NCCR north south

How to identify 'target groups'?

Considerations based on experiences from Honduras and Nepal

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Key Messages

To identify target groups is crucial in order to focus development assistance or research.
However,

- *be aware of the consequences of (discursively constructed) social categories*
- *precisely define your target group*
- *use proxies instead of rigid indicators*
- *acknowledge the heterogeneity of target groups and their embeddedness in the wider social context*
- *know the social fabric and political and economic context of a location*
- *carefully include local leaders in participatory selection processes of target groups*

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Introduction

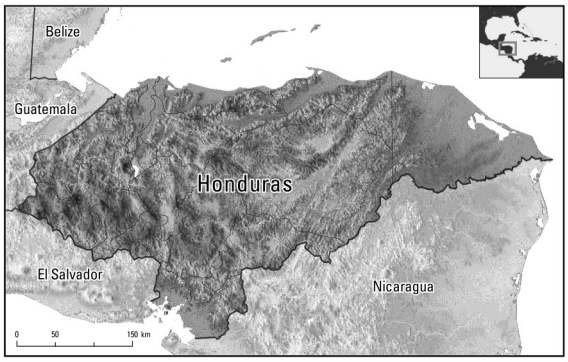
The core challenges in contemporary development practice and research are to identify particular groups which struggle for control of available assets and resources (Oakley & Marsden 1984:9) and to categorize community members into specific groups (such as the 'poor', 'marginalized', 'disadvantaged', 'socially excluded', etc.) for the purpose of either targeting development assistance or focusing research. At present, such categorisation especially in development practice is influenced by concerns first of all for 'poverty', but also 'social discrimination', e.g. by caste, ethnicity, gender, or other forms of identity and distinction. In South Asia for example, Dalits or certain ethnic groups are defined as discriminated groups per se, without recognizing economic stratifications within such groups. As one consequence, gender, ethnicity, religion or origin (indigenization) become mobilized by different political parties, interest groups and individuals to establish power or to gain access to specific benefits. In contexts such as the Central American (with the exception of Guatemala, where indigenization is at stake), despite the existence of ethnic groups, it is not ethnicity but economic categories intertwined with other attributes of people (e.g. the poorest of the poor, the undeserving) which are used to construct 'social categories'.

Drawing on examples from Honduras and Nepal, which are dissimilar cases with different concepts and practices, this document provides a critical discussion of how 'social categories' are used in development practice in order to identify target groups, especially 'the poor'[1], and how challenges encountered can be tackled sensibly and be informed by conceptional insights and research. In order to do this, the document does the following:

1. describes the guidelines, descriptions and practices for identifying target groups for development interventions of both development and government's agencies[2] and development workers/brokers in Honduras and Nepal
2. discusses the challenges and opportunities inherent in the observed practices of social categorising
3. offers suggestions for socially sensitive approaches.

Featured case studies I: Honduras

Honduras is the second largest Central American country and one of the poorest and most unequal of Latin America. According to the World Bank, in the year 2010, 60 % of the total population was living below the national poverty line, which is set at 1.5 US$ per day, and 65 % of the rural population lived below the national poverty line. The rural population still makes up over 50 % of the total population, whose main sources of income are from agricultural activities. However, agricultural activity and poverty are strongly related. From 2001 until 2009 Honduras has had a national Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), which was authoritative for public spending as well as for interventions of development agencies and donors.



Featured case studies II: Nepal

Nepal is a landlocked Himalayan country with a population of 27,4 million (2012), of which about 83 % live in rural areas[5]. Agricultural activities as small farmers or workers are the main sources of income[6], and many households depend on remittances sent home by labour migrants in India, the Gulf States etc. (NIDS 2011). All development indicators of Nepal point out that Nepal remains the poorest country in South Asia (GDP per capita of US$ 700[7], HDI rank 157, HDI 0.463, MPI 0.217[8]). While the overall poverty rate for Nepal is 25 % (19,261 NPR per year/person), this figure increases to 45 % in the Mid-Western region and 46 % in the Far-Western region.[9]

Nepal is a multi-lingual, -religious, -ethnic country, but has been a unitary centralized state since the unification in the latter half of the 18th century. In 2008, after more than 240 years of monarchy, the newly elected Constituent Assembly[10] of Nepal declared the country a democratic, secular and federal republic. This political change is widely considered as having being driven by the decade-long violent conflict between the Royal Nepalese Army and the then Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) [CPN (M)], which later became a powerful, and the largest, political party in the Constituent Assembly from the April 2008 election. During the period of insurgency the CPN (M) vehemently brought forward the issues of the multidimensional inequality and exclusion of large sections of the population (Krämer 2008: 228). The CPN (M) was able to gather numerous support by contextualizing its ideology of class struggle with gender and caste discrimination and by ethnicizing its insurgency (Hachhethu 2009: 64). However, the party lost the 2013 November election by a significant margin. We have to observe whether Nepal's ambitious post-conflict transformation discourse of the "New Nepal", aiming at ending centuries of discrimination and exclusion based on caste, ethnicity, class, gender, region, language, culture and religion (Manandhar 2011), will be as strong as before in the coming years.

Useful concepts

This section presents five concepts which are considered useful for critically discussing how social categories are used in development practice in Honduras and Nepal to identify target groups.

Social construction of target groups

> (...) the terms we use are never neutral. They come to be given meaning as they are put to use in policies. And these policies, in turn, influence how those who work in development come to think about what they are doing. (Cornwall and Brock 2005: 18)

Schneider and Igram (1993: 334) define social construction of target groups as "the cultural characterizations or popular images of the persons or groups whose behavior and well-being are affected by public policy." These characterisations are not neutral but "normative and evaluative" and they portray specific societal groups "in positive or negative terms through symbolic language, metaphors, and stories" (Edelman 1964, 1988 cited in Schneider and Igram 1993: 334).

Furthermore, a social construction "refers to (1) the recognition of the shared characteristics that distinguish a target population as socially meaningful, and (2) the attribution of specific, valence-oriented values, symbols, and images to the characteristics" (Schneider and Igram 1993: 335). Social constructions are influenced by stereotypes "that have been created by politics, culture, socialization, history, the media, literature, religion, and the like" (ibid).

Target groups as stakeholders

Target groups belong to the broader group of stakeholders of a development project, an intervention or research. The term 'stakeholder' refers to all those persons or groups who are (potentially) affected by a project/ intervention or who are influencing the project/ intervention (including the target groups, donors, politicians, NGOs, private sector etc.) (Ejderyan et al. 2006: 76). Furthermore, the term 'stakeholder' is associated with participation (ibid: 77). In this document, the term 'target group' – as one part of the stakeholders – refers to the end beneficiaries of a development project, irrespective of their participation in the process of project development and implementation. Although widely used, the term 'target group' can also be critically viewed: Like the term 'stakeholders', the term 'target group' is borrowed from economic language and alludes to an economic or neo-liberal approach to poverty reduction.[3]

Intersectionality

Poverty and development research widely acknowledge that 'the poor' or 'the disadvantaged' are not homogeneous groups. Still, when identifying target groups, a ten-

dency exists to define the target group either based on a single poverty indicator or on a single social category like gender, ethnicity, religion or other attributes without recognising different social categories or different economic stratification, respectively, resulting in different loci of oppression and inequality within these groups.

Intersectionality as a theoretical and analytical approach refers to the multiple marginalization of persons or groups based on two or more intersecting and mutually reinforcing axes (dimensions or social markers) of inequality or oppression such as race, class or gender (e.g. Braun 2011; Norris et al. 2010; Nash 2008). The mutuality or simultaneity means that inequalities cannot be analysed based on single or separate categories, although "one category may have salience over others in any giving (sic!) situation" (Norris et al. 2010: 62 based on King 1988).

While so far mainly used for women or racism studies, according to Norris et al. (2010), the use of an intersectionality perspective is useful for (rural) poverty studies, as "rural poverty is complicated by social context, political leadership, and social location varying by race/ ethnicity, gender, and age" (ibid: 66). In this regard, intersectionality perspectives are especially useful in two ways: First, intersectionality helps to reveal the situation of those population groups which are historically most marginalized. Second, it is useful to "connect the marginality of poor women, especially poor racial/ ethnic women, with their invisibility to policymakers" (ibid: 67).

Hence, applying intersectionality perspectives is useful to deal with the heterogeneity of groups such as disadvantaged groups, the poor or women, as they can help to identify subgroups within the broader social group as well as different experiences, needs or obstacles faced by these groups (e.g. Norris et al. 2010 or Braun 2011). However, an intersectionality perspective does not assume that "intersectionally defined groups always have different experiences, needs, or face different obstacles", rather it makes us ask whether the experiences or needs differ (Norris et al. 2010: 67).

Livelihoods perspectives

In line with the widespread understanding of poverty as multidimensional (see below), we argue that for the definition and identification of target groups it is important to consider both material and immaterial livelihood realities. Material aspects of livelihoods refer to natural capital (private or public resources such as land, water or forest), physical capital (private and common basic infrastructure and producer goods) and financial capital (cash savings, livestock, salaries or remittances). Immaterial aspects comprise human capital (such as competences, health or education) and social capital (networks, relations, membership or belonging to a specific group, etc.) as well as political and institutional settings and the processes of change (see DFID 1999). Furthermore, livelihoods perspectives acknowledge people's agency and take into account the dynamism and changes of livelihoods, or in the words of Bebbington (1999: 2022)

> The framework thus understands these assets not only as things that allow survival, adaptation and poverty alleviation: they are also the basis of agents' power to act and to reproduce, challenge or change the rules that govern the control, use and transformation of resources.

A major challenge of livelihoods perspectives is to thoroughly take into account power relations and politics as they not only represent the context in which livelihoods take place but also influence the livelihoods opportunities. Belonging to a specific ethnic group or being labelled with a specific attribute might be mobilised in order to access livelihood opportunities, such as projects, or might hinder access.

Poverty indicators

Poverty indicators are crucial for the definition of a target group as well as for the identification of the members of the target group. In the development discourse, it is acknowledged that poverty is multidimensional, which comes close to the concept of livelihoods. Hence, poverty measures or indexes embracing different dimensions of poverty are needed. The recently developed Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) of the Oxford Poverty & Human Development initiative is the most comprehensive index when compared to indexes such as Unsatisfied Basic Needs (UBN), Human Development Index (HDI), etc.

These indexes, and especially the MPI, are very valuable for defining target groups, as the definition should encompass a range of criteria while being precise. However, to ultimately identify target groups, all indexes beg to the same fundamental question: are data available to identify the individuals belonging to the defined target group? Often, such indexes are produced at national or regional level, in the best case at municipal and village level. The individual or household level is very often missing. Therefore it might be necessary to generate own data through methods such as household listing, wealth and wellbeing ranking or SARD (see below). In order to come close to a multidimensional definition of poverty but at the same time have a practicable tool (such as a survey), proxies might be used.

Data basis & methods

This document draws on insights into the realities of living conditions and of targeting and social categorization practices gained during field research in Honduras and Nepal.

Honduras: Fieldwork took place from June 2008 until May 2011 mainly in two case study municipalities in Western Honduras (see Contzen 2013). Semi-structured interviews were carried out with representatives of the local governments, with local leaders and with other key persons of the municipalities. In-depth interviews were conducted with members of over 70 households living in (extreme) poverty. In addition, participant observation was carried out at various meeting, such as town hall-meetings or meetings organised by NGOs. To supplement this field data, relevant documents of the national Poverty Reduction Strategy (also used in Contzen 2013), the Swiss Cooperation Strategy for Central America 2007 – 2012 and to a minor extent the Swiss Cooperation Strategy for Central America 2013 - 2017 were used in the writing of this document.

The empirical data was analysed using qualitative and interpretative methods such as discourse analysis and qualitative content analysis.

Nepal: The insights are based on the supervision of PhD and Master students' research and on the contribution to a large number of case studies on livelihood realities and the dynamic role of institutions in regulating access to means of livelihood in Nepal. The research was conducted between 2001 and 2013 within the framework NCCR North-South (Geiser et al. 2011; Shabhaz et al. 2010). Furthermore, the document is based on qualitative expert interviews focusing on the topic of identifying target groups, which were carried out in 2011 with four project leaders working for Swiss development organisations in Nepal. Finally, the insights are rounded-off by diverse interactions with development practitioners and observations of development practices during the last 30 years.

In addition to this empirical data, the document draws on the analysis of recent SDC documents on Nepal (50 years Nepal-Swiss Development Partnership 1959 to 2009, Swiss cooperation strategy for Nepal 2013-2017, and Swiss cooperation strategy for Nepal 2009-2012).

How are social categories used by development organisations and practitioners in order to identify target groups?

In this section, we deal with the social construction of target groups in Honduras and Nepal. In order to do so, we analysed both development and aid strategies as well as practices of development workers in Honduras and Nepal. Below, we examine how social categories of target groups are constructed, how according to the documents the target groups should be identified and how development practitioners categorise people/groups in their everyday work.

The case of Honduras[11]

Discursive constructions of 'the poor' in the Honduran PRS

The analysis of three main PRS documents shows that the underlying premises changed over time (2001 until 2008): While the original PRS document of 2001 adopted the Washington Consensus with the neoliberal premise of economic growth leading to poverty reduction (with an individualistic perspective towards poverty), the updated PRS document from 2008 reveals a rejection of the Washington Consensus and redresses to a 'socialist' narrative, although always in tension with economic narratives (with a collective perspective towards poverty including pro-poor growth, actor orientation and the recognition of structural aspects causing poverty).

Despite these fundamental differences, two aspects are similar: On the one hand, the terms used to describe poverty and 'the poor' remain very vague. On the other hand, the two official documents distinguish similarly between two groups of poor people: *poor* (pobres) and *extremely poor* (pobres extremos). Although rooting in different underlying premises, both PRS documents conceptualize the *poor* as the target group of productive projects, such as MYPIMES (Small and Medium Sized Enterprises) or agricultural programmes. *Extremely poor* are defined as target groups of relief programmes such as Conditional Cash Transfers, programmes which were criticised even in the PRS documents as not helping people to move out of poverty.

Hence, the PRS discourse of Honduras reveals a bias towards the 'less poor', excluding extremely poor people from poverty reduction programmes other than relief programmes. Although it is never made explicit, following the economic growth premise of both PRS docu-

ments, the main focus seems to be to strengthen *poor* and assume that their economic improvement (e.g. due to setting up a small business) would provide chances for *extremely poor* to move out of poverty ('soft' trickle-down effect).

This distinction is reminiscent of the one between *poor people with potential* (pobres con potencial) versus *poor people without potential* (pobres sin potencial), which emerged in several conversations I had with people working in development practice. Furthermore, it is reminiscent of the distinction between 'economically active' and 'unproductive' poor people, which was revealed in the political elite discourse in Uganda (Hickey 2005) and Bangladesh (Hossain 2005).

Constructed target groups in SDC's strategy for Central America

Cooperation between Switzerland and Honduras began in 1978, the regional approach (Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador) was initiated in 1993. The results of an evaluation through an independent body concerning development cooperation between 1999 and 2005 build the basis of the Swiss Cooperation Strategy for Central America 2007 – 2012. The term 'poor people with potential' or *'pobres con potencial'* was not mentioned in the evaluation but emerged in the 2007 – 2012 strategy, reflecting the lessons learnt of the previous periods (SDC 2007: 6):

> The chosen targeting based on development potentials ("poor people with potential") proved to be relevant but requires a sharper definition of what is meant by "potential" specific for each theme or sector. This means for example in the area of micro-finance to target the "next poorer" client group that currently lacks access to financial services. In the area of water and sanitation the definition of the target group would focus on the degree of social organization as a "potential" with emphasis on the poorest. (SDC 2007: 7)

However, the analysis of the strategy revealed that the definitions of target groups remained vague and that the poorest were still largely excluded. Similarly, as with the PRS document, the strategy was based on the premise of economic growth leading to poverty reduction, and economic measures were foreseen such as the development of micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSME). The strategy focused on those with potential, making explicit that extremely poor people are only indirectly addressed:

> The extreme poor will not be reached directly, but deliberate efforts must be made to extend services to poorer groups currently without access but with sufficient potential to use them for furthering their economic well-being. (ibid: 10)

An important feature of the 2007 – 2012 strategy is provided in annex 4 which gives indications on the definition of the target groups: in line with the description of the thematic priority on MSME development, the target groups for the related themes are people "with limited access to services but potential" to make use of services (SDC 2007: 30), thus, poor people with potential. In line with the description of the thematic priority on 'infrastructure and local basic services', the target groups of the related themes are poor and extremely poor people, however, for one measure, only poor and extremely poor people "with sufficient social capital allowing sustainable results" (ibid: 30) are addressed.

Hence, SDC's 2007 – 2012 strategy distinguishes, similarly as with the PRSP, between poor people with potential and poor people without potential and mainly focuses on the first group of poor people. The poorest are left with 'relief programmes', and the development success of poor people with potential should create enough growth, so that it will 'trickle down' to the poorest.

The term *poor with potential* has disappeared in the Swiss Cooperation Strategy for Central America 2013 – 2017 and the thematic priorities have slightly changed, while the general vagueness in definitions of target groups remained or even grew. Two new terms emerged: 'disadvantaged groups' such as women or youth (as targets of MSME development) and 'vulnerable' people or groups (as targets of climate change and environmental risk measures). However, it was not made explicit who exactly belong to these groups and whether extremely poor people are included or not.

Hence, both SDC strategies revealed vagueness in the definitions of target groups and a bias towards poor (with potential) as opposed to extremely poor (without potential). Furthermore, neither of the strategies makes reference to the question of how to identify the (vaguely) defined target groups mentioned in the documents. Therefore, how to put these social categories into practice is left to the practitioners.

Social categorizations by local leaders

The distinction between *poor with potential* and *poor without potential* is reminiscent of the distinction between deserving and undeserving poor (Katz 1989), which includes ideas about the culpability for poverty. While subliminal in the PRS versions, the distinction is prominent in local

Landless farming family in Honduras , 2010 *© Contzen*

leader's talks, which differentiate between *economically poor* (pobres economicos) and *mentally poor* (pobres de mente). *Mentally poor* are conceptualised as extremely poor people, who do not want to participate in local groups and community work, which are not able to wisely use the resources they have or which are offered by development projects, and ultimately, they are conceptualised as *conformistas,* who do not want to improve. This conceptualisation of *mentally poor* comes close to the category of undeserving poor (ibid.), while *economically poor* can be understood as deserving poor (see Contzen 2013: 88).

With this conceptualisation of extremely poor people, the target group are themselves made responsible for being poor and this in turn legitimises development practices, which exclude the poorest (such as requiring that beneficiaries are organised to receive funds, while extremely poor people are seldom organised).

The use of social categories by development practitioners (including local leaders)

In the case of locally implemented PRS projects (funded by decentralized PRS funds, which target the poorest) and of local NGOs implementing 'own' projects, the selection of beneficiaries is generally delegated to community leaders. Against the above delineated background, one might expect a selection which strategically includes the 'less poor', while excluding the extremely poor. Although this is the end result, the process the local leaders described is different: The community leader (in the observed cases always a man) in charge of the selection of beneficiaries asks around among the group or association in which he is participating. If this already existing group does not provide enough interested people, he asks his neighbours, his enlarged family, his friends and persons he meets by chance on the street (see Contzen 2013: 165). Hence, the selection of the beneficiaries is arbitrary and does not favour the poorest households. Furthermore, the poorest and women tend to be excluded through such selection processes: women are often at home cooking, taking care of the children and small livestock. Furthermore, there exist highly gendered public spaces, such as the football field, where women are not present but information on projects is spread (ibid). Therefore, the probability is smaller that women are informed through informal channels. With regard to the poorest, they are seldom involved in already existing groups, they are less likely to belong to the enlarged family or circle of friends of the local leader and they are less likely to be neighbours of a community leader as they tend to live on the outskirts of villages. Hence, the observed selection of beneficiaries is highly arbitrary, not focused on the poorest and most probably excluding female-headed households. The social categories which the talks of the local leaders revealed did directly or indirectly materialise in the selection of the beneficiaries.

However, another selection bias exists: Honduras is a highly politicised country; often the selection of beneficiaries or the exclusion of people goes along party lines. Hence, to be extremely poor, living in a female-headed households, or belonging to the 'wrong' political party, can exclude a person from being a beneficiary of a development project. The role of the political party comes mostly into play when the projects are distributed by a centralised state agency or by local development practitioners who do not delegate the selection process to community leaders.

The case of Nepal:

Constructing target groups in SDC's strategy for Nepal

Cooperation between Switzerland and Nepal began 1959. The analysis of the SDC Nepal documents shows that the current political main discourse on inequalities and the need for inclusive development shaped most of the components of the country strategy: „After 2000... in the projects, the issue of social equity and the inclusion of people from Disadvantaged Groups (DAG) became a core focus" (SDC 2010: 6). The Swiss Cooperation Strategy 2009-2012 aimed "to support socio-economic development, inclusive democratic State building and to promote human security in Nepal" (SDC 2009: 6) and focussed on poverty reduction by empowering and enhancing livelihoods of DAG and fostering inclusive development.

In the strategy paper for 2013-2017, the need for inclusive development and for responding to the challenges of Nepal's ethnic and social complexities as well as economic inequalities is again emphasised (SDC 2013: 1f). Further it is highlighted that poverty is unevenly distributed and that the social and economic vulnerability, especially of DAG, is exacerbated by the remoteness of markets, lack of access to basic services and to economic and natural resources, as well as increased indebtedness (ibid: 2).

It is clearly stated throughout the documents that DAG are the main target group of development cooperation. However, which groups are to be considered as disadvantaged? How is DAG defined? The definitions in the three documents differ slightly, but all contain as a core statement: "Disadvantaged Groups are groups of economically poor people that also suffer from social discrimination" (SDC 2013; SDC 2009). Consequentially, the construction of the target group is based on the combination of economic and social indicators.

Economic indicators

At the beginning, SDC (2009) used the indicator "less than one dollar a day". Later, probably due to the availability of new data, the indicator was "living on less that

19'261 NPR (equivalent US$ 225) per year/person" and alternatively "having less than six months food security" (SDC 2013).

In development practice, as one interview partner revealed, the food security indicator is mostly used, as in Nepal most people own some land. For people, who are not farming, the off-farm income ("less than 3'000 NR per month as a threshold") counts. Multiple income sources are only partly considered as off-farm and farm income are not combined. For example, the interview partner explains, only "if a person is not in the farm, remittances count, in other cases not".

Another interviewee emphasised that it is important "to choose the people who are really worse off than the others - to bring the services to the economically poor and not to the rich". He considers the official, or in his terms the "scientific indicators", as less important. "Exact figures do not matter, but proxies are needed." In remote areas, where the HDI is very low, he pointed out that nearly everybody would be part of the focus group of the economically poor.

Some interviewees admitted that a livelihood survey or a wellbeing ranking would be helpful to grasp poverty more comprehensively, but too much time would be needed to collect these data. According to another interviewee, in the forestry programmes, a common practice is to conduct participatory well-being surveys in which the local communities develop context-specific indicators.

Social indicators

As an indicator of potential discrimination, the belonging to a specific ethnic or caste group is considered as well as gender (SDC 2013). This approach of SDC is in line with the main political discourse in Nepal. Since the promulgation of the Interim Constitution, the debates that took place in the various committees of the Constituent Assembly, in studies done by individuals and organizations and, last but not least, in the strong demands for carving out federating units on ethnic lines, the inclusion of the powerless, socially and economically discriminated or disadvantaged groups are omnipresent. However, who belongs to this social category and who should enjoy benefits provided to this category under the departmental or special targeted programmes, or under programmes of various donors? Several attempts have been made by different organizations to grasp the notion of socially discriminated. In 2008 for example, the National Planning Commission of the Government of Nepal developed an 'Inclusion Index', consisting of three sub-indices, namely poverty or economic exclusion, human capability and political participation (Bennett & Parajuli 2008, cited in UNDP 2009: 45). According to this inclusion index, Madhesi (Lowland) Dalits, followed by Hill Dalits and then Terai and Hill Janajati were ranked as the most excluded groups. The Newars were categorised as the most included despite the fact that they are not a homogenous ethnic group, but a highly segmented social entity, more or less divided along caste and religion. Additionally, considerable differences were noticed in the degree of exclusion of women, with higher gender inequality among Dalits, followed by Muslims and Terai Janajati. This implies that the degree of discrimination against women is higher among the most discriminated castes and ethnic groups.

Mother with daughters in Taplejung district, Nepal 1998 © Müller-Böker

Different donors, NGOs and the Government of Nepal have different ways to define target groups with regard to social indicators, but whatever terms are used, the core concept is based on caste, ethnicity, religion, gender and sometimes region. However, the labels for the categories differ. The interviewees criticised this "mismatch" and emphasised the need for harmonizing these categories. Moreover, an interviewee stated that it is unclear whether a person, in the case his or her livelihood situation improves, would move into another category and thus would no longer be eligible for projects or not.

Besides these challenges to operationalize social discrimination, it is important to state that all used categories are based on the origin of people: birth into a specific caste or ethnic group determines first of all whether a person is considered as socially discriminated against or not. One interviewee pointed out that this targeting concept reinforced ethnicity and caste consciousness in Nepal: "Before, people were Nepali, now they become Dalit or Newar." He explained that especially persons with a mixed marriage background use their double 'identity' strategically depending on the situation: "If it comes to employment, the person may say – I am Magar, in other contexts, I am Bahun." His colleague added that in some cases also emotional belonging plays a role, "slowly it goes to the heart". In other words, the sense of belonging to a specific ethnic or caste group and the related othering, especially of the 'privileged' groups, was enhanced by development strategies and the practice of targeting, which aim for integration and inclusive development. To cite a practitioner: "I am worried about that,

before it was a political issue. People changed their party, but you cannot change your ethnic belonging immediately. The donors have fuelled the potential of conflicts."

This statement refers to the risk that by using caste and ethnicity as the most important social category in a multi -lingual, -religious, -ethnic country, a 'new caste system' emerges, based on the traditional social categories that the donors, NGOs etc. wish to overcome. The role the donors as well as social scientists play in enhancing these traditional categories, ensuring a sense of belonging as well as 'othering' caste and ethnic groups – being paradoxical to the idea of inclusive development – needs further reflection.

Consequences in the field

In the different projects of Swiss development organisations, the identification of target groups depends on whether a project will be implemented in a new region or new activities will be launched in an established project region. In the very rare case of selecting a new project region, indicators like HDI can only be used at a district level due to the problems of resolution (cp. Chap. 2). Therefore, well-being rankings or an analysis of available data are applied in order to understand the social and economic fabric at village level.

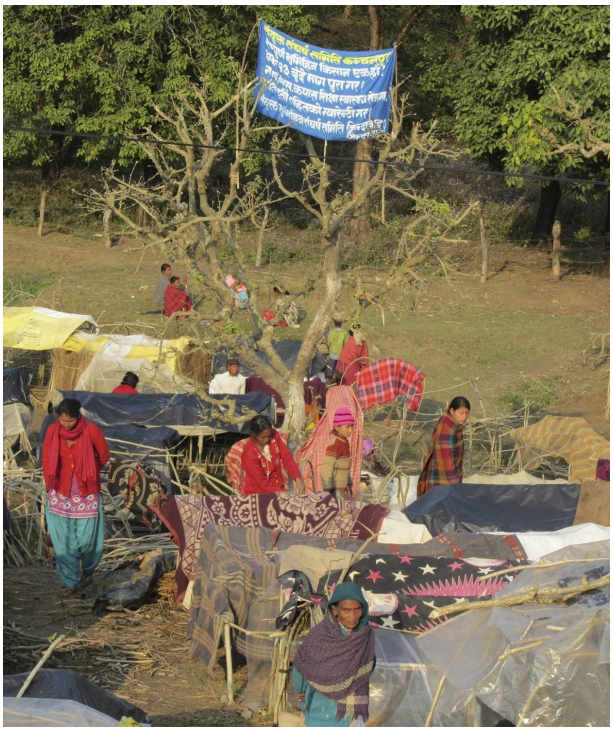
The Swiss development agencies generally work with groups (e.g. farmers' groups, forest users' groups) and users' committees, which are formed by beneficiaries for the construction, operation, management, repair and maintenance of Swiss funded infrastructural projects. The representation of discriminated groups has to be ensured in these groups and committees. Sometimes, existent groups are used, but as one interviewee explained, "if a group does not have a sufficient number of DAG they would not choose it". One interviewee reported that during the selection process the following question was frequently raised: "Why do we not belong to the target group and the others do?" He emphasized that the selection and communication depends on the capacity of staff: "Practically, we are sure to exclude people sometimes, because it is easier to say you belong to a specific group than to explain the reasons, why and how you do belong or not belong to the focus group." He added that in the past they had more problems, because the focus was only on DAG. Now they would consider 40 % of economically poor and 60 % DAG.

At least two interviewees agreed that targeting is a challenge and "that the idea is ok to focus on DAG, but the way how it is communicated is problematic". In addition it was stated: "It is the targeting of the location that is crucial".

Another strategy to approach DAG is to increase the representation of women and members from discriminated groups within the SDC staff through affirmative action:

> SDC's conflict sensitive programme management recognizes that one of the most effective ways of understanding the aspirations of its beneficiaries – who are suffering from caste, gender, ethnicity, religion, language, and region-based discrimination – lies in SDC's ability to integrate into its own staff people from all social groups, again, particularly members of discriminated groups. (SDC 2010: 28)

To sum-up: The current political main discourse on inequalities and the call for inclusive development shaped the targeting policy of many donors, and especially of SDC, working in Nepal. Economic categories intertwined with social categories linked to 'identity' such as ethnicity, caste/religion and gender are used to define the target groups which leads to affirmative actions as key policy.



Landless people's movement in Far Western Terai, Nepal 2014
© Müller-Böker

Comparing the categorisation of target groups in Honduras and Nepal

Despite several differences between Honduras and Nepal, some aspects related to the categorization of target groups are similar. Table 1 summarizes the main differences and similarities.

Table 1: Categorisation of target groups in development documents on Honduras and Nepal

Honduras	Nepal
Focus on poor people with potential. Although SDC acknowledged the need for a clear definition of 'potential', no such definition was made available.	Focus on DAG. Although not uniform definitions of DAG, rather precise definitions of DAG (e.g. living on less than 19'261 NPR and Dalit).
Paradigmatic background: Neoliberal approaches. Believe in a 'soft' trickle-down effect, i.e. that the economic growth of poor people with potential would 'trickle down' to poor without potential via newly created jobs. Ethnicity does not play a role.	Paradigmatic background: Discourse on inequalities based on caste, ethnicity and gender and the call for inclusive development. Neoliberal approaches do not play a role.
Indicators: Economic categories intertwined with attributes of the persons (the lazy, the undeserving).	Indicators: Economic categories intertwined with social categories linked to 'identity' such ethnicity, caste/ religion and gender.

Source: Own illustration

Social categorisation: Challenges and opportunities – learning from each other (Honduras – Nepal)

Defining target groups and therefore using social categories is important. However, as the above description illustrates, the use of such categories might produce undesirable effects (see table 2). We argue that in both cases the used social categories (poor with potential and DAG) on the one hand perpetuate the social structures which cause poverty (e.g. lack of land in Honduras; perpetuation of the category DAG itself in Nepal). On the other hand, the used categories exclude certain group of persons who actually might need to benefit from development interventions: in Honduras the poorest, who are excluded and in Nepal poor but not discriminated people of other ethnic groups than those labelled as DAG.

Table 2: Effects of categorisations of target groups as in development documents on Honduras and Nepal

Honduras	Nepal
The use of economic categories and attributes of the persons a) leads to the exclusion of the poorest (because they are without potential) and b) reproduce and perpetuates the social structures causing poverty (e.g. lack of access to land)	The use of the category DAG leads a) to the reproduction and perpetuation of traditional caste and ethnicity based institutions and b), as it does not recognise the heterogeneity within specific DAG and non-DAG, e.g. within the Dalits (DAG) or within the Brahmins (non-DAG), it leads to exclusion of people who would need to benefit from development projects/assistance (e.g. poor Brahmins).

Source: Own illustration

Based on these observed undesired side-effects, we will discuss opportunities and challenges of social categorisation. Although the discussion is based on Honduras and Nepal, we assume that the discussion is valid for other countries with similar ethnic, political and paradigmatic contexts.

Honduras:

Opportunities:

- **No perpetuation of ethnicity or origin:** Despite the existence of ethnic groups, neither the Honduran PRS nor SDC's strategies use social categorizations based on ethnicity or origin. Also the observation of practices in the case study municipalities revealed that ethnicity does not play a role in social categorization. However, municipalities exist with a higher share of the population belonging to an ethnic minority. Probably practices in these locations could reveal a stronger use of ethnicity or origin for categorizing target groups.

Challenges:

- **Discursive exclusion of the poorest:** The discursive constructions of target groups of the Honduran PRS as well as of SDC's strategies show a bias towards including poor people who have some kind of potential. We posit that this is not unique to Honduras but rather reflects the development discourse of that time, which was relevant for the Central or Latin American region. Furthermore, these social categories do not stay at a discursive level. They materialise in the practical work of development practitioners and exclude certain groups from development programmes.
- **Vagueness in definitions:** Besides 'excluding' social categories, the analysis of the PRS documents and SDC's strategies revealed vagueness in the definitions of the target groups. Vague terms need interpretation, otherwise this vagueness gives way to arbitrarily – or politically – influenced decisions on who to include and who not.
- **Arbitrary selection processes:** Although for the studied PRS projects clear target groups *(the poorest)* were foreseen, the selection process tended to be arbitrary and to exclude the poorest and female headed households, the latter often being among the poorest. The delegation of selection processes to local leaders seems reasonable, as they 'know' the people in their community[12] and therefore could easily select the target beneficiaries, in this case, the poorest. However, as described above, local leaders tend to select the beneficiaries based on existing ties, excluding the poorest. Whether the 'discriminatory' characteristics of the local discourse (favouring economically poor people) consciously influences the selection or whether they were not well informed and briefed about the selection criteria is an open question.
- **Political sectarianism 'dissolving' social categories:** In municipalities and communities where political sectarianism is high, the selection of beneficiaries goes along party lines rather than social categories. Hence, a strong partisan might benefit from a project although in the local discourse, he or she is considered as 'mentally poor'. This way, political sectarianism might dissolve social categories. However, it is not a guarantee that all partisans, who theoretically would belong to the target group actually benefit. Furthermore, all non-partisans who would belong to the target group are excluded.

Nepal:

Opportunities:

- **Precise definitions:** The definitions of the target groups are relatively precise. Vagueness, which leads to a need for own interpretation and therefore facilitates the influence of hidden agendas, does not seem a serious problem.
- **Including the poorest:** When applying the social categories used in Honduras, the majority of Dalits would most probably belong to the group of poor without potential. Consequently, they would be excluded from development intervention. Hence, the focus on DAG, which includes the poorest, is an opportunity.
- The combination of economic as well as social indicators considers in principal livelihood realities.

Challenges

- However, the lack of recognition of heterogeneity within DAG and non-DAG leads to the exclusion of certain people because they are not DAG but are poor / extremely poor.
- The focus on caste and ethnicity perpetuates the caste system and the assignment of social positions is primarily origin (birth) based.
- Affirmative actions - some are already in implementation - may be advisable to guarantee certain groups of population access to positions and to user groups and committees, which they would not have otherwise. How far they have succeeded in their objectives, whether or not the elite within the groups have captured the positions in the name of the disadvantaged sections are moot questions, which needed to be answered. In Nepal, younger people are especially less strongly focussed on the caste identity of others when interacting, and a blending of people with different ethnic / caste background is observable. Affirmative actions might reverse this blending if the ethnic / cast

identity provides an advantage, e.g. to get a job. Learning from the ambivalent Indian experience and being aware that a quota system might perpetuate social divides instead of dissolving them, is helpful in order to refine these measures.

- Multiple income sources are only partly considered as off-farm and farm income are not combined.

Conclusion & recommendations: How can social categories be sensibly used in development practice and research?

Targeting is indispensable to prioritise and focus development interventions and hereby to ensure efficiency and efficacy. According to Friend and Funge-Smith (2002: 7) "not targeting the poor poses a significant risk of exacerbating differentiation between rich and poor, increasing marginalisation and social conflict."

Based on the experiences of the featured case studies as well as on existing literature on targeting (the poor), we formulated the following recommendations on how to identify target groups in development practice and research. They are not meant to be recipes, rather they should stimulate reflexivity about one owns work and provide inspirations on how to deal with the challenge of identifying target groups.

a) Reflexivity about discursive constructions of target groups

Political discourses within a country as well as international development discourses carry ideas about possible target groups, types of interventions, responsibility for poverty and its reduction etc. and with this they discursively include or exclude certain groups of people. Such discursive exclusion of some groups often do not remain at a discursive level but might materialise in practice. Therefore the adoption of discursively constructed social categories must be considered carefully, the categories used provisionally and in some cases the social categories deconstructed. Thus, reflexivity about the use of discursive categories is important.

Questions to be asked:

- Which social categories do we use in our programmes?
- Where do they come from? (e.g. from an international development paradigm or a specific political movement?)
- What are the underlying assumptions of these social categories (e.g. trickle-down or bottom-up effect)?
- Who do these social categories with the respective underlying assumptions exclude?
- Do we want to exclude these people?
- How has the accentuation of specific categories affected social transformation (including undesired side-effects)?

b) Precise definitions of target groups

The definition of key terms is not only a quality criterion of scientific work but also an essential aspect of development intervention. Vaguely defined social categories give way to arbitrary or conscious, i.e. politically motivated, selection which might exclude potential beneficiaries. Therefore it is important to carefully and precisely define social categories considering social intersectionality in order to describe target groups and to select beneficiaries.

Questions to be asked:

- Are the used social categories well defined? Are they specific and comprehensive?
- Are the definitions and social categories used in a consistent manner? Or do they vary and probably produce contradictions?
- Do the definitions include the envisaged target group? Or are certain sub-categories excluded?
- Do these definitions correspond with human rights?
- Does comprehensible justification on the definition criteria exist and is it adequately communicated to target and non-target groups (see section 'g')?
- Which definitions are used by other development organisations and by the government? Does a potential for harmonization exist?

c) Use proxies instead of rigid indicators

Scientifically sound and carefully developed poverty indicators such as the MPI or the more simple 1 to 2 $ poverty line are not always easy to apply in development practice and research. The use of proxies might be an option to come as close as possible to the ideal poverty indicator (in our view the MPI) and to be context specific at the same time. An example of such proxies are the items used for the household listing of the Honduran study: Economic aspects of poverty such as cash income, land tenure and remittances were complemented by questions on diet (how many meals and diet diversity),

housing conditions (material of floors, walls, roofs), clothing and physical conditions of survey participants including other household members. In the case of the Nepalese forestry project the local communities developed context-specific well-being indicators, which can be understood as proxies. Yet, the disadvantage is that participative collected data are not comparable with data from other villages.

It is important to act with caution with social indicators based on people's belonging to a specific caste, ethnic group or specific category of poor. At first, proxy belonging might be helpful, but in a second step stereotypical attributions should be stripped off and substituted by a careful analysis of other indicators which consider intersectionality.

d) Heterogeneity of target groups

Although target groups, be it DAG, 'the poor' or women, do not represent homogeneous groups, for identifying target groups the tendency exists to use single categories, without considering the different opportunities, economic stratification or loci of oppression. To overcome this shortcoming, approaches to identify target groups must deal with heterogeneity. Applying an intersectionality perspective can help to identify subgroups with their specific experiences, needs or obstacles faced. Such a perspective can raise awareness of over-inclusion and under-inclusion. Over-inclusion refers to a situation in which for example the ethnic dimension of inequality is subsumed under the gender dimension, such as in the case of the feminization of poverty thesis. This thesis renders invisible that Dalit women, for example, are historically more impoverished than woman of other ethnic groups. On the contrary, under-inclusion pertains to situations in which, for example, the gender dimension is ignored because the situation is perceived as one of ethnic discrimination. This would silence the gender inequality among Dalits, and might privilege the interests of Dalit men over those of Dalit women (see Norris et al 2010: 63).

e) Embeddedness of target groups

Although the aim is to identify the target groups and with this to somehow isolate them, it is important to be aware of their embeddedness in social contexts.

> Treating them as discrete social groups can undermine economically and socially significant relationships that exist between the poor and the better-off or between women and men. Without a dynamic understanding of people's social networks and the institutions and dimensions of difference that matter in the pursuit of their livelihoods, naïve efforts to bring about inclusive development may simply make things worse. (Cornwall 2008: 278)

Therefore,

> targeting should be inclusive rather than exclusive - there may be good reasons for including nonpoor (for example to overcome jealousy and prevent conflict). Targeting should aim to include the broadest group possible, but developing specific mechanisms to overcome the constraints to poorer people's entry, and to ensure that benefits accrue to poorer people. (Friend and Funge-Smith 2002:7)

Furthermore, in some situations it is appropriate to include those people, who are perceived as harming the target group, i.e. landlords, local leaders, high caste people etc. By including them, more powerful actors can be converted into allies instead of possible adversaries. Through this, the embeddedness of the target group within the social fabric can be taken into account.

f) Knowing the social fabric and political and economic context

Knowledge on the social fabric[13] as well as on the political and economic context, in which a development project is implemented or a study is carried, is vital in order to include the foreseen target groups. Often, development agencies are working in the same region for several years. Therefore, knowledge on the social fabric exists, but the risk of 'going native', i.e. lack of distance, exits too. However, if a project is to be implemented in a new region, this knowledge should be acquired before the implementation starts.
There are different ways of gaining this knowledge; three are discussed here:[14]

- A rather holistic way to understand the local context is proposed in SARD, an approach developed by SDC (Witteveen and Ruedin 2009). The two methods Landscape & History Map and Household Typology (based on the livelihood approach) are especially helpful for understanding the social fabric and the political and economic context. Based on this understanding beneficiaries who correspond to the foreseen target group can be identified.
- Another possibility is the use of a Household Listing (short survey based on livelihood aspects). Such a survey can be combined with SARD, replace livelihood interviews or stand on its own. However, on its own, a Household Listing cannot provide much information on the social fabric, i.e. the social relations between different local population groups, as it is a quantitative approach.
- A process which combines local stakeholders (who are knowledgeable about the social fabric and who know who the poor / poorest are) and the development/project leaders/administrators is another possibility to get to know the local context (see Morestin et al. 2009: 7). Here, the local knowledge on the social

fabric and on who the target groups are, is provided by the local stakeholders, but the identification is controlled by the project leader/administrator in order to deal with the risks of including local leaders – who might politically be biased – in beneficiary selection (see below).

Although all of the proposed processes require time and therefore financial resources, it is worth carrying them out in order to get an understanding of the context and to get an overview on the population groups living in a given region.

Questions to be asked are:

- Who represent the powerful group?
- What relations exist between the dominant and the excluded group? And how is the quality of this relation?

g) Participation yes, but careful inclusion of local leaders in selection process

Participatory methods are not only 'en vogue', they are also crucial for the fit of a given development project, for the compromise of the population with the project and as Morestin et al. (2009: 7) pointed out, for the social acceptability of identification criteria for the selection of beneficiaries. Nevertheless, crucial questions to be asked are, how, to what extent and under which conditions to include a given group of people.

As described above, for the process of getting to know the social fabric as well as to identify, who the poor/poorest or other target groups are, the knowledge of local leaders is a valuable source. However, the inclusion of local leaders or local development practitioners into the actual selection process needs to be carefully planned and accompanied (see also Alviar et al. 2010: 111; Morestin et al. 2009: 7) as they might be politically biased and therefore not objectively selecting beneficiaries.

Questions to be asked

- Are the local leaders/development practitioners well informed about the target groups?
- Are the selection criteria well defined and shared with the local leaders/ development practitioners? Were the selection criteria formulated based on participation (in order to reach socially accepted criteria)?
- Are the local leaders/ development practitioners in a 'neutral' position in order to select the beneficiaries? Are they 'free' from 'moral' obligations (political, friendship or family obligations) during this selection process? Or is there a conflict of interest? (see also Morestin et al. 2009: 7)

With this document we aimed at stimulating reflexivity about the process of identification of target groups based on our experience made in Honduras and Nepal. We strongly argue for a careful and context/country specific definition of target groups, while also suggesting an approach that looks beyond this specific definition and learns from the experiences of other contexts/countries.

Participatory processes in Honduras, 2010 *© Contzen*

Endnotes

[1] We focus on the poor and poorest as eradicating poverty is still the main challenge of development agendas (e.g. Zero Hunger Challenge of the Post-2015 agenda).

[2] We focus on the work of SDC in the two countries.

[3] Although critical development literature on neo-liberal approaches to poverty reduction exists, it seems that there is no debate among development scholars on these terms or on their backgrounds.

[4] For further information see www.north-south.unibe.ch and www.nccr.org.np

[5] See http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ access 03.2014

[6] See http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/country/home/tags/nepal

[7] see http://data.worldbank.org/country/nepal

[8] See http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/

[9] See http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/country/home/tags/nepal

[10] Due to the delayed elaboration of the constitution, an election of the Constituent Assembly was conducted again in November 2013.

[11] This section draws on the Honduran PRS (original version of 2001, popular version of 2005 and updated version of 2008), on the Swiss Cooperation Strategy for Central America 2007 - 2012 and to a minor extent on the Swiss Cooperation Strategy for Central America 2013 - 2017.

[12] Here, the term community refers to a politically or geographically defined area.

[13] We understand social fabric as created through the demographic composition (elements such as ethnic composition, wealth, educational level, employment rate and regional values) and the interpersonal relationships of an area.

[14] ECRIS (Rapid Collective Inquiry for the Identification of Conflicts and Strategic Groups) would be another option, although time consuming. ECRIS serves to gain rapidly insights into the social fabric by identify conflict arenas and strategic groups (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 1997).

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