

CROP newsletter

Comparative Research Programme On Poverty

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NATURE, POVERTY, POLICY: NEW DYNAMICS IN AN OLD DEBATE

The possibility of reducing poverty while conserving the natural environment in poor countries has occupied the attention of researchers and policy-makers for several decades. Recent debates in this field can be linked to the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro '92) and its follow-up agenda. However, the genesis of this debate in international policy circles harks back much earlier, to another environmental conference in Stockholm in 1972 where Indira Gandhi (then India's prime minister) produced the memorable but flawed phrase, 'Poverty is the worst polluter'.

Is there a plausible, clearly identifiable relationship between poverty, environmental degradation, and local-level institutions? For instance, is poverty a frequent cause for degradation of the environment because of poor people's foraging for scarce resources in the lack of other survival options? Alternately, is a lack of well-designed, effective institutions to regulate the individual's consumption of resources in favour of the 'common good' of conservation typically responsible for environmental degradation in poor countries? To put it somewhat differently, do the poor collectively have shorter time-horizons with respect to the use of environmental resources such as fuel wood, fodder, or clean water – in that they tend to use up available resources more quickly than the non-poor?

The influence of Indira Gandhi's catchphrase has lasted a long time. Of course, in various scientific disciplines the search

for the 'most sustainable' or 'optimal' use of renewable resources goes back even further. The question is, how is this related to income (or the lack of it). In 1992, The World Bank produced a World Development Report that argued, among other things, that the relationship between income and the environment was a *bell curve* (resembling the famous Kuznets curve describing the link between income and equality, well familiar to economists). As the incomes of the poor or the per capita income of poor countries begins to grow, the argument ran, the environment is increasingly degraded, but at very high incomes the level of degradation is reduced again. This thesis was widely discussed over the 1990s, with proponents of the Bank's hypothesis producing data in support of their views (as also many general, seemingly impressionistic statements about the degraded environment visible wherever poor communities live).

Opponents of the argument found plentiful data to contradict this thesis. Some suggested that the empirical relationship between poverty and natural resource use was quite different depending on the particular environmental resource that was selected for analysis, and that little was to be gained by lumping together different resources into a sweeping notion of *the environment*. Others suggested that though the bell curve hypothesis might conceivably hold true for an index of industrial effluents, for the local biomass resources typically used by poor households in rural areas the relationship is quite different. For such

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resources, a general description would suggest that the amount of degradation *per unit of income* declines as incomes grow, though in most cases total degradation continues to rise with income.¹ At about the same time, technical specialists within the Bank produced empirical studies that showed that the poor in general lack the resources to produce degradation on a scale comparable to the non-poor; such as large quantities of technology and capital, for instance.

The institutional context of poor communities

Significantly, much of this debate was conducted for a particular conception of environmental degradation: disorganised, piece-meal, mainly local, and for survival resources - in short, just the kind the poor are supposedly responsible for. But another debate conducted over the 1980s and 1990s, on common property resources, was just then beginning to demonstrate that all over the world poor (as well as non-poor) communities have, with some enabling measures from local authorities, created institutions to conserve, manage and allocate the use of natural resources in a way that does not cause degradation. The key here is the amount of trust and social capital that communities can develop to enable collective action for the management of the natural resource base.² In this second debate, institutional issues and the overall risk environment faced by the poor, rather than incomes or poverty driven time-horizons, determine environmental outcomes. For instance, the poor might conceivably increase use of such resources in a calamity, a drought or famine, whereas they would not do so otherwise given the presence of strong institutional resources.

It is also important to consider that the World Bank 1992 report seemed overly influenced by the mindset of international environmentalists, in that it focused mainly on environmental issues and not on the poor at all, except as potential agents of its degradation. Later studies have corrected this imbalance, so that researchers now understand somewhat better the relationship between the poor and the local resource base that they use for survival. In general, environmental degradation can be seen as a form of economic 'bads' which --when left unchecked by governments-- will naturally flow in an opposite direction to goods. An important aspect to recognise is the options available to the poor, including information and knowledge about natural resource management. Good, well-researched policies for poverty reduction and disaster relief are clearly indispensable,

UNESCO / CROP GRANTS:

State of the art reviews of the literature on poverty and human rights

As part of the UNESCO *Small Grants Programme on Poverty Eradication: Building National Capacities for Research and Policy Analysis*, three grants have been earmarked for state of the art reviews of the literature on poverty and human rights (one in each of the three targeted sub-regions of the world - sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and parts of Latin America and the Caribbean). CROP has selected the following highly qualified scholars in the CROP network of poverty researchers to do the studies:

- Latin America: Sonia Alvarez Leguizamon*, Directora Maestría en Políticas Sociales, Facultad de Humanidades, Universidad Nacional de Salta, Argentina.
- South Asia: Karori Singh & Rajendra Singh*, South Asia Studies Centre, University of Rajasthan, India.

The African scholar is in the process of being selected.

The final reviews are due to be delivered by mid-April 2006.

but an imponderable is the variability of local institutional assets, such as established pathways of trust and social capital, that determine the strength and effectiveness of institutions on the ground.³

Ecosystems are the wealth of the poor

If proof were ever needed that the wheels within wheels that spin our international multilateral organisations often come full circle, it is here. The latest issue of *World Resources*, a regular biennial report on international environmental trends produced by the Washington-based World Resources Institute in collaboration with The World Bank, UNDP and UNEP, is devoted to the theme of ecosystems as the «wealth of the poor», and how best to conserve the environment for the benefit of poor communities.⁴ This in a year in which the World Development Report is devoted to the topic of equity!

If ecosystem management is indeed to be organised for the benefit of the poor, then a primary task for governments as well as international organisations such as The World Bank is the facilitation, empowerment and support of organisations of the poor in a way that enables the successful management and allocation of local environmental resources for their survival. This requires a bottom-up, cooperative view of policy rather than a typically top-down, command approach. Unfortunately, these are matters that our international organisations frequently describe but have found very difficult to implement in practice. If that situation is to change, it will require great transformations in the way that international organisations, in collaboration with developing country governments, function in their approach to the poor and their organisations. There are strong reasons for profound scepticism and careful observation of the dominant actors involved in this field over the next few years.

References

¹For a basic review of this literature and some preliminary conclusions, see particularly the appendix to Sanjeev Prakash (1997) "Poverty and Environment Linkages in Mountains and Uplands: Reflections on the 'poverty trap' thesis", CREED Working Paper No. 12. London/Amsterdam: Institute for Environment and Development & Institute for Environmental Studies, Vrije Universiteit. Available at: <http://www.mtnforum.org/resources/library/praks97a.htm>

²Elinor Ostrom (1990) *Governing the Commons: the evolution of institutions for collective action*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

³For recent cross-country perspectives on trust and social capital, see Sanjeev Prakash and Per Selle (eds.) (2004) *Investigating Social Capital: Comparative perspectives on civil society, participation and governance*, New Delhi/London/Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications; or Anirudh Krishna (2002) *Active Social Capital: Tracing the roots of development and democracy*, New York: Columbia University Press.

⁴*World Resources 2005, The wealth of the poor: managing ecosystems to fight poverty*. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute, 2005. http://population.wri.org/pubs_description.cfm?PubID=4073

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NEW OXFAM REPORT

Oxfam has recently published *Paying the Price: Why Rich Countries must Invest now in a War on Poverty*. The report can be read online at their website: http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/issues/debt_aid/mdgs_price.htm

Like the Human Development Report 2005 the Oxfam report argues that though it is clear that time for action to meet the Millennium Development Goals is running out, progress continues to be slow. It is already for certain that targets will be missed.

editorial

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PUBLIC POVERTY

During the past two decades or more, discussion about the definition of poverty has become increasingly sophisticated with growing awareness of the inadequacy of simple, single-number, definitions such as income per capita. Poverty, we have all come to realize, has many faces and exists in different dimensions and needs to be described and analysed accordingly. But one huge gap in all this thinking has become glaringly obvious in recent days. It is the fact that the whole debate has revolved around what one might call private poverty; the deprivations endured by individuals and their households. Far too little attention has been focused on the public poverty which the events in the US in the wake of the hurricane Katrina have brought to the consciousness of the world.

There are two main elements of this public poverty. The first was highlighted by a chilling lack of human solidarity under a disaster that was apparent as New Orleans fell apart. It is profoundly disturbing. But what was possibly even worse was the second aspect of the public poverty that became apparent: the failure of governance. This was manifest both in the decision not to spend the funds necessary to strengthen the New Orleans levees about whose weakness the government had long been warned, and also in the quite extraordinary failure to respond promptly and adequately to the emergency. Commentators have written of the deep personal and structural failures at the heart of American government revealed by the disaster. But the problem lies even deeper than that. At the root is a question of values: an ethic which celebrates the survival of the fittest but views the less fortunate members of society with indifference. The consequences of this ethic (driven by advertising and disseminated relentlessly by television) are manifest in the astonishing lack of human solidarity in those first five days after the hurricane struck. They can be seen in the choices of a government that spent \$414 400 000 000 in 2003 in its military budget but refused the funds necessary for strengthening critical infra-structure; they can be seen in the wilful refusal of the most powerful economy on earth to ensure that all its citizens have adequate health care whilst it cuts taxes for the rich. Public poverty is a reality that requires further research, analysis and action. It is a global phenomenon to which researchers everywhere need to pay more attention.

NEW BOOKS IN CLACSO-CROP SERIES

In cooperation with Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (CLACSO), CROP is launching a joint publication initiative labelled the CLACSO-CROP SERIES with research on poverty and poverty related themes. The major aim is to disseminate studies supported by the joint work of both organisations through their fellowship programme, research presentations from international conferences and workshops as well as other special projects of the CLACSO-CROP Programme on Poverty Studies in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Series will also include peer reviews studies on poverty related issues submitted by members of the networks. The two first books in the series are currently in the printing press and will be available shortly.

Trabajo y producción de la pobreza en Latinoamérica y el Caribe: estructuras, discursos y actores [Work and the Production of Poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean: Structures, Discourses, Actors], **Sonia Alvarez Leguizamón** (ed), Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2005 - examines processes which produce and reproduce poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean. In particular the book deals with poverty production in relation to changes in labour, the state, economic systems and social policies aimed at reducing or *eradicating* poverty. It is also observed how new narratives about economic- and social development in several theoretical- and empirical studies offer a description of a prosperous future, while ignoring or relativizing the effects of concentrated wealth, poverty, inequality and ethnic discrimination. This is in stark contrast to results of the research presented in the volume, which highlights the effects of a new generation of policies that claim to eradicate poverty but in reality rather reproduce it (as shown by the statistics given in the book).

The second book -*The Poverty of the State: Reconsidering the Role of the State in the Struggle against Global Poverty*, **Alberto Cimadamore, Hartley Dean and Jorge Siqueira** (eds), Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2005, seeks to open up issues for debate and for an element of consensus that the state -whatever its past and present limitations- must play a critical role in the struggle against poverty. Dealing with the desire and willingness of international organizations, governments and peoples to reduce and eradicate poverty are evident from prevailing discourses, it is asked: What are the factors that are impeding the accomplishment of such a widely accepted goal? Clearly, it is difficult to give a comprehensive and definite answer. However, a substantial part of the explanation might be found in one of the most important, but problematic, structures of the modern world: namely, the state.

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CROP/SASC PANEL AT ICAS-4 CONVENTION

CROP and South Asia Studies Centre (SASC), University of Rajasthan, India, organised a panel on *Poverty Reduction Practice and Reassertion of Sub-nationalist Identities in the Post-Colonial Asia* at the International Convention of Asia Scholars 4 (ICAS-4), hosted by the Shanghai Academy for Social Sciences, in Shanghai, China, August 20-24, 2005. **Sanjeev Prakash** chaired the panel.

The following papers were presented:

- *Poverty Reduction Practices and the Reassertion of Sub-Nationalist Identities in Post-Colonial Asia*, by **Else Øyen**, CROP Secretariat and **Karori Singh**, SASC
- *Fuzzy Sets as an Alternative to Measure Poverty: The Mexican case*, by **Eduardo Morales-Ramos**, Tecnológico de Monterrey, Mexico
- *The Need for Vision Creation and New Development Strategies and Models for Post-Colonial Asia with Special Emphasis on South Asian Countries*, by **Karunatissa Atukorala**, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka
- *A Comparison of Urban Poverty between London and Shanghai*, by **Fei Yan**, University of Oxford, UK

See the CROP webpage for a full report from the panel.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2005: "LITTLE CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION"

The 16th Human Development Report (HDR) was released on September 7th. HDR 2005, entitled *International cooperation at a crossroads: Aid, trade and security in an unequal world*, focuses on the progress to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's), including the number one objective: *Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger*. Although UNDP says there has been some progress in reducing poverty, there is still a long way left in order to achieve the very ambitious targets put forward.

Director of the HDR Office, and lead author of this year's report, Kevin Watkins, bluntly states "This report is sending a very clear signal that most of the MDG's will be missed in most countries if we continue on the current trend." The report itself puts it in much stronger words, declaring that what is de facto happening is that "the promise to the world's poor is being broken."

If governments do not keep their pledge with respect to the MDG's, HDR 2005 warns that "global security, peace and prosperity" is in peril.

To read the full report go to <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005>

PROBLEMS WITH CROP E-MAIL SPAM-FILTER

The CROP E-mail is protected by a very efficient spam-filter. It is good in the sense that so far we have avoided vicious viruses and unwanted E-mail spam. It is bad in the sense that it does not discriminate well enough between wanted and unwanted E-mail messages.

If you are unable to get through to CROP by E-mail because of the spam filter, our advice is:

- Try and get in touch with us by fax instead so that we may get your E-mail address cleared for future contact (faxno. +47-55589745)
- If possible use an E-mail from your institution rather than a private E-mail
- Use your full name in your E-mail address so your E-mail can be identified
- Use a precise heading for the purpose of your E-mail to help us "save" your E-mail.

We are sorry about this situation and regret any inconvenience you have had.

LIST OF CROP EVENTS 2005-2006

October 2005

21-22: *Where Does Poverty Research Stand in Africa Today?* Workshop organised by CROP and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), in Dakar, Senegal. Papers for the session by invitation only.

November 2005

23-25: *Poverty and Social Exclusion in the Context of Discrimination of Ethnic-Racial Groups: The Latin American Case*. CROP and CLACSO workshop to be held in Cali, Colombia, in co-operation with CIDSE, School of Social and Economic Sciences, Universidad del Valle, Colombia.

February 2006

20-24: *The Politics of Poverty Production*. Session organised by CROP and CLACSO at the International Forum on the Social Science-Policy Nexus, hosted by UNESCO/MOST and the Government of Argentina, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Papers for the session by invitation only. The Forum was postponed from September 2005.

April 2006

21-22: *Poverty in the Light of the Informal Economy*. Workshop organised by CROP and the Economic and Social Council, Portugal (CES), in Lisbon, Portugal.

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, on a non-profit basis.

The CROP webpage is found at <http://www.crop.org>. The site holds general information about CROP, news about past and ongoing activities, as well as the latest CROP newsletter.

CROP has developed a database on poverty researchers (CROPnet), and documentation of ongoing research. If you wish to have your name listed in CROPnet, visit the CROP webpage at <http://www.crop.org/cropnet/register.cfm> and complete the online questionnaire.

SECRETARIAT STAFF:

Else Øyen, Scientific Director of CROP
Kirsti Thesen Sælen, Co-ordinator
Hans Egil Offerdal, Latin American Co-ordinator
Inge Erling Tesdal, Executive Officer

NEW POVERTY RESEARCH PROJECTS IN CROPNET

Members of CROP network of poverty researchers (CROPnet) submit information about their on-going research. The following projects are the latest additions to the CROP database:

Africa:

- Education and Poverty Reduction [in Senegal]
- Human Resource Development and Poverty Alleviation [in The Ivory Coast]
- Child Sponsorship Program [in The Ivory Coast & West Africa]
- Promoting Community-based Eco-tourism Management in Ghana: A Case Study of the Bobiri Forest Reserve
- Quality of Life in Rural Nigeria
- University Education, Appropriate Technology and Poverty Reduction in Nigeria: The Missing Link
- Socio-demographic stratification of Household Food Security in Southern Cross River State, Nigeria
- Strategic Options Open to the Nigerian Rice Economy in the 21st Century
- Poverty Alleviation in Tanzania

Asia/Oceania:

- Collective Action and Property Rights for Poverty Reduction
- Efficient Use of Water Resources [in Tajikistan]
- Regional Social Development [in Aotearoa/New Zealand]

Latin and Central America:

- Recent Trends in the Development Agenda of Latin America: An Analysis of Conditional Cash Transfers
- Forum Waste & Citizenship [in Minas Gerais State, Brazil]

Europe:

- The Role of Poverty Associations in Poverty Policy in Belgium
- Apomixis, Enabling Technology for Poor Farmers
- The Italian way to the Minimum Income
- Antidiscrimination policies in France and Spain

Contact the CROP Secretariat if further information is wanted about the projects listed.