MARIE STOPES INTERNATIONAL
Children by choice, not chance

Country focus:
Global

Theme:
Equity

Marie Stopes Evidence Brief

Routine poverty measurement: an innovative approach to drive equity

IN BRIEF

Women in extreme poverty are one of the most under-served groups in sexual and reproductive healthcare. But identifying this group and tracking reach is difficult.

Unlike age or marital status, you cannot accurately assess wealth with a tick box. Usually we gather this kind of information through multiple questions in client surveys – but these take time and that limits where and when we can collect data.

So we set out to test an approach using just 1 to 2 questions that could be included in a routine service delivery setting to see if we could get accurate information on poverty on a daily basis.

THE CHALLENGE
Getting an accurate picture of clients' wealth

Those with the greatest unmet need for family planning are often the poorest (Figure 1). We need to understand how effective our programmes are in terms of reaching those most in need. And that means getting an accurate view of the wealth of clients and programme recipients in the areas we work.

But the way we've traditionally measured poverty makes it difficult to understand how successfully we're serving the poor. The standard tools to assess poverty are lengthy questionnaires and are therefore only usable in surveys.

So assessing how effective a programme is in reaching those in poverty is typically carried out on a programme-wide level, usually on an annual or less regular basis, and yielding results with wide margins of error.
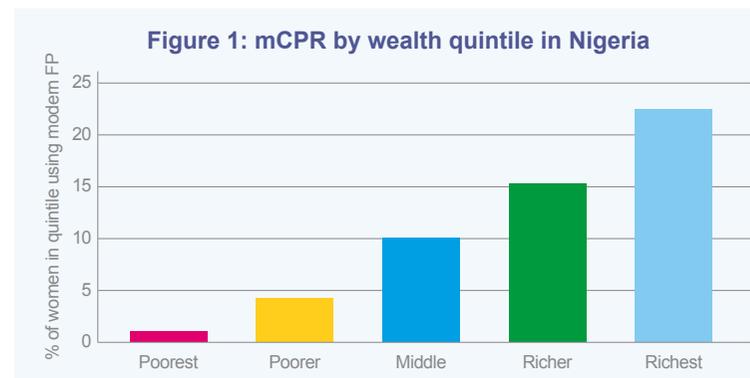
Figure 1: mCPR by wealth quintile in Nigeria

(y-axis: % of women in quintile using modern FP; x-axis categories: Poorest, Poorer, Middle, Richer, Richest)

We've developed a new, easy way to assess poverty on a routine basis. It gives us a reliable measure of relative wealth without putting additional strain on service delivery staff, or the clients themselves.

WHAT WE DID
Integrating paid family planning

We wanted to know if a new measurement approach to capturing information on client wealth through routine data collection would be easy to implement and give an accurate assessment of the average wealth of groups of clients for each site where we work. We set up two pilot projects to capture poverty data routinely.

The first, testing in Ghana and Uganda, utilised the single Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) wealth index question most strongly associated with being in the bottom 2 wealth quintiles, but unfortunately proved too weak in predictive power. But the second approach, piloted in Burkina Faso and Kenya, is proving very successful to date. The key innovation with this approach is to use all of the questions of an existing, validated wealth index, but only two per client. Questions come from Scoros' Simple Poverty Scorecard (SPS) and Innovations for Poverty Action's Poverty Probability Index (PPI), and two are used per client to ensure sufficient accuracy even with small client numbers.

These questions are predetermined by MSI's client-level management information system, so staff won't need to keep track of which set of questions to ask each client. Once recorded, registration proceeds as normal. A pop-up with two wealth questions appears when staff save a new client visit record.
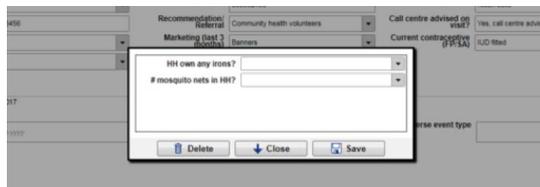
Service delivery staff reported that it was easy to implement and – when we prefaced the question with an explanation for why such questions were being asked – acceptability and response rates were high.

WHAT WE DID
Routine measurement of poverty: a new way to gauge relative wealth

We ran hundreds of thousands of simulations with full data to test for bias and to check the relation of accuracy to respondent numbers. Over the past year, we collected routine poverty data on over 105,000 clients from the two pilot countries and we're using three methods to test how accurate the data was:

1 Mathematical simulations using existing population and client data

2 Existing geo-spatial data on poverty in catchment areas of each site

3 Comparisons against full poverty assessment surveys

When measuring the relative poverty of different sites where we serve our clients, the margin of error was under 10% with 20 respondents and under 5% after 75.

RP accuracy in relative measurement

Skew 0.84

Skew 01.51

— Mean – RP   — Mean – Full PPI
— 95th percentile – RP   — 95th percentile – Full PPI
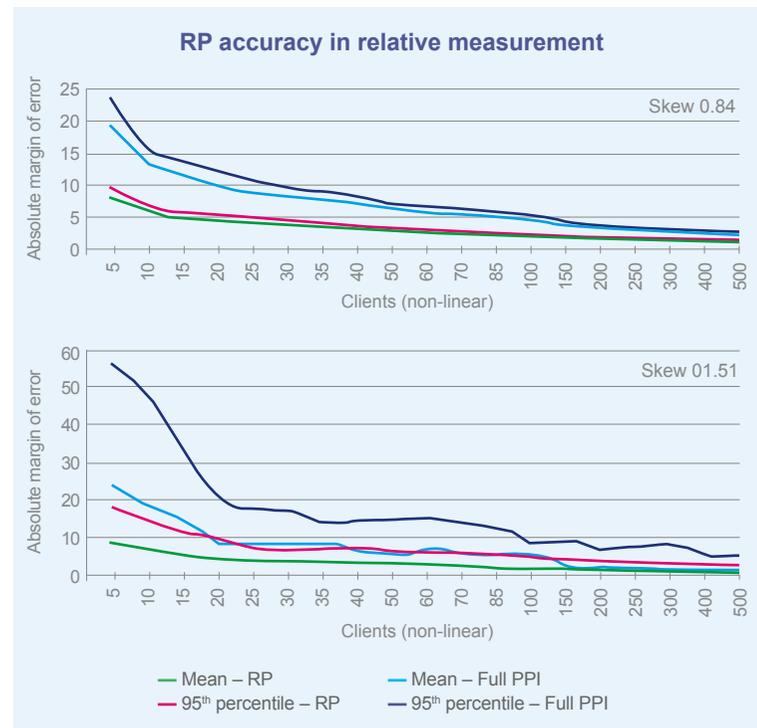
Can we accurately measure absolute poverty?

While no bias was introduced in relative poverty measures, mapping poverty scores to absolute PPI or multidivisional-poverty Index values can potentially result in bias. Further analysis will confirm this possibility.

WHAT THIS MEANS
Driving equity and transforming lives

We've developed a new, easy way to assess poverty on a routine basis. It gives us a reliable measure of relative wealth without putting additional strain on service delivery staff, or the clients themselves. And while there's potential for bias when measuring for absolute poverty in populations with extremely high wealth inequity, it's still more accurate than very large surveys in most scenarios.

Routine Measurement of Poverty facilitates the transition from survey to routine assessments of wealth. This methodology can help organisations see the relative wealth of clients in each location they work every day, to help identify the teams or sites that perform better in reaching the poor.

And we can now quickly evaluate the impact of changes in service delivery, demand generation, voucher targeting and other activities on reaching the poorest and most vulnerable in the communities where we work.

Where can I find more information?

For more information on Marie Stopes International and the work that we do please contact:

T +44 (0)20 7636 6200 • evidence@mariestopes.org
Alternatively, visit our website: **www.mariestopes.org**
Registered charity number: 265543

© Marie Stopes International 2018