

Measuring Inequality and Development Gaps Asia Regional Evaluation Summit I-Pager September 11, 2013

Presenters: Suzanne Polak, USAID/RDMA

Panelists: Taimur Khilji, UNDP; Mark Gellerson, USAID/RDMA; Peter Chen, Development & Communications Centre

Summary: Suzanne Polak described an index of measures, based on publicly available data, USAID uses to monitor and track development gaps among countries. Ms. Polak used the index to analyze countries in Asia to assist USAID/RDMA in their strategy development. She emphasized that by visualizing the information in easy-to-read graphs and charts, policymakers and others have an easier time digesting and understanding the data. She and the panelists discussed that, while macro-level indicators are useful for decision making, donors and policymakers need to dig deeper to understand regional trends in order to make effective programming decisions.

Highlights:

- USAID originally developed the index to measure the progress of countries in the Eastern Europe and Eurasia region, as they prepared to graduate from development assistance.
- The index includes measures related to economic reforms; governing justly and democratically; macroeconomic performance; investing in people; and peace and security. USAID/RMDA also requested data on mobile technology penetration. Using publicly available data, countries are ranked on a scale of 1 to 5 for each measure.
- These measures allow data to be tracked and monitored over time.
- Findings included
 - The region has not made much progress on the 'governing justly and democratically' index over the past 10 years
 - In general, more economically advanced countries are more advanced democratically
 - Mobile technology penetration has grown in all countries in the region, except for Burma
- Aggregate indicators tend to mask internal disparities.
- Each indicator has its own limitations, so it is important to exercise caution in drawing major conclusions based on them.

Synthesis and Reflection: Aggregate, macro-level indicators play an important role in strategic planning and analysis. However, these types of indicators can be problematic because they mask variations (by region, gender, or economic status, etc.) that are important to consider in planning development programs. Donors and implementers should be clear about how they will use data from macro-level indicators and be aware of limitations from the outset.

Prepared by: Monica Matts, PPL/LER