

The Comparative Research Programme on Poverty

STRATEGIC PLAN

2015-2020



CROP STRATEGIC PLAN 2015-2020

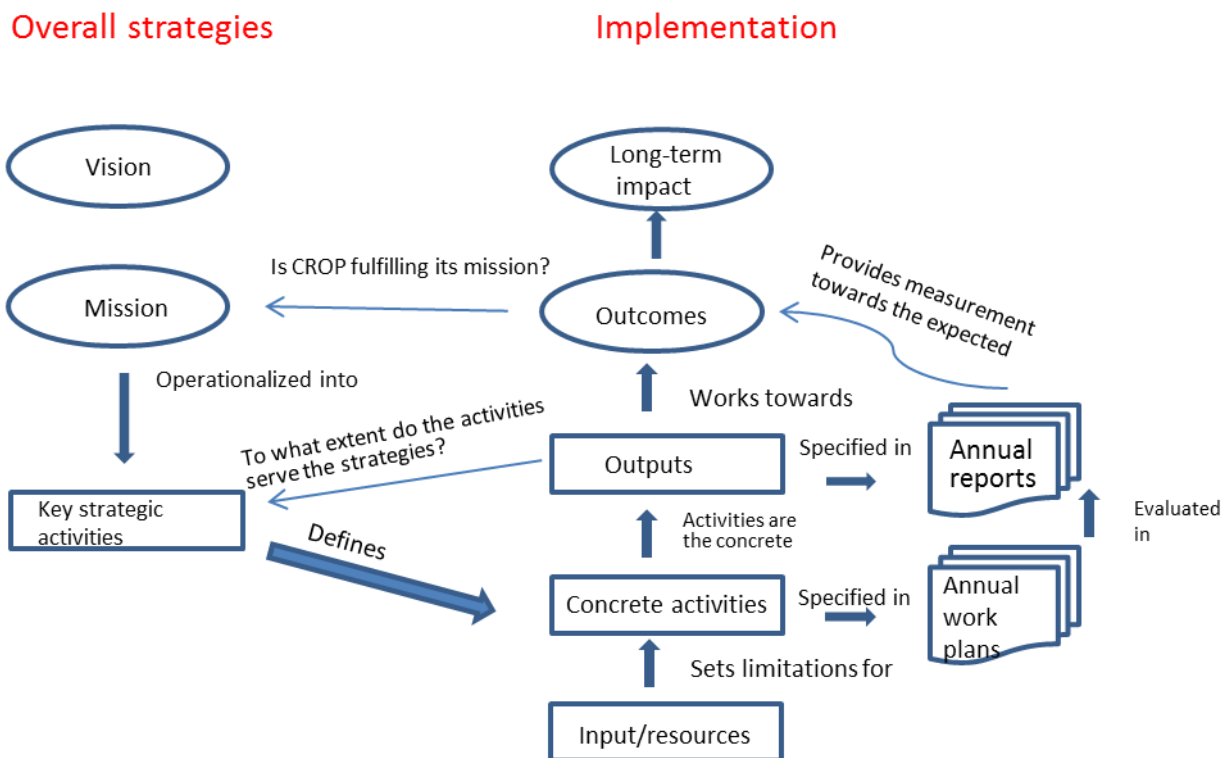
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Organisation of the document

This document will outline both the overall strategies that will give the direction for CROP’s work in the coming period and the implementation of these strategies. The latter part will make use of the concepts derived from Results Based Management (RBM). In this way, we want to provide not only the general framework (“roadmap”), but also the details about how we plan to create an impact on society through our work.

The different concepts relate to each other in the following way:



Definitions

In this document, the concepts above are understood in the following way:

- **VISION:** The changes we expect to see.
- **MISSION:** Why do we exist?
- **INPUTS:** The resources used in the interventions.
- **ACTIVITIES:** What do we do?
- **OUTPUTS:** What do we deliver (quantitative results) to produce outcomes?
- **OUTCOMES:** What do we want to achieve, in the short- and medium-term?
- **IMPACT:** The long-term impact or change we would like to produce in the scientific understanding of poverty.

Introduction

Life-long severe poverty has always been the fate of a majority of human beings. What is new in recent decades is that such poverty is almost entirely avoidable because there are, in our world, enough resources to eradicate extreme poverty. There is also a public commitment of governments all over the world to *“spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected.”* Governments went beyond a simple promise and agreed *“to create an environment – at the national and global levels alike – which is conducive to development and to the elimination of poverty”*¹.

The dominant narrative, produced by mainstream views, presents the persistence of poverty as due to various local problems that the affluent countries are working to overcome with their experts and development assistance. This narrative ignores the fact that economic and political polarisation takes place in the context of a highly integrated global economy, governed by an elaborate regime of treaties and conventions. Designed and imposed primarily by the world’s most powerful governments and corporations for their own benefit, this regime influences the evolution of poverty, wealth, and global inequality. It fails by and large in terms of human rights by perpetuating poverty, inequality and dependence. Yet, this regime also includes some positive elements - such as the recognition of human rights, women’s rights, labour rights and environmental protection - gained by activists from south and north in protracted struggles and which now provide openings in many countries for the poor and disenfranchised to hold their governments accountable.

Building on these achievements, CROP will work for the incorporation of the imperative of extreme poverty eradication and poverty avoidance into the design of the global institutional order. Such incorporation requires a much fuller understanding of the nature, extent, depth, distribution, trends, causes and effects of poverty. We need a better comprehension of what poverty involves and how to identify the best, fast, feasible and sustainable ways out of it. We also need better explanations of how existing and emerging rules of the world economy affect the global distribution of income and wealth, education, health care, job opportunities, violence and environmental burdens.

This approach to social dynamics can provide policy makers with the tools they need to make meaningful reforms work and social change possible. The absence of this form of rigour can open the door to prejudice, dogmatic views and “common sense” that might not be “common” nor make “sense”. Historical debate on poverty and development has been plagued by such views, obscuring the causes of poverty and the possibility to eradicate it for the first time in history.

Social scientists, philosophers and policy makers have different objectives, pose different questions, provide different answers, and are judged by different criteria. However, we all have a shared responsibility to substantially improve the world we live in, for us and for future generations. Furthermore, we have a moral responsibility to do our best in our respective areas to protect those who are suffering the consequences of the societies we construct.

Bridging the gap between science and policy is therefore a social imperative when dealing with poverty. CROP’s strategic plan aims to achieve this by focusing its organisational capabilities on improved communication of poverty research and findings.

¹ United Nations Millennium Declaration: <http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>

Part 1: Strategic planning

The strategy plan provides us with a sense of direction and serves as an overall framework for our work; where are we going and how are we going to get there?

1.1 Vision and mission

CROP's overarching **vision** is: "A world without poverty"

Mission: CROP's fundamental mission is to work in collaboration with knowledge networks, institutions and scholars to build independent, alternative and critical knowledge and education on poverty, and to help shape policies for preventing and eradicating poverty.

1.2 Key strategic activities

In order to complete its mission and achieve the expected long-term outcomes, CROP will focus on the following key strategic activities:

- 1) Promote critical interdisciplinary and comparative research on the nature, extent, depth, distribution, trends, causes and effects of poverty.

Encouraging new research within the field of poverty and development is an important assignment for CROP, but what is also important is that the research should be critical, interdisciplinary and comparative, displaying the magnitude of factors leading to poverty. CROP will promote the research being done by academics within its network and in other institutions.

- 2) Produce knowledge with relevance for poverty eradication and prevention.

As CROP is also a research programme, initiatives will be taken to produce new knowledge through international research projects, thematic working groups and international academic networks.

- 3) Create spaces for dialogue among different actors at national, regional and global level.

Central to CROP's mission statement is the wish to shape future policies. In order to achieve this, we must be in contact and dialogue with policy makers, decision makers and opinion shapers, on a national, regional and global level. CROP will create and encourage meeting places across geographical and disciplinary borders, as well as between the academic and policy making sectors.

- 4) Contribute to the build-up and enhancement of global comparative research capacities.

Capacity building within the field of poverty research is important. In addition to co-ordinating, promoting and disseminating the research of academics *already* working on these topics, CROP will also strive to attract young researchers, advanced graduate students, PhD students or post-docs in its events and general information stream.

- 5) Undertake critical analysis and scrutiny of national and international policy responses to poverty everywhere.

CROP wants to provide critical thinking and alternative solutions in response to dominant international policies.

- 6) Disseminate relevant knowledge on poverty and sustainable development to a wide audience in order to increase the general understanding of the reasons behind and solutions to world poverty.

Effective and professional distribution of research results and other information is a key resource in disseminating CROP's message. The communication plan outlines the strategies for achieving this (see Annex).

Throughout these activities, the emphasis is on developing a second opinion against the dominant defences of the status quo and to produce clear and comprehensible research outputs, accessible not only to the scientific community, but also to policy makers, social activists, the media and the general public.

1.3 Priority themes/topics

Within the field of poverty, there are several interesting thematic areas and topics. The list below shows the topics that are of *priority* to CROP in the coming period.

1. Structural and Institutional Change for Sustainable Development: MDGs and post-MDGs Scenario
2. Social Policies and Welfare States
3. Human Development and Sustainability Science
4. Poverty and Media
5. Child Poverty and Inequalities
6. Rights, Institutions and Global Justice

1.4 CROP as a facilitator and promoter of “encounters”

As specified in the key strategic activities, facilitating meeting places is a priority for CROP. This includes meeting places where researchers from different institutions or regions or from different disciplines can interact. It also includes meeting places among academia, decision makers and policy makers - or even opinion shapers. The aim of these “encounters” will be the creation and/or dissemination of new knowledge on poverty-related issues.

CROP would like to encourage, facilitate and promote meeting places, “encounters” that represent:

a) South-South-North encounters

- Meetings among researchers representing either different countries or regions in the global south or regions in both the north and south - providing different empirical contexts.

b) Inter and trans-disciplinary encounters

- Meetings among researchers representing a variety of academic disciplines with different scientific or methodological approaches to the issues in question.

c) Science & policy encounters

- In order to achieve CROP's objective of influencing policy decisions, it is vital that researchers and policy makers meet and exchange information, ideas and views.

Part 2: Strategy implementation

2.1 Target audiences

CROP's target audiences can be divided into two main groups; the scientific community and society in general. Within the first group we find members of the CROP network, scholars, young researchers, students and partner institutions. Within the second group we find policy and decision makers, including politicians, governmental and non-governmental organisations, as well as other social actors. Journalists and the media sector as shapers of public opinion are also important audiences within the second group.

In order to reach our different target audiences we must make sure that we use the appropriate means of communication. We have various communication channels to choose between, including print (books, poverty briefs and articles), digital (website, newsletters, e-mails) or face-to-face meetings (seminars, conferences, lectures, meetings).

CROP's selected target groups, the available communication channels, and the ways in which these can be combined, are all detailed in the "CROP Communication Plan 2015-2020".

2.2 Input: The institutional and financial conditions to support the plan

CROP activities are normally organised by the secretariat in co-operation with network members and thematic working groups. CROP's ambition is to see the establishment of new thematic groups to decentralise activities and, at the same time, to encourage the creation of key sources for new and diverse knowledge on poverty.

As host of the CROP Secretariat, UiB covers the salary of the programme's director and at least two full-time positions. It also provides the secretariat with necessary office space and equipment as well as core financial support for academic activities.

In order to stretch these resources as far as possible, CROP always seeks to organise events such as workshops or seminars in collaboration with local organisations, which in turn bring in local funding. The CROP Secretariat also looks for other external funding to help support the planned events.

Larger projects may seek their own funding through national research councils or international funding bodies or agencies. During the first two years of the strategic plan the secretariat will concentrate on finding local (UiB) partners to prepare and present research proposals to national funding bodies such as the Research Council of Norway, Norhed or SIU (Center for Internationalisation of Education). In this period CROP will co-operate with the academic departments relevant to the topic of the project in question and will offer them the administration of the projects. This initial period will allow CROP to build up its capacity and prepare the ground for

large-scale projects to be presented to international funders (such as EU, SIDA, IDRC, etc.) during the years 2017-2020.

External funding will be crucial in order to accomplish the planned activities and achieve the desired outputs and outcome of this strategic plan. During the first year of the plan the secretariat will decide on a financial strategy that will include the preparation and presentation of grant proposals to national and international donors and agencies.

2.3 Concrete outputs through annual work plans

A strategic plan provides overall guidelines and gives the work a sense of direction in terms of the goals to work towards, the topics to focus on and the concrete activities that will serve as tools to achieve the expected outcome. However, a strategic plan is not intended to provide a plan for the day-to-day work of the organisation. In order to be applicable during the full six-year period for which it is valid, the strategic plan needs to be flexible enough to allow for variations in resource situations and institutional regimes.

Against this background, CROP will develop annual² work plans:

- to put into operation the objectives of the overall strategy
- to outline the concrete activities to be carried out in the given year
- to set measurable targets for the activities

The work plans will be organised by sorting the activities into the following broad categories:

- Events (workshops, conferences, etc.)
- Projects (research projects, networks, thematic groups, etc.)
- Publications (books, poverty briefs, articles etc.)
- Information and dissemination (both online and through public events)

2.4 CROP's long-term impact

CROP's vision is "a world without poverty". In working towards this goal, CROP wishes to change the language in which we understand and talk about poverty and the understanding of poverty - the way the wider society addresses the problem. Through this, we hope to see a change in the political system and the way that it addresses the question of poverty.

The scientific community has a crucial role in producing these changes:

1. **A new language** – changing the language is the first step in changing our attitude towards poverty. We need to change the discourse from "poverty reduction" to "poverty eradication and prevention" in order to achieve our vision. For example, the POLAME project, where CROP is a central partner, is looking into how poverty is portrayed in Latin American media and the language that is used.
2. **A new understanding of poverty** – the way in which society addresses the societal questions of poverty comes from the understanding that the members of society have of the topic. CROP's task is therefore to build up and provide "independent, alternative and critical knowledge and education on poverty".
3. **Change within the political system** can come as a consequence of the academic community providing scientific evidence that shows how poverty can be eradicated and prevented.

² Following the calendar year rather than the academic year, so as to be in accordance with the annual budget

The ability to take action is conditioned by the way in which we conceive a problem such as poverty: Is it “natural” (and hence “inevitable”) or is it a construction in the societies in which it appears? If we see poverty as a social construction, it is easier for people to see the solutions that are needed to remove it.

Our strategy is to mobilise the scientific community and to transform it into an agent of change. CROP’s network is the instrument we have to achieve this.

In order to build a new understanding of poverty, not only within the academic community, but also in society as a whole, CROP will have a strong focus on providing information on the causes, effects and solutions to poverty through a variety of channels.

The **outcomes** that we hope to see in the short and medium term are changes in people’s understanding of the causes, effects and solutions to poverty. This will be promoted primarily through our scientific publications and dissemination activities.

The long-term **impact** needed to fulfil our vision will be produced by social and political agents acting beyond the limits of academia. CROP’s impact will thus be indirect in the sense that the ideas created and disseminated are intended to feed the social transformative agents working in the political sphere to eradicate and prevent poverty.

Part 3: The institutional settings

CROP was established with a secretariat in Bergen in 1993 in order to promote social science research that theorises and provides understanding of poverty in a global context. CROP is a programme under the International Social Science Council (ISSC) and the secretariat has been hosted by the University of Bergen since its creation.

3.1 CROP as a network and programme

CROP is a **network** of scholars engaged in poverty-related research. They share a thematic interest while working within a variety of disciplines such as political science, law, health, geography etc. CROP’s network is the instrument with which to pursue its mission. A vibrant and interactive network is therefore imperative for its success. This is why the development of the contents and global reach of the network has been given a prominent place in the strategy plan.

CROP is also a **research programme** with a focus on planning and developing research proposals and projects, as well as disseminating research. This is organised by the secretariat in collaboration with national and international partners.

The aim within this strategy period is to build partnerships with UiB units and centres working on development-related issues, as well as to intensify co-operation with key international institutional partners. In this respect, we will continue to work simultaneously as a research programme and international network of scholars and international organisations.

3.2 Governance

CROP's Scientific Committee (SC) provides guidance on scientific and academic aspects of the programme and constitutes the main body for discussion on the programme's overall scientific goals. It is composed of recognised academic authorities in the field of poverty research and is appointed by the International Social Science Council in agreement with the University of Bergen. SC members are appointed on the basis of academic achievements and representation of different geographical regions and disciplines.

The secretariat is composed of a scientific director and supporting administrative personnel. The director, in consultation with the SC chair, is responsible for the effective and expeditious development, implementation and evaluation of the programme.

Part 4: Measuring success

4.1 Measuring outputs and outcomes

The direct impact of CROP's activities on poverty eradication and prevention are not easy to measure as the impact is indirect. The current level of organisational resources within the secretariat makes a precise evaluation of CROP's impact, both in absolute and relative terms, unfeasible.

Planned *outcomes* can be measured with an increase of organisational resources at the secretariat. An increase in organisational resources is therefore an institutional objective to be attained in the medium term. However, it is possible to monitor and measure the concrete *outputs* of CROP's work; the concrete actions that we undertake in working towards the overall strategic objectives.

We can establish a number of proxies for impact related to the different outcomes we wish to produce. In terms of our outreach activities, for example, it is our presumption that the impact of CROP's dissemination is affected by:

- The quality of the content
- The extent to which the message we convey has been adequately "packaged" for the target group we want to reach
- The number of messages we send out
- The number of people we reach

The annual reports will measure the outputs in quantitative terms by listing numbers of members, publications, different events etc. In addition to this, the secretariat will produce a qualitative report assessing;

- In what way have the activities carried out contributed towards the general outcomes?
- To what extent do CROP's actions fulfil the objectives that have been set in the strategy?
- Has CROP achieved the concrete targets (i.e. number of publications, events, meeting points etc.) that were set in the annual work plan?

In this way, there will be both a qualitative and a quantitative assessment of CROP's activities. This evaluation will then be used as crucial input in the elaboration of future annual work plans.

4.2 Baseline – Where is CROP today?

When measuring CROP's fulfilment of this strategic plan and related communication plan, 2015 will be the first year of formal evaluation as it is the first year of the strategic period. 2014 will serve as the baseline year against which the remaining period will be measured.

The qualitative baseline will include the following measurements:

- I. Members
 - a. Core members
 - b. CROPNet active members

- II. Publications
 - a. Books
 - b. Poverty briefs
 - c. Other

- III. Meeting places
 - a. Workshops
 - b. Events
 - c. Other

- IV. Communication
 - a. Users of website
 - b. Electronic messages communicated
 - c. Other