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Implementation of Community-based Poverty Monitoring Survey in Hatay Province

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IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY-BASED POVERTY MONITORING SURVEY IN HATAY PROVINCE

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Before August 2008, Ha Tay was a province in the Red River Delta\(^1\). It has 2.5 million inhabitants in 14 districts and towns, 323 rural communes and urban wards.

Not like other provinces in the delta region, Ha Tay has an amount of hillis and mountainous areas. There are 9 mountainous communes, 26 urban wards and townlets, and 288 rural communes.

Ha Tay stays in the top rank among provinces in the Red River Delta in term of economic development level. The average income per capita of Ha Tay is as half of that of Hanoi capital city. With this, Ha Tay ranks at the fourth among 11 provinces in the region.

The poverty rate of Ha Tay was 12.4% in 2006 and 11.7% in 2007, ranked fifth in the region\(^2\).

Poverty monitoring has been conducted in Ha Tay since 1990s and guided by indicators and procedures defined by Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). Following the administrative decentralization, administration at communes is responsible for identifying poor households and reporting to higher administrative levels. Authorities at district and province levels are reported on number and list of poor households, and they allocate budget for poverty reduction activities and implement supporting policies towards the poor based on this information. In term of methodology, poor households are identified by income criterion. The Poverty Reduction Council

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1 Since 1st August 2008, Ha Tay province has been merged with Hanoi and became a part of Hanoi Capital City.

of commune, which consists of representatives of commune government and major social organisations, collects data of low-income households, compares with the MOLISA’s poverty line. Data of household income is collected by using questionnaires. Heads of villages and officials of commune's authority and social organisations are surveyors. After data collection and quick processing, a list of poor households in each village is drafted. This list is to be reported to villagers for comments and approved finally at a village meeting by representatives of all households in the village.

In principle, households identification of the poor is a community-based census of low-income households. This census is completed not every year, but only in some times when the poverty line is updated, for example in 2001 and 2005. Every year, village heads have to review list of poor households, organise village meeting to exclude from this list some households, which have overcame poverty, and include some which have been falling in poverty during the year.

This current system of poverty monitoring has some weaknesses as follows:

- Information collected in household survey is still poor, mainly on income. Many other aspects of human life as well as implementation of poverty reduction policies and activities are not collected. In 2005 MOLISA has piloted a poverty survey, in which the household questionnaire included information on age, sex, occupation, education of household's member, income, expenditure, property, etc. However, only income data was processed manually and quickly by village heads, as usually, for identifying poor households. The rest of collected data is not used. In the whole Ha Tay province, more than 80,000 low-income households were surveyed, and 77,328 households identified as of poor status.

- The gained information is not processed according to a strict procedure. It is mainly done by cadres of villages and commune; therefore, it cannot be
highly accurate. The subjectivity in the identification of poor households is unavoidable. No control and audit mechanisms on local reports exists. Therefore, the poverty rate is sometimes doubted.

In 2006-2007 the CBMS-Vietnam project has cooperated with DOLISA of Ha Tay province to conduct 2 annual CBMS surveys in 10 selected communes. The objectives of this project is to evaluate results of identification of poor households, which communes in the province have done. Besides, the project has to collect additional data to assess living standards of people. Ten communes were selected in ten different districts in the province. The criteria for commune selection are: (1) representativeness for major typical types of communities (plain, hills, mountains and urban centre); (2) representativeness for districts in the province.

Among 10 selected communities, there were 6 communes in plain areas, 1 commune in the hill area, 2 mountainous and 1 district town. The scope of this census was 8020 households. This number accounted 1.39% of total number of households in the province.
Census of households in the selected communes allowed not only to analyse low-income household groups, but also get a general picture of the structure of community in term of income stratification. The collected data helped to evaluate results of the survey of low-income households which was done before.

The main tool of CBMS survey was household questionnaire containing the following information:

1. Accounting households in vulnerable groups, which need support from the government. They are, in particular, invalids, blinds, orphan, single old people, etc.

2- Information of family members, such as education level, occupation, demographic characteristics. Analysis, for example, of education showed *knowledge poverty* (adult illiteracy, child drop-out schooling).

3- Information on property ownership (land, durable productive and consumer goods). This information showed, in particular, *productive property poverty* (lack of land, productive machines), *information poverty* (no ownership of audio-video equipments) and *communication poverty* (no ownership of transport means).

4- Housing conditions (shelter, types of drinking and washing water, toilet). This information reflected *housing poverty* and *health poverty*.

5- Income reflected living standard of households. Comparing this data with poverty lines, one can see *food poverty* and *overall poverty*.

6- Causes of poverty.

7- Support, which households received from the State and communities. This information reflected efforts of government and communities in poverty reduction, and helped to analysing impacts of poverty reduction program on the poor.
Data of 8,020 households was processed both manually by villagers and with computers by provincial Section of Social Protection. The raw data and results of processing works have been stored by the Section of Social Protection. Lists of poor households and their socio-economic characteristics were used by DOLISA in poverty reduction activities.

In short, implementation of CBMS in Ha Tay province has the following remarkable characteristics:

1) **Methodology**: The main principles of CBMS are similar to methods of MOLISA's identification of poor households, which is conducted in Vietnam. Villages are experienced in doing household survey. With a short questionnaire (4 pages), simple and easily understandable indicators, implementation of CBMS is fully feasible at grassroots levels. The training of local surveyors on survey methods takes few time (halfday).

2) **Use of collected data**: Beside income, CBMS has collected information for computing other indicators, which reflect many dimensions of poverty. Local government and social organisations are supplied with more tools for policy-making and actions. In 2008, CBMS questionnaire was implemented extendly in census of all low-income households in the province. Data of more than 8000 households has been entered in computers and used for daily works of the Section of Social Protection.

Despite of high usefulness of CBMS, it's implementation in localities faces some constrains:

1) Conducting a census of all households in province or districts requires huge amount of financial and human resources. Currently, Ha Tay province has 654 thousands households. Despite of low cost spent for local surveyors, the survey expense per one household is about 1 USD (including questionnaire print, support for travel, data entry). Totally, a census in the whole province costs at least 0.7 million USD. Current budget of province and districts cannot cover these costs annually. There is also no specific line
of budget for poverty monitoring in the list of budget items defined by the State Budget Law.

Due to resource availability, we can conduct a census of low-income households in the province only in five-year cycle. The scope of this census accounts 12-15% of total number of households in province. Therefore, CBMS census could be done only in a small number of selected communes.

2) At the commune and even district level, computer and qualified technical human resources are not enough for processing of survey data. Up to now, encoding and processing data have been done by provincial staff. In addition, time needed for data encoding and entry is relatively long in large-scaled surveys. The results of survey analysis are therefore lagged.

With the above pros and cons, we use CBMS as a tool for evaluation of annual poverty monitoring surveys, for analysis of poverty in particular and living standards of population in general.

REFERENCES