

The India Human Development Surveys

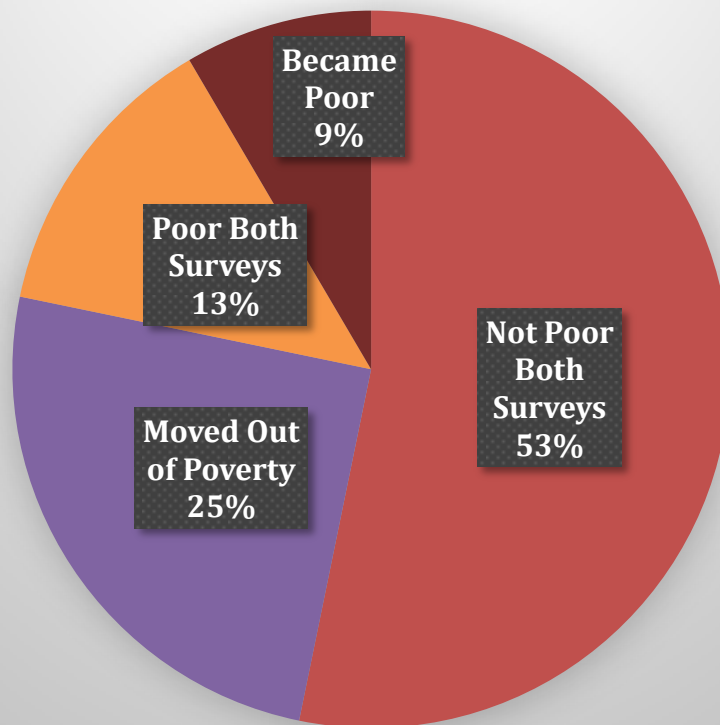
Researchers from NCAER and the University of Maryland have collaborated for the past ten years to develop a programme of research on human development. The India Human Development Surveys of 2004–05 and 2011–12 (IHDS I and II) form the core of this programme. The first round of this survey was conducted during 2004–05 and has become a premier public resource for researchers in India and abroad. The second round, conducted during 2011–12, involves the generation of the first large nationally representative panel of over 41,500 households and more than 215,000 individuals to document the contours of changes in the lives of ordinary Indians during an era of rapid economic transformation and implementation of vast social programmes. The survey has been funded by the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Ford Foundation, with further analysis funded by DFID through two separate grants.

The strengths of IHDS include: (1) A multi-purpose and multi-topic design including questions on income, consumption, health, education, employment, social networks, gender relations, etc.; (2) Many innovative features including administration of short reading, writing and arithmetic tests to children aged 8–11 years, questions about symbolic aspects of gender (for example, *purdah*, or men and women eating together in the household), information on social networks; (3) A survey of youth aged 15–18 years along with information from their parents; and (3) Information on the village infrastructure and facility survey for two schools/medical facilities in each sampling unit.

IHDS is the first household survey in India to cover the full spectrum of health, education, economy, family, and gender modules incorporated for both urban and rural samples. Designed as a multi-purpose survey, IHDS-I was an amalgam of the existing Indian and international surveys with some unique survey items that measure gender, caste, and class inequalities. The sampling design and key results from this survey have been published by Oxford University Press and are now available at www.ihds.umd.edu. The sample for IHDS-I consists of 41,554 households located in 33 states and union territories of India. In IHDS-II, each of these households (as well as any split households) were re-interviewed with a re-contact rate of 84 per cent.

Policies that label individuals as poor via Below Poverty Line (BPL) surveys are mistargeted because in a rapidly changing economy, BPL censuses that are undertaken every ten years tend to miss the mark. The IHDS data show that only 13 per cent of the population was poor in both 2004-05 and 2011-12, the population most likely to be served by present policies; 53 per cent of the population was poor in neither period while 25 per cent moved out of poverty between 2004-05 and 2011-12. Most worrisome is the fact that 9 per cent fell into poverty. The vulnerability of this last group has received very little attention.

Changes in Poverty Between 2004-5 and 2011-12



In order to address the needs of this vulnerable group, it is imperative to focus on work programmes like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) where any household may participate if it cannot find better employment, as well as insurance programmes that help address catastrophic events like hospitalisation or natural disasters. “As Latin American countries have found, moving to middle income levels also means developing a middle income mindset in social policies with greater focus on vulnerability rather than concentrating solely on chronic poverty,” says Sonalde Desai, who has led the IHDS surveys.

Although the IHDS surveys record tremendous economic transformation, social transformations have been uneven. On the one hand, caste and religious cleavages continue to shape social interactions with nearly 95 per cent of the marriages taking place within the same community. This proportion has not changed substantially between the two surveys. On the other hand, educational enrolments have risen in all segments of the society, even at secondary levels. The overall educational enrolment rates for 15-19 year olds increased from 54 per cent to 68 per cent. Although absolute improvement is higher for the forward castes and OBCs, dalits, adivasis and Muslims also record massive growth in enrolment, offering hope for the future.

Percentage of 15-19 year olds enrolled in school or college		
	2004-05	2011-12
Forward caste	66	80
OBC	54	71
Dalit	49	64
Adivasi	48	55
Muslim	43	52
Christian, Sikh, Jain	73	87
All India	54	68

NSS plays a critical role in Indian policy, providing estimates of poverty and employment status through repeated cross-sections. The NFHS surveys of 1992–93, 1998–99, and 2005–06 constitute another major source of household data in India. Modelled after the Demographic and Health Surveys, NFHS has focused on fertility, contraception, and child health with significant additional questions on gender and sexual behaviour. NSS and NFHS have limited focus with repeated cross-sectional designs. Thus, though they are excellent sources of data on poverty, child health, and gender relations in the household, their utility is limited for analytic studies across multiple domains. This is the niche that IHDS fills. Moreover, IHDS also complements these other data sources with new income data collected over a longitudinal panel. Other Indian surveys with income data are either limited to rural areas or are proprietary and not publicly available. As the only Indian survey with individual incomes for a nationwide sample, IHDS-I is being used in comparative research on national accounts and is being incorporated into the Middle Income Country Panel by the Luxembourg Income Study to allow for international comparisons.

IHDS occupies a unique niche even as a cross-sectional survey. However, its longitudinal dimension makes it especially important for studying a society undergoing a rapid transition. With another survey of the same IHDS-I households in 2011–12, this is the first panel study of urban as well as rural households in India. Substantial field work was done in IHDS-I to secure contact information (telephones, neighbours' names, family contacts, etc.) so that IHDS-I households could be easily relocated. Most national surveys in developed countries today are part of panel designs (for example, the British Household Panel Survey, the U.S. Panel Survey of Income Dynamics, etc.), as are some of the most important international surveys (for example, the Indonesian, Malaysian and Mexican Life Surveys and China Health and Nutrition Survey). In India, the most widely used surveys, NSS and NFHS, are repeated cross sections of the population at each survey point but do not provide information about the same households over time. IHDS, therefore, has an important role to play in providing panel data for one of the world's most important regions. Panel designs are favoured for good reasons, despite their added cost and the difficulties entailed in re-contacting a shifting and often busy population. The advantages of panel data include:

- Estimates of entry, exit and duration in such important phenomena as poverty, education and migration.

- Research on path dependent changes such as impact of childhood health on adult outcomes, the interaction between population growth and environment or household response to rising incomes in switching from biofuels to clean fuels.
- Application of better statistical models for controlling unobserved heterogeneity via the enhanced possibility of computing fixed effects models that control unmeasured, time-invariant characteristics of the household or individual (for example, growth in academic skills over time when comparing public and private schools).
- Better analysis of the role of exogenous shocks that occur between IHDS-I and IHDS-II. The most intriguing of these is the Government of India's massive effort to provide employment to the rural poor. MGNREGS was a dramatic expansion of earlier piecemeal efforts to provide government work to the rural unemployed. IHDS household data provides a comparison of economic standing before and after MGNREGS, contrasting districts with minimal efforts and those with well-documented implementation. We expect some of the important MGNREGA effects to be indirect: by mandating equal pay for men and women, for instance. MGNREGS should not only increase women's labour force participation but should also raise female wages even in private sector employment.

Two other intervening programmes, National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), are also important. NRHM was initiated after 2005 while SSA was intensified after 2005. JSY, a part of NRHM, provides cash incentives for hospital delivery. SSA, and from 2010 onwards, the Right to Education (RTE), aim to increase the enrolment of girls and marginalised groups. The before and after comparisons between IHDS-I and IHDS-II would allow researchers to test a variety of hypotheses about intra-household resource distribution as a result of these programmes.

As world economies struggle to reverse recent economic crises with increased investments in job creation and attempts at healthcare reforms, it is becoming increasingly apparent as to how little we know about the distributional consequences of these policy measures. IHDS-II data should make a useful contribution to this discourse.