Raising the voices of the poor

The village level dynamics studies, as part of the Village Level Studies (VLS), are crucial for understanding poverty pathways out of development actions. Understanding the people and the on-the-ground realities is important to create pathways out of poverty. VLS does this:

- A unique dataset collected all year round by full-time investigators who live in the villages.
- Longest time series panel data.
- Most in-depth understanding of any village level dynamics.
- First and only meso-level data collected for the countries covered.
- Household and district level insights.
- Learning repositories for understanding agricultural and rural transformations.

Said about VLS data: “The Goose laying Golden Eggs” Hans Binswanger, World Bank

Village Level Studies Methodology

- Collection of data by resident investigators.
- Lives in the village.
- Masters in Agriculture.
- Takes 3 weeks to conduct.
- Resident investigators.

Households:
- 6 villages (150 households)
- 4 villages (160 households)
- 2 villages (80 households)
- 2 villages (80 households)
- 4 villages (120 households)
- 4 villages (104 households)
- 4 villages (104 households)
- 2 villages (104 households)
- 2 villages (104 households)

NUTRITION

- Anthropometry
- Time allocation
- Social networks
- Labor participation
- Women’s empowerment

Institutions and markets

- Agricultural implements
- Livestock numbers and production
- Crop area and production
- Prices (farm gate by crops)
- Wages (by gender)
- Infrastructure (roads, banks…)
- Population (by rural/urban, age)
- Climate (rainfall, temperature)

Village LeveL studies methodology

- Metro Data: Household and individual data
- Survey data: Livelihood data
- Demographics
- Crop production (inputs & outputs)
- Asset ownership
- Consumption expenditures
- Employment & wage
- Land & soil
- Market prices
- Gender disaggregation

Households:
- 6 villages (160 households)
- 2 villages (80 households)
- 4 villages (120 households)
- 4 villages (120 households)
- 8 villages (160 households)
- 4 villages (104 households)
- 2 villages (104 households)
- 2 villages (104 households)

Special Purpose Surveys

- Africa insights
- Nutrition
- Expansion
- Survey

Data collections:
- 4 villages (104 households)
- 2 villages (80 households)
- 4 villages (120 households)
- 4 villages (120 households)

Data is web enabled, access is field

PUBLICATIONS

- The Goose laying Golden Eggs
- Hans Binswanger, World Bank

Data shared:
- 1st generation data
- Data distributed via CDs
- Analysis features
- Data warehousing
- Visits requested
- Data can be used for spatial and temporal analysis
- GIS compatible

Funding:
- USAID
- IC R S A T
- UK O D I

Data is obtained from
- 1977-78
- 1980-81
- 1984-85
- 1989-90
- 1992-93
- 1999
- 1999-2008
- 2001-02
- 2008-09
- 2009-10
- 2013-14
- 2014-15
- 2015-16
- 2020-21
- USAID
- IC R S A T
- UK O D I

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The Village Level Studies (VLS) methodology, plus:

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- Longest time series panel data.
- Most in-depth understanding of any village level dynamics.
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VILLAGES USED FOR ON-FARM EXPERIMENTS

20 projects tested technologies and practices
- real situations
- with baseline data already available
- on-farm data already available for feasibility analysis
- relationships already built with an environment of trust with the village people

Broad bed and furrow technology was adapted to suit the on-farm environment and was adopted by the farmers.

Pigeonpea variety (CR 19030) tested in Kankanra village and further adapted to cope with fusarium wilt. Through the village kinship network it was adopted in all pigeonpea growing areas of Maharashtra state.

World-first pigeonpea hybrid developed by ICRISAT was tested in VLS villages. (2008/09)

One of the main contributions of renewed VLS is the ability to evaluate the way new technologies fit into the entire farming system. The contribution of the earlier panel provided analytical power to address some of these issues that simply will not be available anywhere else in the world.”

Chris Udry, Henry Heinz II Professor of Economics, Economic Growth Center, and Council on African Studies, Yale University

“...some of the most influential articles in empirical development use this dataset on themes such as nutrition, technology adoption, tenancy contracts, activity choice, consumption smoothing or risk sharing.”

Stefan Dercon, Oxford University (and co-authors)

GLOBAL USE OF THE DATA

- Strong research use of the data - during 2011-13:
  - Over 10,000 citations
  - Over 10,000 stations by 2008
- Useful for many issues

- Over 150 research papers
- 36 doctoral dissertations
- 20 projects tested technologies and practices
- 350 unique users from 18 countries
- 36 doctoral dissertations
- 10 projects tested technologies and practices
- 230 unique users from 12 countries

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LEADING TO IMPACT

INFLUENCED RESEARCH PRIORITIES

- Directed ICRISAT’s breeding program priorities for yields vs protein: The village studies showed that more benefit would be gained from focusing on yield and not protein, as the extra protein would be acquired from the higher yields as well as incomes improving. (Early 1980s)

- Catalyst for CGIAR crops-livestock collaboration: The VLS data had shown that farmers were rejecting new higher yielding crops because they were not suitable for fodder. The VLS team championed the changes that lead to
  - ICRISAT’s breeding program incorporating traits useful for fodder
  - establishment of ILR and ICRISAT collaborations
  - a new program on crop-livestock linkages introduced at ICRISAT (early 1990s)

- Major global programs established: VLS data was used as a baseline in the development of the Program Proposals of:
  - CABP (CGIAR Systemwide Program on Collective Action and Property Rights)
  - Harvest Plus
  - the CGIAR Research Program on Policies, Institutions and Markets

“The detailed information collected by VLS is better than any other datasets I have used” - Emmanuel Skoufias, Lead Economist, World Bank

“There are the only datasets in the world which it is possible to study in depth impact of seasonal and annual variations in agricultural output and labour demand on human behavior, contractual choices and production relations.” - Hans-P Bräuneiger (Duke University)

INFLUENCED DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

- Commissioned to develop the IFAD India Strategy opportunities paper (2005-11)
- Inputted into the BII & Melinda Gates Foundation India strategy refresh (2011)

“I’d rather think of any other data set in development economics that has been as influential as the village level data…”

Stefan Dercon, Oxford University (and co-authors)

CAPACITY BUILDING

- More than 300 scientists and scholars spent 1-3 months at ICRISAT learning the research methods and insights about the village level dynamics. (During the 1st and 2nd level generation)

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INFLUENCED GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY

- Crop and weather insurance schemes were introduced: VLS risk aversion data was used in the debate leading up to this (1975 to early 1980s)
- Government policy to keep common property resources (CPR) available for villages: The VLS data showed that villagers, especially the poorer people, relied on common land to graze livestock and to survive during shock periods by eg harvesting fruits of a forest. (1980s)
- Relaxation of trade restrictions between Indian states: The meso-level data was used to promote that free trade within India would increase agricultural productivity (and onwards)
- VLS meso-level data now the standard used by the Indian government. – Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR): for a strategy refresh, priority setting and decision making as this is the only national collection of such data that is time series compatible.

“This is hard to think of any other data set in development economics that has been as influential as the village level data…”

Stefan Dercon, Oxford University (and co-authors)

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This work is now incorporated as part of the

Working Group on Policies, Institutions and Markets

In partnerships with

International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-arid Tropics

Led by

International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-arid Tropics

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