

MONOGRAPH SERIES NO. 9



**CHILD POVERTY IN BHUTAN:**  
Insights from Multidimensional Child Poverty Index and  
Qualitative Interviews with Poor Children

Sabina Alkire, Lham Dorji, Sonam Gyeltshen and Thomas Minten

National Statistics Bureau  
Thimphu

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Index (C-MPI) and Qualitative Interviews with  
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**Sabina Alkire, Lham Dorji, Sonam Gyeltshen and  
Thomas Minten**

**National Statistics Bureau**

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Publications Inquiries:

National Statistics Bureau, Thimphu Bhutan

Post box: 338

Tel: 975 (02) 333296

Fax: 975 (02) 323069

Please post critical opinion/views directly to [lhamdorji@gmail.com](mailto:lhamdorji@gmail.com)

## **ABOUT THE MONOGRAPH**

The first part of the monograph presents the Child Multidimensional Poverty Index (C-MPI) constructed using Bhutan Multiple Indicators Survey (BMIS, 2010). The C-MPI was based on the Alkire Foster methodology for multidimensional poverty measures. After constructing a national official MPI (2012) and using it to inform the country's Five Year Plan's Resource Allocation Formula (RAF), Bhutan became the first country in the world to develop the Child-MPI. This measure focuses exclusively on children and their experiences of overlapping deprivations.

The second part presents the analysis of qualitative data collected through the in-depth interviews of 140 poor children in six Dzongkhags (districts). In part III a few selected cases are presented.

UNICEF, Bhutan Country Office provided the funding for the study. The monograph is a part of the thematic studies of the Socio-Economic Analysis and Research Division (SEARD), NSB. The Division conducts on a regular basis the studies on the issues of policy importance and in areas where the research gap exists. The monographs covering various socioeconomic themes can be obtained from the National Statistics Bureau (NSB), Thimphu. The electronic versions are available at [www.nsb.gov.bt](http://www.nsb.gov.bt) under Research Reports.

## **DISCLAIMER**

UNICEF and NSB hope the study will be of some use to the policy-makers, politicians, development partners, social workers, researchers, students, individuals, and agencies.

The views expressed in the present publication are those of the authors and do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the National Statistics Bureau (NSB) representing the Royal Government of Bhutan and UNICEF. Both NSB and UNICEF take no responsibility for any inaccuracy or omission of facts, statements, opinions, recommendations or any other errors in this publication.



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## **Director General's Foreword**

I am pleased to present the monograph titled 'Child Poverty in Bhutan: Insights from Multidimensional Child Poverty Index (C-MPI) and Qualitative Interviews with Poor Children'. The monograph is the outcome of a serious effort made by our small research team that worked with the international experts on multidimensional poverty, Dr. Sabina Alkire and Dr. Ana Vaz, Researcher, both associated with Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI). Our research team has studiously strived to capture not only the extent and magnitude of child poverty in Bhutan, but also to measure child poverty in multidimensional way and to understand it in great depth. According to an official statement made by UNICEF Headquarter, the effort to construct the C-MPI makes Bhutan the first country in the world to have the child-specific multidimensional poverty measure. This indeed is very encouraging. We know that no single measure can exhaustively capture the various dimensions of child poverty. This calls for a measure that goes beyond income or consumption metrics, complemented by the insights drawn from children's lived experiences of poverty. This study, which is thought provoking and informative exactly answers that call.

The Royal Government of Bhutan is committed to promote and protect the rights of children. This commitment is manifested in the country's enactment of the Child Care and Protection Act (CCPA, 2011). A great deal of effort is currently being made to promote childcare and protection through the state agencies as well as the active involvement of various non-governmental organisations. Among others and as enshrined in the Constitution, the State guarantees the provision of universal free education and health services that has positive impacts on the well-being of our children. The recent strategy by the Royal Government to use the MPI to inform allocation of resource in the 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2013-2018) is a testimony to the Royal Government's endorsement of the importance of using more comprehensive and integrated approach to eradicate poverty and improve happiness and well-being of the Bhutanese people. Bhutan has made significant improvements in the fields of education, health, sanitation, and drinking water, which imply that so much has been achieved in terms of promoting the well-being of the Bhutanese children.

Despite the improvements in various areas of development, 33.9% of the total child population below age 17 was multidimensionally poor in 2010. This shows that much needs to be done for our children both from policy and budgeting standpoints. As might be expected, lot of things related to children would have improved since 2010, but the qualitative study done in six Dzongkhags (in 2015) involving over 140 poor children revealed that many children are still affected by various social and economic problems. Social and economic deprivations among children have become the issues whimpering for the attention of policy makers, politicians, social workers, and other stakeholders working in the fields of child and human development. More needs to be invested in the development and protection of children to achieve the SDGs goal of ending poverty, including for children of all ages living in poverty and in all its dimensions. This will not only be the act of helping our future generation to overcome poverty and deprivations, but also one of our efforts to ensure GNH for everyone.

It is timely and befitting that this report has come up at the time when the countries around the world are trying to adopt the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which recognises the need to ‘eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions’. His Excellency the Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay spoke about Bhutan’s commitment to implement the MPI during the high level side-event at the UN summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda: Anchoring a Global Multidimensional Poverty Index within the SDGs on 27 September 2015. H.E said: “Together we can design a new metric by which to assess our societies and our own lives, one that not only leaves no person behind, but also leaves no part of human life and potential behind.”

The C-MPI has been constructed using data from Bhutan Multiple Dimension Indicators survey (BMIS, 2010). Unfortunately, data was little outdated, but this is in itself important, for it serves as a reminder on the need to improve the C-MPI variables in future surveys and censuses. It is important to promote the use of the C-MPI for informing public policy that targets children and ensure regular reporting of the C-MPI.

I hope this monograph would help us understand the complexity of child poverty and various deprivations our children are experiencing. In addition, I expect this study to serve as a technically sound baseline to track the SDGs in reduction of poverty and as the basis for any future action researches on women and children. Importantly, I hope that the study would inspire the Royal Government, its development partners, and NGOs to combine their efforts to tackle poverty in general and child poverty in particular.

I congratulate NSB’s research team led by Lham Dorji for delving into such an important area of research. I convey my appreciation and thanks to Dr. Sabina Alkire for her unfailing support given to NSB’s research team in constructing the C-MPI. I acknowledge the financial support that UNICEF Bhutan Country Office has given to NSB to conduct the study and publish it in the form of present monograph.

Kuenga Tshering  
Director General

## **Representative’s Foreword, UNICEF Bhutan Country Office**

Children are often the hardest hit by poverty, which in turn causes lifelong damage to their minds and bodies. Evidence on child poverty is thus critical to understand the distribution of poor children, the different social and economic deprivations poor children face and the kind of life they experience in Bhutan.

This Monograph “Insights from Multidimensional Child Poverty Index (C-MPI) and Qualitative interviews with Poor Children” is a combination of multidimensional poverty index constructed from child related indicators with data available from Bhutan Multiple Indicator Survey 2010 and qualitative in-depth interviews with children, giving a holistic picture of lives of poor children in Bhutan. This report intricately unpacks the complexity of poverty that effects the children and highlights the hopes and aspirations of the poor children in Bhutan. The findings and recommendation shall serve as critical messages and evidence to policy makers, programmers and relevant stakeholders for planning and policy review and in realising the SDG goal of ending poverty at large.

Special thanks to Mr. Kuenga Tshering, Director General, National Statistical Bureau (NSB) and the team from Socio-Economic Analysis and Research Division (SEARD) led by Mr. Lham Dorji, Mr. Sonam Gyeltshen, Cheda Jamtsho, Yeshe Wangchuk, Kinley Wangchuk. Ms. Dechen Zangmo (UNICEF) and Ms. Sonam Wangmo for their concerted efforts in producing this integrated and holistic report on child poverty in Bhutan.

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Lastly, special thanks to the UNICEF team, Martin Evans, David Stewart and Antonio Franco Garcia from UNICEF Headquarters, Ms. Dechen Zam, Bhutan UNICEF Country Office other partners who also contributed to the production of the report.

Shaheen Nilofer

Representative

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Besides, we owe our sincere acknowledgements to many people in the Dzongkhags where the qualitative interviews were conducted, especially Dasho Dzongdas of Trashhi Yangtse, Pema Gatschel, Zhemgang, Sarpang, Samtse and Chhukha for the support rendered during our field research in their respective Dzongkhags.

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We thank Mr. Kuenga Tshering, Director General, NSB for his constant guidance, advice, and motivating us to work hard.

Finally we thank UNICEF, Bhutan Country Office for both technical and financial support in conducting the study and publishing this monograph.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Multidimensional Child Poverty Index (C-MPI)**

This report presents Bhutan's national Child Multidimensional Poverty Index (C-MPI). This index is based on the Alkire Foster methodology for multidimensional poverty measurement and, as far as we know, it is a pioneer in the field of national child-specific measures of multidimensional poverty that cover the entirety of childhood from birth to age 17. Because, naturally, the measure is data constrained, this report sets out the relevant comparisons that must be borne in mind in order to improve such an indicator.

This C-MPI retains the three dimensions used in Bhutan's national MPI, health, education, and living standards and adds a fourth dimension, childhood conditions, focused on children's specific needs. Each of the dimensions is given an equal weight of 1/4. A child needs to be deprived in more than 1/4 of weighted indicators to be identified as multidimensionally poor.

The measure includes 12 indicators: two under the health dimension (child mortality and food security); one under the education dimension (investment in cognitive skills and school attendance); eight under living standards (electricity, sanitation, water, housing material, cooking fuel, assets, land ownership and livestock ownership); and one under childhood conditions (child conditions). To capture relatively comparable deprivations across different age cohorts, two indicators—investment in cognitive skills and school attendance, and child conditions have age-specific specifications.

#### *Child Multidimensional poverty at-a-glance*

Using Bhutan Multiple Indicators Survey (BMIS 2010) data, we estimate that in 2010, 33.9% of the children were multidimensionally poor. These poor children are, on average, deprived in 41.2% of the indicators. The C-MPI, which is the product of the percentage of poor children and the average intensity of their poverty stands at 0.140. This indicates that poor children in Bhutan experience 14% of the deprivations that would be experienced if all children were deprived in all indicators.

A positive finding in Bhutan relates to gender parity: girl children are no poorer than boys. The poverty figures are slightly higher for girls, but only in the age cohort 15-17. This is because the indicator of child conditions in this cohort is only defined for girls: boys in this age cohort are automatically considered non-deprived in this indicator. So the underlying phenomenon is one of gender parity.

In terms of age, poverty rates are highest among children aged 3 to 5 years. This is largely due to 5 year olds who are not attending pre-school. Bhutan's early childhood education programming is rapidly expanding and this bulge of deprivations is expected to decline in future years.

There are stark regional disparities in Bhutan. The proportion of children identified as poor in urban areas is significantly lower than in rural areas—10.8% vs. 44.0%.

Further, heterogeneities are found across Dzongkhags (Districts): poverty rates range from 11.1% in Thimphu (with an intensity of 35.5%), to 46.4% in Samtse (with an average intensity of almost 45.2%).

In terms of the percentage contribution of each of the 12 indicators to child multidimensional poverty, the largest contribution comes from deprivations in child conditions (33%) and low investment in children's cognitive skills and school attendance (27%). The health and living standards dimensions contribute with 17% and 23%, respectively, to overall poverty.

As expected, children living in wealthier households are less likely to be poor although, perhaps surprisingly, a non-negligible number of children in wealthy households are poor. The incidence of child poverty is 64.6% among children living in the poorest households (in the lowest wealth quintile), but 6.3% among children living in the richest households (in the highest quintile). The educational level of the household head also seems to play an important role. The poverty rate among children living in households where the head has at least completed secondary school is almost four times lower than among children living in households where the head has no education (11.7% vs. 41.7%). Yet again, some children in these households are poor.

### *Recommendations*

The report concludes with a set of recommendations. These include: promoting the use of both C-MPI for informing public policy targeting children; and including improved C-MPI variables in future surveys and censuses and regular reporting of the C-MPI for comparisons and the evaluation of plans and programs over time.

Other recommendations include: promoting further research to analyse the relationship between household poverty and child poverty and understand the drivers of child poverty reduction and targeting public policy to improve the indicators of childhood conditions.

## **Insights from the qualitative study**

### *Introduction and rationale*

The qualitative study was undertaken to complement the C-MPI and get insights into how the poor Bhutanese children understand and experience poverty, their actual deprivations, resilience and coping mechanism, opinions about the ways to reduce child poverty, and their dreams and aspirations.

The qualitative research was conducted in the context of growing recognition for addressing child poverty at the national and global levels. The global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has the child-specific target: 'to halve child poverty by national definitions by 2030'. Child poverty merits greater policy attention for being distinct, multidimensional, cyclical, and more time-sensitive than that of adults.

## **Methodology**

### *Study design*

The study was explorative and descriptive in design. It took into account four areas of child poverty, namely; low-income status, material and social deprivations, and emotional well-being. The design of interview questions was partly based on the C-MPI indicators and on some theories and approaches: the theory of social disadvantage, the capability and well-being approach, and social exclusion approach.

### *Sample selection and interviews*

The qualitative data was collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews with 140 poor children (aged 10-17 years) in six Dzongkhags: Trashigang, Trashigang, Pema Gatsel, Zhemgang, Sarpang, Samtse and Chukha. A purposive sampling approach was used to ensure that poorer children with multiple problems were selected from both rural and urban communities. The selection process was guided by two principles: (1) optimal representation of the children in terms of age, gender and region, and (2) consideration of income poverty, material deprivation and social deprivation. About 40.71% of them were males and 59.29% females. The majority of them were students (76.43%).

Mostly the three-member team conducted the interviews. The interviews were held in schools and conducted, to the extent possible, in a natural setting. The effort was made to ensure that research was guided by a child-sensitive approach. The interviews were recorded with the digital recorders.

### *Study limitations*

Since the sample was small, it remains a concern whether the study could be generalised at the national level. The study has missed certain important parameters such as infant and child mortality because only the children in the age group 10-17 were interviewed.

### *Data analysis*

A deductive approach was adopted to analyse data with no predetermined theory (bias), but based on the actual data. A thematic content analysis was used: analysing transcripts, identifying themes, associating those themes together and drawing meanings. The MAXQDA software was used. The frequency evaluation (i.e. how many times a particular word, phrase or concept appeared in the texts) was done within the thematic content analysis framework; these frequencies were then transformed into percentages and some into the info graphics.

## **Study results**

### *Poverty understanding*

The majority of the sampled poor children understood 'poverty as being in the situation of insufficient food and clothing (both in terms of quantity and quality), poor shelter, and shortage of money, which otherwise, they felt could solve many of

their problems'. None of the children singled out poverty dimension; they talked about their experiences of the combination of many deprivations.

### *Experience of deprivations*

The top-five categories of *material deprivations* that the sample children were experiencing included: insufficient food, cash problem (impecuniosity), inadequate clothing, poor shelter, and lack of wealth. They also reported several other deprivations: shortage of cooking fuels; long home-school distance; poor condition of toilets; inadequacy of school stationaries; lack of TV, phones and computers; education deprivation; poor transportation services; education deprivation; and so on.

The top-five *social deprivations* were absence of social support, family instability (drinking parents, parental conflicts and parental divorce), powerlessness and being incapable, poor social participation, and social exclusion. The other forms of social deprivations (though came out as less severe) were exposure to abuse, discrimination and child labour. The most common *negative emotional states* among poor children were the feeling of shame (associated with being poor), negative stereotyping of self, and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.

### *Impacts of poverty on children*

The various deprivations seem to interact to affect the growth, development and overall well-being of poor children. Their experiences of poverty came out to be the case of material deprivations sequentially causing social deprivations and then negative emotional states. For example, a child not having decent clothes in schools thwarts his or her social interaction with other peers (out of inferiority complex), which in turn leads to poor social participation, and then to negative emotional states like being sad, hopeless, self-humiliated, and often frustrated. In severe and more complex interaction of deprivations, children seem to become susceptible to suicidal thoughts and attempts. Among many reasons for their negative emotional states, the most common ones were related to their parents: parental divorce, drinking habits of the parents, and loss of parents through death.

### *Education deprivation*

The school dropouts interviewed gave their parents' inability to meet the nominal costs of schooling like buying uniforms, stationaries and school fees (direct effect of income and material deprivation) as the reasons for discontinuing their studies. Some children had left schools to help their parents at homes and on their farms. A few children talked about other problems like school-home distance, illnesses, disinterest in studies, and parental divorce.

### *Coping mechanism or survival strategies*

Most poor children (in the sample) believed that they could overcome poverty and their difficult circumstance in future with their high orientation towards works and achievements. They reported they work at homes and during school break to supplement the family needs and compensate for their parents' inadequacies. They said they save their hard-earned money for emergencies and prudent use. These



reflect their resilience in the face of vulnerability. However and sometimes, their engagement in wage-based temporary jobs or household-related works seems to affect their studies and cause them a great burden (being physically demanding). A few of them talked about work exploitation.

### *Happiness*

When asked about what normally makes them happy, children gave multiple responses closely related to objective aspects of life like stable family situation, sufficient household income, educational achievement, good housing, food sufficiency, family's possession of land, and good health status. Yet again, for most children, stable family and social relationships were important sources of happiness. Having supportive parents and social relationships, according to children interviewed, make their lives meaningful even in the face of extreme material deprivations.

Most children interviewed reported being sad, angry and frustrated, especially those children coming from poverty-stricken and dysfunctional families. They showed some signs of depression and pessimism. It was clear that abject poverty is somewhat a stigmatised concept. Some poor children do not want to be identified as poor for fear of getting belittled by their peers and other community members. Some of them told that they did not want to avail external support (scholarship or bursary) out of worry that their friends and teachers might come to know about their plights.

### *Social identity*

Some children talked about their low self-image and social identity that they mostly derived from being poor. A few of them were even resentful of being looked down by their peers and teachers. In general, there was no hesitancy among them to consider themselves as poor children, and the majority of them considered that they are very unfortunate.

### *Things that the children value*

#### *Money*

Most children identified money and social relationship as the most important things in their lives. Some children even told: 'everything in our lives depend on money'.

#### *Social relationship*

Most children described poverty in social and relational ways, and interpreted social relationship as networking with other people, necessary for mitigating poverty and overcoming difficult circumstances.

### *Children's dreams and aspirations*

Poor children seem to usually assume early and significant family responsibilities. Most children interviewed had ambitions except for a few pessimists. These pessimists showed the sign of already having resigned to their poor circumstances, fully aware that they might not study beyond certain level due to the rising costs of

schooling. On the other hand, most children seem to have realised that education is the only way to their better futures.

### *Children's opinion on ways to overcome poverty*

The poor children gave their opinions on what should be done to reduce child poverty: (1) providing the poor families (with many children) the access to cash benefit schemes, subsidy and micro-credit (they actually said: 'give money to poor families'); (2) opening up many boarding schools so that poor children could escape from their unfavourable home environment; (3) the government or NGOs to help the poor families build or renovate their houses; (4) to provide the poor families and their children gainful employment; (5) the government's poverty reduction efforts to target at the poor families with many children; (6) to initiate parental education in order to inculcate in them the sense of responsibility towards their children and skills for proper family management and childcare; and (7) the schools to organise more social events that may attract and provide social forums for poor and unsociable children to interact with others.

### *Complementing the C-MPI*

The highest censored deprivation experienced by the poor children in the C-MPI was the cooking fuel (21.3%). In the qualitative study too, in addition to water, sanitation and shelter deprivations, the deprivation of cooking fuels came out to be more severe. The electronic cookers are more of luxury than necessary items for most poor children.

In the C-MPI, about 8% of the poor children faced food insecurity or shortage of food. The qualitative study as well shows the shortage of food as one major problem among poor children.

The child conditions (with child labour, malnutrition, domestic violence and teenage pregnancy as indicators) have the largest contributions (about 33%) to the C-MPI. In the qualitative study, lack of child rights to protection and childcare emerged as the important themes. The deprivations in cognitive skills and school attendance (27%) have the second largest contribution to C-MPI. The qualitative study revealed that many poor children are forced to either leave schools or risks dropping out of schools owing to their families' inability to bear a nominal cost of schooling.

The C-MPI shows the positive role of education of the households' heads. Most poor children (interviewees) described their parents as poor, illiterate, incapable, dependent, and powerless. They identified the education, be it of their parents or their own, as one most important tool to address child poverty.

In the C-MPI, the incidence of child poverty is 64.6% among children living in the households in the lowest wealth quintile, but 6.3% for the children living in the households belonging to the highest quintile. Most poor children in the qualitative study characterised their households as poor: low family income and poor wealth (lacking land, livestock, household furniture, TV, rice cooker and curry cookers, cars, good house, etc.).

## **PART I: CHILD MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY INDEX (C-MPI)**

Sabina Alkire , Sonam Gyeltshen & Thomas Minten

### **Background and introduction**

Nearly 1.6 billion people around the world survive in acute multidimensional poverty according to the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) published by UNDP and estimated by OPHI (Alkire and Robles 2015). Nearly half of them are less than 18 years old with children over-represented among those living in multidimensional poverty and below national poverty lines. There is a growing consensus regarding the need of measuring poverty among children across the globe. In the past, many methodologies have been used to capture child poverty, including UNICEF's MODA (Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis) and the Bristol deprivation methodology. Against the backdrop of Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), most of the approaches in calculating child poverty incorporated child-specific indicators where possible (for example, in health, education, and child labour), and complement these with household-level variables, for example concerning water or sanitation. The child centric approach is relevant because children experience deprivations differently than the adults. It is also an important mechanism to make visible child-specific deprivations and design child-specific policies to try to break the poverty cycle.

Poverty deprives children of the capabilities needed to survive, develop and thrive as well as access to adequate nutrition, safe drinking water, sanitation, healthcare services and education. Child poverty is a root cause of poverty in adulthood, creating and sustaining inter-generational cycles of poverty. A poor child of today is likely to become a poor adult of tomorrow. The cycles of poverty can be a complex phenomenon, in part because poverty is multi-dimensional. While the heaviest cost of growing up in poverty is borne by children themselves, societies too pay a very significant price, for example in terms of underdeveloped human resources. In order to break the cycle of poverty, understanding child poverty in all its dimensions is desirable. That being so, a child-specific poverty must be measured to provide a good baseline for monitoring child poverty and tracking the Target 1.2 of the Sustainable Development Goal 1, which aims at halving child poverty in all its dimensions by 2030.

Bhutan's first official consumption poverty measure was developed in 2000. This measure was based on the pilot Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2000. Since then, consumption poverty rates have been estimated using data from Bhutan Living Standards Survey (BLSS). Bhutan's MPI 2012 was developed on a trial basis using data from BMIS 2010 and by adapting the Global MPI (Alkire and Santos 2010, 2014) to the Bhutanese context. Bhutan's national MPI used indicators from three dimensions (health, education and living standards).

The child-specific multidimensional poverty index was developed using the Alkire-Foster multidimensional poverty measurement approach. It included data for children aged 0-17. According to global MPI, 32.1% of children in Bhutan who are 10 years and below and 28.5% of children under 18 years were MPI poor. To build

upon this work and strengthen its child focus, the same dataset (BMIS, 2010) was used to construct the Child MPI.

### **Methodology**

The Child-Specific Multidimensional Poverty Index (C-MPI) presented in this report follows an adaptation of the methodology that was developed in Alkire and Foster (2011) and used for the global MPI (Alkire and Santos, 2010, 2013) and in the Bhutan Multidimensional Poverty Index 2012. We use two steps to compute Child Multidimensional Poverty Index. The first is to **identify** poor using deprivation cutoffs for each indicator and a cross-dimensional poverty cutoff. The second step is to **aggregate** information into a national C-MPI, in this case using the proportion of children who are poor and the average share of deprivations that poor children experience.

Bhutan's C-MPI is pioneering because it is the first, to our knowledge, that covers children throughout childhood – that is, from birth until they turn 18 years of age – using the child as the unit of identification and analysis. This structure permits meaningful decompositions by age cohort, gender and also permits an analysis of intra-household patterns of deprivations. In short, using the individual as a unit of identification is appropriate for a measure that seeks to reflect child rights. Generating individual child poverty measures, and comparing their results to children who are identified as poor using household-based measures like the global MPI for many countries will provide an empirical evidence basis to evaluate whether household-level MPIs, decomposed by age, are good proxies of child poverty or not.

Creating an individual child poverty measure requires developing age-specific specifications of indicators and justifying that each indicator reflects a level of deprivation for each age cohort that is comparable to the deprivations defined for other age cohorts. There are considerable challenges of creating and assessing such comparability. The issues of comparability are not unique to children. For example, one may wonder whether the standards of 'adequate' sanitation should change across rural and urban areas, and if the standards of health functioning should vary among the older cohorts. However, the issues of comparability are perhaps most stark for children, because of their rapid physical, intellectual and social development in their first 17 years. We advise that experts in child development work together with measurement scientists to propose an improved range of age-specific child rights indicators. Comparability is inherently challenged by the fact that individual children naturally mature at different rates, and average developmental rates also vary by gender. So age-specific deprivations inevitably will include measurement error due to individual or group-based variations in the pace of child development. While the present indicators for Bhutan's C-MPI do not have gendered standards, it would be possible to consider these.

In developing Bhutan's first and pioneering C-MPI, we considered all of the indicators present in the BMIS survey, and aimed to make the best possible use of information in that survey to measure child poverty from cradle until the 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Where possible, national or international standards were used to define

deprivations, for example in the case of child labour or child malnutrition. Where it was not (as in attitudes to domestic violence), we examined the response structure and indicator construction closely. Thus the C-MPI is by no means a perfect child indicator but it shows the kind of measure that can be constructed from a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey. Although data constraints prevent perfect comparability across age cohorts, empirical investigations such as this one are important both to inform future C-MPIs using improved indicators, and also to analyse child poverty using panel data. We hope that this report contributes to both discussions.

Child poverty is seen as a multidimensional problem. Instead of solely looking at the consumption of the household to decide whether a child is considered poor or non-poor, the MPI approach looks at information of several dimensions of a child's life. Four dimensions are selected for the present C-MPI: Health, Education, Living Standard and Child Conditions. For each dimension, one or several indicators give information to what extent a child is deprived. The thresholds used to decide whether a child is considered deprived in each indicator draw on the CRC. A profile of deprivations is drawn up for each child. The indicators are equally weighted within dimensions with some internal groupings (See Table 1.1). The weighted deprivations are summed into a score for each child. Following Alkire and Foster's dual cutoff approach, a poverty cutoff is used to identify whether a child is multidimensionally poor.

The selection of dimensions and indicators builds on the Bhutan MPI 2010 and 2012, retaining the following three dimensions from the National MPI: health, education, and living standards. These dimensions are arguably both important for children and adults. Yet, to acknowledge that children have specific needs some indicator definitions are changed and another dimension called 'childhood conditions' is added. Within the four dimensions (health, education, living standards, and childhood conditions), the indicator choice was affected by availability of indicators in the BMIS 2010 dataset and the child-specific needs. Ten indicators defined at the household level (child mortality, food security, cooking fuel, sanitation, electricity, water, housing, assets, land and livestock) are also used in the Bhutan MPI 2010 and 2012.

The differences between Bhutan's National MPI 2012 indicators and the C-MPI indicators are as follows:

1. School attendance in Bhutan's National MPI 2012 is defined for children aged from 6 to 14 years old; in C-MPI an indicator of investment in cognitive skills and school attendance is defined for all children, considering different types of deprivations for different age groups (see Table 1 for details).
2. Years of schooling—a variable in the Global MPI that identifies a household as deprived if no member has completed five years of schooling – is not incorporated into the index. As all children in the dataset are 17 years or younger, the total years of schooling is not a good indicator, as infants, toddlers, and older children are not easily comparable. Therefore, here we use the investment in cognitive skills and school attendance. If the child is

not going to school or fulfilling the age-specific learning indicator, he or she is deprived in education.

3. The road indicator, which looks at the distance of the household to a road, is not incorporated into the study because it is not present in the BMIS dataset.
4. The childhood conditions dimension, with the childhood conditions indicator, is added to capture age-specific deprivations for children. The possible deprivations vary by age: A child is deprived if it is malnourished (ages 0-4), or has to do a considerable amount of child labour (ages 5-14), or, if the child is a girl, is pregnant or has a baby or experienced domestic violence, or believes domestic violence is justified (ages 15-17).
5. Information on adult education that was present in the National MPI is dropped. The C-MPI does not consider whether a child lives in a household in which no member has completed five years of schooling. Rather, the C-MPI includes the school attendance indicator for children 6-14 (which was included in the National MPI) but gives it the full dimensional weight, and extends it to apply to other age cohorts as well.

After gathering the information for all children, all children are identified as either poor or non-poor. This identification is done using a poverty cutoff. In designing a child-specific measure from Bhutan Multiple Indicator Survey, 2010 we use a poverty cutoff of 26% which means that if a child is deprived in strictly more than one dimension, or in 26% of the weighted indicators, the child is considered MPI poor. Finally, the MPI is computed as the result of the following formula:

$$\text{MPI} = H \times A,$$

where:

H: Incidence ~ the percentage of children who are poor, or the headcount ratio (poverty rate)

A: Intensity of children's poverty ~ the average percentage of dimensions in which poor children are deprived.

This formula makes it clear that the MPI incorporates both the prevalence of child poverty and the breadth or severity of the children's poverty. The MPI is therefore more informative than the poverty rate alone (Alkire, Foster, Seth, Santos, Roche and Ballon 2015).

### *Measurement design*

#### *Dimensions, Indicators, and cutoffs*

Table 1.1 provides the precise indicator definitions and weights for the C-MPI.

**Table 1.1: Bhutan’s Child MPI: Dimensions, Indicators and Deprivation**

Dimension	Indicator	Deprivation Cutoff	Weight
<b>Health</b>	Child mortality	A child has passed away in the household	(1/8)
	Food security	-The household suffers a shortage of food	(1/8)
<b>Education</b>	Investment in cognitive skills and school attendance	<p>-Children 0 to 2 years: Any child 0 to 2 years of age does not have 2 or more playthings AND does not have 3 or more books AND does not have adequate care</p> <p>-Children 3 to 5 years: Any child 3 to 4 years does not attend preschool/early childhood education AND an adult member of the household did not engage with the child in four or more activities; OR any child 5 years does not attend preschool/early childhood education</p> <p>-Children 6 to 14 years: Any school-aged child (6-14 years) in the household is not attending school</p> <p>-Children 15 to 17 years: Any child 15 to 17 years is not attending school AND has not completed class VIII</p>	(1/4)
<b>Living Standards</b>	Cooking Fuel	-The household cooks with dung, wood or charcoal	(1/24)
	Sanitation	-The household’s sanitation facility is not improved or it is shared with other households	(1/24)
	Electricity	-The household has no electricity	(1/24)
	Water	-The household does not have access to safe drinking water or safe water is more than a 30-minute walk (round trip)	(1/24)
	Housing	- household does not have adequate materials in two of: floor, wall and roof	(1/24)
	Assets	The household does not own at least one of: computer, washing machine, power tiller, foreign bow, refrigerator, sesho gho/kira and car; or more than one of these: radio, mobile phone, landline phone, wristwatch, rice cooker, sewing machine, television, vacuum cleaner, sofa	(1/72)
	Land	The rural household does not own more than one acre of land	(1/72)
	Livestock	-The rural household does not own more than three of: cattle, horses, sheep, goats, chickens, pigs, buffalo, yaks	(1/72)
<b>Childhood Conditions</b>	Childhood Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Malnutrition: Any child from 0-4 is considered malnourished if their z-score of weight-for-age is below minus two standard deviations from the median of the reference population</li> <li>- Child Labour: A children from 5 to 11 has at least one hour of economic work or 28 hours of domestic work per week OR a children from 12 to 14 did at least 14 hours of economic work or 28 hours of domestic work</li> <li>- Girls’ Development: Any girl 15-17 years is married OR is pregnant, has a baby OR experiences domestic violence OR believes domestic violence is justified.</li> </ul>	(1/4)

### *Weights*

Once the indicators and their corresponding cut-offs have been determined as described before, the next step is to define the weights each indicator will have in the measure. Weights or values show the relative importance of deprivations to the overall C-MPI. In Bhutan's C-MPI the four dimensions are equally weighted, so each of them receives a 1/4 weight. The indicators within each dimension are normally equally weighted. Thus, each indicator within the health dimension is assigned 1/8 weight and 1/4 each for school attendance and child condition. Each indicator within the living standards dimension receives a 1/24 weight ( $1/4 \div 6$ ). However, for the three indicators – assets, land and livestock – the weight assigned is 1/72 ( $1/24 \div 3$ ) following the weighting structure used for the national MPI.

### *Poverty cutoff*

The poverty threshold is used to identify whether a child is multidimensionally poor. It utilises Alkire and Foster measurement framework. For this report, similar to the global MPI, the poverty cutoff is chosen to be at roughly one dimension. But since there are 4 dimensions, each weighted at 25%, the poverty cutoff needs to change. Here it is set at 26%, which means that any child who is deprived in strictly more than one dimension, or the equivalent share of weighted indicators, is poor.

### *Data for analysis*

BMIS 2010 is a customised version of UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey and has a sample size of roughly 15,000 households and covers 25,920 children under 18. The survey is representative at the Dzongkhag (district) level, by urban and rural areas. The BMIS 2010 has all the required indicators to construct internationally comparable MPI and also indicators which are specific to children. Bhutan Living Standards Survey (2012) and National Health Survey (2012) are two data sets which were also explored as potential datasets for this study and have the strong appeal of being more recent. However, neither survey has the information necessary for the computation of the child poverty index (C-MPI) nor do they have a superior suite of indicators for children 0-17. Our hope is that the analysis of this report, which shows the kinds of child poverty insights that can be obtained using the dataset will catalyse more regular collection of the data required to assess child poverty in all its dimensions.

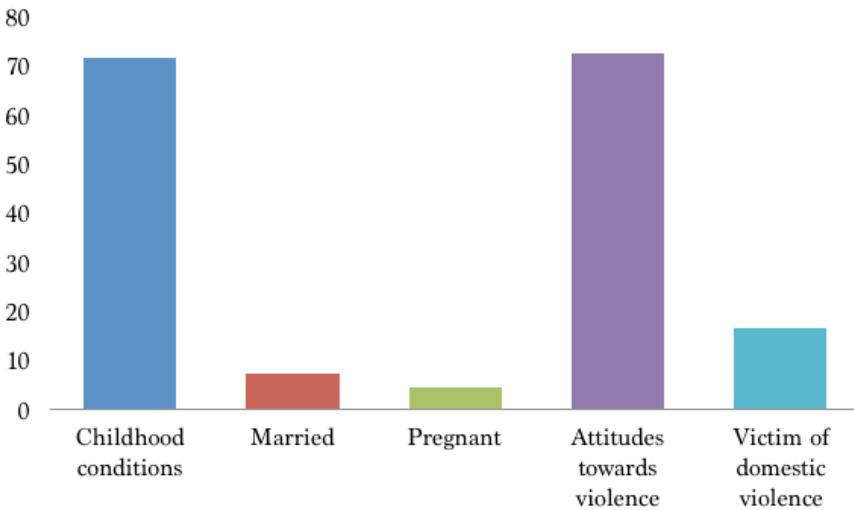
### *Data limitations*

- The Bhutan Multiple Indicator Survey (BMIS) 2010 provides information on the situation of children and women and measures key indicators to monitor progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other internationally agreed-upon commitments. However, the results of this study may already be out of date as the situation could have changed on the ground in Bhutan in the intervening years.



- Despite the importance of immunisation for children’s health, we were not able to include this indicator because BMIS does not include that information. Nor were we able to include other indicators of childhood health, preventative health, and access to healthcare that could be relevant.
- Under the Childhood Condition, the variable only covers female respondents aged 15-17. That is, in the 15-17 age cohort, males are defined as non-deprived. Females are deprived if the respondent is pregnant or has a baby or experienced domestic violence, or believes domestic violence is justified. It would be desirable to have gendered indicators that could distinguish girls and boys poverty in all cohorts, and make meaningful comparisons.
- Also, the deprivations of childhood conditions for girls 15-17 is dominated by deprivations in attitudes towards violence, as Figure 1.1 below shows. Because the indicator marks a girl deprived if either she experiences pregnancy or early marriage or domestic violence, OR if her attitudes at times justify domestic violence, the variable potentially obscures changes in the number of simultaneous deprivations the girls endures (a kind of monotonicity).

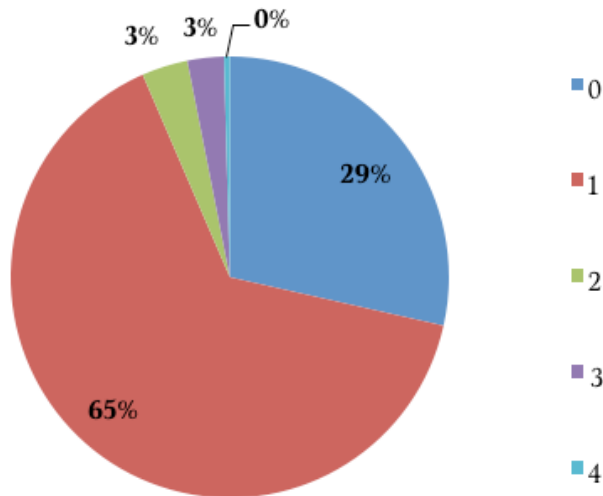
**Figure 1.1: Percentage of girls aged 15-17 deprived in each indicator**



- Figure 1.2 shows what percentage of girls experience deprivations in one, two, or more of these four indicators simultaneously. However, only one indicator is available for the other age cohorts, and so in this pioneering C-MPI we maintained a single complex indicator in order to facilitate interpretation, but other options could be explored in future work.

- As we see from figure 1.2, 29% of girls aged 15-17 are not deprived in childhood conditions. 65% of girls are deprived in one indicator – normally attitudes towards violence. But 3% of girls are deprived in two indicators, and 3% in three indicators of childhood conditions simultaneously. Further consideration of the structure of this indicator could improve its capacity to monitor change. However, for the purposes of this study we have used the indicator as specified.
- Child Poverty rates for Gaza district should be interpreted with caution due to its small sample size, and its large confidence intervals.

**Figure 1.2: Number of within-indicator deprivations among girls aged 15-17**



## Results

This section provides a detailed description of the child poverty results for Bhutan. The results are presented using the following structure:

1. Child Multidimensional poverty index, child poverty rate, intensity of child poverty by:
  - i. gender
  - ii. age
  - iii. location
  - iv. wealth quintile, and
  - v. education level of household head.
2. Percentage of children who are deprived in each indicator.

3. Percentage of children who are C-MPI poor and deprived in each indicator.
4. Contributions of indicators to C-MPI
5. Child poverty and household poverty

*Multidimensional child poverty rate*

Table 1.2 shows that Bhutan’s child multidimensional poverty rate for 2010 is 33.9%. This multidimensional child poverty rate is calculated with a cutoff of 26%, which means that a child is considered multidimensionally poor if he/she is deprived in 26% or more of the weighted dimensions.

The average intensity of deprivation reflects the share of deprivations that each poor child experiences on average. The estimated intensity rate is at 41.2% in 2010 which means each poor child in Bhutan faces deprivations in 41.2% of weighted indicators.

Since MPI is the product of the percentage of poor children (H) and the average intensity of poverty (A), it yields a multidimensional child poverty index of 0.140 which indicates that poor children in Bhutan experience 14% of the deprivations that would be experienced if all children were deprived in all indicators.

**Table 1.2: Child MPI Results**

Using a poverty cutoff=26%	
Survey	BMIS 2010
MPI	0.140
Headcount Ratio (H)	33.9%
Intensity (A)	41.2%
Sample used	89.3%
Weighted sample	90.3%

*C-MPI by gender of children*

When the MPI is decomposed by sex, we see that girls appear to be somewhat poorer than boys although the difference is not dramatic. Actually it is mainly a function of data constraints. Around 32% of boys and nearly 36% of girls are poor, but this is due to the imbalance in the oldest age cohort. More girls aged 15-17 are poor (59.7% vs 28.2%), because boys in this age cohort are automatically considered non-deprived in the child conditions indicator. The decomposition of poverty by gender and age group shows that poverty among boys and girls is practically identical for all age cohorts except among those 15-17 year old. Table 1.3 gives the detail.

**Table 1.3: Child MPI by gender of the children-1**

Gender	Share of Population	H	A	MPI
Boys	50.8%	32.1%	40.6%	0.131
0 to 2 years		29.6%	38.6%	0.114
3 to 5 years		51.4%	43.4%	0.223
6 to 14 years		28.1%	40.0%	0.112
15 to 17 years		28.2%	39.5%	0.112
Girls	49.2%	35.6%	41.8%	0.149
0 to 2 years		29.5%	38.6%	0.114
3 to 5 years		52.9%	42.5%	0.225
6 to 14 years		27.8%	40.6%	0.113
15 to 17 years		59.7%	46.0%	0.274
Bhutan	100.0%	33.9%	41.2%	0.140

*C-MPI by age group*

Analysing poverty by age groups, the C-MPI poverty rates are much higher for the age group 3 to 5 years compared to other age groups. Just over half (52.1%) of the children aged 3 to 5 years of age are poor, whereas this drops to two-fifths of children poor (40.5%) among 15 to 17 years of age, 29.6% in the age group 0 to 2 years and 27.9% for children 6 to 14 years of age (table 1.4).

**Table 1.4: Child MPI by age group**

Index	Age Group				
	0 to 2 years	3 to 5 years	6 to 14 years	15 to 17 years	All
MPI	0.114	0.224	0.113	0.175	0.140
H	29.6%	52.1%	27.9%	40.5%	33.9%
A	38.6%	43.0%	40.3%	43.3%	41.2%
Share of children	14.7%	16.3%	55.3%	13.7%	100%

To understand child poverty, given our distinctive indicators, it is necessary to scrutinise the censored headcount ratios by age group. The high levels of deprivation among 3-5 year olds is due in large part to 5 year olds who are not attending pre-school, due to non-availability of early childhood education facilities (the age-specific variable representing investment in cognitive skills and school

attendance). Bhutan’s early childhood education programming is rapidly expanding and this bulge of deprivations is expected to have declined in the next update of C-MPI. We also see that fully 25.1% of children 15-17 are not attending school and have not completed class VIII, which suggests that investment in school completion is a pressing priority. Looking along to child conditions, recall that the variables for this indicator actually change for children 0-4 and 5-14. However as the censored headcount ratios are nearly the same, we see that malnutrition affects over 20% of children aged 0-4, and that roughly comes to the same number engaged in child labour. If we were to decompose this indicator by sex, we would find that 54% of girls aged 15-17 are deprived due to attitudes on domestic violence (primarily), as well as pregnancy or early marriage, and zero percent of boys, due to the data constraints. Table 1.5 provides the details.

**Table 1.5: Child MPI Censored Headcount Ratios by age group**

Age group	0-2 years	3-5 years	6-14 years	15-17 years	Bhutan
Child mortality	8.3%	13.5%	9.9%	11.4%	10.5%
Food security	8.1%	10.8%	8.2%	9.0%	8.7%
Cognitive Skills	4.9%	37.6%	8.9%	25.1%	15.2%
Cooking	18.6%	30.1%	18.8%	22.8%	21.2%
Toilet	18.6%	29.5%	16.8%	21.2%	19.7%
Electric	13.9%	22.7%	13.8%	16.7%	15.7%
Water	2.1%	3.5%	2.0%	3.9%	2.5%
Assets	6.5%	9.1%	6.6%	6.9%	7.0%
Land	12.7%	20.8%	12.0%	16.3%	14.1%
Livestock	8.1%	12.0%	6.9%	9.4%	8.2%
House	5.8%	9.5%	6.1%	6.3%	6.7%
Child conditions	21.2%	21.7%	16.0%	21.2%	18.4%

*C-MPI by Area of residence*

The poverty statistics by area are shown in Table 1.6. Poverty is mostly a rural phenomenon, 44% of the rural children are poor compared to only 10.8% in urban area. Even the intensity of poverty is relatively higher amongst the rural poor children (41.7%) compared to their urban counterpart (37.3%). Thus, the MPI is obviously higher amongst the rural children. This is consistent with the national MPI 2012 report which showed that the national poverty rates in rural areas were much larger than in urban areas.

**Table 1.6: C-MPI by Area of residence**

Area	Share of Children	MPI	H	A
Rural	69.5%	0.183	44.0%	41.7%
Urban	30.5%	0.040	10.8%	37.3%
Bhutan	100.0%	0.140	33.9%	41.2%

*C-MPI by Dzongkhag*

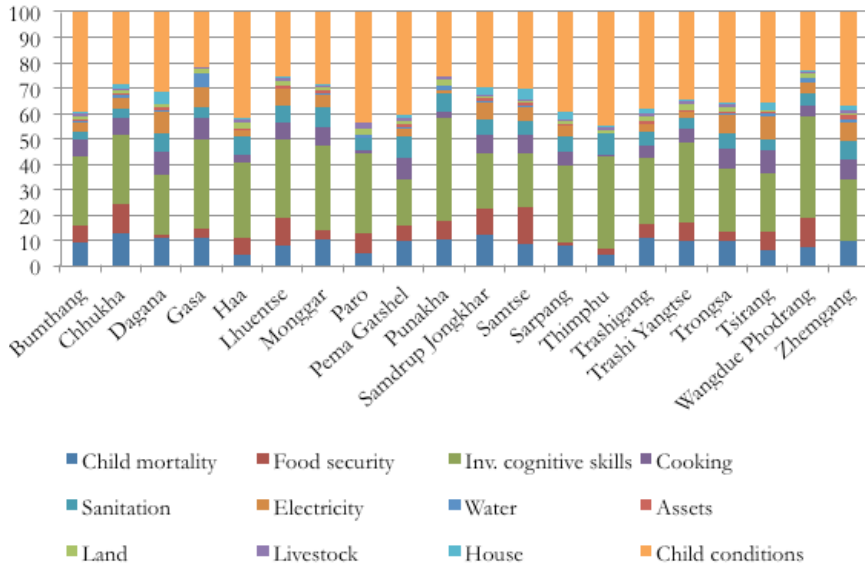
Table 1.7 shows the Dzongkhag level estimates of the multidimensional child poverty rate. It shows that the child poverty rates (H) are higher than the national average in Dagana, Gasa, Lhuentse, Monggar, Pema Gatshel, Samdrup Jongkhar, Samtse, Trashigang, Trashi Yangtse, Trongsa, Tsirang and Zhemgang. Meanwhile, Thimphu (11.9%) followed by Paro (22.1%) have the lowest child poverty rates amongst the Dzongkhags. Since the population size varies considerably between Dzongkhags, it is important to see the distribution of the poor. Among the Dzongkhags, 14.8% of poor children reside in Samtse, followed by Chhukha (9.4%), Trashigang (9.4%) and Monggar (8.9%). Considering the MPI that also incorporates the intensity of the poverty, the poorest Dzongkhags are Samtse, Gasa and Lhuentse.

**Table 1.7: C-MPI by Dzongkhag**

Dzongkhag	Share of children (%)	Share of poor children (%)	MPI	H (%)	A (%)
Bumthang	2.4%	2.3%	0.117	31.4%	37.3%
Chukkha	10.7%	9.7%	0.133	30.8%	43.3%
Dagana	4.0%	4.6%	0.161	39.5%	40.8%
Gasa	0.5%	0.7%	0.198	45.1%	43.9%
Haa	1.9%	1.6%	0.099	27.2%	36.4%
Lhuentse	2.3%	3.0%	0.177	44.1%	40.1%
Monggar	7.3%	8.7%	0.174	40.6%	42.8%
Paro	5.5%	4.2%	0.091	25.8%	35.1%
Pema Gatshel	3.0%	3.7%	0.167	42.7%	39.2%
Punakha	3.7%	3.3%	0.116	30.0%	38.8%
Samdrup Jongkhar	6.3%	7.6%	0.179	40.9%	43.8%
Samtse	10.8%	14.8%	0.210	46.4%	45.2%
Sarpang	6.1%	5.9%	0.127	32.7%	38.7%
Thimphu	13.1%	4.3%	0.040	11.1%	35.5%
Trashigang	8.1%	9.2%	0.156	38.8%	40.2%
Trashi Yangtse	2.7%	2.9%	0.144	36.2%	39.7%
Trongsa	2.3%	2.9%	0.181	43.9%	41.1%
Tsirang	3.2%	4.1%	0.183	43.3%	42.3%
Wangdue Phodrang	3.7%	3.5%	0.133	31.8%	41.9%
Zhemgang	2.4%	3.0%	0.166	41.3%	40.2%
<b>Bhutan</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>0.140</b>	<b>33.9%</b>	<b>41.2%</b>

In terms of composition we see that in all Dzongkhags deprivations in two variables—child conditions and investment in cognitive skills and school attendance—contribute most to the MPI. This is a function both of the weights—these two indicators have the highest weights—as well as the deprivation levels (figure 1.3).

**Figure 1.3: Percentage Contributions by Indicator**



*C-MPI by wealth quintile*

Table 1.8 shows C-MPI by wealth quintile. As expected there is a big difference in the headcount ratio of poor children by their wealth status—but it is less perfect than might be expected. As compared to around one out of every ten children in the richest quintile (6.0%) being poor, six in every ten children (63.8%) in the poorest quintile are multidimensionally poor. The headcount ratio of poor children steadily decreases as their household wealth quintile increases. Consistently, the MPI for poor children is highest in the poorest quintile (0.300), compared to 0.023 in the richest quintile.

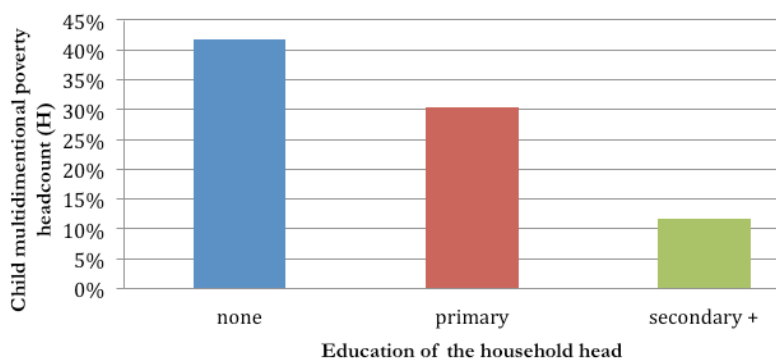
**Table 1.8: Child MPI by wealth quintile**

Index	Wealth Quintile					All
	Poorest	Second	Middle	Fourth	Richest	
MPI	0.300	0.201	0.129	0.066	0.023	0.140
H	64.6%	48.3%	34.9%	19.2%	6.3%	33.9%
A	46.4%	41.2%	37.1%	34.1%	36.1%	41.2%

*C-MPI by educational level of the head of the household*

Figure 1.4 shows the distribution of C-MPI poor children by the education level of the head of their household. The large majority of poor children, 78.4%, lives in a household in which the head does not have any education; while only 11.7% of poor children live in a household where the head has completed secondary education or more.

**Figure 1.4: Child Multidimensional Poverty Headcount Ratio by educational level of the head of the household**

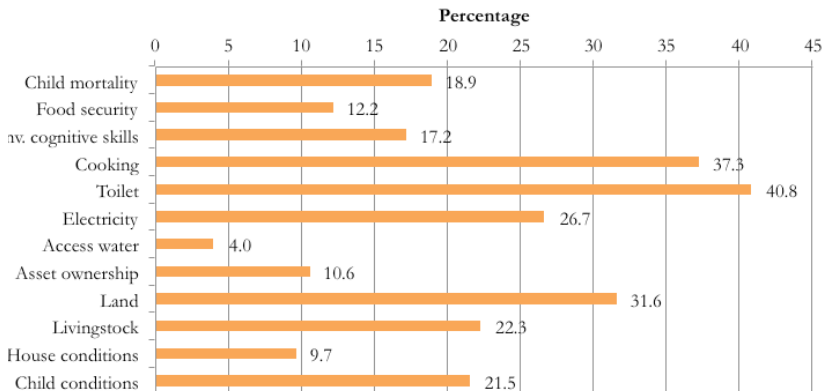


*Uncensored headcount ratios*

The uncensored or ‘raw’ headcount ratios are the percentage of children who are deprived in each of the C-MPI indicators. In other words it is the deprivation rates in each indicator, which includes every child who is deprived, regardless of whether they are multidimensionally poor or not. The deprivations faced by children are highest in improved sanitation (40.8%), cooking fuel (37.3%) and land (31.6%). The lowest deprivation children faced is the access to safe drinking water (4.0%). Figure 1.5 displays of the percentage of children who are deprived in each of the indicators. In a number of cases, children may be deprived in one or two indicators, particularly sanitation and cooking fuel, but are not multidimensionally poor.



**Figure 1.5: Uncensored headcount ratios among children**



*Censored headcount ratios*

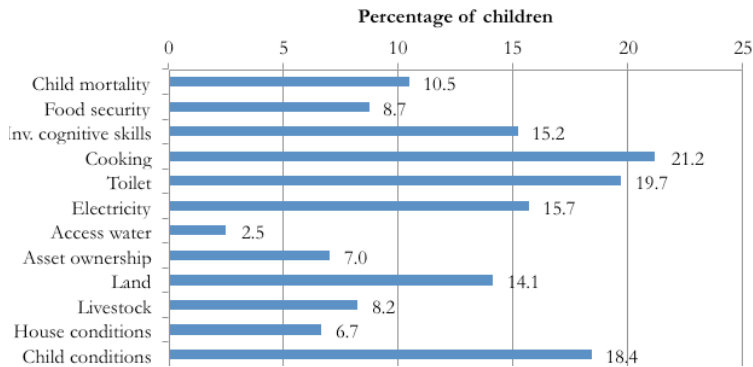
The censored headcount ratios are the proportion of people who are poor and deprived in each of the indicators. The censored headcount ratios differ from the raw headcount ratios in that they focus on the deprivations of those that are poor. The censored headcount ratio is obtained simply adding up the number of people who are poor and deprived in that indicator and dividing by the total population. The censored headcount ratio in the Child MPI is the percentage of children who are the C-MPI poor and are deprived in each of the indicators of the C-MPI. These headcount show the prevalent deprivations among poor children, informing policy makers on what key issues need to be addressed to reduce child poverty. Technically, these are a sub-index of the C-MPI because the weighted sum of censored headcount ratios is equal to the MPI value. So if a policy reduces the censored headcount ratio of any indicator, the C-MPI goes down.

For example, around 22% of children have experienced deprivation in child conditions (raw headcount ratio), but only 18% are poor children who experienced the deprivation in child conditions (censored headcount ratio). In the other 4%, the only deprivation they experience was in child conditions. If we use a poverty cutoff of 25%, all children who are deprived in childhood conditions would be identified as poor. Such a cutoff, strictly speaking, would be appropriate if the data were completely accurate and the indicator reflected child rights. However in fact, given the imperfections of the indicator definitions, it seems likely that children who are deprived in childhood conditions and no other indicator at all, are not poor. The qualitative studies that accompany this report greatly helped to elucidate these kinds of assessments.

Figure 1.6 represents the proportion of children that are multidimensionally poor and who are also deprived in that indicator. It shows that 21.2% of the children are multidimensionally poor and are also deprived in cooking fuel (they live in

households that cook with dung, wood or charcoal). Another 15.2% of children are poor and are not subject to sufficient investment in their cognitive skill, and 18.4% of children are poor and are deprived in the child conditions.

**Figure 1.6: Censored Headcount Ratios**

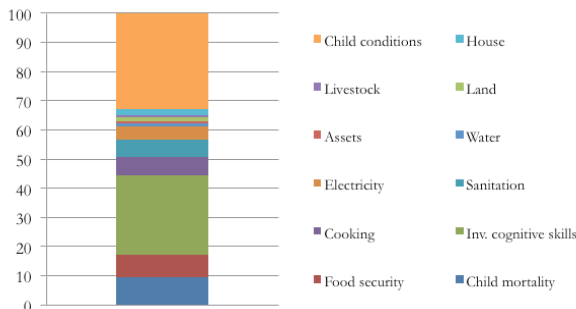


*Contribution of indicators to C-MPI*

It is useful to see the percentage contribution of each of the indicators to overall child multidimensional poverty across Bhutan. The graphic of percentage contribution (Figure 1.7) applies the weights on each indicator in order to show the composition of multidimensional poverty in Bhutan. It represents the contribution of different weighted indicators to the overall MPI.

The weights on education and child conditions indicator are much higher than those on the standard of living indicators, so the deprivations in those indicators contribute relatively more to the overall poverty. Figure 1.7 shows an immediate visual comparison of the composition of the MPI. The largest contribution to child poverty is deprivations in investment in cognitive skills and school attendance (27%) and child conditions (33%). The health and the living standard dimensions contribute 17% and 23% to child poverty, respectively.

**Figure 1.7: Percentage Contribution to C-MPI by Indicator**



*Child poverty and household poverty*

A very valid question to ask is whether every child in a poor household is poor, and if not what are the age and gender patterns of intra-household poverty. It is also important to see whether poor children live in poor households, or whether some children live in non-poor households. Because we have constructed the C-MPI from the same dataset as the National MPI 2010, we are able to provide precise analysis of these important issues.

Let us first explore whether all children living in the same household are poor or not. Table 1.9 presents the distribution of households (that have at least one child) according the poverty status of its child members. The first column presents the percentage of households that fall into the category in each row; the second column displays the percentage of households that fall into the category in each row and have only one child; and the third column presents the percentage of households that fall into the category in each row and have more than one child. Close to half of the households, 47.3%, have at least one poor child; and 26.2% of the households have at least a poor and a non-poor child. This is a striking finding, and surely worth exploring further.

**Table 1.9: Household distribution by poverty status of its children**

Poverty status of household children	% of households	% of households with only one child	% of households with more than one child
All children non-poor	52.7	19.5	33.2
Mix of poor and non-poor children	26.2	-	26.2
All children poor	21.1	9.8	11.4

The further question is whether C-MPI poor children live in MPI poor households. One would expect that they would, in part because a number of the indicators are the same. Table 1.10 presents the proportion of C-MPI poor children and non-poor children that live in households that are poor by the global MPI and by Bhutan’s national MPI. The results are again surprising. They show that only around 54% of poor children live in poor households, and the remainder live in households that are non-poor by the global or National MPIs. Thus, policy making targeted at poor households will miss around 46% of C-MPI poor children. On the other hand, more than 13% of the C-MPI non-poor children live in poor households. This evidence highlights the importance of measuring children poverty directly.

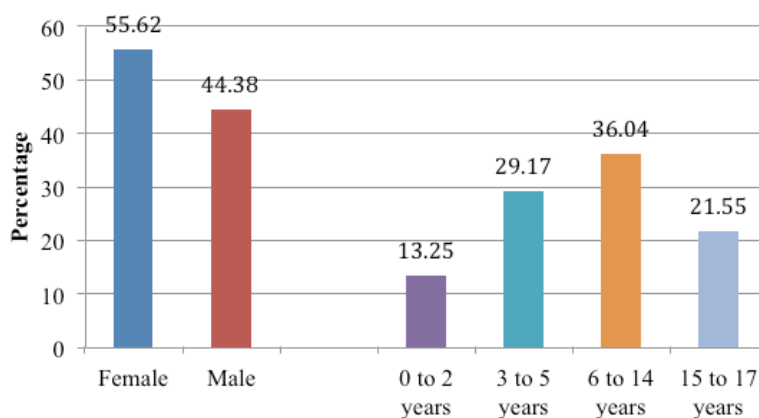
However we must reiterate that the C-MPI indicators are deeply data constrained, and so this analysis should be repeated with a more accurate C-MPI in the future.

**Table 1.10: Distribution of C-MPI poor and non-poor children across poor**

Household poverty status	% of C-MPI poor children living in...	% of C-MPI non-poor children living in...
Global MPI poor households	53.2	15.0
National MPI poor households	55.8	13.3

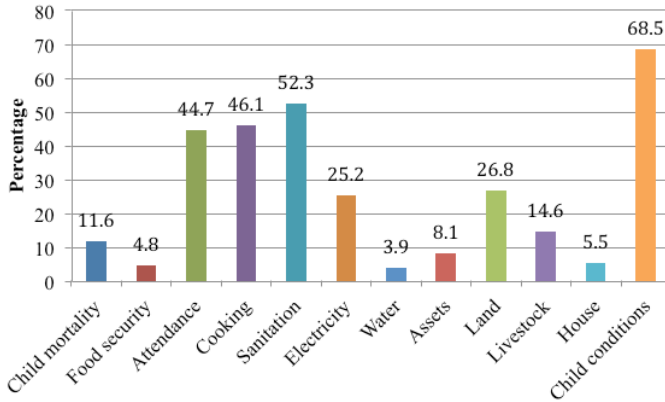
**Note:** Due to the sample drop in the computation of the national MPI, we have no national MPI information for some of the children in our dataset. So, the percentages presented in different rows do not refer to the exact same sample of children.

As shown in figure 1.8, the C-MPI poor children who live in non-poor households by Bhutan's national MPI tend to be girls (55%) and are mostly aged between 3 and 14 years old (65%).

**Figure 1.8: Characteristics of children who are C-MPI poor but live in non-poor households according to the National MPI**

Close to 70% of the CMPI poor children who live in the national non-poor MPI households are deprived in childhood conditions and more than 40% are deprived in investment in cognitive skills and school attendance (figure 1.9). The childhood conditions indicator is not included in the national measure and the indicator of school attendance included in the national measure is computed at the household level with reference only to children aged between 6 and 14. These two indicators have a relative weight of 1/4 in the C-MPI. This implies that if a child is deprived in one of these indicators, he/she will be poor if he/she is deprived in any other indicator. In the case of the C-MPI children living in non-MPI poor households, the household level indicators in which they are deprived represent less than 1/3 of the weighted indicators of the national MPI.

**Figure 1.9: Percentage of children who are C-MPI poor but live in non-poor households by the National MPI, and are deprived in each of the C-MPI indicators**



### Policy recommendations and conclusion

**More recent data:** This C-MPI measure and analysis is data constrained in date and content. BMIS survey was implemented in 2010, so childhood poverty will have changed in the intervening period, and a more recent survey is likely to generate a different set of policy recommendations. Therefore, the first recommendation is to build a C-MPI in the near future using more recent data.

**Survey modifications:** The indicators in BMIS pertaining to child rights and child poverty are limited—a fact that affects both the accuracy of the measure and the ability to compare poverty accurately across age cohorts and genders. Therefore, we recommend that the next BMIS or similar survey in Bhutan include a set of indicators that are more appropriate for a measure of child rights spanning children aged 0-17. The precise definition of such indicators requires further research. It clearly entails improved indicators for children 15-17, for example. Given the interest in child poverty both in other countries and in UNICEF, we hope that such further research will be supported in the near term, and will be available for future survey revisions.

**Investment in Cognitive skills and school attendance:** In this variable, happily less than 5% children aged 0-2 are poor and deprived in this indicator due to neglect or an absence of intellectual stimulation, insofar as it was possible to ascertain this from the questionnaire. However fully 37% of children aged 3-5 were deprived, mainly because 5 year old children in 2010 were not attending early childhood education facilities. If required, this would be an area for ongoing policy action however it may already have been addressed in the intervening years. In the age bracket of 6-14, just under 9% of children are not attending school. This is a significant number, and shows that despite Bhutan’s great gains in education,

ongoing attention needs to be applied to the lagging areas. Moving to the 15-17 cohort, it is noteworthy that fully one-quarter (25%) of children aged 15-17 are poor, have not completed class 8 and are not attending school. In this cohort especially, then, greater attention is required for school retention through class 8. However we note that the school attendance figures for children 3-17 are expected to have improved since 2010, and so the next update of the C-MPI will provide important information on current policy successes and gaps.

**Living Standards:** Among children, as across Bhutan, deprivations in sanitation, indoor air pollution (through the use of solid cooking fuel), and a lack of electricity are especially visible. Electricity provision is a public policy priority and deprivations in it are expected to have declined and continue to decline due to public action. In the case of indoor air pollution, one recommendation is that future surveys include a question on ventilation which will enable this indicator to establish whether or not the use of solid cooking fuel is creating health hazards, particularly for women and children. Clearly there is an unmet need for adequate sanitation, and filling this need may require awareness-raising as to the health benefits.

**Health:** It is striking that despite Bhutan's great gains in health, particularly relative to other South Asian countries, one in ten poor children lives in a household that has lost a child. This grief-tinged finding underscores the ongoing need for preventative healthcare for babies and children, as well as for investments in public health and associated services such as sanitation.

**Food security** deprivations are also non-negligible, particularly in some Dzongkhags such as Samtse, Wangdue Phodrang, Lhuentse, and Samdrup Jongkhar, where over 10% of children are affected.

**Childhood Conditions:** Despite the indicator differences, the percentage of children who are poor and are deprived in childhood conditions is relatively constant, at about 21% across age cohorts. However the implications of this are sobering. It means that fully 21% of children 0-4 are malnourished, and the same share of children aged 5-14 are engaged in child labour that violates ILO standards. Each of these deprivations require a clear policy strategy.

Furthermore, 54% of girls aged 15-17 are deprived in the indicator pertaining to attitudes to violence as well as pregnancy and early marriage. Hence one striking area for policy action relates to attitudes towards domestic violence among girls aged 15-17. Girls in this age cohort are more accepting of violence than in the older cohorts. Their deprivations are very high indeed. This is an important area for policy interventions.

As has been stressed repeatedly, the C-MPI in this report, built from BMIS 2010, is to some extent illustrative rather than precisely appropriate for policy recommendations due to its age and data constraints. However, as this section has shown, despite its limitations the C-MPI has identified serious and important deprivations in child rights that merit a policy response.

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## PART II: CHILDREN'S LIVED EXPERIENCES OF POVERTY

Lham Dorji

### Introduction

In Bhutan, poverty had been dominantly measured in terms of unidimensional income or consumption metrics. It was only in 2012 that Bhutan's National Statistics Bureau (NSB) constructed a national Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). The national MPI, with three dimensions: health, education and living standard, is now used to inform the Gross National Happiness Commission's (GNHC) public resource allocation formula. This manifests the Royal Government's commitment as well as the practical effort to go beyond income to eradicate poverty in multidimensional way and ensure balanced and equitable development across the country.<sup>1</sup>

NSB further developed Child Multidimensional Poverty Index (C-MPI) based on Bhutan Multiple Indicator Survey (BMIS, 2010) data (included in the previous chapter). This initiative has placed Bhutan as the first country in the world to develop an official child-specific MPI.<sup>2</sup> The C-MPI looks beyond the unidimensional monetary poverty measure to cover other areas of well-being, namely: health, education, living standard and child conditions with 12 indicators.

Sen's seminal works on the capability approach in the 1970s and Streeten's basic needs approach in the 1980s influenced multidimensional measures of poverty (Sen 1992; Streeten 1981). Numerous studies elsewhere shows that income and material sufficiency are crucial for a child's healthy growth, development and smooth transition to adulthood, but social rights, survival rights, child protection, social participation (Kingdon & Knight, 2003; Spicker, 2007), child's emotional wellbeing and happiness, and the family care are no less important. The diverse needs of children and their time-sensitive nature are the reasons, compelling enough to necessitate measuring child poverty multidimensionally.

The present C-MPI, though constructed at the individual child level, does not represent the actual views of children. The data source (BMIS 2010) was the household-based survey, administered on adult members (either mothers or head of the households). Children's actual voices are absent in the BMIS data. The C-MPI shows various deprivations that children experience, their age groups, gender, locations, and wealth status of their households, but do not explicitly describe poverty from children's perspectives. Moreover, the C-MPI presents the aggregate of deprivations that children experience at the national and district levels. The

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<sup>1</sup> The Eleventh Five Year Plan documents states that the Eleventh Plan will focus on reducing multidimensional poverty, besides enhancement of income. The major emphasis in the Eleventh Plan is on health, education and living standard, and income. The revised resource allocation formula at the local government level do not allot any budget based on income poverty; it allots 45% of the budget to multidimensional poverty, 35% to the population, 10% to area and 10% to transportation cost index.

<sup>2</sup> Sabina Alkire, 2016.

aggregate measures, though are highly desirable, more often hides the differences. The C-MPI, for that matter, does not delve deeper into various deprivations and vulnerability that children actually experience via their own narratives.

For these various reasons, it became crucial to conduct qualitative research by way of complementing the findings of the C-MPI approach and getting more in-depth insights of poverty through children's own narratives of their lived poverty experiences. The basic questions posed when designing the study were: What do the Bhutanese children have to tell about their understanding and experiences of poverty? What are the impacts of poverty on their lives? How do children cope up with or overcome poverty? What are their views on ways to reduce child poverty? And what are their priorities, dreams and aspirations?

### **Background and rationale**

The views and experiences of the selected poor children from six Dzongkhags (two Dzongkhags from east, west and central regions each) were sought to draw the insights into the complex issues of child poverty. In all, 140 poor children of age 10-17, also facing other difficult circumstances took part in the in-depth face-to-face interviews.

A cursory inspection of the literature on similar theme shows that there is a limited number of studies undertaken [so far] on the Bhutanese children. These studies have taken several, but disparate approaches. For example, the first anthropological research on the Bhutanese children by Uni Winkan and Fredrik Barth (UNICEF, 1990) represents an effort in obtaining a holistic understanding of the numerous problems faced by poor children. The authors were mindful of the sensitivity and respect for local culture when discussing the children's issues.

UNICEF's study on assessing the situation of children in Bhutan in 1991 had used descriptive and anecdotal approaches. Maggie & Peter (UNICEF, 2006) had conducted another 'situational analysis of women and children' using an extensive consultative approach. RENEW's explorative research (2007) on 'violence against women' had incorporated a few issues related to children. It had used both qualitative and quantitative methods to examine various vulnerabilities, barriers and needs of women and children. Save the Children (2008) had carried out a study on 'Early Childhood Care and Education' (ECCE).

Then, Lham Dorji (2012) had worked on child deprivation estimates using the Bristol's deprivation approach. The Child Frontier (2015) had used the qualitative method to study violence against children in Bhutan. Regular reports on children are published by various child-serving agencies using multi-sourced data. The present study amounts to an emerging literature on child poverty in Bhutan using the qualitative method. The design of this study partly relied on the C-MPI indicators.

This qualitative study was conducted in the context of growing recognition of the need for addressing child poverty at the national and global levels. For the first time, global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) makes a specific reference to children. The SDGs include a target 'to halve child poverty by national definitions

by 2030' as one means to ending poverty (both monetary and multidimensional) in perpetuity. There are, among others, two most important reasons for the need to place children at the central of development and poverty reduction efforts. They are *rights* and *sustainability*. From the rights perspective, children deserve their rights to survive, grow, develop, participate, and be protected. In the context of sustainability, present younger generations must be placed in the progression of productive future national asset rather than complaisantly driving them into adult poverty.

Further, child poverty and vulnerability merit greater policy attention for being distinct, multidimensional, and more time-sensitive than that of adults. The other reasons why child poverty deserves more policy attention are: firstly, poverty in childhood is invariably associated with poverty in adulthood (cyclical problem and intergenerational transfer); secondly, the needs of children are more and diverse than that of adults, as childhood is a stage of physical, cognitive and social development that varies by age and gender; and thirdly, Bhutan's enactment of child protection law in 2012 presents the context or timeliness for in-depth understanding of children's real experiences of poverty. In view of these, deeper insights into child poverty in all its dimensions, depth and intricacy, are crucial. This can be best attained only through the qualitative studies such as the present one.

This study was based on the premise that failing to listen to poor children's voices may leave their plights underplayed, discounted and simply ignored. Poor children and children in difficult circumstances (some children may experience deprivations even when their households are prospering) were believed to be more appropriate subjects for the research, as they could better reveal the issues most severe and pertinent to them. This study was designed also to promote poor children's visibility and their voices.

## **Definitions and variables**

### *Who is a Child?*

The Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) defines a 'child as a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood much younger'. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, the monitoring body of the CRC Convention has encouraged the States to review the age of majority if it is set below 18 and to increase the level of protection for all children under 18. This study has included children below 18 years.

### *What is child poverty?*

Child poverty is understood as a complex phenomenon and defined (for this study) as 'low level of income obtained by a household with children combined with a child's deprivation of basic goods and services needed to survive, grow and develop; and a child's lack of rights and inability to participate in the society (social exclusion), lack of social support and protection, a child being exposed to violence and discrimination, and a child living in a poor state of emotional well-being'.

### *Deprivations*

The principles of the Convention on the Rights of a Child (CRC) emphasise on the resources that children would need to survive and grow. UNICEF's child poverty definition (2004) that considers child poverty as 'the experience of deprivation of the material, social, spiritual and emotional resources' provided the conceptual basis for this study. The material deprivations include income insecurity, food shortage, lack of clothing, poor shelter, lack of communication services, poor access to water and sanitation, and poor access to health and education services, and other basic subsistence needs. The social deprivations include exposure to abuse, exploitation, violence and child labour, and lack of opportunities and capability for social participation, family disruption, and poor peer interactions. The spiritual deprivations include lack of meaningfulness and positive attitudes towards life and access to spiritual services. Emotional deprivations include negative mental state including feelings of rejection and exclusion (UNICEF 2007).

#### **Some key information on children in Bhutan**

The national level statistics on children provide the overview of various challenges that the Bhutanese children face. To reiterate, when information are aggregated at the national level, differences usually get hidden. Publicly available in-depth qualitative studies are important to provide deep insights into the various issues confronting children. Small qualitative researches should complement larger surveys to provide clearer picture of the children's issues. This, nevertheless do not mean the national level statistics are worthless. The national statistics remains important input for policy decisions and budget allocation.

According to NSB's Population Projection for 2015, the population of children below age 18 constitutes about 36.97% (2,79874) of the total population with 141,168 (18.65%) male children and 138, 706 (18.32%) female children. Under-5 children account for 13.16% of the total population.

The Statistical Year Book (SYB, 2014) shows that in 2013, a total of 3,835 students were in the ECCD centres, 47,511 children were attending primary schools, 47,246 were in lower secondary schools, 41,153 in middle secondary schools, and 33,520 students were studying in higher secondary schools. In total, there were 173,265 students in 2013. Assuming that the maximum age when studying in the higher secondary level would be 18 years and below, 96.13% of the total children aged 6-18 years (school-going age) were in schools. Out of this, 48.18% were male children (6-18) and 47.94% were female children.

The country's overall health status shows the many achievements, including those of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The national immunisation coverage today stands at 96% (AHB, 2015). Childbirths attended by skilled personnel reached 74.6%, rising from a low of 23.6% in 2000. The major challenge that Bhutanese children are facing is poor nutrition, which can be largely due to poor dietary habits of the Bhutanese people. Prevalence of anaemia was as high as 69.7% in 2014. In 2010, one in eight under-five children were moderately underweight (12.7%) and 3.2% were severely underweight, and 33.6% of children were moderately or severely

stunted. Moderate wasting was estimated at 5.9% and severe wasting at 2%. Inadequate wasting was manifested by outbreaks of peripheral neuropathy among young males in schools. The Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) is estimated at 40.1, Child Mortality Rate at 21.5 and Under-5 Mortality Rate at 61.6 (2005, SYB, NSB, 2014).

The national statistics shows that 96.1% of the total households have access to latrines, 92.6% access to functional piped water, 67.2% has access to drainage and footpath. About 74% of the total households have access to vegetable garden and 80.4% to household garbage pit. The Labour Force Survey (LFS, 2014) estimated child dependency ratio at 52.8. The Labour Force Participation (LFP) for the age group 15-19 was estimated at 10.2 in 2013 and unemployment rate (for the same age group) was 4.5%. The social sectors-Ministry of Education (MoE) and Ministry of Health (MoH) are allocated 3.93% and 3.82% of the total budget for the 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2013-2018) respectively. Thromde (town) schools were separately allocated about 1.43% of the total 11<sup>th</sup> FYP's outlay.

### **Study aims and objectives**

This study sought to explore, understand and provide information on, a deep insights in to, and critical discussions of the key issues relating to the experience of multidimensional poverty by poor children and their families via their own narratives. It included the in-depth examination of various child deprivations: income insecurity, material deprivation, and social and emotional ill-being. The study directly engaged sampled 'poor children' (not children in general) to draw from their situations and experiences.

The study was mainly aimed at complementing the quantitative analysis of child poverty that was done in the form of constructing Child Multidimensional Poverty Index (C-MPI), and to generate qualitative evidences that have practical implications for child-centric policy advocacy and programmes. Specifically, this study had four inter-related objectives:

1. To identify various dimensions of child poverty from children's perspectives; and to highlight the accounts of their lives and experiences of living in poverty and other difficult circumstances;
2. To understand how poor children cope up with poverty so that their resilience in relation to their vulnerability could be better understood;
3. To understand poor children's emotional well-being, their idea of happiness, priorities, self identity, and their dreams and aspirations; and
4. To look at what poor children feel should be done to overcome their poverty and difficult circumstances.

### **Theoretical considerations**

The approaches that look beyond income are examples of multi-dimensional poverty. This study was contextualised within the grounded theory using the constructivist approach. That is, it recognised the existence of many possibilities,

and explored their meanings, which included social, economic and emotive meaning construction of the sampled children's experiences of poverty.

The literature review showed that getting children's perspectives on poverty should cover mainly four areas: low-income status, material deprivations, social deprivations (with respect to impacts on children's relationships and participation), and emotional well-being. While the design was inductive, that is, little was known about the subjects (poor children) and the phenomenon, the following theoretical considerations were used in designing the qualitative interview questions:

1. *Social disadvantage*: refers to a range of difficulties that block life opportunities and prevent people from participating fully in society (Vinson, 2007: 1);
2. *The capability approach*: relates to a lack of freedom and deprivation of basic capabilities to avail opportunities in economic, social and political domains;
3. *Social exclusion*: focuses on an individual's exclusion from society in economic, social, cultural and political terms;
4. *Well-being approaches*: offers a strength-based approach to child poverty, and consider children's civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights (Bradshaw, Hoelscher & Richardson, 2006).

## **Methodology**

### *Selection of the research participants*

The study used explorative, descriptive and holistic study design. It was based on the semi-structured in-depth interviews of 140 children (aged 10-17 years) who were considered to be facing multiple deprivations. The Dzongkhag of Trashy Yangtse, Pema Gatsel, Zhemgang, Sarpang, Samtse and Chukka were selected. In each Dzongkhag, a maximum of three research or interview sites was considered. The choice of the Dzongkhags was guided by the need to include children (research participants) living in poorer districts, covering east, central and western regions. In spite of the fact that there is no appropriate sample size for a qualitative study, most researchers and experts believe that a qualitative research should have minimum of 12 participants. Keeping this in view, at least 12 poor children were interviewed in each of the selected Dzongkhags.

The children for interviews were identified and selected through purposive sampling to ensure that poorer children with multiple problems were selected from both rural and urban communities. The selection processes were guided by two principles: (1) optimal representation of the children in terms of age, gender and region; (2) consideration of income poverty, material deprivation and social deprivation.

Mainly the District Statistical Officers (DSOs) were involved in identifying and selecting the poor children in consultation and coordination with principals, teachers, school counsellors, local government staff, local leaders (gups and tshogpas) and kidu officers. They were asked to select about 12 to 15 children for

each interview site. The inclusion criteria were (1) the children of age 12-17 with equal representation of gender, location (rural and urban) and educational background (school-going and non-school going); and (2) the poor children were to be defined as those children coming from income-poor families living in difficult circumstances, including those who have no one to look after them or those living with step-families, those experiencing deprivation of basic needs such as food and nutrition, clothing, proper houses, and so on and so forth. During the selection phase, instructions were given to the selection teams not to make it known to those children that they were being selected for the reasons that they were identified as either poor or those in some difficult situation. The exclusion criterion was to exclude children who were believed to be belonging to richer and stable families.

During the pre-fieldwork phase and the research design process, the experts from the NCWC and UNICEF were involved in a weeklong consultative workshop, held in Paro. The consultative process was carried out to ensure the comprehensiveness of the study and its operational and internal validity. The insights gathered during the consultative workshop, together with a review of literature, formed the basis of the in-depth interviews. The interview questions were designed, based on desired objectives and certain theoretical considerations (described above). Though the unstructured interviews that can induce free and open narratives were preferred, the interviews were made semi-structured. This was done to ensure that the research team comprising of four interviewers asked similar questions (uniformity). Nevertheless, the options to make prompts were left to the individual interviewer.

### *Data Collection*

Before each interview, the interviewers discussed on the logical sequencing of the questions and translation of the key terms into local languages. To create sense of ease and trust among the sampled children, easy questions were asked in the beginning, those questions that did not require much probing into personal life. The list of questions that were asked to the research participants is provided as annex I.

The interviews in each gewog or study site took place in places where the selected participants had gathered. Each interview was conducted in isolation from the others to prevent distractions. The narratives were recorded in digital recorders upon participants' consents. The languages that participants felt comfortable with, mainly Dzongkha, Sharchopkha, Lhotshamkha and Khengkha, and occasionally English were used.

The interviews were premised on the assumption that the quality of children's participation would depend on their feelings of ease and self-confidence. The interviews were, to the possible extent, conducted in the natural setting. Every effort was made to ensure that research was guided by a sensitive approach, that is, not to probe if an interviewer felt the questions were likely to affect a child's emotion. In order to respect a child's sensitivity, the interviewers explained to each participant that he or she had been selected on random basis without any prior judgment of who and in what situation he or she was.

During the course of the interviews, the interviewers took additional side notes on the physical observations to allow them to contextualise the interviews. Some observations, which were not possible to be conveyed through the transcripts, were made on the following aspects:

1. To note physical appearance and body language of the participants during the interviews;
2. To observe the level of articulation (confidence in speaking and loudness, as voicelessness was considered to be an indication that a child was less exposed and socially isolated);
3. To observe expression of emotions such as being not so confident of life or crying or facial expression when narrating their stories about their own difficult life circumstances.

These observations were not analysed systematically, but were taken into consideration when making sense out of the narratives. The interviews were conducted over the period of three weeks in May 2015. There were three interviewers most of the time. In some districts, local administrative officers and kidu (welfare) officers accompanied the NSB research team. The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) was planned, but after having found two FGDs conducted in Trashi Yangtse was ineffective, the team decided to abandon this approach.

### *Data Analysis*

The qualitative paradigm as a constructive approach provides “context-bound” information related to “what happens on the ground” (Creswell 1994). It has an ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a particular issue or phenomenon and about the “human” aspect of that issue, for example, beliefs, opinions, experiences, relational bond, and often, contradictory behaviours (Mack *et al.*, 2005).

A deductive approach was adopted to analyse data. This approach involved analysing data with no predetermined theory or framework (biases); the analysis was based on the actual data. A thematic content analysis was used—the method that arose out of the approach known as ‘grounded theory’ that involved the process of analysing transcripts, identifying themes, and associating those themes together, and then drawing their meanings. Data were objectively coded into themes. The analysis drew from the orientation that allows researchers to treat social action and human activity as *texts*.

The thematic content analysis of data was done using MAXQDA software. This is a program designed for computer-assisted qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods data, text and multimedia analysis in academic, scientific, and business institutions.

Both interpretive and phenomenological approaches were used for thematic analyses of data. When using the interpretive approach, the texts (or data) were organised or reduced to uncover the patterns of the views and meanings to objectively identify the characteristics of the messages, which were then coded thematically. The interpretive content analysis often may result in the texts losing their meanings



when reduced to numeric forms. Hence the phenomenological approach was used in which data were presented without being condensed through various sorting or coding operations. The results of the phenomenological analysis were presented as illustrative quotes. The quotations were selected based on the relevance of the topics or themes to the issues being studied.

The frequency evaluation was carried out, that is, how many times a particular word, phrase or concept appeared in the text as a part of the interpretive approach, and the frequencies were generated and then transformed into percentages. At times, percentages were transformed into the infographics. In this approach, the texts were treated as the unit of analysis rather than the interviewees. Larger chart and column represent greater magnitude (not necessarily in terms of percentage).

In coding the contents of each observation in the texts, both *manifest content* and *latent content* approaches were used. In *manifest content* approach, those elements, for example, say the word 'no enough food' that were countable in the entire text were added up, while in the *latent content* approach, the phrases with similar meaning were counted (for example, 'I have to often go hungry' was considered as same as 'there is no enough food').

#### *Data quality and reliability*

The quality and reliability of data and findings could depend so much on the internal, external, and operational validity. Internal validity means avoiding any external factors that may influence data reliability; external validity is related to generalisability of data, and operational validity is the ability to measure what is needed to measure (Yayasan MENDAKI, 2015).

To ensure internal validity, all interviews were conducted in separate rooms or isolated places to ensure that other people were not around who might have had influenced the way children responded or narrated their stories.

For external validity, though participants were selected from the representation of all three regions, the sample was small. Therefore, the extent to which the findings could be generalised is left to the readers' discretion. However, since the children interviewed were poor and faced multiple problems, the level of generalisability could be extended to other children in the country with similar characteristics. The children from rich and prosperous families may often be facing certain deprivations, but there were insignificant number of children in the study reporting that they belong to rich and stable families.

To ensure the operational validity, the effort to ensure similar interpretations of the semi-structured questions between the interviewers and interviewees was made. The interviews were taped and then transcribed meticulously by a translator who had gained sufficient experience in this area.

#### *Study limitations*

Conducting interviews with children was found to be difficult because of not only having to respect their immaturity (while asking questions), but in terms of making them express their views in the way more detailed information were revealed. This

study was designed to encourage children to speak more and without any hesitation. This was done firstly, by convincing them of the importance of their views in understanding not only their own problems, but that of other children in the country; and secondly by guaranteeing them 'no harm' for participating in the interviews and sharing their personal information.

However, as is the case in most researches that involves the views of the human subjects, it is possible that not all the children were honest with their views. This was one major limitation of this study. The other limitation was that since the sample was small, it remains a concern whether the study could be generalised with certainty at the national level.

If child poverty is to be looked from the right-based perspective, the qualitative study has missed certain important parameters such as infant and child mortality. This was because in the interviews, only children in the age group 10-17 were selected.

### *Code of Ethics*

Conducting research with children involves sensitivity. In fact, poverty research in general is a highly sensitive endeavour. To provide children their rights to protection, firstly, they were informed on their rights to withdraw if they found questions too personal and taxing. Secondly, since children are generally considered vulnerable due to their emotional immaturity, their parents, guardians or teachers (in case children were studying) signed on the consent forms, and finally, every child involved in the interviews was made to give the written assent. Both the consent and assent forms were available in English and Dzongkha versions.

After data collection, a strict code of ethics was applied to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the research participants. That was the reason for not including their names against the respective quotations. In addition, concerned that children might feel let down or stigmatised of having to participate in the poverty research, the researchers informed them that they were selected rather randomly. Doing this could have amounted to lying to them, but in some researches, certain level of information modification may be considered acceptable if a researcher feels the harm of not doing so is greater than telling the truth.

## **Study results**

### *Profile of participants*

As presented in table 2.1, there were 140 participants from six poor Dzongkhags. These children were of ages between 10 and 17 with the mean age of 14. About 59.21% of them were females and 40.71% males. A majority of the participants were students (76.43%).

The sample constituted 70.71% of the children reporting they were from the poor families, 27.14% reported they came from neither poor nor rich families, and 2.14% of them reported as belonging to the rich and stable families. About 38.57% of them reported they have both parents, 7.86% were orphans, 2.29% of them reported they

live in single-parent households, and 2.24% reported that they live with stepfamilies.

Despite the effort to select equal representation of school-going and non-school-going children, it was difficult to get the sufficient number of non-school-going children. Sparsity of non-school going children for the interviews could be due to: (1) most children were in the schools, and (2) school dropouts most likely had migrated to urban centres. So the sample largely consisted of school children (76.43%), 13.57% school dropouts, 7.86% monks and 2.14% children who had never attended schools.

**Table 2.1: Socio-economic profiles of children (research participants)**

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	57	40.71
Female	83	59.29
<b>Mean Age</b>	14.16	
<b>Parental status</b>		
Both parents	54	38.57
No parents	11	7.86
Single-parent	41	29.29
Step-family	34	24.29
<b>Poverty status (self-reported)</b>		
Poor	99	70.71
Rich	3	2.14
Neither poor nor rich	38	27.14
<b>Educational status</b>		
Student	107	76.43
Dropout	19	13.57
Monk	11	7.86
Never studied	3	2.14
<b>Dzongkhags</b>		
Trashigang	20	14.6
Pema Gatsel	19	13.87
Zhemgang	33	24.09
Sarpang	24	17.52
Chukkha	22	16.06
Samtse	22	16.06
<b>Total</b>	140	

Further, it was hard to segregate the participants into those coming from rural and urban places due to ambitious definitions of rural and urban areas. The maximum

number of the children interviewed was from Zhemgang Dzongkhag. The majority of them belonged to a single parent, stepfamily, and no-parent families (orphans).

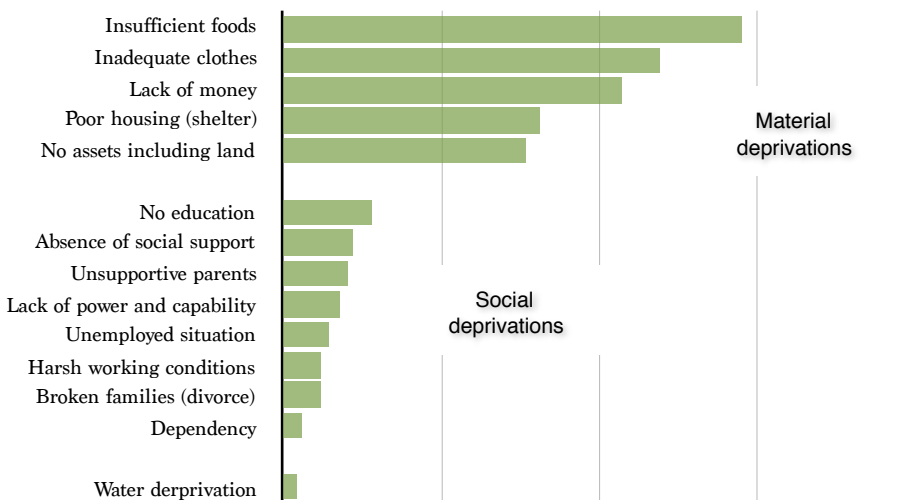
*Children's understanding and perception of poverty*

In the interviews, each child was asked how he or she perceived poverty. Deprivation of material necessities (including income), lack of social needs, and troubled emotional state were the common answers. However, the majority of them were discriminative towards material deprivation: food, clothing, money, shelter, wealth, land, and water.

The top-five frequent categories of *Material Deprivations* (aggregated for six sampled Dzongkhags) were insufficient food, money problem (impecuniosity), and lack of decent clothing, poor shelter, and absence of wealth. Wealth to most children meant land, buildings, livestock, and household assets like TV, electric utensils, cars, furniture, altar, and so on.

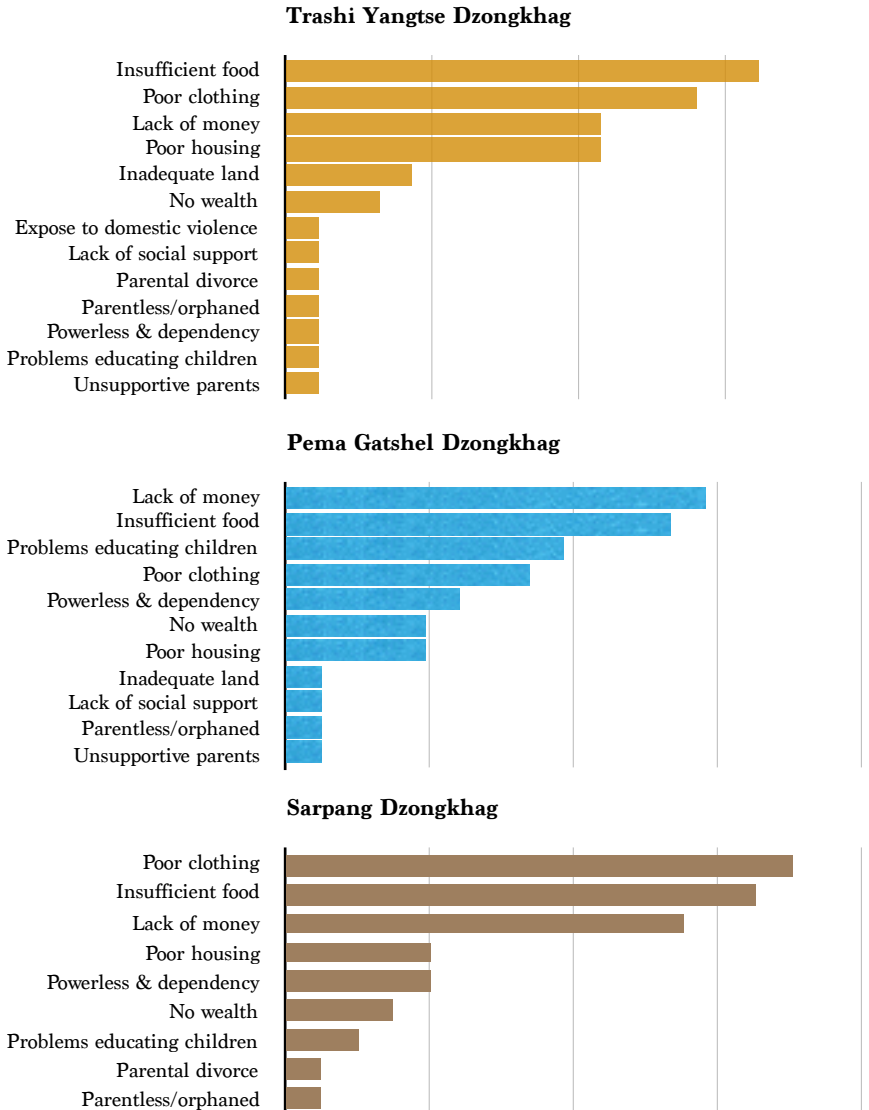
The top-five *Social Deprivations* were education deprivation (difficulty in meeting school expenses), absence of social support, drinking family, unhappy or unstable family, and powerlessness & being incapable. The unemployed situation of their parents also came up as a significant deprivation (Figure 2.1). The *absence of social support* is understood as lack of support from the family, relatives and other community members that entails children working to earn their livelihood in a few cases and meet school expenses in most cases. The *powerlessness & being incapable* mean not being capable to do things as they wishes (closely related to Sen's capability approach), lacking confidence, and being ignorant. The *dependency* is interpreted as children working for others for a meagre compensation and having to mostly rely on their neighbours for livelihood.

**Figure 2.1: Children's perception of poverty**

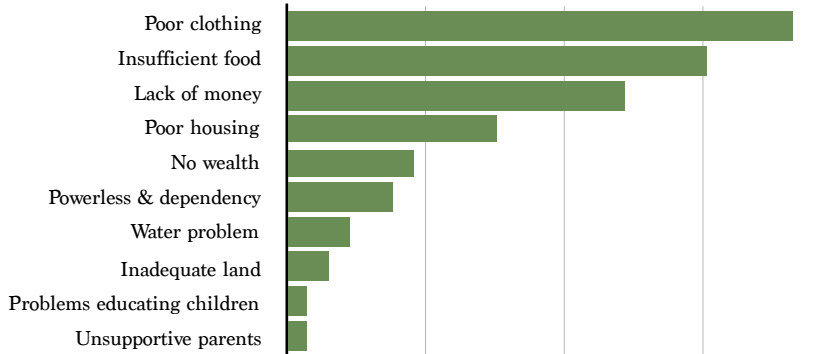


In general, there was a little variation in the way in which the children perceived poverty across the sampled Dzongkhags. For example, in Trashhi Yangtse Dzongkhag, the top-three dimensions of poverty [as perceived by sampled children] were 'insufficient food, inadequate clothing, and money problem'. Details of other Dzongkhags are given in figure 2.2.

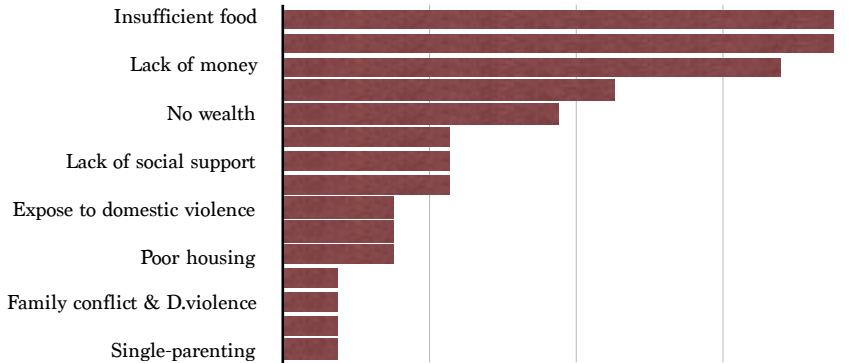
**Figure 2.2: Deprivations faced by children in six Dzongkhags**



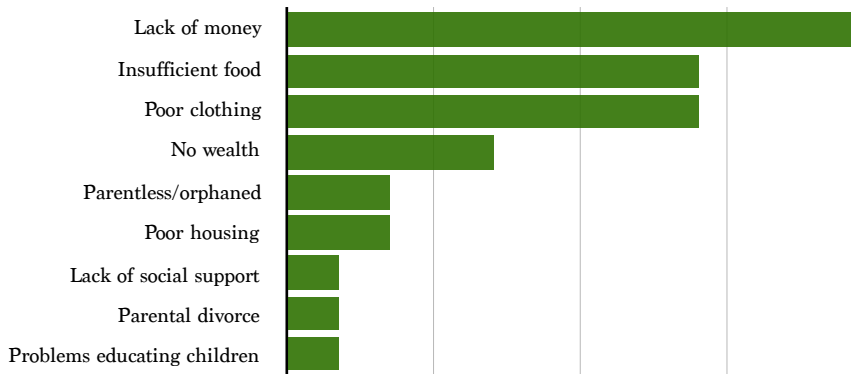
**Zhemgang Dzongkhag**



**Chukkha Dzongkhag**



**Samtse Dzongkhag**



Even though not many children could properly interpret the word 'poverty' in English, they understood it when explained in terms of 'being poor and deprived' or thereof, 'lacking in something important in life'. A majority of the children understood 'poverty as being in the situation of insufficient food and clothing (both in terms of quantity and quality), and lack of money which otherwise [they felt] could solve many of their problems'. However, none of the children singled out poverty dimension; they generally talked about combination of many deprivations.

"Sometimes we do not have sufficient food [at home] when our father is not paid by his Jinda [contractor]. I get to eat three meals a day, but the foods that I eat daily are not nutritious. It is too expensive to buy good foods and clothes [these days]. It becomes even harder when our father does not get enough money due to his periodic drinking habits. That time, we normally borrow from our neighbours." (TYRP03, Age 13, Female)

"I have not heard about the word 'poverty'. But, I understand poor people as the ones who get to eat breakfast, but have to skip lunch; and if they get lunch, then they have to skip dinner." (ZHRP18, Age 14, Female)

"Poor people [are the ones who] live with insufficient foods and clothing. Money is important, but we can survive [without money] by relying on [the products from] our agricultural lands." (TYRP02 Age 15, Male)

"[Poverty] is a state of being without sufficient food and clothing and mattress at home. Poor people also don't have their own lands and houses." (TYRP13, Age 16, Female)

"I understand poverty as lack of money. Poor people cannot afford to send their children to school, as they cannot buy books and shoes for children [because they do not have money]." (SPRP03, Age 16, Female)

Some participants associated poverty with lack of expensive clothes that was manifested in their appearances. Absence of good clothes was usually found to be associated with feeling of dissatisfaction, frustration and shame.

"Poor [children] wear old clothes and even rags. They go to school without nice shoes and mostly wear slippers. They do not have money to buy a nice pair of shoes and often get frustrated over their parents' inadequacies. They look dirty and pitiful. They live mostly in huts." (TYRP19, Age 10, Female)

"Poor children do not have nice clothes. They wear rags and slippers. They are ashamed of going to school because they observe their rich friends wearing relatively better clothes. They do not take pack lunches. Poor children use bags given by some teachers and friends." (SPRP21, Age 10, Female)

Many children said that poverty is obvious by the look of their houses. A poor family's house is typically a hut (though most households now have CGI aluminium roofing) with no proper walls or a mud house requiring proper plaster. Toilets are located outside (built of plastics, rags and bamboo). Many of them mentioned that their houses are crowded, making it difficult for them to study and do their

homework. Some even told that their own housing condition dissuades them from inviting their friends (social interaction).

“Being poor means no job, no money and no good clothes. Poor people live in small [huts] and ramshackle and dilapidated houses that leak when it rains. My parents cannot afford to repair our house. This makes me feel low; I cannot invite my friends to my house. Our toilet is very bad. It is located outside [the house]. I feel scared at night to go out to toilet.” (SPRP05, Age 11, Male)

“Poor people live in mud houses without proper furniture and water supply. They don't have enough money, and usually they work on other people's land.” (SPRP11, Age 15, Male)

Beside lack of good food, house and money, children further associated poverty with the whole range of issues such as being children of alcoholic parents, parents lacking power and capability, parental divorce, broken homes, single-parenting, unfulfilled dreams, absence of support from their relatives and friends, being ill and disabled, being looked down in the society, being abused and maltreated, and other unfavourable social and individual circumstances. On the whole, children's perceptions of poverty reflected the multi-dimensional nature.

“Poverty is a difficult situation that we face when our parents get divorced. It is also a condition of lack of money, food, clothing and proper shelter.” (TYRP12, Age 14, Female)

“Poor children do not get enough food and good clothes. In addition, they don't have strong background: parents, relatives and friends who can help them. Rich people are self-sufficient while poor people suffer from the lack of subsistence needs. They are powerless, as they cannot do anything [as they wish]. Poor people sell their lands to become poorer.” (TYRP17, Age 13, Female)

“Child poverty means a child not fulfilling his or her desire, having monetary problem, and not being able to go to school. Poor parents always face shortage of food and have to work for other people. They are powerless and not so confident [in life]. They are looked down in the society. Such parents cannot help their children who then have to suffer so much and will continue to remain poor when they grow up.” (PGRP02, Age 17, Female)

“Poor family is the one which is stigmatised [by people] mainly for drinking habits of the adult members. My family is poor because our father drinks a lot. Due to this, our neighbours have nothing good to say about us. We feel shamed of his drinking habit in addition to our problem of meeting the basic necessities.” (SPRP01, Age 17, Female)

“Poor children gets nothing except scolding from their step-parents.” (SARPI0, Age 15, Male)

“Poor families face shortage of foods and clothes, and are always dependent on other people. They have multiple problems like a constant conflict within the family, parental drinking, failing to take proper care of their children, and lack of peace and happiness in the family. When such situation exists, children are deprived of decent



school uniforms, stationaries, other basic essentials, mental peace, and happiness.” (SRP02, Age 17, Male)

“Some parents are very poor and stay in remote places. They cannot send their children to school. Thus, they always remain poor. If parents get divorced, their children usually stay with their mothers who are not able to provide them good clothes, food, and education. Some children live with stepfamilies where they become vulnerable to cruel treatment of stepparents. Some children are handicapped. They do not get proper care [from parents and relatives].” (SPRP16, Age 18, Male)

“Children are poor if our parents are divorced. We are poor if our parents are always drinking, and do not bother about our welfare. Richer parents are usually supportive of their children. They have more wealth, and can do anything for their children; while poorer ones [like me] live in small houses with nothing except empty plates and mugs. Empty plates and mugs; empty stomachs!” (SPRP14, Age 15, Male)

“More poor children get frequently sick because they do not have sufficient foods. They usually get headache, stomachache, and have wounds on their bodies.” (SARPI2, Age 11, Female)

“Poor children are the ones who suffer after their parents have died. Children of divorced parents are usually poor. These children are taken care of by their grandparents or uncles and aunties.” (SPRP14, Age 11, Male)

### *Children's lived experiences of deprivations*

#### *Material deprivations*

Children talked about different manifestations of poverty that they were experiencing in reality. Most of them mentioned of ‘having their basic needs unmet and their difficult familial circumstances’. The most commonly reported material deprivation was a periodic shortage of food.

The next common deprivations (in order of importance) were poor housing condition, water shortage, and inadequate clothing. Lack of money (included here under material deprivation), was cited so often. The material deprivations that children have reported that they actually suffer are demonstrated in figure 2.3. Larger circles relatively represent the most common forms of deprivation (as reported by the children participating in the interviews).

Several other forms of deprivation were reported like shortage of cooking fuel, home-school distance, poor condition of toilets, inadequacy of stationaries, lack of TV, poor transportation services, education deprivation (this was expected to count low, as the interviews were mostly conducted with the school-going children), and lack of phones and computers, etc. compared to the most quoted reasons like shortage of food and clothing, monetary problem, poor housing, and problem of water shortage.

Figure 2.3: Material deprivations experienced by the sampled children



A few examples of how children experienced material deprivations are given below. The detailed cases or narratives will be published as a separate volume in future.

### *Food shortage*

"Food is not enough. That is the reason why we eat only two meals a day. I skip breakfast. Sometime I feel hungry, but I cannot help myself. I feel the food served in school is far better than what I usually eat at home." (TYRP09, Age 12, Male)

"We have no timely meals; we eat whenever we are hungry. Food is insufficient when our father drinks and fails to go for work. I do not take pack lunch [because we face food shortage]. I do homework during lunch break when other children eat their mid-day meals." (SRRP01, Age 17, Female)

"My parents were long divorced. I had to go through bitter experience. In school, I used to eat oranges during lunch break to [simply] fill up my stomach. Due to my personal problem, I left school and joined monk-hood." (PGRP12, Age 16, Male)

### *Clothes*

"My mother keeps on saying that she will buy [me] a new pair of school shoes, but it has been over weeks now. My teacher [at first] did not allow me into class without shoes. He took away my slippers, but he gave them back to me [out of pity]. Now school allows me [to attend classes] without wearing shoes. I am wearing the dress [gho] that I had been wearing since three years ago. The gho is torn now. I feel shy in front of friends and teachers." (TYRP14, Age 11, Male)

"I feel sad and ashamed in front of others when I wear torn shoes [in school]." (TYRP15, Age 15, Female)

### *Shelter*

"Our house is made of [paved] mud. It is very small with just one room. Six of us live together. I wish if my house is little bigger and is surrounded by vegetable garden." (TYRP04, Age 12, Female).

"My major problem is a shelter. Other children live in buildings, while I live in a simple hut. This often makes me feel sad." (TYRP05, Age 12, Female)

"I live in a house made up of CGI sheets. We have only one room. Since it is too crowded, we find it difficult to study and do our homework. In summer, we feel too hot to live inside the house." (ZYRP 02, Age 15, Male)"

### *Water*

"Water [that] we drink is collected from a small pond. I don't think we get sick by drinking that water, but I know it is not so clean. I wish we have a piped water." (TYRP18, Age 12, Male)

"Tap water is not constant. Most of the time, we collect water from a pond, which is located about one hour walk from our house. Water source has started to dry [in recent years]. This affects us [children], who actually have to fetch water. We spend our time fetching water than studying." (PGRP19, Age 14, Female)

"We face water shortage due to an irregular supply. We can't even wash our clothes [on time]. We fetch water from other places [neighbours' houses], where we have to walk quite a distance. We are not able to keep ourselves clean as a result of which we often fall sick." (TYRP04, Age 12, Female)

### Money

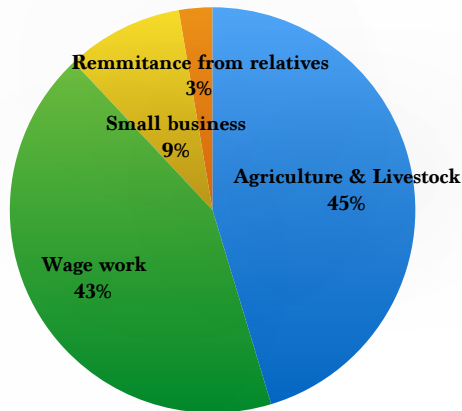
"I face monetary problem in school. Our captains and teachers always collect money [for common purpose]. I am not able to give the class contributions for which I become the object of scorn. I do not ask from my parents and sister knowing they also do not have [money]." (PGRP19, Age 14, female)

"Our family's income was better in the past. We have moved backwards now after our orange trees have started drying (disease). We now face [severe] monetary problem. The only way we can earn is to work on the roads and in housing construction. I work during school break, but the work is too tiring and difficult for my age." (PGRP11, Age 15, Male)

It was observed that most children had their families depending on agriculture and livestock, and earning additional incomes by selling farm products and through wage-earnings. Many of them reported about their parents and other family members working in the construction sector (roads, house constructing, logging sector, etc.) to earn additional income. Figure 2.4 provides others sources of income for participants' families.

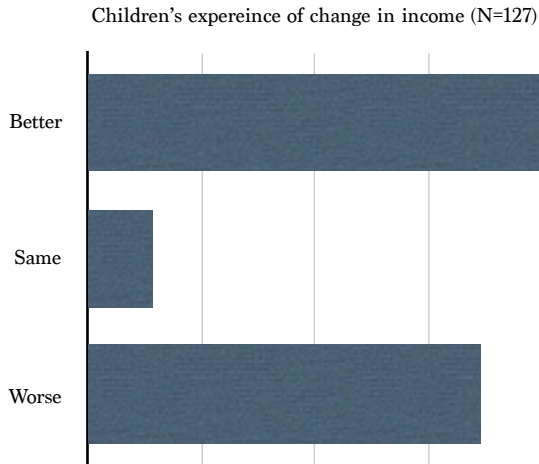
**Figure 2.4: Source of income (poor children's families)**

Source of income (poor children's families/  
houses) N=75



Many children told that their families' incomes have become better in the recent years; while almost equal number of children also reported that their families' incomes have gone worse (figure 2.5).

**Figure 2.5: Children's experience of change in family income**



### *Distance to school*

“My school is far away from home. My neighbours’ children and I have to walk for about two hours daily. When it rains, we get soaked and then teachers scold us. We encounter wild animals like wild boars and monkeys on the way. I have to wake up early so that I can reach school on time. I am spending more time walking to and fro [the school]. I wish if I could [get a chance to] study in a boarding school.” (SPRP16, 17, Male)

“I have to walk about three hours daily to attend my classes. I get tired walking and cannot concentrate on my studies. This is my main problem.” (CKRP 01, Age 15, Male)

### *Cooking fuel*

“We cook on fire. We do not have electric cookers and gas stove. My uncle says he will buy a curry cooker and rice cooker when he go to Thimphu to sell his woven clothes during Tarayana Foundation’s event.” (PGRP15, Age 11, Female)

“Our village has electricity, but not in our house. We could not get the electric line, as we do not have money to buy wires and sockets.” (ZHRP03, Age 16, Male)

### *Toilet*

“Our toilet is built of plastics and bamboo. It is located outside the house. The health officials tell us to keep it clean. It is difficult to use toilet during nights, especially for my mother who has a broken leg. I get scared to go to toilet at night.” (PGRP08, Age 16, Female)

“Our toilet is non-flushable and is located outside. We share toilets with other neighbours. Sometimes, we find it hard to get access to toilet due to over-crowding .” (SPRP 06, Age 15, Female)

### *Phones and computers (communications and information)*

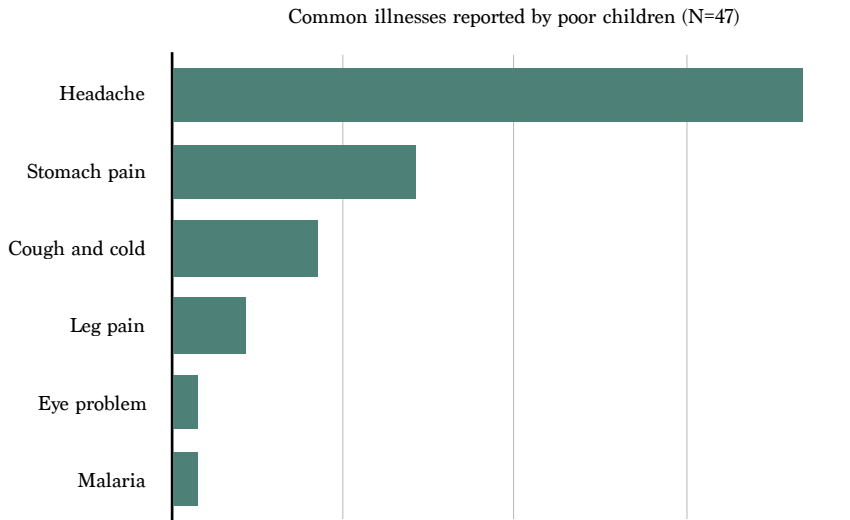
“Mobile phones have become important. We can call our parents and friends. I do not own a phone. I wish if I have one. I feel sad when I see my friends using mobile phones.”(ZHRP03, Age 16, Male)

“I heard computer is useful for getting knowledge. Except for a few rich children, we do not know what computer is. I can only wish if I have one.” (ZHRP09, Age 15, Male)

### *Health*

The most commonly reported illnesses are headache and stomach pain (figure 2.6). Some children hinted that they tend to get headache when they become so anxious about their poor conditions, when their parents quarrel, and when their parents come home drunk. It seems children’s reporting about getting headaches is often associated with stress. A few children gave an inkling that they get stomach pain due to not eating properly.

**Figure 2.6: Common illnesses reported by participants**



### *Illnesses*

“At present, my grandmother is sick. I get stomachache when I do not eat properly and I get headache when I think about my problems. Stomachache and headache are common among poor children [like me].” (PGRP17, Age 11, Female)

### *Stationaries*

“My mother is the only one to look after me. When my teacher asks me to bring a balloon for my practical class, I cannot take. My mother does not give me even extra

pen, pencil and books that I need in school simply because she cannot afford.” (TYRP14, Age 14, Male)

### *Transportation*

“Poor children often get sick, and I guess it is because they do not get good foods. Moreover, hospital is far and we do not have money to pay taxi fare. We have to walk a long distance [to hospital].” (TYRP08, Age 17, Female)

### *Social deprivations*

Besides material deprivations, children talked about their other problems at homes, schools and communities. These problems are social and emotional in nature. They expressed feeling insecure [of their future], excluded, humiliated and being ashamed. Children related such feelings to the problems of drinking parents, family dysfunction, family stress, parenting issues, maltreatment, study stress, disability and illnesses, inability to participate in social events, inadequate clothing, not living in good houses, and other forms of material deprivations.

Most children talked about their alcoholic parents, who often tend to be unstable and unconcerned about children’s welfare. They further correlated alcoholic parents with divorce and maltreatment. The neglect of a child was associated with drinking parents, poverty and multiple family problems as of result of which many of them reported they were not doing well in studies. Single parenting was seen as a frequent source of problem, possibly in relation to neglect, material deprivation, and lack of emotional nurturance for a child.

### *Drinking parents, divorce and family breakdown*

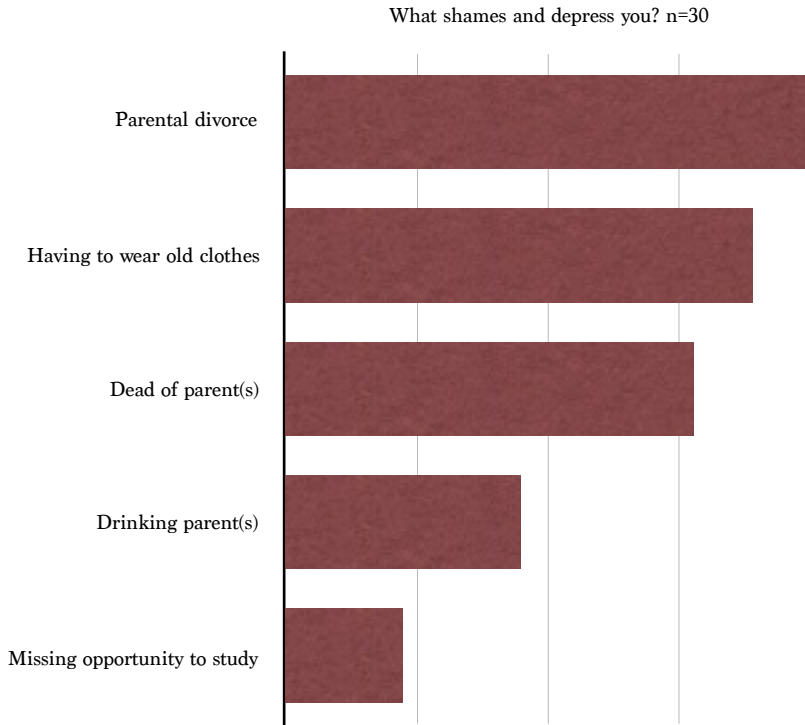
“The greatest problem I faced [as a child] in my life was my father’s drinking habit. He would drink and quarrel with my mother. I always wished if they could control themselves and refrain from fighting when they were drunk. In the end, my father died in a fire accident. My mother is very poor now and struggling to bring us up. We [siblings] live with grandparents. Grandma is not a good woman; she scolds my mother even on an issue of shortage of chilies. We eat maize when we don’t have rice. Sometimes, we do not even have enough maize, so we have to borrow from others. All these are happening due to our father’s drinking habit, and now he is gone forever.” (ZHRP28, Age 13, Female)

“My parents were useless to me. My mother died when I was a baby. She died of drinking. My father used to beat her [for drinking]. She would keep alcohol near her pillow and drink and drink... when my father was away. She died after she fell off the bed, being heavily drunk. She did not take care of me (paused and wiping of her tears). My eye was damaged...after I fell down. I wished if my parents had taken a good care of me so that I could have both my eyes today.” (PGRP16, Age 15, Female)

As presented in figure 2.7, most children attributed their feelings of shame and depression to their parental divorce, then next to having to wear old clothes, third, to losing parents, fourth to their parents’ habit of drinking, and lastly to having missed the opportunity to study. The role of parenthood and the place of children in

the family seem to affect children's life in a considerable way. Some children made a mention of difficulty being in a single-parent family. A large number of poor children seem to live with their siblings, grandparents or guardian. All these indicate about inadequacy of family function, directly bearing on the lives of children and exposing them to cruelty, maltreatment and abuse.

**Figure 2.7: Sources of shame and depression**



Some children discussed about family disruption due to divorce. They were observed to be deeply resentful of their parents' divorce. Some children seem to get good quality parenting from their grandparents and elder siblings, but many of them mentioned that they have to suffer a lot. Those children whose parents were divorced reacted with painful emotions such as sadness, fear of abandonment, anger, worry, grief, and confusion. The short-term consequences, it seemed they were facing, were negative social, psychological and emotional adjustment and poor sense of well-being, including material deprivation. The divorced parents were seen as not being able to act in the best interest of children, maintain warm parent-child relationship, and foster children's resilience. They talked about a significant drop in the quality of parent-child relationship, especially with fathers after divorces.



### Divorce

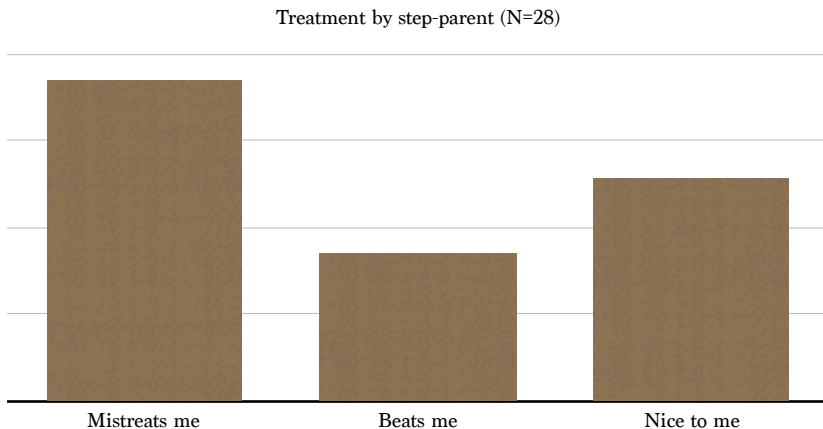
“My parents were divorced [probably] when I was in the mother’s womb. Last year, I stayed with my father, and now I stay with my grandparents. I feel sad and often cry when I think of my parents. They should not have got divorced.” (PGRP10, Age 16, Female)

“My parents were divorced when I was five years old. Both of them used to drink heavily. I left school and joined the monastic body. Three months after I joined the monastery, my mother and stepfather came to see me. They were drunk. They fought here in front of my friends. I didn’t know the reason, but I felt terribly ashamed.” (TYRP13, Age 16, Male)

“I used to feel [seriously] depressed when my parents quarrelled and fought time and again. Those days, I was too young and could not cook for myself. When parents fought, we [children] used to stay empty stomachs. Later they got divorced. Since then I was confused about what to do in life.” (ZHRP30, Age 15, Male)

The problems for most children seem to have compounded when their divorced parents entered into new relationships, particularly when the new partners had their own children. There was an enormous sense of fear, anger and frustration of their step-parents being partial and abusive. A few children talked good about their stepparents, but most of them implicated stepparents as responsible for the neglect and maltreatment (figure 2.8). They stereotyped stepparents as uncaring and cruel. Most children were not aware of the concept of violence. However, it was obvious that many of them, especially those living with stepparents were often subjected to beatings

**Figure 2.8: Treatment by stepparent**



### *Orphaned, Single-parent and step-family*

"Both my parents died after having had been bitten by a snake. We [three children] were left behind young. Our grandparents now take care of us, but they are getting older. I get Nu. 200 as a pocket money in one year. In absence of parents, I don't know what will happen to us when our grandparents become too old [to work and earn]." (ZHRP29, Age 13, Female)

"I am suffering in absence of my mother and due to my father's drinking habit. I have no one to give advice or guide. When I am busy and hungry, I have no one to cook for me, so I go hungry. If I were lucky, my neighbours would give me some foods. That's how I lead my life. But, I am studying hard. I pray to God that He will change my life one day." (SPRP01, Age 17, Female)

"My situation [today] won't be as bad had my mother been alive. I feel sad when I see other children [happily with their parents]. My father does not treat me well. May be, he listens to the stepmother. As a girl, I can't do anything. I did not wish to live with my father, so I came to stay with my sister. Life is not easy [for me] here as well." (TYRP13, Age 16, Female)

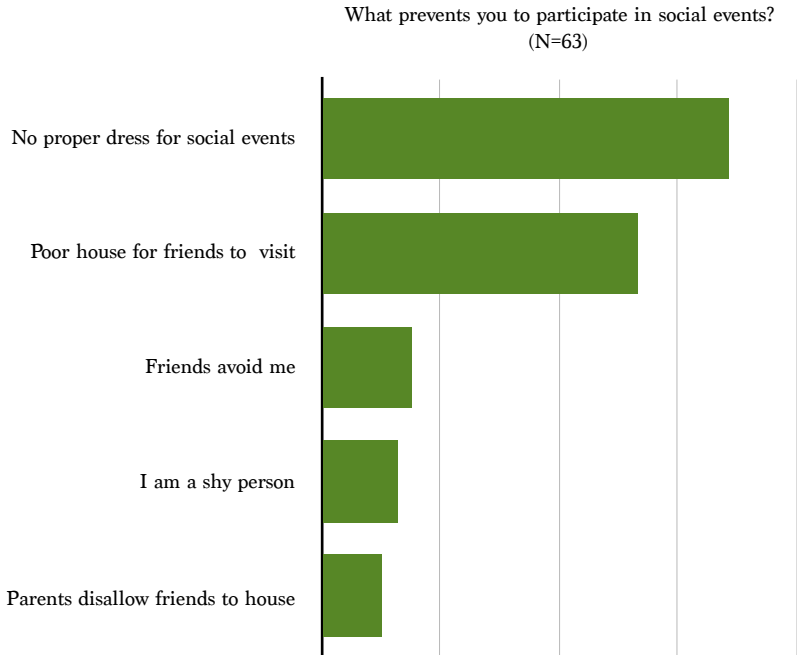
"I work for money after my school hours or during breaks. I give the earning to my mother, but stepfather takes my hard-earned money from her to buy alcoholic drinks. They don't give me my money back when I am in need. My step father beats me....You see here the bruise" (ZHRP17, Age 14, Male)

"We earn by carrying oranges in winter. The problem arises when we do shopping for school. My father and stepmother usually quarrels when shopping for children. She always wants to buy more for her own children [from her previous wife]." (ZHRP30, Age 15, Male)

"I cannot study well at home because a baby always cries and my aunty [step-mother] is always watching Hindi serial. I do not feel like going out because my aunty scolds me. She doesn't bother whether there are other people or not when she is angry with me. My life with her is miserable. My neighbours suggest I should go to boarding school, but where?" (SPRP02, Age 17, Male)

Some children talked about their real experiences of social exclusion and discrimination of being too poor. Many factors seem to exclude poor children socially. The most common factors for social exclusion are: poor children avoiding social gathering and not befriending with relatively richer peers. The main reasons these children gave for being isolated from other peers and social events were lack of proper clothes (especially the costumes for school co-curricular activities) and lack of money or not being able to invite friends to their houses due to poor housing conditions (figure 2.9).

**Figure 2.9: Reasons for inability to participate in social events**



### *Social exclusion*

“I hesitate to invite my friends to my house because it is not well-built like their houses. The roof leaks [when it rains] and the house is never kept clean. We do not have expensive utensils, mattress and furniture. I feel shy of being in this condition. When some friends want to visit my house, my mother sends me to herd the cattle. That time, my friends say they do not wish to be my friends. Moreover, I don’t have toys for my friends. Forget about toys, I do not have an umbrella. I have to go wet to school during rainy seasons. About rich children, their parents drop them at school [by their cars] and they have umbrella too. My single mother cannot afford me what I desperately need, but I am satisfied, though sometimes I feel I am too unfortunate.” (TYRP09, Age 12, Male)

“I am interested in games and sports. I got an opportunity to participate in a school volleyball match, but I gave up after I could not get a shirt [sport dress].” (PGRP10, Age 16, Female)

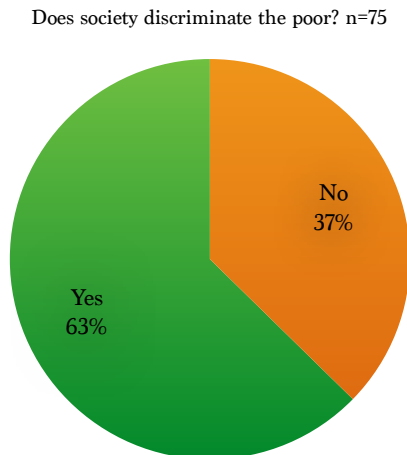
“I hesitate to invite friends to my house because my house is in bad condition. I do not have toys for my friends”. (TYRP09, Age 12, Male)

The recurrent themes in the interviews were 'not being able to invite friends to their houses due to poor housing conditions, lack of toys, and foods to offer' and 'not being able to participate in school events due to lack of appropriate resources for participation (costumes)'. These are examples of how poverty, especially material deprivations, can undermine children's social interactions and relationships with other children or their participation in social and cultural events, often leading to social exclusion.

As shown in figure 2.10, 63% of children (n=75) who responded to a question on 'whether poor children are being discriminated in the society' said there is discrimination. Social stigma and shame associated with poverty emerged as important themes in most of the interviews. Some children refrain from revealing their problems to their teachers and peers out of misgivings about being humiliated in the school. A few of them had even refused to accept the charity supports offered to them for this very reason. Obviously, they were so sensitive to the opinions of their peers, teachers and community members about their situations. This could be considered as their attempts to avoid being stereotyped as the indigent children. Doing so often entails keeping themselves away from their peers causing in them the increased sense of isolation.

"Our villagers know that we are in difficult circumstances: our half-built house, our drunk father, and our dismal material condition. We try to grow vegetables in a small plot, but there is no instance that we get a good yield because our neighbours' animals destroy the crops when we are in the school. When we complain to them, they would speak against us such as that we are poor, children without mother, or children of a drunken father, and so on. In the school, hardly anyone knows about our dismal situation; and we want to prevent anyone from knowing about our plights. When people pour their scorn on us, there is nothing we could do except to feel ashamed, isolated, and often even to wish for death." (SRP08, Age 14, Female)

**Figure 2.10: Whether society discriminate the poor**



### *Discrimination*

“People look down on us [poor children] when we wear shabby clothes and some by looking at our house. We are not allowed to even participate in certain group activities by some of our richer coevals. The best thing is to simply disregard whatever people have to say.” (TYRP08, Age 17, Female)

“I feel most people discriminate against poor children. I have a friend who has both her parents dead. Some students call her a ‘witch’ and condemn her for the death of her parents: ‘she has eaten her parents’. What could this poor girl do? She simply cries.” (TYRP, Age 13, Female)

Some children called attention to how their own disabilities and that of their parents affect their well-being.

### *Disability*

“Some of my neighbours are not good. They tell me that I am a bad person. The worse thing is that they call me a blind [though I can see with one eye]. They are good and I am bad. I cannot do anything against them even when they look at me with open disdain. It is natural that people would be prejudiced about our disability and powerlessness.” (PGRP16, Age 15, Female)

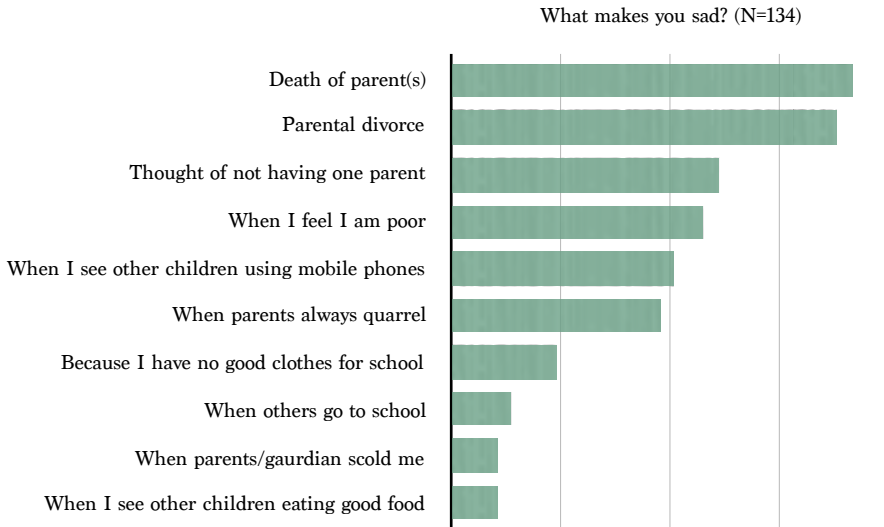
“We are three children and I am the eldest. We all are studying. My mother is a paraplegic (a broken leg). She cannot work and earn. In her place, I have to work and earn during winter break such as carrying stones or oranges for Nu. 300 a day. The work is toilsome, but I have to work manage the family.” (PGRP08, Age 16, Female)

### *Emotional ill-being*

On probing children on the things that make them sad in their life, they gave several reasons (figure 2.11). Among many reasons, the most common ones appertained to their parents. A majority of them said they often feel sad over the early demise of their parents and parental divorces. Separation from the parents as the results of death and divorce seem to potentially disrupt the lives of children thorough psychological loss and loss of financial support. Some children reported about their constant despondence over being poor, deprived, and over relentless parental conflicts.

There were a few children who told about being downcast for not possessing the mobile phones like their affluent peers does. This is the case of technological deprivation. This heralded the negative influence of modernisation and technological advancement on their lives and reflected their propensity towards developing virtual identities. Whatever it may be, it was obvious that the costs of shame and discrimination associated with poverty and deprivation was relatively high for the poorer children.

**Figure 2.11: Reasons for feeling sad in life**

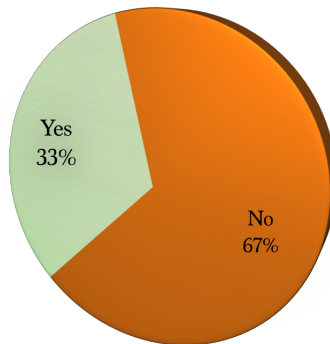


### *Suicide*

Suicidal thoughts and attempts were common among poor children. These were triggered (as reported by children) by their dismal situation. They seem to see suicide as the permanent to their never-ending problems. About 33% of children said they had suicidal thoughts (figure 2.12).

**Figure 2.12: Suicidal thoughts among poor children**

Suicidal thoughts among poor children  
(N=90)



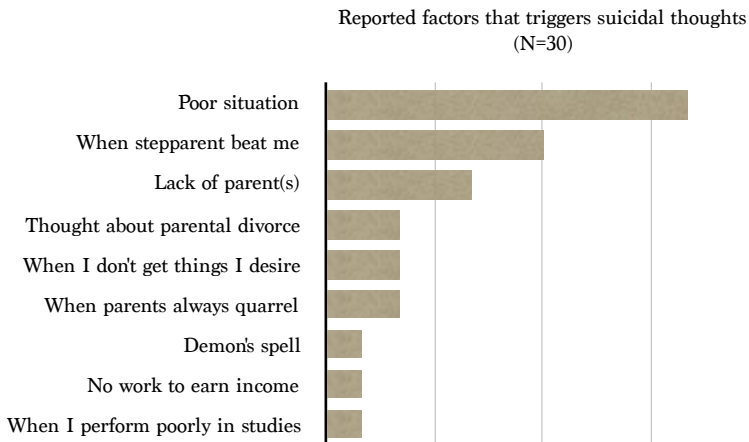
“I attempted to kill myself out of frustration over my parents’ drinking and quarrelling habits. Many children want to commit suicide when they experience domestic violence. Some children are good at studies, but due to family problems they want to kill themselves. Some students here say they want to commit suicide when their love relations fail; and when the school management wants to report their disciplinary problems to their parents or guardians.” (ZHRP09, Age 15, Male)

“My sister and I decided to commit suicide. The reason was that our neighbours had been telling us time and again that we are orphan girls. We decided to commit suicide together and were wailing when our uncle and aunt came and intervened. They said we should not feel disappointed by what others have to say about us. They comforted us by saying we are like their biological children.” (ZHRP11, Age 15, Female)

“ Sometimes, I lament my birth as a wretched child in this human realm. Life is too bad for me. But, I don’t think it is good to kill myself, whatever life is like for me.” (ZHRP30, Age 15, Male)

Among many motives for suicide, the most common one was ‘their being sad about being poor’. The negative home environment, where parents or guardians mistreat or abuse children (say, domestic violence) seems to trigger suicidal thought among children. Children who had experience suicidal thoughts made it explicit that: (1) shame and frustration associated with being too poor; (2) experience of maltreatment and violence at homes; (3) absence of parents (either due to death or divorce and separation); (4) never-ending conflicts in the family; (5) unemployment situation; (6) poor performance in studies; (7) relationship problems; (8) loneliness or social isolation are some of the main stimulus (figure 2.13).

**Figure 2.13: Factors triggering suicidal thoughts among poor children (sample)**



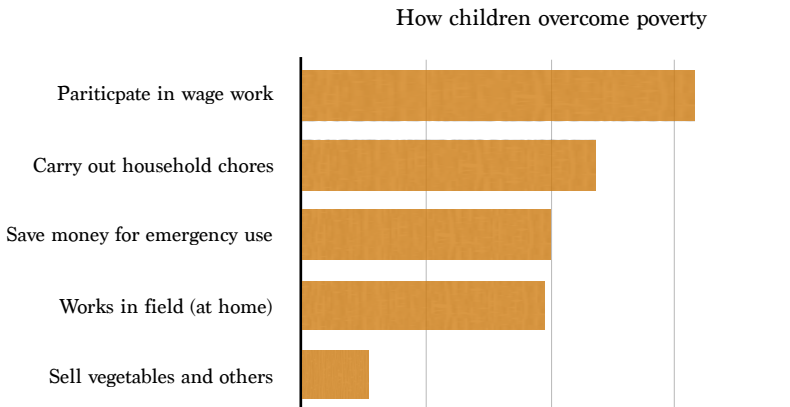
They shared about the utter sense of hopelessness, helplessness and despair one could feel before suicidal thoughts sets in. The ultimate reason for suicidal thought and attempt for any child is to escape from an unbearable life situation. Some wants to seek revenge against real or perceived wrongdoings of their parents, schools and communities. In one case, two sisters planned to commit suicide together; and the reasons were that their parents have died and causing burden on their uncle and aunty.

*Poor children's coping mechanism or survival strategies*

While most children displayed some signs of despair over their bad situations, they also believed that they could change their circumstances as they grow up. These children were highly oriented towards work and achievement. They had high sense of enthusiasms towards studies and works. They said they work hard to supplement the family's income and compensate for their parents' inadequacies. They have their own solutions to deal with the problems. Nonetheless, there were some differences among them, in terms of the extent to which they were confronted with poverty and the degree of coping. It was obvious that most of them have very little time to spare for leisure activities and peer interaction simply because they have to work at homes and during vacations (of course, many said they get to interact with their friends when they work together on certain construction projects).

Poor children and their parents seem to use various coping mechanisms to address their material and social problems. This reflects their resilience in the face of vulnerability. Various coping mechanisms usually adopted are shown in figure 2.14. The most important coping mechanism is engaging themselves in household chores (washing utensils, cleaning houses, laundering, cooking, weaving, even brewing alcohol, and tending to younger siblings). Other children are involved in carrying out fieldworks like herding cattle, collecting firewood, gardening, preparing manure, and other hard agriculture labour. They told they usually work to support their poor parents and mitigate material deprivations.

**Figure 2.14: Coping mechanisms for poverty and deprivation**





During school breaks and winter vacations, most poor children have to work at the roads and in harvesting and transporting oranges. These, they are doing to earn money to supplement their parents' income (direct contribution to family income) and meet their school expenses (indirect contribution). Some children shared their experiences of selling fruits, vegetables and other farm produce; some of them collecting scrapes for sale. Whatever, a working child earns, a larger chunk of it is spent for emergencies and essentially to meet their own schools expenses.

*Coping with poverty and deprivations*

"During winter vacations, I usually work with my sister to harvest and transport oranges. The money that we earn, we spend on buying basic household items and the rest school uniforms, shoes, and stationaries. I fetch firewood to help our single mother. We do not have electric utensils and cooking gas." (TYRP05, Age 13, Male)

"I face shortage of pen and pencil [sometimes] and I do not have money to buy them, either. I manage school dress and shoes using the money that I earn during winter vacation by working on road and house construction. Life is really tough-going for poor children [like me]." (TYRP05, Age 13, Male)

"My grandfather often gives me little money. I save it in a small plastic bag [and I have some here]. I want to buy school shoes when I save enough. I feel the urge to use the money to buy some sweets, juice and snacks, but I have to save it to buy shoes. My single mother cannot afford to buy me a pair of shoes." (TYRP09, Age 12, Male)

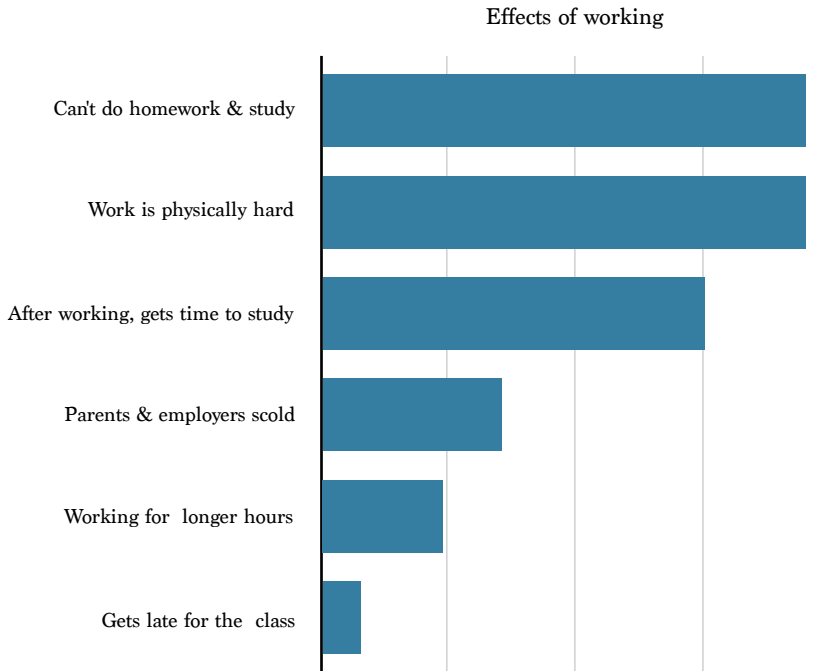
"I help my mother to brew alcohol [which we sell]. We brew alcohol normally on Sundays. It doesn't affect my studies." (TYRP11, Age 13, Female)

"I work very hard. I look after our animals and a younger sister. Sometimes, I go around and collect empty bottles and tins, which I sell [to earn] to local shopkeepers. I spend the money on vegetables, food and clothes." (PGRP12, Age 16, Male)

The trend of poor children working on wage is an effective mechanism of overcoming various deprivations. However, this turn out to be the source of an extreme burden for some children sometimes. Most working children told that their works are often tiring and physically demanding. Some children even mentioned of not being able to concentrate on their studies [when they work], seemingly the effect of child labour. Some of them pointed out that they are usually forced to work by adults, especially their stepparents. A few talked about work exploitation.

As shown in figure 2.15, most children reported they can't do their homework or study after heavy works at homes. Some even complained that their works are physically challenging. However, some children were of the view that working at homes doesn't affect their studies, while others talked about being scolded by their parents and employers if they don't work hard.

**Figure 2.15: Reported negative effects of children having to work at homes**



### *Harassment at work places*

“We [a group of students] laboured in a difficult circumstance last year for a local contractor for a month. The contractor agreed to pay us Nu. 3500 a month initially, but when she paid us; our payment was reduced to Nu. 2500 instead of Nu. 3500. Moreover, she made us to wait in Samtse to get our payment, which I think was a sort of harassment. We could not complain to anyone [either] because being poor, we were powerless.” (SRPR02, Age 16, Male)

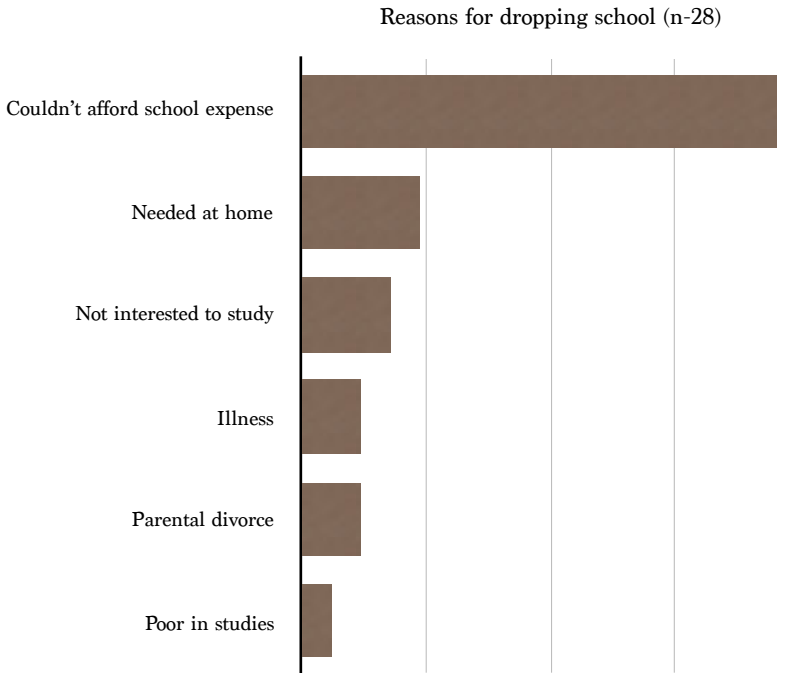
“I work as a parking fee collector. It is a very difficult job. I could not study further, as my parents could not afford basic school expenditure. Some people frown at us or scold us when we ask for the parking fees. Sometimes, they go away without paying the parking fees. When we don't collect the minimum amount on any day, the company deducts the amount from our salary. Once I got only Nu. 400 as my monthly remuneration, which I thought was not fair. But could the poor girl like me do?” (CHRP15, Age 18, female)

### *Education deprivation*

Most children participating in the interviews were school-going, but there were a few who had already left the schools. The common reason for dropping out of

school was their parents' inability to bear the nominal costs associated with schooling such as buying uniforms, stationaries, and school fees (figure 2.16). Some had to leave schools to help their parents. Having had to leave school at early age has left them with some sense of regrets. A few of them had left schools due to school-home distance, illnesses, disinterest in studies, and parental divorce.

**Figure 2.16: Reasons reported by dropouts for dropping school**



### *Leaving school*

“School is not far from my home. I dropped out of school because my father could not afford annual school fee and uniform. I did not have problems with books; school used to provide [free] books. Now, my father gets upset when I tell him I want to go back to school.” (TYRP13, Age 16, Female)

“ I left school after class one. I had to quit because of long distance between school and home. It used to be difficult for me financially [as well]. I had to walk a long distance between home and school [for over an hour], sometimes even at the risk of being killed by landslides.” (ZHRP01, Age 15, male)

“I left school after my parents [who were divorced] did not give me school dress and a bag. We are seven children in total. We could not afford school bags, so we used to

take our books in plastic bags. I used to collect the books that others have thrown away and reuse them. My father who is in Nganglam at present and my mother who is in Phuentsholing are not at all concerned about our plights. I don't know what kind of parents they are!" (PGRP01, Age 16, Male)

### *Children's perception of happiness*

Poverty seems to have a number of negative impacts on the lives of children. Many children described their lives more in a negative way. When asked about what would make them happy, they gave multiple responses, suggesting happiness is a multi-dimensional concept. Most children related happiness to the objective aspects of life—the observable facts such as family situation, household income, educational achievement, good housing, food sufficiency, family's possession of land, and good health status. A few talked about their emotional and social well-being, and related happiness to the state of being free of worries and tensions. Other children linked happiness and good social relations (being closer with others and maintaining good relationships with parents, relatives and friends).

Some children posited that the family is fundamentally an important source of happiness; and it is so, when there exist good relationship among the family members. They said that having supportive parents make their lives meaningful, as they feel loved and valued even when they are materially poor. Some children who were experiencing unfavourable home environment reported of being habitually sad, angry and frustrated. Not having a good family (also supportive parents) seems to affect them in many ways. Especially, children from dysfunctional families were depressed and pessimistic about their lives. They seem to depend so much on friends who provide them social, emotional and material support (sharing lunches, stationaries, pocket money and clothes, etc.). Many children said they choose not to have many friends, anxious that the richer peer might look down on them.

A majority of poor children saw schooling as the important measure to move out of poverty. This was the reason for the presence of a strong desire in them to perform well in schools while they were also concerned about how they would fare in their studies. The learning experiences of these children were being adversely affected by a number of factors like being poor, lack of parental support, and social exclusion. Some of them related their poor emotional states with their poor performances in studies.

Many children highlighted the importance of money for fulfilling their material needs. They said: 'money is the main source of happiness'. This could be true for them due to their low living standards. Lack of money restricts the purchase of goods and services, which in turn affects material and emotional well-being of any individual or family. Children from the income poor families were worse off than their richer peers in terms of their perceived happiness. Among many negative emotions, the most common ones that children often experienced were loneliness and low self-esteem. Figure 2.16 shows children's perception of happiness (response to the question on what makes them happy). Larger circle relatively represent the most common indicator of happiness.

Figure 2.16: Children's idea about 'Happiness'



## *Happiness*

“Happiness to me is to be with parents and siblings. Sharing what you have with other people begets happiness. I am happy when I could help my parents and brothers.” (PGRP02, age 17, Female)

“Happiness to me is the feeling we experience when we have plenty of water at home and when my parents don't drink alcohol.” (PGRP19, Age 14, Female)

“Money is happiness for me. If we don't have money, we won't have to eat enough food, wear good clothes, and live in a better house.” (PGRP15, Age 17, Female)

“I will be happy only if my uncle and aunty stop quarrelling. I don't understand why they are always in tussle. In my village, people are happy when they have enough food, water and clothes, but I always see them drinking.” (SPRP 04, Age 15, Male)

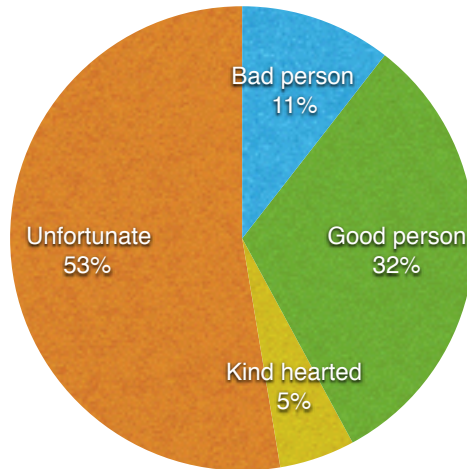
“Being in a company of my friends makes me happy. My tension recedes when my friends are around. But then, I tend to get worried again when I reach home. Happiness to me means is a condition when everyone live in peace and close cooperation and understanding.” (SPRP, Age 17, Male)

## *Children's identity and sense of self*

Poverty is a stigmatised concept that some poor children do not wish to identify with. There were a few children whose dismal situation was not very much known to their teachers. These children have decided to keep secret their poor status in schools. This, they said they were doing to avoid negative stereotyping by other students and teachers.

Some children talked about saving money to buy clothes and shoes that could improve their self-image and social identity. A few of them, despite the dire need of external support, did not want to get charity support out dreading they might get labeled as poor and dependent as many others are experiencing such humiliation. Some children were even resentful of being looked down by their peers and teachers. In general, there was no hesitancy among them to accept themselves as poor children. They also described their own identities in several ways: majority of them perceived themselves as unfortunate children (53%); 32% as good children, and 11% as bad children (figure 2.17).

**Figure 2.17: Identity and sense of self among sample children**



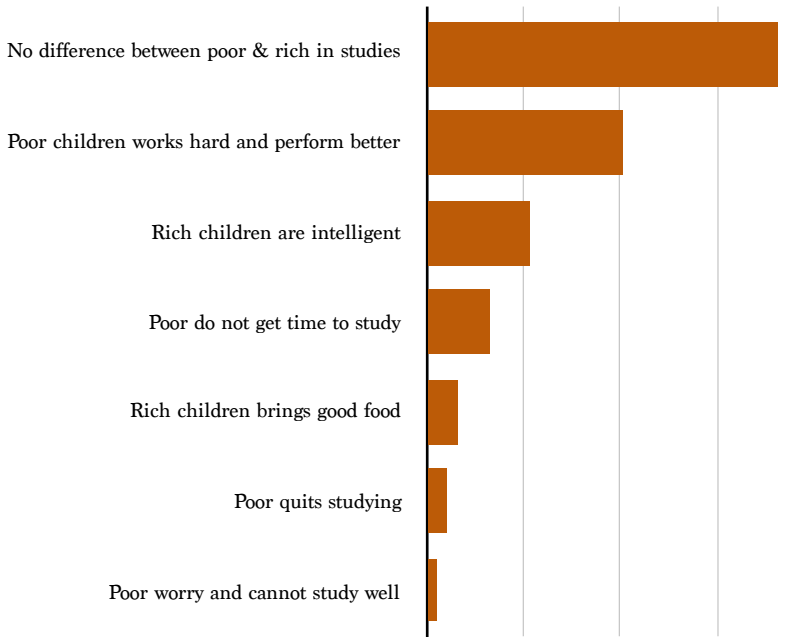
### *Self-identity*

“I feel I am unfortunate of being a poor child. Quite often, I think of [committing] suicide, particularly when I face money problem. But, I borrow money from my friends. I cannot borrow money from most of my friends because I always find them broke [like me].” (PGRP, Age 14, Female)

“ I observe many of my friends wearing good clothes. If my parents are together today I would be happy like them. I like to wear nice clothes [like them], but I don't have. So I feel unfortunate for being born in the human realm.” (ZHRP30, Age 15, Male)

Some of the children seem to have developed their sense of self-worth in relation to their affluent peers by comparing themselves with others in terms of their performance in studies. A majority of them said there is no difference between rich and poor children in school performance, while others told that the richer children are intelligent and performing better in studies. In some cases, being poor seems to encourage them to work hard and perform well in studies (figure 2.18) having realised the need to overcome their dismal situation. The pressure to overcome their poor situation and ‘stand out’ seems to be present in almost all poor children.

**Figure 2.18: Perceived difference between rich and poor children in studies and other performances**



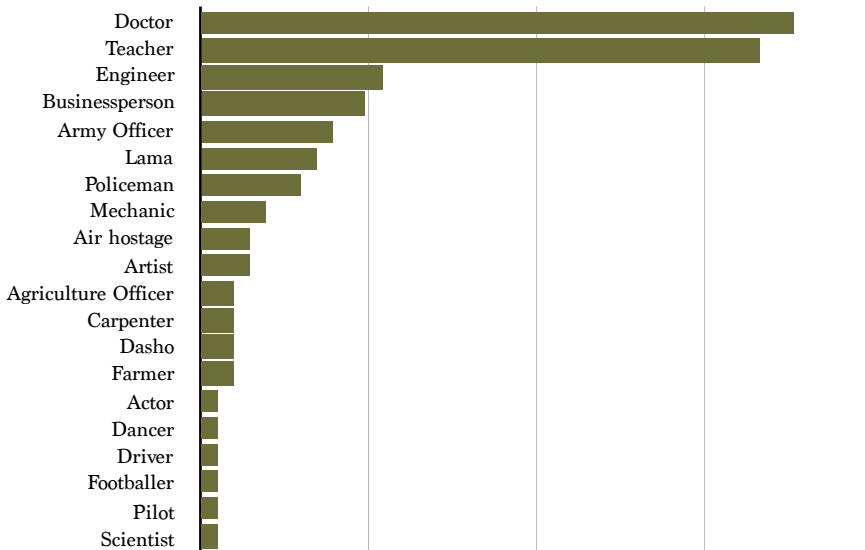
### *Children's dreams and aspirations*

It was found that poor children assume early and significant family responsibilities. Almost all these poor children had ambitions except for a few pessimists. These pessimists had already resigned to their poor circumstances, realising that they may not study beyond certain level due to the rising costs of schooling. The optimistic ones have determined to face any hardship they face. It is good that most poor children have realised that education is the only way to better future.

Most of their ambitions had been shaped by their limited knowledge about different professions and career options. Other than common professions like doctors and teachers, they did not have diverse career goals (figure 2.19). Most children simply wanted to find good jobs and help their parents. They said they want to do better to allow them and their children live better lives than what they and their parents currently experience.



**Figure 2.19: Ambitions of the research participants**



### *Ambitions*

“I want to become a doctor or an engineer. I will work hard to fulfil my ambition. I know my parents cannot fully meet my school expenses. Even then, I want complete my studies by working [on wage] during school break. I want to save money for my school expenses. I hope the government will help me.” (TYRP18, Age 12, Male)

“I want to become a businessman. I am worried that I may not fulfil my ambition. I want to build a nice house and look after my parents. I wish if the government could give us loan to start small businesses.” (PGRP06, Age 17, Male)

One encouraging aspect that came out from the interviews was that poor children have higher life expectations. They seem to know well about their own economic and social limitations and wants to overcome them by working hard. They are sensitive to their families’ financial pressure and try to moderate their demands on their parents or guardian, knowing that the latter cannot afford. Apparently, such strategy seems to have some psychological costs that come in the form of feeling frustrated or sad over their families’ economic conditions.

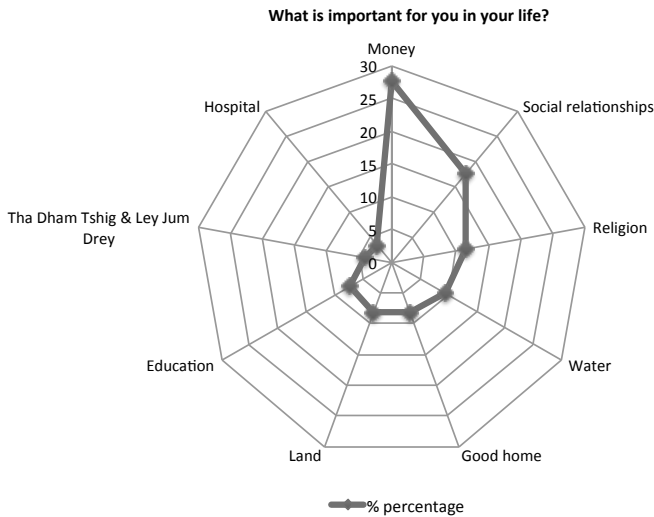
“ I don’t ask for pocket money when my grandparents come to see my sister and me in the school. I know they do not have enough money. I hesitate to even accept Nu. 200 to 500 they give me as pocket money until the mid-term exams. But, I have too choice than to accept money from my rather pathetic grandparents, as I need money to buy exercise books, pen and pencil. I do not spend on other eating stuffs. I feel sad

when I see richer parents come to see their children and provide them with whatever they demand for.” (ZGRP08, Age 16, Female)

*What is important for you in your life?*

Most of the poor children identified money and social relationships as the most important requisites of their lives. Other things that they valued, though less common, were religion, water, good shelter, education, social values, and hospital (as shown in figure 2.20).

**Figure 2.20. Important things of life**



Money stood out as the important thing for poor children (sample); some even said: ‘everything in our lives depend on money’. Their predilection for money could be because they belong to low-income families. From the policy perspectives, any policy and programme directed at increasing the family income could have strongest impacts on the lives of poor children. Despite the urgent need of pocket money, these children said they do not ask their parents for money knowing well that the parents have trouble getting any money. The relatives are the important sources of pocket money for these children, though not consistent. These children said having sufficient money help to boost their confidence and allow them to be accepted as part of their richer peers. For most of them, doing part-time jobs are the important means to earn money.

Good social relationships stood out as important thing next to money. In general, these children described poverty in social and relational ways and reckoned social capital as essential for leading a good life. Their networks with other people: relatives, friends and teachers, they said, help them militate and mitigate their

difficult circumstances. Social relationships seemed to determine these children's participation in social activities, attitudes towards schooling, and overall sense of well-being. For many of these children, the supports they get from their friends seem to help them to deal with anxiety and overcome financial and other material deprivations.

"It is important to have many friends. Mt friends take care of me when I get sick, and make sure that they send leave letters to teacher [on my behalf]. Friends are needed in times of difficulties. My friends give me money when I run broke." (TYRP08, *Male*, Age 15)

### **Children's opinion on ways to overcome poverty**

The sampled children were asked to express their point of views on what could be done to reduce child poverty and improve child well-being. Their suggestions were sought assuming that views on various policy interventions may be more reasonable given their real experiences of poverty and difficult circumstances.

They have given recommendations that may be pertinent to the design of child-sensitive programmes and services as presented in figure 2.21. Most children have suggested providing the poor families the access to cash benefit, subsidy and micro-credit (they actually said: 'give money to poor families'). They pointed out that money is necessary to improve the farm productivity and enhance their income.

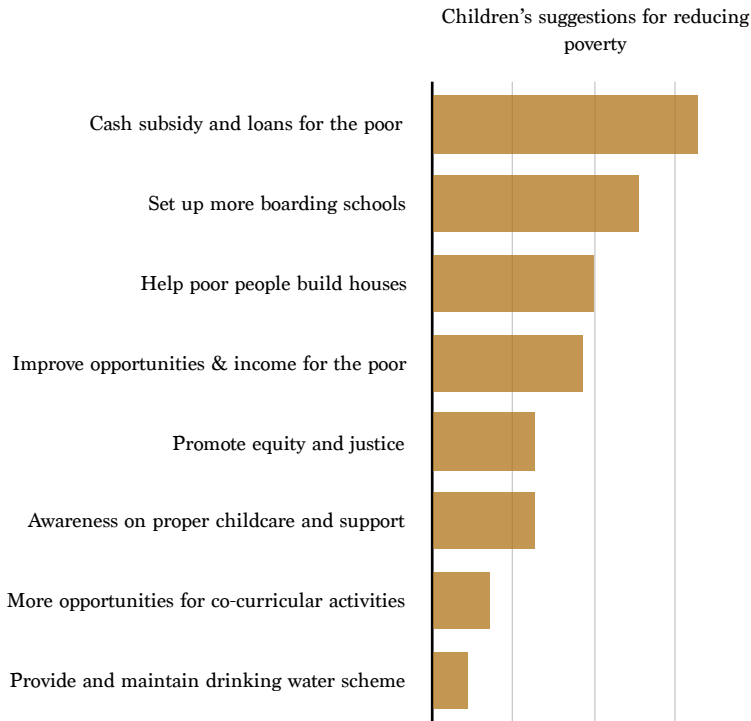
There is no doubt about the Government's commitment to social service delivery, including the provision of free health and education services to each and every child, but the available social benefit programs for poor families and children either do not seem to benefit them equally. For that matter, most children believed that introducing social benefit schemes for the poorest among them could solve many of their problems. Some children have identified introducing more 'free boarding facilities' so that poor children could escape homes indicating they might not be enjoying more caring and friendly home environment. They referred to food scarcity at their homes, and believed that one way of minimising its effect on them is to allow them to study in schools with boarding facilities. Some children accounted about the difficulties they are facing in having to travel a long home-school distance.

Another common suggestion was the need to help the poor families build proper houses. Already this is being done under the King's National Rehabilitation Programme, but more poor families seem to be in need of better homes. Further, some children discussed about the need to provide employment opportunities for their parents as well as part-time jobs for poor children like them. Some pointed out the presence of inequity in the society, as is evident from their belief that: 'rich people were getting richer while the poor ones always remains the same, if not worse'. The equity issues they talked about relates mainly to policies, programmes and resource allocation.

Some children specifically suggested strengthening and expending the parental education in order to inculcate in them the sense of responsibility towards children and skills for proper family management and childcare. They suggested the schools

to organise more social events that may attract and provide appropriate forums for poor and unsociable children. This does not mean they were not being given equal opportunities or discriminated against others in schools; many of the poor children seem to avoid social activities due to some personal barriers such as not possessing money, dress and shoes, and so forth.

**Figure 2.21: Children's suggestions to overcome child poverty**



*Children's Suggestions (quotes)*

“Our Government should create for the poor families the opportunities to earn money [economic capability]. That means, they should be given the works that can help them earn enough money. Most of the poor families are illiterate and less capable financially to meet the additional costs of educating their children. Are poor families like mine being taken care of by the government?” (SPRP03, Age 15, Female)

“There should be equity and justice in the society. It is only the government which can help poor families and their children get what rich people have or at least some stable source of income.” (SPRP14, Age 15, Male)

“I wish if the government could initiate a mass education campaigns to educate our parents on the importance of family support and proper child care.” (CHRP01, Age 17, Female)

“The government can help the poor children to continue their education by providing support in buying school uniforms and stationaries. We know our education is free, but there are many of us whose parents cannot even afford to buy us a decent school uniform. Only the government can help us continue our education and fulfil our dreams.” (CHRP03, Age 16, Female)

“To reduce poverty, my family should work in garden and produce vegetables for sale and rear domestic animals like cows and hens. My family has a huge problem of selling our products. There is a road, but we don't have transportation facility. If we hire a taxi to transport our vegetables, the fare is too high. The government provides us potato and other seeds, but what is the use of producing so much potato when we cannot sell? I see the same problems with our neighbours. We also need to buy more jersey cows for which we need loans.” (ZHRP09, Age 15, Male)

“If poor children are provided with books, clothes and school materials that their parents cannot afford to buy with the support from local and international donors and create some specialised centres for the poor children to gain various [professional] skills, the poor children can do as good as others.” (ZHRP10, Age 16, Female)

### **Complementing the C-MPI**

The qualitative study was carried out to complement the C-MPI. For this reason, the study took into account most of the deprivations present in the C-MPI, except for child mortality, cognitive development of children below five years, malnutrition (specifically for age 0-4), and child marriage (on account of most research participants being school-children). Nevertheless, the qualitative study went beyond the C-MPI to include the themes like social exclusion, discrimination and emotional well-being. Even the choice of Dzongkhags for selecting the study sites and children for interviews had been informed by the C-MPI— the Dzongkhags with higher C-MPIs were selected for the interviews.

The highest censored deprivation experienced by poor children in the C-MPI was the cooking fuel (21.3%). That means, 21.3% of the multidimensionally poor children were deprived in cooking fuel (i.e., they lived in the households that were using dung, wood and charcoal for cooking). In the qualitative study too, though the poor access to clean water, improper sanitation, and poor housing conditions were cited as the common problems, the deprivation of cooking fuels came out to be more severe. In fact, many poor children interviewed reported that their households have access to electricity, but they still rely on firewood for cooking, forget about using LPG fuels. This problem can be largely ascribed to the poor families' incapacity to purchase the electronic cookers. The electronic cookers are more of luxury than necessary items for the poor families. This issue deserves high consideration, as it reflects not only the poor status of those households, but for the health implications the smokes generated from the traditional methods of cooking have on the infants and children.

In the C-MPI, about 8% of the poor children faced food insecurity or shortage of food. The qualitative study as well shows the shortage of food as one major problem among poor children. Many poor children (in the qualitative interviews) reported of having to cut down number of meals each day, go hungry, and borrow money, and foods from other people. These were negative coping strategies they normally use to maintain the household food consumption. They reported of working for wages during school vacations to supplement the household consumption. These children described the works as being physically strenuous; some cases could even be treated as child labour. In the MPI, the child conditions (with child labour, malnutrition, domestic violence and teenage pregnancy as indicators) have the largest contributions (about 33%) to the C-MPI. In the qualitative study, lack of child rights to protection emerged as an important theme, especially among those children living with the stepfamilies and other relatives. Some children reported about their regular exposure to violence and mistreatment at homes.

The deprivation in cognitive skills and school attendance (27%) has the second largest contribution to the C-MPI. The qualitative study too revealed that despite the presence of free universal access to basic education, many poor children had to either leave schools or have high risk of dropping out of schools owing to their families' inability to meet the indirect and nominal cost of schooling. In fact, many poor children could have either never gone to schools or left schools due to the indirect cost of schooling and the opportunity cost of not having children at homes (who can otherwise supplement the parental incomes).

The C-MPI shows the positive role of education of the households' heads in the proper management of the families. The C-MPI poverty rates were quite low among those households with their heads possessing some level of education than those without any education. Most poor children who participated in the interviews described their parents as poor, illiterate, incapable, dependent, and powerless. These children even associated their poor and difficult situation with poor parenting practices at homes that ultimately are contingent on parental education. They identified the education, be it of their parents or their own, as one most important tool to address child poverty.

In the C-MPI, the incidence of child poverty is 64.6% among children living in the poorest households (in the lowest wealth quintile), but 6.3% among children living in the richest households (in the highest quintile). The focus of the qualitative study was on those children that the local leaders, teachers and other community members had identified as poor and living in difficult situation. These children characterised their households as poor: low family income and poor wealth (lacking land, livestock, household furniture, TV, rice cooker and curry cookers, cars, good house, etc.).

In the C-MPI, some children were not multidimensionally poor, but deprived in one or more indicators. The children who participated in the qualitative study, particularly orphan children (staying with relatives or living with stepfamilies) had much to talk about the intra-household discrimination. Even as they live in non-poor households, they seem to be competing for the resources not only with other

siblings or children of stepparents, but with the adult members. This must be the reason why the C-MPI was showing some children in non-poor households as deprived in one or more indicators. Actually, more than 13% of the C-MPI non-poor lives in the national MPI poor households. It is assumed that these children who live in non-poor households are the ones who live with their relatives after their parental death, divorce or negligence by their biological parents. There were many such cases in the qualitative study.

According to the C-MPI, in the age cohort of 15-17, about 25% of children are poor, have not completed class 8 and are not attending school. There were many children in the qualitative study, who were within that age range who had dropped out of school or have risk of leaving school due to their parents' inability to bear the school expenses.

The C-MPI also points out the unmet need for sanitation. Most children claimed their households have toilets, but only the ones which are not properly built. The issue of sanitation (especially in terms of not having proper toilet) came up clearly in the qualitative study.

In the C-MPI, the girls in the age group 15-17 are deprived in the indicator pertaining to attitudes to violence than other age cohorts. The qualitative study came across many such girls who had resorted to accepting ill-treatment and abuse by the family members other than their own biological parents such as stepparents and uncle or aunts.

### **Policy implications and conclusion**

This study has attempted to address several research questions related to child poverty and deprivation, posed in the beginning. These questions included poor children's perceptions of poverty, their real life experiences of being poor and actual deprivations, coping mechanisms, the effects of poverty on their social identity, suicidal tendency among them, things that they value, their dreams and aspirations, their ideas about well-being and happiness, and their suggestions to improve the lives of poor children like themselves in the country. The analysis was based on data collected through the in-depth interviews of carefully selected 140 poor children across six Dzongkhags. This section discusses the implications for ameliorative policy information and concludes with some directions for future research.

Intended to generate the information for policy, this study explored multiple deprivations experienced by poor children through their own reporting. The key areas identified for the exploration were income insecurity, material deprivation, social deprivation and emotional well-being. The study took into consideration the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12) that gives children the rights to express their views on the matters important for them. The key to providing children the rights they deserve is to listen to their plights and accordingly design the policy and programme interventions.

The poverty experienced by children, in all sense of terms, deserves greater attention than that of the adults. Interestingly, the Child MPI is 0.140 while the national MPI (for Bhutan) that includes every age cohort is 0.051. This points to the fact that child poverty is far ginormous than the overall poverty. In other words, children could be facing more deprivations than the rest of the population. This simple evidence is sufficient enough to remind the policymakers that child poverty should matter a lot in the country's overall development efforts.

Tackling child poverty is the most important policy step towards breaking 'poverty cycle'. Undertaking such step would entail in-depth reviews of the current policies and programmes related to the families and children. The policymakers need to understand how children experience poverty, their vulnerabilities, and their expectations. This study is timely, in the sense, it was conducted at the time when the government is driven towards evidence-based policy and planning; is in the process of recognising the merits of targeted interventions; and importantly, when the new SDGs are being adopted and implemented in the country. The new SDGs consider the specificity of child needs.

The present study substantiates the notion that child poverty is multi-dimensional in nature and a very complex issue. It concludes that income insecurity and material deprivations are the defining features of child poverty, as almost all the study children have associated their own poverty with several socio-economic conditions: lack of money, insufficient food and clothing, impoverished housing, water scarcity, inadequate family land, transportation problem, communication, and so forth. While material deprivations including income emerged as the important poverty variables, the study's children have further correlated their difficult situations to various social deprivations: family instability (lack of both the parents, negligent parents, drinking parents, single-parent), social exclusion, child abuse, child labour, peer pressure, shame associated with poverty, and so on. Some children went to a great length to express their sadness and disheartenment over their poor socio-economic state, unstable family situation, and poor social relationships. Indeed, many children looked depressed and pessimistic, indicating the effects of material and social deprivations on their emotional state of well-being.

There was some congruency of the children's accounts of their poverty experience with the definition of child poverty given in the 'State of the World Children' report (UNICEF, 2005). The report defines child poverty as 'the experience of *material, social, spiritual* and *emotional* deprivations'—all essential for child survival, growth and development. According to the same report, deprived children are less likely to be in the position to enjoy their rights, achieve full potentials, and participate in the society. The children's succinct narratives implicated that most of them were living as passive victims of the family



situations, both economic and social. Many children demonstrated the presence of high sense of helplessness, disheartenment, and feelings of inferiority in them. Under such circumstances, it is improbable for them to realise their full potentials, unless supportive policies and programmes are put in place. As a matter of fact, helping the poor families (with many children) overcome poverty by going beyond just increasing the incomes to aiming for greater social investments (to overcome many social ills that confront poor children) may be one way of addressing various problems faced by these children and the likes.

Investing in children may have positive rates of return for the long-term developmental outcomes. Currently, the issues related to children in the country are more or less dealt within the larger policy and budgetary frameworks of 'social sector focus' (that includes everyone) rather than directing the efforts and budgets towards relieving the plights of children living in extreme poverty. These must be the reasons why many poor children repeatedly talked about the equity dilemma, which implied that development outcomes did not necessarily benefit the poorest families and their children. Rather than aiming the social benefit schemes at general population, targeting them on the poorest and most vulnerable families and their children may result in positive outcomes for poor children.

The idea of 'one best way' or 'silver bullet' to address child issues may not work. The multidimensionality and complexity of child poverty warrants more child-centric, multi-pronged, and targeted interventions. The national priorities, focusing on linkages between development and child well-being with constant monitoring and evaluation of the progress and results might help improve the lives of many poor children. The multidimensionality and specificity of child poverty and vulnerability must be visible to those who design social protection schemes and any other child-sensitive programmes.

It was apparent from the children's narratives that most poor families face significant economic pressure due to poor income, lack of sufficient land [to cultivate], parental drinking, and under-employment. Consequently, their children have to struggle to meet their daily foods, get decent clothes, shelter, education, and other basic necessities, including the expenses of their own schooling. The economic hardships these poor children encounter seem to get worse when they lose their parents as result of divorce, separation, and untimely death. Many elderly children interviewed saw prioritising and reinforcing social protection programmes for the poor and vulnerable children as very crucial measures. They have suggested the government to establish more boarding schools with the aim to provide poor children the alternative sanctuaries away from poor and abusive conditions at their homes. For some children food and facilities in schools were much better than at their homes, showing how pathetic their situations might be back at homes. Social protection measures for the poor families with children like

income-enhancement opportunities, means-tested cash supplement or in-kind benefits, and housing assistance may improve child well-being and development.

Poor children, especially school-going ones, works during holidays. This represents their efforts to cope up with the economic hardships by supplementing their families' disposable incomes: to buy food, clothes, and cover their school expenses. Though hardworking children demonstrate their strength and resilience, not all the children can cope up with the same degree. Furthermore, letting poor children fight poverty the way they do would not be strong enough to break the poverty cycle. These children need support of the government and society. Having cash or in-kind benefit schemes may reduce their economic hardships and give them more time to invest on other learning experiences.

There is then the issue of child labour. It is not good to let children work, but then the worst thing may happen to these children if they are restricted from working in various agriculture, industrial, and service sectors in the name of restraining child labour. Children work in construction projects or on the roads, not out of their choice, but due to lack of better choices. They might either go hungry or cannot go to school if they are not allowed to work and earn. Curbing child labour at the cost of child welfare (income) may not be desirable. The law enforcing agencies (responsible for curbing child labour) may have to view this issue from a broader perspective.

In spite of the fact that education is free and universal in the country, for some poor families, meeting the nominal school expenditure meant that families often had to incur relatively huge debt and go without basic items. Many poor children wished if their families are free of debts. Some poor families even prefer to have their children stay at homes rather than in schools to help them with household works and earn additional incomes. Such trend is already picking up in certain regions. For example, with the boom in cordyceps sinensis business in the northern region, the families are reportedly encouraging their children to stay back homes and collect cordyceps sinensis rather than attending schools. This may have negative long-term implications on their children.

Some children have left schools mainly for the reasons that their parents could not bear the nominal cost of schooling. The ideal policy to overcome such setback could be to provide 'free education' without the poor families having to worry about any schooling cost. Such ideal situation may not be practical and sustainable. Nonetheless, more interventions like His Majesty's kidu or grants and financial or in-kind support (for promising students) from the individuals, NGOs and corporations may enhance poor children's educational scope and attainment.

Going by the narratives, the cases of dual deprivations—material and social deprivations seem to be more pronounced among the poorest children whose

parents have died, got divorced or are into chronic drinking habits. These children are, in effect, deprived of proper parenting: lack of love and care from their parents. Initiating the educational programmes on proper parenting for the parents and guardian, specifically for the divorced, negligent and alcoholic parents may prove useful. It may further be noted that some parents are too poor themselves that renders them helpless and impotent. They have no alternative than letting their children go their own ways. In such cases, providing the poor families (with many children) the economic opportunities and cash supports or bolstering their productive activities through provision of various subsidies might be the best options. The life skill programmes targeting those children in difficult circumstances may help them gain important skills and even higher resiliency during uncertainty and adversity; and may help them develop the flairs for social and emotional adjustment, school engagement, and anxiety reduction.

Since the majority of children interviewed (as young as age 12) reported that they work during winter vacations, it is highly likely that short-term technical and vocational training as an alternative form of education during their vacations will benefit them not only in terms of skill acquisition, but in boosting their marketability. Some children reported they help their families by selling vegetables and other farm products at the road points and vegetable markets. Promoting entrepreneurship among them by fostering ideas for establishing small business might greatly benefit them. This means, encouraging entrepreneurship among children as early as the primary level may be worthy an effort rather than making entrepreneurship development activities available only at higher learning institutions and colleges.

The increasing rate of divorce and parental separation seems to put children in difficult situations. It is urgent to understand the impacts of divorce on children and establish ways to protect them from potentially damaging effects of parental divorce. The marriage law exists, but many divorces seem to occur outside the legal framework, more so among the poor families. One policy implication could be to strictly enforce the marriage law. Importantly, introducing the programmes that can make those parents realise about the pernicious effects of divorce and parental negligence on their children might make a worthwhile contribution to the overall well being of children. Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) has initiated the programmes related to effective parenting and healthy parent-child relationship. Introducing more such programmes might prove beneficial for the affected children.

Some children reported of experiencing pressure to keep up with their peers in terms of clothing, pocket money and shame of living in poor housing conditions (relative poverty). These are instances of shame and inferiority complex associated with material deprivations leading to social exclusion and self-stereotyping, and truly the demonstrations of an early awareness of social

difference. For example, not being able to participate in the school activities for not having sport gears or costumes for cultural activities, or being deprived of good pack lunches (that their affluent peers enjoy) are common experiences among poor children. Some stereotyping of being poor, orphaned, and for parents' drinking habits by self or by others seem to be common among the poorest children.

There were some extreme cases of the poor children (who receive the external charity support) being given derogatory names by their friends in schools. This was evident when some children reported that they didn't want to seek external philanthropic support fearing that they might be stereotyped as indignant children in schools and communities. Interestingly, a few of the children interviewed refused to accept the scholarships that the researchers of this study sought for them. It shows how important it is to consider children's sensitivities when charity supports are offered to them.

If these children were to fully participate in social events and interact with peers and others, or be extrovert in nature, which is one of the components of promoting child rights, they must be brought into the mainstream by removing such simple barriers for participation in school programmes and positive interactions with peers. Targeting poor children for Bhutan scouting, winter camping, and similar programmes might reduce their social isolation and social exclusion. Surprisingly, only a few of the poor children interviewed did mention about their participation in any community forums and programmes governance. Their voices in general seem to remain unheard.

Many children, though they did not directly talk about their mental conditions, referred to the stress and strain they face at homes and in schools such as the ones derived from the family instability, difficulty to meet school expenses, pressure from parents to work at homes, pressure from school to complete homework, long home-school distance, feelings less confident about their futures, and low social image due to poor housing conditions and inadequate clothes. All these situations may be leading them to certain mental and emotional conditions. Perhaps, the illnesses such as headache and stomachache were common, and some children insinuated that these ailments could be the results of stress and improper eating.

It was also quite obvious that these children lack access to psychological support and counselling services amid a fast decline of the traditional support from the informal extended family system, neighbours and communities. Not even a single child mentioned about the presence of any social workers or anyone visiting their homes to provide them social and emotional counselling services except the counselling services available in schools, which they usually try to shun to avoid their reputation being shaken.

In order to improve the children's growth, development and overall well-being, and ensure them the rights enshrined in the CRC Act, 2011, starting many complementary programmes that address the multidimensional nature of poverty and vulnerability may be highly desirable. Investing in making social workers (with adequate training on child rights to survival, development, protection and participation) available at the grassroots and in rural communities may have greater impacts on the lives of poorest and most vulnerable children. There is the immense need to have social workers in rural areas who can provide their support to children with disabilities, those coping with extreme socio-psychological stress, children of disrupted families, children at risks of abuse and exploitation, and children with certain mental conditions. Unfortunately, most social workers are based in urban centres.

Extending better-tailored packages of comprehensive child-sensitive social protection services other than the ones provided at present by the Kidu Foundation, Tarayana Foundation, RENEW and others to remote areas may be worthwhile. School and community-based interventions for children living with stepfamilies and for those coming from disrupted or broken families, provision of psychosocial counselling through social workers, positive support to the families in difficult circumstances, extension of child protection services to remote areas, provision of low cost recreational activities, provision of vocational training and counselling for poor children, awareness raising about the risk of child labour and children's right to education, and support to housing construction or renovation, etc. are some programmes that might bring positive outcomes for poor children. Organising frequent community-level discussions to sensitise illiterate parents on child rights, needs of the children, and positive parenting might be worth considering.

The pre-research consultations with various child-serving agencies and individuals pointed out some difficulty in coordination among them. Improving coordination among various NGOs and individuals initiatives may improve the services delivered to poor children. One central agency can play the coordination role to prevent duplication of child-centric programmes or services. It can also maintain the central beneficiary database so that those who are difficult to reach could be easily tracked. Many of the children interviewed were not so aware of the available child-sensitive programmes and child protection services. This was the typical case of information deprivation. The local NGOs the study team consulted raised the issue difficulty in tracking poor and vulnerable children indicating that the poorest children are not so visible and struggling silently.

This study being exploratory in nature falls short of developing a fully formed diagnostic tool, but it does signpost the main issues that needs to be addressed: (1) food shortage among poor families; (2) income insecurity; (3) inadequate clothing; (4) impoverished housing; (5) water shortage; (6) education deprivation;

(7) family dysfunction; (8) parental ignorance of proper childcare or their negligence; (9) family violence and abuse; (10) social exclusion, discrimination and stigmatisation of poor children, and (11) child labour. The insights derived from the interviews with the poor children suggest that the focus of the poverty reduction efforts should be broadened from health, nutrition and education to include family care, child labour, social participation, and psychosocial well-being of the poor children and those children in difficult circumstances.

Finally, if democracy is held as an ideal of development strategies, consideration should be given to broader implications for participation of children in construction and implementation of policies and programmes that affect their lives. Children are found to have much more views and ideas than expected, and unless child poverty reduction policies and programs are designed by involving children's views in decision making, such efforts will address the symptoms of their poverty without adequately grappling with the root causes and persistence of child poverty and deprivation.

### **Suggestions for future researches**

The present qualitative study shows the complexity of child poverty, and suggests that more detailed insights into the manifestations and causes of child poverty are crucial for improving children's lives.

Though this study is exploratory and interpretive nature, it also lays out the opportunities for future researches. More research would be required to validate, refine and elaborate the present findings. The study has identified a number of themes that may be useful to conceptualised child poverty from children's perspective and do further empirical testing using a larger sample and quantitative methods for achieving generalisability of the findings to a larger child population. Several research questions and themes are generated such as follows:

1. What could be the dimensions or variables needed to develop Child Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which is context based? Which dimensions need to be given more weightage when constructing the MPI Index?
2. What are the mechanisms that poor children use to cope up with poverty and difficult circumstances? How could poor and vulnerable children's resiliency be enhanced?
3. Are there strong correlations between child's income insecurity, material deprivation, social deprivation and emotional well-being?
4. Are the additional cost of schooling or opportunity cost felt by poor families the main reasons for some children dropping out of schools and what could be done to address this issue?
5. Children work to earn income that they desperately need, but are the benefits of working more than the harm it causes to them? What are those

- harms? What are working conditions for poor children and what needs to be improved and how?
6. What new initiatives and programmes could schools look for in order to encourage poor children's social participation?
  7. What are the negative effects of parental divorces on children and what interventions are more likely to reduce the parental divorce and its impacts on the lives of children?
  8. How does the poor access to food and nutrition affect the health and well-being of children and by how much? What programmes must be initiated to address these problems?
  9. How could the need for affordable housing for poor families with many children be addressed?
  10. The changing culture of childhood has brought in new issues such as children being deprived of technology: mobile phones, computers and Internet. How does technological deprivation affect the other areas of children's lives including their educational experience and social interactions?
  11. How is the poverty experienced differently by children belonging to various social and economic groups (ethnicity, age, gender).
  12. Are disability and child marriages the issues of concerns and what needs to be done to address these issues?
  13. Finally, what are the drivers of child poverty reduction and what could be the best ways of targeting public policy to improve the indicators of childhood condition.

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### PART III: CASE OF REAL LIFE POVERTY EXPERIENCES BY CHILDREN

Name: Sonam (name changed)

Age: 14 (2016)

Class: three (now IV)

Region: Central Bhutan

I study in class three (now IV). I live with my grandparents, younger brother and sister. My brother is six years old and sister five. My sister is studying in class I. Both my parents died when I was too young from snakebite. My grandparents work in a small family plot. They work hard to send my sister and me to school. I am aware that it is a huge burden for them to buy us the school uniforms, pay school fees, and manage pocket money. I have no other relatives to help me, except my half sister and uncle who have their own children to support. I don't know how my grand parents get money. Maybe, they save some money for us from a little earning they make by selling milk and eggs.

I understand 'rich people' as the ones with everything they need and 'poor people' as the ones who do not have enough to eat and wear (like me who don't have enough kiras). My family always faces shortage of income. I do not know how we can solve this problem. We face the money problem because our grandparents have grown old; and we do not have any opportunity to earn income. In our village, there is hardly any work that we can do to earn additional income. Sometimes, I see our grandfather travelling far to work on house construction. This is one alternative source of income, I suppose. My grandparents, I see, are making lot of sacrifices for our sake. The only thing I am worried is that they are ageing. They do not drink, which is good for us.

Our house is very small. It is made of mud and stone. Our late parents had managed to roof our house with CGI metal sheet. Some of our neighbours have big houses. Seeing them live in big houses does not make me sad. I have learnt to be happy with my own situation. The most expensive household items are rice and curry cookers that my late parents have bought. The curry cooker does not work now. I face lot of problems in absence of my parents. Often, I get so sad that our parents have left us before we could stand on our own feet. Had they been alive today, our lives would have been slightly better. My grandparents give me [at the most] Nu. 200 to pay as school fee. I go without any pocket money. I can only dream about money; I have learnt to live without it.

My uncle tries to help my sister and me. But, he is unemployed. Sometimes, he buys school uniform (kira) for me; grandparents buy shoes and other clothes. I don't have enough clothes. This makes me feel low and ashamed in the school. My main problem in the school is lack of money. I don't borrow money from my friends knowing that I won't be able to repay them.

Thanks to the Government, we get free books. I ask my grandparents to buy pencils when they come to meet me in the school. They bring homemade pickles and give us some money when they come to see us. Some of my friends are rich; most are poor. Rich children have sufficient clothes. They often allow me to wear their clothes. They are kind to me. They are really good friends, but sometimes they are arrogant too

About sanitation and water, my grand mother tries to keep our house clean, but sometimes she fail. I feel embarrassed when guests visit our house. My grandpa has constructed a toilet by using little cement and digging up a pit. We have sufficient water. I do not get ill, but my grandparents often get sick. At home, I cannot do difficult tasks other than cleaning the house, washing clothes and dishes, and tilling garden. My grandparents do not want me to carry out hard jobs. They feel I am too small for that. We eat rice, chilies and potatoes most of the time. Sometimes, we run out of rice. That time, we eat only one meal a day. I don't feel hungry. I think I have got used to live on one meal a day. I think we get better and sufficient foods in the school than at home. We get three meals a day in the school. We have five cows and only two provides milk.

I have many problems in my life, but I try to be satisfied with who I am and what I have. I do not complain; it is my own fate. What to do? The thought of my late parents makes me sad, but there is nothing I could do. I have to accept my own fate. I am too unfortunate to have lost my parents at the very early age. I do not have many friends back in village. I feel fine to be alone rather than with my friends. I do not feel embarrassed when my friends visit me at home because they know well our situation. I try to be happy with my own situation. What's the use of being unhappy when I cannot change the fate? I am happy in the school because I have many kind friends.

I consider myself as a good student. I stood fourth in the class. My teachers are kind to me. They never beat us. I participate in dances during which I borrow outfits from my half sister (same mother). She doesn't have enough money [to give me], but I go to eat in her house sometimes, as she lives near our school. She has to help my younger sister. She is a housewife and her husband has a regular job, but they have many children to support. I consider myself as too poor. I have just two kiras (observed her kira was faded). My old kiras are not fit for me, so my sister uses them. I have no new clothes, and I don't desire for new clothes for there is no way I could get.

At the most, I think I can study up to class X, though I wish to study further than that. I know my grandparents won't be able to bear my schools expenses by that time. I don't know whether I can be a teacher after completing class X. I dream of becoming a good teacher, but it all depends on how far I can study. The most important things for poor people like us are money and good house to live in. I visit monasteries to pray for my late parents and wellbeing of all sentient beings. I also participate in local festivals.

Name: Nyamchung Busthu (name changed)

Age: Eleven years

Class: IV

Region: Eastern Bhutan

I am 11 years old. In my family, I have grandmother, mother and stepfather. My father (as my mother says) left her when I was in mother's womb. I am told that he was a teacher. My home is near to school.

I understand poverty as a state when poor people live in huts, do not own property, and have to always work in the fields. Rich people are those with big buildings, have good jobs and enough money, and those who owns many household items. My family is very poor. We live in a hut and don't own much property. We need money to buy rice, pot and other household necessities. Land too is very important. We depend on land for livelihood.

I think we have enough to eat as my stepfather works with PWD on contract and mother works in stone quarry. But, things are not always good. The stepfather is alcoholic. What he earns, he spends on drinks, leaving my mother to bear the responsibility of managing the family. Since my stepfather does not bring money home, I face lot of problems in the school. When a teacher asks me to bring balloon for practical classes, my mother doesn't give me money. Perhaps, she does not have enough money. She doesn't have enough money to buy rice, sugar, oil and vegetables. She cannot even afford to buy [for me] pen, pencil and books. She buys me a school uniform only when it is torn and unusable. I had been wearing the same uniform [this uniform] for last three years. It is torn and faded, but my mother simply keeps saying she will buy me a new gho.

My mother bought me a pair of school shoes when I was in class II, and now I am in class IV. My old shoes got torn. I do not have shoes to wear when going to the school. Teachers scold me for not coming in school shoes. They even snatched my slippers, but gave them back when I told them I have no shoes. My mother keeps on saying she will buy me a pair of school shoes and socks when she gets money, but she never keep her words. It has been almost a month now. I think she doesn't have money. I feel sad and embarrassed for not having school shoes. Everyone seems to look at me. I think I am one of the few children going to school without shoes.

We can get money only if we work hard and do not spend on alcohol. My parents do not even bother to buy kitchen items. They seem to be not getting hungry because they are most of the time drunk (my mother drinks as well). I have to go hungry sometimes during which I go to relatives' houses looking for foods.

My stepfather is not good. He keeps a rope and stick to beat me. When he assaults me, I tell my grandmother, but he even try to assault her when she complains. He punches me and kicks me if I don't run away. He assaults me for no reason, but under the influence of alcohol. I know whom to inform when being physically assaulted, but I do not report to police thinking he is earning money and if he imprisoned, we would be the one to suffer. Once Doksum police apprehended him for beating my mother.

To make money, it is important to work hard; we have to cultivate vegetables and maize, and sell them. My grandmother, mother and stepfather work in the fields. The stepfather drinks most of the time and do not go for works when he [frequently] suffer from hangover. Whatever the situation is at home, I try to keep myself happy. My mother is kind to me, and wants to give me anything she could. I do not dare to ask my stepfather for anything. He gets angry when my mother gives me something.

At home I wash dishes, cook food and work in the garden though I am too young. I suffer a lot when I am forced to till the garden in the sun. I feel too tired, and when I take rest, my stepfather scolds me. I try to skip work after lunch for which he beats me. I manage to do homework only sometimes. On Sundays, I work in neighbours' fields, and the work is mainly ferrying manure to the fields. I earn Nu. 50 to 100 in a day when working for others. I use the money to buy books, pen and pencil, and sometimes to buy what I like to eat. My stepfather sometimes gives me Nu. 5 as pocket money when he is happy while mother gives me Nu. 50.

During school hours, I come home for lunch. I have to cook my own curry, as my mother is busy in the field. My parents take pack lunch when going for work. They do not prepare pack lunch for me. We usually eat rice and potatoes, and meat is rare in our menu. In a month, I get to eat meat once or twice. I think we should eat eggs to keep healthy, but most of the time we eat chilies and potatoes. We drink black tea; we cannot afford to buy milk powder.

We live in a hut. My stepfather sold our land to school for Nu. 150,000. With this money, he built a small house roofed with CGI sheet. This house is rented out to a teacher. The house rent he collects is of no use, as my parents spend it on alcohol. The hut where we live is not good and comfortable. It must be my fate that I have to live in such a poor house. We have just one room. We have the problem of drinking water shortage. I think the water supply is not constant because some bad people destroy the source and pipes. We have a good toilet. I get sick. I get headache and stomachache. I think this is due to poor sanitation and not eating properly. I play in dust. I get headache when I worry too much. I wash my own clothes and sometimes my mother does it.

The most expensive items we have are TV, rice cooker, steel pot and Chinese blankets. I watch TV, but we have only the BBS channel. I go to my aunt's house to watch other channels.

Some of our neighbours are rich and most of them are teachers. They give us rice sometimes. We have three cows. They do not give milk. My grandma looks after those cows. Grandma is so kind to me, but it is sad that she gets beaten when my stepfather is drunk and when she tries to support me. He beats me with rope. I have bruises all over my body. I get pain. When I try to run away, he throws stones at me.

I want to study hard, but I am afraid if my parents can afford to send me to school as I grow up. If I do not get enough school expenses, I will leave school and work in the field. That's the only option. At present, I find it hard to work in the fields, but I am hopeful that I can do when I grow up. I will not take revenge on my stepfather in future; instead, I will help him. I have just three ghos. I feel shy and sad when I see other children wearing good clothes.

The most important things in our lives are money, land, water, and good house. If we don't have land, we will have no place to build our houses and grow foods.

I do not participate in games and sports. I wish to do so when I reach class V. I play khuru (dart). At present, being small a small boy, bigger boys do not allow me to play games and sports in the school. I have only one friend. He is a son of Gup. When he visits my house, I feel bit embarrassed, as we have nothing and the house is dirty. He helps me when I do not have books and gives me money when I need it. I wish if I am rich so that I can study and others won't look down on me. I visit monasteries to pray for the wellbeing of all sentient beings. I pray that they do not suffer like me.

My greatest problem is physical violence that I am exposed to at home. My stepfather beats me, and I do not know how to stop this. I do not want to complain to police because if he is detained again, my mother too will leave me, and I won't have a place to live and eat. I tried alcohol with my friends. They bring alcohol and force me to drink. I don't wish to continue drinking. I know its bad effects. I learned about the negative effects of alcohol from the experience of my stepfather.

I want to be a doctor in future. I will study hard and work during winter break to earn my school expenses. To make our family happy, I think stepfather should stop drinking. He beats me more than 14 times a week for no reason. That's what I don't like. I cannot bear the pain. I feel sad that I do not have proper pants and shirts. When I am unhappy, I go to friends' house to watch TV programmes. I thought of killing myself many times. At times I felt like jumping off the cliff, but I did not attempt it. Yes, I don't have school shoes. I don't know what to do. I hope my teachers will understand my plight and allow me to attend classes. My sock is torn as well. I believe things will turn out well for me.

Name: Tenzin (name changed)

Age: 14

Class: IV

Region: Southern Bhutan

We are the family of four members. I have one elder sister and one elder brother. We live in a semi-constructed house located close to a town. Our father is the head of the household. Our mother died when I was ten years old. My bother and sister are studying in class nine. We depend on our father's irregular earning, which he earn by working as a wageworker in some construction projects. Our house is in very poor condition. It is incomplete though we managed to roof it with CGI sheet. It does not have proper walls; we just have the plastics as the walls. During rainy season, these plastic walls cannot prevent the rain falling into our room.

We are a very poor family. We do not get sufficient to food to eat sometimes. It is a matter of survival for us. We do not have sufficient money to buy basic needs, including the dress for games and sports in school. We manage to generate some incomes ourselves to meet our school expenditures. During winter vacations, our brother work in construction works; with that income, we buy household items. We spend a little extra money we have on buying school uniforms, books and other needs. Whenever we do not have money, we borrow from our friends in school, who can lend us only very little amount. During school time, our brother work in the evenings and weekends to make some income. When we feel the acute need for money, I work in the evenings after the classes. I normally babysit and washes clothes for rich people.

Our mother died when I was ten years old. That is, about 5 years ago. She died of alcohol related disease. She was a heavy drinker. But, our lives were far better when our mother was alive. Actually, we sold about 30 deci of land from the total of 50 deci land. With that money, we tried to build a semi-concrete house, but in the midst of construction, our mother died. We then could not proceed further with the construction of the house. Our father then started to drink heavily. That was how the problem started for us. The main problem is that our father drinks heavily. He does not beat us, though. He used to drink in the past, but I feel he started to drink more and more after the death of our mother. We wish to continue building our house, but that seem something impossible. Forget about this, we cannot even manage our daily supplies such as rice, oil, vegetables and household needs. Our brother always says he will work hard and complete building our house. When our father does not drink, he works and also seek some advance money to buy our daily supplies. When he drinks, he does nothing and most of the time he is drunk.

I believe money is very important. We are in need of money not to buy luxurious commodities, but to buy very basic essentials. In winter, I go to work at our distant aunt's house and babysit her children. When I come back, she normally gives me about Nu. 1000 and some clothes. This money, I used to buy my school uniforms. When I do not go out to work in the evenings (after classes), I normally spend my time doing some household chores with my sister. I do not get much time to study. If our mother is alive, she must be doing much of the household chores while we study. I think I am good at studies. I normally get 6th or 7th position in the class.

We have a small kitchen garden. We grow very little and most of the time we hardly harvest much from the kitchen garden. Our neighbours' cows damage the vegetables. We cannot raise our voices against them when their cows destroy our vegetables simply because we are very poor and powerless. If we complain, they would talk bad words such as 'you people are poor and live in such a poorly built house'. The best thing is to tolerate and keep silent. I feel terribly sad and angry when our neighbours and some other people look down on us and backbite. I wonder sometimes if I will not die of those things. I cannot really tolerate, but there is nothing we could do. We have no mother; our father is an alcoholic. Our neighbours and a few other people know that we are in such a poor state, but I am sure not many people in the school know about us. We make it sure that we do not talk about our problems to our friends and teachers fearing that one day they might also start to look down on us or talk bad about us. I feel shy when someone talks about our condition. This is the reason why I always try to avoid people. I do not talk with most people.

I have thought about suicide many times. I wished for death several times. But every time such thought came, I always ended up regretting. I always would console myself that my life may become better in future. I know life is precious and that it should not be wasted by committing suicide. I am sure now that it will be too difficult for our father to quit drinking. Sometimes he comes very late at nights, that too, drunk. We are constantly worrying whether something bad might happen to him. My sister has to keep on looking for him or calling him when he fails to return home on time.

We live in such a poorly built house. It is very hard to study in such an environment. But, we try to live as if we have everything. Sometimes, I feel that we might be the poorest of the people not only in the locality, but also in the country. I am sure there are many children facing problems like us. My sister cooks food for us. We eat food when we have sufficient ration; sometime we make it to school without eating enough. Sometimes, we live hungry for two or more days, but we do not show other people our situation. We try to bear our problems.

We usually cook some potatoes and pumpkins. We cannot buy meats. We do not have enough water for drinking. Though, we collect water from the pipe, most of the time the water tap located close to our house runs dry. We simply have one room where all of us live together. We cook at one corner. We have electricity connection, but we do not have rice cooker, water boiler and curry cooker. We have to spend some time, especially during winter to collect firewood.



We live close to a town, but then we live just like in the village. We do not have any domestic animal. If we have a cow, I feel we can produce milk, butter and cheese, which we can consumer or sale. But, it is too expensive to buy a cow, and moreover, it will be difficult to rear a cow as all of use attending school.

Sometimes, I visit my grandparents back in village. They cannot do anything to help us. They too are dependent on their children. I do not have any good friend in school. If I make friends, in the end, they insult me. This must be because I am too poor. After sometime, they do not want to befriend me. I do not know why. So, it is always better if keep alone. Friends are good only if we are rich, otherwise, they would ignore us.

I did not seek any help from the kidu office. Once our teacher called my cousin sister who talked about kidu. She too has problem like us. She might have told our teachers that I too have the same problem. My teachers called me talked about kidu. But nothing happened so far.

I do not blame anyone for our miserable situation. It must be our own destiny. We believe we can change our fate only by working very hard. I dream of studying up to class thirteen. But, the problem is that there is no one to guide us or support us. We do not have money to meet our school expenses. I have no idea how I can fulfil my dream of studying till class thirteen. I rely my hope on my brother who always keeps on saying that he will work hard and support our schooling. I do not know whether he could do, as he himself is studying.

In the school, I do not participate much in other activities. I do not get chance to participate because those who are selected to participate in the extra curricular activities are the ones who have some talents and intelligence. When sometime I take part in games such as football and volleyball I borrow sports dress from my friends. The greatest problems in my life are lack of money, not being able to study well, lack of parental guidance, and our father's drinking habit. Our father does not have good relatives. His relatives do not like him, may be because he drinks too much. We have one paternal aunt, who is good to us, but she has her own problem. She has four children. Her husband is a driver. Though she intends to help us, I think, she cannot do much for us.

Name: Wangmo (name changed)

Age: 17

Class: X

Region: Western Bhutan

I study in class X. I have one elder brother, sister and a younger sister. My elder sister lives in the village. She works on her husband's farm. My elder brother got a job after our father passed away, but he had not been doing well in his life. He drinks a lot and always quarrels with his wife. He was once detained by police and later suspended from his job. He now lives in the village in pathetic condition. My younger brother is studying in Phuentsholing. Both my father and mother died when I was a little child. My father died when I was in class III and mother died when I was in class IV. My sister and brother-in-law take care of me. We have a small house, but we do not know in whose name the land and house are registered.

Poor people are the ones who do not have enough money, live in small house (like us) and do not have enough to eat. Rich people are the ones who have everything they need and can go wherever they wish to.

I have many problems, among which, getting money to meet school expenses is the major one. My sister doesn't have any stable source of income. She works in the field and earns some money by selling potatoes. Sometimes, I go to a road point to sell vegetables. The brother-in-law works with logging company. Both my brother and uncle do not help me at all. I wish to work and earn during winter vacations, but working in the construction sector means we have to move far away from homes. My sister does not allow me to go that far [to work] saying girls are at risks of getting spoiled. She says that she would work hard to solve my problems no matter how big my problems are. But, I know well that she cannot. In trying to help me, she is suffering too much. I really pity her.

At home, I work in the field (sowing potatoes), till vegetable garden, and look after sister's baby. I get tired when I work in the field, but I have to work to survive. I see children from the richer families not working, instead, going for camping and on holidays. People like us have no option, but to work and suffer. The winter breaks are not really vacations for us; it is time for us to go through lot of physical hardships. I feel unhappy when I see rich children enjoying their vacations.

I feel our [family] income has increased over the years. This is because I am grown up now and I try to help my sister. I help her by selling vegetables. I save some money to buy school uniforms. Other than my sister, no one gives me pocket money. I just go by without any pocket money. I see other children buying lot of eating stuffs, but I do not have money like them. The best thing is to remain satisfied with whatever my friends have to share with me.

After my parents have died, I faced lot of problems. I had to put up with my grandmother and manage my own food. Of course, my sister and brother-in-law used to supply me ration, which they would buy on credit. They would buy me school uniform once in two years. Later, I stayed with my uncle who was not so good to me. He used to beat me. Finally, I came to stay with my sister here in the village. I faced such problems until class VI. When I attained class VII, I went to Monggar to stay with my brother. Things did not go well with me there as well. My brother was always drinking and did not manage the family well. He used to spend his earning on drinks; he would rarely bring home rice and vegetables. Sometimes, he would assault his wife and send me to buy alcohol in the middle of night. If I refused, he would kick me. Those days, I was not able to study well and complete my homework. My teachers would beat me for not doing homework, but I did not tell them about my problems.

I get to eat enough when staying with sister. When living with the uncle, I had to prepare meals and skip lunch. When I was living with my brother, police detained him for weeks (after sister-in-law lodged a complaint to police) and she left me for her village. Those days, I had to borrow ration from the neighbours. My own had come to Monggar to bring me back to my own village after she heard about my situation.

In the school, I do not have money for donations that are often collected for different purposes. I am always forced to borrow money from my friends to make the obligatory donations. I hesitate to ask my sister, as she has three children of her own to support. Even when I am required to travel, I don't have money to pay the bus fare. I feel like leaving study, but when I think about my family problems, I feel I should fight through and help my sister. I am determined to work hard. After all, I was born to suffer and it's only through suffering that we will achieve good future.

In my village, we have enough drinking water and electricity. Our toilet is located outside. We use rice and curry cookers. My brother-in-law's house is big enough with six rooms, but my family (sister and me) don't have house. Our house has become a ruin after the demise of our parents. My sister has cows and pig. The most expensive item at home is a TV.

There's not much difference in studies between rich and poor children. It all depends on one's own hard work and intelligence. There are some poor children who do well in their studies. Rich children can continue their studies after class ten even when they do not qualify for the government schools and colleges, whereas a person like me has no option, but to drop out.

I often get headache. This I know is the result of thinking too much about my past and present situation. I don't attend BHU knowing that it is related to my stress. I have one school dress. I wish to own a mobile phone so that I can keep in touch with my sister. I feel sad when I see other students using phones. They do not allow me to use their phones even when I request them during some emergencies.

My parents used to drink a lot. I think they died out of alcoholism. If they are alive today, they must be coming to see me in the school. I feel sad when other children have their parents coming to school [to meet them] with foods, money and clothes. I start to miss my parents when my friends talk about their parents.

I visit monasteries and attend tshechu. These are very important in life. Life is uncertain and we must make it worthwhile by devoting some time to spiritual practices. I always pray for the wellbeing of my sister and myself and good rebirth of my late parents. I am interested in playing football and volleyball. I borrow sports dress from my friends when I participate in the games and sports. I hesitate to participate in school concerts knowing well that I won't be able to get the required costumes. When we participate in dances, we need to look for costumes, which is difficult.

I feel I have low self-esteem. In the school, some friends try to dominate me and make me do this and that. Back in village, I heard some villagers telling me a poor girl with no parents. Such comments make me sad, but what do I do, except to cry? My teachers are good.

I tried to commit suicide when people treated me badly. Sometimes, I feel like getting into drugs and then killing myself, but thought about my younger and elders sisters keeps me going, otherwise I would have long died.

My dream is to become a doctor. I don't know if I will qualify for the government school after completing class X. If I am not able to qualify (and I know I won't be able to afford to study in private school), then I am thinking of joining the police force. I would be grateful to the government if it can allow us continue our studies even if we fail to perform well. The government should provide financial support to poor children like me. I may fail because I am always mentally disturbed. My problems make me lose interest in studies, but the thought about how kind my sister is and how pathetic my younger sister is gives me some motivation to study hard.

Happiness to me is being emotionally strong even when confronted with many problems.

Name: Chuki Lemo (name changed)

Age: 17 (now 18)

Class: VIII

Region: South Western

I am 17 years old. In my family, we are five: stepfather, mother, sister, stepbrother and me. My stepfather worked as DYT staff before, but now he doesn't work. We are having tough time to meet our needs because my mother doesn't work too. Both of them drink a lot. They quarrel after drinking alcohol. I am always interested in studying. I dream of becoming a good teacher one day, but my stepfather told me that he won't be able to fund my studies after class eight. If I cannot study after class eight I want to join police so that I can support my mother. My uncle supported my studies until now. He is a policeman. Though he wishes to help me, I know he has many children to support.

After classes, I work in the field till it becomes dark, and then I have to prepare dinner. After dinner, I study and do my homework, but my stepfather always puts the lights off saying that he cannot pay electricity bill. Therefore, I never get enough time to study. During winter vacations, I work to earn some cash to support my studies. Life is really hard for me. I am hopeless and do not know what to do. My stepfather does not give me enough school expenses. I have to cope up with whatever I have. I find it hard to even buy a few decent clothes. My mother is helpless in this respect.

My stepfather physically assaults my mother and me. I am fed up of it. I was once referred to Sibsoo hospital and the doctor told that I have got mental disease (semkham gi nyed). To get out of the 'mental tiredness' and depression, I tried using alcohol and tobacco. I am thinking of getting into drugs if things do not improve in the family (mainly the stepfather's maltreatment). I want to commit suicide, but I think about the plights of my mother, which makes me refrain from killing myself. These days my mother is sick and she went to Thimphu for a medical check-up. She is being taken care at Thimphu by my sister (a nun). I don't know how she is doing because I couldn't contact her.

I am myself very sick these days. I am experiencing lower abdominal pain. I vomit some blood in morning. I am really worried, but I could not go to hospital because I fear my stepfather. If he finds out that I have gone to hospital for a medical checkup, he will surely beat me (*a question arise why she is suffering from the lower abdominal pain and why her step father is against her seeking medical care*)? I want to go to the BHU during the school hours.

There is a huge difference between poor and rich people. Rich people have everything they want, but poor are always struggling to survive. For me I really want to study and take care of my mother. I am worried because even if I want to study, there will be no one to fund my studies after class eight. My stepfather may encourage me to leave school. I am worried that I won't be able to fulfil my dream of becoming a teacher and helping my poor mother.

I wish if I could study in a boarding school so that I can escape the harsh treatment and physical abuse of my stepfather (*what kind of physical abuse? She was not willing to share*), but I don't know if I can manage the school expenditure.

If I get money, I will not waste it. I will save it and use only when I need to use for urgent needs. I don't feel shy and jealous when I see some other boys and girls wearing good clothes. I do not own mobile phone; I do not like to have one either. My brother has one, which he bought with the money that he earned by working during winter. We call our father using that mobile phone whenever he is late for home.

To lead a good life in future, I think we must study hard and save as much money as we can. Sometimes, the money that I earn by working with other people, I give to our father to buy rice and other household essentials.

I want to become either a doctor or teacher. Our brother is saying that he will do his best to support us. He always says he will not let us get spoiled like our own father. I do not drink alcohol or use tobacco. I do not drink much tea. We drink tea only sometime, that too salt tea. It is made by adding tea leaves and salt.

Beside the main problems I talked about, I face the problem of not being able to buy school uniform, pen and stationaries. When my teacher instruct me to bring new note book, I simply tear blank pages from the used ones. I feel the government can help us by helping us study further. As of now, though I have dreams of becoming a teacher or doctor, I really do not know how I could fulfil my dream. The only thing I can do is to hope and keep on working hard.

*Note: Sadly, she is no longer alive. She left the world recently. NSB research team pray her soul rest in peace.*

Name: Gawa (name changed)  
Age: 17  
Class: Zindri VI, Monastic Body  
Region: East

I am now a monk, studying in 6th Zindra (grade, monastic school). I understand poverty mainly as not having a proper shelter. The poor people are the ones who do not have sufficient wealth. The main difference between the rich and poor people is money. The rich people can afford everything they want while poor people struggle to meet their ends. Poor families cannot even afford the school expenses for their children. Those people with proper jobs and stable income can be rich. We can survive by working on the agriculture farms, still then money is important for improving our living standards.

I come from a very poor family. Worse, my parents were long divorced. Father now stays with the elder brother even though he got remarried. My mother lives in Phuentsholing. I heard my mother has a small job there. She has a huge burden of having to look after my younger brother and two younger sisters. My another younger brother has recently joined the monk body. He probably does not need any financial support from the mother now. However, she has to support other children. You see, she is poor and yet has many children to support. I heard my father is still drinking a lot. He seems to have become an alcoholic addict. I am sure he will die like that. It is sad that my single mother has to bear the upbringing of all her children. My elder brother and sister can hardly provide any support to my mother. They have to look after their own children.

I had to leave school mainly due domestic problems. I thought I'd better become a monk to ease burden on my single mother. I realised she was finding it difficult to manage my school expenses. I studied up to class four. Those days in school was the most miserable part of my life. I was struggling hard to manage school uniform, bag, and shoes. I used to carry my books in a plastic bag. Not being able to buy note books, I used to collect the books thrown away by others and reuse them. Forget about good clothes, I used to be deprived of proper meals. Those days, my father was just useless for us. He knew only to drink from morning to evening. He was not at all bothered about us, and is the same case even now. He is rather dependent on my elder brother. Now, whenever I get some money, I send to my mother so that she can help my sisters go to school. I regret that I had to leave school. I don't wish my sisters to remain out of school.

I am doing good here. I don't have to go hungry like in the past. I eat all three meals on time. We get fruits and meat on alternate days. The toilets and water facilities in the dratshang here are much better. I think monastery is a real sanctuary for poor children like me. Back in my village, people hardly eat twice a day. If they eat breakfast, then they have to skip lunch or dinner. They are really poor, and on top of that, they are drinking too much.

Our house, back in the village, is made of bamboos with CGI roof. People think that a family is rich if they have CGI roofing. I don't think we are rich even though our house has CGI roofing. We just have one room. We were in the village, all of us used to live together in one room. We used to find it difficult to study and do homework. We always wanted to build a bigger house, but we could not do so. These days, unlike in the past, people do not support each other to build house. I think cooperation among the people in my village has declined in the recent years. People are becoming more competitive and selfish.

I think there is no difference between rich and poor children in terms of their performance in studies. It all depends upon individual's intelligence, interest in studying and hard work. However, I feel that poor children get frequently sick compared to rich children. It may be due to poor diets and wearing dirty clothes.

To enjoy better lives, we need to have both material and non-material resources. Trust and cooperation among family and community members are important. We need trust and cooperation between family and community members. For instance, my parents got divorced simply due to lack of trust and 'tha-damtshe' between them. If we have trust, then we will be happy.

In general, I think poor children are looked down by richer children and other people. Despite all those problems in my life, I never thought of committing suicide. I tried alcohol once. My ambition is to become a teacher. I am determined to work hard in order to fulfil my ambition.

In order to reduce poverty, the government should look into inequity between the rich and poor people. There should be equitable development by geography. The development activities should focus more on eliminating the problems of poor families and their children. We are not only the one who are poor. There are many poor families in my village. Children of the poor families are suffering. Happiness to me is having both the parents who are concerned about the well-being of their children.



Name: Sonam (name changed)

Age: 15

Class: 8

Region: West

I have five brothers and sisters. My parents have long abandoned me. I am told that my parents went to Tsirang to sell oranges and they did not come back leaving my younger brother, younger sister and me to survive on our own. It was my uncle who has brought me help after the separation from the parents. My parents are now working in a factory at Pasakha. I lived with my parents until class IV after which I was taken care of by my uncle. I now live with my uncle. My elder brother had to leave school for financial reasons. My parents could not support his school expenditure. He works in Paro now.

I faced a lot of problems in life such as not having sufficient to eat and not being able to pay school fees. I used to request my teacher to waive the school fee. My uncle is doing his best to help me, but he has his own children going to school.

It so happened that four years ago (when I was in class IV), my parents told us that they were going to Tsirang to do an orange business. They told us to stay back in Tala. Three of us—my young brother, sister and I—were asked to manage ourselves until they returned. They bought for us three kilograms of rice, some oil and vegetables before they left us. We thought they would return soon, but they never came back. That was around winter break. I just finished my final examinations. I did not realise that my parents had actually left us forever. We spent the whole winter going through a difficult time. We did not have enough to eat, as the school was closed for winter break. Otherwise, we used to get breakfast and lunch from the school.

After months of managing on our own, we realised that we were not able to fend ourselves. I was too small to work for others and earn money. We were starving almost to death. Thanks to some neighbours, they help us by providing us food. When our school reopened, I took both my younger sister and brother to the school hoping to enrol them in the school. Initially, they refused to take my brother, but after I narrated them about our plights they decided to enrol my younger brother in the school. My sister was too young. I took her to our uncle's place who later handed her over to our parents in Pasakha. Though our sister has left us, two of us had to struggle. We collected from wherever we got, and survived that way. I also started to work for my uncle. He liked my hard work, after which he decided to keep me with him. He sought the school's support. The school provided me a blanket. I was then able to study well. I met my parents recently. They gave me little money.

There is no different between rich children and poor children in terms of studies. In fact, poor children, knowing their situation work hard and do better in studies. They want to do better because they have seen how much their parent are suffering. I see other children using mobile phones during which I also feel like having a mobile phone. Sometimes, I feel it is not a good idea to own a mobile phone, as it may hamper the studies. We have access to electricity and water, but in my uncle's house, we usually cook using firewood. I have not seen any expensive items in the house.

I really work hard. I have a big dream. I dream of supporting my parents even if they have abandoned me. I know that they abandoned us out of helplessness. I wish to keep my parents with me when I grow up and get job. I work during winter break to earn money for my school expenses. I participate in dance and sport activities. Often I cannot participate in school activities. Recently, I missed an inter-house football matches simply because I did not have a boot. My friends are good to me. I always use the pens that my friends give me.

I did not know about suicide. When my sister and brother were going hungry, I simply cried. I tried alcohol. I did not continue drinking. I want to join army after class ten. I think the government should identify poor children like me and give separate financial support. There are many children like me who find it difficult to meet school expenses.

I always consider religion and god as important. I chant prayers to God of Wisdom. Happiness to me is to score more than 70% in my exams. I really want to do well in life, and I hope I will be able to continue my studies.

## ANNEXES

### Annex 1: Semi-structured interview guides

This is just a guideline. Since it is semi-structured interviews, wordings of the questions will depend on the interviewers. However, all the interviewers should agree on the meaning, and maintain the meaning of the questions.

#### **PART I: BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Opening questions (more demographic and personal profile to be collected in the end)

Name (we are not interested in asking his or her name)  
Age:  
Village & Dzongkhag:  
Living with:  
Student/non-student:  
Interview #:  
Interviewer:  
Date:  
Location:

#### **PART 2: OPENING QUESTIONS**

1. How do you understand the word “poverty”? (just give him/her clue)
2. In your opinion, how is poverty manifested (characteristic features)? What is the difference between a poor and a rich family? How does poverty affect the poor? (in a moral , income or other material way)?
3. In your view, who suffers more from poverty morally, by income and materially and why (children including boys and girls, men, women)?

#### **PART 3: INCOME POVERTY**

1. Children’s understanding and perception of income poverty;
2. Children’s view about the causes of income poverty;
3. Income poverty’s effect on children and their families;
4. Survival strategy as perceived by children;
5. Children’s ideas about the ways to overcome income poverty.

Some guiding questions related to income poverty

1. What do you think of income of your family? (Probe: is it enough or not?)
2. What is your view/experience about the family’s living standard (affected by income)?
3. If your elders/siblings are participating in any income-earning jobs (including part-time)?

4. Could you describe the nature of jobs that your elderly siblings and you have to take up to earn extra income?
5. What types of work do you do at home and outside (physical labor)? Do you receive money for the work that you do outside your household (carrying loads, harvesting fruits, vegetables, etc.). Does the work that you do affect your studies at school?
6. What do you think of your family's income (whether increasing or decreasing?)
7. What is your idea pocket money? Do you get pocket money and for what purpose?
8. Do children from poor families work to support their families? What types of work do they usually do? What types of work are done by girls and by boys (this can also be a part of child labour question)?

**PART 4: DEPRIVATION** (education including monastic education and skill acquisition at homes, food and nutrition, access to health, sanitation and safe drinking water, access to road and electricity, housing, cooking fuel, livestock and asset ownership).

1. Children's understanding of material deprivation (*based on MPI used in the quantitative analysis*).
  - 1) Education
  - 2) Food and Nutrition
  - 3) Health, sanitation and safe drinking water
  - 4) Access to road and electricity
  - 5) Housing
  - 6) Cooking fuel
  - 7) Livestock
  - 8) Asset ownership
2. Children's views on the causes of material deprivation;
3. Effects of material deprivation on children;
4. Children's ideas about ways to overcome material deprivation.

Some key questions related to material deprivations

1. Do you think you get sufficient food and nutrition? Is there a difference in nutrition of children from poor families and children from well-to-do families? What do you usually eat? How many meals a day do you have? Do they feed you at school (for children from 6 to 11 years of age)? In your opinion, what is high-caloric food?
2. What could be the reason that your family faces seasonal food shortage (damage by natural disaster, wild animals, etc)?

3. Deprivation associated with clean drinking water (How difficult is it to get clean water?); How does shortage of clean water affect your health and that of your family?
4. In your opinion how does poverty affect health? Including health of children? Who fall ill more frequently: children from well-to-do families or children from poor families? What are the most common diseases afflicting children from poor families?
5. Deprivation related to sanitation (such as his or her experience with toilet use, knowledge and experiences of hygienic practices);
6. What do you think is your shelter like? What needs to improve?
7. If you are not attending school, what could be the reasons (probe: ask if his or her siblings are deprived of education); If you have once gone to school, what level of education did you complete? What could be the reasons that you had to leave school?
8. How do you think poverty affects the quality of education? Is there a difference between knowledge of children from rich and from poor families? If there is a difference? What do you think is the reason for it?
9. If you are going to school, what are your main problems?
10. How do you get clothes? What makes you feel you need more clothes?
11. Question related to technological deprivations such as mobile phones, access to computer: Do you feel a want for mobile phone and computer and what could be the reason for that? When you do not get it, how do you feel and what do you do?
12. Among so many services such as electricity, health, sanitation, drinking water, transport, etc which do you your family need the most? What could be the reasons for not having those services?
13. What could be done to help you and your family get sufficient food, clothes, good shelter, clean water, cooking fuel, etc?

#### **PART 5: SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND WELL BEING**

- 1) Child labour in household
- 2) Child labour in formal sector
- 3) Children as family bread winners
- 4) Children's perspective of child abuse
- 5) Social relationships participation-participation of parents
- 6) Participation in organised social activities and school
- 7) Neighbourhood environment and relationships
- 8) Emotional well being
- 9) Identity and sense of self
- 10) Aspirations

Some key questions related to social relationships and participation

1. Poverty in terms of social relationships rather than access to material resources, how do they view it? Social relationships can be in terms of relationship with parents, relatives, friends and others, including participation in the community or school.
2. How do children's relationships with others affect (say for example, peer relationships) their ability to cope with the financial circumstances? Keeping up appearances with the peers (clothes, etc) and instances of shame associated with poverty. 'Pressure to fit in with peers'.
3. Do they have adequate space at home to have friends to play or stay? How do they feel if they do not have the same?
4. What are other constraints that children face in terms of socially interacting with others such as lack of facilities (transport, sports, dress, etc);
5. In what way do they feel socially excluded for being from poor families? Social exclusion can be defined in many ways, but here, we refer to being isolated from friends, school, not being able to participate in social or community events, etc.
6. What are their favourite pastimes? How are they not able to participate (such as parents being poor, due to clothing code, transport, etc-structural exclusion);
7. In what way are they affected by being in poor neighbourhood or where there is higher rate of crime, violence, etc?
8. Do they feel loved by their parents? In case, single parent or if living in parents who got remarried, how are they treated? Do they feel life meaningful (emotional well being);
9. In your opinion, do children come across any kind of child abuse today? (for example, at school, at home, in the street, in the market). Who, do you think, become the object of child abuse most of all - girls or boys (the poor, orphans). In case of abuse, who do they resort to for protection?
10. Did they think they would commit suicide because they come from the poor? Do they hesitate to say they belong to poor family? How does they compare with other children in the neighbourhood or school? Do they feel laughed at because they cannot get as much as others in terms of clothes, gadgets, etc?
11. What dreams do these children have in future? How do they think they could achieve? What they think either government or someone should do to help them attain their dreams? (Dreams can be such as leaving home to earn)-aspirations.
12. In your life, what are the main problems?

13. What would you like to become in the future and what do you intend to do to raise living standards of your family?
14. In your life, you would have abused alcohol, drugs and tobacco, what are the reasons for doing this?

**PART 6: CONCLUDING QUESTIONS**

1. What do you think needs to be done at present in your family, village, town, including in your area, to bring down the level of poverty and improve overall well being?
2. What does happiness mean to you? How would you describe being happy?

## **Annex 2: Criteria for selecting participants for child poverty interviews**

### In-depth semi-structured Interviews

1. What are the research objectives?

To understand the children's own perception of poverty which goes beyond income poverty to include material deprivation, social protection, participation and social inclusion and well being?

2. What is the target population?

Poor children of age 12-17 (mixed) 5 boys and 5 girls from rural location; and 6 boys and 6 girls from urban location. 20 boys and girls from each Dzongkhag.

3. Who should be excluded from the sample?

Children of rich people: those children who are perceived to have no problems of any kind and enjoying fairly good standard of living.

4. Who should be included in the sample?

Poor children who can be defined as those children coming from income-poor, living in poor shelter, living in difficult situation (including no one to look after or living with step-families, those who are deprived of basic needs such as adequate food and nutrition and decent clothing, etc). The group should be mix of school-going and non-school-going. This is to find out how those children who are deprived of education and those are able to attend school view poverty.

5. What is the benefit? No financial benefit (payment), but they will be served with meals and refreshment.

6. How long will the interview be?

Minimum of 45 minutes and maximum of one hour

7. What size should the sample be?

10 children in rural place and 10 children in urban place: (5 boys and 5 girls). Minimum sample size, usually accepted in qualitative study is 12.

8. How should potential respondents/participants be recruited?

DSO and local leaders will identify the potential participants as per the criteria given.



**Annex 3: What does happiness mean to you?**

1	If we have a good house	22	Being free of stress
2	If my dreams are fulfilled, if parents live together without conflict, and while while playing football	23	If I own the land
3	Sharing money among friends, and when someone give me money	24	If my family is strong and have enough wealth and land
4	Playing in friends' houses and joking with friends in school	25	If we get enough to eat
5	Having sufficient food and being away from parents	26	If my people can live in a good house and my family members could stay together
6	If I have my mother with me and being able to meet my brother	27	If we have enough of everything, if we don't have problem, being with friends and not letting parents drink
7	Family members getting together to eat	28	If I don't get scolded, that is happiness for me.
8	If we have sufficient food, if my parents are rich and if our relatives support us	29	If I can do well in studies
9	Owning a huge house with water tap and sufficient to eat and if my house is near school	30	If I don't have to study and work and if I can live peacefully
10	No idea.	31	if I have enough to wear, eat and drink
11	If parents don't beat and if my father don't drink	32	If I don't have worries; if I have land; and if I can build a house
12	To feel good when parents' reunite after divorce	33	If I can complete my studies successfully
13	Happiness means living without anxiety and worries	34	If my family has enough of everything needed to live
14	If I have money, land and good house	35	If I can build a better house
15	If I have more time to play and sleep always without work	36	If I have more money
16	If rich don't ignore poor and treat us equally	37	Being with friends and obeying parents
17	If my family members live together always, if I get good job and have enough to eat	38	Decent and well-furnished house
18	When I get to play with friends and have no works at home	39	Helping each other
19	Happiness for me means if my parents are together	40	Playing with friends and living with parents
20	To live peacefully with family and friends, share what you have with others and being able to help my parents	41	Money to buy slippers
21	if I own a car	42	Loving our mother

<b>What does happiness mean to you?</b>			
43	If my parents own a car and if we do not have to work	66	Absence of family conflicts
44	If we are free of illness and have good family	67	When my parents treat me well
45	Happiness to means being able to fulfil my own dreams and serving my parents	68	Living with parents and playing with friends
46	If I have have enough wealth, money and clothes	69	No family debt
47	Getting opportunity to study	70	Money, house and electricity
48	If I own a car	71	Supportive parents and government
49	If my parents are not in financial debt and if my brother and sister are alive	72	Money is happiness
50	If we have a goodr house, if parents are wealthy and have money, and if we do not face any problem	73	Buying new clothes
51	If we have sufficient to eat and live with parents	74	Celebrating birthday
52	When we have enough of everything we need to survive and when parents and teachers are supportive	75	A good house
53	Free of problems	76	If my house is made of cement
54	If I can offer a tea to my parents	77	Parental support and if they give me everything I need
55	If family members could live together	78	Being mentally strong
56	When I stay with my parents	79	If there is not problem of studying, helping parents and owning a good house
57	If all the family members could live together	80	If there is no discrimination between rich and poor people
58	Education and wealth	81	If I have both my parents
59	Good job and enough wealth	82	If I get a good job
60	Getting love and care from others	83	To be with parents
61	If we do not have any problem, studying hard and serving the nation	84	Good shelter and job
62	If my dreams are fulfilled; if I am able to keep my parents with me; and if I score above 70% in exams	85	Getting married and starting a new family
63	If my family is self sufficient	86	If I could continue my studies
64	If my family members are happy and if we have enough food, clothes and shelter	87	Being free of worries
65	If we have enough to eat and live with family	88	To have fun without any work

**What does happiness mean to you?**

89	If I can stay with parents without problem and if I am successful at whatever I do	97	Being with my parents
90	Happiness is everything for me. Happiness is the precious gift from God. If I make someone smile, I am happy, because I feel good when someone is happy	98	If all the family members could stay together
91	I feel happy when washing dishes	99	When I get enough money
92	If I have sufficient clothes	100	If I could study hard and achieve my ambition
93	If our parents can give us whatever we need and keep us happy	101	When I stay with my parents
94	When I study and get pocket money	102	If I top in the class
95	When I stay with my parents	103	If we own a good house
96	When I study and get pocket money	104	If we have sufficient water