

**National Research Institute
Discussion Paper 109**



URBAN POVERTY IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

**by
Donovan Storey**

**NRI
National Research Institute**

First published in July 2010

Copyright © 2010 The National Research Institute.

NRI Discussion Paper No. 109

The NRI is an independent statutory authority established by an Act of Parliament in 1988 and confirmed by the *LASER (Amendment) Act* 1993. NRI's main aims are to undertake research into the social, political, economic, educational, legal, environmental, and cultural issues and problems of Papua New Guinea and to formulate practical solutions to these problems. Research results are published in the following NRI publication series:

Monographs	Spotlight with NRI
Discussion Papers	Post-Courier Index
Special Publications	Bibliographies
Occasional Papers	Additional Publications

Direct any inquiries regarding these publications to:

The Publications Sales Coordinator
National Research Institute
P.O. Box 5854
BOROKO. NCD. 111
Papua New Guinea

Tel: (675) 326 0300/326 0061 ext. 338
Fax: (675) 326 0213
E-mail: nri@nri.org.pg
Website: www.nri.org.pg

ISBN 9980 75 173 8
National Library Service of Papua New Guinea

ABCDE 20143210

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and not necessarily those of the National Research Institute.

ABSTRACT

Urban poverty is likely to become one of the most important development challenges facing Papua New Guinea (PNG) in coming decades and threatens progress towards a number of national development targets and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). And yet despite recognition of urban poverty in the National Urbanisation Policy draft and the Medium Term Development Strategy (MTDS 2005-2010) (GoPNG 2004a), there remains little consensus of what constitutes urban poverty, how it should be measured, and how it should be tackled. Poverty results from a complex array of factors.

Adequately responding to urban poverty requires an understanding beyond that of insufficient income and encompasses inadequate access to services, vulnerable livelihoods, a lack of capabilities and exclusion from social, economic and political life. This discussion paper argues for greater attention and therefore research on the dynamics of urban poverty in order to improve the effectiveness of urban poverty reduction strategies. In particular, this paper argues that existing quantitative data and case study research has failed to affect change at the urban planning and policy level. More attention to the relationship between urban poverty and forms of urban exclusion would provide greater opportunity for a participatory and policy-oriented urban poverty strategy for PNG. There is an urgent need to improve the lives of the poor and the social conditions in the country's towns and cities, the viability of which will be increasingly important to PNG's development prospects.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper greatly benefited from interviews conducted in PNG as well as from discussions which took place during a seminar on urban poverty held at the Lamana Hotel, Port Moresby, in June, 2008.

I am grateful to staff and management of the NRI for their support of this research. I am also grateful for the comments and suggestions of two reviewers on an earlier draft.

This study has also drawn, in part, on a report on Urban Poverty in Asia and the Pacific, which I conducted for the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

Donovan Storey

Introduction: The Challenges of Measuring the Significance, Scale and Meaning of Urban Poverty

This paper argues that poverty and inequality significantly undermines PNG's urban and national development prospects. Effective responses are hindered by the absence of evidence-based policy which itself is a result of a paucity of data which seeks to understand, define and measure urban poverty. The paper also outlines trends and examines approaches to urban poverty, arguing that its under-estimation limits effective debate and policy development. The study ends with an overview of future directions and work needed to better identify and react to urban poverty in PNG, with broader relevance for an urbanising Pacific region.

Urban poverty and inequality, and the increasing divide between rich and poor, has recently been highlighted as a crucial social, economic and political issue for cities globally (UN-Habitat, 2009). Though poverty research has overwhelmingly focussed on rural locales, poverty has been recognised as an issue in Pacific Island cities for some time (Morauta, 1984; Bryant-Tokalau, 1995; UNDP, 1998; Government of Vanuatu, 2002). There is no shortage of approaches to poverty, but the complexity of poverty makes it problematic to build consensus on universal measurement criteria. Urban populations are rarely static and confined to a particular location. For example, circular migration between 'urban' and 'rural' domains raises questions over the interpretations of rural and urban poverty captured in research and surveys¹.

Tracking people's livelihoods is equally challenging as income is likely to be met from a number of formal but especially informal sources; such as markets, informal sector work or criminal activity. Consequently, incomes can and do fluctuate on a weekly and even daily basis, as do the relative costs of urban living. The number of people dependent upon these incomes is an important consideration. Household members may vary over time as do the number of income earners in proportion to dependents. Recent MDG targets, based as they are on monetary bottom lines of individuals, have been widely criticised as failing to account for such urban dynamics (Satterthwaite, 2004; Ravillion *et al.*, 2007).

Capturing urban poverty and the 'poor' in an urban setting then is a challenging task. Decisions over what methods and variables to use, and how we should most effectively define poverty (as an income line, lived experience, set of exclusions and so on), are important questions for both research and policy. Though there remain standard approaches, especially relating to income, consumption and expenditure, there is by no means complete satisfaction with either the quantity or quality of available data or its adequacy in demonstrating contemporary urban poverty and policy options (interviews, 2008). As such poverty research has been influenced by calls for more qualitative accounts, in order that policy makers hear 'the voices of the poor' (Narayan, 2000).

Focussing on people's capabilities to live full and proper lives and the impact social exclusion plays in limiting such opportunity has recently become more mainstream in poverty analysis and policy (Sen, 1999; 2000). This literature and

¹ All too often rural and urban poverty are played off against one another in terms of priorities and importance. The reality is that rural and urban poverty, as well as prosperity, are intimately linked. On a recent article examining data on rural poverty in PNG, see Allen *et al.* (2005).

2 *Urban Poverty in Papua New Guinea*

research has undoubtedly enriched understanding and debate on the factors which contribute to the inability of individuals and communities to achieve good health, access to education, to develop social networks, stable livelihoods and so on; each of which is important in providing a person or community with the tools they need to live a valuable and fulfilling life (Sen, 1999:87).

And yet despite this broadening of debate on poverty, and the pervasiveness of poverty in many urban centres, there remains remarkably limited attention given to *urban* poverty and what needs to be done. This has clear implications for planning and policy. If poverty programmes are to succeed they must reflect and draw from the complexity and extent of urban poverty in particular social, political and cultural contexts. This undoubtedly also requires a ‘commitment to know and act’, which involves a greater challenge of putting urban poverty on the public and policy agenda.

The rapidly growing and socially complex urban centres of PNG add to these established problems in poverty-related data and research. Defining urban poverty is not only challenging with regard to meaning and measurement but also provides spatial dilemmas, exposing problems in defining urban boundaries and urban citizenship. In the Pacific Islands (and especially Melanesia), peri-urban populations, often legally rural but effectively urban, arguably suffer from the greatest marginalisation and highest levels of poverty (Connell and Lea, 2002; NCDC, 2007).

On the other hand they may also have greater access to urban agriculture and land for husbandry, rarely accounted for in numerical surveys. In the past urban ‘citizenship’ (and therefore access to services and infrastructure) was conferred through identity cards and similar forms of identification. Today, ethnicity, place of origin or land tenure may be used to define and exclude. Peri-urban populations, ‘urban villages’ and squatter settlements are often unaccounted for but are increasingly significant in the country’s urban growth, raising contemporary dilemmas of defining who is urban and where the planning/policy boundaries of cities lie (Storey, 2003).

A re-focus on urban poverty is both strategically and conceptually important in PNG. As the country undergoes a historically significant transition from rural to urban life it becomes more important to define and act on urban poverty and inequality and the impact of monetization and commoditisation on urban life. Interest in urban poverty has also been reignited by the recognition that globally more people now live in urban settlements than rural.

Although Pacific Island countries have a lower level of urbanization (approximately 25 percent across the region) there will be almost two million Pacific Islanders living in towns and cities by 2010. PNG’s rate is lower still (at around 20 percent) but this figure conceals peri-urban and many ‘settlement’ populations, which constitute a growing number of urban Papua New Guineans and the fastest growing population. Given recent annual urban growth rates of 4.5 percent, it is estimated that by 2030 there will be 3.5 million urban Papua New Guineans, comprising around 35 percent of the national population (National Parliament of PNG 2000:9).

How is urban poverty measured?

Abbott (2007) has recently noted that in the Pacific, levels of poverty are as high in urban as they are in rural areas, and poverty head counts from HIES data support that urban poverty is significant and widespread across the region. Recognition of urban poverty and commitment to devoting resources (human and financial) to address these needs though has been slow coming. In part this is a function of capacity to collect and analyse data, but also to formulate a course of action (Gibson and Olivia, 2002). In PNG recent poverty debates have resulted from donor and international agency direction. Though useful as a catalyst, such activity has tended to result in fragmented data and policy objectives, weakly 'owned' by government agencies responsible for subsequent policy implementation and monitoring (Hayward-Jones and Copus-Campbell, 2009).

Defining and measuring urban poverty is constrained by limited information on urban populations (especially over time), as well as the inadequate capacity and will to dissect, disseminate and act on information². The weakness of all forms of data in PNG and the consequences for effective public policy development and monitoring has been recognised for some time. As the MDG Technical Working Group (2004:40 and 44) summarised:

- Without complete and reliable data, it is difficult to assess effectively the impact of any policy or programme and without the right indicators, important problems might not be detected.
- Many existing policies, strategies, and reports etc in PNG are full of totally inconsistent demographic, socio-economic and other data for which the source is often unknown.

In PNG even urban populations are 'best guesstimates' and often exclude both informal settlements and peri-urban 'villages'. It is not surprising then that little is known regarding livelihoods, forms of vulnerability and levels of poverty. Even where data exists, they are rarely utilised for the purposes of addressing urban poverty. Two examples of this are the continued separation of urban development policies into sectoral approaches rather than an overall strategy for understanding and improving urban quality of life; and the tendency to 'borrow' existing data (collected for other purposes) to extrapolate broad urban trends.

That there is little specific data on urban poverty is a constraint to developing well targeted policies and programmes. Parry (2004) has described this as a 'catch-22' facing many statistics offices in the Pacific; a lack of resources negatively impacts the collection, analysis and dissemination of data, which in turn creates a situation where such activities are seen as lacking value to policy makers. This compounds the weak capacity of statistics and the paucity of information available and so on. This situation is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future, with the cancellation, delay or minimizing of a number of surveys in PNG over the past decade (MDG Technical Working Group 2004:40-41).

² This is a broad problem for national development planning. As one reviewer of an earlier draft of this paper noted, 'in PNG, nothing is counted'.

What is known about *overall* poverty in PNG? Poverty lines using income and/or expenditure data remain common forms of measuring and representing poverty in PNG and elsewhere, though they may weakly reflect many other key dimensions of poverty, such as access to services, non-food expenditure, health care, levels of education and so on. The two most important post-independence surveys which are drawn upon for quantitative data are the Urban Household Surveys (UHS) of 1985–6, and the 1996 independent Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) (NSO, 1997). Indeed, much of the ‘current’ data on poverty still draws upon the 1996 survey, while comparative research (examining poverty trends) often draws across these limited surveys³. Despite clear limitations, the attraction of this data is that it can feed into easily understood and universal forms, such as national poverty lines and indicators used for the MDGs.

Data on income lines and calorie consumption have given wildly different results and therefore poverty estimates. For example, the World Bank has indicated that a likely poverty estimate for PNG (using \$US1/day at 1993 purchasing power) in 1996 was 24.6 percent. Yet, in using a poverty line that allows for 2200 calories per adult per day in 1996, an estimated 37.5 percent of PNG’s population was poor (a variation of some 13 percent of the national population, or 600,000 people (World Bank, 2004:3-5)). Estimating income poverty alone may result in similar variations, in whether ‘higher’ or ‘lower’ poverty lines are used (GoPNG 2004b). Similar variations in indicator data can be found in a number of other MDG and MTDS targets (GoPNG, 2004b; see footnote 6).

All parties work within the confinement of limited and specific data. The last significant set of national *urban* data, the PNG Urban Household Survey (UHS), was collected in the mid-1980s. The UHS consisted of 1093 households across six provinces using expenditure reporting diaries. From this Gibson (1998) was able to conclude that urban poverty was ‘considerable’, ranging between 20-30 percent. Poverty severity was most likely to be located in the largest cities, with the most vulnerable groups comprising those with limited education, without employment and living in large households (though this may include almost all urban households at one time or another!).

Most data on urban poverty since has relied upon Port Moresby⁴ as a guide and has used expenditure self-reporting from a modest number of households (325 in 1986 and 106 households in 1996). While these showed a minor fall in levels of poverty (from 33.7 percent in 1986 to 29.7 percent a decade later) there was greater evidence of a hardening of poverty (chronic and intergenerational poverty) and less likelihood of exiting poverty (Gibson and Olivia, 2002). Of some significance, data has shown a high and persistent level of *inequality* in PNG⁵.

³ The Demographic and Health Survey of 2006 provides more data, however, it will take some time before this survey impacts on the poverty literature.

⁴ In recent years there has been much more attention focussed on poverty in Port Moresby. It should be noted however that the dynamics of urbanisation and urban social conditions do vary greatly across PNG.

⁵ As a measure of this, PNG’s Gini Co-efficient is 0.51, a level of inequality on a par with several Latin American countries. On growth and inequality in PNG see also Gibson (2000).

Consequently, great variations can be found in estimating the number of urban poor in PNG. Similar to the variations in expenditure-based surveys, as a broad guide, the proportion of urban residents living in income poverty⁶ has been estimated at 16 percent, though this analysis depends on the ‘unofficial’ 1996 DHS data (World Bank, 2004: 3-5). Other estimates of income poverty place the figure at 11 percent (Gibson and Rozelle, 2003:162). These estimates are clearly significant undercounts, a point obvious to anyone who lives and works in any city or town in PNG (and which is usually acknowledged by the authors themselves).

It is not surprising then that serious reservations exist over the quality and depth of ‘hard’ data in PNG (interviews, 2008). Much of current policy on poverty works as if there is reliable, valid and consistent official survey data. Yet the weakness or incompleteness of such information is widely known and so there is reluctance to depend upon such information as the basis for resource allocation. The limitations of formal economic statistics and modelling in widespread conditions of informality are clearly an important impediment to formal enumerations⁷ and necessitate the need to move beyond these.

Finally, while collecting formal data on poverty provides a number of challenges, effective analysis and use of information for poverty policy and action has also proved problematic. As an example, the Urban Household Survey of the mid-1980s was never fully analysed by the National Statistics Office (NSO) for policy use, and more broadly the NSO has been unable to undertake a number of surveys in part or whole for a number of years. This may be explained by a lack of capacity, but also reflects the lack of political will to interrogate, disseminate and act on information. Such inaction also suggests problems when the process of collection and subsequent ownership of such information is divorced from those who experience poverty, as is discussed below.

How is urban poverty understood?

Data are important as they generate knowledge and ‘facts’ which are then used to legitimate action and allocate resources. Traditionally this has been the domain of quantitative and statistical data which has sought to take complex phenomena and produce valid and reliable statistics on poverty. However, there is significant concern over the validity and reliability of such data in PNG, as well as its relevance to the contemporary PNG context (interviews, 2008). Conceptualisations of poverty have broadened over the past two decades, stirred in part by multilateral and bilateral development agency shifts toward a more inclusive approach to understanding

⁶ There are two income poverty lines and a food poverty line which can be used to measure the urban poor in PNG. In the case of the National Capital District the lower 1996 income line was 779 Kina, the higher 1016 Kina, while the food poverty line was assessed at 543 Kina. Usually the lower line is used to assess urban poverty (Gibson and Olivia, 2002). The national averaged income poverty line used is 399 Kina.

⁷ Ostensibly for reasons of safety, enumerators often avoid collecting data from informal urban settlements. For similar reasons it is unlikely that any income data accounts for the country’s significant robbery problem. Informal sector workers have also proven reluctant participants in income surveys. Each of these populations make up a very considerable part of the urban economy and, in some cities, close to its entirety.

poverty. Also, the emergence of civil society organisations and NGOs has added a community-based alternative voice on the experiences of poverty⁸.

Recent research has attempted to move beyond income and towards understanding the underlying causes and nature of poverty and the best course for policy intervention. We have learnt, for example, that poverty is felt differently by women and youth, though limited research has been conducted on their specific needs and experiences (see Jourdan, 2008)⁹. In examining the Bugiau community in 8 Mile settlement, Port Moresby, Barber (2003) found that rather than individual incomes, the key determinant of poverty was the dependency level on collective incomes. For many years *wantok* ties have provided insulation against individual vulnerabilities, yet it is also clear that such 'safety-nets' have been in decline for some time in urban areas (Monsell-Davis 1993).

Recently a growing crisis of street children in the country's cities indicates that *wantok* and family systems have broken down under the weight of needs and stress of change (*SMH*, September 10, 2009), despite recent years of economic growth (Manning, 2005; *Post-Courier*, September 28, 2009). Finally, while headcount figures are often employed, they tell us little about the depth of poverty, its causes, and degrees of inequality (MDG Technical Working Group, 2004:56). To date, official quantitative data on poverty has shed limited light on such questions, with implications for the development of effective responses. Indeed, given the absence of data, and capacity to use what information exists, it appears urgent to broaden our approaches and develop new tools in order to enlarge our understanding of what poverty means in particular contexts, including from the poor themselves (see also McGee and Brock, 2001; Mitlin, 2005).

Rarely are income and expenditure the indicators the poor themselves would solely choose to define their own conditions and lives (ADB, 2002; Laderchi *et al.*, 2003). 'Expert' measurements of poverty, such as food baskets, individual incomes, and geographical proximity of infrastructure etc often do not account for what the poor see as their needs, such as security of tenure, *access* to services and transportation, rights, information and so on. In addition, headcount methods may not account for the skills and assets of urban poor households and communities, which are typically undercounted and subsequently underutilised in poverty assessments and poverty reduction programmes (Mitlin, 2000).

Satterthwaite (2002) has been a critic of income-related data as a measure of urban poverty, arguing that narrow and unreliable parameters miss much of the poor (due to unrealistically low poverty lines for city residents) and the nature of poverty (which transcends income). These standard approaches and indicators result in 'nonsense statistics' yet still form the basis of much analysis and policy action. In place,

⁸ Examples in the Pacific include the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECREA) (Fiji), the Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT), the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) and regionally, the Foundation for the South Pacific International (FSPI).

⁹ This has meant that debate is often reactive to a particular crisis or driven by international targets, such as the MDGs. While the latter has provided welcome impetus international approaches have limited focus on sectoral targets, such as sanitation, or basic targets such as reducing the number of (urban) citizens living on one or two US dollars a day or less. To some extent, this has perversely undermined public and government ownership of debates on poverty, but also arguably acts to limit how poverty is understood, measured and addressed.

Satterthwaite calls for research to go beyond income measurements in accounting for the complexity of urban poverty and towards greater understanding of the following:

- the impact of inadequate income;
- the nature of inadequate, unstable or risky asset bases;
- inadequate shelter;
- inadequate provision of public infrastructure;
- inadequate provision of basic services;
- limited or non-existent social or economic safety nets, intensifying vulnerability;
- inadequate legal protection and rights; and
- voicelessness and powerlessness.

In recent years there have been attempts to develop broader indicators and measurements of poverty in PNG. In particular, the National Poverty Reduction Strategy (NPRS; 2004-2020) was based on participatory poverty assessments and a series of workshops. It provided a richer definition of poverty (see also below) which highlighted a lack of opportunity and access to basic services. While the NPRS gave explicit attention to the emergence of urban poverty (especially located in 'settlements') it does not have any official policy standing, though a number of its elements have been incorporated into PNG's MTDS (2005-2010).

The Asian Development Bank's 2002 study on poverty in PNG also allowed both rural and urban respondents to identify key priorities for poverty policy. Responses included access to jobs and other ways to earn cash; access to land for farming; education, water supply, health care, transport and markets; skills training on small business and better access to capital, credit, markets, and transport; and a social care system for elders, single parents, disabled people, and other disadvantaged groups (ADB, 2002:18; GoPNG, 2002). In qualitative assessments undertaken (in both urban and rural areas) for the NPRS, those self-identifying as poor cited a lack of cash; low education; poor health and hygiene and lack of access to infrastructure as key determinants (GoPNG, 2002). This resulted in a *PNG Definition of Poverty*, that being:

Lack of access to economic and financial growth opportunities and the inefficient delivery of, and lack of access to basic services. The factors contributing to this definition of poverty include: weak governance, weak social support systems, unsustainable use of natural resources, unequal distribution of resources and a poorly maintained infrastructure network (GoPNG, 2002: 5)¹⁰.

Urban participants further identified particular drivers and outcomes of poverty which were relevant to conditions in the country's towns and cities. A lack of employment and cash was seen as a particular characteristic of urban poverty, resulting in an

¹⁰ The NPRS research findings resulted from a Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) exercise undertaken in 2001-2 which included over 800 urban and rural participants. An important outcome was the development of 'Five Pillars' to guide PNG's poverty reduction approach. These were 1) To improve and strengthen governance; 2) Increase development of land and natural resources; 3) Improve and maintain capacity and management of transport and physical infrastructure; 4) Improve and expand economic growth opportunities and; 5) Strengthen and improve social services. Although often referred to in official policy documents, the NPRS remains in 'draft' form.

inability to access cheap building materials (reflecting the self-help nature of much urban informal development); a lack of decent clothing; a lack of food (hunger); and a fear of personal security and crime. The latter is a particular fear of women and young people living in informal settlements and includes a 'fear of death' and the stress of constant 'day to day survival and insecurity'. Finally, urban respondents were more likely to indicate a lack of access to land and linked this to food insecurity and the threat of hunger, the latter illustrated by 'one meal a day' indicators. Insecurity of tenure corresponded with a broader set of insecurities, including the threat of eviction (from both the State and customary authorities) (GoPNG, 2002:6).

Recently, the 8 Mile community in Port Moresby have established their own website, through which they communicate experiences in the daily struggle for life and the challenges of living in a marginalised (and stigmatised) community. Community members identify domestic abuse, HIV/AIDS, unemployment and violence as being particularly important drivers of exclusion and marginalisation. The website is also clearly used as a forum for communication to the 'outside' world, through which visitors to the community are encouraged and positive activities in the community are stressed¹¹. The use of IT may be a useful forum for such communities in the future, and a potentially valuable source of information and exchange with a national and global audience. How to 'scale-up' and integrate such information with macro studies remains though a challenge. To date, despite the rich qualitative data which has emerged from such community-based understanding, very little has transferred into policy.

Consequently, contemporary poverty policy lacks a clear and consistent direction and focus beyond what Manning (2005:148) has referred to as 'motherhood and apple pie' development planning statements. In the next section I look to evaluate pathways beyond the problems of weak macro data and fragmented case study research. In particular I argue the need to move beyond solely focussing on quantitative goals and toward fostering the inclusion and integration of the urban poor and marginalised urban communities into economic, social and political life. In so doing, policy and planning needs to build from community-government partnerships, through which broader development policies and urban planning trajectories are understood, negotiated and addressed.

Combining data and building partnerships: towards inclusive and evidence-based poverty research and planning

While debates about the merits of quantitative and qualitative methods are important the end-point of using these tools is to effectively *understand* and *act* on poverty. Understanding poverty should ideally occur concurrent to action and the development of targeted interventions and support which must ultimately reduce vulnerability and poverty (Gibson, 1998). Definitions and measurements of poverty can either lead to the development of policies and practices which reinforce passivity and top-down development programmes, or can allow the poor to become stronger agents of change. This reinforces the importance of not just measuring and calculating

¹¹ In 2009 a photographic exhibition, music CD, and set of life histories and poems were also highlighted. The website offers an innovative attempt to break down the powerful and negative representations which exist of informal settlement communities. See <http://www.8milessettlement.com/index.html>.

what the poor do or do not have, but assessing whether there are appropriate opportunities for the poor to take action to escape poverty. As Carney *et al.*, (1999:8) have noted ‘poverty alleviation will be achieved only if external support focuses on what matters to people ... in a way that is congruent with their livelihood strategies, social environment and ability to adapt’. The capabilities and will of institutions to engage with community needs and concerns is especially important in PNG, where institutional and governance weaknesses have been highlighted as particularly important factors in poverty (Cammack 2008)¹².

Much richer outcomes result from a combination of methods and data. Merging data, or combining two or more data sets (such as expenditure profiles of female headed households) and/or methods (transect walks and community mapping) can provide valuable information which can be compared and triangulated. When mixed approaches have been used they have offered a rich source of information on both the economic constraints facing the poor but also their *experience* of poverty (which may or may not highlight income as a core factor). This is especially important in understanding poverty beyond macro estimates and in the complexities of poverty. For example Laderchi *et al.*, (2003) have shown that data rarely neatly overlaps in assessments of who is poor and who is not. In their study those seen as lacking capabilities were not considered to be income poor and vice-versa. The authors conclude that the methods and measurements we use to assess poverty are critical for the outcomes of *who* is considered poor and *why*.¹³

A leading example of this, originating from the Philippines in the 1990s, illustrates what can be learned about poverty through participatory mechanisms which also aim to bring about greater ownership and responsibility of resulting poverty programs. The Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS) involves communities themselves in developing indicators, data gathering and profiling across health, nutrition, housing, water and sanitation, basic education, income, employment and peace and order (PEP-CBMS 2008)¹⁴.

THE CBMS strategy emerged in response to a need for poverty-monitoring systems that could reflect and be adapted to local contexts and capacities, which could be conducted by local researchers, and used by local-level planners. It acts as a tool for capacity building and sharing of knowledge within communities, rather than as an extractive tool for distant policy makers, programme managers and international donors/NGOs. It also has the benefit of supplementing income-expenditure surveys which are otherwise too costly and infrequent to be used by local governments in poverty-reduction planning. CBMS programmes can also be adapted to local poverty characteristics, such as levels of child labour, the status of women and school attendance (Reyes and Due, 2009). Perhaps the true value of the approach is not just

¹² Governance has been highlighted by AusAID as perhaps *the* key factor in achieving a number of MDGs in the Pacific region (AusAID, 2009), especially at the local level. An important future challenge lies in strengthening the capacity of local government and institutions in service delivery and urban management (Parker and Praeger, 2008; Storey, 2009).

¹³ What is useful from combination is not only the greater empirical richness that results, but also the opening up to different and even competing voices and worldviews – including the views of the ‘recipients’ of poverty programmes themselves (Editorial, 2001).

¹⁴ A further example of quantitative/qualitative case study method is small area estimation, which combines census data with socio-economic surveys. Community generated data are sometimes used to create maps identifying areas of poverty that can be compared across cities.

in its participatory nature but the leading role Local Government Units (LGUs) play in constructing methods of research, identifying needs, targeting and monitoring of programs, which includes dissemination and evaluation of findings back to the communities monitored. Local ownership and knowledge of urban poverty and the poor has helped in defining solutions which are tied to project implementation and monitoring¹⁵. A key lesson in several surveys has been that reducing community isolation and increasing inclusion is seen as a prerequisite for successful poverty programs, as much as the other way around.

Participatory and community-based approaches undoubtedly enrich our understanding of poverty in particular cultural contexts. In PNG there are in fact multiple terms for poverty, and the poor. Each indicates a subtle differentiation of the nature and cause of poverty relative to the person or community involved. Two common terms for the poor are *rabis manmeri* (literally ‘rubbish person/people’), which is often used as an insult, and *tarangu manmeri* (a miserable or unfortunate person/people), more related to poverty resulting from factors beyond control and thus deserving of support. Similarly poverty in terms of need may also be referred to as *nogat mani* (without money) a clear indication of the link between poverty and income¹⁶.

Community identification of poverty can be an important tool in distinguishing not only types of poverty, but also its origins. Over a decade ago Sen (1999; 2000) noted that poverty was as much a lack of capabilities as it was a lack of income (income being only one of the necessary capacities to achieve freedom from poverty). A lack of capacity to shape one’s life is both an outcome of poverty and marginalisation, but also a source. In the case of squatter settlement programmes Frediani (2007) found that residents who were interviewed indicated six desirable freedoms as key to their lives. They were shelter with dignity; the freedom to individualise gains and assets; the freedom to expand; the freedom to afford living costs; the freedom to have a healthy environment; the freedom to participate; and the freedom to maintain social networks. ‘Economic freedom’, that is higher levels of income, only appeared in one of the dimensions indicated by the urban poor themselves. Of note, income was seen as important in increasing people’s participation in urban life, rather than the vehicle by which to consume more or to have more goods. These dimensions are not too dissimilar to what the urban poor have identified in participatory poverty assessments in PNG.

More recently, research on capabilities has included the importance of understanding various forms of exclusion (Kabeer, 2006; Saith, 2001). Social exclusion as analysis primarily focuses on investigating the processes that lead to poverty and the dynamics which lead to deprivation of individuals, communities and groups within society. Ergo, a recent Australian Government definition of social *inclusion* stipulates that people have the resources, opportunities and capabilities they need to participate in education and training; participate in employment; connect with

¹⁵ Ultimately the ability to use local data effectively will be related to the capacity of decentralised institutions. The quality of local government interventions are potentially hampered by three things: a lack of access to data on urban poverty at the local level; a lack of human resource capacity to collect alternative and local data and; a lack of financial capacity to act on this information. See also Devas (2001).

¹⁶ I am indebted to Dr. Michael Unage for reminding me of the importance of these terms.

people through activities; utilise social services; and have a voice in decisions which affect them (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009:3). This implies that poverty reduction strategies should then focus on increasing incomes, but also enhancing social integration and the opportunity to participate in urban life (de Haan, 1999)¹⁷.

There have been recent efforts to understand the ‘cost’ of exclusion and its relationship to poverty, particularly the absence of services. These costs include:

- the exclusion from services because of the illegal status of the house or its occupants;
- the high cost of informal payments, of bribes and of harassment by law enforcers;
- the high opportunity cost of waiting for a free service by a public provider, which forces many to choose a private provider and pay a high fee;
- the high health cost of living in an unhealthy urban environment characterized by inadequate infrastructure and growing pollution and; and
- the threats and consequences of eviction and environmental hazards because of the concentration of the urban poor in hazardous areas of the city or town made worse by a lack of infrastructure and services (ESCAP, 2006).

Such ‘overheads of marginalisation’ may be compounded by government planning. For example, the ‘illegality’ associated with informality in PNG’s towns and cities often leads to marginalisation and harassment and results in thriving but expensive informal supply networks and tensions over existing resources (Goddard, 2005).

There is great merit in considering how a capabilities and social exclusion framework can inform not only definitions and measurements of poverty in PNG, but also the relationship of poverty, marginalisation and exclusion to urban planning and policy. In examining key issues facing the poor, such as housing, access to services, relationships with *wantok*, institutions and the pursuit of sustainable livelihoods, a better understanding of the constraints and mechanisms of individual and community livelihoods would provide an important local framework for understanding urban poverty which contextualises poverty within economic, social and economic power relations. In reflecting on how a capabilities and exclusion analysis could better define and measure poverty in urban PNG the following dimensions may be considered:

- urban poverty reflects limited control over economic resources, such as land, income, and assets;
- urban poverty is related to a lack of access to critical services, for example education, health care, water, sanitation and information;
- urban poverty derives from and reinforces a lack of power, respect, dignity and citizenship. It also stems from the failure of *wantok* and other safety nets. This particularly affects women and youth;

¹⁷ Sen has raised several examples of forms of exclusion which may be related to policy. They include dealing with problems of inequality and relational poverty; labour market exclusions; credit market exclusions; gender-related exclusions and inequality; health care exclusions and the issue of food security; access to markets; and poverty (Sen, 2000: 41-43).

- urban poverty results from exclusion and marginalisation, including economic (informal sectors); spatial (marginalisation of ‘settlements’); and ethnic (the denial of or conflict over resources through ethnicity) dimensions; and
- urban poverty is compounded by crime, which affects the poor both directly but also indirectly (for example, through stigmatization of whole communities by police and planners).

As is clear from this initial reflection in many cases the causes of urban poverty are interlocking and fluid. Deprivations may include the high cost of living, especially the increasing and volatile prices of key goods and basic services such as water, housing, transportation and food; increasing constraints to security of tenure in cities where access to affordable and safe land is difficult; the extra legal status of many urban poor, which increases the cost of accessing services and decreases the likelihood of subsidised infrastructure and services which exist in formal settlements in the same city; and dependence on informal sector activities, which provide sources of income but which are typically low with high levels of insecurity.

Enhancing poverty policy through deepening understanding: Some Conclusions

Where does this discussion lead us in terms of more effectively defining, measuring and acting upon urban poverty in PNG? Gibson and Rozelle (2003:164) have noted that ‘finding out where poor people live is one of the most basic pieces of information’ required for antipoverty programmes. While superficially a spatial task this also suggests that we need to know what poverty is, how we identify it, and agree on its causes and remedies. There are a number of entry points into (urban) poverty. Sen (2000) has noted ‘the poor’ is not a particularly helpful category for analysis or for policy since different groups sharing the same predicament get there in widely different ways.

Based on the above discussion it is clear that there remains a wealth of conceptual approaches to urban poverty, a number of indicators, and debate about most appropriate methods. Though weak in explanation, simple quantitative measurements remain the proxy for measuring and counting urban poverty and the poor. Yet considerable reservations are held about the quality and utility of much of this data, and the worth of macro statistics at a city or community level. Partly this reflects a need to know more about poverty in different contexts as about counting the number of poor. Likewise, as poverty is dynamic and success stories so few we also need to know about the decision making of the vulnerable and poor, and the impacts of policy upon them.

The lack of disaggregated data to the city and community level is a further constraint in measuring and understanding urban poverty using standard techniques. Where data on cities and urban poverty has been collected it has been piecemeal and largely one-off. Finding associations across and within surveys is problematic and inherently based on the level of ‘best estimates’. Various combinations, or slicing of data, are important though still do not offset the limitations of using existing statistics¹⁸. The time taken to analyse official data and use this for policy initiatives is

¹⁸ Respondents are known to either exaggerate or hide potential sources of income and spending from enumerators - for a good number of reasons (interviews, 2008).

also often too slow and public access to this information is almost non-existent (interviews, 2008). Perhaps most important of all, when 'facts' in the form of statistics have been presented on poverty in PNG they have been too easily dismissed as misrepresentations of Melanesian society.

If poverty debates are to have greater meaning and traction a challenge lies in reorienting and renewing our understanding of urban poverty in PNG through broadening both methods and measurements. In essence poverty research needs to scale down at the same time as scaling up. This presents a number of demands including the time needed for the collection of sufficient and relevant information; the need to approach poverty from different perspectives, including economic, political, anthropological and social¹⁹; the combination of quantitative and qualitative data which include oral histories, stories and experiences of poverty, including the voices of women and youth; and the need to better analyse combinations of information (Kedir, 2005)²⁰.

The call to localise understanding and action inclusive of participatory and collective action has a number of merits in PNG. No two experiences of poverty are the same, and the multiplicity of causes and contexts are unlikely to be addressed through standardised instruments (ESCAP, 2007a and 2007b). Indeed, concepts of poverty are 'geographically, historically, and culturally specific' (Toye, 1999:8). A strong argument can be made that poverty is essentially a local phenomenon that is best measured and defined locally. Additionally, if research on the causes and manifestations of urban poverty are to have any meaning, they must be connected to broader social and economic dynamics. In PNG State policy has been, more often than not, a contributor to the difficulties poor urban populations face, in particular in areas of informal sector policy, youth, 'settlements' and policing crime (O'Collins, 1999; Connell, 2003; Goddard, 2005).

If there is to be a final conclusion here, it would be a call for policy makers, donors and researchers alike to engage more seriously with urban poverty and inequality in PNG before its consequences render cities unliveable and ungovernable. To date there has been a reluctance to even recognise the existence of (urban) poverty as anything more than passing hardship²¹ (Bryant-Tokelau, 1995; Abbott and Pollard, 2004; Abbott, 2007). Yet the need to know more about urban poverty offers an important opportunity for a renewal of urban policy and planning through greater community action to identify and confront the drivers of exclusion and marginalisation. Failure to build such partnerships and act on needs will ultimately threaten the very fabric of PNG's urban future.

¹⁹ In recent years JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) (Sagir and Kombako, 2007) has developed rich ethnographic accounts of life in several settlements in the NCD.

²⁰ Despite challenges, a number of urban poor are able to escape poverty and vulnerability. Understanding urban poverty needs to include research which examines how and why people are able to escape urban poverty and what lessons can be drawn from these individuals, households and communities. Where are the successful interventions – in increased tenure security, in support for informal sector activities, and greater opportunities for youth?

²¹ This is often implicit. Findings from a recent Lowy Institute workshop equated 'extreme' poverty in PNG with 'remote and marginalised areas' (Hayward-Jones and Copus-Campbell, 2009).

REFERENCES

- Abbott, D., 2007. 'Poverty and Pro-Poor Policies for Pacific Island Countries'. *Asia-Pacific Population Journal* **22**(3):59–74.
- Abbott, D. and Pollard, V., 2004. **Hardship and Poverty in the Pacific**. Manila: Asian Development Bank Pacific Department.
- Allen, B., *et al.*, 2005. 'Poor rural places in Papua New Guinea', *Asia-Pacific Viewpoint*, **46**(2):201–217.
- Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2002. **Priorities of the Poor in Papua New Guinea**. Manila: Asian Development Bank
- AusAID, 2009. Tracking development and governance in the Pacific. Canberra: Australian Agency for International Development.
- Barber, K., 2003. 'The Bugiau Community at Eight-Mile: An urban settlement in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea', *Oceania* **73**:287–297.
- Bryant-Tokelau, J.J., 1995. 'The myth exploded: Urban poverty in the Pacific', *Environment and Urbanization*, **7**(2):119–129.
- Cammack, D., 2008. Chronic poverty in Papua New Guinea. Background paper for the Chronic Poverty Report 2008-9. Chronic Poverty Research Centre: www.chronicpoverty.org. Accessed 20 December, 2009.
- Carney, D., *et.al*, 1999. **Livelihoods Approaches Compared**. London: DFID.
- Commonwealth of Australia., 2009. The Australian Public Service Social Inclusion Policy Design and Delivery Toolkit. Social Inclusion Unit, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet: Canberra.
- Connell, J., 2003. 'Regulation of space in the contemporary postcolonial Pacific city: Port Moresby and Suva', *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, **44**(3):243–58.
- Connell, J. and Lea, J., 2002. **Urbanisation in the Island Pacific**. London: Routledge.
- Devas, N., 2001. 'Does city governance matter for the urban poor?', *International Planning Studies*, **6**(4):393–408.
- Editorial, 2001. 'Aid and Urban Development: Where are the Views of the "Recipients"?' *Environment and Urbanization*, **13**(3):3–9.
- Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), 2006. **Confronting Poverty Reduction in Asia and the Pacific**. E/ESCAP/1365. Bangkok.
- _____, 2007a. **Urban Poverty and the Working Poor: Micro- and Macro-Based Approaches for Estimating Poverty**. E/ESCAP/CPR(4)/5. Bangkok.

- _____, 2007b. Facing the challenges of urbanisation (ESCAP/CPR(4)/4), December 2007. Bangkok
- Frediani, A.A. 2007. 'Amartya Sen, the World Bank, and the Redress of Urban Poverty: A Brazilian case study', *Journal of Human Development*, **8(1)**:133–152.
- Gibson, J., 1998. 'Identifying the poor for efficient targeting: results for Papua New Guinea', *New Zealand Economic Papers*, **32(1)**:1–18.
- _____, 2000. 'The impact of growth and distribution on poverty in Papua New Guinea', *Applied Economics Letters*, **7(8)**:41–44.
- Gibson, J. and Olivia, S., 2002. 'Attacking poverty in Papua New Guinea: But for how long?', *Pacific Economic Bulletin*, **17(2)**:33–41.
- Gibson, J. and Rozelle, S., 2003. 'Poverty and access to roads in Papua New Guinea', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, **52(1)**:159–185.
- Goddard, M., 2005. **The Unseen City: Anthropological perspectives on Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea**. Canberra: Pandanus Books.
- Government of Papua New Guinea (GoPNG), 2002. National Poverty Reduction Strategy: Working Draft. Port Moresby: Department of National Planning and Rural Development.
- _____, 2004a. The Medium Term Development Strategy 2005–2010. Port Moresby.
- _____, 2004b. Millennium Development Goals: Progress Report for Papua New Guinea 2004. Port Moresby.
- Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2002. Vanuatu Poverty Survey: Analysis Report. Vanuatu Statistics Office: Port Vila.
- de Haan, A., 1999. **Social Exclusion: Towards a holistic understanding of deprivation**, Social Development Department, Dissemination Note Number Two. London, United Kingdom: Department for International Development.
- Hayward-Jones, J. and Copus-Campbell, S., 2009. **Tackling Extreme Poverty in Papua New Guinea: Outcomes Report**. Sydney: Lowy Institute for International Policy.
- Jourdan, C., 2008. **Youth and Mental Health in Solomon Islands: A Situational Analysis**. Suva: Foundation of the South Pacific International.
- Kedir, A.M., 2005. **Understanding Urban Chronic Poverty: Crossing the Qualitative and Quantitative Divide**, CPRC Working Paper 53. Chronic Poverty Research Centre: Manchester.

- Kabeer, N., 2006. 'Poverty, Social Exclusion and the MDGs: The Challenge of "Durable Inequalities" in the Asian context', *IDS Bulletin*, **37(3)**:64–78.
- Laderchi, C.R., *et al.*, 2003. 'Everyone agrees we need poverty reduction, but not what this means: does this matter?', paper presented at the WIDER Conference on Inequality, Poverty and Human Well-Being, Helsinki.
- Manning, M., 2005. 'Papua New Guinea thirty years on', *Pacific Economic Bulletin*, **20(1)**:145–158.
- McGee, R. and Brock, K., 2001. **From Poverty Assessment to Policy Change: Processes, Actors and Data**, IDS Working Paper 14. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.
- MDG Technical Working Group, 2004. Papua New Guinea and the Millennium Development Goals. Port Moresby.
- Mitlin, D., 2000. 'Addressing urban poverty: increasing incomes, reducing costs, and securing representation', *Development in Practice*, **10(2)**:204–215.
- _____, 2005. 'Chronic Poverty in Urban Areas', *Environment and Urbanization*, **17(3)**:3–10.
- Monsell-Davis, M., 1993. 'Urban Exchange: Safety-Net or Disincentive? Wantoks and Relative in the Urban Pacific', *Canberra Anthropology*, **16(2)**:45–66.
- Morauta, L., 1984. **Income, Unemployment and Welfare in Low-income Urban Areas**. Port Moresby: Papua New Guinea Institute of Applied Social and Economic Research.
- Narayan, D., 2000. **Voices of the Poor: Crying Out for Change**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- National Capital District Commission (NCDC), 2007. **National Capital District Settlements Strategic Plan 2007–2011**. Port Moresby: NCDC Regulatory Services.
- National Parliament of Papua New Guinea, 2000. **A Special Parliamentary Committee on Urbanisation and Social Development: Policies and strategies for managing urbanisation in Papua New Guinea, Final Report**: Port Moresby.
- National Statistics Office (NSO), 1997. Papua New Guinea: Demographic and Health Survey 1996. Port Moresby.
- O'Collins, M., 1999. **Isolation, Vulnerability, and Governance: Reflections on Poverty Assessments in Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Vanuatu**, State, Society and Governance in Melanesia (SSGM) Working Paper. Canberra.
- Parker, T. and Praeger, M., 2008. 'Commonwealth Local Government Forum Pacific Project', *Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance*, Number One, May:1–9.

- Parry, G., 2004. **Action Plan for Improving Poverty Statistics and Monitoring in the ESCAP Region**. E/ESCAP/505/9: Bangkok.
- PEP-CBMS, 2008. 'The Community-Based Monitoring System'. www.peb-net.org. Accessed October 30, 2009.
- Ravillion, M., *et al.*, 2007. 'New evidence on the urbanization of global poverty', *Population and Development Review*, **33(4)**:667–701.
- Reyes, C. and Due, E., 2009. **Fighting Poverty with Facts: Community Based Monitoring Systems**. London: IDRC.
- Sagir, B. and Kombako, D., 2007. **Anthropological analysis of ICDP settlement development in the National Capital District**, a report prepared for JICA and ICDP. Port Moresby: University of Papua New Guinea:
- Saith, R., 2001. **Social Exclusion: The Concept and Application to Developing Countries**, QEH Working Paper Series Working Paper No. 72. Oxford: Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford.
- Satterthwaite, D., 2002. **Reducing Urban Poverty; Some Lessons from Experience**, IIED Working Paper on Poverty Reduction in Urban Areas No.2. London: IIED::
- _____, 2004. **The Under-Estimation of Urban Poverty in Low and Middle-Income Nations**, Working paper 14. London: IIED.
- Sen, A., 1999. **Development as Freedom**. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- _____, 2000. **Social Exclusion: Concept, Application and Scrutiny**, Social Development Papers No. 1, Office of Environment and Social Development. Manila: Asian Development Bank.
- Storey, D., 2003. 'The peri-urban Pacific: from exclusive to inclusive cities', *Asia-Pacific Viewpoint*, **43(3)**:259–79.
- _____, 2009. 'Can international local government partnerships make a difference? Lessons from the Australia-Papua New Guinea Good Practice Scheme', *Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance*, Number 3, May:68–91.
- Toye, J., 1999. 'Nationalising the Anti-Poverty Agenda', *IDS Bulletin*, **30(2)**:6–12.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 1998. **Fiji Poverty Report**. Suva: UNDP.
- UN-Habitat., 2009. **State of the World's Cities 2008/9**. London: Earthscan.
- World Bank, 2004. **Papua New Guinea: Poverty Assessment**. Port Moresby: World Bank Group.