Chronic Poverty Research Centre

Working Paper

July 2011 No. 219

Ascending out of poverty: An analysis of family histories in Kenya

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What is Chronic Poverty?

The distinguishing feature of chronic poverty is extended duration in absolute poverty.

Therefore, chronically poor people always, or usually, live below a poverty line, which is normally defined in terms of a money indicator (e.g. consumption, income, etc.), but could also be defined in terms of wider or subjective aspects of deprivation.

This is different from the transitorily poor, who move in and out of poverty, or only occasionally fall below the poverty line.

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Chronic Poverty Research Centre
ISBN: 978-1-908536-16-7

Abstract

This paper looks at inheritance through minimally-structured interviews with several generations of Kenyan families, seeking to explain that the *how* and *why* of poverty can be understood in the wider family context. Five main routes for ascending out of poverty were identified: (1) the gradual accumulation of resources due to income deriving from cash crops; (2) the gradual accumulation of resources due to income from non-farm work, including remittances from family member who have moved away for work; (3) the role of education, particularly skills training opposed to academic qualification, in helping provide employment; (4) accessing financial assets through support both from extended family members and from informal support mechanisms; (5) stability and benefits accruing from long-term strategic planning, including entrepreneurial activity. Both the ascent out of and the descent into poverty can be better conceived as processes, rather than due to chains of discrete events or specific 'shocks'.

Keywords: Kenya, poverty ascent and descent, cash crops, education

Acknowledgements

The research team would like to thank the communities at each of the study sites for their participation in this research. We would also like to thank Andrew Shepherd for his comments on an earlier version. The findings, conclusions, recommendations and any errors are, however, entirely the authors' responsibility.

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This document is an output from the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC) which is funded by UKaid from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries. The views expressed are not necessarily those of DFID. The CPRC gratefully acknowledges DFID's support.

Contents

1 Introduction

The quantitative study of poverty in the developing world has gone through an evolution from cross-sectional studies that used data either derived from official statistics or generated by 'one-off' surveys to longitudinal panel studies. The former give information about the aggregate characteristics of the poor and the not-so-poor that provide tantalising clues about the drivers that lead to exiting poverty. The latter, by following the same individuals or households over time, go beyond association and, through establishing sequence, can give the analyst the potential to infer causality. The best-designed panel studies, well-analysed, are capable of establishing convincing causal links between events. For instance, the securing of a job in an urban area can allow vital remittances to be sent home that could not have been obtained without a level of educational qualification and a move to the city. However, while in some cases education or migration enables people to ascend out of poverty, this begs the question *why* some people with education or who migrate see an improvement in their well-being while others do not.[1] The drivers of ascent from poverty are not simple causes and effects producing 'exits' but are myriad and contingent; a combination of strategy, application and effort and the operation of chance.

This paper reports results from what was essentially an exploratory study carried out in Kenya through a method – qualitative family histories – that, it is argued, has the capacity to provide insights into the contingent nature of leaving poverty. The method, through generating what is essentially a holistic view of the family and having the potential for serendipitous findings, is capable of throwing light onto the complex interplay of mechanisms that can lead to leaving poverty.

The accounts in the interviews yielded rich material about changing economic fortunes with little prompting needed from us.

[1] And while some in fact are *worse off* due to the resources they put into education or migrating not yielding the hoped-for returns.

2 Ascending out of poverty

In order to understand the ascent from poverty, it is important to understand what pushes people into poverty (poverty drivers), what keeps them trapped in poverty (poverty maintainers) and what enables them to escape poverty (poverty interrupters) (CPRC, 2004).

The drivers of poverty are the events, processes or social and economic structures which cause households to fall into poverty. Poverty maintainers are the institutions and processes which trap people in poverty for extended durations. In reality the drivers and maintainers of chronic poverty can be difficult to tell apart from each other. But thinking about poverty in this way enables us to think about the complex interplay of economic, social and political forces which trap people in chronic poverty (Baulch, 2011). It is important to also understand the processes of accumulation, economic and social structures, policies and interventions which allow households to escape from poverty.

Firstly, it is important to recognise that the processes which lead individuals and households to escape from chronic poverty are diverse and context specific. This means that the livelihood strategy that may allow one household, with particular endowments[2] and networks, to move out of poverty may plunge another household, with different endowments and networks, into deeper poverty (Baulch, 2011).

Secondly, it is helpful to understand the pattern of movements out of poverty. These are widely assumed to be a gradual process. However, evidence from life histories collected in Bangladesh shows that, while they are gradual, they are often interrupted by short-term set-backs, generating a slow ‘saw-tooth’ processes of accumulation in which households build up their physical, human and social capital despite regular shocks[3] and other predictable events that can drain finances, such as the need to pay dowry (Davis, 2009).

Escaping from chronic poverty is often due to a combination of improved returns to **endowments**, **asset accumulation**, and **good luck** (Baulch, 2011). These are the reverse of factors driving people into poverty or maintaining them in poverty.

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[2] Endowments consist of all the assets which households may possess. In addition to labour, which is typically the most abundant asset of the poor, endowments include five types of capital: physical capital (productive assets, housing); natural capital (land); human capital (knowledge, skills and health); financial capital (cash, bank deposits, livestock and other stores of wealth); and social capital (the networks and informal institutions that facilitate coordination and cooperation) (Baulch, 2011).

[3] Shocks may be defined as adverse events that lead to a loss of consumption, income, assets, or another welfare indicator.

2.1 Education

Probably the most important endowment for escaping poverty is **education,** which is found to be crucial in many places for gaining higher return employment (Baulch, 2011). Literacy and numeracy enables people to access information and services (e.g. accessing micro-credit), deal with officialdom and transact in the market place. It can provide enhanced status and political voice, and increase the benefit that individuals can gain from pro-poor interventions. People with an education have access to better jobs, their enterprises are likely to be more profitable and they gain from a wide range of social benefits. For example, educated parents are more likely to educate their own children. Educated women gain negotiating power in the household, they are also more likely to delay marriage, have their first child later and have better nourished children (Bird, 2011). They are also more likely to adopt health-seeking behaviour. Educated people are also more resilient in the face of shocks and have been found to recover more rapidly and more completely following conflict (Bird *et al*., 2010; Mathenge and Tschirley, 2008).

Initial education is found to significantly improve upward mobility in studies of Bangladesh, Nepal and Vietnam (Baulch, 2011). Initial education and changes in education are also important in South Africa (ibid.). In Bangladesh, poor people reported increased profits from vegetable production or fish farming directly as a result of practical training they had received from NGOs and other sources (Davis, 2007). Higher education increases access to formal sector employment paying a monthly salary (ibid.). In rural Ethiopia, the probability of being chronically poor in 1994-2004 was more than a fifth lower for households with a head who had completed primary education (Dercon *et al*., 2007). In KwaZulu Natal in South Africa, May *et al.* (2011) found that low initial education was the only variable that can be shown to have trapped households in poverty between 1994 and 2004. In Nepal, Bhatta and Sharma (2011) found a powerful impact of education on social mobility in that while the transient poor have only completed a quarter of a year more of schooling than the chronically poor, the never poor have more than a year and half's additional education. In Vietnam, Baulch and Vu (2011) show that failure to complete primary schooling by the household head is one of the key factors – along with geography and ethnicity – that lock households into chronic poverty, while completion of higher secondary school is an extremely strong predictor that a household is never poor. In Kenya, various studies attest to the importance of education in keeping households out of poverty. A study by Suri *et al.* (2008) indicates that education above primary level has a positive effect on keeping households out of poverty. This finding is also consistent with that of Mathenge and Tschirely (2008), which emphasizes the potential role of education (of at least secondary level) in not only breaking the cycle of poverty for those trapped in it, but also its ability to allow increased recovery from income shocks.

Education is important not only because it gives people the knowledge to improve their livelihoods but also because it provides access to formal (salaried or wage) employment, which a number of studies show is an important escape route from chronic poverty. For example, May *et al.* (2011) show that households with few members in employment in one period found it difficult to improve their wellbeing subsequently. However, returns to education depend on the structure of the economy and the presence, or otherwise, of transparent and meritocratic job markets. Research indicates that at least 10 years of education may be necessary if individuals are to be protected from poverty (Bird, 2011).

For people who missed out on education as a child, adult education can give them the opportunity to gain key skills. A World Bank study reviewed 18 programmes which provided training in livelihood skills and basic education for illiterate and semi-literate youths and adults. It found that such training enhanced the confidence and social resources of participants, which in turn helped them to take initiatives to improve their livelihoods. Their improved literacy and numeracy helped them in market transactions and so supported entrepreneurship, while their new vocational skills encouraged more productive agricultural or livestock practices (Oxenham *et al*., 2002). Lauglo (2001) suggests that adult education also supports gender and social empowerment.

2.2 Labour

Improved returns to endowments, in particular **labour**, help to break the cycle of low incomes and investment that perpetuate poverty (Baulch, 2011). Many poor people report that **hard work**, including **casual labour**, can be an important route out of poverty (Davis, 2007). However, improvements experienced by casual labourers are slow, if they exist at all. Income usually only just exceeds consumption needs, and only if other demands are manageable and there are no negative events or contingencies. In addition, in many areas labour demands are seasonal and it can be hard to find regular work throughout the year. If there is a surplus, poor households tend to invest in other income generating activities, in an attempt to diversify and be less reliant on irregular casual work. In Bangladesh, buying livestock or mortgaging land were viewed as signs that a household was on an improving trajectory (Davis, 2007).

Poor people also emphasise the importance of their own initiative in **finding jobs** and **starting new businesses** in helping them to move out of poverty (Narayan *et al.,* 2009). Poor people commonly have complex portfolios of livelihood activities. These tend to have low barriers to entry (capital, skill) and high labour inputs. They are often drudgery intense (e.g., brewing local beer in Uganda, making bricks in Kenya or charcoal in Zimbabwe) and low status. But it is through having a diverse range of activities that poor people spread risk, seek new opportunities and test out new markets and fit work around household and community obligations. Narayan *et al.* (2009: 20) found that individual initiative in non-agricultural enterprises was the source of improvement in 60 percent of cases, while individual agricultural initiative was the source in 17 percent of cases). The balance is made up of asset accumulation, hard work and a range of other smaller sources of improvement.

Self confidence, aspirations, initiative and **agency** are clearly important if poor people are to develop successful businesses that enable them to move out of poverty. Narayan *et al.* (2009: 28) found people who have moved out of poverty have similar levels of confidence as the never-poor (never poor scored 82, upwardly mobile 74). The chronically poor and the downwardly mobile had much lower levels of confidence (43 and 33 respectively) and in in-depth interviews with poor people inner strength and self-confidence was reported time and again as being crucial in enabling them to move out of poverty (Narayan *et al*., 2009: 27).

Panel studies confirm that household members obtaining **formal employment** is frequently associated with escapes from chronic poverty (Baulch, 2011). In Bangladesh[4], such work is higher status than casual labour or working for a micro-enterprise. It is generally secure and provides benefits (e.g. the ability to get salary advances, when necessary), while having a formal sector job provides an individual with network resources associated with having high status (Davis, 2007). So, in Bangladesh a man with high status might be asked to join the local mosque committee and be invited to wealthy people's houses or be included in resolving village disputes in informal tribunals (Davis, 2007). However, the movement out of poverty can be slow where salaries are low and considerable investments in education are often needed in order to secure these jobs. In Bangladesh, the right education is not enough to guarantee getting a job and, for many salaried positions, personal contacts and bribes are required.

Establishing a successful **non-farm business** is also widely found to support ascent from poverty (Baulch, 2011). Research in rural Africa and South Asia shows that non-farm activities and transfers account for between 40 percent and 60 percent of rural household income (Ellis and Freeman, 2005). In Bangladesh, 'doing business' was identified as a major route out of poverty (Davis, 2001). The businesses tended to be petty enterprises trading in a wide range of agricultural and non-agricultural commodities, but also included storing of grain or jute, bamboo trading, taking vegetables to market towns, dealing in fish fry, livestock, setting up shops, and a host of other activities. New forms of business were also identified as emerging, such as mobile phone shops. Success in business often resulted in diversification and allowed land and other assets to be purchased. It often also involved the use of credit from microfinance organisations (Davis, 2007).

Diversification into non-farm activities can help poorer households to reduce their dependency on a single income source, spreading risk and potentially contributing to poverty

[4] In Bangladesh, formal sector waged work reported by poor people included work for the police, army, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), NGOs, government departments, banks, factories, textile mills, school teaching, work in the offices of private companies (Davis, 2007). More recently, particularly for women, it has become possible to get work in garment factories, for example, without advanced qualifications.

reduction. Non-farm activities range from household-based manufacturing and processing of natural resources to large-scale agro-processing activities.

Resource-rich households (with adequate stocks of savings, land, labour, entrepreneurial skills etc.) may develop high-return enterprises. However, poorer households may well face barriers to entry that result in their concentration amongst drudgery-intense, low-return enterprises. This may limit the role that diversification can play in supporting improvements in food security, income, savings and asset accumulation by the poor. As a result, policies and interventions that reduce the barriers to entry faced by poor households are important, if poor people are to be able to diversify and both benefit from and contribute to local economic growth processes.

Area-specific factors which help people to move out of poverty include labour intensive economic growth, as this helps people to find work, the physical presence of markets in a village and proximity to cities and roads (Narayan *et al*., 2009: 25). This suggests that enabling pro-poor and labour intensive growth in remote rural areas can have an important effect, particularly where they include the development of market deepening and **investments in infrastructure**, including the construction of village market places and feeder roads.

Changes in governance to reduce the political marginalisation of remote rural areas is probably also necessary, alongside **public services** to mitigate the social and economic limits faced by people in remote areas. In reality, the scale of investments necessary to bring remote areas into the social and economic mainstream will take many years. An extreme example of poor governance is a failed or fragile state and many countries that are not in this category suffer from conflicts affecting a greater or lesser proportion of their population.

Conflict has been shown as a major driver of poverty and the **end of conflict** can generate a substantial peace dividend, with poverty rates falling as people are once again able to engage in agriculture and business. In the meantime **migration** (particularly domestic migration) can be important for leaving poverty (Kapur Mehta *et al.* 2011)

2.3 Migration

Adverse geography can keep people trapped in chronic poverty (Bloom *et al*., 2003; Carter and Barrett, 2005; Sachs *et al*., 2004; Narayan *et al*., 2009; Bird *et al*., 2010). Narayan *et al.* (2009: 25) find that community level effects are very strong - 25 per cent of variation across communities in the rates of those moving out of poverty can be explained by country or region while 75 percent depends on the community of study within a country. Many chronically poor people live in remote rural areas, which are usually mountainous or isolated from the centres of economic or political activity by lack of communications and markets (CPRC, 2004). In rural Ethiopia, the majority of chronically poor people live in remote, semiarid areas such as Tigray and Shoa and in rural Vietnam, chronic poverty is highest among people living in the Northern Mountains and Central Highlands regions (Baulch and Vu, 2011). In Nepal, chronic poverty is highest in the mountains and rural hills (Bhatta and Sharma, 2011). People may respond to these concentrations of poverty by migrating in search of work. Some migrate permanently, while others engage in circular migration. If we look at India, we see that circular migration rates are high, particularly with people migrating from remote rural areas. A high proportion of migrants are chronically poor and particularly high migration rates are found in drought-prone areas with low agro-ecological potential, poor access to credit or other pre-requisites for diversification and high population densities.

In India, circular migration is particularly high among the poor, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and Muslims. In the tribal districts of southern Madhya Pradesh, 65 percent of households included migrants (Mosse *et al*., 1997). In Jharkhand, a study of twelve villages found that one-third of the households had at least one member migrating. Short-term migration was higher among poorer groups, involving over 80 percent of the landless and 88 percent of illiterate people and migration among Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) was nearly twice that of upper castes (15 percent of the SC/ST households compared to 8 percent of upper caste households) (Dayal and Karan, 2003). In Rajasthan, 95 percent of the migrants congregating at Chakoris (recruiting points) are dalits (Jagori, 2001). There are extremely high rates of migration among tribals from southern Rajasthan who migrate to Gujarat to work in seed cotton farms and textile markets (Katiyar, 2006; Venkateswarlu, 2004).

In Bangladesh, labour migration has been identified as one of the three most important sources of exit from poverty (Davis, 2007). Much of this migration was international, which was seen as a high-risk option that requires most to sell assets to be able to afford substantial upfront expenditure, but delivers potentially high returns, as workers save many times the initial investment. However, poor, less-socially-connected and poorly-educated people are often vulnerable to dishonest agents when arranging work overseas, adding considerable risk to this option (Davis, 2007). This is echoed by the processes described in a recent World Bank study which explores qualitative data from 15 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America to describe the processes which enable people to ‘move out of poverty from the bottom-up’ (Narayan *et al.*, 2009).

Evidence from India shows that domestic circular migration can lead to positive change in both sending and receiving areas (Deshingkar and Grimm, 2004). It does have the capacity to increase income, savings and assets and be important for supporting an exit from poverty and halting the slide into poverty. For example, the income earned by women migrating from West Bengal to Delhi to work as housemaids enabled them to move out of poverty (Mukherjee, 2004). A study of 955 migrant households in Tamil Nadu found that 57 percent of lower income migrants had seen their income increase and 53 percent had increased their asset holdings (Sundari, 2005). People migrating from Mahbubnagar District, Andhra

Pradesh to the paddy fields of Karnataka were found to have saved an average Rs 2,000-3,000 per season (Khandelwal, 2002). Migration can also enable the sending of remittances to marginalised localities, which can be used to invest in human capital or in productive assets, playing an important role in reducing vulnerability, improving food security, stimulating land markets, increasing local wages and the demand for local goods and services and generally improving the economy (Deshingkar, 2006).[5] It also helps tighten rural labour markets (Wiggins and Deshingkar, 2007).

Hence, migration is perceived as a means of escaping poverty. Being less bound to the land and into social relationships, young adult populations unsurprisingly have a greater propensity to migrate and there is a link between being a child from a larger family and migration, especially where single family members migrate (Deshingkar, 2006). Permanent migration rates are higher among the more educated, but illiterate and unskilled people appear to dominate seasonal labour migration (Deshingkar, 2006).

The majority of migrants are absorbed into the informal sector, which is characterised by low productivity and limited prospects for leaving poverty. Many are adversely incorporated into labour markets, with middlemen and contractors maximising their own profits. Some research suggests that, as a result, migration can only deliver survival wages. However, others have found that migrants have been able to escape poverty while remaining in the informal sector. Migrants in Delhi slums have moved into higher income, regular jobs once they have gained experience (Gupta and Mitra, 2002 in Deshingkar and Anderson, 2004). In West Bengal, migrants now view migration as a way of accumulating a useful lump sum, rather than simply surviving (Rogaly and Coppard, 2003 in Deshingkar and Anderson, 2004) and in Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, lower caste people have used migration to both farm and non-farm work to break out of caste constraints (especially strong in rural areas), find new opportunities, and escape poverty (Deshingkar and Start, 2003).

It is clear that migration is not an option for everyone and adverse consequences of rural-urban migration are well documented. Migration can lead to an acute shortage of labour and high dependency ratios in sending areas with mass male migration sometimes leading to worsening poverty. However, these risks are off-set where wage rates are sufficiently high to allow regular remittances. People who are away for a long time may lose access to natural resources and lose their voice in community decision-making. Migration can also have a

[5] In Mumbai, remittances account for much of the £126 million (2005) sent using money orders from the Mumbai post office to Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal (Deshingkar, 2006b). Earnings from migration were found to account for more than half of the annual earnings from labour in un-irrigated and forested villages of Madhya Pradesh (Deshingkar and Start, 2003). In the more prosperous Andhra Pradesh the overall contribution was much lower but in the village that was in the un-irrigated and poor north-western corner, migration contributed 51 percent of household earnings. 80 percent of cash income in project villages (in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan) was found to come from migration (Mosse *et al.*, 1997).

negative effect on collective action and natural resource management, where significant labour inputs are required (Deshingkar, 2003).

2.4 Asset accumulation

Poverty analysis increasingly recognises that income alone does not provide an adequate understanding of different kinds of poverty (Carter and Barrett, 2006; Osmani, 2007) and may in fact be inadequate (Muyanga *et al.,* 2010). A dynamic asset-based approach, incorporating both privately-held productive and financial wealth, provides important information on the structural foundations of poverty and helps distinguish chronic poverty from poverty traps (Carter and Barrett, 2006). 'Asset holdings are . . . a more stable indicator of current welfare and future vulnerability especially in regions where households rely greatly on their physical assets for their livelihoods (Krishna 2004; Barrett and Swallow 2006; Carter and Barrett 2006; Cooper 2008).' (Muyanga *et al.*, 2010: 1) Access to, and control of, productive assets are clear determinants of individual and household income and consumption levels. Assets influence livelihood and investment options and impact on both short- and long-term well-being. Better endowed households are more likely to maintain their children's food security, health and education. Assets can also be an important source of social mobility.

Asset ownership (widely defined) is a crucial factor in escaping poverty. Evidence over a number of countries find a relationship between growth in expenditures and initial endowments of land, livestock and human capital (Baulch, 2011). **Accumulating additional productive assets** is also of crucial importance for ascending from poverty (Baulch, 2011). The transfer of physical assets from the parents' generation to the children's generation has been shown to provide the start-up material for the younger generations' more independent future livelihoods and economic productivity (Fafchamps and Quisumbing, 2005 in Cooper, 2010). Studies of the poverty trajectories of households and individuals in Sub-Saharan African societies have identified that exclusion from asset inheritance exacerbates vulnerability to chronic and IGT poverty (Bird *et al.*, 2004).

The gradual **accumulation of assets**, which can enable the diversification of livelihood options, provide collateral for formal sector borrowing, enable investment, including in human capital formation, and reduce vulnerability to the impact of shocks or negative trends, can boost resilience and limit the need for the adoption of adverse coping strategies. Assets, when held by someone with both the necessary capabilities and agency to use them effectively, can therefore be an important source of social mobility. As gaining assets is so crucial to wealth and well-being, losing assets is linked to the economic decline of individuals and their households, who can become trapped in long term and chronic poverty. Combined with wider failures in policy or public provision, an absence of assets can lead to the conditions where poverty is transmitted intergenerationally.

In low-income developing countries, land is the key asset, forming a large proportion of poor people's asset portfolios (Deininger, 2004). It is the primary source of wealth, social status and power, and provides the basis for shelter, food, and economic activities. In rural India, for example, poverty is highly correlated with the lack of access to land (Mearns, 1999) and in subsistence economies having land is fundamental to household well-being (Mtika, 2003). Also, access to resources such as water and to services such as sanitation and electricity, as well as the ability to make long-term investments in land and housing, are often dependent on rights to access land (Cooper, 2010a). Land ownership also enables access to other assets and resources, supporting investment and diversification (Dolan, 2002; Desai, 2010; Anriquez *et al.*, 2010 in Jones *et al.*, 2010). An inability to own land creates an 'asset trap' which is reinforced by social norms and the gender division of labour to limit women's livelihood options and investment patterns. Both within-group and between-group unevenness in asset holdings can result in intense inequality in the 'initial conditions' of households, making it much easier for asset-rich households to save, invest and accumulate than others.

Hence, in land-scarce contexts, **access to land** and other productive assets is important in escaping poverty. In rural Bangladesh and Pakistan, the area of land owned initially affected subsequent growth in expenditure, while in Nepal, land ownership was found to have a negative relationship with both chronic and transitory poverty (Baulch, 2011). Again in Bangladesh, **access to land** was a factor helping over half of the households who were identified by life histories as having moved out poverty (Davis, 2011).

Further, where income is highly dependent on cultivable land, the children of people who are poor will grow up to be poorer unless income diversification occurs. Successful diversification will only occur if higher investments in human capital are accompanied by improvements in labour and capital markets (Soto Bermant, 2008).

Asset holdings can be strongly unequal, both within and between groups, embedding the long-term implications of social difference, feudal or colonial systems. In such situations, land scarcity driven by population growth, changing land use, environmental degradation and economic development has contributed to increased land contestation between and within groups accompanied by land encroachments and invasions and alienation by international companies and the erosion of traditional norms and practices around land management inheritance.

The inheritance or non-inheritance of assets has been found to be integrally linked to a person's poverty trajectory and their likelihood of remaining in or moving out of chronic poverty. Inherited assets (particularly land) are a key determinant of non-labour income (Quisumbing, 1994). **Inheritance** or **help from families** was also important, cited by nearly one in five of the exiting households (Davis, 2011). However, the inheritance of land is not always a route out of poverty. It can also restrict mobility. For example, sons inherit land equally in much of India, but the eldest son stays to farm it, while others are free to move into the non-farm sector or migrate, enabling upward mobility. In Kenya, inheriting land can also act as a poverty trap when the land is insufficient to provide more than a bare subsistence living (Miller *et al.*, forthcoming) Outcomes depend on the relative returns to land and other assets and capabilities. And in India, women's land rights can simply increase women's work burden, without much change in terms of status or decision-making authority (Rao, 2006).

The ownership of assets by a household affects the long-run wealth of its members. Where asset holding is low and poverty chronic and severe, poverty can be transmitted intergenerationally. It is not just the absolute level of asset holding by a household or total household income but the share of ownership and control by women and men. A study of household decision-making in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Indonesia and South Africa found that the household head does not necessarily make all decisions in order to maximise the well-being of all household members (Quisumbing and Maluccio, 2003).

Ownership of **other productive assets** also matters for consumption smoothing and poverty ascent. Raising livestock can be an important way for poor households to accumulate assets, while providing income and some degree of protection against shocks (IFAD, 2001 in Baulch, 2011). Many households will start with chickens and move on to goats and eventually cattle. Smaller livestock can be sold to meet household needs and larger livestock to meet more substantial contingencies. Where households are able to accumulate cattle they can make income from the milk and continue to accumulate their assets through breeding. Older people can also use income from livestock (such as milk from a cow) to support them when other forms of work are too arduous (Davis, 2007). However, some risks are unavoidable in livestock production and the loss of a cow can have a large impact on household wealth.

Alienation from productive assets and property has been linked to the economic decline of individuals and their households, who can become trapped in long-term and chronic poverty. Combined with wider failures in policy or public provision, an absence of assets can lead to the conditions where poverty is transmitted intergenerationally.

The evidence shows that households who escape poverty are not households who are unaffected by shocks, but those who are more resilient and able to bounce back from the shock. Asset holding is crucial for **resilience**, or the ability to bounce back from shocks. Households with higher levels of assets and capabilities are more likely to develop effective coping strategies enabling them to maintain household consumption and return rapidly to pre-shock levels of well-being. Resilience is therefore vital for ascending out of poverty. 'In environments where credit and insurance markets are not available, households have been found to rely on their assets to smooth consumption and to ensure survival through repeated shocks. Thus, assets act as a *safety net* when households' income streams are interrupted (Carter and Barrett 2006; Zeller and Sharma 2000)' (Muyanga *et al.,* 2010). Households with low levels of resilience will be set back as soon as they are hit by a negative event and will not be able to make the necessary investments or accumulations of assets to allow an exit from poverty.

However, an **absence of shocks** is also important in enabling poor households to move out of poverty particularly when combined with unexpected positive events, which can boost their upward mobility (Baulch, 2011). Being exposed to some of these shocks is fairly predictable (in areas where there is a drought one year in seven; paying dowry or brideprice if you have children of marriageable age). However, some are merely a matter of bad luck (health shocks, robbery). This suggests that **the avoidance of bad luck** plays a role in poverty exits as families who face a low density of shocks are more able to accumulate and invest.

2.5 Economic growth

Economic growth, particularly when it is labour intensive, can be important in enabling people to leave poverty. A review of the experience of 14 countries during the 1990s found that income poverty only fell when there was growth, and, in general, higher rates of growth were associated with larger falls in income poverty (World Bank, 2005a). Kenya experienced a period of economic growth during most of the period covered by the panel study surveys that provided the sample of households for this study.[6]

If economic growth is to benefit poor people in such a way as to enable them to move out of poverty, the pace and pattern of growth must be right. It must be sufficiently consistent and rapid and the growth must create extra jobs in the sectors where poor people work. At least seven types of features can work to transmit pro-poor economic growth through the economy (Source: Bird, 2011):

(1) Labour intensity

Growth is more likely to benefit the poor if the growing sector(s) are labour intensive and generate both jobs and livelihood opportunities for poor people.

The nature of the labour market equally matters (mobility; health and education level of workers; distortions and rigidities in the labour market; e.g., as a result of discrimination or heavy regulation). It will also depend on the level of employment generated through up and downstream linkages (e.g., supply companies, packers and shippers) and through multipliers and second and third round effects (e.g., increased demand for agricultural produce stimulating both agricultural production and agro-processing).

[6] However, in the three years through the time of the family history fieldwork, this cycle of growth has reversed.

(2) Increased returns on investment

Increased returns on investment can have a substantial impact on the poor; both direct, as a result of returns on their investments and indirect as employment is created and goods and services are more widely available. However, the poor, and in particular the poorest, are less likely to save in formal financial institutions so their investments will be personal investments in human capital and in agricultural and non-agricultural micro-enterprise.

(3) Differential growth rates (effects of sector, locality, enclave)

The increased profitability of enterprises may vary widely, depending on the sector that it is in, the quality of the local economic environment and on the degree of market integration and/or monopolistic and uncompetitive tendencies in that sector.

(4) Improved market functioning

Markets that are competitive and well integrated over time and space are important in enabling enterprise. They can be crucial in providing improved access to services and increased labour opportunities. Indirectly, they can be important for poverty reduction. However this depends on the nature of market institutions and their relationship to underlying social and economic structures. The functioning of markets can lock poor people into adverse forms of exchange (adverse incorporation), where power asymmetries lead them to exchanging their labour for low wages and under poor conditions of service and their land, livestock or produce for low prices. For example, in Kenya, poorer farmers benefited from rising coffee prices in the mid-1990s. But since the late 1990s, agricultural earnings have stagnated.

(5) Increased government revenue, spent in a pro-poor way

Growth increases the tax base. If the government's administration of revenue collection is efficient it is likely that the tax take would increase. Whether this is pro-poor or not would depend on the 'progressiveness' of the tax regime, what is taxed (e.g., consumption, labour, capital, energy, etc.) and whether the government has a good record on delivering public services (which the poor have access to), generating a pro-poor enabling environment (e.g., appropriate infrastructure, telecoms and utilities) and delivering effective poverty reduction interventions

(6) Improved institutional performance

Growth may influence institutions in unanticipated ways. For example, the increased inequality which accompanies narrowly-focused growth may undermine democratic accountability. The populist politics which responds to inequality in some environments (e.g. Bolivia) can have profound impacts on institutions and norms. Growth can also drive improved (downward) accountability as citizens become more vocal and hold decision-makers and service providers to account.

(7) Agricultural growth

According to the World Bank, agricultural growth in some countries could be identified as the source of between 40 percent and 70 percent of poverty reduction (World Bank, 2005b). Dorward *et al*. (2004) argue that even where large-scale productivity increases cannot be achieved, agriculture still has an important role to play in supporting people's livelihoods, promoting food security and incomes. Although the policies and investment required for supporting rural livelihoods are less ambitious than growth-promotion policies, significant investment is still needed in appropriate technologies, in coordinated services for small farmers and in promoting and enabling economic and political environment for poor farmers. However, these policies, investments and institutional changes have to be balanced against the risk of livelihood failure, as well as the fiscal and human costs of the poorest rural communities becoming increasingly locked into a descending spiral of declining production due to increasing the sub-division of small plots with consequent soil exhaustion and increasing dependency on welfare support and emergency relief.

2.6 Interventions in farming

Improved forms of agriculture have commonly been identified in Bangladesh as an important route out of poverty and included increasing yields through using high yielding rice varieties and improved irrigation, adopting new crops and moving into horticulture. Credit was important in enabling such improvements, and it has been used to finance agricultural inputs (seed, fertiliser, pesticides and irrigation). However, the research also showed that greater capital intensity exposed farmers to greater risk, as they had more to lose if the crop failed (floods, insect damage, hailstorms) or when there were input shortages (Davis, 2007).

Expanding the **technology** available to poor farmers has played an important role in increasing agricultural earnings in Asia. However, in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, there has been a lack of appropriate high-yield/reduced-risk/reduced-labour plant varieties, and inadequate investments in water harvesting and micro-irrigation (Bird, 2011). Much of Africa's crop production still takes place under rain-fed conditions. In Kenya, less than 2 percent of arable land is irrigated (ASDS, 2010). Micro-irrigation and improved water management would enable farmers to expand production, creating a larger marketable surplus. Those close to appropriate markets would be more able to also diversify into higher value horticultural and export crops.

Agricultural extension services have tended to perform poorly, delivering inappropriately adjusted advice to resource-poor farmers – who are commonly also labour constrained and have weak linkages to poorly performing and fragmented markets. Fiscal constraints, combined with poor advice from donors, resulted in the rapid privatisation of agricultural research and extension services in many low-income countries. This has sharpened exclusion from service provision as services have commonly only been provided to those who can pay on the point of delivery. Advice has tended, therefore, to focus increasingly on commercial crops grown by farmers producing a marketable surplus, with access to savings or seasonal credit (to pay for services) and with a belief that the lack of agronomic technical information is their binding constraint (Bird, 2011). Where tailored advice has been given to poor farmers, gains have been considerable, enabling some households to improve their incomes, invest in assets and move out of poverty.

Helping poorer and smaller producers deal with risk is crucial to poverty exit. It reduces risk-averse behaviour and increases the likelihood of investment and livelihood diversification. Such investments may include those using higher yielding agricultural techniques or with non-farm diversification which might enhance income, reduce poverty and – potentially – stimulate both employment and economic growth (Bird, 2011). Approaches to reduce risk might include irrigation, flood defence, market information, microfinance to help households to build an asset base, and improved post-harvest storage or micro-insurance interventions that help households mitigate the negative events they experience and include a wide range of social protection measures.

Good environmental management can enhance the value of land and other natural resources and increase the returns from such resources. Examples might include: introducing contour ploughing and soil management; micro-irrigation; integrated pest management; agro-forestry or improved crop rotations and fallowing. The problem for poor households is that many of these techniques require substantial initial investment and/or labour commitments.

2.7 Services and social support networks

A country's **political economy**, the **state-citizen contract** and the **quality of governance** matter for people's chances of moving out of poverty. Together, they influence the design and delivery of macro-economic, sectoral and social policy and determine fiscal policy. These set the context within which poor people are able to access services, build enterprises, find remunerative work, accumulate assets, invest and move out of poverty.

Appropriate financial services are important in enabling consumption smoothing and giving poor people access to opportunities to save, borrow and buy insurance. Accessing credit was identified as having helped poor people to move out of livelihoods based entirely on casual labour to more profitable activities such as rearing livestock, buying rickshaws and sewing machines, starting up small shops or mortgaging or purchasing of land, and lending-on money at higher interest rates, although greater indebtedness also had clear downsides (Davis, 2007).

Insurance is also important. Poor people are commonly the most exposed to risk and the least able to cope, but their inability to afford regular insurance premiums leads to their exclusion from formal insurance schemes. Instead, they tend to rely on their extended social network, although traditional safety nets do not necessarily perform well in protecting the poorest and most excluded, particularly where there is a widespread decline in well-being. An attempt to respond to this exclusion has led to the development of micro-insurance schemes[7] to complement non-contributory social-protection mechanisms (Bird, 2011).

Social protection can also enable households to move out of poverty by allowing consumption smoothing, supporting investment in human capital and enabling asset accumulation and investment in micro-enterprise. Forms of social protection might include **pensions**, **employment guarantee schemes**, **food for work** or **cash for work** schemes, **conditional/unconditional cash transfer schemes** and others. Sadly, social protection schemes are often too small in coverage and provide such a low level of resources that they do not enable poor people to build permanent assets or sufficiently reduce their vulnerability to enable them to ascend out of poverty (Narayan *et. al*., 2009: 22). In the absence of effective social protection, an individual's **social network** can play an important role in coping strategies following a shock or negative event. They can give or lend money or food, provide paid work or housing, foster children or provide advice. They can also be important in accumulative strategies, providing introductions to employers or accommodation while looking for work. This can be important for circular migrants but also for those looking for work more locally.

In Kenya, **old-age pensions** were found to have the potential to pull poor recipients above the poverty line. Elder-led households in Kenya were found to be more likely than other households to be poor and to experience poorer wellbeing over a range of social indicators (Bird and Gatheru, 2009). Pensions buffer against poverty – more so than either wages or other transfers and they also benefit children living in a household containing an older person. This is particularly important in 'skip-generation households' where older people look after children without any other adult support (3 per cent of Kenyan older people of pensionable age live with children under 15 in skip-generation households) (Bird and Gatheru, 2009). However, few Kenyans receive a pension – 3.1 percent of people over 55 (Kenyan retirement age) in 1994 (90 percent of whom were men) – and those who receive them are not the neediest.

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[7] Micro-insurance provides tailor-made insurance 'products' to poor and disadvantaged people in order to protect against a variety of risks, including those related to health. It typically involves low premiums and modest benefits and can be delivered by either public or private insurance companies. Insurance companies have found that collaborating closely with civil society organisations helps them to overcome the information asymmetries and transaction costs of providing insurance to low-income groups and to provide them with information about the risks to insure against, what benefits to provide, the premiums to charge and how best to approach the settlement of claims (Ahuja, 2006 in Bird, 2011).

The **position in the life-cycle** of the household and key individuals within it can also play an important role in enabling people to leave poverty. Evidence suggests that people who escape poverty are often relatively young and their households are at relatively early stages in their life cycle (Baulch, 2011). Younger individuals are typically more mobile and adaptable and have greater physical strength, enabling them to engage in low-barrier-to-entry, drudgery-intensive activities. Younger households are also less likely to experience health shocks or the social obligations which have negative consequences for assert retention amongst older households (Baulch, 2011). Evidence suggests that when poor households split, it is often the younger household(s) who escape poverty while the older household (typically consisting of the parents and their dependents) remain poor (Lohano, 2011 in Baulch 2011; Davis and Baulch, 2010). However, other life cycle events can pull in the other direction, pushing younger households back into poverty. These might include young adults becoming parents (Baulch, 2011), changing the dependency ratio of the household.

Household composition matters for poverty ascent and households benefit when children grow up and join the labour force. Even if the jobs gained by these young adults are unskilled and low paid, their earnings add to household welfare (Baulch, 2011).

Anti-discrimination policies, equal-opportunities legislation and affirmative action or ‘positive discrimination’ can play an important role in enabling poor people to move out of poverty. People are at risk of discrimination if they have an ‘ascribed status’,[8] experience oppressive labour relations, are viewed as an ‘outsider’, experience impairment or disability or certain forms of ill-health, especially HIV/AIDS. Other forms of social difference are also important[9] and household composition can single people out for discrimination[10] (Bird, 2011).

[8] Identified by their minority/low-status race, ethnicity, religion, caste.

[9] For example, gender, age.

[10] For example, being from a child-headed household.

3 Method

This section will give a detailed explication of the conduct of the research – how the families came to be chosen, the approach to interviewing that was employed across the several generations of the family and the mode of analysis employed.

Household level panel data collected under the TAPRA (Tegemeo Agricultural Policy and Research Analysis) programme was used to identify households that had exited poverty. The panel study consists of four waves collected in 1997, 2000, 2004 and 2007 by the Tegemeo Institute at Egerton University. The initial sample was drawn in 1997. Stratified sampling was used to generate a sample of 1,500 households taking into account all eight agro-regional zones in the country, excluding the pastoral areas. The existing districts were clustered into the eight agro-regional zones within which 24 districts were selected. Using standard proportional random sampling, aided with data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 1,500 households were randomly sampled for interviews. Due to attrition, the number of the households has reduced over the years. In 2000, the number of households fell to 1,428 (93 percent), 1,324 in 2004 (86 percent) and 1,275 in 2007 (83 percent). Thus the full panel constitutes 1,275 households that were consistently interviewed across the four waves (Suri *et al*., 2008). The data collected in each wave covered broad aspects, including a variety of rural household livelihoods. Information collected from the households includes: detailed information on the crops grown and harvested; inputs used (seed, fertilizer, labor and land preparation costs); outputs and market outlets and prices; information on livestock and livestock products; household demographics; health and education data on each individual household member; a detailed profile of household income incorporating all sources of income of all members of the household: crop income; livestock income; salaried income; remittances, business income; and any other sources of casual or informal income (Suri *et al.,* 2008).

Using the Tegemeo panel data and respective rural poverty lines, sample households were classified into five categories depending on their poverty status across the panel waves. The nominal rural poverty lines for 2000, 2004 and 2007 were computed by linear extrapolation of the CBS rural-poverty lines for 1997 and 2006, which were Ksh 1,239/month and Ksh 1,562/month, respectively. The resulting nominal poverty lines were: Ksh 1,239/month in 1997; Ksh 1,347/month in 2000; Ksh 1,490/month in 2004; and Ksh 1,598/month in 2007. Using these poverty lines, households were classified in each wave as being either below or above the poverty line in each year. An observation of the poverty status of individual households across the four waves enabled the following classification: stable non-poor (24.1 percent), households that remained above the poverty line in all the four waves; chronically poor (14.9 percent), those households that remained below the poverty line during the four waves; poverty exiters (20.1 percent), those households that were below the poverty line in 1997 but rose above the poverty line by 2007; poverty descenders (2.9 percent) as households that were above the poverty line in 1997 but ended below the poverty line by

2007; and oscillators (38 percent), households that were both one time above and the subsequent time below the poverty line during the four waves.[11]

From the panel of 1,275 households, poverty exiters were listed, then grouped by district to check on their distribution across the sample districts. Once the households were confined to those owning four acres or less of land, the total number of exiters from the panel was 202 households. Due to time limitations and the intensity of the planned interviews, the research team picked the two districts that had the highest number of exiters. Since the poor live side by side with the non-poor, sampling for the descenders was informed by the choice of the exiters. The team sampled descenders within the same general location as with the exiters in the two districts.

Once the areas for fieldwork had been selected and the 'ascender' and 'descender' households that were potential cases for interview had been identified on the basis of quantitative data held in the panel study files, the research moved to its qualitative fieldwork stage.

The first stage was to conduct a focus group discussion with representatives from the selected village. With the assistance of a local elder, an *ad hoc* group was assembled and asked to discuss: the history of the village, particularly in recent times; the general economic characteristics of the area, people's livelihoods and how these had changed in living memory; major events and trends in recent years; and people's expectations for the future.[12]

The purpose of these focus groups was threefold. First, they enabled the research team to develop an understanding of the local context in which the families that were subsequently going to be interviewed were living. Second, while the panel data provided a means of identifying 'ascenders' and 'descenders', the statistical information on which these attributions were based is a relatively blunt instrument and the focus-group discussions provided the research team with a more detailed understanding of local factors associated with upward and downward mobility. Third, while the research team had used an analysis of panel data in order to identify a relatively small number of households that were potential

[11] Muyanga *et al.* (2010) carried out a similar operation on the TAPRA panel data, placing households into the same categories, only with the attribution based upon households falling into the top and bottom terciles of assets over the four waves: their chronically poor were households in the bottom tercile in each of the four waves; their ascenders were those in the bottom tercile in 1997 and the top in 2007; descenders, the reverse, top tercile in 1997 and bottom in 2007; and the consistently non-poor those in the top tercile across all four waves. Using their method, about the same numbers of households are categorised as chronically poor and as descenders but fewer as consistently non-poor and considerably fewer as ascenders. They found 'a high degree of correlation between changes in income and asset wealth' (Muyanga *et.al*., 2010: 9).

[12] The research team was strongly influenced at this stage of the research by the work of Krishna *et al* (Krishna *et.al.,* 2004; Krishna, 2007) who have carried out focus group-style interviews with villages in India, Latin America, parts of Africa and, of particular relevance to our study, Kenya, collecting local histories and developing definitions of poverty that are locally-based and locally valid.

candidates for interview, these exceeded the number we could interview in the time available for fieldwork. A small sub-set of households would need to be targeted for interview and it was crucial that households were targeted that would give the best chances of yielding family cases that were true ‘ascenders’ and ‘descenders’. The team needed a means to triangulate information beyond that available in the panel study data to identify the best potential cases. At the end of the discussions, once the focus groups had been told about the broad interests of the research team, the group was shown the list of ‘ascender’ households and asked to discuss whether these households were truly households whose economic position had changed for the better in recent years. They were also asked to describe the reasons behind their ‘ascent’.

The team chose not to share the list of ‘descenders’ with the focus group on the grounds that the households on the list might not want their poverty status discussed by members of their own community, since such a discussion might invade their privacy and they could find it invidious that they had been identified by ‘the Institute’ as falling into poverty. However, the latter list was shared with the village elder who was assisting us in each locality and ask him to give his opinions about the reasons these households and been identified as ‘descenders’.[13]

In both instances, the information gained was invaluable in enabling the research team to select good candidates as starting points for each series of family history interviews.

It is important to understand that, while the qualitative family history study was ‘piggy-backed’ on a household-panel study, the ambit of the family history interviews did not limit themselves solely to the household members in the panel study. The panel data gave the fieldwork team a ‘contact person’ – an individual who was the starting point for a series of family history interviews.[14] Once the interview with the first individual was completed, the research team would then move to multiple interviews within the interviewee’s family. The spread of interviewees was both *vertical*, in the sense of interviews conducted with adults across several generations, and *horizontal*, through interviews with several people in the

[13] At this point we diverged from the practice of the Krishna *et al* researchers (Krishna *et.al.*, 2004; Krishna, 2007), who categorised all households in their villages into wealth groups, identifying the always poor, the always rich, the transitorily poor and both ascender *and* descender households. Their approach identified greater movement (both into and out of poverty) -- much larger proportions of the village households were typed as either ‘ascenders’ or ‘descenders’ than from the quantitative-panel study data. However, we coincide with the Krishna team on its essential point – that local definitions of poverty and attributions to those who have moved into or out of poverty are at least as valid as externally-imposed categorisations (and probably moreso).

[14] While the panel study collected information on households, one should note that this information was based upon one interview carried out with a single individual in each household who gave information about the whole household. Our starting point for the family history was the same individual, but we then used this person as the link to a number of other members of the family, who were also interviewed. At the same time, the panel study data gave the team a baseline level of context about the households prior to the interviews which saved time and gave us cross-reference points.

same generation.[15] We sought to interview adults from each generation present in the family (ideally, three generations: the middle-aged; their young adult children; and, if they were still surviving, the elderly) and family members of both genders, although this was not always possible. The number of persons interviewed in a family depended upon the numbers and 'variety'[16] of those available. If there were a lot of potential interviewees available and willing, findings from what was revealed in the initial interviews were used to help us choose which individuals should be targeted for the latter interviews. One should note that those in the family who were interviewed did not have to be members of the same household – a relation living nearby could be interviewed.[17]

3.1 Conduct of the interviews

The method of qualitative interviewing employed was an adaptation of the biographical narrative interview method pioneered in Germany by Fritz Schütze and colleagues. Essentially, this is a highly qualitative mode of interviewing that moves from a completely open-ended beginning through stages that become progressively more interrogative. The aim of the interview is to give the respondent the maximum control for as long as possible over what is raised in the interview and how it is raised. After introductions and securing the consent of the respondent, the interviews began with a request to the interviewee to tell us the history of their family from their point of view, how they came to be living in the area and how they came to be at their current level of living. Sometimes after prompting, the interviewees then embarked on their personal account of the family's history, which could be quite lengthy and detailed.[18] Once the interviewee had finished, we moved to a more interrogative phase in which questions were asked, but only about events or issues that the interviewees had already raised themselves. Finally, if there still were issues that we wanted

[15] Usually the partner of the initial interviewee and/or a sibling living nearby.

[16] The fieldwork had to be carried out within a limited time span. Where there were a number of family members who appeared quite similar (e.g., siblings close in age all doing the same type of work), we did not interview them all.

[17] We had had plans to follow up family members who were working away from their home in Nairobi by attempting to find and interview them when we returned to the city at the end of the fieldwork. However, this was not possible since none of the families had members working in Nairobi at the current time. This may have just been chance. However, we noted that the original sample for the panel study had been drawn over a decade earlier, with the result that, overall, the sample had become older. A 'family life cycle', by which family members worked away and sent remittances home when young but then returned home when they were older may have been a factor. Had we carried out our interviews at the time of the first wave of panel interviews, several families would have had their male breadwinner working away.

[18] It sometimes required some prompting for the respondent to realise that we simply wanted their own detailed account. The interviewees were 'veterans' of four waves of a quantitative panel study and were used to social research being carried out in a highly-structured question and answer format.

to know about that had not been raised by the respondent at all, we would fall back on direct questioning. Each interviewee's account was kept confidential from other family members.[19]

The goal of this approach to qualitative interviewing is to preserve the 'gestalt' of the interview as long as possible, ceding control of the interview to the interviewee and giving pride of place to topics and stories that they consider important. The main contrasting mode of qualitative interviewing, the semi-structured interview, employs a directly interrogative mode in which the research team devises a schedule of questions *prior to any fieldwork taking place* about the topics or issues that they have determined in advance will be of significance. The semi-structured method of interviewing can be effective for testing pre-existing hypotheses or expectations or for 'putting meat on the bones' of quantitative findings by making it possible to go beyond commonsense suppositions when attaching meaning to statistical results. However, the odds that genuinely new or serendipitous findings will emerge from a semi-structured interviewing technique are minimised by the approach itself.[20] Many of the interviews were successful in that they yielded rich detailed accounts that threw up unexpected material.[21]

The main mode of analysis could be termed *contrastive comparison*, in that the research team discussed among themselves the accounts and information given by the interviewees and how different persons' accounts, often of the same events, varied. The end result is a multi-faceted view of the family with the 'facets' being the different perspectives on the family that are held by different members of it.

Interviews were conducted in the language of the respondent's choice, usually their own tribal language. While the interviews were audio-recorded in full, these have not yet been transcribed. The interview team took notes during the interview and then a team member

[19] In terms of practice, this was not always possible since other family members often wandered in and about or sat down and joined us (though we tried to discourage the latter). Occasionally the team did have to deflect questions in one interview about what another family member had told us previously. It also became clear during the interviews in 2008 that it was virtually impossible for a male researcher to interview a woman without the presence of either a female researcher or another family member as a 'chaperon'.

[20] Keeping 'on schedule' when working with a semi-structured interview schedule can be quite difficult. The interviewer can become blinkered by the list of topics that must be covered so that the significance of anything that does not 'fit' is missed. Furthermore, there is the danger of regarding attempts by the interviewee to raise the issues that he/she considers important as digressions and consequently prematurely cut off revealing lines of enquiry.

[21] One of the purposes of the interviews that had been carried out in 2008 had been to establish whether the minimally-directive biographical narrative mode of qualitative interviewing would be effective in a non-European, African milieu in which many of the interviews would have little formal education and relatively less exposure to mainstream consumerist 'western' culture. In retrospect, these misgivings seem ludicrous and probably reflect the Eurocentric origins of the approach. If undirected biographical narrative interviewing had been developed in Africa and then in turn tried out in Europe, a more genuine concern might have been whether Europeans existing in cultures where oral traditions are largely moribund would be capable of providing rich narrative life stories.

wrote up an account in the evening following the interview, which was then reviewed and added to by the other team members.

As the number of interviews accumulate, it can be difficult to avoid becoming overwhelmed by detail. A standard commercial 'family tree' genealogical computer programme, Family Tree Maker, was used to manage the data. The programme coped easily with Kenyan polygamous marriages and provided a reliable family structure framework in which to record the results of individual interviews. Important facts and selected notes could be attached to any individual's record. The fieldwork team usually concluded an interview by taking photographs of the respondent and their relations and surroundings. These photographs could be attached to the individual's record in the family tree programme, which proved invaluable in aiding the team's recall of interviewees later on.

4 Findings – routes out of poverty

All of the families possess some amount of economic capital, mainly but not always exclusively, land, had strategies for developing cultural capital through the education of their children and existed within a network of social capital connections. While none of the families were chronically desperately poor, neither were any of the families completely insulated from economic shocks.[22] They were acutely conscious of their potentially precarious positions and the interviewees' accounts of the families oriented themselves towards strategies for survival. These interviews of family groups located in a number or rural areas identified a number of routes out of poverty: (1) the gradual accumulation of resources due to extra income arising from **cash crops**; (2) the gradual accumulation of resources due to extra income coming from **non-farm work outside the farm**, including remittances from distant employment; (3) the role of **education** in helping provide employment; (4) accessing financial assets through **informal support mechanisms**; (5) stability and benefits accruing from **long-term strategic planning,** including entrepreneurial activity.

4.1 Cash crops

Access to and/or possession of land for farming has the potential for two distinct types of benefits for rural families. On the one hand, the *shamba* (small farm) provides a subsistence level of support by enabling a family to meet all or most of their basic food needs through their own cultivation. The land held by all of the families we interviewed, both in 2010 and in the 2008 pretest, met this need. Even though money did not change hands, in effect, subsistence farming on the *shamba*[23] was the main source of income for many of our households, freeing them from needing to purchase food -- the need for additional cash income was minimised.[24] Many interviewees who had worked away from their homes saw the *shamba* as a fallback. If outside employment opportunities were to dry up, there was always the *shamba* as a refuge to where they could retreat and at least survive. Hence, while the possibility of subsisting on the *shamba* does not in itself provide a route out of poverty, its existence does provide a safety net allowing a person to take a risk and try something else,

[22] And several had experienced in recent times, or were experiencing, shocks. While we deliberately targeted families that had been identified from the waves of the quantitative panel study as poverty exiters, several had experienced calamitous events in the period since their last survey interview that had led to dramatic adverse reversals of their fortunes.

[23] A definition of a *shamba* could be just this; a small land holding that enables a Kenyan family to be largely self-sufficient in their food needs.

[24] However, close analysis of the Tegemeo panel study indicates that slightly over half of the households are net purchasers of food, especially maize. The households sell during harvest (at a low price) in order to meet other needs and then purchase later (at a higher price) when their stocks are depleted.

such as migrating for work or seeking an educational qualification that might pay off in increased income.

On the other hand, access to and/or the possession of adequate land of sufficient quality does give a family the capacity to augment their income through growing a cash crop. Either through direct ownership or through a combination of owning and renting, a number of the households we interviewed had sufficient surplus land capacity to grow a crop intended wholly or partly for sale. That a significant proportion of the families we interviewed were renting land implies that rental income from rented land must contribute to the livelihoods of their neighbours. Either way, where a household has adequate labour and other resources, possessing land has the potential to generate extra income that, if all goes well, can enable a family to accumulate resources and gradually move out of poverty. Hence, the accumulation of land can be a route out of poverty; with a feedback mechanism, additional land beyond the minimum needed for subsistence provides opportunities for extra income, which in turn can be used to procure more land.[25] A uniform characteristic of most of our ascender families was that additional land had been bought and/or rented at some point in the lifetimes of the current heads of the households.[26]

The clearest example among our cases of additional stable income coming from a cash crop was a family located in a prime tea-growing area. The family exists in a symbiotic relationship with a large tea-growing firm that maintains plantations in the area. The plantations produce lesser quality bulk tea. The families that own small, independent tea-growing farms produce a higher quality tea by picking smaller, younger leaves. These command a high price.[27] The plantations pay regularly on a monthly basis and, in order to keep from losing 'their' independent farmers to other large growers, pay a 'loyalty' bonus once a year that is equal to a monthly payment.

'*If all goes well' . . .* implies that things may not always go well. One of the dangers of a cash crop is market variability or collapse. The best example we have of the latter is another region where pyrethrum, which yields a natural insecticide, was grown as a major cash crop. The Kenyan government had maintained a centralised system for the buying and processing

[25] And the reverse can apply. The loss of land, for example having to sell off land to meet debts or medical expenses, can lead to a downward spiral of income not meeting needs and progressively more land having to be sacrificed.

[26] The 'Krishna-style' focus groups that we carried out with the villagers before commencing fieldwork in the two areas include asking the participants when a family could be considered to have become rich. In both cases, the groups agreed it was when the family had the capacity to begin to buy land.

[27] The tea-pickers employed on the plantations are paid by weight; so they pick larger leaves as fast as possible. In effect, the economic motivation to earn more by producing smaller quantities of higher quality tea means that the independent families self-impose a discipline that the large plantations cannot exert on their workers without providing clear quality incentives.

of the crop. Unfortunately, it was woefully mis-managed, leading to a collapse of the market, making growing pyrethrum pointless (*'I tore out my plants'*). This led to a reversal of family fortunes for at least one of one of the families we interviewed. The market collapse, in combination with advancing age and some other minor shocks that could otherwise have been weathered, mean that one family is now slowly descending into poverty.[28]

In another region, coffee has been a major cash crop. This site provides an interesting example of the changing fortunes that can follow dependency on a single cash crop. The price of coffee dropped drastically around the turn of the century and farmers in the area had to switch to other crops for income. The price of coffee has now revived and so has the area's coffee cooperative and the cultivation of coffee, albeit with a lag as new plants have to mature. One respondent we interviewed, a serious coffee grower, persevered during the downturn (*'I did not tear out my plants')* and is now reaping the benefits.

Cash crops require an effective infrastructure in order to generate effective, reliable sources of income. 'Area 1' and 'Area 2', the two main study sites in which we interviewed in 2010,[29] have very poor road connections that made it very difficult to get agricultural produce to markets. This makes local farmers dependent upon outside agro-traders from outside the immediate area – middlemen who can command their own (low) prices.[30] The motivation to attempt to produce a cash crop is depressed further by the inconsistent appearance of these middlemen, which means that growers cannot depend upon having a buyer reliably available when their crop is ready to be harvested and sold. In this light, the revival of the coffee cooperative, which both buys *and processes* the growers' coffee, giving them independence from agro-traders, can be seen as essential. Similarly, the independent tea growers are in a 'sellers market' since there are a number of large tea growers in the region who compete for the independent growers' output.

4.2 Non-farm work

Off-farm work constitutes the other main source of cash income for rural families. At the local level, women or men could be involved and this could take various forms: hiring oneself out

[28] The Kenyan government is attempting to revive the cultivation of pyrethrum, which could be could have a good market since the plant is a natural insecticide. This family is staking its economic hopes on this, and is planting the crop again.

[29] See Appendix for descriptions of these areas and the areas covered in 2008.

[30] A classic example of *adverse incorporation* – thanks to the middlemen, the farmers are included in the market economy, but on terms that disadvantageous to them.

as agricultural labour; running a *duka* (a small local shop selling goods); running a small business, such as doing carpentry work[31]; working as a paid employee.

Long-term circular migration for work was another important form of off-farm work. Migration, usually but not exclusively to work in urban areas, was quite common both for young women and young men, with connections with other relatives often being important for helping to find jobs. Almost all the women that we obtained information about (the interviewees, plus other female relatives mentioned in interviews) who migrated for work had returned after some years, often to marry shortly thereafter. After marriage, when women earned cash from outside the household, it was from local employment or growing cash crops or making products for a local market. This was also the pattern for some of the young men; however, not all. In contrast, a significant proportion of our male interviewees had migrated for work and had spent much or the whole of their married lives away from home, remitting money and only returning for brief periods. Remittances, particularly those from male family migrants whose lives were being lived away from their families, were very significant for some families. Non-farm incomes from sources other than the sale of crops are also important because these types of income can act as a buffer against the shocks of drops in agricultural production due to factors such as drought or poor weather.

Aside from the financial benefits (and the financial necessity), there are dangers and personal costs from the long-term separation from one's family that circular migration with its extended period of working away from one's family can bring. These were not mentioned explicitly in the interviews with our male long-term away workers, but expressed themselves nevertheless in chronic alcohol abuse, at least one case of severe mental illness and an instance of long-term criminal incarceration and probably contribute to (though we were not told this in our interviews) the high incidence of HIV/AIDS in Kenya.

4.3 Education

The results pertaining to formal education are decidedly ambivalent. On the one hand, virtually all of our families saw the education of their children as vital. The message that education is important has gotten across to the general population. On the other hand, virtually all of our families also talked about severe difficulties in meeting school fees, particularly if they had chosen to send their children away to boarding secondary schools in order to secure a better standard of academic education for their children. Many of our interviewees reported that they and/or some of their children had had to leave school early

[31] People, usually women, also frequently reported making something, such as rope from sisal for sale in local markets. This could be considered a hybrid activity, part business, part 'cash crop'.

due to the costs of education, with numerous instances of elder siblings being called upon to help with the educational costs for their younger brothers and sisters.

However, looking more closely at the actual findings reveals deeper ambiguities. In some cases, the elder siblings had the income and resources to be able to help with the family's educational costs; however, in other cases, the support of the elder sibling came at a cost they could little afford. In the most extreme cases, this meant they had to sacrifice their own ambitions.

Clearly, education is important for imparting a sufficient level of literacy and numeracy to the general population. Also, clearly certain types of occupations require skills that need to be imparted through formal education courses (Baulch, 2011). However, there seems to be a discontinuity concerning this latter function of education in our actual results. There was only one instance in all of our interviews of a distinctly unambiguous link between formal academic education and subsequent career – the eldest child of a respondent who now is a secondary school teacher. We had two instances in the same family in which persons had trained or were training to be teachers, but more so because they were expected to go further in their education and the family could only conceive of teaching as the only credible route. One had qualified as a teacher and began work, only to terminate his teaching career abruptly and leave immediately when offered a place in the Kenyan army. The second, his nephew, appears to have followed his uncle's reluctant steps to teacher training college. While he is doing the course, he clearly has other career interests and, once he has his independence from his family, other career plans. The families we interviewed seemed to be following an uninformed model of educational mobility – the main persons with education and in gainful employment with whom they have contact are teachers, so they not unreasonably conclude that teacher training is *the* educational route to follow.

In contrast, more consistent links with employment were found for vocational training courses (e.g., carpentry, dress-making, engine mechanics, horse training). To be an effective poverty leaving strategy, the pursuit of education needs to an informed and strategic. Otherwise, given the scarce resources it consumes, the investment may be unwise.

4.4 Informal support mechanisms

There were only two reported instances of formal support from the Kenyan government (an interviewee who received a 'golden handshake' upon retiring after working seventeen years for a government ministry and another interviewee who received a compensation payment when her husband died while serving in the Kenyan Air Force). Families, *if* they have the capacity to do so, are a significant source of support (Davis, 2011), with the most common example being the help with school fees provided by elder siblings noted above. Siblings can band together for a joint venture. (One of the main areas in which we interviewed is water-poor, and there were two instances of brothers pooling resources for irrigation.) Siblings who have the resources may also help their nieces and nephews. We found two instances in which uncles had taken on the role of 'patriarch' – the clearest example being a man who owned a garage in a distant town and, in turn, hired two of his nephews as trainee mechanics.

Our interviewees also reported on several semi-institutionalised social practices whose common feature is that they are informal support mechanisms that allow poor people to bring together or concentrate their financial resources for a set reason. Specifically, two were mentioned: the 'merry-go-round' and the *harambe*.

'Merry-go-rounds' or 'ROSCAs' (rotational savings and credit associations), common throughout sub-Saharan Africa, are indigenous savings and credit initiatives mainly undertaken by members who come together to pool finances and help each other. Different approaches are used, building on a basic model of informally organised groups in which each member buys a place and then regularly contributes a set amount of money, usually on a monthly cycle and usually a fairly modest amount. This is often combined with informal networking and meetings where problems are discussed and advice is given and received, etc. All or a significant portion of the cash is given out to a single member of the group each month, with each member's turn coming around in a rota. Hence, a relatively small cash outlay each month eventually results in a considerably larger payout after a predictable period of time. A 'merry-go-round' helps the individuals involved to save and at the same time gives them hope and motivates them to work hard to look for the money to stay in the group. Depending on the scale, the 'merry-go-round' can be used to purchase fairly mundane items such as kitchen utensils or furniture or for more substantial purposes such as paying for children's school fees, house improvements, investments in farm or other business activities, etc. Sometimes the resources of the 'merry-go-round' can be used by a member to acquire collateral for a loan from a more formal financial institution.[32] The merry-go-rounds identified during this research were organised solely by women, for women and were particularly important for them, as they were largely excluded from formal financial services.

Whereas the 'merry-go-round' is an ongoing enterprise that can last for years or even some decades, the *harambe* is a one-off fund-raising event for a specific goal (e.g., to build a church, meet funeral expenses, school fees etc.) or need to ward off disaster (e.g., to pay for medical treatment for a life-threatening illness, loss of a business due to fire, etc.). The family who wants to raise funds will organise a meeting or throw a party for others in the community

[32] See Miller *et al.* (2011) for a description of a larger than usual scale merry-go-round.

with the guests expected to repay the hospitality with the offer of a generous gift of money.[33] *Harambes* are meant to benefit society (e.g., children) rather than individuals.

4.5 Long-term strategic planning

In contrast to the above, which all can be considered as gradual, 'accumulationist' mechanisms for moving out of poverty, we also found accounts of ascending from poverty that took place through untypical, 'strategic' behaviour. What distinguishes this from 'accumulation' is that the individual patriarch or family concerned had the foresight to see an opportunity and then seized that opportunity. These were not careless gambles where little effort might have an outside chance of success balanced by potentially catastrophic costs of failure but, instead, calculative behaviour in which the element of risk is minimised and replaced by an investment of intensive labour. The labour is different from 'everyday' labour in that it is directed towards a long-term goal.

The history of the tea-growing family again provides a clear example. The people in one of our study sites came to the area where they now live shortly after *Uhuru* (Independence) when the land was still forest. They invested seven years in clearing the land, living off subsistence agriculture while they waited for their first tea plants to mature and yield a cash crop.

Several other examples of strategic behaviour relate to the creation of agricultural cooperatives shortly after *Uhuru.* Both cases, from different regions, tell the same basic progression of events. A large white-owned farm came on to the market when the *mzungu* (white man), frightened by the prospect of independence, sold up. In both cases the land was eventually[34] bought through the aid of government loans by a cooperative of Kenyans. The cooperatives have now been wound up and the land has been broken into small holdings for each of the cooperative members.[35] In both cases, considerable foresight was needed by the men who created the cooperatives in order to band together to seize the opportunity.

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[33] Poor people the world over have similar mechanisms for raising money; for instance, the house party among African-Americans in the United States could be considered an urban ghetto version of a *harambe*.

[34] In one case the land was first bought by a single wealthy Kenyan who failed to manage the farm and it then was resold as a cooperative.

[35] The Co-operative movement thrived in the years before market liberalisation. With the opening up of markets for competition, the co-ops were unable to compete effectively and thus their demise.

While the basic story about how they began is the same for both cooperatives, there are interesting differences in how they ended. Many of the members of Co-operative A, located in one of the areas in which fieldwork took place during 2008, were former labourers on the large white-owned farm. Rather than farming the majority of the land themselves, the co-op members in effect took over the role of the mzungu; they took small plots of land on which to live and grow some vegetables, but hired workers to do the large-scale commercial agricultural labour.

Entrepreneurial behaviour can also be seen as a variety of strategic behaviour. The study uncovered several accounts of families whose positions have been secured through entrepreneurial activity. The now-deceased ‘patriarch’ of one of the families in the 2008 pretest fieldwork recovered from an initial potentially disastrous setback when he lost his cattle while being expelled by Masai from their land. He moved to a tea-producing area and worked as an agro-trader buying tea from small producers and selling it on, eventually accumulating enough profit to buy separate farms for the families of both of his wives. These farms have now been sub-divided amongst his sons and provide fallbacks and/or subsistence livings for them.

However, the clearest account of strategic entrepreneurial behaviour was given by an interviewee in the 2010 fieldwork. Now retired in his sixties, his life history has been an entrepreneurial story of ascent. Born into a landless family, he accumulated capital and early on began buying land, some of which he uses for farming and some of which he retains as a speculative investment, along with other non-land investments. During the period of the pyrethrum boom he also deliberately farmed 2.5 acres of the crop in order to become eligible for another source of income – 2.5 acres was the minimum area that had to be cultivated to be allowed to buy and selling pyrethrum as an agro-trader. In his later working life, he obtained a job as a security guard for a government ministry. When he retired, he received a ‘golden handshake’ and used the money to purchase a plot of land beside a busy road, which he subdivided into smaller plots and with his brother then developed the plots into shops and dwellings for rent. The interviewee stated that one of the attractions of the government job, in addition to the regular salary, was that he knew it eventually would result in a retirement bonus that he could invest.[36]

Once the government loan had been paid off, the machinery and plant of the co-operative were sold off and the land was sub-divided into individual holdings and the co-operative was totally wound up (something that our interviewee somewhat ruefully speculated might have been a bad move).

Co-operative B, from an area in the 2010 fieldwork, was created by a mixed collection of people from the Kalenjin and Kikuyu ethnic groups, almost none of whom had any prior connection with the area. The co-operative subsequently ‘collapsed’ due to the management’s failure to repay loans and, while there is a remnant in terms of some shares still being held in a common building, the land has been broken into individual holdings. There is some hope of reviving the co-op.

[36] For a somewhat fuller account of this latter entrepreneurial interviewee that emphasises the passing on of an entrepreneurial *habitus* from one generation to the next, see Miller *et al.* (forthcoming).

5 Discussion

A feature of the evidence emerging from the family histories was several ‘dogs that did not bark’ or, in other words, some of the characteristics that one would have expected to have seen or perhaps should have been prominent were not in evidence, at least not in the form that one would expect. The strongest example of this is education. While it is clearly crucial that Kenya has a literate and numerate population in order and that an educated elite is essential for development, it does not necessarily follow that academic education should be a universal route for all. The importance of education was wholly accepted among all of the interviewed families; however, genuine, often severe, difficulties faced in meeting school fees were also universally reported. This included cases where some children had had their opportunities passed over or put on hold in order to concentrate the family’s limited resources on other (often male) siblings. While instances where a direct, demonstrable link between academic educational qualification and a subsequent career were rare, instances where training in a vocational skill had paid off were common. So, the evidence in support for education is decidedly ambiguous – education that is vocationally relevant and within the capacity of the family to provide can give a pay-off, but the benefits of education for education’s sake are not proven.

Aside from being uniformly pilloried for lack of infrastructure provision (poor road maintenance, mis-managing support for the pyrethrum market), support from the Kenyan government was almost never mentioned (the only, quite significant, exception being the provision of loans to enable the formation of cooperatives around the time of *Uhuru*). Clans were recognised as a means of resolving disputes and upholding traditional behavioural norms (and depending upon the tribal group, sometimes as a source of ritual and spiritual guidance) and as the quasi-official ‘bottom tier’ of government institutions. Their main role in relation to Kenyan state institutions seemed to be to provide a malleable buffer of traditional practices between the individual and what are perceived to be the severe unyielding workings of the State. However, specific mentions of concrete material help from the clans were rare.

If it is large enough, the *shamba* can provide additional income from the sale of produce and can help make a person feel secure enough to take a chance on something new since they have the *shamba* to fall back upon if things do not work out. However, at the same time, the *shamba* can become a poverty trap if it can do no more than provide support for a minimal existence. Additionally, instead of being seen as a safety net and encouraging risk-taking, the inertia of life on the *shamba* could mire a person to remain in a dead end, the conditions of which will worsen if the land is further sub-divided through inheritance by later generations (Miller *et al.*, forthcoming).

The most stable exits from poverty may be those resulting from a long-term strategic plan. The individuals we found in our interviews who had created these plans could be labeled 'visionaries', in that a common feature of them is that the person who made and put them into effect had realised that a moment of opportunity had arrived which, if seized, could pay off in the long term. In effect, these people were able to anticipate long term patterns of social change.

It is also worth noting that these moments of opportunity were associated with times of instability, particularly around the time of *Uhuru* when Kenyan society underwent its great transformation from a colony to an independent nation. Perversely, the other period of instability appearing in our interviews that also is associated with opportunity is the time of ethnic strife in 1992. 'Area 2' had a mixed Kalenjin/Kikuyu population. Most of the Kikuyu fled the area in 1992 and subsequently sold their vacated lands to Kalenjin, who are now in the majority.[37] It is a bitter truth that, when resources like land are finite, asset accumulation for some implies asset loss for others. In a situation of scarcity, events that result in the concentration of land (or other assets) into larger holdings can aid poverty exiting, at least for the 'winners'. 'Little *et al.* (2002) argue that while poor households tend to sell their assets in response to shocks, their relatively wealthier counteparts maintain a higher asset base by keeping their assets off a devalued market and by purchasing the assets from poorer households' (cited in Muyanga *et. al.,* 2010: 13).

The main samples taken for both the 2008 and 2010 family-history interviews were deliberately biased towards 'ascenders' – households identified by four stages of a quantitative panel study as having moved out of poverty. The much more in-depth information collected by the series of qualitative interviews with each household case broadly confirmed these attributions as 'ascenders'. While the point at which the border between being poor and being not-poor is crossed is always a matter for considerable debate, these households have bettered their conditions, *at least as far as up to the point of the last wave of the panel study.*

What the qualitative interviews also highlight, however, is the great fragility of the 'ascents'. The now well-documented 'saw-tooth' pattern (Davis, 2009) of gradual rises punctuated by abrupt drops due to shocks such as illness, bad weather or becoming the victim of criminality was very apparent in our interviews. Ironically, it is a family that, while correctly categorised as an 'ascender' based upon the panel data, suffered a series of negative shocks beginning immediately after the last wave of the panel that transformed them into 'descenders' that provides both the best example of the utility of the family-history approach and the most comprehensive collection of our findings.

[37] The purchasers included several of our interviewees. An oblique acknowledgement of the practice came in the course of an interview in the area in which another Kalinjin interviewee mentioned that she had bought two acres in 1992 and, without prompting from us, immediately qualified this by saying: *'but not from a Kikuyu'.*

Located in Area 1, five members of the household were interviewed: 'Zachariah'[38], the male head of household, aged 52. who was the original panel study interviewee; 'Glenda', his spouse; their 22 year-old son, 'Martin', who still lives in the family home; 'Alphonse', the original interviewee's brother, aged 62, who lives on an adjacent *shamba*; 'Mary', his spouse. The brothers' father had three wives, and the brothers were two of the five sons of the middle wife. The father's land was apportioned equally between three wives, the result of which was that each brother received only a small portion of sub-divided land.

At the time of his marriage, Zachariah received informal support from his eldest brother, who worked in Nairobi and sent remittances home, living in his eldest brother's house. When Glenda became pregnant with their fourth child, due to strained family relations, Zachariah and Glenda built a basic house on their portion of land and Zachariah migrated to Nairobi for work. Except for short periods, he would spend the rest of his adult life working in Nairobi, mainly as a messenger. Alphonse had spent virtually all of his adult life in Nairobi, starting as a *'shamba boy'* (garden labourer), but quickly moving into working in a stables. Alphonse becomes a skilled horse trainer and rises to become the well-paid manager of the stables of a rich *wazungu* family. Remittances home allow the households to improve their houses and the households join together to install an irrigation system. (Glenda uses some of the remittances to make contributions to a merry-go-round. When her turn comes around, she uses the sum to make purchases for substantial home improvements.)

Zachariah and Glenda's household, using pooled resources from the remittances and earnings from the produce of their *shamba,* expands their land holdings, buying two additional plots of land located some distance from their home. They are able to employ a farm worker to help raise their production. Alphonse saves his money and retires at 60. It is at this point that Zachariah is interviewed for the final, fourth, wave of the panel study. The 10-year period of the panel study has coincided with his most prosperous period of life and the household clearly should be categorised as 'ascenders'.

At this point, disaster strikes. Zachariah, suffers a severe mental breakdown, probably brought on by alcoholism as a consequence of his living away from home. *'He drank before, but not so much.'* He is hospitalised for a year. The children who are still in education have to leave due to school fees except for the youngest child, who is considered to be the brightest. However, the family cannot afford to send him away to board at a provincial secondary school as planned and he has to attend a lesser quality local day school.

When Zachariah leaves hospital, he is no longer capable of working. He receives substantial compensation from his employer and returns to his home to help out as he can on the

[38] All names are pseudonyms.

shamba (up to this point his family had been paying for extra labour, but this is no longer possible). The eldest brother, who until now had been a supporter of his extended family, is also an alcoholic and, taking advantage of Zachariah's condition, convinces him to invest most of his compensation in a bar. The brother also convinces Alphonse to make a similar-sized investment. The bar fails within a year and all their money is lost. Shortly after the failure of the bar, the eldest brother and the second-eldest brother who was also involved in running the bar, die 'suddenly' within a week of each other. In the meantime, the irrigation system has failed due to the pipes splitting in the sun and damage by animals (and perhaps vandalism from jealous neighbours). The family cannot afford to replace it. Alphonse and Mary's household has lost much of his retirement nest egg and Zachariah and Glenda's household is living under severely restricted financial conditions.

Glenda has had to take on sole responsibility for running the household.[39] (Zachariah's alcoholism is still chronic. While he will not sell the family produce, if he has access to any cash, he will immediately spend it on drink.[40] Glenda is pinning all their hopes of reversing failing fortunes on their youngest son doing well in education and obtaining a good job. While Glenda plans for his education as a teacher, the son hopes to train as an engineer. Martin, who had left school early to work to support the education of his siblings and who had been promised a welding kit, is told by Glenda that family can no longer afford this. He will have to stay in the family home to help grow produce to pay for the education of his younger brother.[41] Glenda hopes that they will just manage to educate the youngest brother (as well as Martin's labour on the *shamba*, she is receiving some help from her eldest son) and plans to hold a *harambe* about eighteen months after the interview date to gain funds for his further education. She also has some hopes of regaining at least part of Zachariah's lost investment from his eldest brother's family. ('*I will speak to the wife.*')[42]

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[39] The first woman interviewed in the 2008 pretest was in a similar predicament. The general situation – women who are forced by the incapacity or incompetence of their partners to take on the responsibilities of running their households and who must cope with the difficulties of doing so in a patriarchal society – is likely to be common throughout many countries in the developing (and developed) world and would be worthy of a comparative research project.

[40] We were not aware of Zachariah's illness at the time we asked for an interview and the nature of the problem only became clear during later interviews with other members of his family. While the interview was difficult and he withdrew from contact with us immediately afterwards, Zachariah managed to carry the interview through to its conclusion. Given his situation, this must have required considerable courage.

[41] The theme throughout Martin's interview is 'broken promises'.

[42] However, this is probably overly optimistic. The eldest brother has two sons with families and the clan elder who would be instrumental in arranging for any recompense was decidedly ambivalent about Zachariah and Glenda's prospects for complete repayment.

Both in its ascent and subsequent descent, this 'case' illustrates the utility of applying a family-history perspective. The results of the family histories places into context many of the findings of Muyanga *et al.'s* (2010) multivariate quantitative analysis of the panel study data that generated the contact points for the family histories. The importance of health and the consequences the loss of health are illustrated by Zachariah. The Muyanga *et al.* analysis defined ascenders in terms of change in assets with the ability to acquire land found significant for ascent. All of the family histories of the ascenders (including Zachariah and Glenda until their reversal of fortunes) were stories of the accumulation and development of land. Muyanga *et al.* found that roughly half of their descender households had experienced shocks. Zachariah and Glenda illustrate how these shocks play out.

Informal support within the family (the elder brother's support at the start of Zachariah and Glenda's marriage and the joint installation of the irrigation system), the remittances of the brothers back to their households along with the pooling of resources to expand land holdings was important for their assent. Glenda's attempts to cope with their reversal of the family's fortunes and, sadly, the disastrous 'investment' – one of the major shocks that has caused this reversal of the family's fortunes, also has a family dimension.

The other important feature of a family history approach is that it highlights that leaving (or descending into) poverty is a *process* rather than the result of single event or a combination of causes. 'Ascent out of poverty' is a better and more accurate means of expressing what actually happens than 'poverty exit' since the former implies the assessment of alternative courses of action, the hard toil, the changing of attitudes, the deferment of temporary pleasures, the saving, accumulation and husbanding of resources etc. that with some luck and the avoidance of bad fortune can lead to a family ceasing to be poor. However, echoing debates about how to define poverty, 'poverty exit' implies a distinct event, crossing some index-determined threshold beyond which one is no longer 'poor'. It would be better to think of leaving poverty as a trajectory – a sequence of occurrences and feedback mechanisms that eventually over some span of time carry one over, and beyond, an arbitrary line that distinguishes the 'poor' from the 'non-poor'.

Similarly, while 'shock' is a high impact term that effectively evokes a sudden setback can be a calamity for a family trying to rise out of poverty, the discussion of the ways that shocks affect the poor can also be taken forward by the concept of trajectory. A shock or series of multiple shocks becomes a calamity because it sets in motion a 'negative trajectory' that, once it begins, cannot be avoided but only coped with. Zachariah's illness, coupled with the loss of his compensation, put in chain a series of events and attempts to cope that could not be avoided: his loss of his job; his hospitalisation; the curtailing of his children's education; Martin's 'broken promises'; the inability to maintain their irrigation system; the inability to pay for extra labour on the *shamba*; etc. Zachariah and Glenda's family was immersed in this trajectory at the time they were interviewed and are likely to remain on it for some time before reaching a resolution or descending absolutely into poverty.[43]

While there is no such thing as complete security for anyone, vulnerability remains a feature of the families. This continuing vulnerability is a common feature of all the families we interviewed, regardless of the route or routes they have followed to leave poverty or whether, like Zachariah and Glenda, ascent has turned into descent.

The processes and events that allow families to leave poverty are a complex and multi-faceted interplay in which the same strategies employed effectively by one household may not work for another (Baulch, 2011). While the research reported here is confined to interviews carried out in a small number of areas, the results do demonstrate the potential of the family-history method to make a contribution to the study of how families can move out of poverty. While considerably greedy for researchers' time, the family-history approach does enable a holistic, process-based view that adds to the cause and effect findings of longitudinal panel studies.

[43] 'Trajectory' is a biographical concept originally conceived by Anselm Strauss and then elaborated by Fritz Schütze and colleagues. Its origin came from the analysis of the psychological transformations of individuals afflicted with potentially terminal cancer who found themselves on a 'negative trajectory' of events and psychological coping that, after they had received the initial diagnosis, could not be avoided but only endured through to a resolution. (See Riemann and Schütze, 2005.)

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Appendix

Descriptions of the Fieldwork Areas

Area 1

Located in the Kilungo hills east of Nairobi at an elevation of approximately 2,000 metres. Immediate road access is very poor. The land in the area is very steep and arid. The quality of the land is poor and rocky and lack of water is a perennial problem with annual periodic drought. Disputes over irrigation are an issue; with the net effect probably being a widening of disparities between families that can afford irrigation and families that cannot. Agriculture is mixed cropping, mostly for subsistence with the main cash crop being coffee, avocados or mangos and some vegetables. Coffee farming dwindled severely a decade ago but now has revived thanks to the coffee cooperative, but not to its former level. The area is distant from the main markets of Nairobi and Mombasa and the local farmers are dependent upon middle men to sell their produce.

The area has been settled for a long time by Akamba with the families having been located in the area for generations. Much of the land was terraced 'during colonial times'. There is little remaining land worth clearing so, as the population has risen, the land has had to support larger numbers of people. Several of the older interviewees talked about crops being better in the past and there is some sign of soil exhaustion.

Area 2

Located in the North Rift Valley near Eldoret at an elevation of approximately 2,500 metres. Immediate road access has degenerated over time and now is poor. The land is undulating hills, soil quality in the area is good and rainfall is plentiful. The average temperatures are temperate chilly so there is a single crop cycle per year. Pyrethrum was the main cash crop until it failed. Agriculture is now mixed cropping, with the main cash crop being maize and most produce being bought by middle men.

The immediate area of the interviews was a 400-acre farm owned by a rich white who sold it to a Kenyan at Uhuru. The land subsequently was sold to a cooperative of 120 members created with government support in 1970 that was made up of Kalinjin and Kikuyu who moved into the area. The co-op subsequently faded. The area was subject to severe ethnic strife in 1992 and most of the Kikuyu left at that time. Because people came into the area, no single clan dominates and so the clan functions are elected.

Pretesting of the method employed was done in several areas two years earlier in 2008. Fewer interviews were done and there was no general focus group with representatives of the area, but brief descriptions can be made.

Area 3

Located near Kericho. The area is a prime tea-growing area with regular rainfall each afternoon. Tea plantations were established by white colonists at the beginning of the 20th century. Africans cleared additional land at the time of Uhuru and established small holdings with tea as a cash crop. Road access is fair. The local population is mainly Kipsigis, a sub-tribe of the Kalenjins.

Area 4a

Located in the South Rift Valley near Nakuru. The land is flat with maize as the main cash crop. The land was owned as a single large farm by a white farmer who left at the time of Uhuru. A co-operative of Kenyans created with government support subsequently bought the land and continued to run it as a single unit with hired agricultural labour; effectively taking over the white farmer's role. When the loan that set up the cooperative was paid off, the coop was closed down and the land split among its partners. Road access is good. The local population is mainly Kikuyu.

Area 4b

Located in the South Rift Valley near Nakuru. The land is rolling hills with mixed croppage, mainly subsistence. Its history is unclear, but it now is owned by Kenyan families who have been there for at least one generation. The local population is mainly Kalenjin, followed by Kikuyu.

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