Dynamics and definition of poverty in the Colombian Andes: participatory approaches vs. objective approaches.

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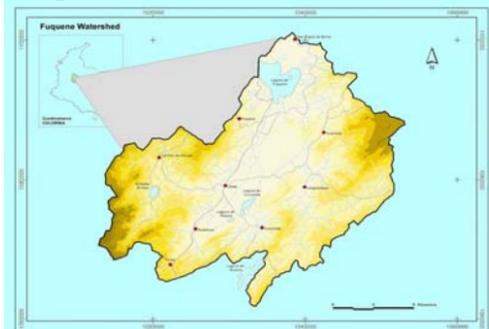Challenge Program for Water and Food (CPWF) – Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical CIAT.
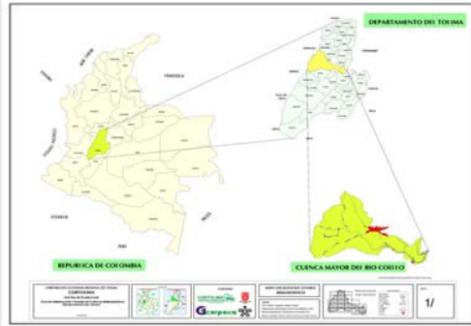
CORPORACIÓN SEMILLAS DE AGUA

The objective of this study is to examine the consistency of results of the Stages of Progress (SOP) methodology (Krishna, 2004) applied in two Colombian watersheds, with those from more objective approaches. This study applied the SOP in 23 communities located in two watersheds in Colombia, 13 communities in Fuquene (FL) and 10 in Coello (CR).

Fuquene Lake Watershed

Source: CONDESAN

Coello River Watershed

Source: PN20 SCALES

SOP Methodology: After identifying the communities, focus groups are convened to:

1. Define poverty, based on what the groups identifies as the poorest households in the community.

2. Define stages of progress and the poverty line, based on what poor households would do if they had "a little more money."

3. Categorize all households according to the stage they are at now, and the stage they were at some reference point in the past

4. Categorize households by group A, B, C, D

5. For a sample of households, identify the causes behind their movement into or out of poverty

In this project, we also conducted follow up interviews with households to confirm results of the focus groups and to get more information on water and collective action issues.

Adapted from Krishna, A (2004a). "Escaping Poverty and Becoming Poor: Who Gains, Who Loses, and Why?". World Development Vol. 32, No. 1, 121–136.

• There is **high variability between the poverty lines defined by each community**. Some communities have as few as 3 stages that must be achieved in order to be considered non-poor, which in other there are as many as 10 stages below the poverty line. This shows that some communities are much more demanding than others. This differences between PL defined by communities seem to be explained by a range of social, economic and cultural characteristics, that appear to be very relative. There is a need to study them more deeply, in order to understand better the differences that we found.

Index of Relative importance of Poverty Lines
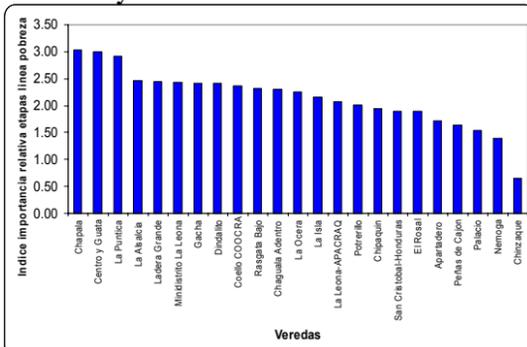
Source: Own measurements, based on Scales project information

The index was calculated as follows:

$$I_i = \frac{\sum f_j * W_j}{N * W_{Max}} \qquad 0 <= I_i <= 1$$

Where:

fj = Number of times mentioned at level "j".

Wj = Weight of level "j".

N = Number of communities.

Wmax = Value of level 1.

Cluster of Communities Poverty Lines Components
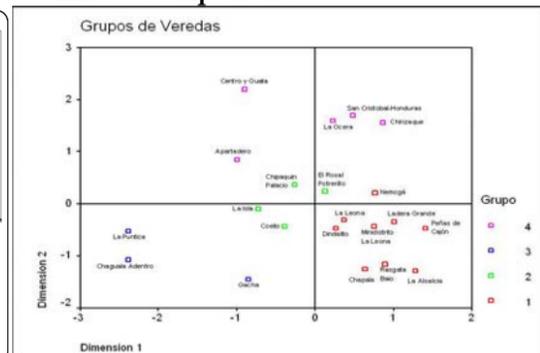
Source: Own measurements, based on Scales project information

Four clusters including the following distinguishing elements:

1: Land and small appliances

2: Small animals and clothes

3: Vehicles and Recreation

4: Crops

•The PLs built by the communities **include some of elements that are also considered as "basic"** by other type of poverty measures, such as food (mainly by objective poverty lines), housing, education, access to water and electricity. But **there were also elements like clothes, land, crops, small animals (e.g. chicken, pigs), recreation, small appliances and vehicles** (e.g. bicycle, motorcycle), that were included by the communities in their poverty lines.

• **PL elements are important assets for rural households, that will make the difference between being poor or not, and they are not present in qualitative poverty indicators** like basic needs (NBI , from its acronym in spanish) or the index of life quality (ICV, from its acronym in spanish), the most common qualitative poverty measures used in Colombia. These two include mainly elements such as house quality, access to public services (water, sanitation and electricity) and education or accumulation of human capital at the household level. **The NBI and the ICV don't include food as an element in their measures**, and it is the first element considerer by the communities.

Comparison of PL stages and NBI and ICV elements

Línea de Pobreza	NBI	ICV
1. Food		
2. Education	School unattendance: Households with Children between 7-11 years old that aren't going to school	EDUCATION AND HUMAN CAPITAL Proportion of children between 5-11 years old that attend to school Mean of Schooling rate 12+ years old Proportion of youth between 12-18 attending high school or college Maximum schooling rate of household head
3. Clothes		
4. Housing	Inadequate housing: dust floor and bad walls material House without access to water supply or sanitation systems	HOUSE QUALITY Floor predominant meterial material Walls predominant material Water supply Fuel for cooking Garbage collection
5. Small animals		
6. Land		
7. Services		
8. Household Appliances		
9. Health		
10. Crops		
11. Other	Number of people within a room higher than 3 High economic dependency rate: Household with more than 3 members per employed member, and where household head has less than 3 years of primary education	SIZE AND COMPOSITION OF THE HOUSEHOLD Number of people within the household Proportion of les than 6 year old children within the household
12. Vehicles		
13. Savings/Investment		
14 Recreation		

Source: Own calculations, DNP, UNDP

Note: the table acronyms refer to PL poverty lines based on SOP, ICV Index of quality life conditions and NBI basic needs

•In the studies conducted by Krishna for other developing countries (Kenya, Uganda, India and Peru) there is a similar group of assets that are included by the communities within the participatory PLs. Food, clothes, housing and education, plus small animals, land and crops. The PLs presented less variability than in the 2 Colombian case studies, but there's a range of elements that seem to be relevant when talking about rural poverty.

Objective measures, no matter if they are qualitative or quantitative tend not to include these rural household assets.

•**An example of bad population targeting for poverty alleviation programs would be the Subsidized Health Insurance, SISBEN** (from its spanish acronym). A similar measure to the ICV is used to target the SISBEN beneficiaries. As seen here, poverty indexes like ICV are not the best way to do so, especially in rural areas. There are assets that are not being considered by these measures, that are relevant for rural families, in order to not be poor anymore. The poorest family in terms of the SOP methodology will be the one that not only has a lack of adequate public services access or a inadequate housing, but would also be the one who lacks land, crops and small animals for their food security. In these terms, there is a risk of subsidizing some households that are not the poorest.