The Social Observatory Approach: Towards "Reflexive" Development

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Reflexive Development

- Policy as a Dialogic Process: Prozac vs Therapy
- Focus on Processes that allow constant flow dialogue to determine goals and outcomes and how to achieve those goals.
- From the citizen side: deliberation, citizen action, working towards collective solutions
- Design informed by observation and dialogue.
- Implementation informed by participation of beneficiaries, and feedback loops with adaptive implementation

How?

- Needs a "sandwich." Top has to support the bottom
- Deliberation and community action takes time, has uncertain trajectories, and requires attention to local contextual variation
- Embedded Research – questions determined from citizen and project priorities
- "Slow" development. Attention to Process

Reflexive Development in practice: The Social Observatory

1. **Long-Term Feedback:** Understanding Impact and Process - Mixed-Method Impact Evaluations

2. **Everyday Feedback:** Management Information Systems, Decision Support Systems, Process Monitoring

3. **Citizen/Beneficiary Feedback:** Empowering Deliberative Forums (Gram Sabhas, SHGs), Democratizing Data, Giving beneficiaries a role in improving design and implementation

-- Will Highlight Two Things: Community-based cultural change in Bihar, Participatory-Tracking in Tamil Nadu

History of the SO

- Active coloration with NRLP, Jeevika and Pudhu Vaazhvu Project
- Grateful for funding mainly from SAFANSI
- Several people in Bihar – particularly Arvind Chaudhuri, Ajit Ranjan and Archana Tiwari
- And in Tamil Nadu - S. Krishnan and T. Shajeevana
- Main World Bank SAR collaborators (in alphabetical order) - Kevin Crockford, Samik Sundar Das, Sitaramchandra Machiraju, Onno Ruhl, Parmesh Shah, Shobha Shetty, and Vinay Vutukuru
- Bihar – 2011-2018
- Tamil Nadu – 2011-2017
- Also Odisha (DV Swamy) and Maharashtra

SO Team

- Core Team: Nethra Palaniswamy, Upamanyu Datta, Smriti Sakhamuri, Shruti Majumdar, Madhulika Khanna, Nishtha Kochhar, Nandini Krishnan, Samrat Ghosh, Manivannan Govindraj, Sanjay Paswan

- Research Partners: Kripa Ananthpur, Paul Christian, Vivian Hoffmann, Shareen Joshi, Ramya Parthasarathy, Slesh Shrestha, Vaishnavi Surendra, Cassandra Xia

Bihar

How did Jeevika induce cultural change and improve gender equality with lower caste groups?

What is the magnitude of change in Phase I?
PSM 200 treatment, 200 control villages

Savings and Debt (Diff-in-Diff)	Effect Size (Percent)
Savings	290.63
Percent HH with high cost loans(from 2008)	-43.39
Amount borrowed (New loans)	-46.72

Empowerment (Diff-in Diff)	Effect Size (Percent)
Visit Panchayat Meetings	534.61
Visit local shop	21.54
Visit PDS	58.99
Visit Health Center	44.30
Visit Relative	37.08
Provide input on decisions on Children's Education	36.65
Report having an opinion on politics	333.33

Datta, Upamanyu (2015) , World Development

How did this change happen?

To understand this we tracked a subset of the quantitative sample in different phases of the project with in-depth qualitative methods…

P. Sanyal, V. Rao and S, Majumdar, "Recasting Culture to Undo Gender," World Bank Working Paper, 2015

Qualitative Study

- Selected the best paired matches from the quantitative sample

- Further selection on the basis of field level observation

- Data was collected from 6 villages
  - 2 villages from Phase 1
  - 2 villages from Phase 2
  - 2 villages are "pure controls"

Methodology: 12 cycles of data (4 years)

- Four years of data collection
- Every three months, five ethnographers entered different hamlets of the village for a week
  - Interviewees were reminded that study is independent from project
- **Open-ended Interviews and focus group discussion:**
  - Joiners, non-joiners, husbands
    - Most were new informants, a quarter were follow ups
  - Key stakeholders in the village
    - Village heads, religious heads, village council members, moneylenders, landlords, ward members
  - JEEViKA staff
    - Field-level facilitators, state, district and block level officials
- **Participant Observation**
  - Of group meetings, trainings, workshops, mobilization drives

Findings In Control Villages
Caste Hierarchies

- Spatially and socially
  - caste boundaries remain rigid and constrain preferences (Dumont 1980) and *Sanskritization* remains the modus operandi for upward mobility (Srinivas 1962)
- In the public sphere
  - dominant castes hold key positions in panchayats
  - even in villages with reservations for lower castes and women, dominant castes continue to call the shots via traditional panchayats
- Recent increase in outgoing migration and political empowerment of lower castes has made a small but not significant dent

Findings: Control Villages Gendered Practices

- Household decision making dominated by men and in-laws

- Women's physical mobility is circumscribed: women moving freely is seen as symptomatic of male deficiency

- Public sphere and moneylending sphere are considered 'masculine'

- Restrictions are more stringent for women of upper castes: "Women from the Brahmin community will starve to death, but they won't step outside".

Facilitation Step 1: Village Entry "Cultural Match"

- Project did a thorough power analysis / informal information gathering
  - on caste dynamics, land-use patterns, informal moneylending practices, gender norms, nature of existing poverty alleviation and microcredit project
- Getting buy-in from the village elders, elites, husbands
  - emphasizing economic benefit: cheap credit as "bribe" to allow women to enter project
  - ongoing conversations between elites and facilitators
- Social mapping
  - to identify and recruit first movers – women who eventually turn into 'eyes and ears' of the community and help mobilize other women

Facilitation Step 2: Mobilization of Women

- **Co-production** of discourse
- Discourse cuts across caste and is poverty-centric:
  - ◦ Flipcharts + encouraging women to share their own narratives of poverty
  - ◦ Openly discussing gender norms that constrain participation for women from different castes
  - ◦ Making self-help and self-reliance the end goal, rather than jobs or cheap credit
- Targeting of households:
  - ◦ Participatory identification of poorest: Getting women themselves to decide on indicators of poverty

Facilitation Step 3: Ritualization of activities

- ◦ Giving women passbooks, money box
- ◦ Encouraging women to rotate calculating and counting tasks
- Engaging head-on with elite capture and messy politics within SHG
  - • Handholding through elections and loan making decisions to ensure equal voice
- Repeated messaging / re-iteration / indoctrination
  - ◦ Through rituals, songs, street theatre, flipcharts
- Treating Jeevika as a way of life rather than donor funded project
  - ◦ Focusing on claim-making skills that spillover outside project (household, community, PDS shops, banks, public sphere)

How did change come about?
"Nitish has turned women into men"

- JEEViKA, backed by political clout and cheap credit, gave women *exclusive* access to a set of physical resources, symbolic resources, and an institutional environment – all of which were perceived as 'masculine' prior to project

- Norms cannot be changed in a short period of time: a *re-iterative process of collective violation of behavioral injunctions on women is key*

- This enabled a mini-social movement.

Learning and Adapting from Evaluation*

- Expansion to 2nd phase did not go as well initially (see results from Jeevika Phase 2 RCT)

- Key difference was in how well the project listened

- Qualitative (Listening) evidence critical in interpreting quantitative results

- Corrective Steps taken by the project:

- Decision Support Systems = MIS + Dashboards

- Emphasis on Process Monitoring

- Adaptation Helps Improve Co-Production and Cultural Match

- *S. Majumdar, P. Sanyal, V. Rao, "On the Frontlines of Scaling-Up," 2017

Odisha – effect of SHGs on Climate Resilience

- Cyclone Phailin had a devastating impact on household consumption, particular on food expenditures and expenditures on women's goods, but increased expenditures on post-Phailin festivals

- Not designed to study this question, but takes advantage of a natural experiment (baseline July 2011, Phailin October 2013, endline August 2014: RDD)

- Women's SHGs raised non-food expenditures for households more affected by Phailin. It also increased expenditures of post-Phailin festivals.

- Women's SHGs increased access to credit for households more affected by Phailin, and increased awareness of participatory meetings used to allocate benefits.

- Interpretation: Suggested evidence that women's SHGs have a compensatory effect on natural disasters by improving access to credit and to govt programs

P. Christian, E. Kandpal, N. Palaniswamy, and V. Rao, "Social Safety Nets and Natural Disaster Mitigation: Evidence from Hurricane Phailin in Odisha," *Climatic Change*, vol. 153(1), pages 141-164, March, 2019.

Effect of SHGs on Gram Sabhas (Tamil Nadu)

- Recorded 100 Gram Sabhas – RDD with 50 control and 50 treatment
- Machine Learning (Text as Data Analysis) shows that there is high gender discrimination in gram sabhas
- Women's reservation corrects this
- SHGs correct it too but to such a large extent that SHGs and their issues take over the gram sabha – so problem with crowding out.

- R. Parthasarathy, N. Palaniswamy and V. Rao "Deliberative Democracy in an Unequal World: A Text-As-Data Analysis of South India's Village Assemblies" *American Political Science Review*, Volume 113, #3, August 2019 , pp. 623-640. & "Unheard voices: the challenge of inducing women's civic speech," *World Development*, Vol 115, March 2019

Democratizing Data

Participatory Tracking in Tamil Nadu*

*V. Rao, N. Palaniswamy, S. Sakhamuri, RV Shajeevana, C. Xia, "Democratizing Data: Participatory-Tracking in Tamil Nadu, India," (forthcoming)

Origin

- Modernize PRA with new technology and methods
  - Democratizing Data
- Census of program participants
  - Pilot of 32000 women in PVP
  - Government has requested an extension to 10 million women in Tamil Nadu

Step 1: Develop Questionnaire

- Community Based
- Uses women's networks
- Tested by community members with community members
- Finalized questionnaire should take no more that 30 minutes

What makes this questionnaire different?

- Overlap in themes covered
  - NSS: 17 %
  - LSMS type survey: 70 %

- Covered a range of themes:
  - Well-being, Livelihoods, Economic Welfare, Food Security and Nutrition, Empowerment, Access to public services and programs, Political Participation

- Differed in framing and emphasis

A sample of questions

Food and Nutrition	
How much do you spend on the purchase of vegetables in a month?	**Does the person who eats last get enough to eat?**

Marriage	
What was your age at the time of your marriage?	**Was your decision taken into account at the time of your marriage?** **Did you marry your relative?**

Empowerment	
Who makes decisions on assets and loans in your family?	**Do you decide on what clothes to wear based on your own preferences?** **Have there been any instances of violence against women in your village?**

Digital Participation	
	Can you use a mobile phone on your own? **Can you read and send text messages?**

Social Observatory

Step 2: Data collection and management

- Participatory
  - Implemented and managed by CBO members
    - PVP project staff- Coordinating role

- Other Key features
  - Tablet based
  - Data Quality and Validation
    - Designed for users with low digital literacy

Step 3: Data visualization

→ Empower respondents to analyze and act on their own data

Pilot PVP: Data visualization

Face forces

Who has the dominant voice in household decisions? Dominant parties are represented with larger faces.

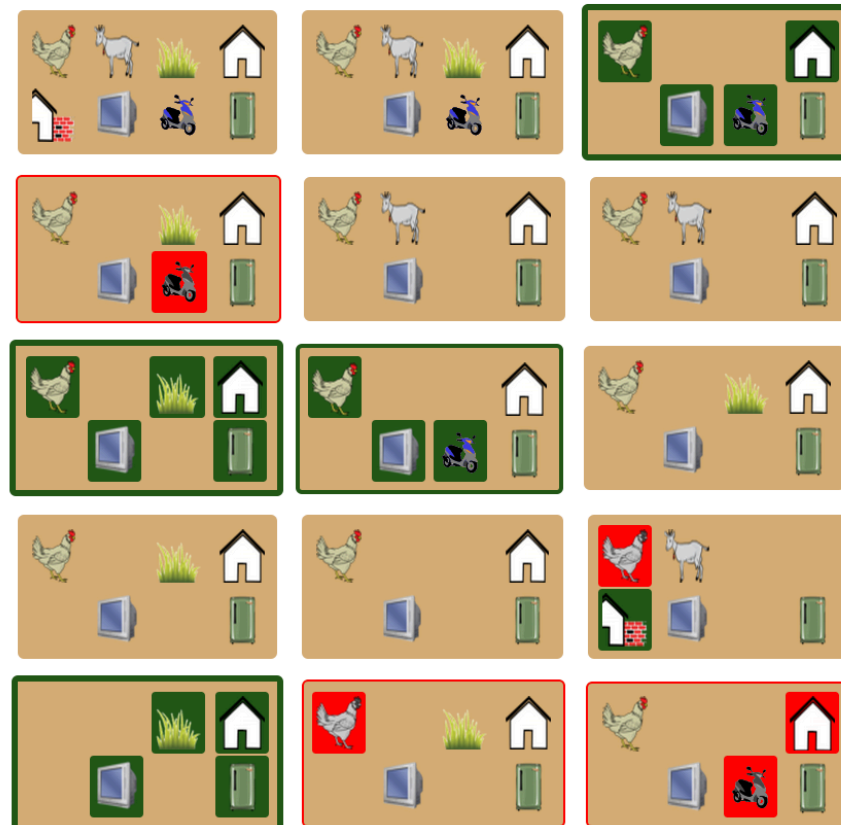|	Agamalai - Tribal	H9 Manalathukudusai
Is your opinion accepted related to your child's education and marriage?		
Who makes the decisions regarding your clothing?		
Who makes the decisions regarding the number of children?		
Who makes the decisions regarding when to visit your parents house?		

Pilot PVP: Data visualization

Asset change

The change in assets of families in the village are shown. Green items have been gained in the last five years. Red items have been lost. Unshaded items were in possession both five years ago and now. Click to see different families.

Agamalai - Tribal

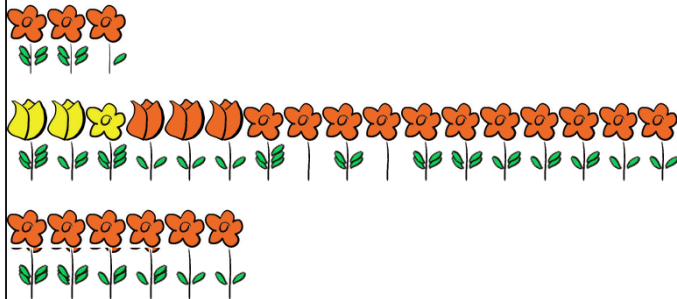**H9 Manalathukudusai**

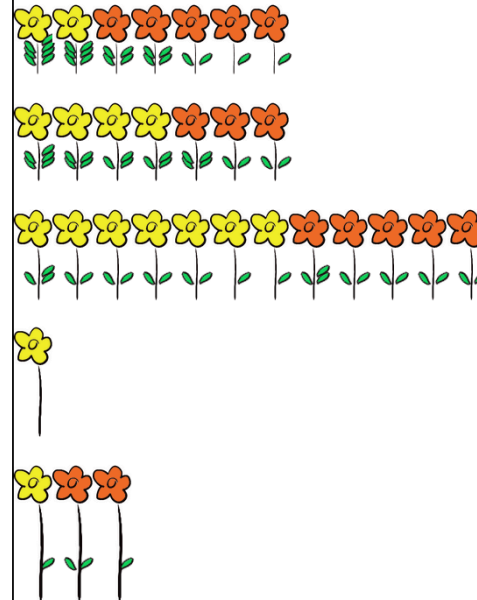# Pilot PVP: Data visualization

Flowers and marriage

Each flower depicts a bundle of indicators pertaining to marriage. One flower reprents one married woman. The height of the flower corresponds to the age at marriage where shorter flowers are women that got married at younger ages. The color of the flower represents whether the marriage was with a blood relative (red) or not (yellow). The type of flower represents whether the woman gave consent (bloomed) to being married or not (unbloomed). The number of leaves represent the number of children in marriage. Click to see different women in the area.

This visualization may be used to see relationships in the data. For instance, are there many short, unbloomed flowers? Are red flowers usually consensual or not? Does consensuality increase or decrease with age?

Agamalai - Tribal

H9 Manalathukudusai

Diet and nutrition

Diet

The diet of families from the village are shown. The size of food items on the plate indicate the frequencies at which people consume vegetables, meat, and fruit -- larger items are consumed more frequently. Colored rupees indicate how much money was spent on each type of food. An empty banana leaf indicates that the last person did not have enough to eat. Click to different families.
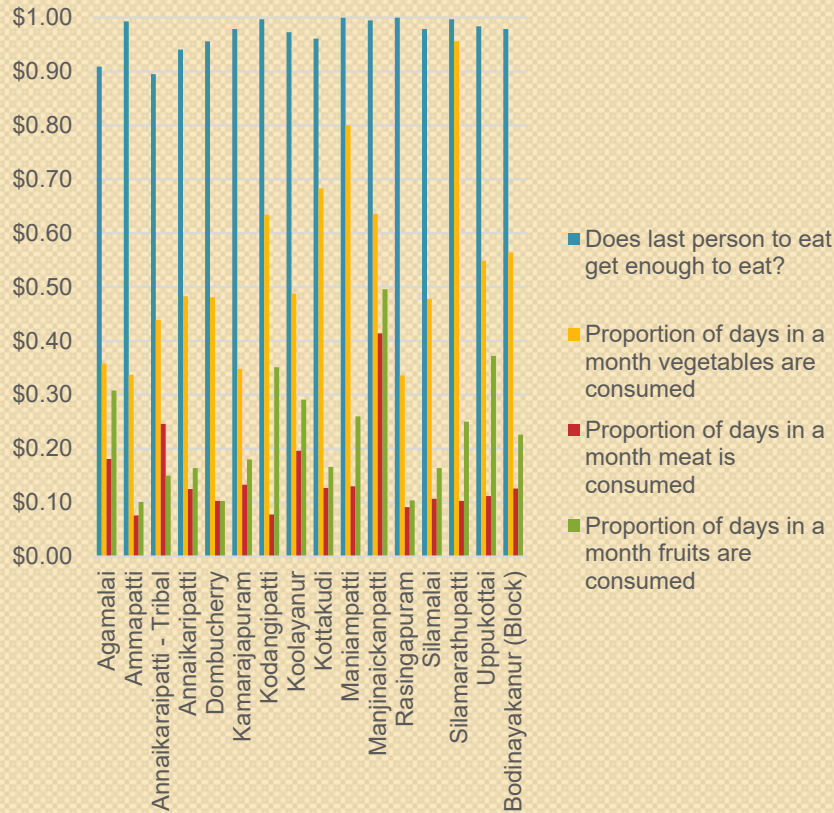
Step 4: Data Feedback

Feedback

- Village Planning
- Gram Sabha – Deliberative Decision Making
- Planning Village Organization Budger

- RCT - half the villages randomly received treatment
- PVP had problems unfortunately
- Yet, results show visualized data have better results
- Expansion to rest of Tamil Nadu
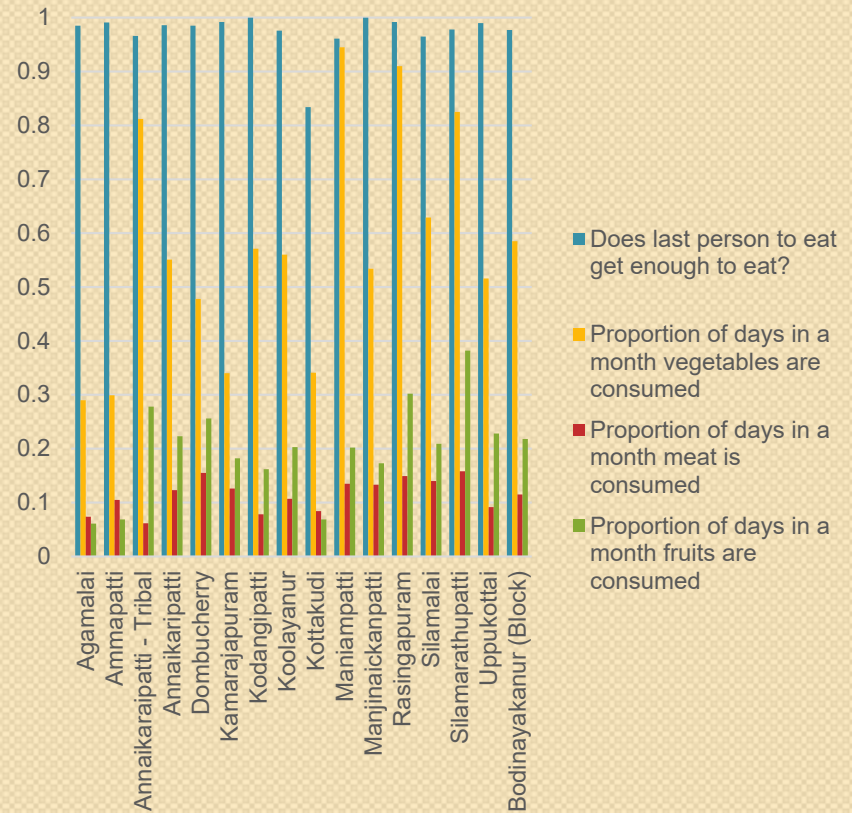- Planning for Indonesia (looking for funding)

Demonstration of Block, Village and Neighborhood Level Drill Down with P-Tracking (Nutrition Data Only)

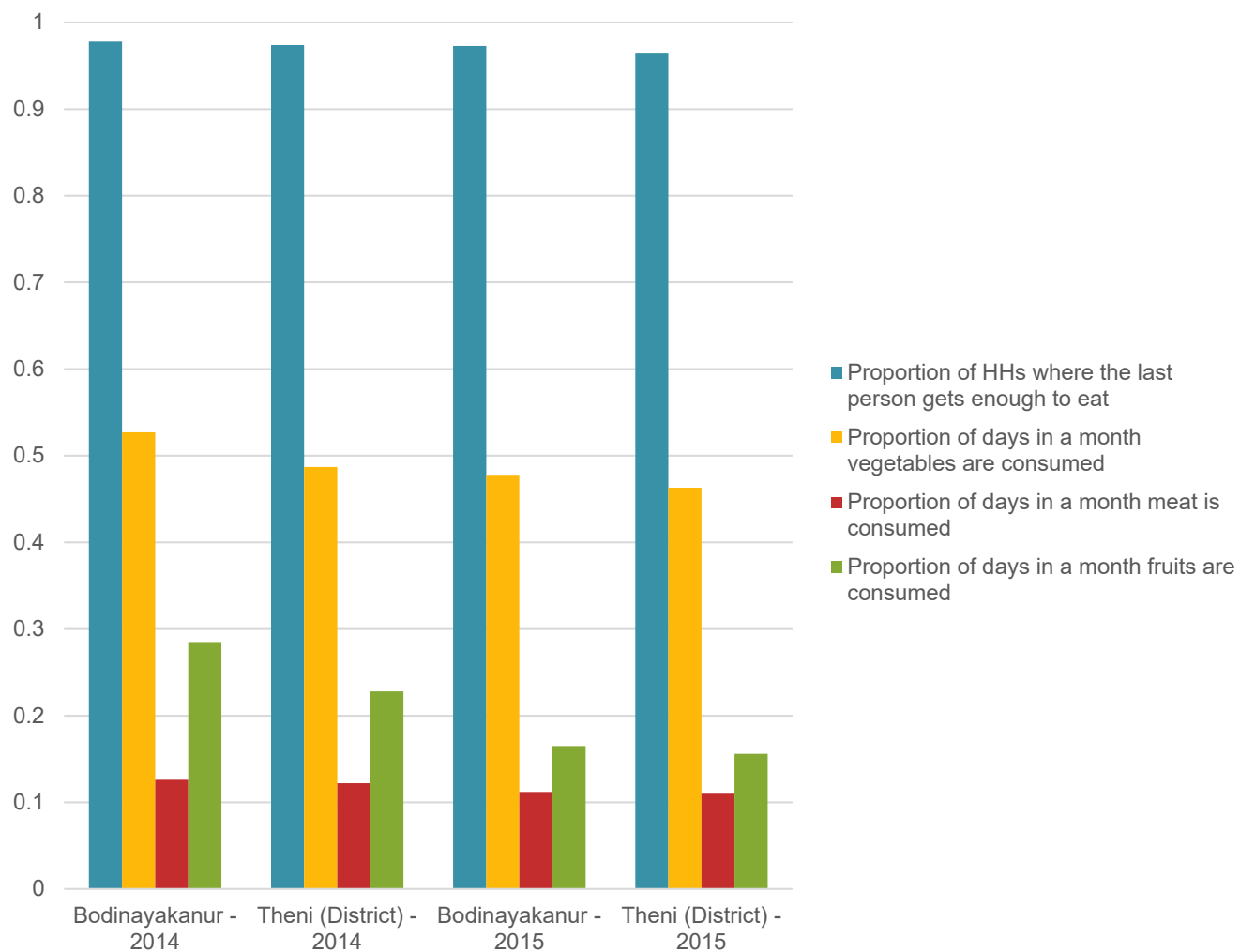|	2014		2015	
	Bodinayakanur (Block)	Theni (District)	Bodinayakanur (Block)	Theni (District)
Sample size (N)	4771	28990	4720	30829
Hunger and nutrition:				
Number of meals consumed daily	2.941	2.946	2.960	2.932
Does last person to eat get enough to eat?	0.978	0.974	0.973	0.964
Proportion of days in a month vegetables are consumed	0.527	0.487	0.478	0.463
Monthly expenditure on vegetables (INR)	609.6	607.9	569.3	594.9
Proportion of days in a month meat is consumed	0.126	0.122	0.112	0.110
Monthly expenditure on meat (INR)	722.5	733.2	672.7	665.5
Proportion of days in a month fruits are consumed	0.284	0.228	0.165	0.156
Monthly expenditure on fruits (INR)	462.0	438.6	410.3	381.0

Hunger and Nutrition - Village Level 2014

Hunger and Nutrition - Village Level 2015

Does last person to eat get enough to eat?

Proportion of days in a month vegetables are consumed

Proportion of days in a month meat is consumed

Proportion of days in a month fruits are consumed

Tracking Hunger and Nutrition at Village Level

Hunger and Nutrition - Block and District

Some Uses of Participatory Tracking

- An alternate citizen-based narrative of poverty and well-being

- High frequency census data

- Public goods decision making

- To get us out of our bubbles and understand exclusion from the people's perspective

- Expansion plans in Karnataka and Indonesia

More on our website

- http://socialobservatory.worldbank.org
- Research: RCT on Jeevika, Ethnography of Scaling-Up, another mixed-methods RCT evaluation – "Anatomy of Failure," Evaluation of Food security intervention in Jeevika, etc.
- Monitoring Systems: For community-based nutrition, and for everyday management of large projects

Conclusion

- Reflexive Development is difficult: slow, requires a tolerance of mess, and developing the *capacity to listen and communicate.*

- **Interdisciplinary** in theory and method

- Priority is not publication in top journals but facilitating the needs of the project and citizens.

- Values the good life as expressed by citizens: intrinsically multi-dimensional in how it defines poverty

- Point is to put experts, including researchers, out of business.