VOICES OF THE POOR

From Many Lands

Edited by

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Patti Petesch

THE WORLD BANK
VOICES OF THE POOR

From Many Lands
# Contents

Foreword ................................................. xiii

Acknowledgments ........................................... xv

Chapter 1: Introduction .................................... 1
- Methodological Framework and Study Process ............. 2
  - Study Background ........................................ 2
  - Research Partnerships ................................... 3
  - Sampling Framework ..................................... 4
  - Data Analyses .......................................... 5
  - Follow-up ............................................. 6
- Challenges in Writing and Editing this Book ............. 7
- The Importance of Context Specificity .................... 8
- Organization of the Book ................................ 12

Chapter 2: Ghana — “Empty Pockets” .................... 17
- Hunger and Illbeing ...................................... 20
  - No Money ............................................... 23
  - Diverse Obstacles to Farming ............................ 24
  - Joblessness ............................................ 27
  - Coping ................................................ 28
- Government Is Important, but Its Help Falls Short ........ 30
  - Missing Basic Services .................................. 31
  - Faith in Chiefs and Churches .............................. 35
  - Little Regard for NGOs ................................. 37
- Growing Responsibilities for Women, but Few Rights ...... 38
  - Economic Gains? ....................................... 39
  - Widespread Gender Violence ............................. 41
- Conclusion ............................................... 42

Chapter 3: Malawi — Tangled Web ....................... 51
- Doing Well and Doing Poorly: No Plate-Drying Rack ....... 54
- Caught in a Web of Misery ................................ 56
  - Empty Stomachs ........................................ 56
  - Early Marriage, High Fertility, and Less Land .......... 57
  - Costly Fertilizers and Devalued Currency ............. 58
  - Precarious Jobs ........................................ 59
  - Weather Vagaries ...................................... 60
  - No Credit ............................................. 61
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 4: Nigeria — Illbeing and Insecurity</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Downward Slide</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Governance</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poorly Functioning Private Sector</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious and Community-Based Institutions: Trusted but Noninclusive</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illbeing</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodily Risks</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eroding Physical Environment and Dilapidated Infrastructure</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seasonal Stresses</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime and Conflict</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education's Mixed Promise</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signs of Hope</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gulf of Gender Inequities</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Stigma of Women without Men</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 5: Bangladesh — Waves of Disaster</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor People's Many Risks</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunger, Weakness, and Poor Health</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Assets</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure Livelihoods</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floods and Erosion</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime, Violence, and Police Harassment</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dowry</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of Vulnerability and Abuse of Women</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions in Bangladesh</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failing Grades for Local Government</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependence on Moneylenders</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs: Reliable and Trustworthy</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Institutions: Important but Limited</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

vi Voices of the Poor: From Many Lands
Chapter 11: The Russian Federation — Struggling against the Tide ............................................. 301
The New Poor and the New Elite .............................................. 305
The Unraveling of a “Normal Life” ........................................... 305
The “New Russians” ......................................................... 308
Struggling to Hang On ....................................................... 310
Delayed Wages, Vanishing Jobs ............................................. 310
Informal Work and Subsistence Agriculture .......................... 312
Lawlessness and Ineffective Police ....................................... 313
Alcoholism ............................................................................ 315
Health Risks .......................................................................... 316
Decaying Governance .......................................................... 317
Bureaucratic Disintegration and Corruption ......................... 319
The Private Sector ............................................................... 321
Civic and Religious Groups ................................................. 322
Family and Friends ............................................................. 322
Women’s Increasing Responsibilities ..................................... 324
Conclusion ............................................................................. 326

Chapter 12: Argentina — Life Used to Be Better .................... 333
Lost Livelihoods and the New Labor Markets ......................... 337
Insecurity and Struggling Families ........................................ 339
Gender Roles Overturned .................................................... 341
Abuse at Home ................................................................. 343
Effects on the Next Generation ............................................ 344
Pervasive Crime ................................................................. 347
Police Brutality .................................................................. 348
Safer Places in the Countryside ........................................... 349
Limited Community and Governmental Responses to Poverty 349
Community-Based Actions and Partnerships ......................... 350
Government Helps Poor People Survive .............................. 353
Problems beyond Poor Communities ................................... 355
Conclusion ............................................................................. 356

Chapter 13: Brazil — Gains and Losses in the Favelas ............ 363
Joblessness, Underemployment, and Workplace Abuses ........ 366
Life amid Violence .............................................................. 369
Fear in the Streets ............................................................... 369
Fear in the Home ............................................................... 371
Violence, Substance Abuse, and Children ......................... 375
Poverty, Power, and Social Class ......................................... 377
Poor Brazilians’ Interactions with Institutions ....................... 379
What Works and What Doesn’t in Novo Horizonte ............... 381
Foreword

This is the final book in a three-part series entitled Voices of the Poor. The series is based on an unprecedented effort to gather the views, experiences, and aspirations of more than 60,000 poor men and women from sixty countries. The work was undertaken for the World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty.

The first volume in the series, Can Anyone Hear Us?, draws from studies conducted in the 1990s and brings together the voices of over 40,000 poor people from fifty countries. The second volume, Crying Out for Change, is based on comparative fieldwork conducted in 1999 and includes the voices of over 20,000 poor men and women in twenty-three countries. From Many Lands presents a selection of these country studies. The Voices of the Poor study is different from all other large-scale poverty studies. Using participatory and qualitative research methods, the study presents directly, through poor people's own voices, the realities of their lives. How do poor people view poverty and wellbeing? What are their problems and priorities? What is their experience with the institutions of the state, markets, and civil society? How are gender relations faring within households and communities? We want to thank the project team led by Deepa Narayan of the Poverty Group in the World Bank, and particularly the country research teams, for undertaking this work.

What poor people share with us is sobering. A majority of them feel they are worse off and more insecure than in the past. Poor people care about many of the same things all of us care about: happiness, family, children, livelihood, peace, security, safety, dignity, and respect. Poor people's descriptions of encounters with a range of institutions call out for all of us to rethink our strategies. From the perspective of poor people, corruption, irrelevance, and abusive behavior often mar the formal institutions of the
state. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), too, receive mixed ratings from the poor. Poor people would like NGOs to be accountable to them. Poor people's interactions with traders and markets are stamped with their powerlessness to negotiate fair prices. How then do poor people survive? They turn to their informal networks of family, kin, friends, and neighbors. But these are already stretched thin.

We commend to you the authenticity and significance of this work. What can be more important than listening to the poor and working with our partners all over the world to respond to their concerns? Our core mission is to help poor people succeed in their own efforts, and the book raises major challenges to both of our institutions and to all of us concerned about poverty. We are prepared to hold ourselves accountable, to make the effort to try to respond to these voices. Obviously we cannot do this alone. We urge you to read this book, to reflect and respond. Our hope is that the voices in this book will call you to action as they have us.

CLARE SHORT, Secretary of State for International Development, U.K.

JAMES D. WOLFENSOHN, President, World Bank
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Kristin Rusch worked with us very closely for over a year, providing substantive editorial support. We could not have finished this book without her. We also thank Cathy Sunshine for her copyediting, and the Bank's Office of the Publisher for its assistance in bringing the book to publication.

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