

# Poverty Fighters

By Jet Damazo

*FROM GATHERING data to produce accurate statistics on poverty, to creating strategies and action plans on how to address it, three long-term experts engaged by the Asian Development Bank through technical assistance grants funded by the National Poverty Reduction Strategy and Poverty Reductions Cooperation Funds provided valuable assistance to their respective governments and people.*

## Mao Moni Ratana *in Cambodia*

Having been immersed in development work in Cambodia from the government, NGO, and international development organization perspectives, Mao Moni Ratana comes into the job with a holistic appreciation of the issues related to poverty reduction at the micro project level.

The task given to her, when she began working for ADB in November 2004, was to help the Government's Ministry of Planning to formulate a socio-economic development plan, along with specialists from the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank.

"It was a great professional challenge," says Ms. Mao. "The work required a great understanding of the links between micro-level ground realities and macro policy issues, which was something new to me."

At the time, various key medium term plans existed and the Government and international donor community agreed to work on a single "National Strategic Development Plan" that everyone would adhere to. This plan would contain specific indicators that would make implementation easy to monitor.

"Having several planning documents created confusion," she says. "Our goal was to translate the Government's rectangular strategy for growth, employment, equity and efficiency into an easy and implementable action plan."



**Mao Moni Ratana**

**Educational Background**

- BS in Agronomy & Animal Husbandry
- MA in Rural Development Management

**Areas of Specialty:**

- Agriculture, rural development, decentralization, natural resource management (agricultural, land issues)

*"Our goal was to create an easy and implementable action plan."*

The problem, however, was not getting government agencies to cooperate. In fact, all of the various ministries had plans themselves. Only, they did not coordinate with each other.

“The most challenging part of my work was having to make the line ministries understand the need to create plans that were strategic and aligned with each other,” she says. “I think there was a lack of understanding of what a sector plan is how they should contribute to it.”

Aside from all these, Ms. Mao provided project design and monitoring assistance to ADB’s resident mission in Cambodia, helping ensure that projects benefit the poor more.

Today, Ms. Mao is with the Danish International Development Agency, but the work she began in with ADB continues. “There’s still a long way to go. The line ministries are still working on their individual plans to contribute to the strategic development plan. But I’m sure all these efforts will contribute to reducing poverty in Cambodia. ”

## **G. M. Arif** *in Pakistan*

The former Chief of Research at the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Islamabad, and head of the Poverty and Income Distribution section, Dr. G. M. Arif knows the importance of statistically-backed regular monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of poverty reduction programs.

As a poverty reduction specialist for ADB’s resident mission in Pakistan, he helped the Government monitor the implementation of the poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) and progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

He provided capacity building support to the PRSP secretariat, enabling them to improve monitoring and evaluation so that they can come up with reports on the PRSP indicators more regularly. He also helped align the PRSP indicators with the MDGs to make M&E easier and consistent.

“The M&E system of the PRSP has been successful in tracking budgetary as well as non-budgetary expenditures on the priority sectors. Availability of household survey data also helped monitor the performance of social sector,” he says. “However, evaluation and assessment of poverty reduction related interventions have not been systematically carried out. They need to be strengthened.”



**G. M. Arif**

### **Educational Background**

- MA Demography, Australian National University
- PhD Demography, with a specialization in International Labour Migration, Australian National University

### **Areas of Specialty:**

- Poverty, Employment, Migration/Urbanization, Health and Education.

*“Sufficient monitoring and evaluation is needed to improve poverty reduction efforts.”*

Dr. Arif reports that as a result of the increased regularity in M&E, the Government realized that much more resources than currently allocated are needed for the health and education sectors to meet the MDGs. The Government now aims to double the allocation of resources on these sectors during the next 10 years.

Aside from all this, Dr. Arif carried out poverty-related research work at ADB's resident mission in Pakistan. He has recently completed a research report on 'Demographic Transition, Education and Youth Unemployment in Pakistan', which shows that the youth population of urban Pakistan is by and large literate, more educated than older cohorts and more balanced in gender dimension. Unfortunately, progress in urban areas has widened the rural-urban gap in literacy and educational attainment, and the integration of unemployed young men into the domestic labour market is a serious concern.

## **Ngo Thi Minh Huong**

*in Viet Nam*

At 32 years old, Ngo Thi Minh Huong is already a leading development expert and a poverty reduction activist in Viet Nam.

She has done extensive work in advocacy, and research and networking in governance, and has devoted herself to poverty reduction and social development both at the national and grassroots levels in the region.

In fact, she founded a Vietnamese NGO - the Centre for Development and Integration - that provides professional services in research, policy analysis, campaign and advocacy, capacity building in strategic planning, organization development, project management. She was also previously involved in the participatory poverty assessment in the country.

As Poverty Specialist at ADB's resident mission in Viet Nam, Ms. Ngo lent her expertise towards helping achieve the overarching goal of poverty reduction.

"I believe poverty should really be understood and perceived in its own context," she says. As such, during the two years she served as a consultant for ADB, she carried out researches on poverty, sustainable growth and socio-economic development in Viet Nam's Central Highlands and Northern Mountainous regions.

"These two regions are among the poorest in Viet Nam. To fight poverty effectively, one



**Ngo Thi Minh Huong**

### **Educational Background**

- MA Development Management, Asian Institute of Management, Philippines
- BS Economics, Finance and Banking, National Economic University, Vietnam

### **Areas of Specialty:**

- Institutional Strategy and Program Formulation
- Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy and Policy Formulation and Planning
- Sector Review Analysis and Project/Program Planning and Design
- Project/Program Management and Evaluation
- Socioeconomic and Social Impact Assessments

*"To fight poverty effectively, one needs to understand it deeply."*

needs to understand it deeply and the studies provide good situational analysis," she says.

"It is important to take the specific situation of the regions into consideration in order to increase program effectiveness and to really address poverty. The studies helped the Government set relevant targets and policies in these regions, and helped ADB in the formulation of its Country Strategy and Programs."

Ms. Ngo also helped develop a results-based and strategic planning approach for the Government's Socio-Economic Development Plan (SEDP) at provincial and lower levels. Drawing on her own expertise, she made this local planning tool into a participatory one that involves local communities across income levels, gender, age, ethnicity and others. Afterwards, she trained key staff in the Ministry of Planning and Investment and in selected provincial governments on these participatory planning methods.

Her contributions did not end there. She also provided support to ADB's resident mission in Viet Nam in drafting ADB's Country Strategy and Program for Viet Nam, loans, and in the preparation and implementation of technical assistance projects.

"Working to help reduce poverty at ADB was a great experience," she says. She lauds the NPRS and PRF for financing the creation of country-based poverty focal points.

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