# EVIDENCE REPORT
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Policy Anticipation, Response and Evaluation

India Public Opinion Monitor: Causes of Poverty Survey Results

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# 1 Scope and aims of the India Public Opinion Monitor

The India Public Opinion Monitor (IPOM) is a longitudinal panel of 3,022 opinion leaders from across India that aims to provide an ongoing monitor of opinions and perspectives on the economic and social development of India, and on India's place in the wider world. A particular sub-theme is India's relations with other emerging and developing economies in South Asia and globally.

Reflecting the logistical difficulties and costs associated with surveys involving a representative sample of the Indian population, the IPOM specifically focuses on opinion leaders. Here, opinion leaders are defined as individuals who are actively engaged in economic and/or political issues in India and are willing to participate in a continual panel, which means that they will be asked to respond to questions on an ongoing basis. A further rationale for the focus on opinion leaders is that they provide both an effective 'pulse' on opinions relating to economic and social issues in India, and also act as key drivers of those opinions.

The IPOM is an internet-based survey platform through which members are presented with short questionnaires every two months. Members are sent an email inviting them to participate in each survey and containing a link to the survey. After a period of seven days, members who have not responded are sent a reminder.

The current survey was undertaken in December 2013. Of the 3,022 members of the panel, 1,543 returned the fully completed questionnaire. A summary of the results is provided below.

The focus of the current survey was poverty in India. Panel members were asked about current levels of poverty in India, how they expected the level of poverty to change looking to the future, and what factors they considered to be the major determinants of poverty in the country. The same questions were put to panels in Brazil and South Africa, enabling comparisons to be made with other BRICS countries.

# 2    Level of poverty in India today

The survey started by asking opinion leaders about the level of poverty in India today. Responses ranged from 35 to 90 per cent of the population, with an average of 72 per cent. Almost half of respondents expected the level of poverty in India to decline over the next five to ten years (Figure 2.1), whilst around 25 per cent thought levels of poverty would increase and 25 per cent thought there would be little or no change. Even those who expected a decline in poverty, however, did not expect any dramatic improvements over the next five to ten years, with an average decline over this period of less than 10 per cent.

**Figure 2.1   Expected change over the next five to ten years in proportion of population that is poor**
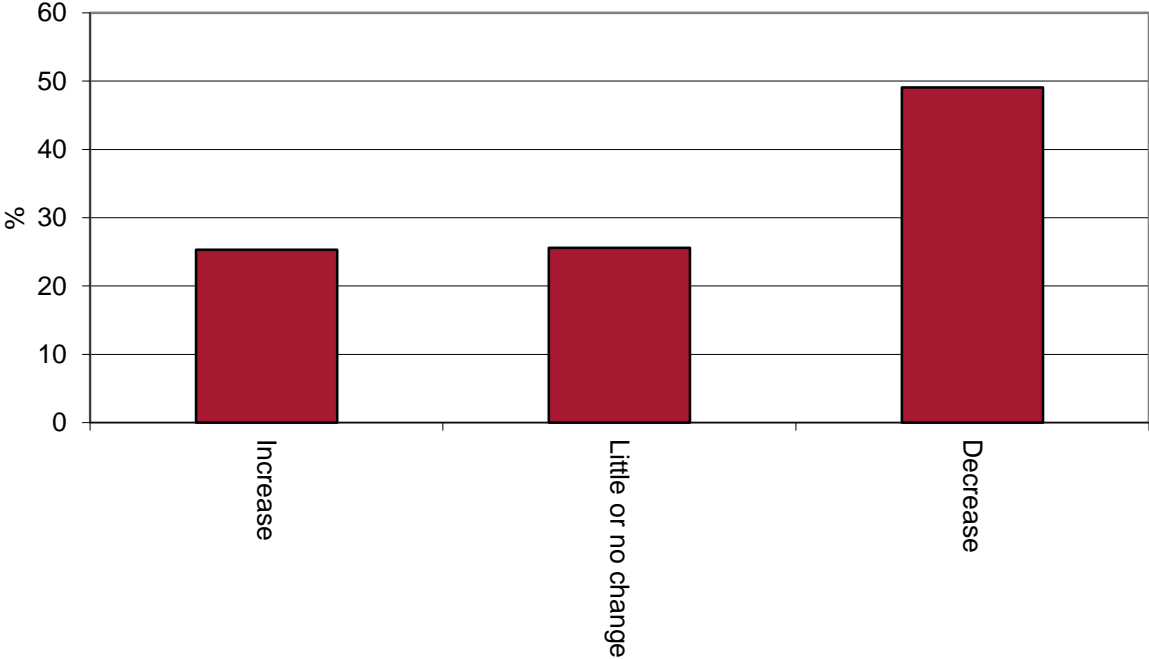
# 3 Causes of poverty

In order to identify the factors that opinion leaders consider to be the most critical causes of poverty, respondents were presented with a list of 25 potential causes compiled through a review of the research literature on antecedents of poverty. They were asked to indicate the importance of each of these factors in explaining why poverty exists in India, Brazil and South Africa today, on a five-point scale ranging from 'very unimportant' (1) to 'very important' (5). The resulting scores for the 25 factors were then categorised using Principal Components Analysis (PCA).[1] Specifically, PCA was applied to the pooled scores provided by survey respondents (n=4,653) from India, Brazil and South Africa so that common principal components were identified for the three countries.

A total of seven broad causes of poverty were identified as follows:[2]

- **Actions of the poor:** This principal component is closely related to items such as 'they have too many children', 'they are lazy' and 'financial mismanagement by the poor', suggesting it relates to beliefs that poverty results from the personal actions and behaviours of the poor themselves.
- **Fate or bad luck:** With close relations to items such as 'it is the will of God' and 'they have had bad luck', this suggests that poverty is outside the control of the poor and rather is the result of fate and/or bad luck.
- **Low social status:** Items such as 'exploited by the rich', 'inequality in Brazilian/Indian/South African society' and 'low social status' are most closely related to this principal component. This suggests that it relates to low status in society.
- **Lack of opportunities:** This principal component is most strongly related to items such as 'lack of economic opportunities for the poor', 'lack of education' and 'their parents were poor', suggesting lack of opportunities as a cause of poverty.
- **Government incapacity:** This principal component relates to the incapacity of government to help the poor with strong relations to items such as 'government corruption', 'government inefficiency or incompetence' and 'inadequate social welfare or assistance'.
- **Lack of societal concern about poverty:** The items 'lack of community spirit in Brazilian/Indian/South African society' and 'lack of concern about the poor within Brazilian/Indian/South African society' were heavily related to this principal component, suggesting it relates to a lack of societal concern about the poor.
- **Actions of rich countries:** This final principal component related to 'inadequate or inappropriate aid from rich countries' and 'exploited by rich countries', suggesting it is related to the actions of rich countries.

The loadings of each of the 25 items on these seven principal components are reported in Annex 1.

The average score for each of the seven identified causes of poverty is reported in Figure 3.1 below. The single most important cause of poverty in India today was considered to be the lack of opportunities for the poor. Government incapacity was also considered an important

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[1] PCA is a statistical technique that aims to identify the underlying patterns or structure in data. Thus, underlying the 25 items presented to respondents here, there are likely to be a smaller number of latent variables (or 'principal components') that are not immediately observable but with which the 25 items are related. PCA is a technique of identifying these latent variables and, in so doing, allowing better sense to be made of the scores provided by respondents.

[2] Seven principal components had eigenvalues exceeding one. These seven principal components accounted for 78 per cent of the variation in the data. Note that one of the 25 items did not load appreciably onto any of the seven eigenvalues and was excluded from the analysis.

factor. The least important factors were the actions of the poor themselves and exploitation by rich countries. It is noteworthy that, although not amongst the factors considered most important, fate or bad luck had a relatively high average score.

**Figure 3.1   Average score for causes of poverty scales**
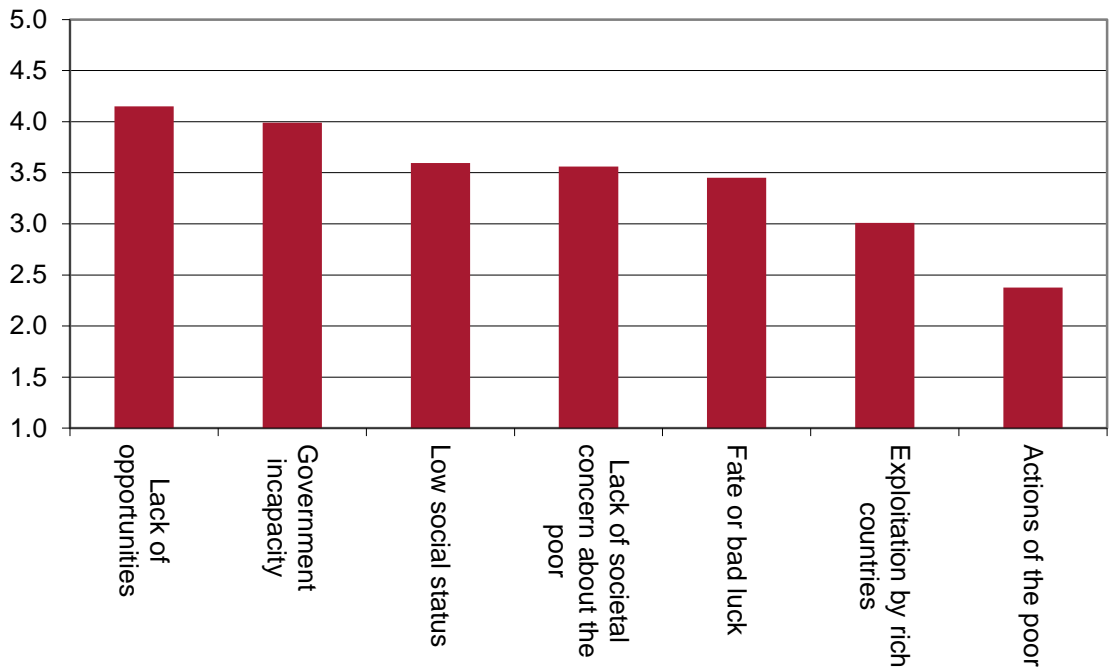
# 4    Views on alleviating poverty in India today

The final part of the survey explored the views of opinion leaders on approaches to alleviating poverty in India. Firstly, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements on a five-point scale ranging from 'disagree strongly' (1) to 'agree strongly' (5).

The results are reported in Figure 4.1. Almost 63 per cent of respondents disagreed with the statement 'poverty is inevitable in a country such as India today'. This shows strong support within the panel for efforts to redistribute wealth. Thus, 78 per cent of respondents agreed that 'the poor do not get their fair share of the nation's wealth', whilst 75 per cent agreed that 'the government should redistribute more income from the better off to the poor'. Whilst 58 per cent were of the view that rich countries should do more to reduce levels of poverty in India, 83 per cent agreed with the statement 'it is the responsibility of India to get rid of poverty in its own country', suggesting that primary responsibility is seen as residing within India itself.

**Figure 4.1    Level of agreement with statements on alleviating poverty in India today**
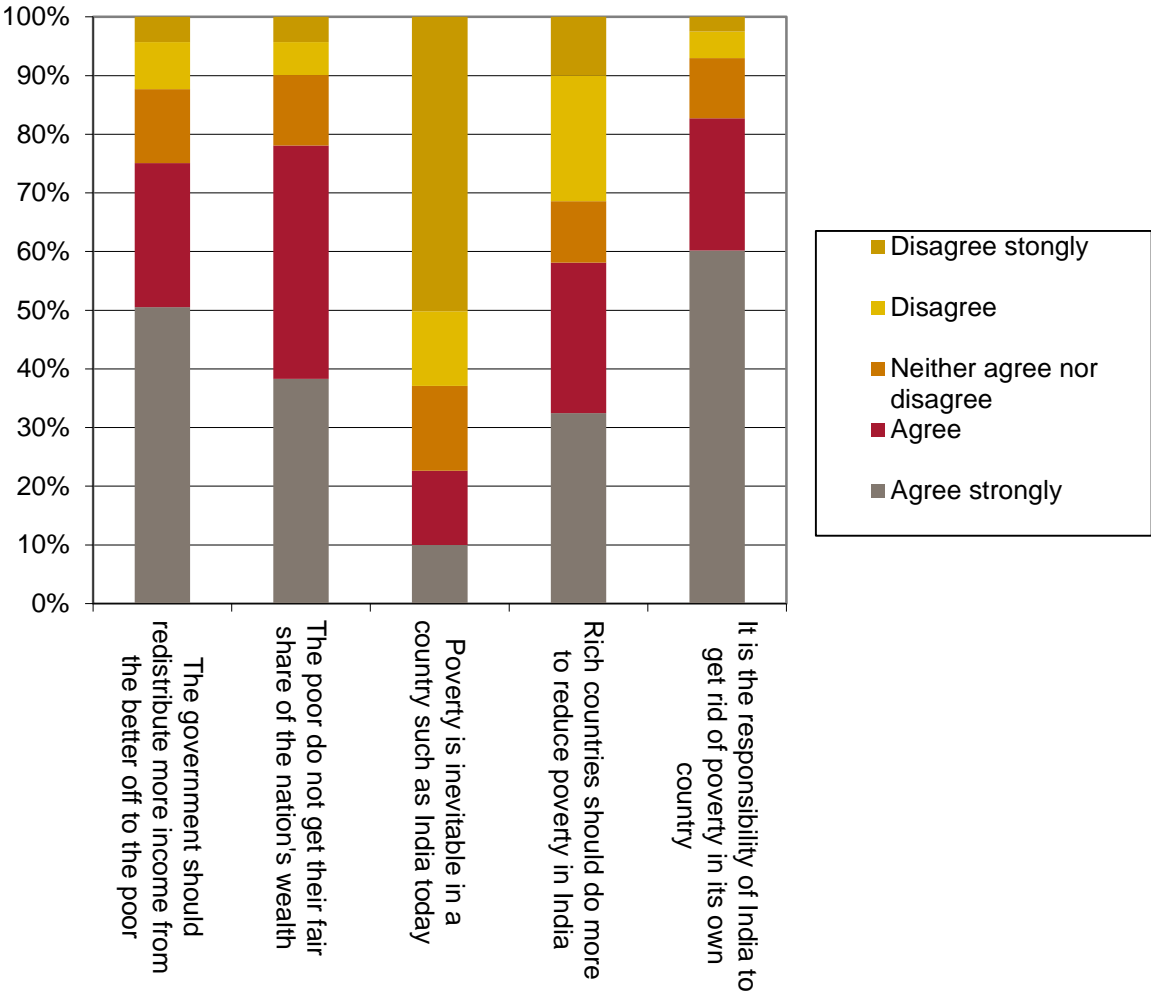
Finally, panel members were asked to score a range of actors in terms of their responsibility for reducing poverty in India on a five-point scale from 'very little' (1) to 'very great' (5). Overall, the government was judged to have the greatest responsibility for reducing poverty in India (Figure 4.2), whilst people in rich countries and the governments of rich countries were considered to have the least responsibility. Business was also considered to have great responsibility for reducing poverty in India. Interestingly, poor people were considered to have equal responsibility as civil society organisations and more responsibility than international organisations and rich people in India.

## Figure 4.2 Responsibility for reducing poverty in India
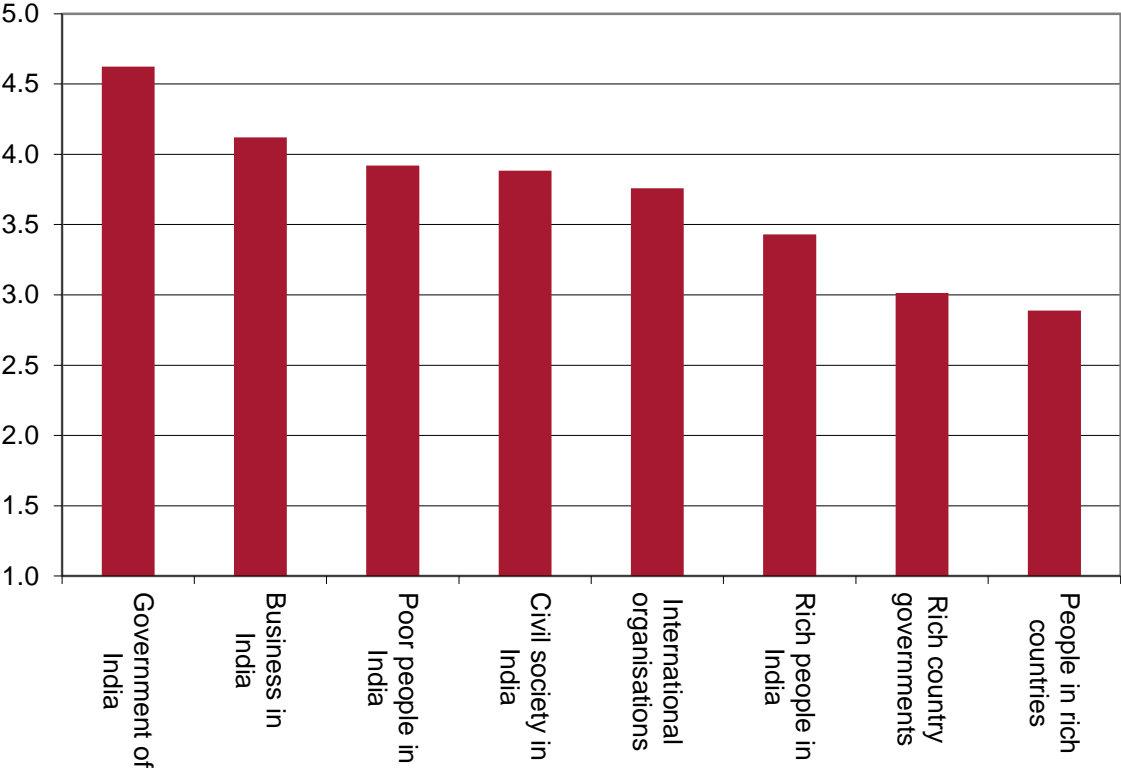
# 5 Further information

If you would like any further information about the IPOM and/or additional results, please do not hesitate to contact Spencer Henson (s.henson@ids.ac.uk). In addition, information about the IPOM and similar panels in South Africa and Brazil is available at www.ids.ac.uk/ipom.

# Annex 1     Principal component loadings for seven causes of poverty scales

| Determinant | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Personal responsibility | Fate or bad luck | Low social status | Lack of opportunities | Government incapacity | Lack of societal concern about the poor | Exploitation by rich countries |
| They have chosen to be like this | **0.637** | 0.280 | -0.217 | -0.568 | -0.229 | 0.249 | 0.007 |
| Financial mismanagement by the poor | **0.671** | -0.077 | 0.160 | -0.037 | 0.143 | 0.500 | -0.182 |
| They are lazy | **0.633** | 0.133 | -0.387 | -0.436 | -0.074 | 0.268 | 0.316 |
| They have too many children | **0.818** | 0.201 | -0.126 | -0.066 | 0.099 | -0.169 | -0.133 |
| Alcohol or drug abuse | **0.831** | 0.037 | 0.174 | 0.122 | -0.087 | 0.167 | -0.002 |
| They don't plan for the future | **0.624** | 0.071 | 0.017 | 0.044 | 0.030 | 0.252 | 0.267 |
| It is the will of God | 0.112 | **0.768** | -0.136 | -0.005 | -0.152 | 0.038 | -0.027 |
| They have had bad luck | 0.036 | **0.822** | -0.087 | 0.014 | -0.125 | -0.100 | 0.189 |
| Sickness | 0.204 | **0.643** | -0.068 | -0.241 | 0.190 | 0.082 | 0.276 |
| Exploited by the rich | 0.066 | 0.190 | **0.703** | 0.023 | 0.531 | 0.031 | -0.083 |
| Prejudice or discrimination against the poor | 0.276 | 0.139 | **0.746** | 0.243 | 0.018 | 0.223 | -0.277 |
| Inequality in Brazilian/Indian/South African society | 0.029 | -0.149 | **0.815** | 0.195 | -0.021 | 0.158 | 0.089 |
| Low social status | 0.114 | 0.472 | **0.693** | -0.160 | 0.013 | 0.000 | 0.416 |
| Lack of economic opportunities for the poor | -0.307 | -0.063 | 0.141 | **0.734** | 0.345 | 0.109 | 0.063 |
| Lack of education | 0.018 | 0.176 | -0.154 | **0.759** | -0.059 | 0.322 | 0.035 |
| Lack of employment | 0.104 | 0.046 | 0.169 | **0.832** | 0.243 | 0.044 | -0.136 |
| Their parents were poor | 0.231 | 0.128 | 0.170 | **0.648** | -0.026 | 0.029 | -0.004 |
| Government corruption | 0.258 | -0.156 | 0.152 | 0.298 | **0.749** | 0.139 | -0.411 |
| Government inefficiency or incompetence | 0.079 | -0.011 | -0.028 | 0.164 | **0.867** | 0.076 | 0.092 |
| Inadequate social welfare/assistance | -0.208 | 0.273 | 0.301 | -0.081 | **0.676** | 0.276 | -0.222 |
| Lack of community spirit in Brazilian/Indian/South African society | 0.267 | 0.083 | 0.107 | 0.094 | 0.034 | **0.750** | -0.028 |
| Lack of concern about the poor within Brazilian/Indian/South African society | -0.084 | -0.048 | 0.301 | 0.152 | 0.295 | **0.673** | 0.043 |
| Inadequate or inappropriate aid from rich countries | -0.007 | -0.138 | 0.241 | 0.138 | 0.234 | 0.057 | **0.744** |
| Exploited by rich countries | 0.027 | 0.028 | 0.181 | 0.268 | 0.302 | 0.096 | **0.655** |

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