Poverty in Rural Samoa: Reasons and Strategies

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Introduction

- Government-led economic development strategies in Samoa have tried to improve livelihoods of rural poor over last 40 years
- Samoa performs comparatively well in terms of some development indices but isolation makes it vulnerable
- Objective of this research to:
  - Determine why rural Samoans became poor
  - Strategies they used to manage their poverty
  - Constraints they faced in trying to move out of poverty
Methodology

- Classic grounded theory approach
- 25 respondents in four islands
- Entry to first site followed by theoretical sampling
- Customary approval, general check-list for interviews, self-debriefing, discussion with village
- Analysis after each batch, emerging themes developed, questions refined, and so on until saturation reached
Results: What is Poverty?

- Poverty is:
  - Not food poverty but can be times of temporary food shortage
  - Lack of household assets, particular consumer items, community facilities
  - Inability to meet social obligations
  - Lack of income, income-earning ability and savings characteristic of rural poor
Results: The Process of Rural Poverty

- Becoming Poor
- Moving out of poverty
- Remaining Poor (Transient Poor)
- Becoming Poor Again (Vulnerable Poor)
- Safety Net
Results: Becoming Poor?

- Three types of events associated with becoming poor
  - Personal circumstances
  - Social obligations
  - External events
    - Natural
    - Economic
Results: The Process of Rural Poverty

Becoming Poor

Remaining out of Poverty (Transient Poor)

Becoming Poor Again (Vulnerable Poor)

Moving out of poverty

Safety Net

Remaining Poor

Time

Poverty Level
Results: Safety Nets

- Safety nets arrest the fall into further poverty
  - Getting support from others
  - Semi-subsistence activities
  - Temporary employment
Results: The Process of Rural Poverty

- Becoming Poor
- Moving out of poverty
- Remaining out of Poverty (Transient Poor)
- Becoming Poor Again (Vulnerable Poor)
- Safety Net
- Remaining Poor

Time

Poverty Level
Results: Remaining Poor

- Remaining Poor is the first poverty path
- Those on this path are:
  - Unable to get financial support from others
  - Inability to get a well-paying job
  - Unable to build up financial reserves through semi-subsistence activities
- Likely to lack voice and be isolated from decision-making and community facilities, credit and markets
Results: The Process of Rural Poverty

- Becoming Poor
- Moving out of poverty
- Remaining out of Poverty (Transient Poor)
- Becoming Poor Again (Vulnerable Poor)

Poverty Level

Safety Net

Time
Results: Moving Out of Poverty

- On this path, able to employ short- and long-term strategies to emerge from poverty
  - Building up a business from semi-subsistence
  - Getting money from others and building up savings
  - Reducing social obligations
  - Using family resources strategically
Results: Moving Out of Poverty

- Transform from semi-subsistence to income-earning business through a series of steps
- Able to access micro-credit schemes or government grants and incentives
- Strong family networks, reducing social obligations, strategic management of expenditure
- Confidence with a proactive attitude – but what is cause and effect?
Results: The Process of Rural Poverty

- **Becoming Poor**
- **Moving out of poverty**
- **Remaining out of Poverty (Transient Poor)**
- **Remaining Poor**
- **Becoming Poor Again (Vulnerable Poor)**

*Graph showing the process of rural poverty with time on the x-axis and poverty level on the y-axis.*
Results: Remaining out of Poverty

- Able to amass savings, income-earning assets and earn a good income
- Gives them a buffer so that
  - Social obligations do not become a financial drain
  - Can withstand external shocks
Results: The Process of Rural Poverty

- Becoming Poor
- Moving out of poverty
- Remaining out of Poverty (Transient Poor)
- Becoming Poor Again (Vulnerable Poor)

Poverty Level

Time

Safety Net

Remaining Poor
Results: Falling Back into Poverty

- Able to begin the process of amassing savings, income-earning assets and earn a good income

- At a vulnerable stage of their recovery pushed back into poverty by
  - Social obligations
  - External events

- Don’t have quite the same access to resources, family networks and strategic approach as those who manage to remain out of poverty
Discussion and Conclusion

- Three paths to rural poverty, each with their own characteristics
  - Long-term poor
  - Transitory poor
  - Vulnerable poor
- What does this imply for villages, communities and government?
Discussion and Conclusion

- Long-term poor
  - Communities and villages could provide
    - Greater social support
    - Recognition of the powerlessness and isolation of most vulnerable members
  - Greater support for small business, improved access to credit and markets, support for projects and initiatives that provide employment or build business
Discussion and Conclusion

- Long-term poor
  - Government can provide
    - Macroeconomic environment that is conducive to small business and encourages opportunities for employment
    - Better access to health and education
    - Better rural infrastructure to reduce isolation and market access
    - Better targeted credit provision and access to resources
    - Targeted pension support for sick and elderly
Discussion and Conclusion

- Transitory poor
  - Well positioned and most likely to have become poor because of external events
  - Assistance for disaster relief and insurance
  - Access to credit once the process of emerging from poverty has begun
Discussion and Conclusion

- Vulnerable poor
  - Require policies that can
    - Enhance employment opportunities
    - Viability of small businesses
  - Reducing social obligations when trying to move out of poverty could allow them to build buffers against future poverty-inducing events
The research implies that

- Government measures could be most effective if targeted to the requirements of those on the different paths

- A focussed response by villages and communities could assist their more vulnerable and poorest members
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