**By Carolyn**

**Project: Putting Poverty in Perspective – Images from Across India’s Cumulative Distribution Function**

The problem: Policymakers often rely on measures of poverty to guide programs intended to improve individuals’ wellbeing. However, measures of poverty often grossly oversimplify the problem of targeting programs to reach those who require public or philanthropic assistance. The poverty line, for instance, is commonly used in India to define those who are eligible for many national and state-level welfare programs, with little appreciation for the diversity of experiences of living at or below the given poverty level, or the implications for those above the cutoff whose quality of life may clearly require support, perhaps as much as or more than some individuals living below the line.

The project: The purpose of the proposed project is to help communicate what it means to live at or below a given income level, including the diversity across experiences at the same income level and how those individuals compare across the entire population.

We propose to sample households at every income level, photographing most in a short-form format and a small, representative subset in a long-form format. We will present the photos and accompanying statistics in an online, interactive representation of the cumulative distribution function so that the audience may see the diversity across lifestyles for households (individuals?) at any given income level and see how they compare to the rest of the population.

Viewers will be able to manipulate the cumulative distribution function so that it adjusts to include only subpopulations (e.g. only urban or rural residents, female-headed households exclusively, etc.). They will be able to select any photo to see more details about that household (individual)’s lifestyle, as measured by the survey.

The current poverty line will also be an element of the graphic, and the audience will also be able to view and manipulate measures that go into determining the poverty to change its location along the cumulative distribution function (the purpose of which will hopefully be to reveal how the underlying assumptions affect who is or is not included in the definition of “poor.”)

Design

500 households will answer short-form survey questions (NSS) and be photographed with their home and day’s food. We will use a stratified sampling system to reflect diversity within each income level on several factors: urban/peri-urban/rural; family size; primary source of income; (?) to demonstrate diversity of experience at comparable income levels. *Lots of questions on how we’re going to do this -- How big of a sample do we want to try and get to represent diversity within each income level? What do we mean by “each” income level (how many different subgroups are we really going to try to sample, and who is going to get lumped together)? What factors are we going to control for?*

100 households will complete the long-form survey (to be decided—multiple photo and/or video shots of home, school, income source, neighborhood, healthcare facility, children at play, etc.) in addition to the NSS survey.

Product

The collection of photos and accompanying data will be displayed in an online, interactive cumulative distribution function display. The website will be designed and hosted by the team of Explain (weexplainit.com) with assistance from Jeff Hammer and Carolyn Edelstein. The graphic will be featured in interactive journalistic pieces by PBS Frontline into the way the poverty line has shaped policy and in turn impacted peoples’ lives.