

# CROP newsletter

Comparative Research Programme on Poverty

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## FRONTIERS OF POVERTY RESEARCH

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### *Poverty and Children: Policies to break the vicious cycle*

By *Enrique Delamonica*

September 17-19 a large group of researchers from all over the world gathered in Oslo, Norway, to discuss ideas and exchange experiences on policies to reduce child poverty at the *Rethinking poverty and children in the new millennium: Linking research and policy* conference. The meeting was hosted at the University of Oslo by CROP and Childwatch, two international networks of researchers on issues of poverty and child rights.

The reduction of poverty, fortunately, has been gaining ascendance in international development policy circles. However, child poverty, with its own specific causes, characteristics, and consequences has a smaller constituency. One of the aims of the conference was to further promote concerns on child poverty.

Of course, both the organizers and the participants were interested in a broader agenda than just increasing awareness. The objective was to come up with practical policy advice.

However, this is easier said than done. Several obstacles need to be surmounted. These were debated during the conference. Suggestions on how to move forward were also provided.

Essentially, there are three obstacles: One of them is to define and measure child poverty, another one is to devise practical policy recommendations, and the third one is to translate these findings and proposals into laypersons' and policy-makers' terms. All three aspects of the problem were discussed during the meeting, with a focus on the first two. Participants contributed their insights as well as actual examples of successful interventions.

Currently, it is estimated that, in developing countries, 1 billion children are severely deprived of at least one of the following seven elements to which they are rightfully entitled: drinking water, sanitation, nutrition, health, shelter, education, or

information. This represents about half of the population under 18 years of age.

This measure is based on the conceptual convergence of social, economic and human rights perspectives. From a human rights perspective the definition of child poverty and anti-poverty strategies should be guided by the international human rights laws and values. CROP has organized several international conferences and published books on the relationship between law and poverty dealing precisely with these issues. Poverty reduction becomes more than charity, it becomes a legal obligation.



*Delamonica sat in the conference expert panel (third from left), alongside Sebastian Lipina, National Council for Scientific and Technical Research, Argentina; Sigurd Johnsen, Save the Children Norway; Anne Trine Kjørholt, Norwegian Centre for Child Research (NTNU); Caroline Knowles, Young Lives Project, UK; Poul Engberg-Pedersen, Director of Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad).*

This has important implications for the politics of policy, the implementation of programs (with regard, for instance, to such issues as coverage of the whole population without discrimination, avoidance of clientelism, etc.), and budget allocations without which the laws are not put in practice. There is also an important rhetorical

effect. Even if the poor cannot take the government to court in order to implement specific policies or programmes (i.e. the problem of justiciability of some social or economic rights) the recognition of these rights allows for political pressure to be built up in order to set up or change policies and resource allocations. Clearly, this is not an automatic process. Laws, by themselves, may be limited in their capacity to produce social change. Nevertheless they are a major contribution in the long struggle to eliminate poverty.

When their civil and political rights are ensured, the poor will have a better chance (alone or through political alliances) to influence their governments to adopt anti-poverty strategies that will help them live a decent and independent life. Thus, these rights are considered “instrumental” rights, i.e. rights which help in the fight against poverty, although their absence does not define or constitute poverty.

As for identifying the poor, that is, for measurement and analysis, we need to look at constitutive rights – those rights, in other words, without which a person is considered poor. Clearly, some rights could be both constitutive and instrumental. However, the important point is that not all rights violations constitute poverty. For instance, a child from a very wealthy family could be physically abused. This is a rights violation but saying that the child should be considered poor would stretch the meaning of “poverty” beyond any accepted understanding of the word. Thus, it is important to explicitly identify those rights violations which constitute poverty.

Although the list of these constitutive rights may differ from one country to another, the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) developed a common set which applies to most countries and coincides with the lists that emerge from the capabilities and basic needs approaches

- Being adequately nourished
- Being able to avoid preventable morbidity and premature mortality (including health, water and sanitation)
- Being adequately sheltered
- Having basic education
- Being able to earn a livelihood (which does not apply directly to children)
- Taking part in the life of a community (which includes the right to information)

This list can be used to identify the poor, to learn more about their exact needs, and to evaluate the success of poverty reduction strategies. The elements which were used to estimate that the incidence of child poverty in developing countries reaches almost 50% (mentioned above) are basically the ones in this list.

Besides the incidence, it is important to ask questions relating to how poor are the poor (i.e., on average, how far they are from the poverty line). For instance, child poverty in sub-Saharan Africa is worse than the developing world average (the incidence being 48% and 84% respectively). In addition, most children suffer more than just one deprivation. Thus, while 15% of the children in sub-Saharan Africa live in households where at least 5 deprivations exist, only 4% of the children in the Middle East and North Africa region are deprived to the same degree. While 1% of the children in the East Asia and Pacific region suffer from 4 or more deprivations, in South Asia this group represents 19% of the children.

It should also be mentioned that the one of the virtues of this type of measurement is that it can be contrasted with income poverty. For example, out of almost 40 countries for which comparable data were available, the estimator of child deprivation is considerably higher than of income poverty based on the dollar a day measurement. In other words, the dollar a day measure seriously underestimates child poverty. A similar conclusion applies to the national poverty lines, although the underestimation is less pronounced.

This is partly due to the monetary approach neglecting to note that children’s well-being also depends on non-market-based goods. Access to basic services and a safe environment for play is generally more dependent on the level of local provision than on household income. Thus, individuals cannot purchase these goods even if they have sufficient income. The importance of these non-market goods to reduce child poverty was addressed at the conference in Oslo.

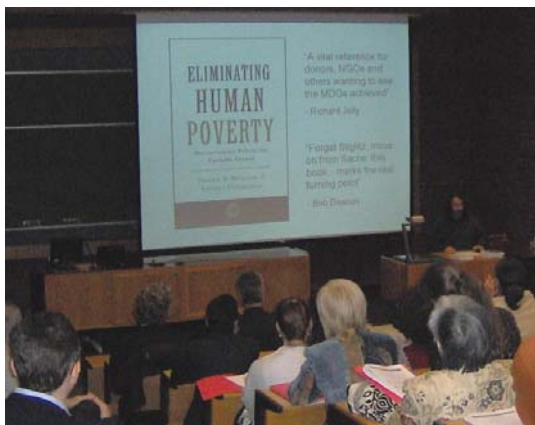
In addition, when children work (one of the topics discussed during the conference), a family’s income often rises above the poverty line. These children are deprived, yet according to the traditional income approach, they would not be considered poor.

Consequently, income poverty only partially captures child poverty and distorts their dimensions and characteristics. In order to deal with child poverty, it is necessary to keep in mind that children do not live in a vacuum. Their experience of poverty is couched in the social structure in which they are growing up (as was highlighted during the conference by presentations looking at the situation of poor children in industrialized countries). Thus, child poverty (both in its income and non-income dimensions) need to be complemented with an analysis of exclusions and vulnerability to fully understand the context in which children and their families are situated if practical policies are to be designed and properly implemented.

When discussing policies to reduce child poverty, it has to be understood that, because child poverty is multidimensional (e.g. deprivation along the seven elements mentioned above), various policy interventions ought to be in place. In other words, a continuum, from very precise sectoral interventions (in health, nutrition, education, etc) to broad macroeconomic and trade policies affect child poverty.

In terms of sector-specific interventions, the following can be highlighted:

- Programs of early childhood care and development (including recent advances in neuro-science, as discussed at the conference);
- Female teachers, toilet facilities and elimination of gender stereotypes in educational materials to retain girls in schools;
- Adequate budget allocations for essential drugs, spare parts for hand pumps, teaching materials and textbooks;
- Procurement of generic drugs;
- More reliance on nurses and other medical staff than on physicians;
- Use the mother tongue, especially in the early years;
- Multi-grade teaching and multiple shifts in low-density areas;
- Accelerated learning programs for over-age pupils; and
- Elimination of school and health fees for basic services, and minimizing other out-of-pocket costs for users (e.g. uniforms or preventive care).



*Delamonica at the conference presenting his book "Eliminating Human Poverty - Macroeconomic and Social Policies for Equitable Growth", which he has co-written with Santosb Mebrotra, Vice-Chair of the CROP Scientific Committee. The book was published earlier this year by Zed Books, London, in the "CROP International Studies in Poverty Research" series.*

The last point could be considered to be a notch higher in the policy continuum, as it cuts across different sectors. There are various issues involved with user fees. They are onerous for the families, yet they provide too little revenue. Often, it is more costly to administer the funds collected through user fees than the amount of these funds. Exemption schemes and waivers are prone to be abused as well as to create marginalization and ill will among the population. The problem with user fees is that the poorest and most vulnerable people may not be able to pay them, and not have access to basic services. In many countries where user fees were removed, public services became more accessible for the poor. This was the case in Malawi, Uganda, and Tanzania in primary education.

Another cross-cutting social policy issue is narrow targeting. It has important hidden costs, five of which deserve to be highlighted:

- Costs of mis-targeting, due to the difficulty in identifying the poor and/or vulnerable groups;
- Costs of failing to reach the poorest, as the non-poor seldom accept to be by-passed by special subsidies;
- Administrative costs of narrow targeting, which are at least twice as high as for untargeted programmes. They also create opportunities for mismanagement so that extra outlays for oversight and control add to the costs;
- Out-of-pocket costs: narrow targeting frequently requires beneficiaries to document their eligibility, which involves expenses such as bus fares and other costs. They can easily exclude the poorest — who already resent the social stigma associated with means testing and are less informed about special programmes;
- Cost of non-sustainability: once the non-poor cease to have a stake in narrowly targeted programmes, the political commitment to sustain their scope and quality is at risk. The voice of the poor is usually too weak to maintain strong support. Benefits are often allowed to erode over time by not adjusting their nominal value for inflation.

At a slightly broader policy level, several countries have used cash transfers to help the poorest families with children. South Africa (which was discussed at the conference), many Eastern European countries and Brazil, among others, have implemented cash transfer programs.

A current debate on cash transfers is whether they should be conditional or not. There are several important issues to highlight in regards to conditionality.

One problem is clientelism. In other words, both the politicians and the recipients engage in an implicit contract where political support is expected by the families receiving the cash transfer. This is usually because neither the policy-makers nor the public understand the cash transfer as contributing to fulfilling the right to a minimum standard of living. It is the relatively restricted size of the program (in comparison with the extent of poverty) and the conditionality itself which generate this perception.

Patriarchalism is another issue. The programs tend to be top-down with little participation by recipients in terms of design and implementation. Moreover, the conditionality itself is based on the premise that the policy-makers and experts know best what is good for the poor than the poor themselves. This does not generate empowerment of the poor.

There are also efficiency issues. The conditionalities do not work if the services that the poor are supposed to use are not available. Unfortunately this may be more common than it appears at first sight. This is related to ethical issues

One ethical issue is that the conditionalities are overtly punitive. In the situation described in the previous paragraph it is clear that poor families are not at fault, yet they would lose their cash support. There are alternative ways to generate behavioral change based on mutual trust and support which, based on positive reinforcement, could avoid this issue.

Moreover, a division can be generated between those who receive the benefits and those who do not. In some cases there may be a social backlash against the recipients by the non-recipients. Again, this is largely due to the limited vision in providing support for some of those which need it or as a social protection mechanism for all citizens.

Given all these problems, it is no wonder that there is little evidence that the conditionalities work. Moreover, there are cases where countries have improved the limited conditionality-based programs by converting them to programs which cover all children and families.

National budgets are the financial embodiment of a government's policy goals. Moreover, they simultaneously affect income distribution (through taxation, subsidies and transfers) employment and household income (through its macroeconomic impacts), and access to social services (through sectoral expenditures). All of these directly or indirectly contribute to reduce child poverty along various dimensions. Thus, prioritizing children's rights in public expenditure requires political will and progressive financial commitment from the government. This was also extensively discussed at the conference.

The reproduction of inequalities in spite of growth needs to be addressed squarely by macroeconomic policies. This is crucial in linking inequality and poverty reduction to growth. Given the ratchet effect which leads to large increases in poverty during recessions and only mild reductions (at best) of poverty during recoveries, stabilization which do not rely on unemployment or low wages are also important for poverty reduction. Thus, an essential element to reduce child poverty and increase the well-being of children is the creation of stable employment for parents and care-givers.

Macroeconomic and fiscal policies have a great impact on child well-being in general and child poverty in particular. The policies linked with globalization – free trade, privatization, increase in debt burden – have impacted children's lives and prospects.

These strategies and national development plans, as mentioned above, provide an opportunity to less developed countries to define macroeconomic goals and policies that address domestic poverty. They need to take into account that macroeconomic reforms that focus on non-inflationary budgetary policies and monetary restraint at the expense of social services may not be in-line with what is best for reducing poverty in a country. For example, cuts in education, health care, and other social services may impact children in a way that may propagate the poverty cycle.

Reducing child poverty requires direct interventions by both international organizations and national governments. The latter need to fully own their development plans and strategies, i.e. they should avoid following blindly the latest fad or the one-size-fits-all prescriptions.

**Enrique Delamonica** has previously worked for UNESCO, and along with A. Minujin and M. Komarecki he co-edited the book *Poverty and Children: Policies to break the vicious cycle* (The New School and UNICEF: New York, 2006). He is now based at Saint Peter's College, and can be reached by E-mail: edelamonica (at) spc.edu

*CROP and Childwatch are currently planning the follow-up of the meeting in Oslo, both a new conference and a publication is in the pipeline. We wish to thank the Norwegian Research Council for helping fund the conference, and all the researchers who came to Oslo and contributed to the conference proceedings. We appreciate very much your efforts that have helped us put the spotlight on the important issue of child poverty.*

## FROM THE DESK OF THE SCIENTIFIC DIRECTOR

### *CROP Research Activities 2007 & Plan of Action 2008*

Dear reader, you are receiving this newsletter as a member of CROP's international network of poverty researchers and others interested in poverty research. As you know I took over as Scientific Director of CROP from Prof. Else Øyen at ISSC's General Assembly in Alexandria last year. I will along with my competent staff do my best to continue her legacy, and expand the CROP network and its impact in the years to come.

#### **Research Activities 2007**

CROP has had a busy year, as you will see from our webpage we have contributed many poverty research activities, and helped gain interest in these important issues. We have specifically focused on human rights, education, child poverty, and development issues in Latin America, which is part of our long term strategy:

#### Scholarly Courses:

- *Educational Course in Poverty Studies for Young Central American Researchers*, organized in Honduras
- *Training Course on Poverty & Human Rights*, organized in Norway

#### Academic Workshops:

- *Poverty, Economic Integration and International Trade*, organized in Ecuador
- *Adolescent Poverty: Institutional Relations between Work, Education & Poverty*, organized in Norway
- *Rethinking Poverty and Children in the New Millennium: Linking Research and Policy*, organized in Norway
- *Poverty, Religion and Social Justice in Latin America and the Caribbean*, organized in the Dominican Republic
- *Contemporary Reflections on Poverty in Latin America*, organized in Norway

#### Research Publications:

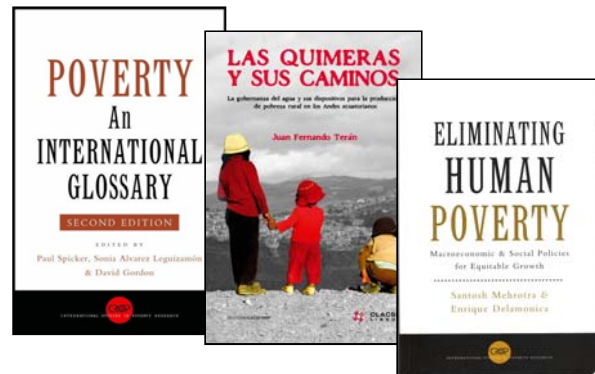
- *Eliminating Human Poverty: Macroeconomic and Social Policies for Equitable Growth*, by Santosh K. Mehrotra and Enrique Delamonica, CROP International Studies in Poverty Research, London: Zed Books.
- *Poverty: An International Glossary*, Paul Spicker, Sonia Alvarez Leguizamón and David Gordon (eds.), CROP International Studies in Poverty Research, London: Zed Books.
- *Las Quimeras y Sus Caminos - La gobernanza del agua y sus dispositivos para la producción de pobreza rural en los Andes ecuatorianos* [Water governance and its role in the production of rural poverty in the Ecuadorian Andes], by Juan Fernando Terán, Buenos Aires, Argentina: CLACSO/CROP Programme.

#### **Plan of Action 2008**

This is an overview of the main activities CROP has planned next year, more detailed information will be published on the CROP website shortly:

- March 3-7: *Educational Course for Young Central American Researchers*, organized by the CLACSO/CROP Programme, in El Salvador
- Spring: CROP/CLACSO academic workshop
- Spring: CROP/Childwatch research group meeting
- Spring: Publication of *Poverty & Water* book.
- Spring: Publication of *Poverty: An International Glossary* translated to Spanish
- August 7-17: *Labyrinths of Poverty and Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean*, CLACSO/CROP panel at Bergen Summer Research School, in Norway (see page 6).
- Fall: CROP/CLACSO academic workshop
- Fall: CROP workshop at NFU conference
- November 24-28: ISSC General Assembly, in South Africa

Not all of the activities are finalised with funding and partners, but the plan indicates our ambitions.



Chair of the CROP Scientific Committee, Dr. Atilio Boron, has visited and held meetings with the CROP Secretariat twice this year, he has provided us with knowledge, wisdom and practical ideas. I have also had the pleasure to meet several of our CROP network members at our various events this year, I hope to be able to meet many more of you and learn from your expertise in the years to come.

*With warm regards*

*Tom Skauge*

Dr. Tom Skauge, CROP Scientific Director



The International Social Science Council (ISSC) has launched its new website at [www.unesco.org/ngo/issc](http://www.unesco.org/ngo/issc). This represents the first step towards implementing a new networking and communications strategy for the Council.

Through its Action Agenda 2007-10, ISSC wish to establish a strong presence and authority for the social sciences, so that national and world leaders take account of social science findings and their relevance for the issues with which they struggle.

The website will therefore also function as a source of broader information on international social science actors and activities, a portal for social sciences worldwide.

The Bergen Summer Research School is an initiative of the Bergen academic milieu's commitment to produce and disseminate research-based education to address some key global challenges posed by an increasingly knowledge-based, complex, multicultural, religiously diverse, and unequal global society.



The first edition of the School, to be held **August 7-17, 2008**, is dedicated to the theme of *Global Poverty*.



The courses and activities planned reflect an effort to address poverty as a truly global challenge, affecting advanced, developing and less developed economies.

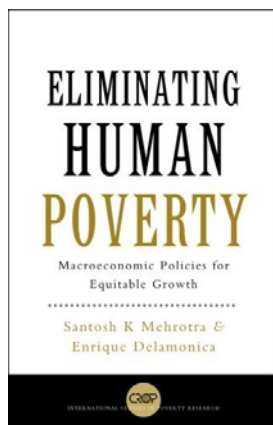
The organizers aim to produce an overall event that presents an inclusive yet well defined concept of *global poverty*, based on Norwegian and Scandinavian research traditions as well as internationally recognized research produced by all disciplines. Poverty will be addressed as a global challenge, that requires disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and problem-oriented research-based education.

The CLACSO/CROP Programme will co-organize one of the plenary roundtables, on *Labyrinths of Poverty and Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean*.

For more information visit [www.gdc.uib.no](http://www.gdc.uib.no)



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### Eliminating Human Poverty

*Macroeconomic and Social Policies for Equitable Growth*  
Santosh K. Mehrotra and Enrique Delamonica

This examination of how basic social services, particularly education, health and water, can be financed and delivered more effectively departs from the dominant macro-economic paradigm.

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