were seen as a means to improve peoples’ situations in both the short and long-term.

There was also a strong conviction among both women and young people that increased participation in decision-making could result in an improvement in their lives and in the community.

Figure 15: People’s Proposals, Bombali, Sierra Leone



Discrimination

“I cannot access farm land in this community. Men own all of the lands.”
(Sierra Leone, female)

“I am denied assistance as they see me as lazy and poor.”
(Sierra Leone, female)

“Culturally being a woman you are always set behind.”
(Sierra Leone, female focus group)

“If you are a woman and you don’t have money you are nothing in the eyes of leaders in our community.”
(Sierra Leone, female focus group)

Figure 16: Obstacles to a reasonable quality of life, Bombali, Sierra Leone

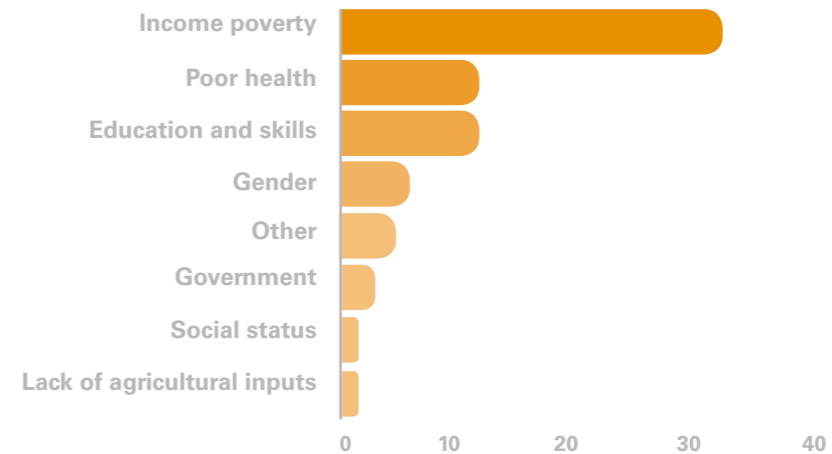
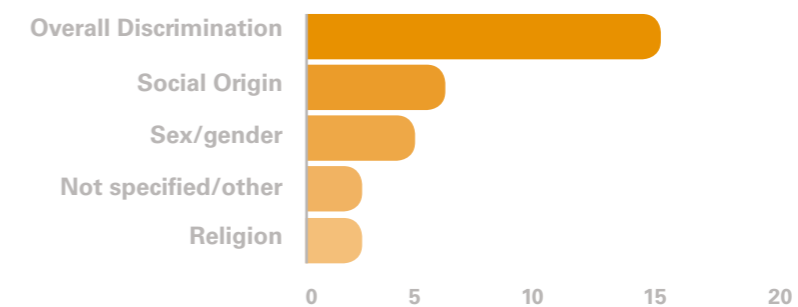


Figure 17: Discrimination, Bombali, Sierra Leone



Out of the participants who felt they experienced discrimination in accessing their rights, social origin was identified as the primary basis. A majority also highlighted income poverty as the primary barrier in accessing their priorities.

Gender was the other basis for discrimination identified. In focus group discussions many examples of gender-based discrimination emerged, with many women preferring to discuss their experiences in the second person.

Women’s focus groups noted that women have less access to resources. They referred to their lack of land and property rights, specifically in cases of inheritance and linked this to food insecurity, lack of income, and consequently, the inability to access other priorities such as health, education and adequate housing.

At the same time, some women from a peri-urban area noted that being a woman was advantageous in terms of accessing certain economic opportunities. Petty trading is traditionally a female occupation and was noted as among the few income generating options for many in peri-urban areas.

In focus groups discussions, most men recognised the disproportionate exclusion and discrimination faced by women in relation to economic and decision-making power. One woman noted that women only benefit from initiatives specifically targeted at women, and that even then beneficiaries are selected among the female relatives of community leaders and economic and/or political elites. According to both men and women participants, the significance of political power is limited for women as even female leaders must be subservient to their male counterparts.

Participants’ responses suggested that experiences of corruption and discrimination overlap and interact. The limited capacity of households with very low income levels to pay bribes results in an additional barrier and indirect form of discrimination, affecting women in particular. Younger participants spoke of the tendency of girls to drop-out of school, due to forced marriage by family, as well as unplanned pregnancy due after girls are forced into prostitution in order to pay both formal and ‘informal’ school fees.

Participation

“If they want us to vote them in, they have to listen to us and act upon our concerns. With this we hope things will change for the better. And especially if we are involved we think we can talk of our needs of education and plans will be made to consider our development needs in the community.”

(Sierra Leone, youth focus group)

“Men are better involved in community decision making than the women, for women are only involved in the field work, household chores, as men take the lead in household decision making and even in the community.”

(Sierra Leone, male focus group)

“If you are a poor man you are not being listen to whatever you would say.”

(Sierra Leone, male focus group)

Table 3: Participation in decision-making processes, Bombali

	Agree	Disagree	No response
If you think there is a problem in your community you can voice your opinion	18	20	2
You have all the necessary information about the decisions taken by local government	14	24	2
You can propose solutions to the leaders about community problems	13	20	7
You feel confident your solutions will be taken into consideration by the leaders	11	22	17
You feel the leaders allow you to participate in decision-making process, such as through meetings or discussions.	19	16	5
You are only told what leaders have already decided and you have no input to the decision-making	21	14	5
You are not told about decisions made in your community	19	17	4
You are not asked your opinion about decisions made in your community	23	14	3

When asked if they felt they could express their views and ideas in their community, around half of participants said that they could not voice their opinion in relation to problems in their community. A similar proportion felt they could not propose their ideas for solutions to leaders.

With regard to accessing community meetings,

around half, mostly men, felt they would be permitted by leaders to participate. However, most felt that they would be unable to actively input in decision-making processes and were mainly informed of decisions once made. The majority said they did not have access to decision-makers, even at local level, and the few experiences of participation reported were limited to meetings

organising labour or material inputs from community members. Across all gender and age groups participants referred to local political and economic elites as having exclusive influence over decision-making.

In focus groups discussions it was noted that women's participation is largely limited to labour or financial contributions. One woman noted that there was no one to represent women and their concerns in their community. According to both men and women, the influence of some women

who are able to access decision-making is limited, as even female leaders are subservient to their male counter-parts.

Young participants felt completely excluded from decision-making. As noted above however, a number of young people, as well as women, expressed conviction that increased participation in decision-making could result in an improvement in their lives and the community. Some youth hoped that reaching voting age would mean their views would have more influence over leaders.

Accountability

“We reported those people to the elders in the village but we were told not to pursue the matter any further. As you try to push further you will be risking facing harm and hatred from those who are involved in corruption and the leaders who are behind them.”

(Sierra Leone, male focus group)

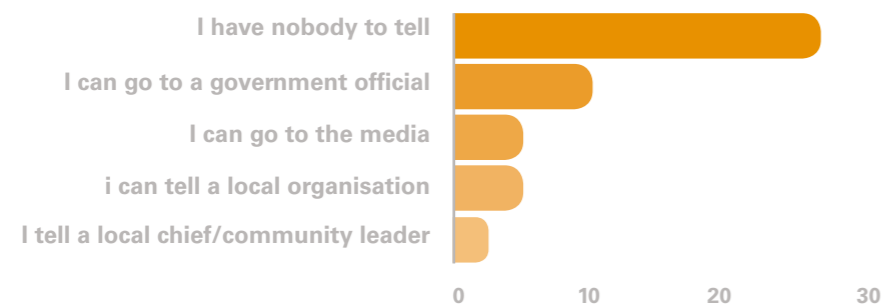
“We are shy to ask duty bearers, and being that we are illiterate we do not know who to meet and ask to account for anything that we find going wrong in our community.”

(Sierra Leone, female focus group)

“All these things happened to women in our community but we have nowhere to take our case because of the culture of silence.”

(Sierra Leone, female focus group)

Figure 18: Demanding accountability, Bombali, Sierra Leone



More than half of participants (26/40) felt they did not have anyone to report their experiences and grievances to. Those who felt they did have people they could approach were mainly adult men (11/14), nine of whom said they would approach a local government representative, either directly or indirectly through community groups. Hesitation among women and youth to seek accountability emerged in focus groups. Other channels identified by participants included the local radio and newspapers as channels for highlighting problems.

A small number of cases where participants had sought accountability were identified during discussions, including the case of a local elite

who took private ownership of government-sponsored agricultural machinery meant for the community, and in relation to cases of bribery in schools. However, in all cases they said that their efforts resulted in no positive change in relation to the situation. Participants noted that some accountability mechanisms exist, but are ineffective.

In focus groups some participants suggested that the power of elites was absolute. Fear of punishment for speaking out, and a sense of powerlessness particularly among illiterate people, were also cited a number of times as reasons for not demanding accountability.

“Young people in this community have no place or someone to tell when our duty bearers failed to deliver what we want, we always keep silent.”

(Sierra Leone, youth focus group)

Reflections

In Bombali, responses, views and experiences shared indicated the precarious livelihoods situation of participants, and limited external support. Responses highlighted the impacts of pervasive corruption on people’s access to their priorities. They also indicated the challenges experienced by the poorest people, and women in particular, in accessing resources, supports and services. Entrenched views on the role of women affect their vulnerability and the opportunities open to them at all levels. Participation appears particularly limited, with power imbalances and corruption undermining people’s ability to access or influence decision-making, or to seek accountability.

Lilongwe and Dedza Districts, Central Region, Malawi

Malawi is ranked 170th of 187 countries in UNDP's HDI. It has an estimated population of 15 million people, of which more than 80 per cent live in rural areas. While Malawi has had one of the fastest growing economies in Africa in recent years, this has come under threat as high fuel and food prices in the global market exacerbate internal economic issues. Human development indicators remain low. Life expectancy is 54.8 years and although children now are expected to attend school for over ten years, most adults have completed only four years in education.

Agriculture is the main livelihood of approximately 80 per cent of the population. Agriculture is largely rain-fed and particularly vulnerable to climate variability and change. Unreliable weather patterns and droughts and floods have increased in frequency and intensity over recent decades, negatively impacting on food security and livelihoods.

Malawi has one of the highest national HIV rates in the world. The current prevalence rate is 11 per cent but varies across regions and by age and gender. The HIV prevalence rate for women between the ages of 15-19 is nine times higher than that for men, while women in the 20-24 age group have a prevalence rate 3.4 times higher than men of a similar age.

Women constitute 52 per cent of the population, but remain marginalised in many social and economic spheres. Efforts to reduce poverty among women in Malawi are challenged by entrenched cultural norms and traditions, particularly in rural areas. Women are largely excluded from economic decision-making and experience unequal access

to education, health care and reproductive healthcare.

Trócaire has been working in Malawi since the late 1990s and opened an in-country office in 2007. Programmes are focused on Sustainable Livelihoods, Gender Equality, HIV and AIDS and Governance and Human Rights. In Malawi the research was conducted by Trócaire's Partner, Centre for Social Concern, in Kasiya Village in Lilongwe Rural and Mayani Village in Dedza Rural. The communities were approached as they participate in the rural 'Basic Needs Basket' data collection exercises, conducted on a regular basis by the Centre for Social Concern.

The Centre for Social Concern seeks to promote justice and peace and interfaith dialogue in Malawi. The Centre conducts action-oriented research to inform and advocate for a pro-poor focus in national policies, mainstreaming gender, HIV and Aids and a concern for the environment in its work.

<http://www.cfscmalawi.org>



People's priorities and their experiences of them

“I have a house, but it is small and not protected from rain and water.”
(Malawi, male)

Among participants in Lilongwe and Dedza Districts priorities for living well, having sufficient food came out particularly strongly, indicating the pervasiveness of food insecurity in the communities. A number of people (5) made explicit reference to the negative effects of climate change on their food security. Other priorities included access to clean water, adequate housing, and in relation to livelihoods a facilitative environment for improved agricultural production, access to land and other agricultural inputs. While the majority of participants (35/40) felt that they currently had some access to at least one of their priorities, all participants felt they had an inadequate level of access to them. Men were more likely to feel they had access to their priority needs.

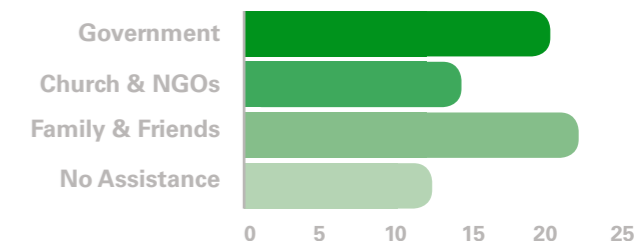
“Water is a big problem. I do not have enough to feed my family. Farm inputs are out of reach - too expensive.” (Malawi, male)

“Erratic rains mean it is difficult to produce food.”
(Malawi, female)



Petty trading in the Central Region.

Figure 19: Accessing support, Lilongwe & Dedza, Malawi



“The fertiliser income subsidy scheme is helpful, my family receives it but not in sufficient an amount. Instead of 1 recipient, a bag of fertiliser is shared by 4 families, not the way it should be. It is not fairly distributed, some get more than others.”
(Malawi, male)

Strategies and Supports

Over half of participants (28/40) said they had received some form of support in the past, the majority of whom were men or younger people. Among them, around half had received support from the Government, and others from NGOs. In both cases the support was considered inadequate. Almost all participants (38) said they were 'very dissatisfied' with the Government's performance in supporting them in relation to at least one of their priority issues. Across all focus groups participants also expressed dissatisfaction with local government and public service providers. Traditional authorities were believed to work hard at times but were often considered unable to influence government.

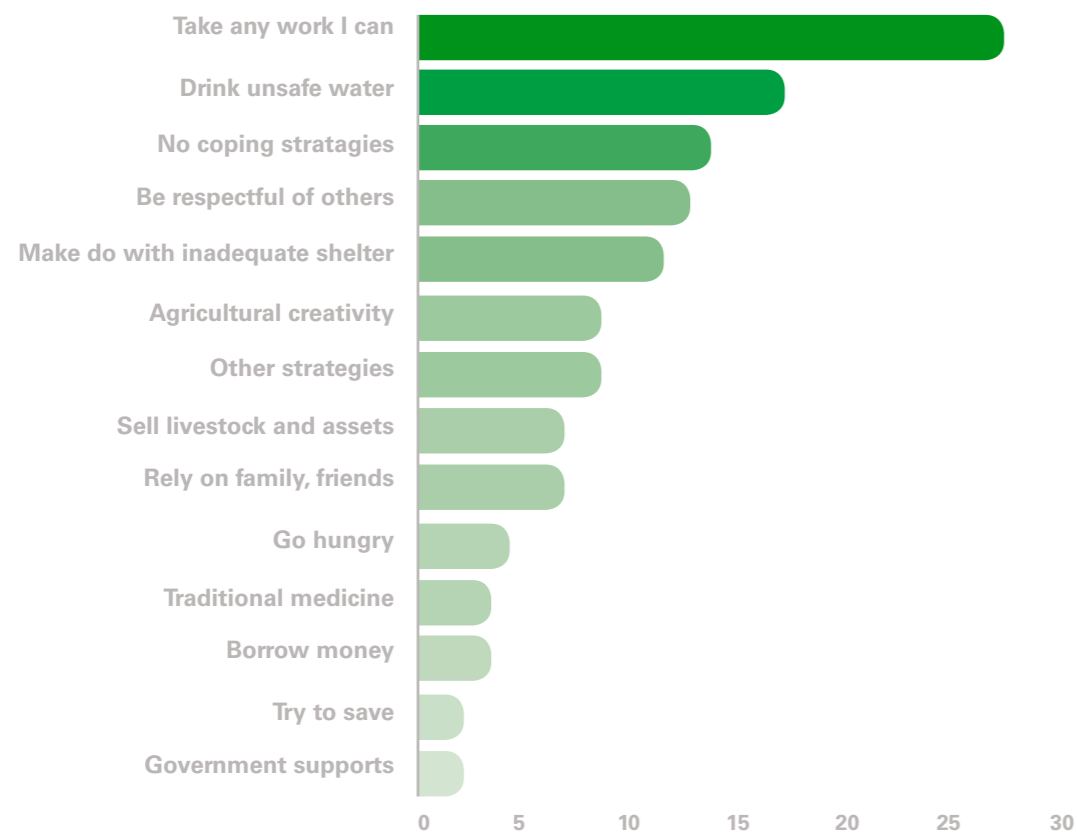
In focus group discussions reference was made to the politicisation of supports, and corruption was identified as a major issue. Many participants pointed to corrupt practices in relation to the distribution of fertilizer coupons, bribes for medical care and accessing job opportunities, and land grabs. A male participant suggested

that because their local member of parliament was from the Government opposition, they were unlikely to be able to bring benefits to their area.

When asked what strategies they pursued to secure their priorities, what supports they receive and how they coped during times of difficulty most participants indicated being heavily dependent upon casual labour for income-generation to pay for food, health and education needs. A significant number of people (14) stated they had no coping strategies, leaving them particularly vulnerable.

Women were more likely to receive support from family and friends in Lilongwe and Dedza. In focus groups it was acknowledged that women were disproportionately affected by food shortages, with coping strategies including skipping meals to allow men to eat, and incidences of forced early marriage. One man noted the additional challenges facing women, noting that if he was a woman he would probably have to resort to sex work to get food.

Figure 20: Coping Strategies, Lilongwe & Dedza, Malawi



People's proposals

In Lilongwe and Dedza Districts, participants' proposals for how they could be supported included increased support for agricultural production, investment in infrastructure and in income opportunities, including affordable micro-credit facilities. One participant also noted the need for roads to be maintained so that transport is possible.

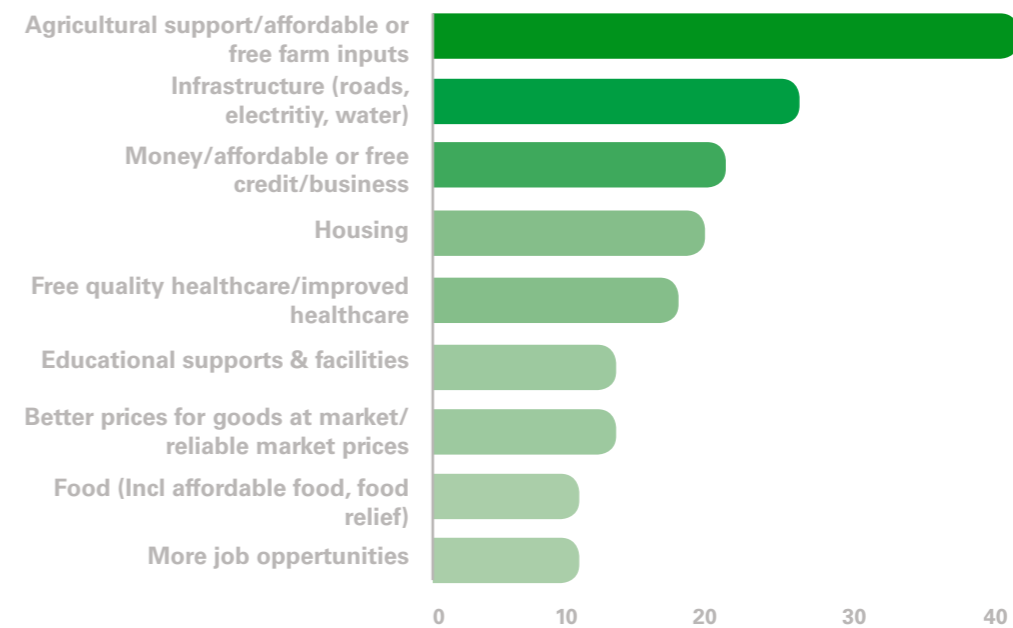
All participants identified the need for public services which are currently absent or ineffective

A small number of participants suggested development partners accompany the Government to improve service delivery, and at least one participant made explicit reference to the need to tackle corruption.



Building a reservoir in the Central Region.

Figure 21: People's Proposals, Lilongwe & Dedza, Malawi



Discrimination

In the questionnaire responses, almost half of participants (15/40) said they felt discriminated against. Those who did were almost exclusively women (12/15) and socio-economic status, or poverty, was seen the main basis for discrimination. Examples given were mainly of indirect discrimination in that poorer households could not afford school fees, medical care, or the surety needed for micro-credit. Illiteracy and lack of education were also cited as a basis for exclusion from decision-making at community level. References to unequal access to supports such as the fertiliser subsidy scheme, indicated

that direct discrimination, including in the context of corruption, are also experienced.

In some responses, particularly among a number of young people, perceptions of discrimination on the basis of being poor was described in terms of an inability to move out of poverty.

The other basis for discrimination identified was gender. Many examples of the differences in the opportunities open to women were given in focus groups. In women's focus groups participants said that girls were expected to stay at home to help with household chores and 'food searching

endeavours', whilst boys went to school, while in times of food shortage women were more likely to go hungry. Limited access to income generation opportunities was highlighted due to cultural norms around appropriate forms of work for women. One woman noted that women were not able to access loans, and that it was more difficult for them to access the fertiliser subsidy programme. Another woman noted that women were generally looked down on, and a number noted the particular treatment of women and the difficulty they experience in shaping their own lives and influencing life within the community. Other groups were identified as experiencing discrimination in accessing services and supports, including old people, people suffering from physical or mentally illness, orphans, and people living with disabilities.

“It’s because I was born from a poor family and it is difficult to come out of poverty.” (Malawi, male)

“My family, community and the country are poor. We have a bad foundation. It’s difficult to prosper or live a good life when you are born in poverty.” (Malawi, male)



Community meeting in the Central Region.

“They don’t allow us to participate. This is why we are afraid to ask our husbands on the decisions made.” (Malawi, female focus group)

“There are no rules but masculinity is very exploitative- they mistreat us women. There is a lot of abuse spearheaded by men.” (Malawi, female focus group)

Figure 22: Discrimination, Lilongwe & Dedza, Malawi

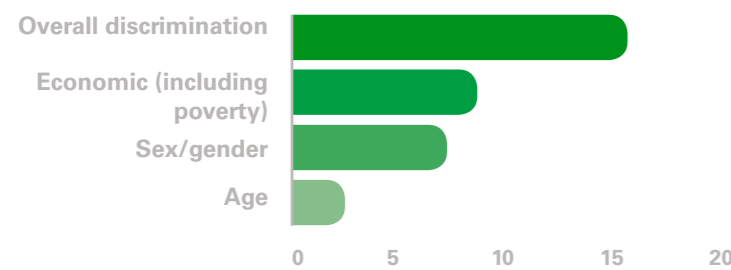
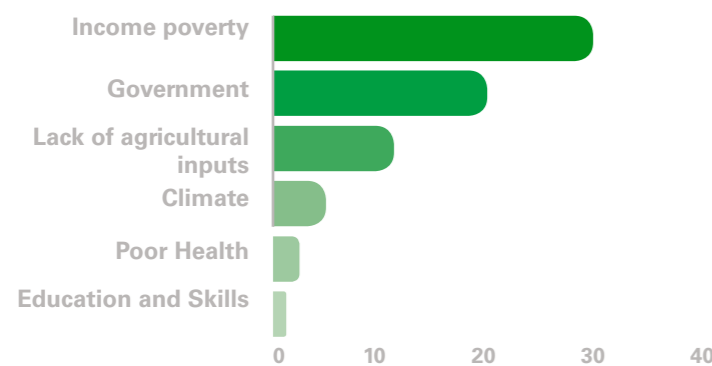


Figure 23: Obstacles to a reasonable quality of life, Lilongwe & Dedza, Malawi



Participation

“It would be better if all are involved, for then it is taken with seriousness, for all are participants in decision-making process and take responsibility for the outcomes.”

(Malawi, female focus group)

Table 4: Participation in decision-making processes, Lilongwe and Dedza

	Agree	Disagree	No response
If you think there is a problem in your community you can voice your opinion	35	4	1
You have all the necessary information about the decisions taken by local government	6	28	6
You can propose solutions to the leaders about community problems	18	22	0
You feel confident your solutions will be taken into consideration by the leaders	11	29	0
You feel the leaders allow you to participate in decision-making process, such as through meetings or discussions.	20	18	2
You are only told what leaders have already decided and you have no input to the decision-making	24	15	1
You are not told about decisions made in your community	25	12	3
You are not asked your opinion about decisions made in your community	32	7	1

When asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements related to their experiences of participation, the majority of participants (35) felt they could voice their opinion in relation to problems in their community, but fewer felt that they could propose solutions to leaders (18). Around half of participants, both men and women, felt they would be permitted by leaders to participate in meetings but most (24/40) felt they would not be able to influence decisions. In men’s focus groups participants said that the existence of elites in the community and the traditional leadership system, meant that some community members were privileged in decision-making.

Among female participants, while some referred to their involvement in discussions on food issues, others said they were excluded from decision-

making. In focus group discussion with young participants, they said they were not involved in any decision-making. While some adult participants expressed the view that the youth were not included because they could not make meaningful contributions, others noted that there were some discussions that affect the youth in which they should be included.

All groups felt that increased and inclusive participation would lead to greater shared ownership of development efforts.

A significant number (28) felt they did not have adequate access to information related to government decisions. Physical distance and lack of access were noted by a number of participants as affecting their ability to engage with officials and political representatives.

“Not all are involved in decision-making. Those close to leaders are at the forefront of decision-making. If you are a relation to the chief, from a political party or an elite.”

(Malawi, male focus group)

“It’s not just physical power, but how they control things in the community.”

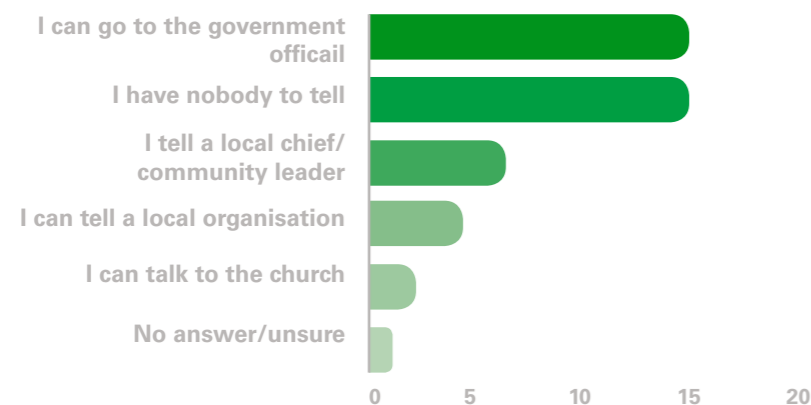
(Malawi, female)

Accountability

“In theory it’s the MP but in practice, they live in town. I can request but in fact they do not hear or respond.”

(Malawi, female)

Figure 24: Demanding accountability, Lilongwe & Dedza, Malawi



While across all focus groups participants expressed dissatisfaction with local government and public service providers, 16 felt they did not have anyone to go to approach about it. Of those who did feel they had somewhere to complain, the majority of these were adults, who identified their member of parliament, chief or village headman as someone with whom they could discuss their problems. As noted above however, difficulties were described in accessing political representatives.

Participants said that rules and accountability mechanisms existed in theory but were not

implemented in practice, with corruption identified as a major issue. In one focus group men said awareness of laws, rights and entitlements in relation to public services was essential to demanding accountability, and felt that lack of knowledge on the part of some people was exploited. Women and youth, in particular, were reported as less likely to attempt to seek accountability.

At the same time, there was a sense from a number of participants that if effective redress mechanisms existed this would enhance accountability.

“There is nothing we can do. We remain put, we have nowhere to go. Even our chiefs are corrupt. We do not speak to them. We do not have the opportunities to do so. If we spoke to them it would not make a difference.”

(Malawi, female focus group)

“If these people knew there would be consequences, this would enhance their accountability.”

(Malawi, female focus group)

“Rules are there but we are afraid to approach and renounce the leaders.”

(Malawi, female focus group)

Reflections

The responses, views and experiences shared in Lilongwe and Dedza districts in Malawi give an insight into the precarious livelihoods situation of participants, in particular the continued challenge of food insecurity. Government support is seen as inadequate and unfairly distributed, and support for an enabling environment for agricultural production and other income opportunities lacking.

Participants’ dependence on the weather and natural resources for survival highlight their vulnerability to shocks and stressors such as climate change. Entrenched gender norms limit the opportunities open to women, result in disproportionate impacts during times of stress, and prevent them from expressing their views and influencing decision-making in their communities. At local levels participation and influence is seen to be the remit of those with political or economic influence, and access to other decision-makers is limited.



Madriz District, North-Central Region, Nicaragua

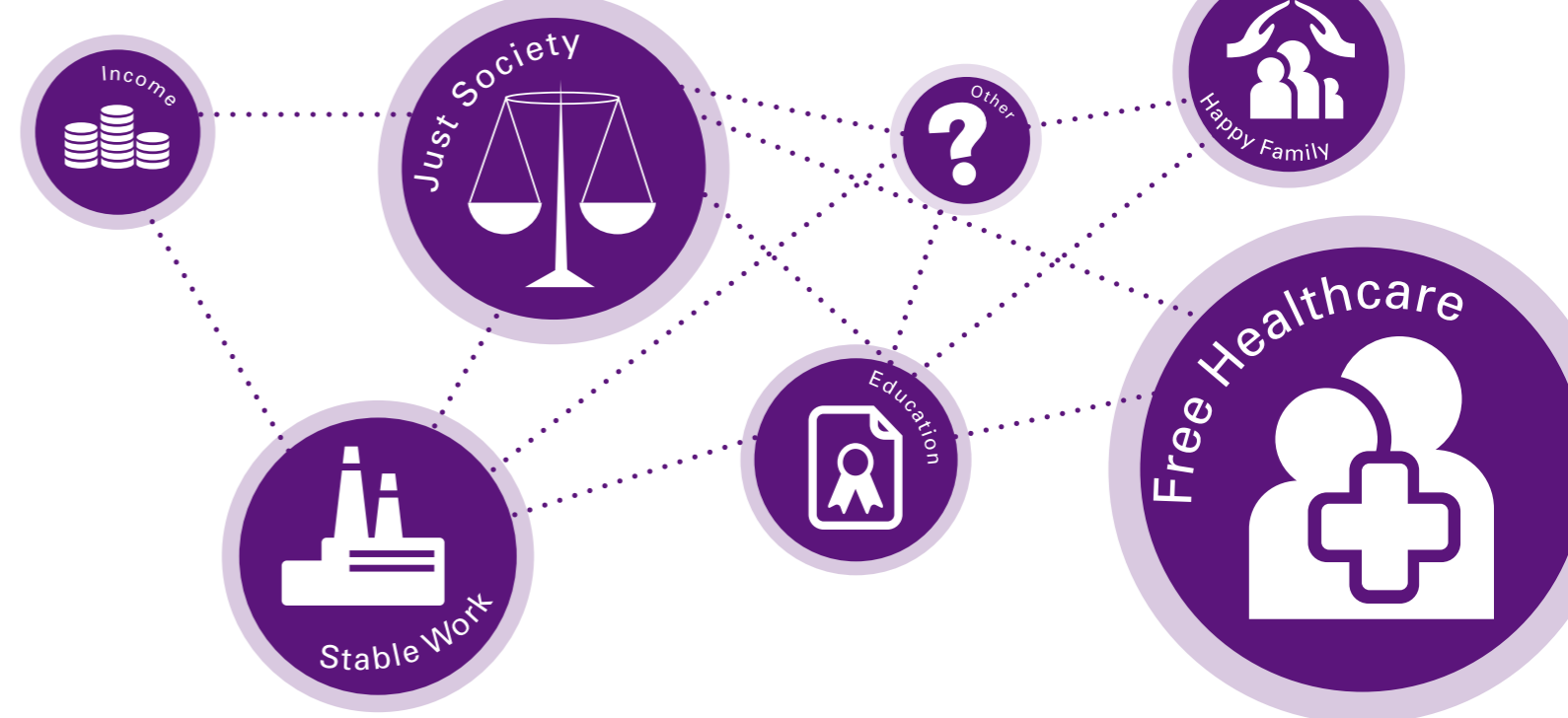
Nicaragua is the second poorest country in Central America and ranks 129th of 187 countries in UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI). It has an estimated population of almost six million people, of which 57 per cent live in urban areas. While there are pockets of poverty in the capital Managua and in other urban areas, poverty is largely a rural problem in Nicaragua. Over 30 per cent of Nicaraguans in urban areas live in conditions of poverty; in rural areas the number more than doubles to 70 per cent. The most disadvantaged groups in rural Nicaragua are households headed by women, child-headed households and indigenous people.

Young people in Nicaragua face many challenges. More than half are not in education and 60 per cent of younger people of economically active age (15-24) are unemployed. For women, high rates of teenage pregnancy present additional challenges. On average women in Nicaragua attain higher educational levels in both primary and secondary schools than their male counterparts but their access to opportunities and resources remains restricted due to continued patriarchal attitudes in social, economic and political affairs. Political representation of women is limited; about one fifth of rural households are managed by women but only 15 per cent of women hold title to land under their own names, and access to credit for women is limited.

Trócaire has worked in Nicaragua for over fifteen years and established an office there in 2004; supporting programmes on Disaster Preparedness and Prevention, Sustainable Livelihoods, Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Governance and Human Rights. The villages are in locations suitable for the cultivation of coffee, staple grains and the farming of cattle. This region contributes

significantly to the national economy, yet 77 per cent of the population live in poverty and 37 per cent in extreme poverty. In Nicaragua the research was carried out together with Trócaire's partner OCTUPAN, in the communities of Jocote Arriba, Los Rodeos del Bramadero, Plan de Grama, El Hato, Darayli and Urban Condega in the Palacaguina municipality of the Madriz District, in the north-central region of Nicaragua.

OCTUPAN is a NGO working to strengthen communities' organisational capacity from an active citizenship perspective and a rights-based approach that includes issues of governance and food security. Within this strategy advocacy processes have been developed with women and men from rural areas and young people. Communities define the problems and proposals they want to present to the municipal authorities, including a wide array of issues such as monitoring municipal plans, budgeting and auctioning, the implementation of a municipal gender policy, and managing community development projects.



Relative weighting of different priorities expressed

People's priorities and their experiences of them

“I do not have money to buy medicine, and in the health centres and hospitals they only give you a prescription.”
(Nicaragua, male)

When asked what people in their society need to live well, the priority issues emerging in the communities in Madriz were health and healthcare, and dignified and stable employment. Livelihood issues were most important for young people. People said inadequate employment opportunities and difficulties in accessing credit, resulted in a lack of financial security which is seen as a key enabler in pursuing other priorities.

Peace and security were also highlighted as priority issues, particularly by adults. Among many participants in Madriz, there was a particular awareness of the fact that many of their priority issues relate to rights, and many noted the ability to access one's rights as a priority for living well.

Around half of participants felt they had some access to their priority needs (23), while a few felt they did not have access to any of their priorities (9).

“I cannot find stable employment because I do not have the financial resources to go look for work in another region.” (Nicaragua, male)



Family stall at market in the North-Central Region.

“Children cannot continue their education because the economic resources to continue do not exist. This is what limits their access to a better education.”
(Nicaragua, male)

Strategies and supports

When asked what strategies they pursued to secure their priorities, what supports they receive and how they coped during times of difficulty, only a relatively small number of participants, mainly men, indicated that they received no support. Assistance and support provided by community-based organisations and the Church was highlighted as particularly significant for more than half of participants (26/40). Support

from the government was received by a quarter of participants (10), including an equal number of men and women.

The majority of people (36/40) were 'very dissatisfied' with the government's performance in supporting access to at least one of their priorities.

Examples of coping strategies during financial difficulties included selling possessions, and use of wild herbs as medicine.

Figure 25: Accessing Support, Madriz, Nicaragua

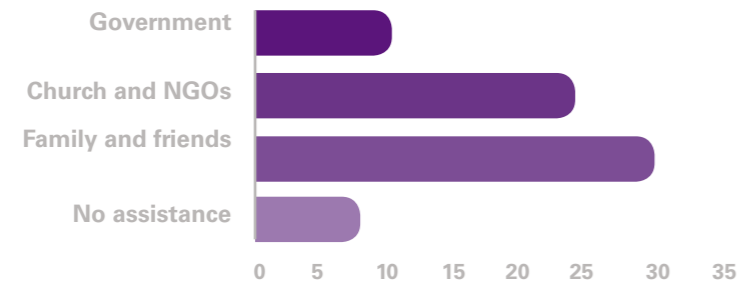
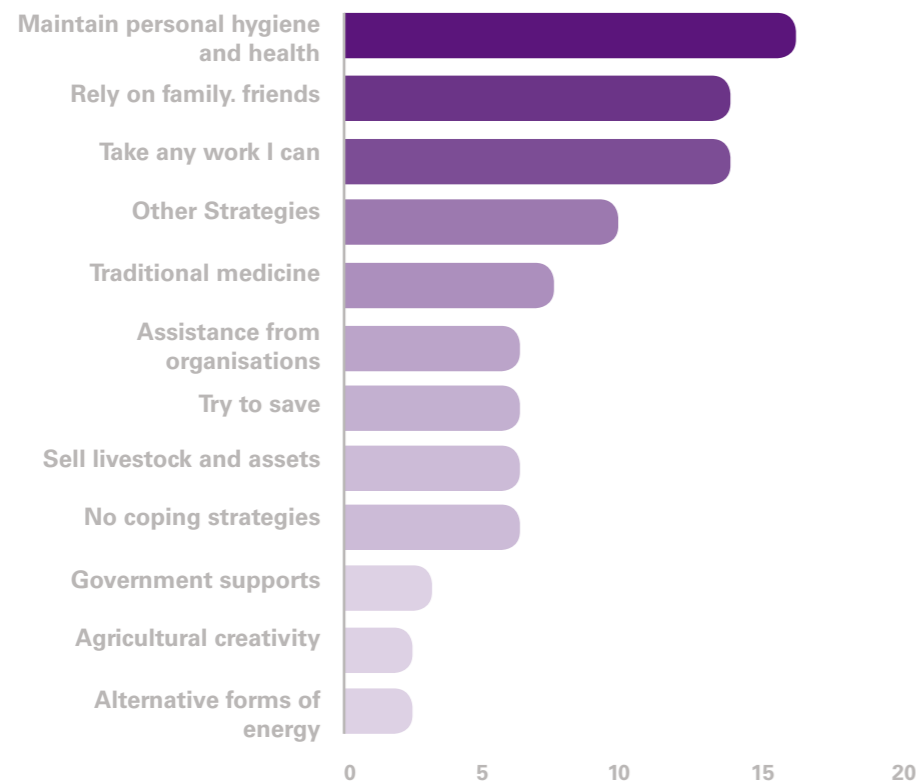


Figure 26: Coping Strategies, Madriz, Nicaragua

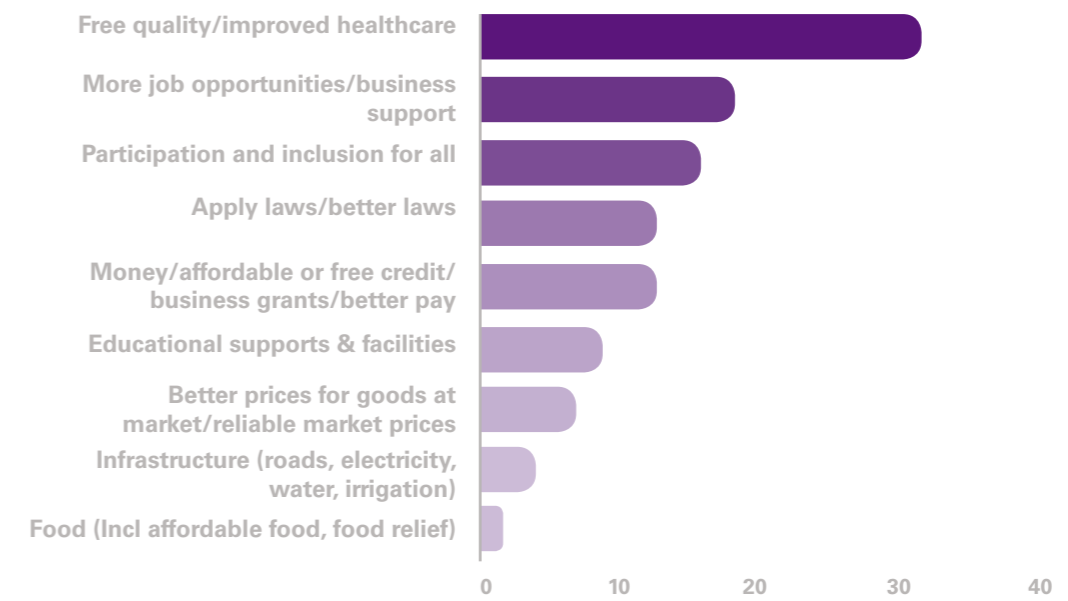


People's proposals

“Organisations should support land reform in order that women that do not have land have the resources to farm the land. We can work, but we need resources and opportunities.”

(Nicaragua, female focus group)

Figure 27: People's Proposals, Madriz, Nicaragua



In their proposals for how access to their priorities could be improved, most participants (37) highlighted the need for public services, in particular healthcare (30) and law enforcement for a just society (12), which were seen as currently absent, inadequate or ineffective. Many people (17) also suggested that improved opportunities for stable and dignified employment, access to credit and a better price for goods sold at market would contribute significantly to improving their quality of life.

One woman called for support for land reform and the provision of land to women who do not have it.

A number of participants (14) from across women, men and youth, also felt that standardised access to decision-making processes and channels in which their voices could be heard would see improvements.



Family stall at market in the North-Central Region.

“It is very expensive for our children to receive a good education. As a father, I make sacrifices in order that my children can go to school even though I don't have the financial resources to do so. Sometimes I sell belongings that I have at home in order that they can continue.”

(Nicaragua, male)

Discrimination

Figure 28: Discrimination, Madriz, Nicaragua

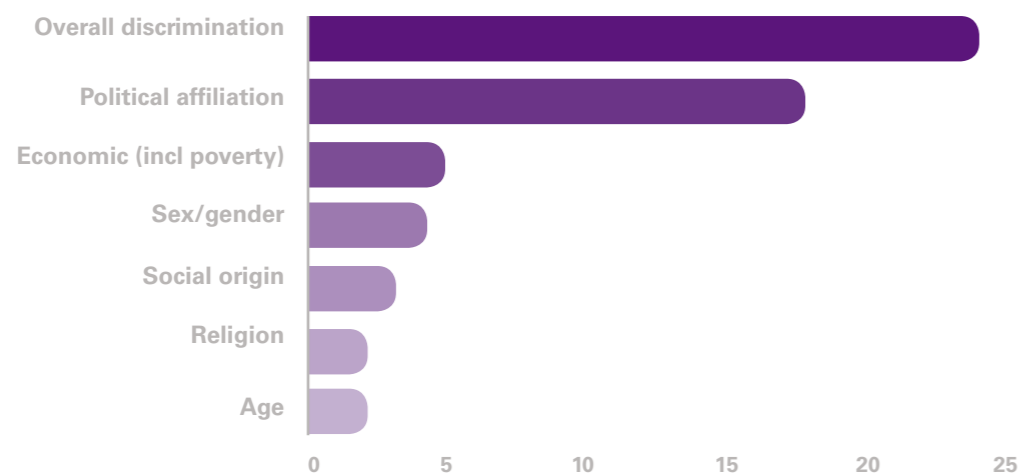
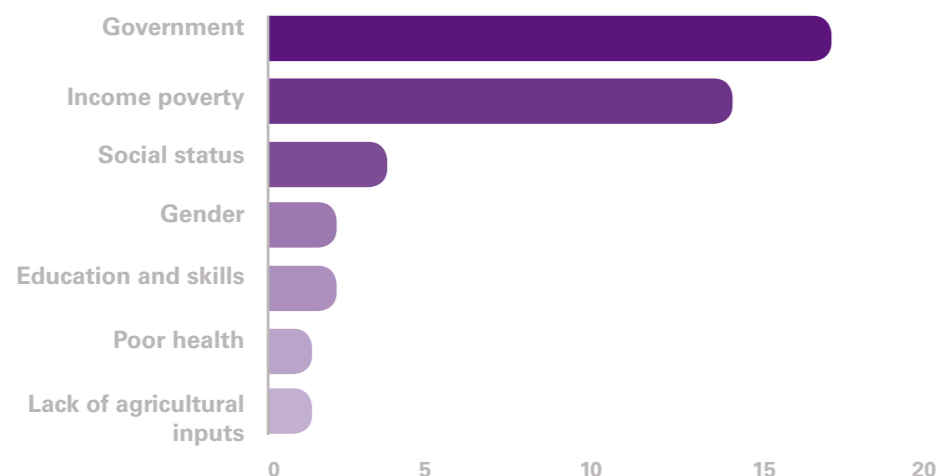


Figure 29: Obstacles to a reasonable quality of life, Madriz, Nicaragua



More than half of participants (23) felt discrimination was affecting their ability to access their priorities, the majority of whom were women and young people. Discrimination based on political affiliation was the most common and pervasive form of identity-based discrimination noted by participants in the communities in Madriz (18); who cited many examples of how access to opportunities, resources, supports and influence were affected by political affiliation based on which parties were in power and their ability to influence access to services, supports and decision-making at various levels.

A small number of people (5) also perceived themselves as discriminated against on the basis of their socio-economic status, affecting how they

are treated and their access to services. The lived experience of being from a rural area, as well as being poor, was associated by participants with a particular social identity.

While gender was only cited by a small number of participants (4) in the questionnaire as a basis for discrimination, in focus groups different experiences of women as compared to men came out clearly. Greater challenges experienced by women in accessing job and income opportunities and accessing and owning land were among the issues highlighted.

Those responding to the question of whether their lives would be different if they were the opposite sex had mixed views. While a few men believed women were better off because of supports and

services targeted specifically at them, a number of both women and men believed women had access to fewer benefits, and that poorly educated women were particularly vulnerable. A number of both male and female participants acknowledged the greater challenges experienced by women in accessing jobs however, and the problem of gender-based violence.

“The CPC (Citizen Power Committee) structure is politicised, and the municipal government also prioritises people affiliated with its political party in distributing benefits to the communities.”
(Nicaragua, youth focus group)

“The government does not provide opportunities to those that do not sympathise with their party. If I do not have political backing, I cannot get a job. We do not have just representation, because the will of the people is not respected. There is an authoritarian system. The people are told who they are going to vote for. There is no democracy, nor are there free elections.”
(Nicaragua, female)

“People that come from the most rural communities are discriminated against because of their appearance.”
(Nicaragua, female focus group)

“Municipal authorities provide attention based on your social status. When you arrive at an institution and they see that you are a campesino (peasant farmer), they leave you sitting there. They make you wait, and sometimes they don’t meet with you.” (Nicaragua, male)

“These (programmes) do not benefit the majority of the population. In many cases, they are politicised, and benefits are provided to people that don’t have the capacity to receive them. They are also used to manipulate the vote. They buy the people.”
(Nicaragua, female focus group)

“We are often denied employment because we are women. They say that only men can do the work.”
(Nicaragua, female)

“If a woman owns a plot of land, she does not have the money to invest in it to be able to farm.”
(Nicaragua, female focus group)

“If I were a man I would not suffer from violence. I would also have more job opportunities.”
(Nicaragua, female)

Participation

Table 5: Participation in decision-making processes, Madriz

	Agree	Disagree	No response
If you think there is a problem in your community you can voice your opinion	38	2	0
You have all the necessary information about the decisions taken by local government	6	28	6
You can propose solutions to the leaders about community problems	36	3	1
You feel confident your solutions will be taken into consideration by the leaders	17	13	10
You feel the leaders allow you to participate in decision-making process, such as through meetings or discussions.	22	16	2
You are only told what leaders have already decided and you have no input to the decision-making	25	13	2
You are not told about decisions made in your community	23	14	3
You are not asked your opinion about decisions made in your community	24	12	4

When asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements related to their experiences of participation, most participants (38) in the communities in Madriz felt that they could voice their opinion in relation to problems in their community. Similarly, most people (36) believed they could propose ideas to leaders in relation to their problems. Less than half of these people, however, felt their ideas were likely to be considered.

Over half of participants felt they were allowed to participate in decision-making processes (22), but the majority believed they were not able to effectively input into decision-making (25). A significant number (23) felt that information on the outcomes of decision-making processes was lacking. Young people were more likely to feel they were unable to participate or influence decision-making. In focus groups, young people said they felt unable to participate in community decision-making processes. It was noted that when

“We must advocate more in public forums. We need to use the media in order to be heard.”

(Nicaragua, female)

young people are excluded they lose interest in community development and can result in them leaving the community to pursue employment elsewhere.

In relation to official decision-making, there was a sense among participants that there were spaces in which they could participate, but felt that this had limited impact on decisions made. It was suggested that new formal structures were not achieving more meaningful participation.

In the communities in Madriz in particular, high levels of political consciousness and commitment were reflected in the desires and proposals expressed in relation to participation in community and public life.

There was also greater evidence of knowledge of rights, with the constitution and other legislation referred to in discussions by a number of participants, and an indication that active efforts to promote knowledge were having an impact.

“When we are sick and do not have medicine, we cope by drinking teas made of plants and herbs.”

(Nicaragua, female)

“People are interviewed during the development of the Municipal Investment Plan. However, although some projects are prioritised, most investment goes to infrastructure (latrines, roads...). These are not the priorities of my community, but that’s what is prioritised.”
(Nicaragua, female focus group)

“I would like for there to be dialogue with representatives in my community in which no one is excluded, and for people to come and ask about our needs and find positive solutions to our problems.”
(Nicaragua, female)

“There should not be preferential treatment. Everyone’s voice should be heard. There should be equality, and no discrimination based on politics or religion.”
(Nicaragua, female)

“Previously, women did not participate. We did not have the right to vote. The trainings have helped us understand our rights and search for opportunities (to participate), especially around the issue of healthcare.”
(Nicaragua, female focus group)

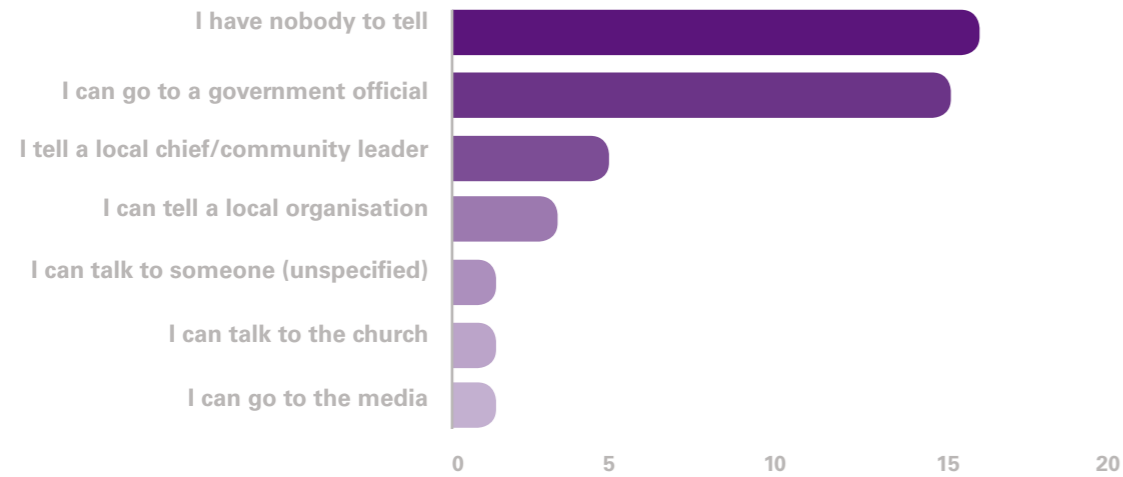
“In the communities, the adult leaders decide who to invite and who to include and exclude from community (decision-making) processes.”
(Nicaragua, youth focus group)

“Adult leaders say that young people don’t know anything. In workshops and meetings with representatives, when there are few young people in attendance we are shy about talking, because we don’t feel like we have any support.”
(Nicaragua, youth focus group)

“There are spaces in the community, but we focus on other processes. We have to ask the government and MAGFOR (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry) for support in planting organic products. Sometimes the Citizen Power Committee (CPC) has meetings, but they don’t work well.”
(Nicaragua, mixed focus group)

Accountability

Figure 30: Demanding accountability, Madriz, Nicaragua



The majority of people were 'very dissatisfied' (36/40) with the government's performance on at least one of their three priorities.

Over half the participants (24) felt they had someone to speak to when they were dissatisfied with government performance, with most of these pointing to official government channels to do so. A significant number (16) however felt they had no one to report their experiences to and others (10) expressed frustration that their complaints did not achieve any change. A number of participants also indicated fear of consequences for speaking out.

Access to information was also highlighted as a key enabler for improving people's ability to seek accountability.

Challenges in achieving accountability were also strongly linked to the political discrimination people experience. The common practice of withdrawing officials and replacing them with party-affiliated appointees, and the impact this had on people's access to services and supports was noted numerous times. This was contrasted by one participant with people's inability to remove or replace ineffective officials.

“When I request support from the corresponding authorities, I am never given an answer - just false promises.”

(Nicaragua, male)

“I do not say anything. I avoid expressing my opinion because I am scared that there will be retaliation. Considering the situation, I try to stay quiet.”

(Nicaragua, female)

“We don't know anything and are not told anything. If there are laws, we should understand them as citizens. They have an obligation to explain the laws.”

(Nicaragua, mixed focus group)

Reflections

In Madriz high levels of political consciousness and knowledge of rights emerged in participant responses and views. This was set in a context where the primary barrier to participants' ability to access their priorities was seen as discrimination based on political affiliation. The differences in the priorities highlighted by participants in Madriz indicate the importance of context in determining people's priorities, and in influencing their access to their priority needs, whether health/healthcare or income opportunities. The number and variety of challenges experienced by women in accessing resources and income opportunities contrast with the indication by female participants of their ability to express their opinions and propose solutions. While participants have access to decision-making spaces these are considered ineffective. Supports and services are politicised, undermining accountability.

Gonaïves District, Artibonite Department, Haiti

Haiti is ranked 161st of 187 countries in UNDP's HDI. It has an estimated population of 10 million people, of which 55 per cent live in urban settings. Long considered the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti faces numerous challenges. Low GDP levels are accompanied by chronic unemployment, and the absence of social protection leaves vulnerable populations particularly exposed to risks and shocks. Other challenges include housing deficits, unclear land regulations, weak governance, increased violence and criminality, food insecurity and political instability.

The January 12th 2010 earthquake resulted in substantial damage in terms of lives, livelihoods and infrastructure. Due to its geographic location, Haiti is prone to natural disasters, including hurricanes, flooding, drought, and earthquakes, exacerbated by the effects of climatic change. These conditions are a constant threat to food security. Despite minimal government investment in the sector, agriculture remains the main form of economic activity in Haiti. Virtually no supports are offered to farmers in terms of agricultural inputs or other services and insecurity of land tenure has been an impediment to the development of agriculture in the country. Most lands are managed informally, and farmers generally do not have land titles causing difficulties when applying for credit. Furthermore, land tenure insecurity influences farmers in their decision to adopt sustainable farming practices or protective measures, contributing to Haiti's land degradation. Increasing urbanisation is leading to rising numbers of single-headed households in rural areas.

Conditions in Haiti are particularly challenging for women. Although the Haitian Constitution is not discriminatory in terms of rights to property, in

practice women are systematically disadvantaged. Traditionally women in Haiti rarely hold title to the houses in which they live or of the land they work. Often, only the name of the man appears in the title and in case of separation, their right is challenged. Women face gender-specific threats such as rape and domestic abuse, more constraints in accessing credit than male counterparts, and restrictive cultural norms including responsibility for household tasks and child care, alongside farming activities. Following the 2010 earthquake many women were rendered particularly vulnerable as a result of inadequate protection within tent communities for women and vulnerable groups.

Trócaire has been active in Haiti since 1991. Programmes are currently focused on Governance and Human Rights, Emergency Response, Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Preparedness. The research was conducted in the province of Gonaïves with Trócaire's partner, Caritas Haiti. The communities were Bretay 6 and Tarasse where Caritas Gonaïves works. Many of them are victims of Hurricane Jeanne, a deadly hurricane that struck in 2004. These communities do not have access to basic necessities.

People's priorities and their experiences of them

When asked what a person needs to feel well and live a good life, the priorities that emerged in the communities in Gonaïves were access to free quality healthcare; having a livelihood and/or cash income; having a clean water supply; and electricity. While women and men broadly shared the same priorities, women also highlighted housing. In comparing the responses of older and younger participants, the younger participants placed a high priority on access to quality education.

Participants saw electricity as necessary for children's education, to enable them to study in the evenings. In the female focus group electricity was also linked to security, referring to the threat of violence against women.

More than half of participants (25/40) felt they did not have access to any of their priorities, including equal numbers of women and men. The majority of younger participants felt they had access to at least some of their priorities however.

Access to an income and financial security were viewed as enablers for accessing other priorities such as health and education, while good health was understood as a precondition for food security, education and financial security.

People referred to challenges in their efforts to find work and generate an income. It was noted that even if one is lucky enough to access training opportunities, it is difficult to find the money for tools and other equipment, to make use of it. Current trade policies were also noted as affecting the ability of producers to earn an adequate income from their work.

Younger participants pointed to the distance of public schools from their communities and fees in the education system as undermining their ability to access education. Fees for accessing basic services, including bribes, were noted as barriers to people's ability to access their priorities, with responses suggesting corruption was a pervasive problem.

A strong sense of humiliation and marginalisation came across in participants' descriptions of their situation.

“We cannot go out in the dark. Electricity is essential because it allows us to go out at night.”

(Haiti, female focus group)

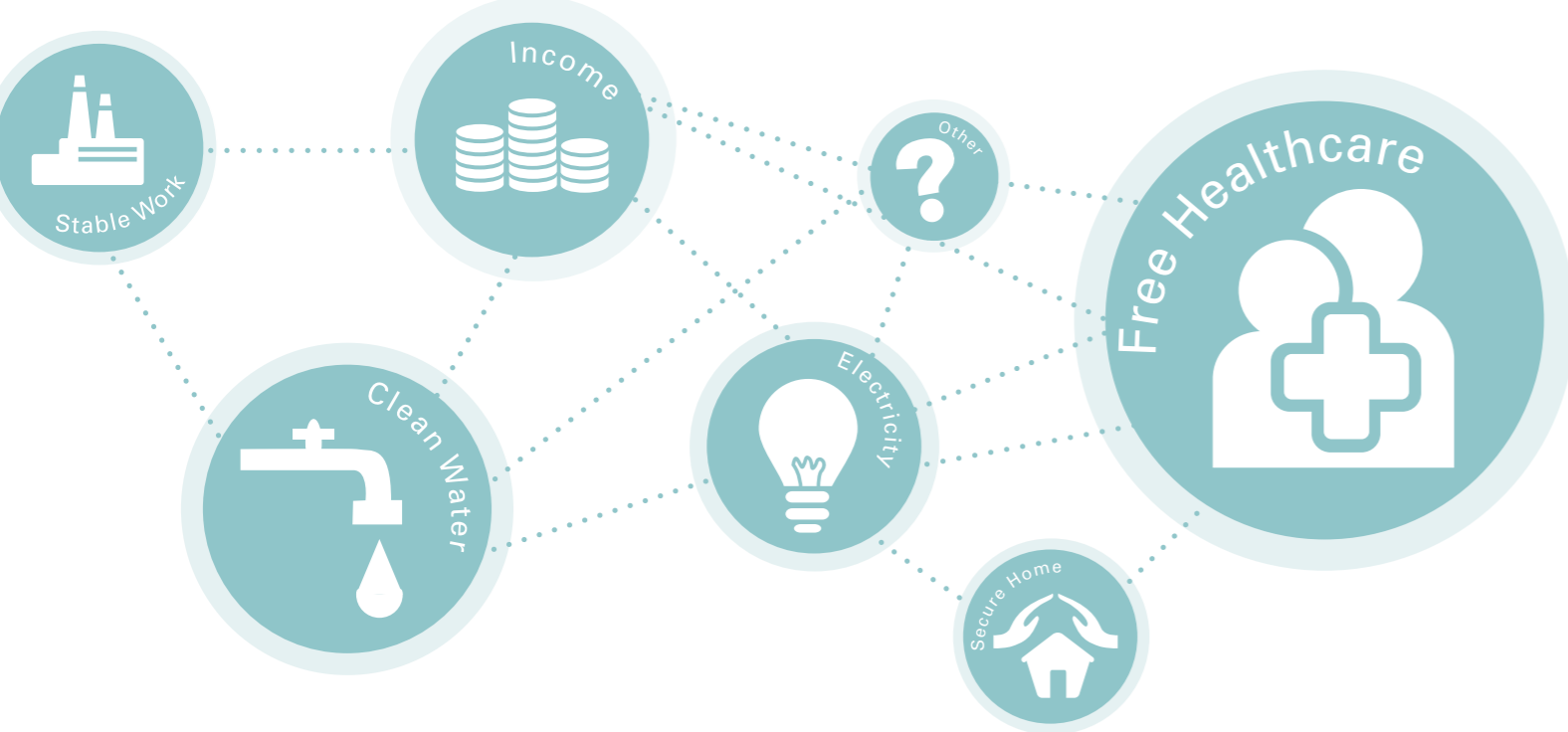
“In Haiti it is very difficult to be healthy because to be healthy, one needs a job and proper alimentation to avoid certain diseases. However, we live in a country where we have nothing and we can't even eat.” (Haiti, male focus group)

“We have a lot of difficulties because we do not have jobs. If we had jobs, we would have electricity; we could send the kids to school and pay rent. If we had jobs we would have a better life.” (Haiti, mixed focus group)



Construction work in Artibonite.

Caritas Haiti was established by the Bishops Conference of Haiti and is a member of the global Caritas Confederation. Caritas Haiti works for a more just and equal society through programmes on food security and nutrition, education and training, disaster risk reduction, local governance and institutional development, and equality between women and men; engaging in policy as well as overseeing development and humanitarian assistance programmes. Since the earthquake, Caritas Haiti has supported various communities with housing construction.



Relative weighting of different priorities expressed

Strategies and Supports

When asked what strategies they pursued to secure their priorities, what supports they receive and how they coped during times of difficulty, more than half of participants (23/40) referred to autonomous coping strategies. Half of participants (20) said they receive support from family and friends, with women more likely to receive this support in this way (13/20). The majority (34) said they did not receive external support from the Church or community-based organisations, and all but one participant said they received no support from the Government (39).

A significant number of people borrow money to meet their priority needs (14). Examples included informal credit arrangements within local markets for food, and with schools for paying education fees, or borrowing money from friends and neighbours.

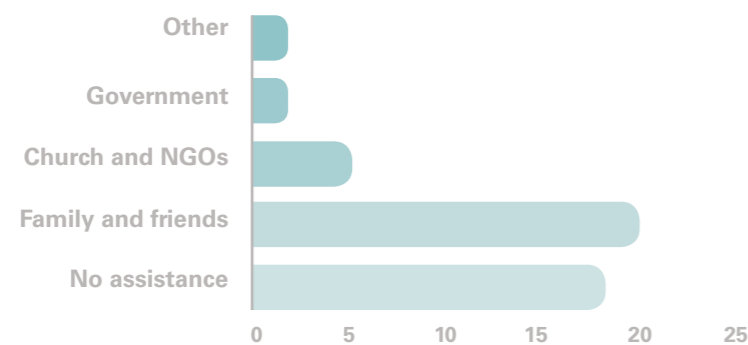
No formal micro-credit or loan facilities were identified.

Poor government performance was noted by a number of people (15) who said they were very dissatisfied with the support and services they receive in relation to their priority needs.

Importantly, however, more than half of participants (23) felt this question was 'politically sensitive' and declined to respond.

“The decision makers do not provide us or help us with anything.”
(Haiti, male)

Figure 31: Accessing Support, Gonaïves, Haiti



Peoples' Proposals

Figure 32: Coping Strategies, Gonaïves, Haiti

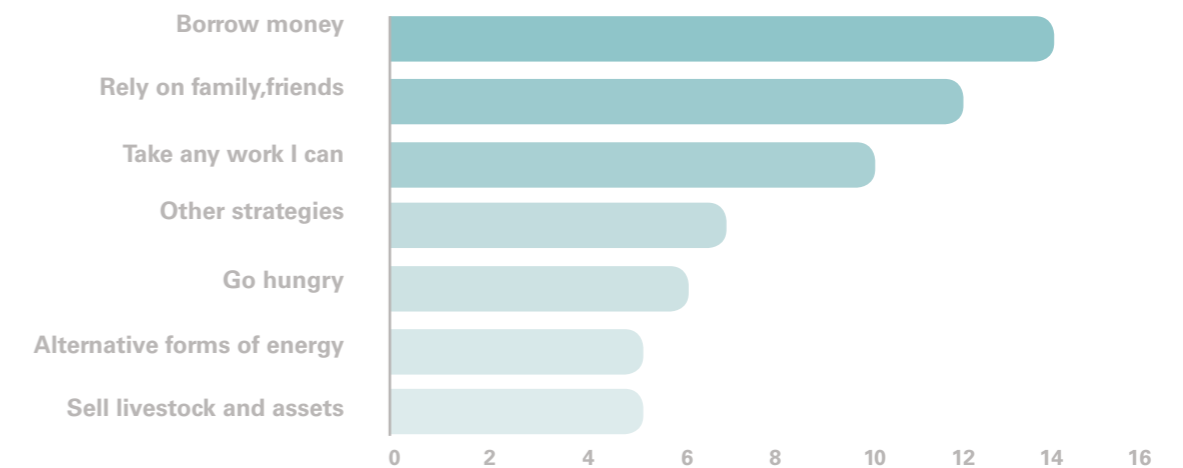
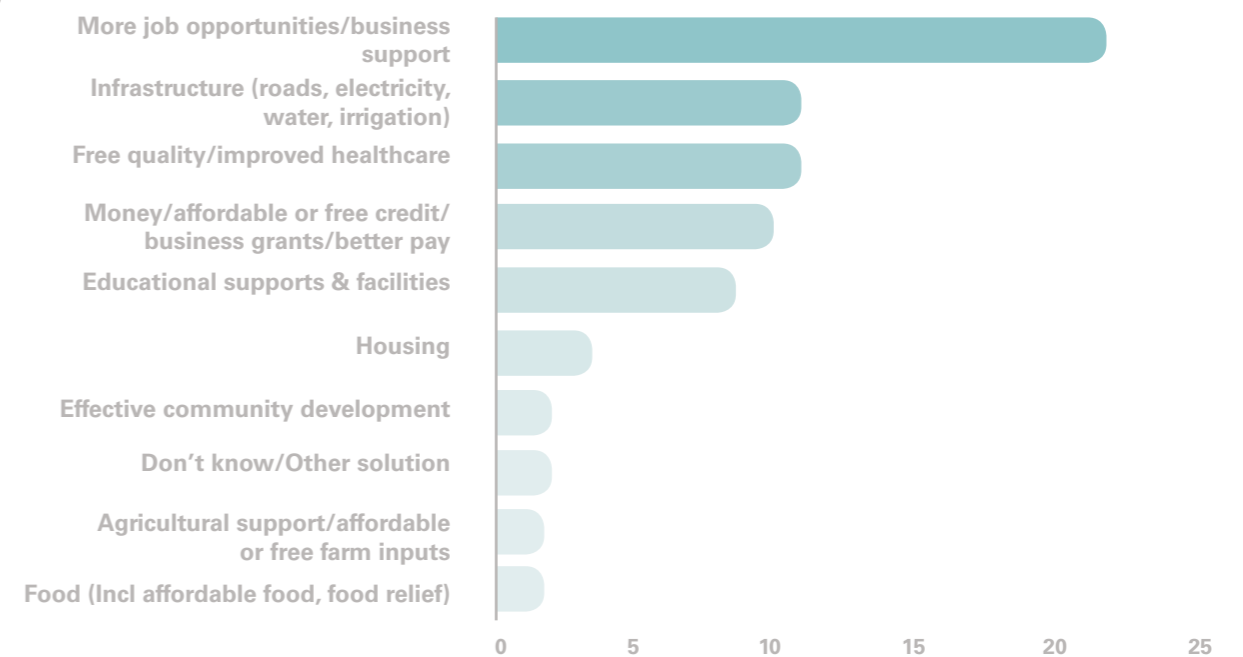


Figure 33: People's Proposals, Gonaïves, Haiti



When asked what could support them in securing their priorities, a majority of participants (32) highlighted the need for an income, through increased access to employment opportunities (22) or financial assistance (10), reflecting the recurring references to the need to pay fees and bribes for access to services.

All participants (40) also identified the need for improved public provision of services and supports currently seen as absent, inadequate or ineffective.

“We need jobs in the country and everything will be resolved.”
(Haiti, male)

Discrimination

Figure 34: Discrimination, Gonaïves, Haiti

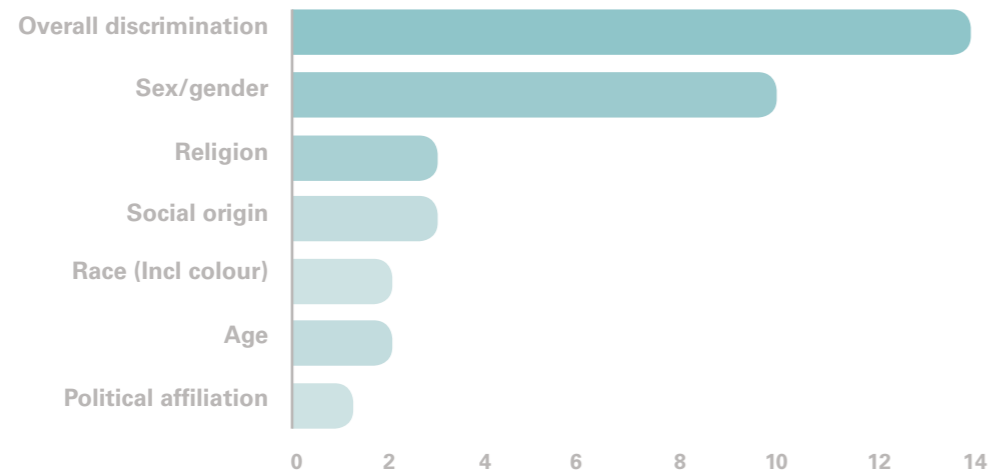


Figure 35: Obstacles to a reasonable quality of life, Gonaïves, Haiti



Less than half of participants (14) reported discrimination as affecting their ability to access their priorities; the majority of those who did were women (9).

Among those who did perceive themselves as affected by discrimination, gender, race, religion, age and social origin were noted as the primary bases for discrimination.

More detail on experiences of discrimination emerged in focus groups. Race or religion were not noted again as key issues, but a combination of socio-economic discrimination and geographic isolation came across clearly, as well as their mutually-reinforcing impacts. There was also a strong sense of the humiliation experienced as a result of direct and indirect discrimination, which

results in an inability to access, or exclusion from supports and services.

In relation to gender-based discrimination, the impacts noted by women included greater difficulties in accessing jobs and income opportunities due to traditional gender roles, stereotypes in relation to childrearing and household work, and the need for permission from their husbands for women to work outside the home.

Half of the women surveyed felt their lives would be better as a man. A small number of men (2) felt that life would be easier as a woman, as they can depend on men to provide for them. Other men acknowledged the lack of opportunities open to women, and their exposure to domestic violence.

“Because I am not white, bourgeois or in the government I am treated differently.”

(Haiti, male)

“If you are not close to the government you won’t get anything.”

(Haiti, male)

“It humiliates people in our community when the authorities do not give us any support or assistance; they have no regards for people who are poor.”

(Haiti, female focus group)

“We do not have any health clinics. When we go to town, they humiliate and minimize us. We have no one to represent us. To be cared for at the clinic we need at least 500 gourdes (\$12/€9).”

(Haiti, female focus group)

“In this area, when they are distributing food, mosquito nets, we were excluded. They only gave to bigger towns even though we also have needs; we were humiliated.”

(Haiti, female focus group)

“In this country they always say that there are jobs that women can’t do.”

(Haiti, female)

“I would be able to provide for my family alone and have money. Now I have to ask him and wait for him to give me money to survive.”

(Haiti, female)

“My life would be different if I was a girl. I think it would have been worse because a woman cannot do all the things that I am currently doing to survive.”

(Haiti, male)



Busy street in Artibonite.

Participation

Table 6: Participation in decision-making processes, Gonaïves

	Agree	Disagree	No response
If you think there is a problem in your community you can voice your opinion	23	12	5
You have all the necessary information about the decisions taken by local government	2	35	3
You can propose solutions to the leaders about community problems	9	24	7
You feel confident your solutions will be taken into consideration by the leaders	6	28	6
You feel the leaders allow you to participate in decision-making process, such as through meetings or discussions.	8	27	5
You are only told what leaders have already decided and you have no input to the decision-making	17	17	6
You are not told about decisions made in your community	17	17	6
You are not asked your opinion about decisions made in your community	18	20	2

People were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements related to their level and type of participation in decision-making. More than half of participants (23) felt they could voice their opinion in relation to problems in their community, the majority of whom were adult men. However few (9), again mainly men, felt they could propose solutions to decision-makers.

Most people (27) did not feel they would be permitted by leaders to participate in community meetings, in particular women and youth. Some youth felt that attempting to be included in decision-making spaces would be viewed negatively by local leaders and therefore they would not attempt to do so.

While one man noted that women's participation in decision-making was to be valued by the men, as they brought a different perspective to analysing

“If we go ask to be included in the decision-making process, they will say that we are too curious.”

(Haiti, youth focus group)

“They exclude us and put us to the side. They do not support us; we cannot ask questions or talk about our needs.”

(Haiti, female focus group)

community problems, women largely felt they were completely excluded from decision-making processes and that their opinions were not valued.

Discrimination on the basis of socio-economic status, linked particularly to employment by participants in Gonaïves, was also noted as impacting on people's ability to engage in community discussions and associations.

In focus group discussions participants struggled to cite examples of participation in formal decision-making structures or processes. A significant majority of people (35) also felt they did not have all the necessary information about decisions taken by government. Discussions indicated that lack of trust in government and experiences of corruption, condition people's perceptions of the value of seeking to engage with political structures.

“In the community, those who do not work are considered lazy and the poorest which is a sign of disrespect because you do not have income. This therefore doesn't allow us to participate in any discussion or association. If a family member does not work, he does not have the right to speak. They sometimes humiliate you.”

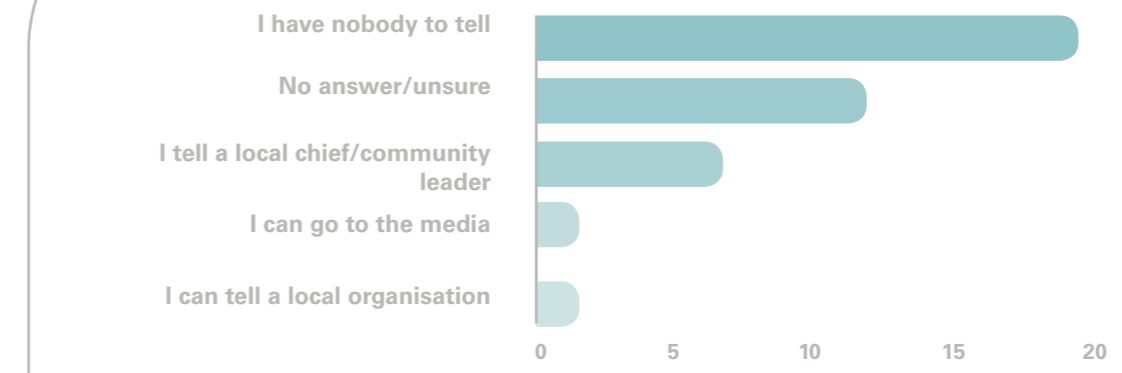
(Haiti, mixed focus group)

Accountability

“There is nowhere to go or nobody to talk in regards to the issues we have.”

(Haiti, male)

Figure 36: Demanding Accountability, Gonaïves, Haiti



In Gonaïves only 17 out of 40 participants provided a response to the question relating to satisfaction with government support and services in relation to their priority issues. Of the 17 participants who did respond, 15 were very dissatisfied. When asked who they could approach to register experiences and grievances, 19 participants felt they had no one to approach and more than ten did not answer or were unsure.

Of those who did feel they could express their dissatisfaction (9), a number identified the traditional, community leader, as someone with whom they could raise issues. However these leaders were seen as largely unable to influence the official decision-makers.

“If we want to meet up with the CASEC [elected local government official], we can; but he won't be able to do anything for us because the higher authorities won't let him.”

(Haiti, male focus group)

Men were more likely to approach local government with problem issues, but said this had no impact.

“I went to all the government offices: civil engineering office, CNE, but nothing

worked; the government is absent. We would die if we depended on the government.”

(Haiti, male focus group)

Many participants referred to an absent State, claiming that politicians disappeared after election periods, and participants saw no possibility of holding them to account. Women did not feel they could seek accountability from the State and were unable to identify any cases when they had attempted to do so.

Access to information was seen as a prerequisite for demanding accountability, as well as for participating in decision-making, but as noted above the vast majority of people (35/40) felt they did not have the necessary information about government decisions.

Corruption emerged as a key theme in relation to seeking and achieving accountability from official responsibility holders. Participants pointed out that in most cases, the perpetrators of corruption were those in responsibility, who are also the official accountability channel. A number of participants expressed fear of retribution for calling attention to corruption or seeking accountability for absent or inadequate State support or services, even citing the threat of murder. This provided context for why many questionnaire participants declined to answer the questions regarding satisfaction with government performance.

“The government had put in place a programme with private schools but the directors decided to run a scam. One person decided to file a complaint and he lost 2 fingers.”

(Haiti, youth focus group)

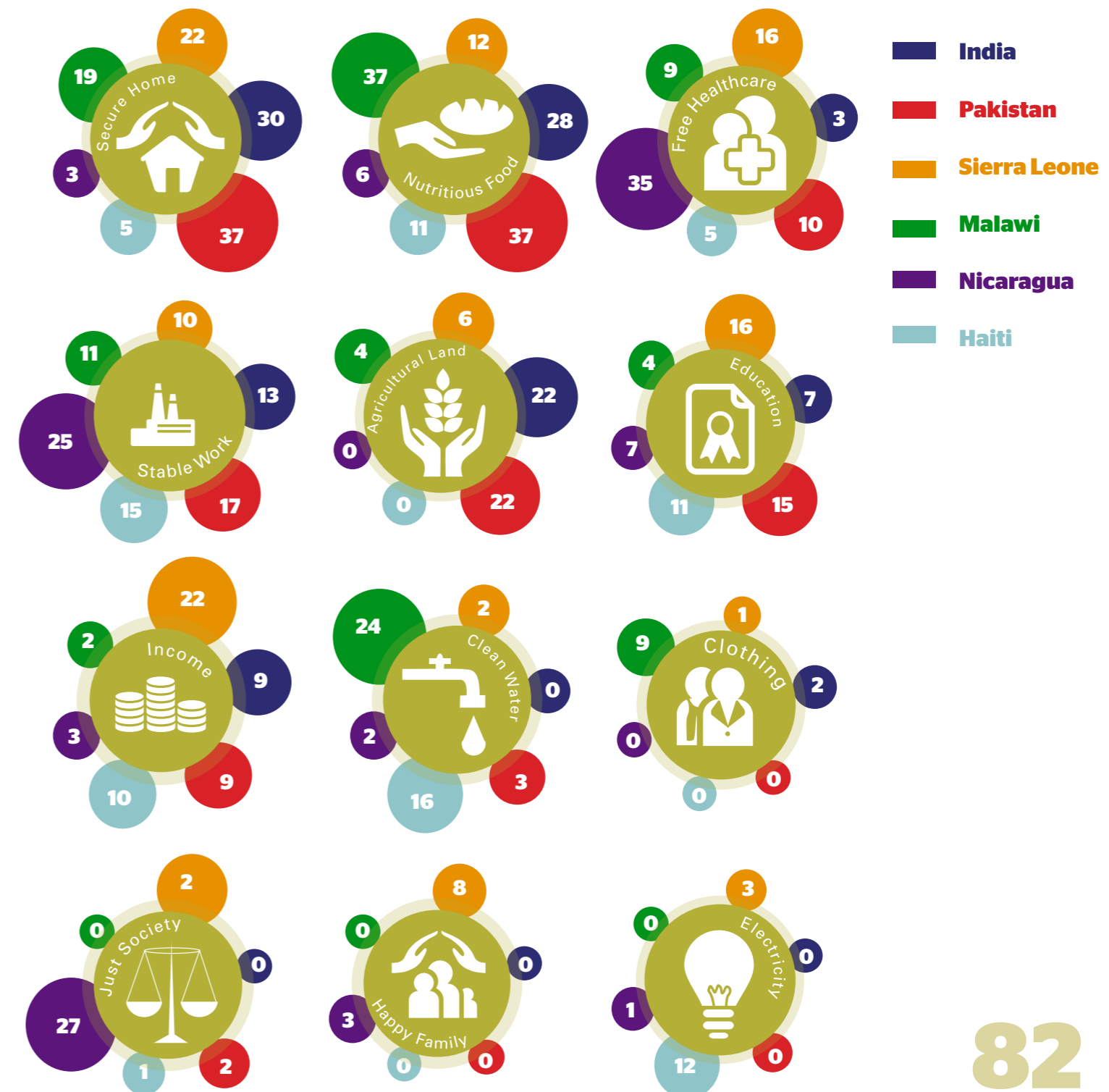
“I would not complain to the authorities because if the manager gets fired, I can be exposed and be killed.”

(Haiti, male focus group)

4. Insights from the Case Studies

The primary goal of this research is to amplify the voices of people living in poverty in current debates on a post-2015 development framework. This has been done through soliciting the views and experiences of people living in poverty in six countries, using a rights-based analysis. While the numbers were not large enough to be statistically representative, the data collected on the priorities, views and experiences of people from a variety of very particular contexts, including post-conflict and post-emergency situations, remote communities and highly marginalised groups, provides important insights into how highly vulnerable people and communities experience development supports and services.

Figure 37: Relative importance of priority issues for participants in six case studies



Reflections

Participants in Gonaïves gave a clear indication of their tenuous access to basic survival needs such as food. Humiliation was a common description of their experiences, including unemployment, being passed over for supports. Many responses referred to the absence of government and expressed frustration with inadequate services and unjust distribution of supports. Gender-based discrimination was seen as presenting additional barriers for women in accessing opportunities. As in many of the other case studies, the view by a majority that they could express their opinion on problems within their community was in contrast to their views on their ability to access and influence decision-making, and to be informed in relation to decision-making. Moreover, the reluctance of almost half of participants to answer certain questions seen as politically sensitive, suggests the experience of the State as an institution of repression and arbitrary power, presenting a challenging and even dangerous context within which participants can participate, seek accountability and change in their situation.

Whilst there is much local specificity in their stories (and that in itself is very relevant), a key question is whether there are any overarching messages or themes relating to people's experiences which can be fed into the post-2015 discussions? In this chapter we will explore a number of insights or themes which emerge from the research that resonate with an extensive range of other participatory research studies with people living in poverty. We believe these should be explored further in the context of the post-2015 framework debates.

Insight 1

Whilst certain core basic needs are common to all, people's priorities are quite specific and context related.

The first thing that emerges from the case studies is the mix of priorities which are common to all, and a long list of other priorities which are context specific. Key themes across all of the case studies were the need for a stable income and nutritious food. In all the case studies apart from that of Nicaragua, shelter featured highly.

Stable Income: Access to adequate, reliable income and income-generation opportunities, were the biggest priority across the case studies. Almost all participants talked about the importance of having financial security, whether through a job, access to land for crop production to sell, or having a small business. Responses across the case studies highlighted how people linked an adequate and reliable income to their ability to access their other priorities, including food, health, education, and materials and inputs for agriculture and housing. All participants considered their current income-generation activities, whether small scale agriculture, petty trading or waged labour, as inadequate to meet their basic needs.

Nutritious Food: The majority of participants do not have reliable access to adequate food. In Haiti and Malawi in particular, hunger was noted by many participants as affecting other priorities such as health, education and income. The incidence and impacts of food insecurity were often worse for women, because of greater challenges in accessing income opportunities or the means for agricultural production such as land or credit.

Adequate Shelter: Access to adequate, secure shelter was also a key priority for just under half of participants. They considered their current access inadequate due to its size, quality and vulnerability. Many participants pointed to the importance of having a title document, linking this to security of tenure for people's homes and land.

Beyond these three priorities, other issues emerged as clear priorities in certain communities, but were less of a priority in others. For example, whilst access to housing emerged as important in most communities, it was not a priority in the communities in Madriz in Nicaragua. In that community, access to healthcare was by far the most important priority. While food did not feature in the participants' top priorities in Pakistan, secure tenure of their homes and land were particularly prominent here.

The main insight from this is the importance of context in shaping people's development priorities. If the priorities of the participants in this project are overlaid on the current MDGs, nearly half of the issues identified in the case studies are not currently MDGs.

“Work is the core and basis of everything. Working gives you money which can buy food and all basic necessities.”
(Haiti, mixed focus group)

“When there is no food at home, it is women who suffer the most.”

(Sierra Leone, women's focus group)

“I have small wooden hut on the land of landowner, but nothing else.”

(Pakistan, male)

Shelter, a major issue for half the participants is not on the list of current MDGs. In this very small sample, whilst it was clear that certain basic priorities were more or less common across the case studies, there was more divergence than commonality in overarching priorities. This divergence raises questions about the ability of a narrow set of global goals to respond effectively and appropriately to the priorities of diverse people living in poverty.

The issue of “which goals” and the “right number of goals” has already emerged as a key theme within the post-2015 debate. In response to the criticism of being top-down, many studies and consultations are taking place to inform the next round of goal setting and identify where transformational change can be achieved. Given the rise in issue-based data and advocacy, relating to specific needs and disadvantaged groups (in part as a result of the MDGs), there is already mounting pressure to increase the number of goals dramatically to reflect all their priorities. There is concern amongst interest groups to ensure their issue is not left out – and for good reason. The MDGs, as outlined in the first chapter, matter because they have influenced priority themes of major donors and governments, influencing programmes and funding priorities. The alignment in many cases of the MDGs to programmes and funding is incentivising a sense of competition between priorities.

If global goals are to have any impact in terms of driving global action there is general agreement that they need to be relatively few. Yet, in restricting the number of goals, the risk is that key priorities for people in extreme poverty in diverse locations may be missed altogether. This points to the importance of clarity on the purpose of goals and targets at a global level, and the need to combine these with national commitments to action. A set of global goals can provide an important global compact against which overall progress can be tracked. Mandating the establishment of national level commitments would complement this by providing space for establishing specific and/or additional priorities and appropriate targets at national and sub-national levels. With a view to a global framework with universal application it would also play a critical role in setting out the commitments to which each individual government can be held to account for their contribution to global goals, including in relation to investments in domestic poverty reduction, advances in policy coherence for development and progress against international cooperation targets.

Insight 2

The interconnections between different priorities really matter.

Whilst there was divergence across the communities relating to what their most important issues were, everyone could point to the interconnected nature of their priorities. Participants' descriptions of access to their priorities often reflected the extent to which each priority was dependent on access to another, an income for food, land for food and income, food for health and education and so on.

Furthermore, as discussed further down, the data highlighted important factors affecting participants' ability across the case studies to secure their priorities, such as discrimination, and their ability to shape and challenge government policy and practice. Across a number of case studies the challenges for women in securing access to land and/or the means to invest in it were highlighted, and at the same time, across the case studies women were more likely to feel unable to express their opinions at local levels, or to access or influence decision-making.

This interconnectedness points to the need to address the critique of the MDG framework as promoting a single issue-based approach. Given the global nature of the MDGs and their formulation as thematic goals with narrow parameters, the MDGs have tended to promote top-down application, with each goal being pursued largely in isolation. The synergies between goals were not articulated, resulting in missed opportunities for efficiencies and coordination. For example, addressing gender inequality (MDG3) is essential to an effective HIV response (MDG6). Women, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, are disproportionately affected by HIV: they are at a higher risk of infection, and they also face greater barriers to access treatment, care and support. They are disproportionately burdened with caring responsibilities for family and community members. National policies on HIV and gender fail to articulate and address the linkages between women's inequality and the HIV response – as do the MDGs²⁸. While the UN in particular has sought to respond to this challenge in recent years, overall there has been inadequate attention to the interdependency of development outcomes sought, or the principles or processes governing their implementation at national and local levels²⁹.

The experience of people in this research, however, tends to support an approach in which interconnections between their priorities are addressed in a holistic, integrated way tailored to their context. People experiencing poverty need to be allowed to be the primary agents in defining and articulating solutions to their problems if they are to be addressed effectively. Incorporating and actively promoting a sense of interconnectedness of priorities into a new framework is central. This poses a significant challenge to the articulation of new global development goals. Not only does it need to reflect specific priorities; if it is to be effective it also needs to facilitate integrated approaches to addressing any combination of these priorities, in particular as they are experienced by people living in poverty at local levels.

“We have a lot of difficulties because we do not have jobs. If we had jobs, we would have electricity; we could send the kids to school and pay rent. If we had jobs we would have a better life.”

(Haiti, mixed focus group)

Insight 3

Reliance on family, friends and local community is a central coping strategy.

The self-reliance of the communities in this research in the face of extreme poverty is reflected in the diverse range of coping strategies they have developed. Nearly a third of the people in the research reported having to get by on their own without assistance from anyone. Overall, family and friends remain the most important source of help, followed by Church and NGOs. Under 30 per cent of participants reported receiving any level of Government support in relation to their priority issues.

Commonly cited coping mechanisms included borrowing to make ends meet, support (material and non-material) from family, and neighbours, and in some cases schools and local markets. Seeking day-labour and selling of assets were noted in a few cases.

Women and girls were more frequently associated with coping mechanisms such as reducing food consumed, being removed from school to work or search for food, and in the case of Malawi even forced early marriage or prostitution.

Most participants across the case studies are heavily dependent upon natural resources for income generation activities, food, and in some cases medicine to get by. The case studies also revealed how fragile some of these strategies are in the face of environmental changes and shocks such as the weather.

The Participate synthesis report highlights the ingenuity displayed by people living in poverty to cope with their situation³⁰, as well as the increasing uncertainty, insecurity and volatility characterising the experience of poverty for many people due to macro-level shocks such as climate change. The findings note that people living in poverty are continually having to make difficult trade-offs to manage short-term needs, resulting in some cases in negative long-term consequences, as reflected in this study, such as when children are withdrawn from school to work, as referred to in the communities in Haiti, Pakistan or Sierra Leone.

The proposals put forward by participants in relation to their priorities closely related to their existing coping strategies, suggesting that appropriate additional supports were those that would build on existing capacities and strategies. Participants' proposals were not lists of aspirational demands; they related primarily to the adequate provision of basic services such as health or education, or social protection for the poorest. Notably, participants' proposals also highlight the importance of support to establish a more enabling environment, whether for agricultural production, income and employment opportunities, or other activities. This resonates with findings from the Participate synthesis report which emphasises the importance of building on local knowledge, capacities, assets and networks if change is to be sustainable.³¹

If the post-2015 framework is to support communities to become more self-reliant and resilient, it needs to build on their existing capacities and strategies, placing far greater focus on development processes as well as outcomes, and on empowering people as the active agents of their own development. This would mean stepping away from a predominantly outcome focused approach, underscoring once again the importance of determining action and assessing progress from the bottom-up.

“It is very expensive for our children to receive a good education. As a father, I make sacrifices in order that my children can go to school even though I don't have the financial resources to do so. Sometimes I sell belongings that I have at home in order that they can continue.” (Nicaragua, male)

“Erratic rains mean it is difficult to produce food. Small farm land so insufficient space to grow crops even if rains were good.”

(Malawi, female)

Insight 4

Services and supports may exist but barriers undermine access for the poorest groups.

The level of basic service provision varied across the different case studies. In some cases, provision was inadequate or non-existent. In other cases, services existed, but many participants were not able to make use of them. The problem of accessing supports and services was highlighted across all the case studies. Barriers to access consistently raised included costs, whether official costs or necessary bribes, and were noted as affecting participants' ability to access education, health and other services as well as income opportunities. Other barriers related to geographic location and travel difficulties.

Another barrier, highlighted across a number of case studies as undermining participants' access to services, was illiteracy, lack of education or information. These affected people's knowledge of existing supports and services as well as their ability and/or confidence to pursue these.

The Participate synthesis report highlights extensive evidence of the difficulties experienced by the very poorest people in accessing infrastructure, services, support and opportunities. According to those findings, where services exist they are sometimes inaccessible to the very poorest people as a result of a lack of information on their existence, because they simply don't have time to explore or pursue opportunities with all their time dedicated to coping strategies, or because of barriers such as costs and distance.³²

Discrimination can undermine access to basic services. In the case of key target populations affected by HIV, the criminalisation of drug use, sex work, homosexuality, and even the transmission of HIV itself can drive affected people underground and limit their access to services enormously. Dedicated strategies are required to target necessary services towards the most marginalised communities, but the focus on outcomes under the MDG framework diverted attention from the importance of removing barriers that inhibit access to services for the most disadvantaged groups. If the post-2015 framework is to be an effective tool for enabling the poorest people to access services and supports, it needs to actively address the barriers they encounter in accessing these.

“They speak about free schooling and then in the middle of the year they ask parents to pay the school.”
(Haiti, youth)

“Where we live in the country side, it is hard to get medicine. Only aspirin is available.”
(Nicaragua, male focus group)

“Being a tribal, I haven't had education and so don't have information about government schemes.”
(India, male)

Insight 5

Discrimination is a significant barrier in accessing supports, services and opportunities. Multiple intersecting forms of discrimination, in particular gender-based discrimination, lead to disproportionate vulnerability.

Participants across the case studies consistently highlighted experiences of discrimination as a significant barrier in accessing supports and services. Overall, half the participants directly identified discrimination as a major obstacle to achieving their priorities. When asked about barriers to accessing their priorities, moreover, many more referred to discrimination-related barriers. Experiences of discrimination on the basis of socio-economic status, for 'being poor', and gender-based discrimination were highlighted in every case study. Other forms of identity-based discrimination, their extent and their impacts varied according to context. Discrimination based on political affiliation came across strongly in Nicaragua for example, while in India being tribal, and in Pakistan being a bonded labourer, in conjunction with being of a particular caste and religion, were seen as the primary factors in identity-based discrimination.

Discrimination on the basis of socio-economic status was described in terms of poor people's inability to afford official costs or requisite bribes, but also of being treated differently by service providers as a result of their perceived status. Participants in Pakistan highlighted indirect discrimination of poor people based on the lack of investment in public services which are used almost exclusively by people living in poverty.

In four case studies, India, Pakistan, Nicaragua and Haiti, discrimination based on caste, religion, being tribal or rural, were referred to simultaneously with discrimination based on their 'socio-economic status', reflecting the multiple and intersecting nature of the discrimination experienced.

Gender-based discrimination was noted by some participants as compounding other forms of discrimination they experience. In the questionnaire, out of 120 responses by women, 76 female participants thought their lives would be different if they were a man. Across the case studies, the de jure or de facto unequal treatment of women in accessing supports and services, land ownership and job opportunities were cited as factors in their disproportionate vulnerability. Coping mechanisms in times of difficulty were noted in a number of case studies as disproportionately affecting women and girls, affecting their access to food as noted above, and to education. While no questions were asked in relation to gender-based violence, violence against women was referred to explicitly or implicitly by a number of female and male participants across a number of case studies.

“Municipal authorities provide attention based on your social status. When you arrive at an institution and they see that you are a campesino (peasant farmer), they leave you sitting there. They make you wait, and sometimes they don't meet with you.”
(Nicaragua, male)

“It would be worse if I were a woman. They do not receive any benefits, and it is even worse if they haven't studied.”
(Nicaragua, male)

“Access to fertiliser subsidy is easier for men.”
(Malawi, female)

“Us women in rural communities suffer a lot in the hands of our brothers. They still do not allow us to access family property.”
(Sierra Leone, female)

“We are often denied employment because we are women. They say that only men can do the work.”
(Nicaragua, female)

Social norms shaping views on appropriate activities and responsibilities for women were also highlighted in all the case studies as affecting the activities and opportunities open to them. Examples included freedom of movement, income-generation activities and participation in decision-making at various levels.

The fact that participants across all case studies felt that they were discriminated against because they were poor is indicative of the ways in which identity-based discrimination can result in a series of deprivations, contributing further to the discrimination experienced and compounding people's situation. This underscores the importance of tackling discrimination and inequality to achieving progress in eradicating poverty, with implications for policy and practice from global to local levels. This insight resonates strongly with the Participate synthesis report, which highlights the impact of social norms that divert resources from those most in need, including the traditional patriarchal systems that discriminate against women in the management and distribution of resources.³³

The prevalence and persistence of discrimination against women is particularly concerning. Gender-based discrimination continues to compound other forms of identity-based discrimination. In certain case studies the low recognition of gender-based discrimination reflects the entrenched nature and level of acceptability of gender norms, and in certain cases, for example Pakistan or India, where gender is one of a range of intersecting forms of discrimination. Gender-based discrimination presents an added layer of discrimination with which women must contend within all groups of disadvantaged people and people experiencing discrimination, resulting in disproportionate vulnerability and additional barriers to progress. Today, the majority of people living in poverty globally are women.³⁴

Data on who has and has not benefitted from the MDGs indicates that many of the poorest people and groups who experience discrimination have benefitted least.³⁵ The MDGs have not been effective in tackling discrimination or promoting inclusion due to the focus on narrowly defined outcomes and lack of attention to local realities. In relation to the HIV response, for example, many countries have concentrated epidemics affecting particular groups who often do not have the access to services they require, due to legal and social barriers including discrimination and criminalisation. This has had severe ramifications for the continued spread of HIV. If the cycle of poverty in which many people are trapped is to be broken, the post-2015 framework needs to find ways of addressing discrimination as it is experienced at a variety of levels.

“When I was attending school, my brother committed a crime for which my mother had to spend the money she could have used to pay my school fees. I had no option but to drop out of school.”

(Sierra Leone, female focus group)

“Few people who have money and some social status in the village can be invited to make decisions about the community.”

(Sierra Leone, female)

“There are no rules but masculinity is very exploitative- they mistreat us women. There is a lot of abuse spearheaded by men.”

(Malawi, female focus group)

“People are interviewed during the development of the Municipal Investment Plan. However, although some projects are prioritised, most investment goes to infrastructure (latrines, roads...). These are not the priorities of my community, but that's what is prioritised.”

(Nicaragua, female focus group)

Insight 6

Participation does not equal influence.

Experiences of participation varied across the case studies. With the exception of Sierra Leone and Malawi, more than half of participants felt they can voice their opinion on issues of concern in their community. Half of participants felt however that they are not confident that their solutions will be taken into consideration, and two thirds also felt they did not have sufficient information about local government decisions.

The context in relation to participation and to influence decision-making varied between geographic locations; in Pakistan for example where key decisions in relation to priorities such as health, education, land and housing, were often taken by landlords, or India and Nicaragua where official spaces for participation exist but are felt to be ineffective.

Various forms of discrimination also were noted in relation to access to or influence over decision-making. Education levels, income level/economic status and being, or being associated with an authority figure in the community, were noted as impacting on people's ability to influence decision-making.

Across all countries participants felt disempowered and experienced a significant lack of control over decisions that affect their lives. Participant views on their experiences of participation reflect much of the critique around participatory approaches, including that participation can take place without resulting in any impact on decisions made or their implementation. A number of participants indicated that experiences of tokenism, where participation takes place without accountability, can result in disillusionment.

Participants' current and future ability to attain their priorities is contingent in many respects on whether they are able to influence the policies and programmes that affect them. Importantly this involves participation not only in the design of policies and programmes, but also in the review of their implementation. Engaging people not only to identify their priorities, but to also understand their experiences of them, focuses attention on quality and accessibility. This is conducive to more responsive and appropriate policy making and implementation, but also supports the building of people's individual and collective capacities to shape their own lives, an intrinsic end in integral and sustainable human development.³⁶

The Participate synthesis report notes that in 70 per cent of the 84 studies reviewed, how people experience interventions in their lives is as important to them as the focus of any intervention. It indicates that public policies can often perpetuate stigmatisation, including self-stigmatisation, rather than empower people living in poverty.³⁷

The MDGs pay little or no attention to the role of participation in development. While the MDGs emerged following the ascendancy of participation in development discourse and practice, the lack of attention to participation, either as a development end and priority in itself, or as critical in practical terms to effective implementation of the MDGs, is stark.³⁸ If the post-2015 framework is to enable people experiencing poverty to be agents of their own development, enhancing their participation and capacity to influence decisions which affect them, needs to be an objective and outcome of the framework and its implementation.

“We are responsible for this. We do not know how to write complaints properly. We are illiterate, we can't talk properly, we are like blind people. This is why our demands are not met.”
(India, male)

“I would like for there to be dialogue with representatives in my community in which no one is excluded, and for people to come and ask about our needs and find positive solutions to our problems.”
(Nicaragua, female)

Insight 7

Perceptions of accountability of those in authority influences people's hope in a different future

While varied according to issue and case study, high levels of dissatisfaction with government performance in providing support or assistance were reported by participants in relation to their priority needs.

Nearly half of the participants (46%) said they had no one to turn to when the Government is not performing well in relation to their priority issues. Most people identified traditional leaders as someone whom they could tell if they were dissatisfied with the Government's performance, but they were often noted as having limited influence over official government.

In most case studies, accountability mechanisms were referred to; however, across all case studies participants struggled to identify an example of where they had successfully sought and achieved accountability from authority figures at the community or local government level. Pervasive corruption and the fact that in many cases those in authority were both the perpetrator and the accountability channel were seen as undermining the possibility of holding those in authority to account and achieving change.

The case studies demonstrated the problem of accountability mechanisms that exist but are ineffective, tokenistic and open to the same corruption experienced in relation to services and supports. Without the three components of effective accountability; responsibility, answerability and enforceability, the possibility of participants to seek and achieve change is significantly impeded.

The participants across the different case studies had mixed views as to whether greater accountability and change were possible. In a number of case studies they saw potential for change if accountability mechanisms were enhanced, and if people are able to participate effectively.

In two case studies, the media was noted as possible channels for exposing issues. In both Haiti and Pakistan, NGOs were noted as actors people could approach to support them in putting pressure on the government.

Among those that felt change was unlikely this related to their perceptions of the entrenched nature of power and influence, as well as their limited capacities to seek change.

In three of the case studies, participants perceived certain dangers related to demanding accountability, including consequences such as death. In Haiti, the vast majority of participants refused to answer questions regarding their relationships with Government.

Despite the clear sense of injustice expressed by many participants in relation to both individual experiences and their situation as a whole, many participants believed that accountability was simply not possible because in their experiences power effectively resides in the hands of the perpetrator. The barriers cited above, such as lack of education, distance, costs involved, and social norms, undermine the belief and confidence of many people that accountability is possible, or their due.

While a lot of emphasis has been put on reporting on the outcomes of the MDGs, they have done little to strengthen accountability at local, national or international levels. There is much debate about whether and how to strengthen accountability under a post-2015 framework. A key consideration for the post-2015 framework needs to be how such a framework can support strengthened, effective accountability mechanisms at global, national and local levels that facilitate the active participation of people living in poverty, in the implementation of the framework, but also beyond it.

“Government stops us accessing facilities. Our elected representatives would never want our lives to improve because if our lives are improved who will serve them and be a bonded labourer?”

(Pakistan, male)

“We ask the Sarpanch about it. Every time he asks 20/30 Rupees and says that he has sent the form to the BDO. But nothing happens.”

(India, mixed focus group)

“We have being constrained by the culture of silence, we fear to meet the teachers and challenge them on the issue because we are illiterate and even the school management committee would not listen to us.”

(Sierra Leone, female focus group)

“All government, politicians and all departments are corrupt; no expectation from them, no one monitors them, and if someone does this, he would be killed.”

(Pakistan, male)

5. Conclusions and Recommendations for the Post-2015 Framework

This research points to the need for a very different framework to the MDGs beyond 2015, if it is to effectively support people living in poverty to achieve their priorities. The overall insights resonate strongly with other participatory studies carried out in recent years, around the need to focus attention back on key principles and processes underpinning human development.

Firstly, they underscore the importance of recognising the appropriateness of different goals at relevant levels, their purpose and impact; secondly, the research highlights the interconnectedness of people's priorities and the need for global goals to foster integrated approaches; thirdly, the research highlights the level of self-reliance of communities based around local coping strategies, and the need for any global framework to strengthen these; fourthly, it highlights the barriers to supports and services, especially discrimination, and the need for an equality agenda to inform action at all levels under a framework; finally, it emphasises the key role of participatory and accountable governance in the achievement of people's priorities and the need for this to be seen as both an end and a means in development processes. In this final section, we consider how a human rights-based approach can address these issues and offer a more effective post-2015 framework, which ensures people are able to become full actors in their own development.

International Human Rights Accountability Mechanisms³⁹

Human rights mechanisms include certain UN human rights treaty bodies – such as the Human Rights Committee that oversees compliance with the International Covenant on International Civil and Political Rights; the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.⁴⁰ Along with regional human rights courts and other mechanisms, these bodies play judicial or quasi-judicial roles, allowing individuals to lodge complaints, where States have ratified relevant optional protocols. The treaty bodies also have a broader oversight function; allowing civil society organisations to submit reports and information to them, in parallel to the reports that State parties submit on their compliance. The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) procedure under the Human Rights Council also provides a degree of international political accountability, as do Council resolutions on topical and emerging human rights issues, and the Special Procedures mandate-holders it appoints, such as the Special Rapporteurs on the Right to Food, an Adequate Standard of Living, Extreme Poverty, and Freedom of Opinion and Expression.

The international human rights bodies generally have a supervisory or oversight role rather than an enforcement function. However, they serve an important role in requiring States to justify their development efforts and outcomes in the light of human rights principles, setting targets and benchmarks, exchanging data, identifying trends and challenges. Such mechanisms enhance the answerability of States and also scrutinize whether adequate resources are being allocated and if national mechanisms of redress exist, issuing recommendations for strengthening domestic accountability. Importantly, these international mechanisms strengthen the efforts of civil society to influence a State's conduct, offering additional and international spaces for highlighting violations. This is particularly helpful in situations where Governments disregard civil society concerns at national levels, or seek to reduce the space for civil society to perform its functions of watchdog and advocate.

The work of many Special Procedures mandate-holders has been extremely relevant to the MDGs. They have been at the forefront of efforts to integrate a human rights perspective in the implementation of the MDGs and are making important contributions to the post-2015 debate.

In 2011 the Human Rights Council endorsed the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, considered the authoritative global reference point for business and human rights. These provide all actors, from Governments to civil society, investors and the international community with a tool for monitoring impacts of business activities on human rights. The standards set out how States and businesses should implement the UN "Protect, Respect and Remedy" framework's three pillars, including the State's duty to protect human rights, corporate responsibility to respect human rights, and the need for access to remedy for victims of business-related abuses. An Expert Group has been set up to promote their implementation. Adequate and appropriate regulation of the private sector is critical for the delivery of public goods and services and in the management of natural resources in line with human rights obligations and principles.⁴¹

³⁹ Adapted from 'Office of the High Commissioner For Human Rights and Centre for Economic and Social Rights, 'Who will be accountable? Human Rights and the Post-2015 Development Agenda'. (2013) New York and Geneva. Ps 50, 53.

⁴⁰ For a full list of Human Rights instruments and mechanisms see the website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Pages/WelcomePage.aspx>.

⁴¹ UN (2013), Global Thematic Consultation on Governance and The Post-2015 Development Framework, Consultation Report. P26. Available at <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/governance/finalreport>. Accessed 28/8/2013.

1. Goal setting needs to happen at the right levels, to support local priority setting.

The insights from this study point to the importance of local specificities and contexts in shaping people's priorities, and their ability to pursue them. The new framework needs to consider carefully the purpose of goal setting at the global level. Determining the impact of the MDGs on government policy and action, whether developing country governments, donor country governments, or other actors, has been difficult. Lessons learned from the experiences of the MDGs, highlight the importance of translating global goals into national policy and action if goals are to be appropriate to national and local contexts, and if implementation is to be effective and conducive to tracking. This indicates strongly that a post-2015 framework will have to play a more explicit and effective role in incentivising action at national and sub-national levels by, inter-alia, combining global goal setting with the establishment of national and sub-national commitments, and ensuring their integration into national policy frameworks.

Calls for greater attention to national context and implementation, and for a framework with universal application are supported moreover by changes in the context of global goal-setting this time around. Spiralling inequality in many rich countries and emerging economies in recent decades, and the disproportionate impacts of the economic downturn and austerity on the most vulnerable people, have thrown a global spotlight on poverty in all countries. Sustainable development, like poverty, is a challenge common to all countries, but the causes, consequences and responsibilities for environmental destruction and degradation vary significantly. There would therefore be significant added value in combining global goals on poverty and sustainability with national and sub-national poverty and sustainability commitments in all countries, to reflect national and sub-national contexts.

A meaningful way of framing the post-2015 framework would be to focus the goals on the progressive realisation of human rights commitments as laid out in international law. Acknowledging the existing human rights commitments and obligations to which goals relate would significantly strengthen the moral, political and legal standing and credibility of the framework. This would acknowledge the right of every person to be free from hunger, to an education or to a healthy environment, and the obligation of governments to respect, protect and promote these rights, rather than seek socio-economic outcomes for the percentage of the population deemed feasible. Recognising people living in poverty as rights-holders, with the ability to claim their rights from governments as duty-bearers, is much more profound and empowering than being considered passive recipients who may benefit from support when and if it is available, and an important reaffirmation of the social contract underpinning democratic societies. This is important given evidence of the sense of humiliation, powerlessness and hopelessness experienced by many people living in poverty, as reflected in many participant responses in this study.

Nearly all the priorities put forward by participants in this study relate directly or indirectly to economic or social rights which they are entitled to under international law, and in some cases national law. In recognition of the financial and institutional resources required for the promotion, protection and fulfilment of economic and social rights, the principle of progressive realisation recognises that in many cases these obligations may require time to be met in full. The principle of progressive realisation demands however, that States demonstrate their efforts towards realisation of these rights, including through their policies, plans and resource allocation, if they are not to be found in violation of their obligations under international human rights law. Furthermore, minimum standards apply immediately which must be achieved by the State directly or in conjunction with other actors.⁴²

Such an approach, underpinned by legal instruments and principles, would provide clarity on the responsibilities of national governments, ensure coherence with existing obligations and establish links to existing reporting and accountability mechanisms. National governments are by no means the only actors in focus under a rights-based approach, but the primary importance of the relationship between people and their government is emphasised, and the need for implementation processes in which this is the central relationship, is underscored.

Recommendations

A post-2015 framework should:

a

Have universal application, establishing international consensus on where global impetus and increased international cooperation are needed.

b

Incentivise enhanced international and national level action, establishing global goals and mandating the elaboration of national and sub-national level goals, targets and indicators.

c

Explicitly serve the fulfilment of human rights by, inter-alia, reaffirming the full set of social, economic and cultural, civil and political rights of all people everywhere, linking goals and targets (global and national) to existing human rights obligations, and integrating framework accountability mechanisms with national, regional and international human rights accountability mechanisms.

2. Address the interconnectedness of people's priorities.

This research reaffirms the interconnected nature of people's priorities, and of the factors affecting their access to them. The single issue MDGs have, however, promoted programmes designed to achieve particular objectives often without acknowledging or acting on the interconnections between different goals. A new framework needs to actively promote action to address the interconnections between priorities, and the factors that impact on their pursuit by people living in poverty. The human rights principles of 'indivisibility, inter-relatedness and interdependence' focus attention on the interconnections between realising different rights, including economic, social and cultural rights, and civil and political rights. This provides a lens with which to approach a post-2015 framework to ensure it responds effectively to the challenge of promoting joined-up action in both its content and its implementation.

Coherent approaches are also critical if a global post-2015 framework is intended to address poverty and sustainability in an integrated way. Advancing policy coherence for sustainable development in all countries should be acknowledged as a central objective of an integrated agenda. Evidence of the impacts of certain development interventions, and more recently sustainable development policies such as biofuels policies, highlight the importance of putting human rights at the centre of a development framework, so that policies and interventions strengthen the resilience of the poorest and most marginalised people, and do not further exacerbate vulnerabilities.

Recommendations

A post-2015 framework should:

a

Reaffirm the human rights principles of indivisibility, interrelatedness and interdependence, and mandate their integration in the implementation of the framework at all levels.

b

Reflect a balance within global, national and sub-national level goal sets, between socio-economic rights and outcomes, and the civil and political rights and processes that underpin their realisation for all.

c

Provide global impetus to advancing policy coherence for sustainable development, designating human rights standards and obligations as the universal norms and standards governing poverty eradication and sustainable development policies.

3. Support local strategies to build sustainable and resilient livelihoods and communities.

This research indicates the variety, and the fragility, of existing strategies employed by participants, and their ability to identify the kind of supports, services or other interventions that could support them to improve their lives. The Participate synthesis report concludes that interventions not based on a deep understanding of local context and dynamics are often inappropriate, can result in conflict, dependency and/or deepen the marginalisation of some groups.⁴³ This highlights the importance of a post-2015 framework incentivising action at national and sub-national levels that builds on the existing capacities of people living in poverty, enhancing their ability to contribute actively to their own development. This includes increasing the access of people living in poverty to resources, enhancing their capacity to represent issues that matter to them, and to support collective responses to problems.

This emphasises the importance of engaging in participatory processes with people living in poverty to identify global goals, but importantly also in the translation and elaboration of global goals into national and sub-national level commitments, targets and indicators to ensure appropriate and responsive national and sub-national action. Participatory approaches provide a basis for building on existing capacities, networks and assets, and engaging with the formal and informal processes and norms most relevant to people's lives.⁴⁴ Recalling the preceding conclusion, participation of people living in poverty is necessary to support identification of the inter-linkages between people's priorities and the barriers they face in accessing them, and to address the trade-offs they face. Participation of people living in poverty is critical not only in the design of policies and programmes, but also in the review of their implementation. Engaging with people to understand their experiences of supports, services and other interventions focuses attention on quality and accessibility. This is conducive to more responsive and appropriate policy making and implementation, but also supports the building of people's individual and collective capacities to shape their own lives, an intrinsic end in integral and sustainable human development.⁴⁵ A human rights-perspective lends weight to this approach, recognising people as rights-holders, critical actors in development processes and the primary agents of their own development.

Recommendations

A post-2015 framework should:

a

Be shaped by the the priorities, views and experiences of people living in poverty. People living in poverty should be appropriately supported to participate in debates at various levels that are influencing the post-2015 agenda.

b

Promote, pursue and actively provide for the participation of people living in poverty in the establishment of national and sub-national level goals, targets and indicators, and in their monitoring and review at all levels.

4. Address the barriers experienced by people living in poverty in accessing services, supports and opportunities, especially discrimination.

This study highlights both commonalities and differences in experiences of identity-based discrimination. It indicates the pervasiveness of gender-based discrimination and the prevalence of experiences of discrimination based on socio-economic status. At the same time, the findings indicate how context shapes the form and experience of discrimination, and how socio-economic discrimination is often, in practice, a composite of other forms of identity-based discrimination.

Lack of attention to the barriers to accessing services, supports and opportunities under the MDGs is seen as responsible, at least in part, for the lack of progress among the poorest and most marginalised people. Extensive evidence reaffirms the fact that the poorest and most marginalised are mainly those suffering from various and often multiple forms of discrimination.⁴⁶ This research indicates the extent to which inequalities and discrimination are entrenched and perpetuated by many policies, practices and social institutions. It indicates how this can trap the poorest and most marginalised people in poverty and lead to a sense of hopelessness.⁴⁷

Applying a human rights perspective provides a normative and legal basis with which to challenge discrimination and inequality. A human rights approach invokes obligations to achieve substantive equality with full protection under the law, and non-discrimination, with prohibition of distinctions based on impermissible grounds that have the effect or purpose of impairing the enjoyment of rights. Furthermore, the right to equality and the principle of non-discrimination ensure that the people and groups usually excluded from decision-making are purposefully and actively identified, and that they are meaningfully included in the design, implementation and review of action. This is critical if the status quo is to be effectively challenged.

This has a number of important implications for a post-2015 framework for development. Adopting a rights-based approach would mean prioritising the people whose rights are currently being denied or violated, identifying the barriers to their ability to enjoy or claim their rights, and disaggregating implementation and outcome data to provide an equality lens on progress. It would involve identifying actions needed to remove the direct and indirect barriers that prevent people from securing their rights. Under human rights obligations primary duty for addressing these barriers lies with the state, with their

⁴³ Leavy J, and Howard J, (2013), 'What matters most? Evidence from 84 Participatory Studies with those living with extreme poverty and marginalisation'. The Participate Initiative, Institute for Development Studies. P23.

⁴⁴ Leavy J, and Howard J, (2013), 'What matters most? Evidence from 84 Participatory Studies with those living with extreme poverty and marginalisation'. The Participate Initiative, Institute for Development Studies. P15.

⁴⁵ Ibid P20.

⁴⁶ Melamed C (2012), 'After 2015: Context, politics and processes for a post-2015 global agreement on development'. Overseas Development Institute. P16.

⁴⁷ Leavy J, and Howard J, (2013), 'What matters most? Evidence from 84 Participatory Studies with those living with extreme poverty and marginalisation'. The Participate Initiative, Institute for Development Studies. P15.

action subject to international scrutiny. This is appropriate given the localised, contextual nature of many barriers, coupled with the importance of objective standards and external pressure in promoting change, in relation to entrenched social and cultural norms in particular.

No country in the world has successfully eradicated discriminatory norms and practices and, as noted above, inequalities are increasing rapidly in many countries and regions. Establishing equality as a central objective under a post-2015 agenda, under-pinned by the international legal human rights framework, would provide both a normative boost to the fight against inequality and discrimination, and enhance accountability for progress at global and national levels on this critical component of a poverty eradication agenda. The level and persistence of discrimination against women is indicative of the significant continued efforts needed to ensure women, in particular, enjoy equality of treatment in both law and practice. The impact of a post-2015 agreement on advancing gender-equality and empowering women, will be a litmus test of its success as a framework for tackling poverty.

Recommendations

A post-2015 framework should:

a

Tackle discrimination by including equality as a global goal with universal application. This should be accompanied by participatory processes and empirical work from local levels upwards to identify additional context-specific forms of discrimination and establish equality targets and indicators in national and sub-national goal sets as appropriate.

b

Equality should be mainstreamed across all goals and targets, incentivising action to tackle discrimination and advance equality under each goal area. Groups experiencing discrimination should be enabled to actively participate in identifying appropriate qualitative as well as quantitative indicators to provide disaggregated data to assess progress.

c

Commitments to tackling gender-based discrimination should be explicitly prioritised and addressed in both global and national level commitments.

5. Foster empowerment and enabling people living in poverty to influence decisions which affect them.

While experiences of participation across the case studies in this research varied, the majority of participants felt that they were unable to influence decisions affecting them at local governance and government levels. As discussed above, participation is both an inherent end as well as a critical means in human development. Ensuring that the people who are intended to benefit from, or who will be impacted by policies and programmes, are able to shape their content and implementation, supports relevant, well-targeted action, and recognises their dignity as actors in their own development. Participation, moreover, is critical to accountability and achieving change. Participants in this study were unable to give examples of having successfully sought accountability from official duty-bearers in relation to their grievances, in accessing their priorities, and had little confidence that this was possible. Their experiences of governance were of powerlessness rather than as actors; official duty-bearers

were not obliged to answer for decisions made or actions taken, grievances remained unaddressed and existing laws or sanctions unenforced.

Participation without influence, anchored in accountability, is tokenistic and inhibits transformational change. Evidence from extensive studies with people living in poverty, highlights the inherent link between people's ability to access their priorities, their ability to have their voices and views heard, and their ability to hold those in authority accountable. The Participate synthesis notes that more than a third of participatory studies with people living in poverty over the last twelve years, referred directly to the impacts of governance on their situation. The report emphasises the need to address constraints regarding the access of people living in poverty to formal governance structures through interventions to enhance government transparency, accountability and responsiveness, and mechanisms to foster and support transparency and accountability of local level institutions.

This points to the misplaced distinction within the MDG framework which defines development in terms of economic and social outcomes, and the failure to factor in the civil and political processes that underpin securing them for all.

Participation in public affairs is a human right and both participation and accountability are core human rights principles. Applying a human rights-based approach to a post-2015 framework places both participation and accountability at the centre of development processes, as the fundamental hinge on which democratic society turns. A human rights-approach to enhancing participatory and accountable governance is critical furthermore, if transformational change is to be achieved. A rights-based approach interrogates whose rights are unmet or being violated and the root causes, challenging the power of those whose interests are served by the status quo.

Whilst extensive monitoring has been conducted on the MDGs, with the UN in particular spearheading efforts to improve international reporting and accountability, a consistent criticism of the MDG framework has been the inadequacy of accountability at all levels for its implementation. Who will be held accountable if certain MDG targets are unfulfilled by 2015 and how is unclear, and throws into question the purpose and credibility of such global compacts. A key consideration in relation to a post-2015 framework needs to be how such a framework can support strengthened, effective accountability mechanisms at global, national and local levels that facilitate the active participation of people living in poverty in the implementation of the framework, but also beyond it.

The international human rights framework provides an existing legal framework and architecture on which accountability mechanisms for implementation of a post-2015 framework can and should be built. While centring responsibility with national governments as noted above, international human rights law establishes responsibilities for other governmental actors, and Guiding Principles provide moral obligations for non-governmental actors. National and international human rights accountability needs strengthening, including improving accountability of powerful non-governmental actors such as private sector actors. Deliberations on accountability under the post-2015 development agenda provide a critical opportunity for doing so.

Participation and accountability are processes rather than one-off events or stand alone mechanisms however. This highlights the importance of strengthening both formal and informal mechanisms and channels for participation and accountability, at national levels and in particular at local levels, and the importance of securing other civil and political rights, such as the right to association and assembly, and the right to freedom of expression.

The challenges experienced by people living in poverty in influencing decisions that affect them, and seeking accountability for violations of their rights, are common to rich and poor countries and would be an appropriate global goal under a universally applicable framework for poverty eradication and sustainable development. Existing initiatives to strengthen bottom-up, community based, social and human rights accountability in relation to performance against standards, and for fulfilment of official commitments should be supported and scaled up.

Recommendations

A post-2015 framework should:

a

Reaffirm the human rights principles of participation and accountability in legitimate, people-centred development.

b

Integrate effective accountability mechanisms with existing national, regional and international human rights accountability mechanisms, and improve accountability of powerful non-governmental actors.

c

Actively involve the participation of people living in poverty and marginalisation in monitoring and review of implementation at all levels.

d

Establish participatory and accountable governance as a global goal for universal application, to be translated and elaborated on at national and sub-national levels in participatory processes with people living in poverty.

Conclusion

This research was carried out with the aim of amplifying the voices, views and experiences of people living in poverty. It is hoped that for research participants and readers alike, the research has contributed to reflection not only on development priorities, but on the means and processes by which they are pursued, how they can be achieved effectively, and for the benefit of those most in need of support. Much work remains to be done to ensure people living in poverty are empowered and enabled to participate in setting the agenda between now and 2015, and to unpack and elaborate on the practical implications of some of the insights and recommendations set out in this report. Trócaire is committed to continuing to pursue this agenda in collaboration with our Partners and others.

From Trócaire's perspective, the voices, views and experiences of people experiencing poverty need to be the starting point and the measure of success of any new framework. Trócaire's experience over 40 years is that poverty and injustice are allowed to continue where respect, protection and promotion of human rights norms, principles and laws are lacking. The role of a post-2015 framework for development is not to replace existing human rights conventions and laws, but rather to give real, meaningful impetus to their implementation. This report has set out the reasons why the MDG framework fell far short of playing this role, and proposed a number of ways in which the potential of a new global development framework can be harnessed by applying a human rights-based approach to its content, implementation and review.

Human rights and governance issues are often contentious topics in intergovernmental fora. While there is increased interest and advocacy around the inclusion of governance and human rights in a post-2015 agenda from a wide variety of actors, advocates are likely to meet reluctance or dismissal from many corners. Positive developments include the recognition by the international community in the outcomes of the High Level Meeting on the MDGs in 2010, and the Rio +20 Anniversary Summit in 2012, of the role of human rights in achieving the MDGs and sustainable development. Importantly however, while a range of rights were explicitly reaffirmed, civil and political rights have been largely absent in these assertions. This study has indicated the importance of the full range of human rights to development processes based on their indivisibility and inter-relatedness.

The demand side for greater recognition of issues like equality, rights and participatory and accountable governance is increasingly clear furthermore. This is clear in countries that have reported positive progress against MDG indicators and yet witnessed significant civil and political upheaval in recent years, and in calls across the world for more transparency and accountability within national and international financial, economic and political institutions. The outcomes of consultations on a post-2015 framework, facilitated in 39 countries by the Beyond 2015 campaign, call for human rights, equality and justice, environmental sustainability, and participatory and accountable governance to provide the pillars of a post-2015 framework.⁴⁸ In UN-led global consultations with a wide variety of civil society and governmental stakeholders, governance was a critical thematic issue, with significant support emerging for the integration of human rights and rights-based approaches⁴⁹, echoed in the report of the UN Secretary General, 'A Life of Dignity for All'.⁵⁰ It is clear that a development agenda for post-2015 that denies a vision and agenda for development that goes beyond socio-economic outcomes will not be credible or acceptable.

No country in the world has succeeded in securing the human rights for all people within their territory. No country has eradicated poverty, achieved equality, or sustainability. Trócaire contends that the international human rights framework codified within the UN, provides the universal legitimacy and applicability that can provide the basis for a truly global, people-centred framework for development.

The social, environmental and economic challenges to which a post-2015 framework must respond are systemic, and a post-2015 framework alone cannot provide the solutions. Trócaire believes, however, that it can and must make a critical contribution. Today's context demands a very different framework to the MDGs, one in which there is greater shared responsibility, strengthened action at national and sub-national levels, strengthened collective and individual accountability, and enhanced coherence around a people-centred agenda. A human rights-based approach provides an existing, universal normative and legal framework, that can and must provide an anchor and a compass to ensure that the poorest people are placed at the centre of concern, as governance at national and global levels seeks to navigate change in a context of increasing uncertainty.

⁴⁸ Beyond 2015 (2013) 'Civil Society Demands for a Post-2015 Agenda from 39 Countries'. Synthesis Report. Available at <http://www.beyond2015.org/civil-society-demands-post-2015-agenda>. Accessed 28/8/2013.

⁴⁹ Global Thematic Consultation on Governance and The Post-2015 Development Framework, Consultation Report. P26. Available at <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/governance/finalreport>. Accessed 28/8/2013.

⁵⁰ Report of the UN Secretary General (2013), 'A Life of Dignity for All' accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015' A/68/202.

Annex 1: Questionnaire and Focus Group Schedules

Questionnaires asked, in summary:

- Everyone wants to feel well and live a good life. What does a person need to feel well and live a good life?
- From these, what would you say are the three most important things for you to have a reasonable quality of life?
- Which, if any of these three, would you say you currently have?
- What, if anything, is stopping you having these three important things?
- Considering your priority issues, how do you manage/ deal with these problems on a day to day basis?
- Do you receive any help (material or non material support) in dealing with these problems?
- Do you feel you are denied these important things because of you are a man/woman, or because of your; religion, social origin, ethnicity, health status, or for any other such reason?
- Do you think your life would be different if you were a man/woman? If so, how?
- How satisfied are you with your Government's performance (local Government) in providing support or assistance? (ranging from 'very dissatisfied' to 'very satisfied')
- When you are not happy with the Government's performance, is there anyone you can tell to make the Government perform better?
- What service or assistance do you need to be fully satisfied in relation to the three priority issues identified?
- How do you view (agree, disagree, neither) your ability to participate in decision-making in relation to public services in your community? (ability to voice opinion; have the necessary information about local government decisions; you can propose solutions to the leaders about community problems; you feel confident your solutions will be taken into consideration by the leaders; you feel the leaders allow you to participate in decision-making process, such as through meetings or discussions; you are only told what leaders have already decided and you have no input to the decision-making; you are not told about decisions made in your community; you are not asked your opinion about decisions made in your community)

As far as possible focus groups were split into one group of men, one group of women, one mixed group and one group of young people. Focus Groups included discussions around 3 topics, built around one of the most common priority issues identified by the group during the questionnaire stage.

The 3 topics were

1. Participation:

- Identify the participants' experience of participation in decision-making with respect to their priority issue.

2. Accountability:

- Introduce concepts of responsibility and accountability.
- Identify the participants' experience of being able to hold decision-makers accountable for decisions and actions with respect to their priority issue.

5. Equality (Non-discrimination):

- Determine whether or not some people/groups are discriminated against in relation to the priority issue.
- Determine to what degree the inequality prevents people/groups fully enjoying their determined issue.

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