

# CROP newsletter

Comparative Research Programme On Poverty

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## frontiers of poverty research

### TOOLS AND MEANS TO ALLEVIATE POVERTY IN ISLAM

Most of present day poverty definitions in research have originated in Western countries. However, in the Qu'ran verses and hadiths from the 7<sup>th</sup> century are found poverty definitions and concepts which are valuable also for modern poverty research, writes Dr. Neamat Mashhour, Assistant Professor of the Economics Faculty of Commerce, Al Azhar University for Girls, Cairo.

Poverty, in the Islamic perspective, is the state of inadequacy of goods, means or both, that are necessary for the continued well being of the human being. It implies a state of the individual whereby resources are lacking to meet the needs necessary, not only for continued survival but also for a healthy and productive survival.

The definition of poverty in Islam embraces a wide range of categories of needy people who fail to meet their sufficiency level due to numerous temporary or permanent causes. The Islamic notion of poverty stated in the Qu'ran verses and hadiths includes the objective view of these writings, the subjective feeling of the poor himself/herself, and the views of the beneficiaries of the solidarity institutions in the Islamic society.

The Qu'ran describes two levels of poverty which virtually cover all groups of poor individuals in the economy - those who are living at the poverty level: the destitute poor, *al fuqara*, and those living below the poverty level: the needy poor, *al masakin*.

*Alfuqara* are persons who lack material means, possessions or income to support themselves. The destitute or indigent poor, *sing. fakir*, finds himself/herself in involuntary poverty, unable to satisfy his/her necessary needs. He/she may be disabled or handicapped, unable to fend for himself/herself, without assets or incomes, without capital for trade or self-employment, landless, unskilled, old, orphan or a poor widow

*Masakin* are the working poor, the under-employed who work long and hard hours, or the non-working but income-possessing individuals, yet facing inadequacy of income/assets due to a large number of dependants or low-level productivity. The needy poor, *sing. miskin*, is in misery, dependent on others, either unable to work or not earning enough to maintain himself/herself and the family, humble but in straitened circumstances.

Both these groups can not survive healthily without monetary or in kind assistance, temporarily or permanently, to fill the inadequacy gap and to help ensure their need fulfilment with dignity.

While the state of being a *miskin* implies a state of involuntary poverty, the Qu'ran mentions one category of *masakin* who chose poverty voluntary. Those were the people, who, in the Prophet's time, had completely devoted themselves to learning, teaching and meeting priority social needs. As a consequence, they could not work and support themselves. They were entitled to be helped to reach their sufficiency level, considering the importance Islam attaches to the elimination of ignorance (continues on page 2)

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through literacy and education, to the cultivation of ethics, values and skills and to the infrastructure of education in general.

Other groups who need temporarily monetary assistance are identified by the *Qu'ran*. They fall below their sufficiency level due to hazardous unexpected causes. Those are the overburdened and wayfarer.

*Al gharimun*, the overburdened, include two kinds: The first are those overwhelmed by debts contracted in good faith, for consumption needs or for business needs, and which they are subsequently unable to redeem, or simply those who are in chronic debt. They become poor and get poorer while trying to pay back their debts. The second are those who lose their properties due to natural catastrophes: inundation, fire, agricultural epidemic, etc. Losing their properties get them below the sufficiency level, to join the poor.

*Ibn al sabil*, (literally son of the road), the wayfarer denotes any person far from home who lacks sufficient means to meet his/her needs on the journey or stay, and consequently faces hardship. Nowadays, the wayfarer is the category of people who, for some valid reason, are unable to return home, temporarily or permanently. Thus, they are unable to use their resources to meet their needs. This would include people facing religious or racial persecution, political exiles or refugees and those pursuing knowledge or education. They are considered permanently or temporary poor till they reach their means to fulfil their sufficiency level.

In Islam, the sufficiency level is the level for adequate human life in a given place and time. It is different from the subsistence or minimum level. Many passages of the *Qu'ran* point to the universal needs of Man which are known in Islam as utilities, *masalih*. They include: physiological needs, safety and security needs for a continued healthy existence, and social needs. These universal needs define the well being of Man in his life and in the hereafter. They aim to meet the five objectives of Islam, *el makased el khams*: protection of religion, life, mind, property (wealth), and posterity (offspring).

The socio-economic Islamic system was settled more than fourteen centuries ago, not to merely alleviate poverty, but to ensure the Islamic basic right of a sufficiency level for all the members of the Muslim society, throughout their whole life. It is a universal system with multiple institutions and measures to confront all forms of poverty and deprivation and carry on social development throughout time and space. Its preventive, curative and comple-

mentary system of work does not wait for cases of poverty to happen and declare themselves, it anticipates them and covers their many aspects. Resources are developed through *zakah* - *sadaqat* - *waqf* and society/state supervision.

*Zakah*, one of the five pillars of Islam, constitutes a monetary levy on all forms of every Muslim's wealth, and is calculated as a fixed percentage on each of these forms of wealth.

The designated beneficiaries of the proceeds of *zakah* are the poor, the needy, those who collect *zakah*, those whose hearts are to be won over, for the freeing of human beings from bondage, for the assistance of the overburdened, for the cause of God (all priority social needs) and for the wayfarer.

The poor are entitled to take their share in *zakah* till they realise their sufficiency level. But this does not mean that *zakah* is meant to support, and thereby create, a permanent class of welfare recipients. It is largely a temporary relief measure aimed at meeting two purposes. The first is to meet the immediate needs; the second is to help people stand on their own feet, to move out of poverty toward the sufficiency level and to be socially and economically productive. The Prophet has made it clear that charity is unacceptable for healthy adults, unless they are in severe distress, and only to the extent of satisfying their pressing needs; they should make all attempts to be self-supporting through self-employment and remunerative work.

*Sadaqat* is an act of sharing one's resources with one's closest relatives or next of kin, as well with other members of the human community, including those of other faiths. The *Qu'ran* flourishes with verses that urge *sadaqat*-giving, as an act of the greatest value in the hierarchy of values of Islam

*Awqaf*, (*sing waqf*) is the giving away of a Muslim's assets or wealth in favour of a category of people or a kind of social service, which serves for ever. The Prophet encouraged this kind of wealth dedication to support social. These *awqaf* usually provide goods and services that help deeply in poverty alleviation and social development through meeting educational, health, infrastructure and general welfare purposes. They used to cover an extremely wide range of social foods and services, providing a prosperous, highly developed society, throughout a long period of the flourishing of the Islamic state. *Sadaqat* can play an important role by providing necessary funds for these *awqaf*, known in the West as charitable trusts and foundations.

The role of the state/government promotes elements of the Islamic system aimed at alleviating poverty and enhancing social development. For instance, where poverty is widespread and deep, Islam calls for comprehensive strategy to help the poor through a targeted program of transfers and safety nets. Similarly, where lack of work opportunities prevail, Islam argues for provision of capital through grants and loans so as to enable the unemployed/underemployed to become adequate income-earning members of society. Meanwhile, Islam argues for a sufficiency wage-structure and equalisation of work and educational opportunities and a policy that leads to increased income potential and opportunities.

This comprehensive Islamic system to promote the quality of life through providing sufficiency level for each and every member of the society, is further enhanced by Islamic doctrines on poverty eradication and social development. These doctrines include social, political and economic factors that lead to an enlightened, healthy society and contribute towards long-term social stability and development.

## WINNERS OF BOOK PRIZES

Among those who returned their questionnaires for the CROP database before the deadline, the following winners of the announced book prizes were drawn:

1. **Irma Chavez**, South Africa (a complete set of CROP publications)
2. **Gian Matteo Apuzzo**, Italy (a copy of *Poverty: A Global Review*)
3. **Bob Deacon**, Great Britain (a copy of *Poverty: A Global Review*)

Ten prizes (a set of the two books *Law, Power and Poverty* and *Poverty and Participation in Civil Society*) were won by: Ubaldo Martinez Veiga, **Spain**; Blandine Destremau, **France**; Subhash Misra, **India**; Theodor Dams, **Germany**; Ides Nicaise, **Belgium**; Nakorn Yimsirivattana, **Thailand**; Hafez Musa, **New Zealand**; Antonella Mameli, **Italy**; Sarthi Acharya, **India** and Mokbul Ahmad, **Great Britain**. Congratulations from the CROP Secretariat. The books are now in the mail.

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## editorial

The question we are faced with again and again is: Can poverty really be done away with, and what does it take to achieve such an ambitious goal?

One of the interesting answers lies hidden in the operationalisation and rationale of the many poverty reducing strategies. Why do non-poor people bother with poverty reduction in the first place? What are their motives for initiating poverty reduction and what are the driving forces behind a successful poverty reduction? So far, more research attention has been turned to the actual construction of poverty reducing strategies and their effects than to the emotional, social and political rationale behind the introduction and upkeep of poverty reducing strategies.

This is an important area for research, and several hypotheses can be forwarded. Poverty reducing strategies can spring out of a conscious moral commitment to other unknown and unfortunate human beings. But poverty alleviation can also be based on unidentifiable individual reflections of simply the need to 'do good'. Poverty reducing strategies can be tied to religious paradigms and the believers expected to share with the poor. These are favourite humanitarian hypotheses. Poverty reducing strategies can be the result of a rational choice in the business community to invest in human capital to meet a need for fresh labour or new markets. Or, as in the case of the World Bank, a certain poverty reduction is now perceived as necessary to achieve further economic growth. Poverty reducing strategies can be part of a nation building scheme which uses poverty reduction as a tool to develop social citizenry and increase the loyalty of the citizens towards the state. But it can also be used as a conscious instrument for authoritarian regimes to split the population and keep in power. Poverty reduction can spring out of a collective fear of political instability or epidemics, as well as it can spring out of pure individual fear among those who see poverty and crime as synonymous.

These different hypotheses may have very little in common, except the fact that they are all crying for empirical meat. It is a research area which needs to be opened up in full. CROP has wandered into the field with the projects on the elite perception of poverty and the poor, the social costs of poverty, the role of the state in poverty alleviation, the use of human rights in poverty reduction, and the relationship between poverty and legislation developed to protect the non-poor. Underlying all these projects is a focus on the non-poor society and the influence it may have on poverty reduction.

Once we have a better understanding of

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### CROP AND INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR THE SOCIOLOGY OF LAW, OÑATI

CONVENE A WORKSHOP ON

### LAW AND POVERTY III: LAW AS A TOOL FOR COMBATING POVERTY

OÑATI, SPAIN, MAY 19 - 21, 1999

CROP will organise the third workshop on "Law as a Tool for Combating Poverty" in cooperation with the Institute for the Sociology of Law (IISL), Oñati. The workshop will be held in Oñati, Spain. You are cordially invited to offer a paper (in English) for the workshop. Papers presented at the workshop must fall in one of the following categories:

- analysis of practical experiences and solutions using law in the service of poverty reduction and social injustice
- protection of the poor by constitutional rights
- the legal ability of social movements to assist their members in improving their living standards
- case studies and research into legal instruments required to meet poverty problems (for example: new kinds of unemployment, social movements of the landless, social movements of indigenous people, legal services for the poor, implementation of new constitutions, defence of human rights)

The papers from the first workshop in 1995, are available in the book: *Law, Power and Poverty*, Asbjørn Kjønstad and John H. Veit Wilson (eds.), CROP Publications 1995. The workshop will be limited to 25 participants. All participants will be expected to take part in the proceedings (in English), presenting and discussing papers. Participants bear the responsibility for their own funding. However, a limited number of travel grants are available. The grants will be awarded from the CROP Secretariat, according to geography (CROP's policy is to prioritize researchers from "the third world"), and the relevance, quality and originality of the abstract/paper. Please indicate if you need a travel grant, enclose a budget, and state the amount you are able to cover from other sources. As a rule, accommodation will be covered for all participants during the workshop.

If you wish to present a paper, please send an abstract (in English) to the CROP Secretariat.

#### THE DEADLINE IS NOVEMBER 1<sup>st</sup> 1998

*The abstract should include: Personal name, title, full postal (and e-mail) address, TELEPHONE and FAX numbers; the title of the proposed paper and a summary of the main theme or argument. The summary should include: Theory, methods and findings. Do not exceed ONE PAGE (A4). Include also a list of your recent publications.*

Participants will be notified by December 1st whether their proposals for papers have been accepted, and will then be given details of the format in which the papers should be prepared **(the deadline for submission of the paper will be March 15, 1999).**

All enquiries about the workshop should be addressed to:

**CROP Coordinator: Hans Egil Offerdal, CROP Secretariat, Fosswinkelsgate 7, N-5007 Bergen, Norway**

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the ways in which the non-poor society handles poverty, we may also be able to answer the question whether poverty can actually be done away with. When the sum of all the many motives, interests and rationales outlined above is larger than

the sum of vested interests in keeping poverty alive, then it can be predicted that the non-poor will prioritise in pro-poor terms and poverty reduction gain momentum. *Else Øyen, Chair of CROP*

## CROP 5 YEARS

CROP celebrated its 5th anniversary with a workshop on "Poverty, Law and Human Rights" in Bergen, Norway. Rector at the University of Bergen, professor Jan F. Bernt, opened the workshop. UNESCO was represented by Dr. Vladimir Volodin, Chief, Human Rights Unit, Division of Human Rights, Democracy and Peace. He brought a message from the Assistant Director General for Social and Human Sciences, Mme. Francine Fournier, who stressed the fact that CROP is a privileged UNESCO partner. She also pointed to the significance of CROP's 5th anniversary taking place in the same year as that of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Keynote speakers at the workshop were Dr. Asbjørn Eide, the Norwegian Institute of Human Rights, (*The right to an adequate standard of living as a human right: Content and prospects*); Professor in human rights and international law, Willem van Genugten, Nijmegen University/Tilburg University, (*Poverty and human rights: A market oriented strategy*) and professor Camilo Perez-Bustillo, Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, (*Poverty, human rights and the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas: Implications for Mexico and Latin America*).

The staff at the Secretariat sends greetings to all the members of the CROP network and looks forward to the next 5 years. Without the unselfish generosity and dedicated commitment from so many of you, CROP would not have survived its first 5 years of existence.

## LIST OF CROP EVENTS

1998 - 1999

### July/August98:

26-1: "Poverty Research Through a Non-Western Lens". Symposium organised by the International Social Science Council at the International Sociological Association XIV World Congress, Montreal. Chair: Professor Else Øyen.

### September98:

18-22: "The Role of the State in Poverty Alleviation II", CROP/SALDRU/University of Cape Town workshop in Cape Town, South Africa.

### March99:

18-20: "Poverty and Social Justice in Latin America", CROP/Universidad Iberoamericana/Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey workshop, Mexico City, Mexico.

### May99:

19-21: "Law and Poverty III: Law as a Tool for Combating Poverty", CROP/IISL workshop, Oñati, Spain

## WORKSHOPS UNDER PREPARATION

### October99:

"The Role of the State in Poverty Alleviation III"

"Best Practices in Poverty Reduction", a joint CROP/MOST/UNESCO workshop, Byblos, Lebanon

## CROP IN BRIEF

CROP is a world-wide network of researchers and experts on poverty. The aim of CROP is to establish an arena for interdisciplinary and comparative research on poverty in developed and developing countries. CROP organises regional workshops, symposia and international conferences, promotes joint research projects and publications, links poverty researchers and disseminates information about poverty research. CROP is developing an international database on poverty researchers, and documentation of ongoing research. CROP is chaired by professor Else Øyen, University of Bergen, Norway.

If you wish to have your name listed in CROPnet, you are welcome to write the CROP Secretariat and request a copy of the CROP Questionnaire. For further information please contact the CROP Secretariat

## WEB PAGE FOR CROP

Those who have an Internet connection and a WWW browser programme installed, find the CROP web page at <http://www.svf.uib.no/helsos/crop/> or <http://www.crop.org> The pages hold general information about CROP, news about past and ongoing activities, as well as the latest CROP newsletter.

Please note: We can no longer answer the increased demand for copies of single papers presented at CROP conferences and workshops. However, if you have the patience, most of the papers become available through the publications that follow the conferences and will be duly announced. We still supply the authors addresses, phone & fax numbers.

## AT THE CROP SECRETARIAT

you will meet:

**Else Øyen**, Chair of CROP

**Hans Egil Offerdal**, CROP Co-ordinator

**Einar Braathen**, CROP Programme Officer

**Inge Erling Tesdal**, CROP Assistant

## THE CROP ANNIVERSARY PRIZE 1998

Researchers of all nations and academic fields are invited to compete for the CROP 1998 Anniversary Prize and submit a paper on:

### The Relationship between Development and Poverty Reduction

The concept of development points towards a better life, free of poverty in all its many forms. However, the theoretical framework between development strategy and poverty reduction, or even poverty eradication, needs further elaboration. Theoretical papers as well as papers on case studies highlighting more general aspects of this relationship, are invited.

First prize: USD 2 500 plus a travel grant to a CROP workshop

Second prize: USD 1 500 plus a travel grant to a CROP workshop.

Third prize: A travel grant to a CROP workshop.

The Prize Committee will be drawn from the CROP Scientific Committee.

Deadline: Submissions must reach the CROP Secretariat before

**January 15th, 1999.**

Length of paper: Maximum 30 double spaced pages, excl. References.

The paper should be submitted in English.

A short CV is to accompany the submission.

## THE QUOTE

*"Live simply that others may simply live."*

Mahatma Gandhi  
(1869-1948)