

B

Perceptions of the People

In the 2001–2004 participatory assessments of hardship,³ people who were considered to be less well off were given the opportunity to define poverty in their own terms (see Box 2). The PAH involved consultations with more than 150 village and/or urban communities in eight countries. Individual and focus group discussions were held with traditional village leaders/elders, government representatives, women’s and youth groups, nongovernment organizations (NGOs), and others prominent in the communities. Separate discussions were also held with those identified as the most disadvantaged. These were often the elderly, widows, single parents, or families with health problems.

1. CAUSES OF HARDSHIP AND POVERTY

Do people in the Pacific really consider themselves to be poor? Do they believe that they experience hardships? Do they perceive that they lack the economic and social opportunities necessary to enable them to improve their own or their children’s standards of living? If so, why? The complex nature of poverty and hardship has to be appreciated from the point of view of each society as one interpretation may not be shared by another. People’s perceptions are important indicators of the extent of hardship and poverty in society. The needs, aspirations, and priorities of the poor can answer key policy questions and can help set national development priorities and strategies. Frequently, however, the views of the people either are not sought or are overlooked by policy makers.⁴

³ Participatory poverty assessments (with the number of village/communities consulted) were completed in the Republic of the Fiji Islands (20), Republic of the Marshall Islands (10), Federated States of Micronesia (9), Papua New Guinea (18), Samoa (16), Tonga (16), Tuvalu (6), and Vanuatu (12), under TA 6002-REG: Consultation Workshops for Poverty Reduction Strategies in Pacific Developing Member Countries, TA 6047-REG: Preparation of National Poverty Reduction Strategies in Pacific Developing Member Countries, and TA 3667-PNG: Poverty Analyses for Socioeconomic Development Strategies. A separate survey was undertaken for Timor-Leste under an ADB co-financed project with World Bank and UNDP.

⁴ An assessment of the nature and importance of participation on the formulation of poverty reduction strategies by the World Bank may be found in Stewart Francis and Wang M, *Do PRSPs Empower Poor Countries and Disempower the World Bank or Is It the Other Way Round?* QEH Working Paper Series No 8, Queen Elizabeth House Oxford, May 2003.

Box 2

Participatory Assessments of Hardship

The assessments (PAH) sought to obtain information on the needs, perceptions, aspirations, and priorities of communities living in different conditions and in different parts of each country.

Within each country, communities were chosen on the basis of their access to basic services and opportunities rated as good, medium, or poor. Level of access was generally related to their proximity to the main urban centers where most services tend to be centralized

The objective of the assessments was to provide qualitative guidelines to assist in the development of national and community strategies for equitable economic growth and hardship alleviation.

Communities were chosen in consultation with national governments and with the people themselves. Particular attention was given to the views and needs of the disadvantaged and poor. The assessments included general village meetings, focus group discussions, and individual consultations.

The PAH are not intended to be statistically rigorous. They are, rather, qualitative surveys of perceptions and views of community groups, leaders, and individuals that reflect the particular circumstances of that community but that nevertheless provide valuable insights that have much wider implications and relevance.

The key objectives of the participatory assessments were to:

- determine community perceptions and levels of hardship and poverty;
- define hardship and poverty locally including causes and characteristics;
- identify community perceptions of hardship and poverty trends over the last 5 years;
- identify people suffering from hardship;
- determine community issues and priorities for improving standards of living and alleviating hardship.

All communities without exception acknowledged that hardship was certainly a common, widely shared condition

The PAH revealed that few communities acknowledged that extreme poverty was an issue. Only in Fiji Islands and PNG was this type of poverty accepted as a serious concern. However, all communities without exception acknowledged that hardship was certainly a common, widely shared condition when defined as a family's inability to

supply basic needs and to meet community obligations. In general this meant that such a family had no regular wage earner or source of income from remittances. In urban areas, however, there was hardship even among families with an employed member, the so-called working poor whose wage income did not bring them above the basic-needs poverty line. Theirs was a life of making difficult choices between competing priorities: paying school fees or household bills; buying food or meeting community obligations. Hardship was seen also as the result of poor education, the lack of access to land for food gardens or cash crops, poor access to good water and sanitation facilities, poor health, and living alone or depending on others.

The primary causes of hardship among the PAH communities are summarized in Table 1. These concerns show remarkable consistency not only between the urban and rural areas within each country but also across the region. In other words, despite the wide differences in geography and resource endowments among the atoll states of Micronesia and the high islands of Melanesia and most of Polynesia, the concerns of the people are very similar. The causes of hardship and poverty center around the need for income, the need for a reasonable standard of basic services, and the need for skills to meet opportunities and challenges as they become available.

People are clearly concerned that the increasing monetization of their economies is placing ever-greater burdens on their cash resources and that they therefore need additional opportunities to earn income. They also realize that one of the keys to higher income is better education. In many countries, there is concern that governments are failing to deliver better education despite increased resources allocated to the sector. Coupled with better education is the recognition that good health and nutrition play important roles in promoting family well being. Here also the people felt that governments frequently failed to deliver needed services.

People also believed that hardship was caused by the gradual erosion of traditional values

People also believed that hardship was caused by the gradual erosion of traditional values. Communities are losing their knowledge of traditional customs and values, and respect for the authority of chiefs and elders is declining, especially among the young and among the more highly educated.⁵ The perception of many was that social tensions were rising, drug and alcohol abuse was increasing, and the law and order situation in some countries was deteriorating. People tended to blame governments for failing to address the underlying causes of these trends, i.e., unemployment, poor educational attainment, and lack of opportunity.

⁵ ADB. 2004. *Governance in the Pacific: Focus for Action 2005–2009*.

Table 1
Participatory Assessments of Hardship and Poverty
Summary of Causes/Characteristics of Hardship

	<i>Samoa</i>	<i>Tonga</i>	<i>Tuvalu</i>	<i>Vanuatu</i>
Shared Causes of Hardship in both urban and rural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No jobs • Not enough money • Lack education and skills • Poor housing • Numerous village and church commitments • Lack of and/or access to services and infrastructure such as education, schools, health care • Lack of training and employment opportunities • Low/limited income opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Too many dependents”. Limited access to basic services and infrastructure • Landlessness. “Too many children” due to lack of family planning • High cost of goods and services • Burdensome family, church, and community obligations • Poor health • Poor family budgeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could not afford basic needs • High cost of basic goods and services especially in the Fusi store, • High cost and unreliability of power and communications • Poor quality and condition of health and education infrastructure leading to poor quality service delivery • Social problems resulting from changing attitudes and values • Demands on families for contributions to meet social and community obligations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor living conditions of families (living in poorly maintained houses)- Inability to secure productive employment opportunities for individuals • Families could not afford prices of goods- Inability to afford children’s school fees and materials • Parents struggling to provide for family needs • “Worry about lack of money all the time”

Table 1 continued

	<i>Samoa</i>	<i>Tonga</i>	<i>Tuvalu</i>	<i>Vanuatu</i>
Additional Urban Causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Without land in urban area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing attitudes towards extended family by younger educated generation (individualism) • Poor relocation site • Urban drift 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor living conditions of families (living in poorly built houses) • Lack of access to land. Overcrowding of households 	
Additional Rural Causes			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small size of available land • Limited employment and income earning opportunities • Lack of markets for produce and handicrafts. Increasing dependency in the outer islands • Social problems resulting from changing attitudes and values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty accessing needed health services

Table 1 continued

	<i>Fiji Islands</i>	<i>RMI</i>	<i>FMS</i>	<i>PNG</i>
Shared Causes of Hardship in both urban and rural communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited income earning opportunities (e.g., low educational level, limited paid employment opportunities, limited market access) • Limited access to basic services & infrastructure • Landlessness • Decline of respect for traditional values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate health and/or education support for children; • Poor basic service provision, in particular safe drinking water and electricity; • Lack of regular and frequent field trips to outer islands; • Limited employment and income generation opportunities; • Low educational attainment of youth, including limited training opportunities for youth who wish to return to education; • A range of child- and youth-related problems, including school drop outs, youth 'idleness', 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No job/skills/education, unemployment • Idle land, lack of farming/fishing equipment • Lack of basic services (water, power, poor health & communication facilities, poor education, no road) – Chuuk • Sickness & mental illness, poor nutrition, physical disabilities • Alcohol & drug abuse • Threat of natural disasters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of employment and cash earning opportunities • Lack of education and skills, especially for women and girls • Lack of infrastructure and poor living conditions • Poor access to basic services, including water and sanitation, education and health services • Breakdown of family life • Poor information and communication facilities • Poor governance standards

Table 1 continued

	<i>Fiji Islands</i>	<i>RMI*</i>	<i>FMS</i>	<i>PNG</i>
		unemployment, alcohol abuse and teenage pregnancy; and <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasingly stressed gender relations and women's increased workloads. 		
Additional Urban causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unequal distribution of basic services and infrastructure due to ethnic discrimination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large extended families with only one or two wage earners; • Overcrowding and low quality housing on Majuro and Ebeye; • Poor water and/or power supply; • Lack of employment; • Inadequate care and supervision of children and youth; and • High rates of children and youth not in school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pohnpei • Prejudice/feeling of inferiority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of land • Increased unemployment and crime • Increasing drug and alcohol abuse

* Republic of the Marshall Islands

Table 1 continued

	<i>Fiji Islands</i>	<i>RMI</i>	<i>FMS</i>	<i>PNG</i>
Additional Rural Causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laziness or lack of personal motivation to use resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor transportation, in particular the lack of regular and frequent field trips; • Lack of electricity and (in some cases) water catchments; • Access to and quality of elementary school and health care services (most notably in the absence of a functioning health dispensary on island); • Higher cost and lack of supplies; • Low price of copra; and • Lack of alternative employment opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yap and Chuuk·Lack of personal motivation–Yap • Lack of price control–Chuuk • Restrictions on females for higher education– Yap • Failure of parents to take care of children & grandchildren–Yap • Opposition of elders to improving access to services and infrastructure – Yap • Having no spouse and not listening to parents– Yap • Corruption, incompetent leadership, lack of cooperation between people & community leadership–Chuuk • Weakening traditions and customs–Chuuk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of access to markets • Long distances to and from schools and clinics

2. WHO ARE THE MOST DISADVANTAGED?

On the atolls, in the highlands, and in the urban centers, there was almost universal agreement on who would be most likely to experience the greatest degrees of hardship and poverty: (i) the young, (ii) the old, (iii) the infirm, (iv) those who had no source of regular income, or (v) those with no access to adequate land on which to grow food for consumption and/or sale (see Box 3).

Box 3
**People and Households Likely to Experience
the Greatest Hardships**

- Unemployed.
- Youth and school dropouts with few prospects for the future.
- Orphans or people without relatives in the community.
- Homeless people or those living with relatives.
- Land-less individuals, families without access to land, or settlers.
- People with large families and/or those supporting relatives.
- Elderly people, especially widows, without regular support.
- Mentally challenged and physically handicapped.
- Single mothers and teenage couples without means to raise their children.

This list reinforces two of the principal concerns that communities expressed in the PAH: the need for cash income and the fact that traditional safety nets are weakening. Traditionally, the old and infirm would have been adequately cared for by their families and/or communities. As dependency ratios have risen, especially those in rural areas, more elderly people have been left to fend for themselves. Sometimes they have even been left with grandchildren, grandnephews, and grandnieces to care for also. This places serious pressures on those who are least able to carry the burden. The case studies in ADB's⁶ "Priorities of the People" publications highlight these concerns.

⁶ *Priorities of the People: Hardship in the Fiji Islands; Hardship in Federated States of Micronesia; Hardship in Marshall Islands; Hardship in Samoa; Hardship in Tuvalu; Hardship in Tonga; Hardship in Vanuatu; and Priorities of the Poor in Papua New Guinea*

Dependency ratios can generally predict the likely degree of hardship and vulnerability. The ratios for urban and rural areas in selected PDMCs are shown in Table 2. In all cases, rural dependency ratios are higher than those in urban areas indicating that rural areas have fewer people of working age and that greater burdens are therefore falling on those who, under normal circumstances, would be deemed either too young or too old to work. In the case of the young, the need to work as well as study might lead to a higher number of school dropouts. This would seem to be supported by comments made in the PAH. For the old, the need to work often causes considerable hardship especially for widows; in fact, widows were classified among the most disadvantaged of all in the PAH.

Among the countries for which data are available, Timor-Leste has by far the highest dependency ratios in both urban and rural areas. Other countries with rural dependency ratios of 1.0 and above include Marshall Islands (RMI), Samoa, and Tuvalu. Tonga's is 0.96.

Table 2
Dependency Ratios in Selected PDMCs

<i>PDMC</i>	<i>National Average</i>	<i>Urban Households</i>	<i>Rural Households</i>	<i>Survey Year</i>
Fiji Islands	0.68	na	na	1996
Kiribati	0.76	0.70	0.82	2000
FSM	0.85	0.75	0.86	2000
Marshall Islands	0.80	0.75	1.00	2000
Samoa	0.91	0.76	1.03	2001
Timor-Leste	1.25	1.09	1.30	2001
Tonga	0.88	0.80	0.96	1996
Tuvalu	0.90	0.77	1.05	1991

ADB estimates from national census data

3. GETTING BETTER OR WORSE?

Where services had improved, people acknowledged that their lives had become easier.

In the PAH, communities were asked whether they perceived that their situations had become better or worse in the past 5 years. Not surprisingly, responses were mixed with some communities indicating improvements and others saying that life had become harder. What set the responses apart was the

availability of basic services. Where services had improved, people acknowledged that their lives had become easier. On the other hand, where communities felt that they had been bypassed or that their needs had not been met while others had received assistance, they perceived that life had become more difficult even if nothing had actually changed. The perceptions of those surveyed in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) are typical (see Box 4).

4. PRIORITIES OF THE PEOPLE

The priorities identified by the poor very clearly and consistently point to three broad areas for action to alleviate hardship and poverty:

- the need to improve access to, and delivery of, essential social services, especially primary education and primary health care;
- the need to improve access to employment and other economic opportunities, including access to markets in which to sell produce and services;
- the need for governments to be more responsive to the needs and priorities of the people, that is, to improve governance standards, to be more participatory in policy making, and to deliver more efficient, cost-effective public services.

Not surprisingly, these three are in accord with the three pillars of ADB's poverty reduction strategy namely good governance; inclusive social development; and sustainable, pro-poor economic growth. They form a set of clear and simple directions for future development strategies: the development of competitive, commercial, private markets for pro-poor growth; performance-oriented, essential public service delivery in support of inclusive social development; and improved, broadly defined, governance that includes well-operated, honest private and public institutions. These are discussed in Section E.

Individual country priorities are summarized in Appendix 1. The three themes run through each country list, but each also has its own particular needs. In some countries the emphasis was on services (Fiji Islands, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu). In others, employment and economic opportunity were especially important (Kiribati and Tuvalu) while governance was perceived to be important in FSM and PNG. The people are slowly but surely finding their voices and are letting it be known that poor governance and declining standards are no longer acceptable. Greater participation in policy and decision making is demanded.

Box 4**Trends of Hardship in the Last 5 Years: The Case of FSM**

In two of the three sample states, Yap and Pohnpei, the perception was that hardship in both urban and rural communities had increased in the last 5 years. In Chuuk, however, people gave a mixed response stating that their situation had deteriorated in some respects and had improved in others. Improvements in basic services particularly water supplies and the relative improvement of access to education (primary and secondary) were cited. People also perceived improvements due to the increased number of church programs helping communities highlighting the role of the churches in the delivery of basic services. Where nothing had been done, they perceived that they had become worse off.

Low incomes and the increasing need for cash so households can gain access to basic services and goods were the most commonly cited factors for increasing hardship in both the urban and rural communities. Growing drug and alcohol abuse, particularly among the youth, was another issue identified as contributing to the downward trend. Weakening traditions and adoption of individualist or “Western” lifestyles (particularly in Chuuk and Yap), overcrowding of households (particularly in Yap and Pohnpei), and increased incidence of stealing (Yap) were other factors seen as contributing to growing hardship in the last 5 years.

Availability and Quality of Basic Services and Infrastructure

In Yap and Pohnpei, most basic services and infrastructure were available particularly in urban centers. In Chuuk, access to and quality of services were deemed poor throughout the state. This reflects the especially poor standards of governance in recent years. In Yap and Pohnpei, there were some concerns that the quality of, access to, and ability to pay for some services (e.g., water, education, health, power) were deteriorating in both urban and rural areas and outer islands, particularly for those people without regular incomes.

5. CONCLUSIONS

People surveyed in PAH agreed that those who would be most likely to experience the greatest degrees of hardship and poverty were: (i) the young, (ii) the old, (iii) the infirm, (iv) those who had no source of regular income, or (v) those with no access to adequate land on which to grow food for consumption and/or sale. The causes of hardship and poverty centered around the need for income, the need for a reasonable standard of basic services, and the need for skills to meet opportunities and challenges as they become available all of which require responsive government. Where services had improved, people acknowledged that their lives had become easier, but they perceived that life had become more difficult if they had been bypassed even if nothing had actually changed. People also believed that hardship was caused by the gradual erosion of traditional values and culture.