International Institute for Environment and Development

Report Part Title: A trajectory of poverty surveys in Zambia

Report Title: Interrogating urban poverty lines:

Report Subtitle: The case of Zambia

Report Author(s): Miniva Chibuye

International Institute for Environment and Development (2011)

Stable URL: http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep01279.5

JSTOR

More recently, even the World Bank has recognized that an exclusive focus on income may not be enough and that an alternative empirical approach to measuring poverty may be needed in addition. Hence, in 1993, the Bank began conducting poverty assessments that included participatory surveys. Initial investigations along these lines were designed to elicit information about an expenditure-based or income-based poverty line. For example, respondents might be asked, "What income would you consider to be the minimum needed to make ends meet?" More recent work on participatory poverty assessments is much more open-ended, interactive and qualitative, allowing people to describe what constitutes poverty in whatever dimension they choose (Kanbur and Squire, 2001).

It is clear, therefore, that there is now widespread agreement on the scientific definition of poverty as including both low income and limited capabilities to fulfil universal human needs. Perceptions about the nature of poverty, and the policy responses which follow from these perceptions, are central in deciding how best to study, measure and analyze poverty (Wratten, 1995). In interrogating urban poverty measurements in Zambia, this paper will adopt an expanded definition of poverty, embracing dimensions such as income, health, literacy and longevity.

A trajectory of poverty surveys in Zambia

The 1995 World Summit for Social Development reached a consensus on approaches to poverty, as stated in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Summit's Programme for Action, signed by 117 countries (United Nations, 1995). In planning to defeat poverty, governments agreed to issue frequent reports on the extent of national poverty, to be based on measures of both "absolute" and "overall" poverty. This was welcomed as an aid to comparable investigations in countries at different levels of development, and as a way to prevent the use of different regional measures of poverty. Further, it was seen as a way of providing genuine measures of the scale of extreme and overall poverty in the world, and of the success or failure of different policies in alleviating poverty (Rio Group, 2006).

Such discussions encouraged the Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) to conduct a number of household surveys to estimate poverty levels. Although the country's Central Statistics Office (CSO) has been collecting poverty-related data since the 1960s, the collection of poverty data for monitoring the social dimensions of adjustment programmes started in 1991 through the first Priority Survey (PS I) followed by PS II in 1993. The overall aim of these surveys was to understand and highlight social dimensions emanating from Zambia's structural adjustment programme, and to analyse how such activities affected different segments of the country's population. Among other data, the survey collected information on demographic characteristics, health care, education, labour-force supply, household income and assets, household expenditures, poverty, and household amenities and facilities.

These surveys were followed by broader surveys, the Living Conditions Monitoring Surveys (LCMSs), which evolved from the Priority Surveys. To date, four LCMSs have been published: in 1996, 1998, 2002/03 and 2004. A 2006 LCMS has also been conducted, and highlights of the findings have been disseminated to the public. However, the full report was still unpublished when this study was finalized. While these surveys are the major source of poverty statistics for Zambia, the objectives and methodologies of some of the surveys differ, making direct comparisons difficult.

3

Comparability of the Living Conditions Monitoring Surveys

The objectives of the LCMSs are broader than those of the PS I and PS II, and include:
- measuring and monitoring poverty over time for the government to evaluate its programmes of poverty alleviation and reduction
- monitoring living conditions of households over time in terms of access to various facilities and infrastructure and basic needs such as shelter, clean water, health and food
- identifying vulnerable groups in society who were unable to cope with and adjust to structural changes in the economy and were not able to afford or did not have access to basic needs of life and necessary social and economic infrastructure.
(CSO, 2004, 3)

In analysing the LCMSs, it is best to separate the 2002/03 survey from the rest, because of differences in methodology. The 1996 and 1998 LCMSs were cross-sectional consumption-data surveys implemented over a six-week time period, which limited coverage of seasonality and the influence it has on the intensity of poverty. The 2002/03 LCMS criticized the cross-sectional consumption data as not providing a good measure of poverty, mainly because the survey design did not capture changes in welfare due to seasonal variations. The 1996 and 1998 surveys took place in the last two months of the fourth quarter, when people are food insecure. Furthermore, household expenditure was captured using a recall method, prone to omissions resulting from memory lapses.

These shortcomings prompted the World Bank and the CSO to conduct the third LCMS over a period of 12 months: between November 2002 and October 2003. This survey took into consideration the aspects of seasonality and information documented in a diary by participating households. Despite the identified shortcomings in the first two LCMSs, the fourth and fifth surveys (CSO, 2004; CSO, 2006) were again cross-sectional consumption-expenditure data. These surveys are marred by the same shortcomings identified in the 1996 and 1998 LCMSs.

The comparability of household surveys over time is always of concern in poverty monitoring. Clearly, there was a significant break in survey design of the 2002/03 LCMS, which was longitudinal rather than cross-sectional or single-interview. The other surveys usually relied on a two-week recall period; in some instances, this was extended to one month or one full year depending on the assumed regularity of expenditure on certain items. However, there have also been instances where either a two-week or a one-month reference period was used for the same item, which makes aggregation and comparison difficult. CSO justifies these differences with instances when a household had not spent anything on a particular item in the last two weeks but would have done so in the last four weeks. For instance, as mealie meal is a staple food item, a one-month reference period can be more useful in case households purchase a months' supply at once.

This survey design may result in sampling and non-sampling errors leading to imprecise welfare measures such as under- or over-estimation of expenditures due to memory lapses. The 2002/03 longitudinal survey avoided such errors because of the diary method used, requiring households to record daily transactions. Therefore, the longitudinal survey stands higher chances of yielding more accurate estimates of consumption. In fact, the poverty statistics in the longitudinal survey (elaborated in the next section) yielded lower prevalence of poverty than the surveys before, which may be due to the differences in survey methodology.

4