

Poverty and Politics in Middle Income Countries

**Organized by CROP and the Institute for Social Development, University of the Western Cape
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According to the latest World Bank estimates (Feb 29, 2012) there is a visible “decline in both the poverty rate and the number of poor in all six regions of the developing world”. While figures showing how poverty rates have fallen between 1980 and 2010 might bring some hope, they obscure the fact that the number of poor individuals has remained more or less unchanged over 4 decades at 2.5 billion. In retrospect, the distribution across countries and within countries has changed dramatically. Today 2/3 of the poor are living in Middle Income Countries (MICs) while in 2005 the proportion was considerably less than 1/3 (26.5%) and most poor people lived Low Income Countries (LICs).

The explanation of this huge change in the geopolitics of poverty is at a first sight quite intuitive. Over the past decade 26 poor countries with a large poor population (including giants like India) have graduated into the MIC category due to the changes that they have experienced in those aspects of development that are measured by international agencies. Meanwhile strategies and policies against poverty remained quite stable with the known results.

The traditional thought, strategy, and action on poverty was mainly concentrated in the circumstances and realities of the LICs. The question that naturally arises here is how this new reality of a growing poor population in the MICs is inducing us to (re)think anti-poverty strategies and policies. More knowledge seeking out the characteristics, causes and future impacts of the nature of poverty increase reduction that has occurred in the MICs is necessary. At the heart of this lies the role played by politics and public policy in shaping social development policies and their impact on well-being in MIC countries. The workshop calls for papers addressing one or several of the following questions:

- *Is poverty reduction in MICs distinctive? Are (anti) poverty politics the same for MICs as for LICs? What are the margins of manoeuvre and leverage that the MICs, international community and donors have in this new landscape? What are the MICs doing to reduce poverty and what are the tangible results and lessons?*
- *Social development: reduced extreme poverty, increased inequality? What types of poverty have been reduced absolute (and ‘extreme’) poverty, relative poverty, social inequality, social exclusion and the racialization and feminization of poverty? What factors and practices are contributing to the increase of this type of segregative poverty? Have the concepts and measurements of poverty used by the official statistics such as Low Income Cut-offs on human well-being been adequate to understand the changes in social development? Are there inter-generational implications that follow from such poverty reduction trajectories? What are the internal differentiations of the poor as their countries gain membership in the MICs and what are the consequences of the widening inequalities within the MICs as poverty persists in the face of rising prosperity for some.*
- *Public policies and politics: less important than economics? How is poverty reduction in the various MIC countries to be explained and by whom? Have factors related to economic growth such as employment, wage levels and other trickle down effects dominated the narratives? What have been the main social policies (in narrow as well as broad terms), and what have been their impact on poverty? In particular, what has been the role of the policies for potential income and asset redistribution such as: labour market policies, land entitlement policies, taxation policies and universal public services in health and education? Which political debates have surrounded the various efforts to explain and/or prescribe poverty reduction?*
- *Politically vulnerable welfare regimes? To what extent have the combination of government, private sector and civil society initiatives in the field of social policies resulted in a new form of ‘welfare regime’? Are these sustainable, economically and politically? Will this welfare regime - or institutional arrangement for social policy, poverty reduction and income/assets redistribution - have a lasting effect on the economic-political regime of the country? Is the welfare regime assumed to strengthen or hamper economic stability and growth? What is the likelihood that it might change at the next economic downturn, and in which direction? Are cash transfers the panacea that many have argued for?*

The aims of the workshop are to enhance comparative and critical views of poverty politics; to consolidate CROP’s recently formed Working Group on Poverty Politics and Social Policy, and to prepare the publication of an anthology based on selected contributions to the workshop.

The workshop will bring together a maximum of 20 participants from across all university disciplines. This call for papers is open to all although preference will be given to researchers based in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. Participants are expected to actively participate with presentations and in discussions of all the papers.

Participants are responsible for their own travel expenses and health insurance. Board and lodging will be covered. A limited number of travel grants will be assigned according to geographic origin and the relevance, quality, and originality of the submitted abstracts. In the case of co-authored papers, only one author may compete for a travel grant. The seminar will be conducted in English.

The abstract should not exceed 500 words (one page) and must include: the title of the proposed paper and a summary of its theme, including its central argument and research question. In addition, a brief resume (max. one page) clearly indicating your name, title, nationality, and contact information as well as a list of recent publications. The abstract and resume should be sent by e-mail to both: CROP Secretariat [crop@uib.no] and the University of the Western Cape [jmay@uwc.ac.za]. Submissions exceeding two pages will not be considered.

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION OF ABSTRACTS: Monday, AUGUST 13, 2012

Accepted participants will be notified by the Academic Committee regarding format/guidelines for the final paper, which must be submitted by Wednesday October 31, 2012.