Improving poverty measurement in Sri Lanka

Description

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Recently, conceptual advances in poverty measurement have been made:

- acceptance of the multidimensionality of poverty
- parallel use of monetary, capability, social exclusion and participatory approaches
- better measurement of the dynamics of poverty and vulnerability
- a rudimentary but growing agenda for the measurement of empowerment
- empirical work comparing the results of different approaches
- availability of non-traditional instruments of data collection

Reviewing studies that measure poverty in Sri Lanka, this paper finds that poverty measurement in Sri Lanka has also evolved considerably:

- establishment of an official poverty line
- adoption of the cost of basic needs (CBN) poverty measurement methodology by the Department of Census and Statistics
- operationalising the multidimensionality of poverty via the human poverty index and multidimensional composite index
- ne w survey instruments and methodologies
- considerable data generation â??capacityâ?• of the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) and the Statistics Department of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL)
- availability of a large amount of administrative data

However, there has not been much progress in measuring the dynamics of poverty, mainly because of a lack of panel data. Measurement of vulnerability and empirical work comparing the results of quantitative and qualitative approaches are also scarce. The existing data still has to be made into an information system and there is a lack of highly disaggregated data as well as data for the North and the East.

Given those weaknesses and strengths, the following steps toimprove poverty measurement, data generation and dissemination in Sri Lanka are proposed:

- identifying user needs
- developing appropriate equivalence scales to assign household expenditure to individuals
- deriving relative and subjective poverty lines
- constructing baseline datasets for the North and East
- combining qualitative and quantitative methods of poverty analysis and data collection

- making surveys consistent and comparable across time and instruments
- introducing multi-topic surveys
- generating panel data
- publication of consistent and comparable poverty statistics
- maintenance of an internet site with information on data for monitoring poverty
- construction of public use data files from the Census and relevant household surveys

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