## **Dimensions of poverty, Vulnerability, and social protection in rural communities in Myanmar**

**Abstract:** research jointly conducted by the Department of Rural Development and the Social Policy and Poverty Research Group between January and June 2015 conducted 160 in-depth interviews and surveyed 22,000 households across all 14 States and Regions, plus Nay Pyi Taw Council, using a survey tool designed to capture key elements of household socio-economic status, livelihood practice, vulnerability, access to social assistance, and opinions on the dimensions, causes and proposed interventions for poverty and poverty reduction. The key findings of the research are as follows:

1. Rural households primarily describe the dimensions and causes of poverty using the paradigm of **livelihoods**, with income and asset paradigms being the second and third most frequently used descriptive paradigms. The conceptualization of poverty was significantly influenced by the household situation and context.
2. When indicating preference and prioritization for interventions to reduce poverty, rural households place a high priority on **increased access to low and no-interest credit** (75% of all households), interventions which create livelihoods for youth (47% of all households), and micro-enterprise (36%), consistent with the descriptive paradigms relating poverty to livelihoods.
3. Vulnerability profiling demonstrated an overall vulnerability rate of 24%, with considerable variability between States and Regions, and **female headed households, households dependent on casual labour as their primary income source, landless households, households with persons with disabilities, and households in fishing communities all demonstrating higher levels of vulnerability**.
4. Social Protection: Over 80% of rural households describe having accessed social assistance. However, **the vast majority of assistance is received in the form of loans (69%), and less than 25% of households reported ever accessing assistance of any kind from government sources**. Poor households, female headed households, and households with low levels of social capital and participation are less likely to receive assistance of any kind, less likely to receive assistance from government or through insurance schemes, and more likely to receive assistance in the form of loans.
5. Fishing communities: Households in fishing communities experience **significantly higher rates of vulnerability and lower rates of access to both formal and informal social assistance** when compared with non-fishing communities.
6. Debt: More than one in every ten households spends at least 10% of their income on debt repayments, and this is linked to a reduction in investment in education and livelihoods. Debt repayments consume nearly 12% of all household income, and over half of households are borrowing primarily from high risk lenders. **Nearly 6% of households across the nation can be labeled as “high risk.”** When asked about priority interventions for poverty reduction, respondents most frequently prioritized low or no-interest loans.
7. Social capital: Rural communities demonstrate high levels of social capital, with active traditional social organizations in 63% of all communities. The level of engagement at community level was strongly associated with having accessed social assistance from community organizations. However there was relatively low levels of participation by women and persons with disabilities in community events.
8. Landlessness is associated with high degrees of household vulnerability, with **landless households experiencing over twice the overall vulnerability rates of landed households** and higher rates of vulnerability in all areas except livelihood diversity. In the rural communities surveyed, nearly half (49%) of households reported that they did not own land, and just over half reported having planted any kind of crop the previous year.
9. The majority of rural households are engaged in agriculture or related livelihoods. However**, in over on-third of households, the main income source was reported as casual labour, and more than half of all rural households have only one income source. Less 20% of households reported any regular income.** Livelihood diversity is strongly linked to higher economic status, lower poverty rates, higher levels of social capital, and higher rates of school attendance by children.