Improved poverty analysis

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In areas of extreme poverty it is often difficult to determine the standard of living. During her doctoral research in Uganda, Nicky Pouw developed a method to analyze relatively simple material and immaterial possessions that can serve, for example, as an early warning system for food shortages.

Development planners and policymakers in developing countries need accurate information about the poverty of the population. The risk of food shortages or other poverty-related problems is an ever present threat. This is certainly the case in rural Uganda where there is a lot of poverty among smallholder farmers. However, the usual method of assessing poverty in terms of expenditure often fails to work here, as the farmers frequently produce for their own consumption.

Therefore in order to make statements about the economic status of the population in these regions, Pouw developed a method for measuring possessions instead of expenditure. She itemised the different categories of possessions in the rural areas of Kabarole, Mpigi and Kapchorwa. In this system each category has its own hierarchy. For example, in the case of sustainable household goods, the priority of most households is the acquisition of basic goods such as chairs, a table, a bed, blankets and a mattress. The more luxury goods such as a fridge, TV or car are only acquired once the basic needs have been met. Pouw applied a similar highlighting to the other categories, namely clothing, housing quality, food consumption, land ownership, agricultural equipment and livestock.

Some differences were observed in terms of what people consider to be

valuable. For example, female farmers were found to attach more value to certain agricultural equipment than male farmers and some Ugandan cultures consider it inappropriate for a woman to own a bike. In addition, the most important basic requirements were equally spread over the three regions, with firstly the welfare characteristic sustainable possessions, followed by agricultural equipment and thirdly clothing.

The research did a lot to clarify the type of poverty that prevailed in the regions concerned. Whereas in Kapchorwa district the farmers mainly suffered from a shortage in housing, land and sustainable possessions, people in Kabarole had relatively little clothing and in Mpigi there was a relative deprivation in food consumption. This type of information can be of immediate importance for development planners and policymakers at the district level. It reveals the most pressing problems in a given area at a certain moment in time. For example, the information about food consumption can be used as an early warning system for food uncertainty. As soon as households only have maize and beans to eat, this can be a sign of imminent food shortages.

Source: Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research