

# Understanding Poverty from the Perspectives of People Living in Poverty: Indonesia

Reality Check Approach Sub-report 1  
Indonesia



The mission of the National Team for the Acceleration of Poverty Reduction (*Tim Nasional Percepatan Penanggulangan Kemiskinan* or TNP2K) is to coordinate poverty alleviation policies in Indonesia. As part of its tasks, TNP2K conducts and commissions research reports and studies with the objective of facilitating and informing evidence based policy planning (<http://www.tnp2k.go.id>).

This is a report of only part of the findings of the Reality Check Approach study carried out in June and July 2014. It provides the findings on poor people's perspectives on poverty. Sub-report 2 provides findings on poor people's perspectives on social assistance programmes.

This work is the product of the staff of the Reality Check Approach Plus Project. The findings, interpretations and conclusions are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Team for the Acceleration of Poverty Reduction, the Government of Indonesia or the Government of Australia.

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Cover Image: The Reality Check Approach Team (Indonesia)

Identifying features have been removed to protect the identities of individuals photographed.

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**February 2015**

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The study was only possible thanks to the many families who opened their doors to the study team. We thank these families in all seven locations for contributing their valuable time and allowing the team members to live with them and share their everyday experiences. We hope that this report accurately reflects the views of the families, their neighbours and others within the communities.



Researcher and family conversing and peeling nutmeg together.



# Terms, Abbreviations and Acronyms

<i>Agar-agar</i>	gelatinous substance extracted from algae
<b>Bajo</b>	indigenous tribe in South Sulawesi, distinguished as sailors
<b>BOS</b>	<i>Bantuan Operasional Sekolah</i> (School Operational Grants)
<b>BLSM</b>	<i>Bantuan Langsung Sementara Masyarakat</i> (Temporary Unconditional Cash Transfers)
<b>BPS</b>	<i>Badan Pusat Statistik</i> (Statistics Indonesia)
<b>BSM</b>	<i>Bantuan Siswa Miskin</i> (Cash Transfers for Poor Students)
<i>Desa</i>	village
<i>Dusun</i>	sub-village
<b>DFAT</b>	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Government of Australia
<b>FHH</b>	focal households (neighbours of the host households)
<b>GOI</b>	Government of Indonesia
<b>HHH</b>	host households; where members of the study team stayed with families
<b>ID</b>	identification
<b>IDR</b>	Indonesian rupiah
<b>Jamkesmas</b>	<i>Jaminan Kesehatan Masyarakat</i> (Public Health Insurance)
<i>Kartu keluarga</i>	family card
<i>Kecamatan</i>	sub-district
<i>Kepala desa</i>	village chief
<i>Kepala dusun</i>	sub-village chief
<b>KMS</b>	<i>Kartu Menuju Sehat</i> (baby record card)
<b>KPS</b>	<i>Kartu Perlindungan Sosial</i> (social assistance card)

<b>Liya</b>	tribe of former tree dwellers
<b><i>Madrasah</i></b>	Islamic religious school
<b>MONEV</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group
<b><i>Ojek</i></b>	informal motorbike taxi
<b>OSIS</b>	<i>Organisasi Siswa Intra Sekolah</i> (Internal Student Organisation at Junior and Senior Secondary School)
<b>PKH</b>	<i>Program Keluarga Harapan</i> (Conditional Cash Transfer Programme for Poor Families)
<b><i>Polindes</i></b>	<i>pondok bersalin desa</i> (village maternity home)
<b><i>Puskesmas (PK)</i></b>	<i>pusat kesehatan masyarakat</i> (people's health centre)
<b><i>Posyandu (PY)</i></b>	<i>pos pelayanan terpadu</i> (integrated health post)
<b>PMT</b>	proxy means test
<b>PNPM <i>Generasi</i></b>	<i>Program Nasional Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Generasi</i> (National Programme for Community Empowerment – to assist with healthcare for pregnant women and infants and students' education needs)
<b>PPLS</b>	<i>Pendataan Program Perlindungan Sosial</i> (Data collection for social protection programmes)
<b>Raskin</b>	<i>Program Subsidi Beras Bagi Masyarakat Berpendapatan Rendah</i> (Rice for Poor Households)
<b>RCA</b>	Reality Check Approach
<b>SD</b>	<i>sekolah dasar</i> (primary school)
<b>SMA</b>	<i>sekolah menengah atas</i> (senior secondary school)
<b>SMP</b>	<i>sekolah menengah pertama</i> (junior secondary school)
<b>TNP2K</b>	<i>Tim Nasional Percepatan Penanggulangan Kemiskinan</i> (National Team for the Acceleration of Poverty Reduction)

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IDR100,000 : £5.13 UK pounds sterling (approximately, August 2014)

IDR100,000 : AUS\$9.14 Australian dollars (approximately, August 2014)

# Executive Summary

This study was funded through the Reality Check Approach Plus (RCA+) project support provided by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Government of Australia. It was commissioned by the Monitoring and Evaluation working group of the National Team for the Acceleration of Poverty Reduction. The study aimed to gather people's perspectives regarding the uptake and experiences of two of the current social assistance programmes, Cash Transfers for Poor Students (*Bantuan Siswa Miskin* – BSM)(with recent modifications) and the 2014 roll out of the Conditional Cash Transfer Programme for Poor Families (*Program Keluarga Harapan* – PKH) in the eastern provinces of Indonesia. Part of this study gathered insights and perspectives on poverty from people themselves.

The Reality Check Approach is an internationally-recognised qualitative research approach that requires the study team to live with people living in poverty in their own homes for periods of time and to use this opportunity to have informal conversations with all members of the households, their neighbours and with the frontline services with whom they interact. The emphasis on informality and being in people's own spaces enables the best possible conditions for openness and for the study team members to triangulate the conversations with their first-hand experience and observations.

The study was undertaken in June and July 2014 in three locations in Southeast Sulawesi and four locations in Maluku. Locations were selected purposively and took into consideration a number of important contextual variables (remoteness, rural/urban, ethnicity/religion, availability of health and education facilities). Locations where there were high concentrations of social assistance recipients were selected on the assumption that these were poorer villages. Study team members lived with people living in poverty in their own homes for four days and four nights. A total of 22 host households, selected as being poorer households in their villages, participated in the study and more than 1,300 others were engaged in conversations during the course of the study (conversation time amounted to more than 1,200 hours, equivalent to more than 200 focus group discussions).

The findings on poor people's perspectives on poverty are covered in sub-report 1 and the findings on their perspectives on social assistance programmes are covered in sub-report 2. Both reports document people's own views that emerged from conversations based on the loose areas of enquiry developed specifically for the study (annex 2). Authorial voice is confined to the discussion section of the report (section 4).

Conversations around poverty were challenging in communities where most people see themselves as poor. Nevertheless, clear perspectives emerged through detailed conversations. Although it was easier for people to describe "who was not poor", a clear uncontested category of "those who need help" emerged in all study locations. These are people who are either incapacitated and cannot earn cash (for example through chronic illness, some disabilities or old age) or people who are in caring positions (for example, looking after the elderly, very young or people with disabilities) which makes it difficult for them to earn cash, especially if they have been abandoned or they have lost immediate family support.

Other determinants of poverty were listed (and are recorded in the report in order of frequency). These included: “not having cash in the house”; type of livelihood (those in unskilled day waged work were considered most vulnerable); ability to work; certain assets (especially access to metered electricity); location within the village and nature of the village (level of social cohesion); and “what you eat” (not how often). People expressed some caution about the “certain assets” determinant as many people receive gifts or buy on credit. People also noted that incomers, especially men marrying local women, are often poorer because the family does not have access to land. People who have travelled less and “not had exposure to other places” were considered poor and in Maluku the sentiment was shared that “only lazy people are poor” as farming and fishing are considered accessible to all.

People noted that poverty was dynamic and people move in and out of poverty depending on external causes (for example, conflicts or natural disasters) as well as on family life cycles (care/work dynamic, costs of education, number of family members able to work and family crises, for example, bereavement, accidents, divorce, chronic illness and chronic indebtedness).

Importantly, people noted that where you live had a significant influence on the experience of poverty. Families with similar configurations, assets and reported main livelihoods could experience poverty vastly differently depending on whether they lived in an area offering numerous opportunities to earn informal cash or not. Resource-rich communities and/or those with active local economies support a range of casual ways to earn cash and make the experience of poverty less extreme. Similarly, the experience of poverty was much worse in areas with high public poverty (areas with poor access to health facilities, schools and administration and poor roads). Being a religious or ethnic minority has significant potential to worsen the experience of poverty. Temporary migrant workers as well as those employed in state-owned plantations are disconnected from government poverty programmes.

Throughout the study, people indicated strong motivation for their children to “do better than we have” and were willing to invest in education to try to achieve this. People in these locations are disenchanted with farming and fishing and aspire to having government salaried work with the attendant security of tenure and access to credit that ensues.

Overall, people saw being poor as:

- Not having enough cash to cover increasingly cash-based transactions;
- Not having enough options to raise “instant cash”;
- Not having the time (usually because of caring duties) or health status to benefit from instant cash-earning opportunities;
- Being dependent on single livelihoods, seasons and middlemen;
- Not being employed on a permanent basis, so unable to plan or think about the future or gain access to credit;
- Living as a minority, with limited access to local decision-making structures and facilities;
- Living in fear (due to ethnic tensions, lack of documentation, illiteracy); and
- Living in places “off the map” and therefore difficult to reach.

The discussion section suggests that determining the undisputed category of “families in need of help” is a priority from people’s perspective. While this could theoretically be largely informed by existing data, especially around age, chronic illness and numbers of household members unable to work (either physically or due to caring roles), it is not currently done. It also suggests that surveys that ask people’s main occupation inadequately capture the diverse nature of people’s livelihood strategies, especially with the increase in cash demands. The means of collecting consumption data could be revisited and based on actual cash expenditures that people can recall rather than on monetised consumption, especially where people do not know quantities of items consumed but do know the cost. The discussion also notes that some assets used to determine poverty have limited applicability in the current context.

The report concludes with a number of policy implications and considerations with regard to improving targeting and recommends the following processes that make sense to people living in poverty themselves:

- Identify “families in need” through differently prioritised survey questions and ensure that the social assistance programmes are designed to reach them as a priority;
- Provide community facilitators to help families specifically to access their entitlements as these families are often the least able to do this themselves;
- Update the indicators used to determine poverty so they are more consistent with contemporary experiences;
- Weight household poverty indicator data with public poverty assessment (availability of a range of essential facilities) and with an “opportunities” index which encapsulates the diversity of opportunities available in particular locations.



# Chapter I

## Introduction

This report presents the main findings of the Reality Check Approach study which was conducted in June and July, 2014. The study was commissioned by the National Team for the Acceleration of Poverty Reduction Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group. It sought to gather people's perspectives regarding the uptake and experiences of two of the current social assistance programmes, Cash Transfers for Poor Students (*Bantuan Siswa Miskin* – BSM) and the 2014 roll out of the Conditional Cash Transfer Programme for Poor Families (*Program Keluarga Harapan* – PKH) in the eastern provinces. The study also provided an opportunity to learn how people themselves define and experience poverty and these findings feature in this sub-report.

The Reality Check Approach (RCA) study was undertaken by a team of 21 researchers under the guidance of the international team leader who also undertook some field research directly (see annex 1). Overall management of the team, training of new researchers in the approach and logistic arrangements were undertaken by the Reality Check Approach Plus (RCA+) Project (see annex 5). Nineteen families participated as host households from six different locations (three in Southeast Sulawesi and three in Maluku), with a further three host households on a commercial plantation where team members stayed for one night. Over 1,300 people from the villages where host households were situated participated in the study (equivalent in numbers to 100 focus groups discussions) involving over 1,200 hours of interaction (equivalent in time terms to 200 focus group discussions).

## Background

The study was designed to gather insights about people living in poverty and their perceptions, experiences and use of the two social assistance programmes. Since both these programmes are targeted using the Unified Database for Social Protection Programmes (*Basis Data Terpadu Untuk Program Perlindungan Sosial* – UDB), understanding people's perceptions and experiences of poverty and the relevance of the database formed a key part of the study. The database (as a basis for targeting) is described in the next section.

### *Poverty indicators and the Unified Database for Social Protection Programmes*

The Unified Database for Social Protection Programmes is managed by the National Team for the Acceleration of Poverty Reduction and is intended to improve the accuracy and accessibility of data on poor households. It is used to target social programmes, especially the following: Public Health Insurance (*Jaminan Kesehatan Masyarakat* – Jamkesmas), Cash Transfers for Poor Students, the Conditional Cash Transfer Programme for Poor Families and Rice for Poor Households (*Program Subsidi Beras Bagi Masyarakat Berpendapatan Rendah*, popularly known as the Raskin programme). Research has shown that the various targeting approaches used previously failed to accurately and effectively identify intended beneficiaries and there was, in particular, unacceptable leakage to the non-poor. The database uses proxy means testing<sup>1</sup> to rank “prosperity” which, in turn, uses data extracted from the 2011 National Social and Economic Survey (*Survei Sosial dan Ekonomi Nasional*, known as Susenas) and the 2012 Data Collection for Social Protection Programmes (*Pendataan Program Perlindungan Sosial* – PPLS).<sup>2</sup> The computation results in a poverty-ranking index by (named) households within the bottom four deciles (poorest 40 percent of households in Indonesia).

<sup>1</sup> Proxy means testing uses multivariate regression to correlate certain proxies, such as assets and household characteristics, with poverty and income. In Indonesia the correlation is made with consumption.

<sup>2</sup> The main data used was from the Data Collection for Social Protection Programmes (*Pendataan Program Perlindungan Sosial*) which included 25 million households (poorest 40 percent) conducted by Statistics Indonesia (BPS) in July–August 2011.



The household index is adjusted by location using inclusion/exclusion of certain key survey questions and weighting of others to allow for rural/urban and location-specific variations in the determinants of poverty. Field verification of the validity of some indicators was undertaken during the course of refining the database and some indicators were dropped because of inaccuracies or practical difficulties faced in collecting accurate data.<sup>3</sup> The automated targeting was supplemented by consultations at community level and “sweeping” which means adding or deleting households according to these local consultations. Introducing this database was intended to improve targeting effectiveness.

SMERU Research Institute (2012) noted in their rapid assessment of the Data Collection for Social Protection Programmes that it provided a number of improvements over previous systems. These included, firstly, that the data collection (the survey) was not linked to any specific programmes and, secondly, that it requested more detailed information from households. However, it was still criticised for being too generalised in that it uses poverty indicators without sufficiently taking into account local socio-economic characteristics. SMERU also pointed to some evidence of under-coverage. Furthermore, the data collection was conducted with households pre-listed as poor from the 2008 census so the accuracy of this base information was questioned. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – DFAT commissioned study (2011) notes that the proxy means test (PMT) has many built-in errors:

“Part of the reason for this is the imperfect correlation between multiple proxies and household consumption. Additionally, the PMT methodology is based on national household survey data that represent ‘reality’ at one point in time and are inherently inaccurate to varying degrees. Other issues are sampling errors in household surveys and assumptions made in applying the PMT, which increase the arbitrary nature of the methodology yet affect whether individual households receive social protection benefits.”

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<sup>3</sup> For example, house floor size was dropped because people had difficulty estimating this.



# Chapter II

## Research Methodology

## Reality Check Approach

The Reality Check Approach (RCA) extends the tradition of listening studies (see Salmen 1998 and Anderson, Brown and Jean 2012) and beneficiary assessments (see SDC 2013) by combining elements of these approaches with the researchers actually living with people whose views are being sought, usually those who are directly experiencing poverty. It could be likened to **“light touch” participant observation**. Participant observation involves entering the lives of the subjects of research and both participating in and observing their normal everyday activities and interactions. It usually entails extensive and detailed research into behaviour with a view to understanding peoples’ perceptions and their actions over long periods of time. The Reality Check Approach is similar in that it requires participation in everyday life within people’s own environments but differs by being comparatively quick and placing more emphasis on **informal, relaxed and insightful conversations** than on observing behaviour and the complexities of relationships.

Important characteristics of the RCA are:

- **Living with** rather than visiting (thereby meeting the family in their own environment, understanding family dynamics and how days and nights are spent);
- **Having conversations** rather than conducting interviews (there is no note taking thereby putting people at ease and on an equal footing with the outsider);
- **Learning** rather than finding out (suspending judgement, letting people who experience poverty take the lead in defining the agenda and what is important);
- **Being household-centred** and interacting with families rather than users, communities or groups;
- **Being experiential** in that researchers themselves take part in daily activities (collecting water, cooking, cultivation) and accompany household members (to school, to market, to health clinic);
- **Ensuring inclusion** of all members of households;
- **Interacting in the private space** rather than public spaces (an emphasis on normal, ordinary lives);
- **Embracing multiple realities** rather than relying on public consensus (gathering diversity of opinion, including “smaller voices”)
- **Interacting in ordinary daily life** with frontline service providers (accompanying host household members in their interactions with local service providers, meeting service providers as they go about their usual routines);
- **Taking a cross-sectoral view**, although each study has a special focus, the enquiry is situated within the context of everyday life rather than simply (and arguably artificially) looking at one aspect of people’s lives;
- **Understanding longitudinal change** and how change happens over time.



Researcher chats informally in the village



Training and orientation on the RCA were provided before each round of the study. This was the first time that training was provided without a concomitant immersion experience as the National Team for the Acceleration of Poverty Reduction (TNP2K) staff had limited time available (see limitations section). The training was led by Dee Jupp with assistance from Dewi Arilaha, who was a team member for the 2009–2010 study conducted on the basic education programme in Indonesia, and Ansu Tumbafunghe, who has conducted training and acted as a sub team leader in a number of RCA studies in Nepal.

The emphasis on informal conversations and observation allows for openness and insights into the differences between what people say and what they do. The team found that the families they stayed with were accepting and quickly relaxed and felt at ease to talk openly. Study team members engaged all members of the family as well as neighbours (focal households) in conversations. They accompanied them to their places of work, schools, health posts and assisted them with household chores to minimise any disruption in their daily routine and to ensure the most relaxed conditions for conversations. The team members also interacted with local power holders (village chiefs and administrators and heads of neighbourhoods) as well as local service providers (health workers, school teachers, religious leaders, shop and stall owners) through informal conversations (see annex 5 for the list of people met).

Each team member discreetly left a “gift” for each family on leaving, comprising food items and stationery to the value of IDR120,000–300,000, to compensate for any costs incurred in hosting the researcher. As researchers insist that no special arrangements are made for them, they help in domestic activities and do not disturb income-earning activities, the actual costs to a family are negligible. The timing of the gift was important so families did not feel they were expected to provide better food for the researchers or get the impression that they were being paid for their participation.

Each team member kept their own field notes but they never wrote these in front of the people they were conversing with. In addition, they facilitated some joint visual analyses with members of host households on their incomes and expenditure (“pile sorting”). They also facilitated people to make maps of the sub-village (*dusun*) and ranked household assets as well as undertaking other preference-ranking activities. Activities included playing games with the children of the household too. To illustrate the context of the village and the households, photos were taken with the consent of villagers. These narratives and visual records formed the basis of detailed debriefing sessions held with each sub-team as soon as possible after each round of the study was completed. A final workshop was held with the study team to confirm the findings in September 2014.

## Selection of locations

The RCA study villages were selected purposively. Key determinants for location selection were negotiated with the TNP2K Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group and others working on the social assistance programmes. These determinants included:

- Remoteness or proximity to district town;
- Rural or peri-urban;
- Ethnicity or religion;
- Main occupation;
- Concentration of social assistance recipients (proxy for relative poverty of community); and
- Presence of health and education facilities (opportunity to meet conditionalities associated with social assistance programmes).

Table 1 lists the study locations with reference to these key determinants.

TABLE 1: STUDY LOCATIONS IN RELATION TO PURPOSIVE SELECTION CRITERIA

SULAWESI							
CODE	DESCRIPTION	RURAL/ PERI- URBAN	ETHNICITY/ RELIGION	MAIN OCCUPATION	CONCENTRA- TION OF PKH RECIPIENTS (%HH )	EDUCATION FACILITIES	HEALTH FACILITIES
B1	20 min motorcycle ride on asphalt road from <i>kecamatan</i> . Verdant rolling hills with rivers, about 9 km inland from coast.	Rural inland	Muslim	Trade (in Ambon), farming, construction	7.6%	x2 SD in village x1 SMP in village Higher education 20 mins <i>ojek</i> journey away	x1 PK in village (closed) PY in each <i>dusun</i>
K1	Two <i>dusuns</i> contiguous with district town but one across flooded river extends into mountains with very dispersed houses (plantation)	Peri-urban inland	Muslim Plantation workers all migrants	Plantation (cloves/cacao) construction, transport, petty trade	4.8%	Nothing in mountain <i>dusun</i> . x1 <i>madrasah</i> (mixed) in near town <i>dusuns</i> .	Nothing in mountain <i>dusun</i> . x1 PK closer to town
W1	Small island, village 30 mins walk from sub-village ( <i>kecamatan</i> ).	Rural-coast & inland	Bajo tribe (Muslim) Liya tribe (Muslim)	Bajo – fishing Liya– <i>agar-agar</i> , sea products	16.7%	x1 SD, x1 SMP in town (30-45 mins walk)	

TABLE 1: STUDY LOCATIONS IN RELATION TO PURPOSIVE SELECTION CRITERIA (CONTINUED)

MALUKU							
CODE	DESCRIPTION	RURAL/ PERI- URBAN	ETHNICITY/ RELIGION	MAIN OCCUPATION	CONCENTRA- TION OF PKH RECIPIENTS (%HH)	EDUCATION FACILITIES	HEALTH FACILITIES
SUW	2.5 hours drive inland on good tarmac road followed by walk on rocky road. Mountainous, state-owned plantation	Rural inland	Long-term migrants – mostly Christian	Plantation workers (cacao/cocout)	N/A	Plantation-run SD which charges 25,000/month SMP in village	Plantation clinic only – charges minimum 10,000/visit
SU2	30-60 mins drive from <i>kecamatan</i> , one <i>dusun</i> 1 hour walk from coast.	Rural-coastal	Christian (one Muslim <i>dusun</i> – migrants from Buton)	Farming (some plantation also) – fertile land. Shrimp factory	16.6%	x4 SD in village x1 SMP in village or 60 mins away x1 SMA in villages	<i>Postu</i> in <i>dusuns</i> . No PK
MT2	2.5 hour drive from <i>kecamatan</i> , Team stayed in different sites – one was across river, only accessible by foot and on coast, one was in the forest inland (primitive village) and third was scattered along the coast flanked by forest.	Rural-coast and forest	Christian and Muslim (from Buton) but separated by distinct <i>dusuns</i> . Christianity predominates	Hunting (indigenous village); fishing (small-scale near shore) chilli, cassava, coconuts, durian and nutmeg farmers; Portering across river.	11.6%	SDs in all <i>dusuns</i> except primitive village where new one is planned. Meanwhile 2.5 kms walk SMP ( <i>satup atap</i> ) currently being expanded	<i>Poselu</i> in all <i>dusuns</i> One PK in poor condition
B2	Village of 4 <i>dusuns</i> on coast, 2 hours drive from <i>kecamatan</i> . Recent speculation about the potential for gold mining in the area but apart from many surveys and new roads no evidence yet. Very fertile farmland	Rural-coastal	Muslims (from Buton) with one Christian <i>dusun</i>	Farming – coconut, cacao, eucalyptus for sale	26.2%	x2 SD in village x1 SMP 45 mins walk Higher education need to go to district town	<i>Poselu</i> in all <i>dusuns</i> , <i>puskesmas</i> in one <i>dusun</i>

Note: *dusun* = sub-village; *kecamatan* = sub-district; *postu* = sub PK facility ; PK= *puskesmas* = people's health centre; PY= *posyandu* = integrated health post; SATAP = '*satup atap*' one roof school ( SD plus SMP)

The villages are not named in this report in order to protect the identity, anonymity and confidentiality of participants for ethical reasons but also and especially as there is a possibility that the study may be extended over a longer period of time as a longitudinal study requiring visiting the families again.

## Selection of households

Nineteen host households participated fully in the study (researchers stayed with them for four nights and four days) and a further three households, situated on a state-owned plantation, hosted our team members for just one night.

All host households were identified by team members through discussions with villagers and the host households themselves. Only two household selections were referred through the relevant village chief (*kepala desa*) but in both cases researchers were able to maintain final jurisdiction over the selection to ensure that host families met the study criteria. In all other cases, no authorities were involved in household selection.<sup>4</sup>

Households were selected with a view to representing the kinds of households that the social assistance programmes are designed to target (see section 2). Care was taken to ensure that people understood the nature of the RCA and the importance of staying with ordinary families and not being afforded guest status. The researchers worked with villagers to choose host households that were comparatively poor (defined by local perceptions of poverty as discussed in section 5) and included children of school-going age.

Team members entered villages independently and on foot to keep the process “low key”. The households selected by different members of the same team were at least 10 minutes walk away from each other and where possible further away to ensure interaction with a different constellation of focal households.

In addition to intense interaction with the host households (talking to family members and accompanying them in their daily activities), each team member also had extensive conversations with neighbours. This was usually with at least four other households living in poverty (referred to as focal households). They also had opportunistic conversations with local service providers such as teachers, formal and informal health service providers, motorbike taxi (*ojek*) operators, small shopkeepers and teashop owners (see annex 5). In total, the research involved conversations with over 1,300 people and represents more than 1,200 hours of conversation.

## Timing

The RCA study was conducted with six teams of three to five members in six different sites during the months of June and July 2014, as described in table 2.

TABLE 2: TEAM COVERAGE OF LOCATIONS

Team	location	June 2014	July 2014	No of team members
B1	SSE Sulawesi			4
W1	Island east of Sulawesi			4
K1	NSE Sulawesi			3
MT2	Maluku			5
SU2	Maluku			4
B2	Island west of Maluku			4
SUW 2	Plantation in Maluku			4

Each team member stayed with their respective host households for four nights and four days. Average conversational interaction with host families, neighbours and frontline service providers per team member was at least 50 hours. The entire study therefore provided the equivalent of 1,200 hours of conversation (roughly equivalent to 250 focus group discussions) and had the advantage of being supplemented by high levels of immediate and extensive triangulation, largely because of the immersion element of the study.

<sup>4</sup> Courtesy visits only were made to village or sub-village chiefs or heads (*kepala desa/ kepala dusun*)



## Reality Check Approach (RCA) methodological considerations: offsetting bias

Like all research methods, the Reality Check Approach takes note of and attempts to offset potential bias. The following is an analysis of the potential for bias and the way the researchers in this study and through the approach itself sought to minimise these biases.

### *Bias from being researched*

The approach benefits from being low key and unobtrusive. It seeks to provide the best possible conditions to listen, experience and observe ordinary daily lives and deliberately seeks to reduce the biases created by an external research presence. The team members take time to get to know the families they stay with, work alongside them and adapt to their pace and way of life. Ideally they seek to listen to family conversations and interactions rather than engage in lengthy question and answer sessions. Considerable effort is made to ensure the host families feel comfortable and at ease so they tell their own stories and explain their realities in their terms and in their own way. This goes some way to ensuring that the families do not feel their answers should be filtered, measured or in any way influenced by the presence of the outsiders. The team members actively suspend judgment. Considerable effort is made in pre-field team training to make the researchers aware of their own attitudes and behaviour which may be conducive or obstructive to openness and trust among those they interact with.

### *Bias from location*

At least three team members stayed in each village (*desa*), each living with a different poor family. All homes were at least 10 minutes walking distance from one another (and most were considerably more than this) so that each team member could maximise the number of unique interactions with people and service providers in the community and avoid duplication with other team members.

### *Researcher bias*

A minimum of three researchers were allocated to each village but they worked independently of each other thus allowing for more confidence in corroborating data. Each village team underwent a day-long debriefing to review information and findings emerging from each location immediately after completing the immersion. This enabled a high level of interrogation of the observations, experiences and responses and reduced the possibility of individual researcher bias. Furthermore, following completion of the entire baseline study, a validation workshop was held with the entire research team to analyse and confirm the main findings and ensure that both specificity and diversity in the findings were captured, along with more generalisable findings.

### *Evaluation framework bias*

Rather than using research questions which can suffer from normative bias, the team used a broad thematic checklist of areas of enquiry. These themes, summarised in annex 2, provided the basis for conversation topics rather than prescribed questions. The team members engaged with family members and others at appropriate times on these issues. For example, while cooking the meal, opportunities might arise to discuss what the family usually eats, when they eat and who eats what, and while accompanying children to school, opportunities arise to discuss access to, cost and experience of schooling.

### *Triangulation*

An integral part of the RCA methodology is the continuous triangulation that ensues. Conversations take place at different times of the day and night allowing unfinished conversations or ambiguous findings to be explored further. Conversations are held with different generations separately and together in order to gather a complete picture of an issue. Conversations are complemented by direct experience (for example, visits to health clinics, accompanying children to school, working with families on their farms) and observation (family interaction/dynamics). Cross checking for understanding is also carried out with neighbours, service providers (for example, traditional birth attendants, community health workers, school teachers and teashop owners) and power holders (informal and elected authorities). Conversations are at times complemented with visual material or illustrations, for example by jointly reviewing baby record books or school books as well as through various activities, such as drawing maps of the village, ranking household assets, scoring income and expenditure proportionally, and so on. In the course of four intensive days and nights of interaction on all these different levels, some measure of confidence can be afforded to the findings.

### *Confidentiality, anonymity and continuing non-bias in project activities*

The study locations are referred to by code only and the team is at pains to ensure that neither the report nor other documentary evidence, such as photos, reveal the locations or details of the host households. Faces of householders and images that reveal the location are either not retained in the photo archive or identities are digitally removed. This is partly to respect good research practice with regard to confidentiality but also has the benefit of ensuring that no special measures or consideration are given to these locations or households in the course of the programme. All families are asked to give their consent for their stories and photos to be recorded and shared.

### **Study limitations**

In addition to the determinants listed in table 1, practical considerations were also taken into account in choosing locations for the study. However, long road journeys of 12–14 hours were required for locations SU2 and K1. Other locations were reached by combinations of boat, road and foot (including wading through rivers for MT2 and K1) on journeys of 3–4 hours. The most remote location was reached via a local flight and then a walk (W1). Even though the journeys undertaken were not necessarily easy or quick, other possible locations were even less accessible and would have required journeys of several days so they had to be excluded from the study.

The June phase of the study partly coincided with the school holidays in some areas (different in different locations) which affected observations of school going and interaction with school children was affected (some children were away from home visiting relatives).

In all study locations, the use of local languages was common when families talked among themselves or in groups. Although researcher interactions were all in Bahasa Indonesia, some nuances and context may have been lost.

Reality TV had filmed in Sulawesi and some parts of Maluku some years ago and there were expectations that the research team were also “secretly filming”. These expectations meant that constant reassurance was required that this was not the case.

Location Maluku B2 had had a series of researchers visiting recently, apparently associated with speculation regarding the extractives industries. A pyramid marketing scheme for pharmaceuticals had also been recently set up by outsiders. Both had raised expectations that had to be managed carefully by the team.

Some members of the team were new to the Reality Check Approach. Normally, they would be given a two-night immersion experience with families living in poverty in order to experience this and think through their own attitudes and behaviours before embarking on the main study. However, the National Team for the Acceleration of Poverty Reduction participants did not have time to do this and some researchers felt that they may have been able to build informality and trust with their host households sooner had they had the confidence gained from a previous immersion experience.



# Chapter III

## People's Perspectives on Poverty

This section looks at how poverty is experienced and perceived by people living in poverty themselves as well as how it is perceived by other members of the community in the different study locations. This inevitably takes a multidimensional view of poverty, exploring its changing dynamics as well as peoples’ aspirations for the future. It investigates the nexus between private and public poverty and how these factors interplay resulting in individual households’ particular experience of poverty and vulnerability.

Whilst the study concentrated on the 19 host households,<sup>5</sup> researchers interacted with more than 80 additional focal households and gathered information about the village as a whole through conversations with other people, including frontline service providers (teachers, health workers, local administrators) and through the researchers’ own observations. The triangulated findings are therefore somewhat representative of the locations rather than just the small number of host households.

## Who is poor?

During the course of conversations, we asked our host and focal households and others who they considered to be the poor people in the community, sometimes obliquely using phrases like people “who live more simply” or “who are less fortunate” because of the sensitivities around this issue. People explained that it was easier to describe who was not poor rather than who was poor. Nevertheless, a number of recurrent themes permeated conversations in all locations. These are presented below in approximate order of frequency. The first descriptor refers to those who are struggling and need help and people felt this category was both easy to describe and uncontested. The second descriptor is “lack of cash” and came through strongly as something that distinguishes the very poor.

### BOX 1: UNCONTESTED ‘FAMILIES IN NEED’

The following are a few examples of families that other poor people considered clearly in need of help:

My host household neighbours told me they wished my host family had been a bit more open about their situation to me. They said: “They have struggled so much, especially paying for the treatment of the mother. She coughs blood and the *puskesmas* here is hardly ever open so they have to take her to town. The health card does not help as it only partly pays for medicines for this. The family conserves water by sending the children to the river to bathe and they eat poorly. The mother no longer goes to the women’s savings group because she is embarrassed” (Field notes, Sulawesi, B1).

I was told a mother abandoned her three children in the village without saying a word. The father is currently still in the village but it seems he does not take care of the children. I saw one of the children sleep outside a neighbour’s house one night on a bamboo bed. People said she was fed by different people in the village (Field notes, island off Sulawesi, W1).

This twice divorced woman [in my host household], now in her 60s, has struggled most of her life as a single mother raising three children. She used to sell spices until an earthquake destroyed the plywood factory where most of her customers worked and the factory never reopened. Now she has been left two of her grandchildren to look after as her daughter and son-in-law cannot afford to look after them. She also feeds an orphaned boy who lives next door. She has moved to the island to be close to her brother but because she has no identity card she is not entitled to any official assistance here (Field notes, island off Sulawesi, W1).

There is a 12 year old girl who can’t go to school because she alone has to look after her 85 year old grandmother. She and her elder brother were sent to her grandma when she was 7, although she had been studying in primary school in Papua before. Her parents have divorced and each remarried but did not take her back. Since the grandma needs help, the care arrangement stands, especially as her elder brother has now returned to Papua (Field notes, Maluku, SU2).

<sup>5</sup> Plus a further three plantation-located host households where researchers stayed for one day and night.

### • *Those who need help*

As the study purposively sought out poorer locations, the prevailing feeling among study participants was that “everyone is poor in our village”. However, further conversations and probing revealed more nuanced responses with people often volunteering the categorisation of “those needing help”. The particular families who fell into this category seemed to be universally clear and uncontested within the community. Box 1 describes some of the households that people put into this category. Those needing help, according to other poor people, include: families that have members with chronic medical conditions (recognising the actual costs and the opportunity costs of care); those caring for elderly people; elderly people living on their own with no support from relatives; widows living on their own or caring for children or the elderly; and abandoned women and children.

### • *Access to cash*

Having or not having cash in the house (Maluku, SU2) is, according to people living in poverty, one of the most important determinants of poverty. People told us that it is not possible to exist without cash any more, as it used to be in the past. Former subsistence farmers explained that they have to find ways to earn cash to pay for food, electricity (or kerosene), water (sometimes), school costs, medicine, farm inputs, social obligations,<sup>6</sup> new clothes,<sup>7</sup> and so the list goes on. The days of bartering are largely over and we only found the practice in one village.<sup>8</sup> But it is cash flow and the ability to meet day-to-day cash demands which people feel creates the biggest divide between the poor and poorer. Simply put, those with a range of ways to raise “instant cash” are better off than those who have limited or few ways to do this. So, for example, the widow described in the third paragraph in Box 1 has no means of raising cash except through occasional kitchen garden surplus. However, a self-declared subsistence farmer host household in Sulawesi B1, despite facing huge demands for cash (with twelve children, ten of



The family was ‘in need of help’ according to the community as grandma looks after two grandchildren and also feeds an orphan who lives next door. She has no documentation so cannot access social assistance.

<sup>6</sup> Including donations to mosques or churches. In one Maluku location all families were expected to contribute IDR250,000 to facilitate a meeting of the local synod, something they felt they got no benefit from but had no way to avoid. Others are frequently required to contribute to building and renovation costs yet feel the church offers no services to the community except worship.

<sup>7</sup> Especially at celebrations such as Lebaran or Christmas

<sup>8</sup> In B2, Maluku, households processed cassava and exchanged this for fish.

whom are in full-time education), has a range of options to raise instant cash. The family can do a number of things: collect rocks or dredge and sell sand for construction; clear other peoples fields; work as unskilled day labourers on construction sites; sell cassava cakes house to house; and cut and sell firewood. A household with a single livelihood or crop to sell is at a disadvantage compared to one with year-round alternatives. As a farmer in Maluku noted:

“I have my crops but can also sell banana and cassava leaves to passing traders and if necessary I can cut wood from the forest, which takes me a week, and sell it to traders in town. We sometimes catch and sell parrots. There is always a way to earn some cash somehow” (host household, Maluku, SU2).

His youngest son currently makes regular trips to the forest to earn money to pay for his tuition fees. Box 2 gives an example of cash-earning possibilities available to those living near an urban centre but we also found multiple options if there was some indication of local economy in rural areas. On the island off Sulawesi, fishing and agar agar cultivation are the main livelihoods and depend solely on middlemen from outside who have a monopoly on pricing. There is little local economic activity (not much construction or disposable income) so no means of earning the small cash sums needed for day-to-day consumption. In one Maluku fishing village the poorest were those who had to raise cash through loans: “If you have to borrow money then you get into difficulty” (host household, Maluku MT2).<sup>9</sup> By contrast, the villages where there was a lot of hawker activity indicated that households had disposable cash income. For example, in one of the coastal villages in Maluku vendors sold kecup (soy sauce), MSG and other seasonings daily from house to house.



When there are day income-earning opportunities like collecting rocks or sand for construction (for example in Sulawesi B1) people say they feel less poor

#### BOX 2: MULTIPLE WAYS OF EARNING “INSTANT CASH” NEAR THE TOWN

My host household works on a share-cropped clove and cacao plantation but supplements this income with clearing land for others, making and selling alcohol from wild palm and selling leafy vegetables collected from the mountain. The mother of the family has bought a motorbike on credit and works as an *ojek* driver. The father picks up occasional work on construction sites in town (Field notes, host household 1, K1).

The host household cultivates cloves in a share-cropping arrangement with the landowner and can earn about IDR11 million per year but the income is seasonal and cash is needed throughout the year so they also cut wood, offer insect-spraying services, clear other people’s fields and buy and sell sugar house to house: “Life is better than before because there are many ways to earn cash” (the family migrated) (Field notes, host household 2, K1).

<sup>9</sup> Considered a “slippery slope”



- *What you do for work*

In all locations, people stated that if you have a government salaried job then you are better off. People noted that a salaried job meant not only job security and “fixed money” but also that the incumbent would be considered credit-worthy and be able to purchase assets such as a motorbike, television and fridge or use loans for house construction and education, especially higher education. So strong is the association between having a fixed income and wealth, in some areas people suggested that this was the only livelihood to aspire to. One host said:

“The *kepala dusun* is rich but he is a failure because none of his children have tertiary education and all (eight) are just traders” (host household, B2 Maluku).

Many parents shared their hopes of their children getting government jobs, especially in health and education.<sup>10</sup> Fishermen on the island off Sulawesi complained that even non-accredited teachers (*guru honor*) earn “so much and only work half a day”.<sup>11</sup>

Traders and shopkeepers, followed by transport providers, skilled construction workers (including carpenters and electricians), factory workers<sup>12</sup> and mine workers (especially at gold mines) were usually mentioned as the next better off. Often these jobs involved migration, albeit temporarily. The idea of going away to make money was entrenched in most of the study locations. For example, on the island off Sulawesi, only those who worked away picking cloves, selling spices or working in construction were regarded as less poor than those remaining. This tradition of working away from home has existed for several generations and is referred to as “*bernakat*”.<sup>13</sup> The idealism expressed in this term however belies the reality that fortunes are not made. A different view was expressed in Maluku MT2 where people implied that only poor people had to migrate as the fishing or farming village life was good enough. This was one of the three villages where people said that resources were sufficient and only lazy people were poor (see the last descriptor in this list).

“I am poor because I depend on seasonal fruit growing. You have to be a trader to get out of poverty”

host household father, Sulawesi, B1

The next categories of relative wealth become more indistinct. Fishermen, we were told, can be comparatively wealthy if they have larger ocean-going boats and outboard engines but if not, they can be among the poorest. Farmers can be comparatively wealthy if they have sufficient, good quality, irrigated land but if they are only subsistence farmers and have no supplementary income, they too can be among the poorest. However, people recognise that even landed farmers who used to be considered wealthier are facing increasing problems. Profitability is less secure with no direct connection to a value chain and with increased labour costs because young people are now in school rather than helping on the family farm. This is combined with less predictable

<sup>10</sup> The military was mentioned as another option but the various payments required to secure places were generally considered too much of a burden for poor people.

<sup>11</sup> Unaccredited teachers (*guru honor*) supported in part here were able to earn IDR3 million per month by working in three different schools, said to be more than fully qualified teachers earn.

<sup>12</sup> Factory workers are a special case as sometimes the employment conditions (short-term contracts, daily wage basis) are considered risky and insecure and so they do not always fit in this category.

<sup>13</sup> So called after the city in South Sumatra which is the origin of the Bugis tribe known to migrate to “make their fortune”. The term is now used to refer to the idea that this tradition continues.



seasons and cash wages required for labour. A farmer who has just started out is poor compared to others : “It takes 4–5 years for cacao and cloves to establish – this is a period of struggle ” (farmers in K1, peri-urban Sulawesi).

Unskilled labour (for example, portering at harbours or to cross rivers) and dependency on others for day-wage employment were seen as risky livelihoods without opportunities to move out of this unpredictable hand to mouth existence.

Conversations around livelihoods often resulted in discussion of the next most talked about element of poverty, the capacity to work and the number of household members who could work.

• *Whether you can work*

We heard in several different locations that older widows find working the land too hard, even when the land is theirs to cultivate. Getting help increasingly involves cash payment or reciprocity and the latter is usually in the form of labour but older women are not considered productive so reciprocal labour arrangements are limited or non-existent. Paying for labour is not possible so the land remains idle or minimally cultivated. We observed many fields that had been abandoned in this way. The family may have managed to work the land before the father died but cannot continue subsequently. People shared their observation that this is less often a problem for widowers as they may still be able to cultivate the land and engage in reciprocal labour arrangements but also because “they usually marry again and get help”.

Women of all ages who were on their own as a result of abandonment or divorce or because their husbands were away working told us that managing the farmland is hard. Physically managing tasks such as insecticide spraying and digging cassava is difficult and the cost of labour is prohibitive so, again, their land remains largely idle. In Sulawesi B1, several young mothers were struggling to provide for their children as their husbands had left to start trading in Ambon. The unpredictability of remittances or visits home and their inability to work because of child care duties left them vulnerable. One host household mother (Sulawesi, B1) confided, “children are a burden, to feed and care for and are preventing me from working” and added she had not been able to work for daily wages in people’s fields for nearly nine years.

Families with a number of able-bodied members are often in a good position to exploit local employment opportunities. For example, being called to clear a field can earn each family member IDR35,000 per day. A young family may only be able to provide one worker whereas others can provide perhaps four or five. Those caring single-handedly for others, looking after young, elderly or sick family members, cannot participate in these opportunities at all.

### • *Whether you have things*

Although often mentioned first by people as a possible indicator, having electricity (where it was available) on further discussion was not deemed a good indicator as poorer households often took connections from neighbours, usually at nominal monthly rentals.<sup>14</sup> The widespread use of mobile phones has made having a connection (to charge the phone) more important than before. Poorer households whose electricity connections came from others typically had a single light bulb and socket to charge the mobile phone. People said having electricity used to be a good way to determine poverty but now it only makes sense if you consider who has their own meter. The prohibitive costs of new connections,<sup>15</sup> people told us, mean that households without their own connections are unlikely to ever have them and are likely to be poor. Some communities, such as the sub-village situated across the river from town in Sulawesi, where predominantly short-term migrants work on small plantations, did not have electricity. This was partly because houses were located several kilometres away from each other but also because the migrants did not have identity cards.<sup>16</sup>

People told us the shabby house might not be their main house or in some cases the beautiful exterior might hide “simplicity” within.

### • *Where you live: accommodation*

The type of house people inhabit was not considered particularly informative; some people had more than one house and the “run-down one you see is not their main house” was a comment heard in several locations, especially in Sulawesi where people had abandoned houses to work in Ambon,<sup>17</sup> for example. Traditional wooden or bamboo houses can be linked to poverty in some areas, people explained, but with caution.<sup>18</sup> On the island off Sulawesi, for example, stone houses lined the main thoroughfare while those behind were bamboo and they were where poorer families lived. Better-off families here used concrete for the stilts for their houses while those less well-off used wood (which needs replacing every three years). How a house looks from the front and is described by the owner is also misleading. For example, in a fishing village in Maluku (MT2) the “houses looked like pretty concrete houses with tin roofs from the front but were very rough wood with pebble floors behind the façade” (researcher notes, Maluku, MT2). Government resettlement programmes (for example, those after the 1999-2002 conflict in Maluku)<sup>19</sup> where concrete housing is often provided further blurs housing type as a potential indicator.

Some families indicated that they had refused offers of government housing, preferring their traditional bamboo homes.<sup>20</sup> Inhabitants of the “primitive *dusun*” in one of the Maluku study sites had largely abandoned government-provided housing (with electricity) preferring to live in their traditional forest homes where they felt safer. In Maluku B2 people now living in government housing were “not interested in making it better – we had better houses before the conflict”.

14 IDR10–20,000 per month.

15 For example, the fee was IDR1.5 million in B1 (Sulawesi) ten years ago but people say it will be at least IDR3 million now. On the island to the east of Sulawesi, they said connection costs were IDR2 million about 10 years ago but would be IDR10 million today. New connections in Maluku where the infrastructure has recently been installed cost IDR1.5 million and there was little likelihood of new connections being made.

16 Which also prevented them accessing government-distributed solar panels

17 Sometimes using them only for family gatherings, for example at Lebaran

18 Photos of the study host households, which were considered poorer households, show they are all wood or bamboo.

19 The conflict involved inter-communal fighting between Christians and Muslims across the archipelago of Maluku and lasted about four years.

20 Considered by many in the study as “less pretty, less modern but cooler”

People pointed to families who owned motorcycles, televisions, fridges and furniture<sup>21</sup> as better off but cautioned that these could be gifts, especially from relatives working abroad or they could have been purchased on credit, often by more credit-worthy relatives on their behalf. Although credit-worthiness was linked to permanent employment (teaching and other civil service jobs) or to businesses with regular incomes (for example, shops), credit was also readily available for poor families whose incomes were linked to seasonal sales (where the lenders risks are mitigated). In the peri-urban village in Sulawesi, pre-harvest loans and credit deals were assertively sold (based on harvest incomes due in July/August) leading to high levels of indebtedness. Households here had televisions, the latest phones, other electrical items and the latest fashions, for example, but nearly all bought on credit. People who owned the assets they needed for their livelihoods, such as boats for fishing, chainsaws for logging, motorcycles to provide motorbike taxi (*ojek*) services, were not necessarily better off than their neighbours. These means of production, too, were often bought on credit or rented.

While firewood is used mostly for cooking, people also use kerosene, for example, to fry things quickly. By the coast, people collect rubber sandals and other flotsam as cooking fuel. Collecting firewood is restricted in some areas and so people have to buy fuel. People said that the requirement to buy rather than collect the wood for free is an indicator of poverty.

Toilets are not a good indicator of poverty as people do not necessarily prioritise them. Where there is a beach that is constantly being washed by the sea or jungle which is not cultivated, investment in toilets is not given precedence. This is well illustrated by the map drawn by people in Maluku MT2 where a variety of other assets were highlighted as indicators of becoming better off but toilets were excluded.

Washing in the river rather than having your own water source can sometimes indicate poverty but sometimes it is just a preference – a social activity



Firewood is typically used for cooking but now increasingly people use mixed fuel sources.



This map shows household assets which people felt were important – everyone has mobile phones, two-thirds have televisions but less than half have toilets, giving this low priority

<sup>21</sup> Meaning sofa sets, cupboards, chairs and beds

- *Where you live: position*

In the Maluku study fishing villages, those who owned their own boats and outboard engines lived along the coastal road. These tuna fishermen indicated they could make as much as a million rupiah per day during the high season (March–December) but the poor relied on the small coconut groves, small-scale farming and fishing in small boats without engines for their own consumption. They lived away from the main road. Similarly, the better-off fishermen on the island off Sulawesi occupied stone houses along the main road. In other locations, the poor were described as living at the edge of the village or behind the village “in the jungle”. For example in B1 (Sulawesi) the hosts waved their hands towards the hill behind the village, saying: “That’s where you will find really poor people.” However, there was much evidence that those who may formerly have lived away from the village had recently abandoned their old dwellings in order to access electricity and some concomitant government schemes that encouraged this move.

“Those who live far away from the road  
are the most poor”  
host household Sulawesi

- *Where you live: community*

Another aspect of “where you live” refers to the kind of community you live in and its internal and external relations (what is referred to as social capital in development parlance). On the island off Sulawesi, people spoke of “open or broad mindedness” meaning a willingness to include everyone, support each other and work cooperatively, as an important dimension of feeling less poor than others who were “closed minded” and concerned about themselves. Closed people or communities, they explained, have a tendency to migrate out of the village and abandon others and there is less cooperative spirit. People from the marginalised Muslim sub-village in the largely Christian village in Maluku (SU2) also spoke of the importance of social cohesion and working together. The neighbouring Christian sub-village practised reciprocal help arrangements between families (see Box 3), a practice in decline in other study areas where earning cash is prioritised. Others in Maluku noted that social cohesion and mutual support had increased since the religious conflict of 1998 and this included supporting those less well off.

#### BOX 3: WORKING TOGETHER – SOCIAL COHESION MEANS WE ARE LESS POOR

The people of this *dusun* near the coast in Maluku pointed to the importance of working together. For example, they have reciprocal arrangements for harvesting coconuts. Each family who gets assistance provides food and drinks for those who help and their children. Usually a husband and wife will work for different families to spread the opportunities for reciprocity. The same system of mutual help applies to clearing farmland, building houses and preparing for a party or other special occasions (Field notes, Maluku, SU2).

- *Where you live: public amenities*

Finally, where you live encompasses access to public facilities. Communities that are remote and lack health centres, schools, roads and markets (with high levels of public poverty) are difficult places to live. Costs are incurred in accessing facilities and the disconnectedness is also considered impoverishing.

- *What you eat*

Missing meals or eating less food was regarded less an indicator of poverty these days than it was in the past. People explained that it can be a choice households make in order to service other needs, especially school and other consumer goods or services. In K1 (on the outskirts of town in Sulawesi) people explained that they consciously cut back on food in order to buy cosmetics, fashion items and the latest gadgets (see Box 4). In B2 (Maluku islands) the following quotes were typical: “If others are fashionable, how can I not be” and we want to be “more beautiful, like people in the city”. Their lifestyle involved constant loud music and conspicuous alcohol consumption and we were also made aware of many extra-marital affairs. Families who received social assistance also spent IDR 600,000 on hair straightening. This was confirmed by spending time with the hairdresser who had a thriving business in this small Muslim coastal village.

The hairdresser in the village does good business going house to house straightening and curling hair at a cost of IDR600,000. Customers can pay on credit. People reduce their food intake to afford this (Maluku)

There were a few cases of families feeding their neighbour’s or relatives’ children (sometimes considered a burden to those who are slightly better off – see later) because the family could not afford to do so.

What you eat is considered a better indicator of poverty than how many times you eat. However, in all cases this was found to be context-specific so no generalisations could be made. The inhabitants of the very poor village on an island east of Sulawesi ate fish and other seafood in abundance daily but rice was a rarity. Here people said things like: “the better-off can buy food” and rice was a major expense for all those with whom we jointly examined expenditures. In contrast, people in the village close to town in Sulawesi said they rarely ate fish because they could not afford it. They ate rice and vegetables or leaves gathered from the mountain. In Southeast Sulawesi, families often ate cassava, sago and maize instead of rice and had their own plentiful production, supplementing their diets with mostly homegrown vegetables and fish bought from peripatetic tradespeople. On one of the Maluku islands, eating rice was “what people in the city do – everyone there eats rice ... for us it is just for special occasions“(host household, Maluku B2). The issue is what food the household feels it has to buy or pay for and how much of a burden this is to them.

However, many conversations suggested being able to buy what some regard as luxury items, such as sugar<sup>22</sup> and snacks (including noodles), is something poor people should be able to do and inability to do this makes them feel poorer. However, in the village close to the main town in Sulawesi, the plantation workers are anxious to cut costs as the purpose of their migration is to make money to invest back home. Some families actively discourage their children from snacking and drinking sweet tea or coffee: “We don’t want our children to be spoilt like rich children.”

#### BOX 4: “OUR CHOICE TO MISS MEALS”

My host household had only one meal a day but they had more than fifteen “must have” cosmetics and used them daily. “I will not go out without my perfume and my lip-gloss” the 12 year-old daughter told me. A young neighbour, who dropped out of elementary school recently, used skin whitening, foundation, hand and body lotions, lipstick, eye shadow, blusher and eye liner daily. I found the same in several households: “Looking good is more important” they explained (Field notes, peri-urban Sulawesi).

<sup>22</sup> When sugar was used in host households, it was consumed in large quantities, for example being added to fresh coconut water, comprising half of a cup or glass of coffee, sweetening cassava cakes, and so on



Typically our study host households ate simple meals comprising a staple and, in this case, leaves collected from the forest – this is supplemented by fish when they can afford it.



When the family has cash, they buy fish. The fish costs about IDR10,000 (Sulawesi) and the women buying in Maluku spend about the same each day.

• *Who you marry*

Families comprising local women married to outsider men may be poorer as they have no land to cultivate. This was pointed out to us in several study locations and Box 5 gives two such examples.

**BOX 5: MARRYING AN OUTSIDER**

My host household is considered poor by others in the community because the husband is not local. He met his wife when he was a road construction worker and later got work as a logger in the area. Because he is not from this village, he has no land inheritance. His wife has only a small piece of inherited land. As a daughter she was given land with no established coconut or cacao, so currently it is only suitable for subsistence vegetable production (Field notes, Maluku SU2).

Everyone says that my host household is the poorest in the dusun, even though she is the daughter of the kepala dusun. The husband is an “outsider” from Flores and required his wife to convert to Islam on marriage. They are the only non-Christians in the village. They have no land, so the wife picks coconuts, making about IDR12,500 per day and the husband works for a drinking water company as a delivery man (Field notes, Maluku MT2).

• *If you never travel*

The idea expressed by some is that the poor are those who are not able to travel and learn through travel:

“Our *kepala desa* did not graduate from primary school but he has travelled, even to Singapore, so he knows things, is open to trying things” (host household, Sulawesi).

Such sentiments were shared elsewhere too. Education is one way to progress but exposure to other places and other ideas, people explained, is another way to “try things” and “move ahead”.

In some of the study sites in Maluku, people pointed to the Buton people as successful because they have had “lots of exposure to other places before they came here. They have learned a lot through their travels.” People explained that they were “competitive people” who had aspirations to acquire what their neighbours had. They were prepared to travel widely, we were told, to achieve their aspirations whereas others with less ambition remained poor. In Maluku B2 and SU2 people talked often of the advantages of speaking English which facilitated access to jobs:

“All you need to learn at school is English and maths, then you can go anywhere in the world”  
(host household, Maluku B2).

The advent of the new bridge completed a year ago in Maluku (B2) has brought much optimism as people feel “connected with ‘up’ places” and able to travel. “Now we feel less left out, we can catch others up” further exemplifies the connection made between having limited experience and minimal networks and poverty.

- ***“No poor people only lazy people”***

In the Maluku study sites, the sentiment raised frequently among villagers themselves (and in all three Maluku locations)<sup>23</sup> was that “there are no poor people here, only lazy people”. The reasoning was that the abundance of fertile land and good fishing was sufficient and accessible to all:

“We are very lucky having farms and fish... I have travelled elsewhere and know how lucky we are” (host household MT2, Maluku).

This was echoed in Maluku B2 by comments such as “If you are a hard worker then you will get rich” (host household B2, Maluku). However, the caveat was nearly always school expenses. Again this referred to the need for cash (as described earlier) and people talked about the need to take out loans and the problems this sometimes precipitated when loans had to be rescheduled or were not forthcoming.

## **Experiences of poverty change over time**

People we interacted with in the study see their experience of poverty as dynamic; they move in and out of poverty depending on external causes (conflict, natural disasters) as well as internal causes which may relate to family life cycles (the care/work dynamic, costs of education, number of family members able to work) and family crises (bereavement, accidents, divorce, chronic illness, chronic indebtedness).

“I will sacrifice anything ... if I have to eat rice with salt then I will do so in order to send my children to university” (host household Sulawesi, K).

This is typical of many parents who participated in the study. The costs associated particularly with further education are considered a burden but one which parents are prepared to make sacrifices for. However, when investments are disrupted by events such as pregnancy or illness, parents find themselves making these sacrifices for longer than they had anticipated or having to take on new burdens, particularly looking after grandchildren

<sup>23</sup> This does not include the plantation location



**BOX 6: POVERTY IS DYNAMIC – THE UNEXPECTED “SACRIFICE” OF LOOKING AFTER GRANDCHILDREN**

My host household has three children, two daughters and a son, and another (informally) adopted daughter (a cousin whose mother died). The eldest daughter started teachers training college two years ago and then became pregnant. To ensure she continues at college, the parents have taken care of the baby although the daughter has since married the father of her child. My host household mother keeps sending rice, cassava, sweet potatoes and sometimes smoked fish to her daughter. I saw her clean 15kgs of Raskin rice (from the 60 kg this family was entitled to) just received last Monday to send to her daughter. Because she has to look after her grandson, she cannot now help her husband in the field. She also no longer makes cakes or *pandanus* mats for sale as she has no time (Field notes, Maluku, SU2).

Four years ago, my host household father and mother moved out of their government-built house so that their fifth son, who is married with three children, could live there. They moved into a self-constructed wood and bamboo house on stilts. Now in their 60s they are finding it difficult to climb the ladder to enter their house. They want a better house but they are now looking after two grandchildren while their mother is studying. This daughter phoned Mamma while I was staying and asked for IDR3 million to cover tuition fees. Mamma cried, “Why does she keep doing this, why does she keep making us suffer with these demands?” They continue to have hope that at least one of their eight children will get a “proper job” and “become a real person” (*jadi orang*) they can be proud of (Field notes, Maluku SU2).

while their children continue their education. Box 6 describes two cases where grandparents have been required to step in to care for their grandchildren unexpectedly. Our conversations and observations during this study suggest that this is a widespread and growing phenomenon, not only to protect investments in education but also to enable children to take up employment away from home.

Once children have graduated and got their first job, there is often a concomitant feeling of relief, parents confided. Not only have the educational costs ceased but, with time, the children may start to support other younger siblings through their education and send gifts and money home. The study team observed a clear correlation between “graduation photos on the wall” and other assets in houses they visited. Conversations around these photos often led to families acknowledging relief that “at least one of my children has been successful” and a sense that they now enjoyed not having the stress of constant demands for education expenses. Often the television, new phones and rice cookers in evidence had been given as gifts by these graduates.

As mentioned earlier, young households often struggle because they do not have enough “hands” to take advantage of *ad hoc* local income-earning possibilities. Older households where children have left home do not necessarily receive the support from their offspring in old age alluded to although it was once assumed to be

“at least one of my children  
has been successful”

(host, Sulawesi B1)

part of the culture. People often shared their feeling that children these days are interested in their own families and often spare “little thought for their parents”. This situation, experienced by growing numbers of parents, may be compounded by the fact that they too may be in caring roles, looking after elderly relatives, and so are unable to take advantage of local income-earning opportunities when they arise.

## Poverty means different things in different places

“If you are poor in the village, you can survive but you die in the city” (30 year old man, Maluku, SU2).

It was clear from the interactions in the different locations that poverty meant different things in different places and this thinking was especially clear among those who had travelled or had relatives living in different locations. The whole study area (Sulawesi and Maluku) presented a context of constant movement of people and this had been the norm for many for successive generations, according to those consulted. Mobility is nevertheless seen as increasing these days as people search for better work and are instantly connected through mobile phones. This has led to increased consumerism and people feel poor if they cannot be part of this.

Most people felt that city life was good and believed you would be less poor in the city because of the multitude of opportunities to earn. Cash earnings translate to purchasing power and many young rural people confided that being able to own things such as phones, motorcycles and televisions and being able to dress fashionably indicated that they would no longer be poor. Those who are poor in town are those who have no networks to draw on for work, or they are addicts or mentally ill, they ventured.



“At least in rural places people can get by”

### BOX 7: URBAN VS. RURAL

#### The dominant view....

To live in Ambon was the main ambition of the youth in my village (Sulawesi, B1). Children drew pictures of the dream houses they hoped to be able to live in after they had spent time in Ambon. The opportunities to earn are varied and there is always a way of earning money, they said. The city life is more interesting, many told us, but most importantly “you can buy things in the city” (Field notes, Sulawesi, B1).

#### The less stated view....

The nephew of my host household father had dreamed of becoming a lawyer. He went to college in Ambon to study social welfare. During his time in college he disliked the lifestyle in a “big city” as well as the high cost of living there and he could not find a job after he graduated. He explained that “if you are poor in a city you will die, however if you are poor in the village you can survive.” He therefore moved back to the village after finishing his studies and moved into a house on the outskirts of the village where it is quieter. The village and surrounding forest he described as “the Garden of Eden” where “if you even throw a stick on the ground it will grow”. In his village he feels he is cosseted by the natural fertility of the ground and the beauty of nature (Field notes, Maluku SU2).

**BOX 8: BEING A RELIGIOUS MINORITY**

The “village of Christians” in B2 (Maluku island) comprises 78 households and is surrounded by other Muslim-dominated *dusuns*. The people living there migrated from Buton at least 30 years ago. Their attitude towards outsiders was apologetic and embarrassed and they were extremely reticent to host an outsider. The village suffered badly during the 1998 conflict and had only recently been rehoused by the government. The village has no shops and so, apart from a weekly night market, there is no reason for people from other neighbouring *dusuns* to visit. “We never have any conversations with them,” people from neighbouring *dusuns* told us, “even when we go to the night market or pass through on the way to school.” When the people there were not awarded social assistance cards (*kartu perlindungan sosial* – KPS) the response was just acceptance as there is no leadership capable of protesting on their behalf (team debriefing, Maluku B2).

By contrast, a group of Muslim Butonese arrived in one of the study *desa* in Maluku (SU2) before 1998 and live in one of the *dusuns* in an otherwise Christian *desa* ruled by a king. The 400 families maintain Buton traditions, including language, food and traditional events and customs, and enjoy a high level of social cohesion. However, they had to buy land from the king and continue to pay him to access common property resources such as the cropping coconuts. While the *posyandu* was built there, it was done without consultation and was poorly sited and is now abandoned. They are not visited by health workers as regularly as other *dusuns*. No asphalt road can be built in the village because the land belongs to the king. A small number of Buton Muslim families live in the neighbouring Christian village. Significantly, they were missed off a map drawn of the village by villagers during the study and were only added much later.

While the Butonese who had settled in other areas in the study said they had enjoyed unrestricted access to land and had bettered their lives (B2), the lives of settlers in this *dusun* were arguably worse than they had been in Buton because of the restrictions placed on them. They said they did not want to return however because “grandparents are buried here” (From team discussions on marginalised communities, post-study debriefing, Maluku SU2).

Being a minority in a particular location is another factor affecting the experience of poverty. Box 8 describes two sub-villages in different locations in Maluku where being the minority religion within the larger village has had significant effects on their experience of poverty. In another fishing village on the island off Sulawesi, there was strong local prejudice against the Bajo people (traditionally nomadic fishermen) with some referring to them as “untrustworthy, lazy, drunks and thieves”. This results in tensions and distrust in the distribution of resources. In a coastal village in Maluku (MT2) people referred to the “primitive *dusun*” where live apart from others in the forest as hunters. One researcher stayed there to experience their lives and describes the experience in Box 9.

**BOX 9: MARGINALISED TRIBAL POCKET**

Within the *dusun*, a small tribal community comprising 12 households lives in government housing provided since the 1998 troubles. They are Hindu and are never invited to the religious events held by the villagers from the Muslim village. But they are used to not mixing as many generations before them. Most families have many children and few go to school. For example, in one family of nine children only three attend school. The community adults are mostly illiterate and unused to using money. They are unusual in still relying on bartering. They barter their surplus cassava, sweet cassava and nutmeg for clothes and other needs. Unlike their neighbours, they have little access to information from authorities and rarely go to markets where information is exchanged. Uncomfortable in this setting, nearly half the households have left their government-provided homes to return to their traditional home in the forest (Field notes, Maluku, MT2).

The position of plantation workers can be especially precarious and two locations in the study gave some insights into this. The first was a share-cropped small-scale cacao and clove plantation near a main town in Sulawesi (K1). This plantation offers opportunities for migrants to earn some money over periods of 5–10 years before they then plan to return home (see Box 11). The second was an old government-owned plantation that had previously employed families on a permanent basis in Maluku (SUW 2)<sup>24</sup> but is currently facing financial difficulties. Households here explained that they were not eligible for any social assistance because “we are not

24 Researchers stayed only one night with the three host households here.

#### BOX 10: STATE-OWNED PLANTATION WORKERS

This study village is owned by a state-owned plantation company that started in the 1980s. Before the 1998 riots, workers had come mostly from Java but since 2002 most had come from Southeast Maluku. Until recently they were permanent workers with fixed incomes and housing provided. But since the company has been facing financial crises over the last three years, payment is now made on a daily basis by output. Incomes have been halved (some cut by 75 percent) and many men have left in search of work elsewhere in the district or in Papua.

The families are not only struggling but they do not get any social assistance. The puskesmas is run by the company and charges a minimum of IDR10,000 per visit with the cost of medicines additional. The families say that as they are part of the plantation company no government surveys have ever been done of their conditions, they have never received any social assistance and the authorities know none of them by name. Some cash support was provided by the junior secondary school for a few students this year for the first time but the origin of this assistance was unclear (Field notes, Maluku SUW1).

counted” (host household, SUW2) or they are “overlooked” (host household K1). Box 11 describes the particular situation of the government plantation workers in Maluku but the situation may illustrate the vulnerability of similar plantation workers, especially in struggling plantations like this one.

Remoteness or, more accurately in the study sites where this was noted, inaccessibility, is associated, people say, with the lack of reliable services. Service providers are simply not there. For example, the sole health worker in Sulawesi B1 is only available through phone contact. She either provides advice over the phone or has to make an arrangement to open up the otherwise permanently locked public health centre. Poor teacher attendance is blamed on transport problems and lack of supervision:

“Only half the teachers in the high school are active, the rest go fishing and farming”  
(host household, Maluku, SU2).

The plantation workers described in Box 11 are not only neglected by service providers because of the frequently flooded river that has to be crossed but also because the houses are so dispersed. No surveys have ever been carried out there. Some told us that in a study sub-village in Maluku (SU2), large swathes of households had been excluded from surveys because they lived “too far away” or they had simply been away on the farm and had left their houses locked up when the surveys were carried out.

#### BOX 11: PLANTATION WORKERS (PRIVATE)

This study village outside the main town and across the river, is home to migrants and their young families from south Sulawesi who stay for a few years to work on the share-cropped small-scale clove and cacao plantations that cover the mountainside above the town. Previously they had mostly eked out a living as pedicab drivers, for example, but they were attracted here by the prospect of earning once the new road was opened some three or four years ago. They hoped to “make enough money to go back home”. They live in poor rented or previously abandoned accommodation and are spread out, sometimes kilometres apart. The most recent migrants live the furthest up the mountain and are the ones “struggling” as it is the first few years and the new plantation needs to be established. The community suffers stigma from town people. They have no identity cards because the *kepala desa* (village chief) in their home village did not want to reduce his electorate numbers and refused to provide transfer letters. This means they cannot access facilities such as government-distributed solar panels. Living the other side of a flood-prone river means that access to school is difficult and in the *dusun* where the researcher stayed only ten children went to school from more than 50 households. The desire to earn as much as possible in order to return home sooner also drives these children who are able to help in the plantation. They receive no social assistance and the only survey that had taken place was carried out by health workers using mobile phones. Since there is no signal in this *dusun*, they were not recorded (Field notes Sulawesi, K1).

## Aspirations and expectations

“Being a farmer is no solution – it is too much effort, guarding the crops at night from pigs, monkeys and wild dogs. It is very hard work and nowadays there is nobody to help as everyone is in school. It takes twenty people to build a wall to keep out the animals” (host household farmer, Sulawesi, B1).

Throughout the study sites the dominant view among farming families was that they did not want their children to continue as farmers, even if some said they themselves were relatively content with this work. Men who expressed positive sentiments about farming were nevertheless adamant that they wanted better for their children:

“Farming is being one with nature and nobody bosses me around” (host household, Maluku B2).

“Farming makes me happy in my heart because I know at least I can feed my children” (host household Sulawesi, B1).

“They [our children] have to be sarjana [degree holders], find a better job so that they can have a better life than us. They cannot live like their parents forever” (host household father, Maluku SU2).

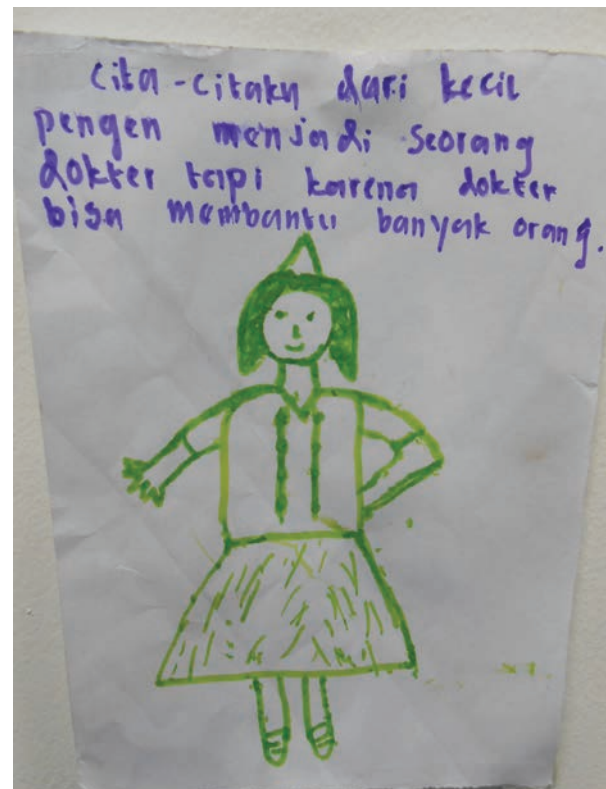
“If our children are committed [to working hard at school] we will do whatever it takes to support them. I don't want them to be like us” (host household, Sulawesi W1).

The above comments were typical of most parents' views. The dominant preference was that at least one child should become a civil servant, preferably a teacher or health worker. Farming is regarded as hard work, high risk and does not allow one to plan ahead or buy on credit. Furthermore in some places access to land is becoming restricted, for example, where national parks have been established (Maluku SU2). Fishermen, like farmers, mostly wanted something better for their children. On the island off Sulawesi, nobody wanted their children to be fishermen. The following comment typifies this feeling:

“It is dangerous work – even though it can earn well, it is more important that the family is together” (host household woman, Sulawesi W1).

“None of us want to be fishermen like our parents”

Youth, Maluku MT2



“My dream since I was a little girl is that I want to be a doctor because doctors can help a lot of people”  
10 year old girl, Sulawesi B1



“I want a big house like the one we see on the way to school. Other people will live in small houses down the road”  
9 year old boy, Sulawesi B1

Aspiring to civil servant jobs means that children must complete university-level education and despite the costs, parents explained that they work towards this. Many youth shared the aspirations of their parents although there were several “cool guys” who explained they preferred to drop out of school to earn money as soon as possible to service their preferred lifestyle. There was a sense that education was important for them but “just enough to get a job”<sup>25</sup> and a recognition that not all children were “school-minded”. But more saw themselves “going to college and going as far as possible with my education” and parents and children alike often shared the opinion that “only education can move us out of poverty” (host household father, Sulawesi K1). Many study families had sent their children away to relatives to study. This was sometimes because the relatives supported the children or were better located for good educational institutions. Some children had been sent away to remove them from the “bad influence of the local kids”. Having an education was correlated, especially among young people themselves, with having employment choices. Some teenagers worked hard studying into the night while we stayed with them. For example, one 17 year old in the peri-urban sub-village in Sulawesi studied the entire night and is strongly motivated to become a computer expert.



Children ‘built’ this model of their dream house which has separate bedrooms, furniture, a large television

25 A good grasp of Bahasa Indonesia and basic maths are the key requisites but English is highly valued too.

## What it means to be poor

The section summarises our findings on people's perception of poverty. From our conversations with people living in poverty, the experience of poverty means:

- Not having enough cash to cover increasingly cash-based transactions;
- Not having enough options to raise “instant cash”;
- Not having time (usually because of caring duties) or health to engage in instant cash-earning opportunities;
- Dependency on single livelihoods, seasons and middlemen;
- Not being employed on a permanent basis, so unable to make plans, think about the future or access credit;
- Living as a minority, with limited access to local decision-making and facilities;
- Living in fear (due to ethnic tensions, lack of documentation, illiteracy); and
- Living in difficult to reach places that are “off the map”.

Families explained that the constant demands for cash were what gave them “headaches” and made them feel stressed and down. This, they often confided, led to a downward spiral of poor health and listlessness which made it harder to take advantage of any *ad hoc* earning opportunities that are so vital to meeting these cash needs.

However, it was the elderly who shared their anxieties with us most intensely. Many of them said that they had not anticipated the demands for tertiary education costs, they had not expected to be left behind on their own as their children left to study or work and, most of all, they had not expected to be burdened with bringing up grandchildren. They often suggested that the old traditions of looking after elderly parents was breaking down and they could not rely on this into their old age. They shared their bewilderment at their bleak prospects for the future.

### BOX 12: CONUNDRUM OF ELIGIBILITY

One family in my village did not have electricity as they could not afford it. The father was in his late 60s and was the only breadwinner for his family of wife, daughter and grand-daughter (2 years old). His daughter's husband had left her before the baby was born. They did not have a social assistance card and they thought this was because the father was too old and there were no school-aged children in their family.

By contrast, in the same village a couple in their 40s lived with three children, all of whom were in either primary or junior secondary school. Their house was much better than the other households. They had electricity and a television. They also had social assistance cards, were part of the PKH and benefited from the BSM programme (Field notes, Maluku MT2).





# Chapter IV

## Discussion on Findings: People's Perspectives of Poverty

This section gives the research team's perspective, drawing on their joint analysis of the findings.

As far as people in the study communities are concerned the “most in need” are easy to identify. They are the people who have limited opportunities to earn cash, either because of their own inability or because they are caring for elderly people, people with disabilities or with chronic illnesses or very young children. The people we spoke to all had concerns about people like this who were often left out of social assistance programmes.

Proxy means testing can only use data that is currently collected. The RCA study suggests that there may be indicators that are either no longer useful, for example, ownership of mobile phones, which is becoming ubiquitous, or need to be reworded to become more informative and therefore better proxies. The data collection for social protection programmes process, for example, asks people for details of disability and chronic illness within the household. While this may be being collected to help programme targeting at the moment, this could also provide useful information on households' propensity for poverty. The key information in this case is whether the members of the household with a chronic illness or disability need full-time care (thereby constraining opportunities for the carers to work or earn incidental cash), whether they are able to work or earn an income and what costs are associated with their condition. These three elements are crucial in understanding the poverty impact of their presence within the family. The study clearly indicates correlations between families with obligations for care (for the elderly, sick, people with disabilities or for young children) and poverty status (opportunity costs of care). It also emphasises the crippling actual costs of care for people with certain chronic conditions that are not fully covered by existing health schemes. The nature of the illness or disability is less important than the impact it has on the household.

Both the data collection for social protection programmes and the National Social and Economic Survey (Susenas) ask the question about the main occupation of the household (column 18 and question 30 respectively). The RCA study indicates that most poor people have diversified their income sources to meet the growing need for cash in an increasingly cash-based economy. Opportunities to do this are more important than an attempt to classify a main livelihood. So, for example, a household situated in a depressed local economy will have fewer opportunities to raise cash than a household with a similar profile in a thriving local economy. Subsistence farmers are able to raise cash in a number of ways in such a situation (see section 3 on access to cash) but when enumerators ask for their occupation, they simply list subsistence farming. More important questions to ask in household surveys may concern the families' ability to earn cash (and therefore questions relating to their ability to satisfy consumption needs), for example, whether they are waged, salaried or rely on incidental (informal) cash earning. Supplemented by a question about the range of informal cash-earning opportunities available to them, this may provide a more accurate indication of relative poverty.

Detailed consumption information is collected in the National Social and Economic Survey, based on recall from the previous week or month. Consumption is calculated by monetising quantities of different consumption items, for example, types of food. The findings from the study suggest that people are not used to recalling quantities consumed. After all, they tend to buy fish, sugar, rice and snacks when they have cash to spend (and go without otherwise) and they buy however much they can afford so decisions are led by how much cash they have in hand. These items are not usually bought by known or clear weight or quantities. The better recall question that the researchers found easy for people to answer was: “How much did you spend on food last week – on essentials<sup>26</sup> and on extras?” People seemed to know exactly how much they spent in cash. This assumes that

<sup>26</sup> Essentials being basic foodstuffs like corn, rice, sago or cassava, vegetables and fish (our host and focal households rarely ate meat) to provide just enough for the family, in other words, what they ordinarily eat. Extras are what people buy when they have a “bit more cash” and would include, for example, sugar, snacks, coffee and tea.

anything obtained through subsistence farming and fishing is a given but whatever else is needed is what puts a strain on poor people. In this way, the widow in Sulawesi W1 who eats fish every day still has to purchase rice and needs to find cash to do this. The families in Sulawesi K1 have to buy both fish and rice so they need more cash which means that the inability to earn puts them at greater risk of impoverishment than the widow.

Both the data collection for social protection programmes and the National Social and Economic Survey ask the question about access to electricity. However, with the increased demand for at least a simple connection to charge a mobile phone, the practice of “bridging” or taking electricity from neighbours has become widespread. This means the question about electricity would be better rephrased to find out if people have their own metered supply or if they “borrow” a supply.

The study indicates that people use different fuels for different purposes (see annex 3) so asking about the main fuel they use may be inappropriate. Purchasing fuel for cooking may be a forced expense because of restricted access to national forests, lack of common or their own land from which to forage or other restrictions. Choosing to use firewood is not necessarily linked to poverty but to household economy. Like the argument regarding the burden of having to purchase food, having no alternative but to purchase fuel can likewise require the family to raise cash or go without cooking when times are hard.

Building materials used for housing can be a misleading indicator of poverty. In the study area there were a number of government rehousing schemes. In Maluku MT2 indigenous people had been rehoused and seem to have been left off social assistance lists yet they were clearly in need. With people's aspiration to replace traditional housing with concrete and corrugated iron roofs, these “improvements” are often gifts from children after they have left home and are earning. There are also many examples of houses which present from the front as “modern” but are simple houses, often in a poor state of repair, behind the façade. It takes a conscientious enumerator to make these observations. Like housing materials, key assets such as televisions and fridges are often bought on credit or are gifts. It would be a mistake to classify those who have these as necessarily less poor. All assets related to livelihoods and means of production for example, fishing boats or *ojeks*, should not be included as household assets.

The RCA study flags up once again the issue of poverty related to life cycle events and the need for indicators to capture this in the surveys that form the basis of poverty ranking.



# Chapter V

## Policy Implications

The policy implications from this study are based on issues raised by the people themselves. People’s understanding of poverty is well articulated, especially with regard to the category they referred to as “families in need”. Since this category is uncontested, it follows that using these criteria will lead to less tension around who gets or does not get help that has often plagued external and imposed definitions. These families represent only some of those eligible for social assistance but this would be a good starting point.

## Policy implication 1:

Consider identifying “families in need” through differently prioritised survey questions and ensure that social assistance programmes are designed to give precedence to these families. Provide community facilitators to help these families access their entitlements as they are often the least able to do this by themselves.

Other categories of poor are less clear-cut and people have sometimes perceived the indicators used to define these categories as unfair, outdated and inappropriate. This study shows that there are two possible ways of making the ranking of households more acceptable from the people’s perspective. The first relates to making sure the indicators are appropriate and unambiguous. For example, counting a means of production acquired on credit as a sign of wealth could be misleading. The second suggests a robust location weighting so that poverty is not simply based on household assets and resources but also on where you live and what opportunities there are in the area.



“Ownership of the assets counts against us in deciding if we are poor or not”. This family has motorbike purchased on credit so he can provide field spray services.

## Policy implication 2:

Consider updating indicators used in determining poverty so they are more consistent with contemporary experiences.



One interviewee said he gathered coconuts for a living but that he supplements his income with fishing, making copra and weaving coconut leaf baskets.

### **Policy implication 3:**

Consider weighting household poverty indicator data with public poverty assessments (the availability of a range of essential facilities) and an “opportunities” index that encapsulates the diversity of informal income-earning opportunities a particular location offers.





# Annexes

## Annex 1: Team members

Overall team leader	Dee Jupp		
	Code		
Team A (Southeast Sulawesi)	B1	Team leader	Dee Jupp
		Interpreter	Rizqan Adhima
		Members	Sharon Kanthy Kholid Fathirius
	W1	Sub team leader	Dewi Arilaha
		Interpreter	Nusya Kuswantin
		Members	Danielle Stein Lucky Koryanto
	K1	Sub team leader	Rida Hesti Ratnasari
		Members	Dwi Oktiani Debora Tobing
	Team B (Maluku)	MT2	Sub team leader
Interpreter			Rizqan Adhima
Members			Dewi Arilaha Umi Hanik Meby Damayanti
SU2		Sub team leader	Peter Riddle Carre
		Interpreter	Yarra Regita
		Members	Yunety Tarigan Farida A Sondakh
B2		Sub team leader	Rida Hesti Ratnasari
		Interpreter	Denny Firmanto Halim
		Members	Lewis Brimblecombe Christin Maya
SUW1		Sub team leader	Peter Riddle Carre
		Interpreter	Yarra Regita
		Members	Yunety Tarigan Farida A Sondakh

## Annex 2: Areas of Enquiry

### RCA June 2014: Areas of enquiry for entire study

Please remember this is just for you as a memory jogger for conversations and observations, it **MUST NOT** be used as a list of questions

#### 1. The household

Family tree – who lives here, relationships, ages, persons with disabilities etc, level of education.

Main and supplementary ways of making a living/income sources (subsistence and cash)

Sketch aerial diagram of the house – number of rooms, who stays where, key assets, building materials (photo of house, excluding people)

Key assets: physical – bikes, motorbikes, solar panels, television, mobiles, rice cooker, agricultural/fishing equipment etc.

Livestock – cows, goats, sheep, buffalo, chickens

Arrangements for bathing, toilet, collecting water for washing, drinking

Cooking fuel – year round? Light source?

Distance from facilities such as school, market, health centre (walking time)

#### 2. People's perceptions of poverty, well-being, aspirations for future

Who are the poorest/richest in the village – detailed descriptions and reasons why they are rich/poor.

What gets people out of poverty? What holds them back?

What does it mean not to be poor any more? What is their aspiration?

We need to establish what are the ways in which people themselves define poverty. What does it mean to be poor? What are the manifestations of being poor? This would include assets, access, behaviours, opportunities. Our conversations can be around how they see recent change (are they better off/less well off now than before) how do they see themselves in relation to others in the village? Who is better off and why? Who is the worst off and why? Are particular people more likely to be poor? (e.g. people living on own, certain ethnic groups, occupation groups etc). Are there particular times of the year when they are poorer? Within the household who eats what and when? Do they know of people who do not eat enough? Why not?

What do host household want for their future, their children's future? What is good change? What is preventing this change now? What would make a difference to the process and speed of change?

#### 3. People's understanding of the social assistance programmes

- o What do they know about them?
- o How did they hear about them?
- o What do they think/feel about them?

4. **People's views on how assistance programmes work**
  - o Who gets and who does not?
  - o How appropriate/relevant are they? Is this the right incentive?
  - o Experience of participating in the scheme – enabling and constraining factors
  - o How complaints are dealt with, systems of redress?
5. **Costs of education (financial and others)**
6. **Difficulties /challenges to meet conditionalities of social assistance programmes**
7. **Changes in the household and drivers of those changes**
  - o Positive and negative change
  - o Contribution of social assistance to specific and overall change (significance)
  - o How social assistance cash transfers are actually used
8. **Alternative support and assistance**
  - o People's suggestions for improved social assistance
  - o Alternatives to social assistance
  - o What else/who else provides support (family, community, mosque etc)

## Annex 3: Host households

### Sulawesi Rural



B1.DR



B1.S



B1.K



W1.DN



W1.D



W1.L

### Sulawesi Peri-urban



K1.R



K1.D



K1.U

### Maluku Rural



B2.LD



B2.R



MT2.AR



MT2.M



MT2.U



MT2.D



SU2.PY



SU2.Y



SU2.F

**Maluku (Plantation)**



SU2W.PY



SU2W.Y



SU2W.F

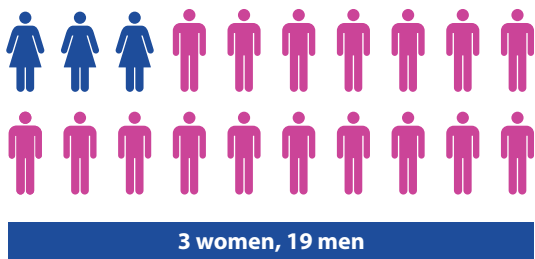
## Annex 4: Host household information

\*Total no. of host household = 22

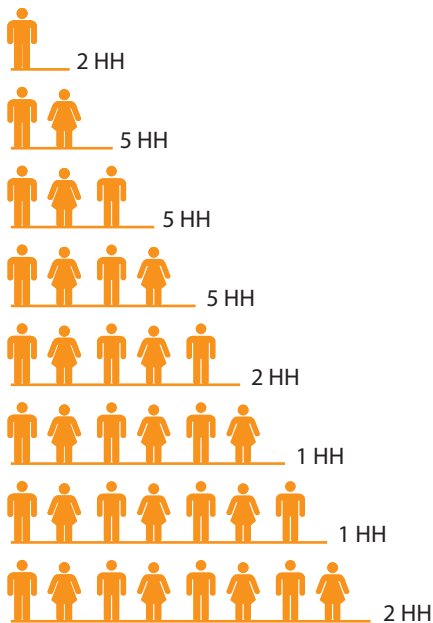
### FAMILY

Nuclear	Extended
15	7

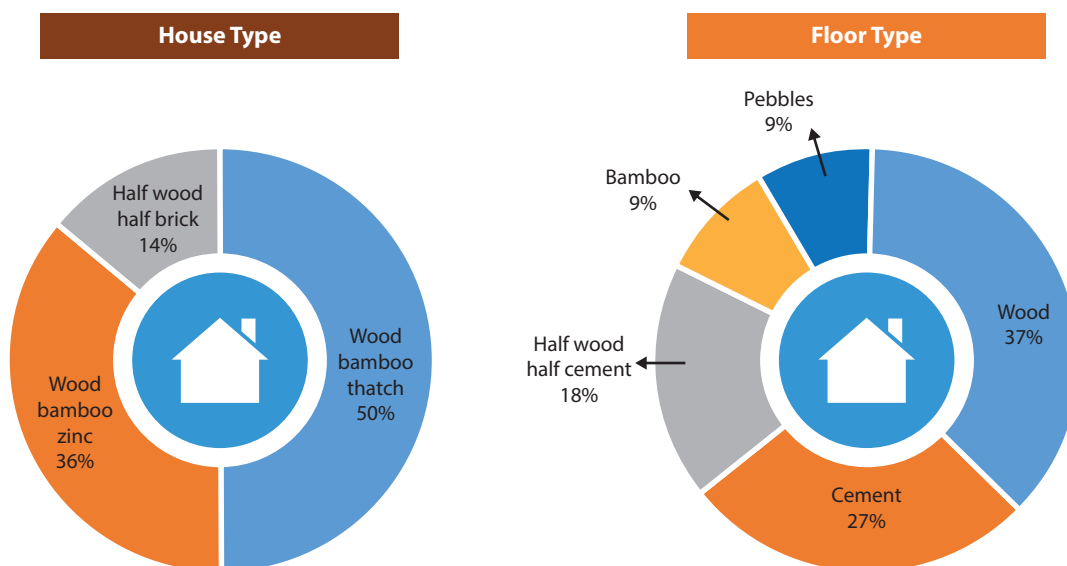
### HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD



### NO. OF CHILDREN CURRENTLY LIVING IN HOUSE







## MAIN LIVELIHOOD

Farming	Fishing	Day labour construction	Plantation work
14	2	2	4

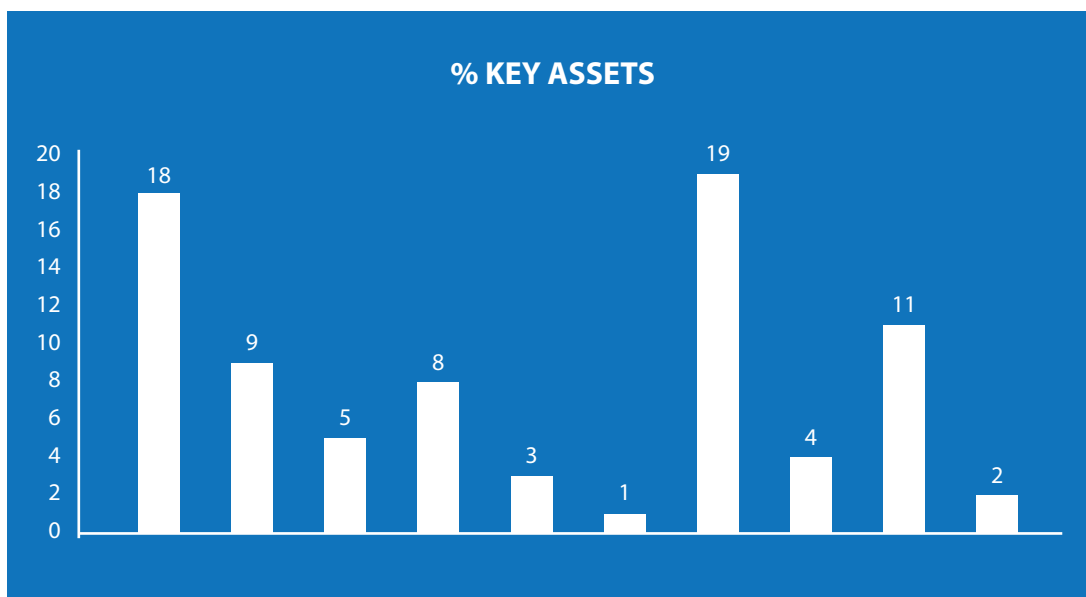
## ADDITIONAL LIVELIHOOD

Additional	None	Fishing	Construction	Collecting construction material	Village	Driver	Agricultural services	Business
<b>Main</b>								
<b>Farming</b>	1	4	4	2	2		5	14
<b>Fishing</b>			1					2
<b>Construction</b>		1		1			1	1
<b>Plantation work</b>			1			1	2	2

Only 2 of 22 HH has single livelihood

## NO. ADDITIONAL JOBS

	None	+1job	+2jobs	+3jobs	+4jobs
<b>Farming</b>	1	3	4	4	2
<b>Fishing</b>		1	1		
<b>Construction</b>		1		1	
<b>Plantation work</b>		2	2		



% WITH ELECTRICITY

Metered electricity	41%
Electricity from neighbour	27%
No electricity	23%
Generator	9%

% WITH TOILET

No toilet	54%
Toilet outside	32%
Toilet inside	14%

DISTANCE FROM FACILITIES

	Walking time		Motorbike/car/boat	
	< 15 mins	15-30 mins	< 15 mins	15-30 mins
<b>School</b>	59%	22%	14%	5%
<b>Health centre</b>	45%	27%	14%	14%
<b>Market</b>	9%	9%	9%	72%

## Annex 5: List of People Met

People Met	Male	Female	Total
Children (not in school)	69	64	133
Community	276	392	668
Construction workers	5	1	6
Farmer	29	20	49
Fisherman	16	5	21
Government officials	45	6	51
Health workers	2	16	18
Plantation workers	16	1	17
Private sector workers	3	5	8
Religious leaders	10	7	17
Researcher	2	1	3
Shopkeepers	26	24	50
Student	59	71	130
Teacher	27	11	38
Transport workers	6	1	7
Widows/FHH	0	5	5
Women	0	47	47
<b>Total</b>	<b>591</b>	<b>677</b>	<b>1268</b>

## **Annex 6 : Overview of the Reality Check Approach Plus project, Indonesia**

The Reality Check Approach Plus Project:

- Provides capacity building for Indonesian researchers;
- Creates demand for qualitative research and RCA studies in particular to inform public policy making;
- Enhances the approach through further innovation and improved communication;
- Is funded by DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government);
- Is administered through the Poverty Reduction Support Facility (PRSF), in collaboration with the National Team for the Acceleration of Poverty Reduction
- Was implemented in April 2014 as the first phase of its multi-year initiative

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## Understanding Poverty from the Perspective of People Living in Poverty: Indonesia

This study examines poverty from the perspectives of those experiencing it themselves. By living with ordinary people in Eastern Indonesia, the Reality Check Approach study team heard about, experienced, observed and learned about poverty first hand. The report documents the views of more than 1,300 people through more than 1,200 hours of detailed conversations. Ordinary people easily identify and agree on who are the poorest in their communities. They also highlight the increasing importance of access to cash as a key determinant of well-being, noting that those who cannot earn cash, especially in areas where there is little opportunity for local informal cash earning, are particularly vulnerable. The dynamic nature of poverty resulting from crises but also from family life cycles is emphasised. When particular groups live as a minority in a given context they often experience exclusion and are more likely to have been left out of surveys and distribution of benefits. The study concludes that the current means to determine poverty are not considered by ordinary people to be consistent with contemporary experience and the poorest 'families in need' are not automatically getting social assistance.

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