

# Bridging the Gap: Synthesising Evidence from Secondary Quantitative and Primary Qualitative Data

**Abstract** There is widespread recognition that mixed-methods approaches are a ‘platinum standard’ in research and evaluation and that the expanding availability of secondary quantitative data creates unprecedented opportunities for studying poverty and evaluating poverty reduction programmes. At the same time, this expanding availability of secondary quantitative data presents methodological shortcomings that are underexplored. This paper by Keetie Roelen<sup>1</sup> explores the ‘matching problem’ and a participatory tool for overcoming this challenge in a bid to offer wider reflections about the combination of secondary and primary data as well as quantitative and qualitative data in mixed-methods studies and evaluation. It does so in reference to research on child poverty in Burundi, Ethiopia and Vietnam.

## 1 Mixing methods in poverty evaluations

It is now widely recognised that using a combination of methods, rather than a single method, can enhance and deepen our understanding of issues pertaining to poverty and vulnerability (Roelen and Camfield 2015). This includes the field of impact evaluations, which tend to be dominated by quantitative methods and experimental designs (Devereux *et al.* 2013). The implementation of national or large-scale household panel surveys in low- and middle-income countries creates unprecedented opportunities for studying poverty and evaluating poverty reduction programmes, particularly as data from these surveys are increasingly being made available to third-party users. The combination of quantitative panel data with qualitative data collection or analysis allows for innovative and comprehensive research on poverty (Taylor 2008) and evaluation of poverty programmes (Adato 2007).

This paper reflects on the combination of secondary quantitative and primary qualitative data in mixed-methods research on poverty and evaluations of poverty reduction programmes. To our knowledge, the particular combination of secondary quantitative household survey data (i.e. survey data collected by a third party) and primary qualitative data (i.e. data collected directly by the

researcher) presents methodological challenges that have been underexplored. The paper discusses those challenges and explores a participatory research tool for overcoming them, thereby offering wider reflections regarding the mixing of methods and data in poverty studies and evaluations. It does so in reference to child poverty research in Burundi, Ethiopia and Vietnam, and in light of the ongoing debate on the extent to which monetary and multidimensional (non-monetary) measures identify the same groups as being poor (Sumner 2007).

## 2 Integrating methods and the ‘matching problem’

An important value-added of mixed-methods approaches lies in the opportunity to undertake in-depth and fine-grained assessments that no single method is able to produce when used in isolation (Torres Penagos and Bautista Hernández 2015). The available literature offers various typologies that describe different approaches to mixed-methods research and evaluation (Shaffer 2013; Stern *et al.* 2012) ranging from combined reporting based on parallel quantitative and qualitative data collection processes to close-knit integration of research design, data collection and analysis and write-up of findings.

The degree of integration has implications for the requirements for and utilisation of primary and secondary data. Combining methods for purposes of triangulation and complementarity, for example, can be based on multiple sources of data – either primary or secondary – with limited requirements for matching data. By contrast, taking a ‘case-based view’ that recognises individual cases as complex entities (Stern *et al.* 2012) requires the ability to link information from different sources to individual cases.

Most studies that are strongly integrated match information from multiple sources for the same units of analysis using data from primary sources. In their study on chronic poverty in Bangladesh, for example, Davis and Baulch (2011) collected in-depth information about the same households using a range of tools, including quantitative household surveys, participatory exercises and semi-structured interviews. Similarly, an evaluation of conditional cash transfer programmes in Nicaragua and Turkey combined household survey and ethnographic data for a sub-set of households in the survey samples (Adato 2008).

Matching data from different sources for individual cases becomes much more complex when combining secondary and primary data, with access to unique identifier details being a key requirement. However, privacy and ethical considerations often prevent third-party users from accessing such unique identifier details. In a study on child poverty dynamics in the UK, Taylor explains how she was only able to secure access to unique identifier details from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) because she was using a dormant rather than ongoing sample of the survey (Taylor 2008). The inability to uniquely identify households or individuals in secondary data leads to the ‘matching problem’ – i.e. the inability to match data from different sources for unique individuals or households.

Despite widespread recognition that mixed-methods approaches are a ‘platinum standard’ in research and evaluation (Khagram and Thomas 2010) and the expanding availability of secondary data, methodological challenges in combining secondary and primary data (such as the ‘matching problem’) are rarely discussed. This paper explores the ‘matching problem’ in more detail and considers a participatory tool for overcoming this challenge in reference to research on child poverty in Burundi, Ethiopia and Vietnam. In doing so the paper gives rise to wider reflections about the combination of secondary and primary data as well as quantitative and qualitative data in mixed-methods studies and evaluation.

### 3 Monetary and multidimensional poverty: two sides of the same coin?

Although the multidimensional nature of poverty is mostly undisputed (Sumner 2007), the extent to which monetary measures can serve as a proxy for non-monetary

measures and vice versa remains unresolved. Moreover, while empirical evidence shows that monetary and non-monetary measures do not identify the same groups of households, individuals or children as being poor, there is only limited analysis as to why this might be the case (Roelen 2015). An exploration of the drivers and factors underpinning patterns of monetary and multidimensional poverty requires a mixed-methods approach and, ideally, the availability of multiple types of data for individuals.

This study aims to analyse differential pictures of child poverty when using monetary versus multidimensional measures. It considers the extent to which children experience monetary and multidimensional (non-monetary) poverty at the same time or only one type of poverty. It also explores explanations for why some children may experience only one type of poverty. An ideal combination of methods would consist of a sequenced analysis of quantitative household survey and qualitative participatory data, using the household survey data to select children that suffer only one type of poverty for follow-up with participatory methods (see also Adato 2007; Taylor 2008). However, as the secondary household survey data sets used for this research in Ethiopia and Vietnam do not allow access to unique identifier details, it is not possible to select children from the household survey data for follow-up qualitative data collection – we face the ‘matching problem’.

### 4 Exploring a participatory tool for overcoming the ‘matching problem’

In order to overcome the ‘matching problem’, a participatory tool was developed for assessing the situations of community members in Ethiopia and Vietnam with respect to monetary and multidimensional child poverty. The goal was to use the tool to identify children that experience only one type of poverty for follow-up qualitative data collection. Access to unique identifiers in household survey data in Burundi does allow for matching information from survey and qualitative sources for individual households and children, thereby providing the opportunity to assess the validity of this exercise in overcoming the ‘matching problem’.

Quantitative data sources include the Ethiopian Rural Household Survey (ERHS) from 2009,<sup>2</sup> the Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey (VHLSS) from 2008, and data from the evaluation of Concern Worldwide’s ‘Terintambwe’ Graduation Model programme in Burundi. Primary qualitative data were collected in four sites in each country between August 2013 and May 2015. Site selection was informed by analysis of secondary data, including quantitative data and other reports, and pragmatic considerations.

Qualitative and quantitative sample sizes are presented in Table 1. Information for the qualitative data represents an

Table 1 Sample statistics – quantitative and qualitative data

	Quantitative data	Qualitative data		
	Children	Adults	Children	Total
Ethiopia	228 (ERHS 2009)	88	61	149
Vietnam	364 (VHLSS 2008)	145	78	223
Burundi	367 (Terintambwe 2015)	91	40	131

Source: Author's own calculations.

aggregation of respondents involved in the community child poverty profiling exercise, group discussions and exercises, and household case studies. One community exercise was undertaken in each community, totalling four exercises per country and 12 in total. On average, four household case studies of 'mismatch households' were undertaken in each community, complemented by a range of group discussions and exercises. Information for the quantitative data reflects the numbers of children from the respective communities that were included in the most recent rounds of the survey data as used for this study.

## 5 The 'community child poverty profiling exercise'

The participatory tool developed for this purpose builds on community wealth ranking exercises, which are widely used and a well-established part of the Participatory Rural

Appraisal (PRA) toolkit (Grandin 1988). PRA is an approach to understanding and analysing poverty based on explicit participation of local rural (and urban) people themselves, aiming for a more activist and bottom-up as opposed to extractive approach (Chambers 1992). Community wealth ranking exercises ask community members to list criteria or indicators of wealth (these commonly include livestock, land and income) and to indicate what values of those criteria constitute low, average or high wealth status (e.g. number of goats, cows and oxen). Against the backdrop of these criteria and their thresholds, community members are asked to rank households in the community according to their wealth status. The exercise developed for the purpose of this research extends this tool as it asks community members to undertake this assessment for household wealth and child wellbeing,<sup>3</sup> leading to the 'community child poverty profiling exercise'.

Figure 1 Categories of child poverty overlap and mismatch



## Example of community child poverty profiling exercise in Óc Eo, An Giang province, Mekong River Delta, Vietnam

A group of eight community members – four male and four female – discussed criteria and thresholds for household wealth and child wellbeing categories appropriate to their community. These were captured in matrices on flipchart sheets using text and symbols (see Tables 2 and 3 for the matrices for household wealth and child wellbeing respectively). The community members subsequently established which category the households in their sub-community belonged to.

An excerpt of the household categorisation is provided below. Cases for which the identified category of wellbeing did not match the identified category of wealth were to be discussed.



Table 2 Matrix for household wealth

Criteria	Poor and sub-poor	Average	Wealthy
Land	No cultivated land, land for housing	There is cultivated land and housing land but not much	A lot of cultivated land and housing land
Occupation	Daily labourers, workers	Also daily labourers, workers but the occupation is stable	Employ people to work for them. Mechanise
Number of labourers	Few labourers	More labourers, less dependent children	Least dependent people
Number of children dependent on parents	Many children	Two or three children	One or two children
Housing	Leaked roof, thatched roof, earthen-wall house	Pretty beautiful house	Big house

Source: Author's analysis of primary qualitative data.

Table 3 Matrix for child wellbeing

Criteria	Bad	Average	Well
Parents either have money or not	Less or no money	A little more money	Much money
Food and drink	Cold rice or empty stomach	A little more food and drink	Sufficient and nutritious
Study (suggested)	Primary school or high school	High school	Graduating high school
Parents in peace	Parents are divorced or often have arguments	Harmonious	Harmonious

Source: Author's analysis of primary qualitative data.

Table 4 Matrix for identifying overlap and mismatch

Household	Child wellbeing category	Wealth category	Overlap/mismatch	To discuss
#1	Average	Poor	Positive mismatch	Yes
#2	Bad	Poor	Poverty overlap	No
#3	Average	Poor	Positive mismatch	Yes
#4	Bad	Wealthy	Negative mismatch	Yes

Source: Author's analysis of primary qualitative data.

The profiling exercise consists of six stages:

- 1 Establishing community-specific categories and criteria for monetary poverty/ household wealth.
- 2 Establishing community-specific categories and criteria for child multidimensional poverty/ child wellbeing.
- 3 Mapping or listing the households in the community (or sub-community up to 40 households).
- 4 Establishing which category of monetary poverty/ household wealth applies to each household.
- 5 Establishing which category of multidimensional child poverty/ child wellbeing applies to each household.
- 6 Establishing whether there is overlap or mismatch between households' identified categories of wealth and child wellbeing. Given the categorisations for household wealth and child wellbeing, there are four categories of overlap and mismatch: positive mismatch, negative mismatch, poverty overlap, and no poverty overlap (see Figure 1).

Community members are subsequently asked to elaborate on the situations of households identified to experience either 'positive mismatch' or 'negative mismatch'. Depending on these elaborations, households are subsequently selected for follow-up qualitative research with both the caregivers and children (see page 4 for an example from Vietnam).

## 6 Validation of the community child poverty profiling exercise

The validity of the exercise will be considered from three perspectives. First, we assess the extent to which percentages of children experiencing poverty overlap, positive mismatch, negative mismatch or no poverty overlap (as identified in the community exercise) match

those as identified using the survey data. This is possible for all countries using secondary survey and primary qualitative data. Second, we consider the extent to which assessments made by community members in the exercise about individual households are in line with assessments of those households based on quantitative survey data. This analysis is only available for Burundi as it requires the ability to match quantitative and qualitative data for individual households. Third, we assess the extent to which identification of mismatch patterns based on either qualitative or quantitative information reflects reality on the ground. In other words, whether follow-up interviews with adults and children as part of the case studies mirror the assessments made about child wellbeing and household wealth using a combination of qualitative and quantitative information.

### Quantitative and qualitative percentages of overlap and mismatch

We compared prevalence of child poverty overlap and mismatch in quantitative and qualitative data for all three countries. An example of this analysis from Ethiopia is presented in Table 5. A comparison of findings in Ethiopia indicates that proportions of children experiencing poverty overlap (i.e. having both poor household wealth and poor child wellbeing) or experiencing positive mismatch (i.e. living in a household with few resources but experiencing good child wellbeing) differ markedly when comparing qualitative and quantitative findings. Proportions of positive mismatch are higher when using the survey data in comparison to using data from the community profiling exercise.

Comparative analysis of quantitative and qualitative findings in Vietnam displays discrepancies with respect to positive as well as negative mismatch. In contrast to Ethiopia, community groups identified larger proportions of children experiencing positive mismatch compared to

Table 5 Prevalence of overlap and mismatch in Ethiopia

Tabia, kushet	Source	Overlap	Positive mismatch	Negative mismatch	Non-poor	Total
Harresaw, Harresaw	exercise	73% (14)	11% (2)	16% (3)		100% (19)
	survey data	40% (30)	53% (39)	3% (2)	4% (3)	100% (74)
Harresaw, Limeat	exercise	64% (21)	27% (9)	9% (3)		100% (33)
	survey data	33% (25)	61% (47)	1% (1)	5% (4)	100% (77)
Geblen, Kaslen	exercise	70% (19)	26% (7)	4% (1)		100% (27)
	survey data	17% (7)	73% (30)		10% (4)	100% (41)
Geblen, Welaalabur	exercise	29% (11)	68% (26)	3% (1)		100% (38)
	survey data	11% (4)	89% (32)			100% (36)

Source: Author's analysis of primary qualitative data.

**Table 6 Identification of mismatch case studies using primary qualitative and quantitative data, Burundi**

Province, colline, commune	Consistent findings	Partially consistent findings	Inconsistent findings	Total
Cibitoke, Nyangwe, Bukinanyana	23% (5)	23% (5)	54% (12)	100% (22)
Cibitoke, Rushiha, Mabayi	31% (7)	17% (4)	52% (12)	100% (23)
Kirundo, Nyabikenke, Bugabira	12% (4)	3% (1)	85% (29)	100% (34)
Kirundo, Sigu, Busoni	13% (4)	10% (3)	77% (23)	100% (30)

Source: Author's own calculations.

estimates based on survey data. The prevalence of negative mismatch is higher when using survey data compared to data from the community exercise. Analysis of findings in Burundi displays relative consistency between qualitative and quantitative prevalence of positive mismatch. We do observe considerable discrepancies with respect to the proportions of children experiencing negative mismatch; these are considerably larger when using quantitative data compared to using qualitative data.

In sum, we find a considerable degree of incongruence when considering percentages of poverty mismatch based on survey versus exercise findings.

#### Quantitative and qualitative identification of case studies

In this section we explore the validity of the community profiling exercise in greater detail by matching qualitative and quantitative findings to individual households and children in Burundi. This is possible because of access to unique identifiers across both data sets. We assess the extent to which these data sources identify the same households with children as experiencing poverty overlap or mismatch.

The identification of children experiencing poverty overlap, positive mismatch, negative mismatch or no poverty overlap when using the community child poverty profiling exercise or quantitative survey data leads to mixed findings. Findings are only fully consistent for 12 per cent to 31 per cent of cases within a specific site, meaning that identification of poverty status for those children was consistent across the community profiling exercise and quantitative survey data (see Table 6). These cases primarily refer to poverty overlap – i.e. children experiencing both monetary and multidimensional poverty at the same time. This relatively low degree of full consistency is not unusual; Davis and Baulch (2011) observed similar levels of consistency in their study on chronic poverty in Bangladesh.

Inconsistent findings are observed for between 52 per cent and 85 per cent of the cases. Generally, the degree of inconsistency is larger in Kirundo province than in Cibitoke province. An important explanation for this follows from the indicator used for monetary poverty in the survey data, which is based on an income measure that incorporates

income earned from occupation and does not overlap strongly with indicators of household wealth used in the community profiling exercise (these focus on availability of labour, land and assets).

There is also a considerable degree of partially consistent findings, meaning that the degree of overlap or mismatch at household level as identified in the profiling exercise holds for some but not all children in the household when considering children's individual situations using survey data. While the quantitative data allow for analysis of the individual child, the unit of analysis in the community profiling exercise is the household, drawing the same conclusion about poverty patterns for all children in the household. Closer consideration of the cases that reveal partial consistency indicate that this can be attributed to the use of different units of analysis in the community profiling exercise and quantitative data.

One issue that plays into inconsistent as well as partially consistent findings is respondent fatigue. The numbers of households included in the community profiling exercises were much higher in Burundi than in Vietnam and Ethiopia, particularly in Kirundo. Feedback from the fieldwork team suggested that the need to assess the situation of >30 households with respect to both household wealth and child wellbeing led to resistance from community members and inaccurate assessments for the second half of the listed households.

In sum, we find consistent identification of poverty mismatch and overlap when using exercise versus survey data for up to one-third of cases, and partially consistent or inconsistent findings for the remainder.

#### Reality on the ground

This section considers the extent to which assessments of the poverty situation using the qualitative community exercise or quantitative survey data are in line with reality on the ground as captured in follow-up interviews with adults and children in the selected case study households. Case study households in Ethiopia and Vietnam were selected following identification of mismatch in the community exercise, allowing for an assessment of the

accuracy of the community profiling exercise *vis-à-vis* households' own assessments of their situation. In Burundi, case studies were selected on the basis of both the community exercise and survey data, allowing for a comparative assessment of the accuracy of qualitative community data and quantitative survey data *vis-à-vis* households' own assessments of their situation.

Although the selection of case study households using the community exercise does not allow for identification of mismatch patterns for individual children, results from Ethiopia and Vietnam indicate that the community profiling exercise was relatively effective in picking up on discrepancies between household wealth and child wellbeing for at least one child within the household (see the example below of Sara in Tigray, Ethiopia). A comparison of the identification of poverty overlap and mismatch for individual children when using quantitative household survey data versus the community exercise in Burundi indicates that the community exercise was, in fact, more effective. The selection of children and their households for follow-up analysis using survey data was undermined by changes in household composition, temporary absence or illness of children, and inadequate reflections of household wealth.

In sum, the community exercise proves useful for identifying poverty mismatch or overlap for individual children and can be considered more effective in doing so than survey data.

### Explaining discrepancies and incongruence

The findings from the three validation exercises give rise to a number of reflections explaining discrepancies and incongruence, as follows.

- Despite a gap in timings of quantitative and qualitative data collection in Ethiopia and Vietnam, **time lag appears to play a minor role only in explaining incongruent findings**. Findings in Burundi display a

similar level of disagreements between quantitative and qualitative findings despite data collection being only a few months apart.

- **The use of different criteria for child wellbeing and household wealth in the qualitative and quantitative data contributes to differential findings on the prevalence of poverty overlap and mismatch**. In Burundi and Ethiopia, indicators used in the quantitative data did not directly mirror the criteria as defined by community members in the profiling exercise, particularly with respect to household wealth (for which availability of livestock, land and labour was mentioned rather than household consumption or income). Quantitative and qualitative indicators for child wellbeing in these countries were more similar, with a strong focus on going to school and working in or outside the home. In Vietnam, criteria for household wealth and material child wellbeing as defined by community members overlapped more strongly with indicators that are used in the quantitative analysis; these include income and employment (to denote household wealth and education), and sanitation and shelter (for child wellbeing).
- Although the community exercise asked people to list criteria for child wellbeing and to subsequently use those criteria for assessing the situation of individual households and children, **actual assessments of child wellbeing were based on a sub-set of those criteria and additional subjective indicators**. In all three countries, community members identified indicators referring to 'material needs' such as quantity and quality of food, clothing, shelter, schooling and health care but also children's behaviours and attitudes and the extent to which these fit societal norms, and applied these to varying degrees. In Ethiopia, children's participation in household chores and family work, as well as their obedience, was considered a virtue and part of good wellbeing. When asked to assess

### Example of negative mismatch case study, Harresaw tabia, Tigray region, Ethiopia

Sara, from Harresaw, is 16 years old, lives with her father and attends grade 8. Community members selected her case as one of 'negative mismatch', in terms of good household wealth but poor child wellbeing. Her family is considered to do fairly well as they own land, have an oxen and cow, sheep and goats and bee colonies. But community members indicated that child wellbeing did not match this wealth, particularly following the divorce of Sara's parents.

In the follow-up case study, Sara shared the community members' perceptions of her situation as she expressed mixed feelings about her wellbeing. Although she is going to school, she also needs to do heavy domestic work when at home: 'I can say my wellbeing is good and bad. It is good because I am in school. My wellbeing is bad because I am working at home when I return from school.'

Sara's father indicates that he does not send his children to work elsewhere but that he finds it important that they help with work at home: 'I don't send my children to work for other households but I believe children should work at home in household production.'

Sara aspires to be an engineer but feels that she is not supported by her father as he wants her to go to a local secondary school rather than in the nearby district town: 'If I pass the national examination, I want to continue my education in the town of Atsbi. But my father wants me to join the Dera high school in order to support him. I want to be an engineer in order to construct roads to my community in particular and my country in general.'

individual cases, however, respondents tended to focus more on the observable and objective indicators of whether a child is going to school or not, or the type and amount of work undertaken. Respondents indicated that they found it difficult to make assessments on the basis of other criteria identified as being important for child wellbeing as they felt unable to look inside households and their dynamics.

- **The conceptualisation of the abstract and unfamiliar concept of child wellbeing was a challenge for respondents.** They also struggled to disentangle it from household wealth. Common responses included: 'This child is doing badly because the household is poor.' In a bid to overcome this, respondents in Vietnam focused strongly on the behaviour of children and the extent to which this was congruent with societal norms. Such a narrow focus on children's behaviour might be explained by the fact that it prevents passing judgement on caregivers and the extent to which children's needs are met. By contrast, respondents in Burundi based their information on a combination of observable indicators – most notably whether children were going to school – and the observed attitudes of their parents, suggesting that the passing of judgement was less of a concern.
- **The rigid categorisation of individual households on the basis of multiple criteria was challenging when the situation with respect to those underlying indicators appeared to be in conflict with each other.** In Burundi, for example, children might go to school during the week but leave the household on Saturdays to work for someone else. Going to school was considered an attribute of 'good child wellbeing' but working for others was considered to be part of 'bad child wellbeing'.
- **There was a response bias towards positive mismatch in the community profiling exercise,** contributing to proportions of children experiencing positive mismatch being higher than proportions of children experiencing negative mismatch within the qualitative data, but also to proportions of positive mismatch being higher when using qualitative versus quantitative data (except for Ethiopia). In Ethiopia, the community groups appeared to be motivated by portraying the community at large as doing well for children despite levels of poverty, only highlighting cases of negative mismatch when they represented clear cases whereby children were taken out of school and working in the family business or treated badly. In Vietnam, community members were hesitant to speak negatively about others, which is not only reflected in higher rates of positive mismatch but also by the willingness only to discuss the detail of positive mismatch cases. In Burundi, respondents indicated that they had limited information with which to assess the situation of children within households and appeared to err towards positive assessments when in doubt.

- **The differential use of units of analysis in the community profiling exercise and quantitative survey data contributes to inconsistent identification of children's poverty status.** The quantitative data hold information for individual children and therefore allow for analysis of the individual child. The community profiling exercise asks community members to assess the situation of the household at large, drawing the same conclusion about poverty patterns for all children in the household. Analysis in Burundi points towards a considerable degree of 'partially consistent findings', referring to cases whereby the assessment made in the community profiling exercise was consistent with the quantitative data for some of the children in the household but not all.

## 7 Mixing secondary and primary data in studies of poverty and evaluations of poverty reduction programmes

This paper has offered reflections on the combination of secondary and primary data in mixed-methods research on poverty and evaluations of poverty reduction programmes. It did so by considering an underexplored yet important challenge in the combination of such data when lack of access to unique identifiers prevents direct matching of information for individual units of analysis – the 'matching problem'. The paper explored the use of a participatory tool for overcoming this challenge with reference to child poverty research in Burundi, Ethiopia and Vietnam, highlighting how the tool can facilitate the combination of secondary and primary data in mixed-methods studies.

The degree of inconsistency between quantitative and qualitative findings suggests that the community profiling exercise, in its present form, cannot serve as a proxy for quantitative data analysis and identify children experiencing poverty overlap and mismatch in the same way. The exercise does present a meaningful tool for purposive sampling in its own right; comparisons between households' situations as discussed in the community exercise and reflected in case study interviews in all countries convey that the exercise was fairly accurate. As such, it can be considered a partial solution to overcoming the 'matching problem'. A number of improvements will facilitate the use of the exercise and reduce incongruence between quantitative and qualitative findings:

- **Consistent use of criteria:** A consistent use of indicators across quantitative and qualitative analysis will reduce discrepant findings. When mixing secondary survey data and primary qualitative data, this does imply the perpetuation of the much-criticised dominance of quantitative methods because the choice of indicators is bounded by information available within the survey data.
- **Individual child as unit of analysis:** Findings clearly indicate that levels of child wellbeing are not necessarily

the same for all children in a household and that an individual level of analysis would be more appropriate. Indeed, the validation exercise in Burundi points towards the importance of using a consistent unit of analysis, with many differences between quantitative and qualitative identification of mismatch households following differential findings for children within the same household.

- **Strong facilitation of the community exercise:** This could help to (partly) overcome issues of focus on easily observable outcomes, as well as challenges in interpreting contrasting findings with respect to different child wellbeing criteria, response bias and respondent fatigue. Probing is a particular skill that could help respondents consider issues for children in their community beyond those that are easily observable. Appropriate and careful probing could also help to overcome response bias towards positive mismatch by addressing respondents' concerns regarding the passing of judgement on their community members. The exercise should also be made as manageable and engaging as possible. Reframing it as a game (as opposed to clear listing and ranking) may help to keep respondents engaged while also bypassing response bias towards positive mismatch.

Findings in this paper hold relevance beyond the 'matching problem' and assessment of the community child poverty profiling exercise. While the starting point of assessing the validity of this participatory exercise was to consider the extent to which such a tool could help overcome challenges in matching data from different sources in the absence of access to unique identifiers, the analysis problematises the very notion that findings from qualitative and quantitative data should add up to the

## Notes

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same conclusion. Even when information from different sources can be uniquely matched to individual households and children, there are substantial discrepancies, with different data providing different pictures of the same situation. This finding is not new; in their study on chronic poverty in Bangladesh, Davis and Baulch (2011) observed disagreements between quantitative and qualitative assessments of poverty transitions in two-thirds of cases. But rather than considering this a weakness of mixed-methods research, they argue that the emergence of incongruent findings is a strength. Discrepant outcomes unveil the complexities underlying poverty and trigger further investigation into those complexities.

Mixed-methods evaluations of poverty reduction programmes are particularly well placed to address complexity (Roelen and Camfield 2015) and to overcome narrow analysis seeking to confirm or reject a predefined theory of change (Devereux *et al.* 2013). In undertaking such evaluations, researchers need to build on the value-added of different methods and sources of information – quantitative or qualitative and primary or secondary – in their own right, rather than seeking to rely only on findings that are mutually reinforcing. As Dawson (2015) illustrates in his study of rural poverty in Rwanda, the reality of poverty reduction lies as much in the stories behind contrasting findings as in those behind compatible findings. Regardless of whether data originate from primary sources or a combination of primary and secondary sources and whether or not the research is subject to the 'matching problem', mixed-methods studies and evaluations of poverty require researchers to trust in the strength of individual methods and the power of stories behind incongruent findings.

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- 3 Given the technical nature and negative connotations of the terms 'monetary poverty' and 'multidimensional poverty', questions for adults and children were framed around concepts of household wealth and child wellbeing in English but culturally appropriate terms were used in Tigrinya (Ethiopia), Vietnamese and Kirundi languages.

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“ ... Regardless of whether data originate from primary sources or a combination of primary and secondary sources and whether or not the research is subject to the ‘matching problem’, mixed-methods studies and evaluations of poverty require researchers to trust in the strength of individual methods and the power of stories behind incongruent findings. ”

### Centre for Development Impact (CDI)

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- (1) Exploring a broader range of evaluation designs and methods, and approaches to causal inference.
- (2) Designing appropriate ways to assess the impact of complex interventions in challenging contexts.
- (3) Better understanding the political dynamics and other factors in the evaluation process, including the use of evaluation evidence.

This CDI Practice Paper was written by **Keetie Roelen**.

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