

Methodological issues when assessing poverty among older people : Insights from Uganda

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Two types of poverty indicators are in use in developing countries. The first one refers to monetary poverty, the 'poor' being those whose income or consumption falls below a given threshold. An important share of the population lives below the poverty threshold in Africa, estimated at 1.25\$ per adult per day since 2008 by the World Bank. To give a fuller image of poverty, the UN have been promoting since 2010 a second indicator, this time multidimensional, taking after the Human Development Index. This new indicator is taking into account not only income or consumption, but also housing, equipment, access to education and health, etc., focusing on deprivation from key elements of well-being. This multidimensional index provides measures of poverty that are usually higher than the purely monetary index, and enables researchers and planners to make a distinction between the different dimensions of poverty and their representations at the national or regional levels. It is also possible to distinguish different categories of people facing difficult situation, according to the sector and the degree of poverty. However, for both types of indexes, poverty is usually measured at household level, in relation to data being produced at household level.

Three main limitations can therefore be mentioned. First and foremost, all household members are not equal in terms of income and other resource sharing within the household. There are therefore differences within households that are not reflected in household poverty measures. Second, households are far from being isolated. In developing countries, remittances and other inter household transfers have been proven to be fundamental in understanding family economics, especially in contexts where young adults are often in migration, leaving their children back home with the rest of the family. Last, household definitions often differ according to place and date. The way the household is defined and the way this definition is implemented at the time data are collected have an implication on the results, and especially so on poverty estimates.

Older people are often in a peculiar situation in the household, and in the family in general. In the literature on older people in Africa, two trends coexist. On one hand, some have pointed out the central place of older people in kin systems and the respect that was due to them. High social status and often power positions place older people above the common human being. On the other hand, others have pointed at cases where older people were marginalized or just left out, forecasting increasing gaps in family solidarities altogether, with definite consequences on the well being of older adults.

According to the latest data available, 69,9% of Ugandans were in 2011 in a situation of poverty (31,2% in extreme poverty). An important part of the older Ugandan population live in single person households or with children only, which leads to overestimating the poverty of older people. But this context hides a large variety of situations.

This paper is based on a corpus of qualitative interviews conducted with individuals over 60 years old and their families in seven different locations in Uganda. These data

were collected as part of the HH-MM (Household management: the implications of standardized data in understanding intergenerational relations) ⁱ and IGLEA (Intergenerational Relations and transmission of land rights in East Africa)ⁱⁱ between 2010 and 2012. Different types of study areas were targeted: four sites were located in rural settings; one is a small town, two are neighbourhoods of the capital city Kampala. Different standards of living were represented in the sample, both in the capital city (one poor, one intermediate) and in rural areas (two rather poor, two intermediate). The rural areas were spread out at different distances/travel times from Kampala, ranging from 30 minutes to five hours by road, the two closest to the capital city being better off than the two farthest, in terms of standard of living. The interviews were focused on the relationships and support within domestic units and beyond, especially in relation to older people. We visited one of the study sites regularly over a period of three years in order to assess the quality of single visits and for a better understanding of the dynamics of social networks and residential arrangements over time.

The aim of the paper is to shed light on the methodological difficulties raised by attempting to measure the poverty of older adults through precise case studies. We also bring forward elements that play a key role in identifying poverty situations as well as provide directions for further research.

ⁱ ANR / ESRC 2009-2012, interviews with 26 households in rural areas (13 in Busia (Eastern region) and 13 in Wakiso District (Central Region) and 39 urban households: 14 in a poor neighbourhood of Kampala, 12 in a middle income neighbourhood in Kampala and 13 in a provincial town (Hoima, Western Region).

ⁱⁱ IRD 2009-2013, repeated interviews with 10 older persons and their families in a rural area on the periphery of Kampala, Mukono District.