

Chapter VI. A Poverty Monitoring and Analysis Agenda

The Government of Belarus has been conducting poverty assessments regularly since the mid 1990s. This current poverty assessment with the World Bank and the UNDP has also been conducted at the request and with the full cooperation of the government. *What happens next in the realm of poverty monitoring and analysis?* We offer a few suggestions for further discussion.

- **Updating the methods for measurement of poverty.** The collaborative work undertaken in the course of the poverty assessment to develop regional and inter-temporal cost-of-living deflators and adjustments to adult equivalence scales, is important to ensure that poverty estimates over time and space are comparable. It is also important to minimize inconsistencies between estimates of GDP growth and movements in poverty measures. The data and the technical capacity to implement these changes is there in MOSA, which is a highly competent institution. An extensive discussion is required between MOSA and other key institutions such as MOLSP on the implications of these measures for other key policy variables, such as the minimum consumption basket, the CPI, and so on. Also of assistance would be a standing capacity-building fund for MOSA to be able to regularly send its staff to international statistical institutes and conferences to be able to contribute to, and maintain links with, the latest developments in poverty measurement.
- **Improving coverage of non-income dimensions.** Belarus' regular household survey, while highly detailed in collection of income and consumption data, is relatively weak in coverage of non-income dimensions. Yet a few modifications of the HIES—as was attempted with the special module for this poverty assessment—would enable a more textured analysis of education, health, risk and social protection dimensions could be immensely improved. Given the distributional issues which have been identified, these dimensions are likely to acquire greater importance.
- **Complementing quantitative information with qualitative information.** The current poverty analysis conducted in Belarus—including this assessment—relies heavily on quantitative data. In order to verify the validity of some of the quantitative results, and to answer the “why” question behind some of the findings, a regular qualitative or participatory assessment of living conditions may be introduced in the appropriate institution.
- **Introducing a panel data component for better poverty dynamics and vulnerability analysis.** The analysis of some key poverty dynamics—such as poverty traps—was not possible given the absence of panel data, that is, data collected on the same households every year. Belarus could designate, say, 10% of the HIES sample to be tracked over time.
- **Analytical outreach to encourage data use.** While the data collection and production system is strong, there is scope to improve the dissemination of the data and to increase its use in policy analysis. In this regard it may be noted that MOSA has a clear mandate to collect and produce poverty data, but the institutional mandate for conducting poverty analysis and drawing out policy implications is less clear. Furthermore, capacity for such analysis also needs to be strengthened: for example, for several of the sectoral ministries, the availability of relevant information in the household survey and the techniques for using this data to draw out policy implications for service delivery, was relatively new. At the same time, Belarus has an almost unique and outstandingly rich set of household survey data that could be utilized to go into depth on many policy questions that the present poverty assessment has only touched.

- We would thus recommend that capacity-building funds be sought to establish an analytical and outreach program involving sector ministries, academies, institutes, universities and research NGOs. Participants from these institutions need to learn how to utilize household survey data for poverty analysis and more refined policy analysis. The apex of the poverty analysis system would require a central coordinating body. The system also needs to develop a system of disseminating findings to a wide range of users, including local authorities, civic groups, the media, and so on. A two-pronged strategy has been shown to be effective in other countries: outreach and capacity-building of line agencies, academies and universities in poverty analysis; and the establishment of an ongoing Study Fund that promotes the use of poverty data to analyze poverty impact of policies.
- **Strengthening service delivery and accountability.** Belarus can be justly proud of the elaborate system of social services it provides its population. The analysis of the preceding chapter shows that the ability of households to access quality education, health, and social protection services makes a large difference to their living standards in the present, and their prospects for the future. Yet the analysis also shows that a sizable proportion of the

Box 17: Service Delivery, Trust and Local Authorities

In general I do not fully trust the authorities. I experienced so many humiliations and insults from them after the release from prison that I do not want to ask for any assistance from them. They do not need me... (Gomel)

If the situation worsens, I will not appeal to government authorities as I do not trust them. In my opinion, our court system operates against ordinary people. I am totally disappointed with it. In my community nobody trusts law enforcement agencies or other government bodies. (Gomel)

Several times we have requested the village council to give us additional land but we got a polite refusal. Four years ago we cultivated the deserted land owned by the collective farm and we were fined for that (the amount of fine made up half of the disability allowance; the land was confiscated and it is still deserted). (Grodno)

My wife supposedly has the right to maternity leave, but she was forced to resign and she immediately lost membership in the collective farm. On the next day after she resigned we needed a machine for planting potatoes. We had to pay a full price - 88000 BYR for 0,35 ha though she had worked in the collective farm since 1993. She was thus punished because 4 years ago I was illegally dismissed and my wife filed a complaint, my rights were restored and those who violated the law were prosecuted. In rural areas, however, such things are kept in mind. Now she may also try to prove her right to maternity leave instead of resigning, but we are so exhausted by the situation that the laws giving us sufficient rights are not enforced in practice. (Grodno)

The procedure is humiliating both physically and morally. I felt miserable and humble because I could not resist humiliation to which my son was subjected. I was told to get out. Now I had to fight either for a supplement to a scholarship or compensation for unused sanatorium voucher though we have statutory entitlements. I think that our poverty helps officials responsible for enforcement of laws to pretend that there's no relevant law. (Grodno)

An opportunity has emerged recently to get out of the crisis situation through non-governmental associations which help to get information needed for addressing yet another social problem. There's an opportunity for self-education. It is important for me to learn how to find solutions and moral balance through concrete actions. People are kept in poverty by fear, helplessness, lack of trust in their own strength. It is not enough to give people clothing and food, it is more important to teach them confidence and to create opportunities for implementing their strength. Only changes in the mentality can dismantle the old system. By joining hands we become capable of solving problems which we are unable to address through only personal effort. (Grodno)

Our generation has been brought up with no initiative skills...My skills and ideas acquired in childhood do not meet today's demands. I have no complexes on this account as I am sure that others will come to replace us. I mean my children and the children of my neighbors who will build their lives differently. My major task is to keep going and give my children an opportunity to take their chance. (Grodno)

Source: Interviews, June 2003

population are failing to access services adequately, especially in rural areas and especially among the poorer segments of society. Even for those services that are being accessed, there are few mechanisms of assessing the quality of the services being provided or the responsiveness of providers to their consumers or clients, especially the poorer ones.

- The meager qualitative evidence we collected for the poverty assessment suggests that the issue of accountability mechanisms between local authorities and poor people on the one hand, and service providers and poor people on the other, are raw, alive and important (Box 17). Poor people often feel voiceless or regard themselves as powerless to effect change when they lack information on their rights, on the resources being channeled to local service providers, and when they lack mechanisms to exercise any choice in providers.
- The 2004 World Development Report offers many avenues for strengthening the accountability of providers and administrators to the poorer segments of society. A general element involves the empowerment of community and civic institutions through the provision of regular information to these groups on basic parameters, such as budget and expenditures for their local school or clinic, and a feedback loop to policy makers on a service satisfaction “report card”. The development of such accountability mechanisms would bring in the “voices of the poor” regularly and would also enable Belarus to deepen the poverty reduction impact of its public resources and service delivery system.